

Critical Thinking

Advanced GCE A2 H452

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H052

Report on the Units

January 2009

H052/H452/MS/R/09J

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Chief Examiner Report

It is a great pleasure to report that the first sitting of the new AS specification was an extremely successful session. Although both Units 1 and 2 were available in January 2009, the vast majority of the candidature advisedly entered for only one unit. As Unit 1 in the new specification examines a broader range of skills than previously, centres took the opportunity to introduce these in the first term of teaching, enabling the remainder of the year to be used to extend these skills for the Unit 2 May examination.

This policy appeared to work well, with increased performance in Unit 1. Where both units had been entered, candidates did not always match their Unit 1 performance with an equal expertise in Unit 2, suggesting that a term may not be adequate for even the most able of candidates to reach their potential in Unit 2 skills whilst mastering those of Unit 1.

The quality of performance across both units was very encouraging, with the majority of candidates using specialist terminology correctly, even those who went on to give answers that attracted partial performance marks. This together with the focused answers that were given suggested a very well prepared entry. A greater number of candidates delivered answers with accurate analysis, and astute evaluation was very evident; such responses were a joy to mark.

Neither the question rubric nor timing appeared to be an issue, as across both units there were fewer instances of candidates attempting the wrong task or of leaving questions blank or incomplete. The vast majority of candidates attempted all questions and tackled the new style questions with a focus that brought about very pleasing performance. In both units where candidates were given greater freedom to evidence a range of skills with a larger mark tariff, heartening differentiation was achieved. The strongest responses provided enthusiastic focused answers which demonstrated a higher level of skills, whilst weaker responses did enough to attract partial performance marks.

It is anticipated that Unit 1 will attract similar numbers in the summer examination series, whilst Unit 2 is expected to have the vast majority of their entry for 2009. This should afford the opportunity for the usual number of candidates to progress to the A2 new specification in 2010.

F501 Introduction to Critical Thinking

General comments

This first sitting of the new specification attracted a large entry of approaching 12,000, with almost 3,000 candidates remaining with the legacy paper. The vast majority of centres in January advisedly chose to enter their candidates for Unit 1, as an introduction to the course, without also entering Unit 2 after only a term of teaching. The candidature for Unit 2 in January was thus reduced to approximately 200 entries. This single unit entry approach appeared to have a beneficial effect upon performance and might be taken as good practice for the future.

It was heartening on a new specification, where the raw mark total is 80, that a wide range of marks was accessed. The very best accessed marks in the seventies, whilst the majority of the weakest candidates were within striking distance of 25. Pleasingly candidates took full advantage of the two longer questions, Q5 and Q9, to give both incisive and balanced assessments. A greater number of questions with partial performance marks enabled a wider differentiation of marks. The strongest candidates were rewarded for quality responses and the weaker for those answers that were headed in the right direction, but fell short of an accurate or full response. There was stronger performance on Section B than Section A, which might have been expected, with the former more closely resembling the skills previously examined in the previous Unit 1 qualification. The strongest performance was found on Q6 and Q8a assessing the credibility of documents and personal claims, whilst the weakest performance related to Q2a and b identifying and explaining argument elements.

Candidates on the whole appeared to be well prepared, demonstrating competence with the new areas of the specification, such as in Q5 assessing the link between reason and conclusion and in Q9 applying plausibility to possible outcomes. Surprisingly the area that was least well answered was in Q2a and b that assessed identifying and explaining argument elements. In this discrete area, a significant minority of candidates seemed to grasp at a range of elements that were outside Critical Thinking. For clarification, the argument elements are set out in the new specification in 3.1.1.7 The Language of Reasoning. This is only a short list, which if focused upon should lead to accessible marks.

Very encouragingly, there was no evidence of questions being misconstrued, as candidates gave answers that were targeted to what was required in each instance, albeit limited or incorrect in weaker papers. The level of engagement was impressive for a new specification, especially in Q5 and Q9, where candidates engaged enthusiastically with the requirement for a more extended evaluation. There were also far fewer instances of candidates giving up half way through the paper. Time management did not appear to be a problem, with uncompleted papers being a rarity. The only question left blank on a small percentage of papers was that of Q2.

The topic was also engaged with well, with no apparent misunderstandings of what it involved. Candidates were able to supply additional reasons in Q4b and to assess the likelihood of opposing outcomes in relation to the topic in Q9.

With regard to spelling and grammar, this was one of the best sessions for both precision and the use of specialist vocabulary. In the weakest papers '*echotowns*' occasionally appeared, as did '*biast*' and '*arguement*', but even on these weak papers the standard of written English was higher than in previous sessions.

