

Level 2 Award

Thinking and Reasoning Skills

OCR Level 2 Award in Thinking and Reasoning Skills **J930**

OCR Report to Centres June 2014

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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 specification 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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OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

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B901 Thinking and Reasoning Skills

General Comments:

The average standard of the candidates appears to be improving from session to session as candidates seem to be receiving effective instruction from teachers who are familiar with the subject-specific terminology and the range of skills assessed in this qualification. For example, it is notable that the vast majority of candidates understand what is meant by credibility criteria, flaws and argument maps. Fewer candidates confused credibility criteria with criteria for choice.

In this session, the paper was accessible and there were no common misinterpretations of the rubric. In Questions 9 & 10, there were very few examples of “wrong way” answers. Very few candidates failed to complete the paper in the allotted time. Compared to previous sessions, it was more common to find that candidates had used additional sheets.

In order to improve the performance of their candidates, centres could give further guidance on the skill of recognising patterns in data and on the use of evidence when candidates are developing their own reasoning.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

Most candidates received full marks for part (a). However, a significant number of candidates circled the wrong map in part (b). Most candidates who circled the incorrect map were, nevertheless, familiar with the terminology of joint and independent reasons but incorrectly believed that this was an example of the reasons working together. Most candidates recognised that there was an intermediate conclusion.

Question 2

Part (a) was answered well. In part (b) many candidates failed to recognise the distinction between flaws and other weaknesses, but this was not penalised in this session. Therefore, candidates could gain full credit if they identified a slippery slope as a weakness and a false appeal to authority as a flaw. Where candidates used a false appeal to authority as an answer, some failed to adequately explain what the weakness in the reasoning was the irrelevance of the authority being appealed to, i.e. that the professional qualifications of the Professor of French did not match the claim being made.

Question 3

As with the January session, identifying patterns in tables of data is a skill on which many candidates could improve. Good answers tended to be those that began with the words “all”, “none” or “only”. For example, “Only females passed first time” or “All those who took lessons weekly passed on the second attempt”. Less successful answers tended to be those that made general observations from the data, or suggested conclusions that could be drawn from the data, rather than identifying patterns linking two or more columns.

Question 4

The matrix question was