Comments on individual questions:

Section A

- 1 The answers to this question as a whole evidenced a great deal of uncertainty. Candidates deleted and substituted answers, or had arrows moving answers from Q1a to the first part of Q1c, indicating that they had revised their understanding of the thrust of the argument.

The most able identified the argument elements precisely without additions or omissions, the weakest being prone to copying out whole sentences. Pleasingly very few candidates offered paraphrases.

The vast majority heeded the instructions to consider paragraphs 1 and 2, with only a few straying into either the preceding background information or the protests in paragraphs 4 and 5.

- (a) The strongest answers identified the main conclusion correctly, although some confused which side the argument was supporting and mistakenly identified the advice of the supporters.

Those who discerned the thrust of the argument occasionally wandered away from paragraphs 1 and 2 into the protests, quoting the claims of the CPRE, RTPi or the LGA and could not be credited. Others added on to this the reason, '*as many of the sites are inappropriate*', whilst the weakest also added the example, '*such as Weston Otmoor in Oxfordshire*'.

- (b) The strongest answers included the sources of the '*local residents*' and '*the local authorities*' as well as the conditional '*may*' as part of the reasoning. Weaker candidates, who had already included a reason within Q1a, incorrectly offered the example as the reason.

- (c) The strongest answers identified the elements of the counter argument accurately, whilst weaker answers referred to the Housing Minister's claim. A minority strayed into the background information, identifying the first or second sentence relating to the proposal.

- 2 (a) The strongest answers quickly accessed very accessible marks with a pleasing number of candidates gaining full marks. Weaker answers ventured into realms beyond those assessed by Critical Thinking, with offerings of alliteration (occasionally appearing as '*illiteration*') and metaphor, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the argument elements tested. Other incorrect answers referred to '*fear*', '*emotive language*', '*opposition*', '*exaggeration*', '*slippery slope*', '*assumption*' and '*claim*'.

- 2 (b) The strongest answers referred to the conditional element of hypothetical reasoning in some form or other. Weaker answers referred simply to the '*if...then*' format, which gained partial performance marks, whilst the weakest quoted the original statement, gaining no credit. The majority sought to give a straight definition, whilst others explained their choice via the context. Correct versions of both were credited.

- 3 On this question only a minority gained full marks, but most candidates were able to pick up some credit under partial performance. The strongest answers identified a characteristic such as age and explained how this might have led to a difference in views between the father and the residents as a whole. Others looked for similarities and expertly explained why this would make *both parties'* views the same.

Weaker answers identified a characteristic but applied it only partly, thus gaining partial credit. Others misread the question and made assessments relating to the tennis player, rather than his father.

Some candidates confused '*representative*' with knowledgeable about local residents or being influential upon them. Here it was difficult to credit marks, unless the answer inadvertently moved into a comparison of views.

- 4 (a) It was not always the strongest candidates who gained marks for this question. The strongest answers identified that action was required to bridge the gap between computer analysis and energy efficiency, although some gave an overdrawn answer which included '*all*' or '*none*'. Others wrote a paragraph explaining why action was important.

The weakest answers were versions of a restatement of the caption, or an explanation of the effects. These answers betrayed that perhaps the nature of assumption had not been grasped. Some candidates were distracted by the fact that the computer was in the kitchen of the house and made uncreditable culinary points.

- (b) The majority of candidates did confine their answers to areas other than energy efficiency, with many looking at other environmental issues. Few candidates failed to score here, but a minority failed to gain full marks by going beyond the requirement to clearly specify a reason, by extending their answer into an argument or reducing it to a clause.

- 5 This question differentiated well, with the strongest answers focusing directly upon the link, identifying valuing '*the countryside*' and/or '*fear*' as the key factors. Answers often focused upon both strengths and weaknesses, most making successful points about the relevance of the Otmoor site and the lack of direct relevance of the pressure upon services to the conclusion.

Weaker answers, went to great lengths to assess the reasons themselves, rather than assessing the link between the reasons and conclusion. The weakest answers simply identified the link by doing little more than restating the argument elements, but were able to access partial performance marks.

Section B

This section evidenced very pleasing performance, with even the weakest answers using specialist terms, applying them in most instances correctly, if not fully.

- 6 Pleasingly, a number of candidates gained full marks, giving focused answers that supported both possible neutrality and vested interest related to government funding, also identifying the relevant expertise that the title of the TCPA would suggest. Weaker responses left out a supporting reference or did not explain specifically why there was bias or expertise. Oddly, candidates appeared to perform better on Q6 than its equivalent in the previous specification.
- 7 (a) This question was well answered. Weaker responses occasionally left out the source or referred to the paragraph instead of naming the source. Others unwittingly gave the LGA claim referred to in the question.
- (b) Again weaker answers occasionally left out the source or they gave a claim that was consistent rather than inconsistent with the prediction.

- 8 (a) Candidates got off to a good start with this question by correctly identifying a claim and recording it precisely. Only a small number of the weakest responses sought to paraphrase the claim, losing its precise focus and so could not be credited. Some candidates strayed into Document 2 quoting the claim of the Minister of State for Housing, which could not be credited.

The vast majority of assessments related to the claim, but there were rare instances when the assessment was that of the source rather than what they claimed. Assessments varied in quality, but the vast majority demonstrated a competent application of a relevant credibility criterion. Only in the rarest of cases was a credibility criterion not identified, with perhaps more instances of the strengthening or weakening not being stated.

Some candidates sought to repeat the same assessment under both bias and vested interest but could not be credited twice, whilst others made wild assessments about the CPRE that gained only the mark for a correct understanding of the criterion used.

The weakest responses threw two or three criteria into a single point, appearing to lack confidence in the application of a single criterion. At times an assessment mark could be credited for the understanding of the criterion itself, but in most cases these answers gained no marks.

- (b) Stronger responses related their answer to one of their assessments in Q8a and gained either full marks or partial performance marks for a circular argument. Amongst weakest responses the tendency was to direct their answer at the verification of the claim itself, rather than the credibility of those who had made it, gaining no credit.

- 9 This question differentiated well, with strong answers including a comparison of credibility of the two sides represented and a consideration of the likelihood of both positive and negative outcomes. Encouragingly, it was a rarity for responses not to contain a judgement.

Weaker responses assessed individual sources rather than sides or failed to deal with the sources, talking only in general terms about the issue. Others concentrated primarily or exclusively upon either credibility or plausibility. Some otherwise strong candidates assessed the 'plausibility' of their own assessments of credibility.

Overall, stronger answers made full use of the freedom of a longer answer to give a full bodied comparative response without the constraints that short answers bring with them, thus accessing level four marks. Weaker answers were credited at a lower level for their partial responses. Only a tiny minority of answers gave superficial assessments, with disjointed and random thoughts, but even these were able to be credited within level one marks.

Both the spread of marks and the informed way in which candidates approached the paper was very encouraging and is a testimony to the hard work that must have gone into thoroughly preparing them for the skills that Unit 1 now examines.

For those who might wish to have feedback on the new unit examination, OCR will be offering teacher INSET that includes this. There is also an OCR endorsed textbook offered by Heinemann as well as materials on the OCR website, to help in the teaching of these skills.

F502 Assessing and developing argument

General Comments

The entry for this January was unsurprisingly small, with less than 400 overall in this first sitting of the new unit. In general it is not expected that candidates will sit this unit in January of the first year of study. There was a good spread of marks overall on the paper, with a good number of candidates scoring high marks. There was no evidence of any candidate being short of time, with many continuing onto additional pages, particularly for the further argument questions. In most cases the extra work completed in the additional pages did not gain significant extra credit, showing that there is enough space given on the paper itself for adequate answers.

The new style of question on this paper, Q22, offered candidates the opportunity to write in an open way evaluating a section of argument. Many candidates answered fluently with good quality explanation. In general candidates found the evidence and flaws questions the most challenging and locating the principle in the passage was also troublesome for many.

Section A

Multiple Choice

Candidate performance on the multiple choice questions was very strong with the majority of candidates scoring double-figures on the 15 marks available for the questions.

The questions which candidates found the hardest were as follows:

Q3 - A large number of candidates went for option C which is a statement of a situation without any reasons supporting it. The correct answer being D which does have reasons supporting it and can act as a conclusion.

Q6 - A significant number of candidates went for each incorrect option of B, C and D, showing that intermediate conclusions are an area which cause difficulty. Only the correct option of A has both reasons supporting it and lends support to another conclusion, given in option C.

Q11&12 - These were the only questions on section A for which the majority of candidates did not choose the right answers. The passage was tricky to get to grips with and this is probably what caused the candidates issues. On Q11 many candidates incorrectly chose B considering the explanation of why it was that some people like the mud as an example, which is not the case. On Q12 many candidates went for the incorrect options of B, C and D despite the correct answer, A, still being the most popular.

Section B

Q16

The vast majority of candidates wrote using exactly the wording of the passage, as asked to. Although on some parts, incorrect parts were selected and extra information sometimes added, it was rare that candidates lost credit for reasons of paraphrasing.

Q16a

A significant minority of candidates were unable to identify the correct conclusion and thus did not score credit. Common incorrect answers were the first sentence “Britain’s Prison System is in crisis” and the last sentence “The only way to break the vicious cycle is to use Community Service Orders”.

Candidates are advised to test whether a conclusion supports other conclusions (in which case it is probably an IC) or whether it is itself supported by other conclusions.

Q16b

The majority of candidates answered this well and with accuracy. Common errors were selecting the following, where the first or last sentence of a paragraph was often thought to be an IC:

- Britain’s Prison System is in crisis
- The justice system should aim to rehabilitate rather than punish
- This means that many that are sent to prison learn more about crime and can leave prison with more criminal knowledge and intent.
- The explanation for this increase is the longer sentences being given to petty criminals.

Q16c

Many candidates incorrectly stated ICs from the passage as principles for this answer. When candidates did correctly state the principle, they almost always scored full marks. A small number of candidates gave their own principles that would support the argument, but this mistake was rarely made.

Q17

This question was answered well, with the majority of candidates getting full marks and nearly all at least gaining one mark for their answers.

There were lots of creative answers offering a good range of alternative explanations. The most common reason why candidates would get one rather than two marks was for undeveloped answers. For example “more crime” or “better police” without a statement linking these factors to more prison places.

Many candidates gave alternative explanations which concentrated on more petty criminals. Some weak answers attempted to incorporate information from the text, e.g. repeat offenders due to ‘colleges of crime’.

Q18

Candidates found this question, along with the next one on evidence challenging with many candidates not scoring.

Many candidates gave an explanation of the purpose of having evidence in an argument, for example, “it shocks” or “it supports the argument”, rather than explaining a strength or weakness of the use of this particular evidence. Some candidates focused on the emotive aspect of shocking readers, without even explaining why this figure may do that.

When candidates did answer in a way that evaluated the evidence and its use itself, the answers were generally good. There were some good answers on the benefit not being shown, and opportunity cost type arguments.

It is clear that candidates need to be assisted in how to tackle these types of questions and shown the range of correct responses which could be used.

Q19

The majority of candidates did not score any marks on this question, indicating, as above, that evidence questions are an area to focus on in teaching.

Many candidates focused on there only being a small difference between 67% and 47% arguing it was too small to make any conclusion. This was despite the wording of the passage clearly highlighting the difference is significant. Candidates should in general not '*question the evidence*' in this way, but instead look at how the evidence is being applied in the argument, which the mark scheme answers all do.

There were a number of weak answers which discussed that the sample sizes may be different, clearly showing a misunderstanding of percentages along with not being clear on how to tackle this type of question.

What was surprising is that a large number of candidates focused on the above method, ignoring completely that the study was just in one area and only for a relatively short time. There were a minority of candidates who noticed the issue that the groups would not be the same, with ex-prisoners being more hardened criminals, but this was rare.

There were a number of candidates who scored 2 marks with good answers, but did not get the third mark by not relating back to the claim that it would not be possible to say that Community Service was better at changing behaviour, even in an implied way. The question asks for the answers to be focused on the claim, and candidates needed to make reference back to this to score full marks.

Q20

Candidates seemed able on the whole to know the names of flaws, rather than just being able to describe them. This was pleasing since it is new to this specification as an expectation.

Many candidates mistakenly thought that this was a slippery slope flaw, naming it and going on to explain what was meant by this term and why it would be flawed. This was not given credit, as the argument does not end up in a far-fetched or overdrawn statement after a series of jumps. The last chain "...and **can** leave prison with more criminal knowledge and intent" is not indicative at all of this type of flaw.

Some candidates got mixed up with appeals, labelling this as either an appeal to emotion or popularity for the 'colleges of crime' statement in the first sentence. It is wrong to conflate appeals with flaws, and the specification treats them as separate. Irrespective of that, the argument in paragraph 4 does not rely on an appeal within this first sentence.

A number did correctly label the flaw as restricting the options, but then went on not to explain the correct idea behind this, examples being "the offenders had no choice but prison", so no limitation to two options given.

Q21

This was very well answered with only a very small number not getting credit.

Q22

A minority of candidates wrote answers that purely described the elements in the Reader's Response without any evaluation on these aspects. This did not answer the question and thus did not get credit. To evaluate, candidates need to discuss aspects in the argument which either strengthen the argument or weaken it, along with an explanation of why this is. A small number of candidates mistook the task in a different way and wrote their own further argument counter-attacking the Reader's Response

Report on the Units taken in January 2009

Most answers did evaluate and point out different aspects with clear referencing and correct labelling. Given that this was a new style of question, the candidates responded well.

The hypothetical reasoning was identified by most candidates, but not all indicated whether it was offering sound support or not, thereby not evaluating.

The ones that did, explained clearly. The appeal to emotion was also well answered. A good number of candidates explained assumptions well or discussed the generalisations present in the examples.

A number of candidates mistook the reference to the Her Majesty's Government as an ad hominem flaw or an appeal to authority. It was neither of these, not attacking the Government, nor relying on an appeal to its authority.

No candidate discussed the lack of a conclusion in the Reader's Response and how that limited its effectiveness as an argument.

Q23

This was mostly done well with creative and well expressed reasons. Some candidates lost credit by giving reasons that were vague, e.g. "they have been sentenced for a reason" which implies justice needs without making it clear. Some candidates tried to incorporate material in the passage into reasons, with a range of success. Often this was not as successful as the fresh reasons which weren't from the passage and re-worked.

A number of candidates tried to counter-argue against the idea that the prisoners would be non-dangerous. However, these answers did not address why government should not release them early, apart from the fact they are disagreeing with a statement in the article.

Q24 & 25

Nearly half of the candidates used additional writing booklets, for questions 24-25. There was no evidence that those who had used the additional writing booklet to continue to write their FA generally achieved higher marks. This could indicate that being verbose does not necessarily produce a well-developed or structured argument.

- There was no evidence that the candidates who annotated their FA with letters such as R, C, CA, IC, consistently could identify the correct parts of their argument or always reached the higher marks.
- It was frequent that candidates who did annotate, could not generate clear ICs, despite annotating an area of reasoning as an IC.
- There was evidence that candidates had rehearsed writing a FA to a specified structure (CA + C, R+EV, R+EV, IC, R, C), but they did not always generate well developed or convincing arguments.
- Weaker responses consistently produced IC(s) which were merely a summation of what has preceded it.
- Stronger answers anticipated and addressed CA in their further arguments and their arguments often had a more convincing nature because of this.
- The stronger responses developed their reasons through hypothetical reasoning as well as some use of evidence/examples. Weaker responses often tended to give examples instead of reasoning.
- Students often conflated CSOs with Community Service, rehabilitation with Community Service, prison and punishment.
- A significant proportion of candidates aimed to re-utilise the data found in paragraph 4 in one or both of their FAs.

Q24

- A number of candidates did not give the conclusion succinctly, rather stating something such as, 'I am going to challenge this statement/conclusion'.
- A small number wrote an argument which SUPPORTED the argument and hence received no credit. Candidate must check carefully the conclusion asked for, and it is good advice to start with this in their conclusion as well as to end with it, to ensure the focus is kept to and understood.
- Additionally, some presented the statement 'prison sentences should be short and unpleasant' as a counter assertion, and then argued against it, without ever stating their conclusion.
- Some weaker answers missed off the either SHORT or UNPLEASANT from their conclusion and/or presented an argument which argued against only one of these areas.
- Some candidates gave an argument for long and unpleasant OR short and not unpleasant, rather than an argument to challenge 'prison sentences should be short and unpleasant'.

Q25

- This FA usually was more successfully presented than Q24.
- A number of candidates did not give the conclusion succinctly, rather stating something such as, 'my argument is for/against this'.
- Additionally, some presented the statement 'we should aim to rehabilitate offenders rather than punish them' as a counter assertion, and then argued against it, without ever stating their conclusion.
- Some weaker responses missed off the 'rather than ...them' from their conclusion and/or presented an argument which argued for/against one point (rehabilitation/punishment) without mentioning the other point.
- Some candidates gave an argument for prison VS rehabilitation.
- Some candidates wrote an argument which argued towards a compromise position of rehabilitating and punishing, which did not address the question asked.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE Critical Thinking (H052/H452)
January 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

| Unit | | Maximum Mark | A | B | C | D | E | U |
|------|-----|--------------|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| F501 | Raw | 75 | 55 | 48 | 41 | 35 | 29 | 0 |
| | UMS | 100 | 80 | 70 | 60 | 50 | 40 | 0 |
| F502 | Raw | 75 | 56 | 49 | 42 | 35 | 29 | 0 |
| | UMS | 100 | 80 | 70 | 60 | 50 | 40 | 0 |

No candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication

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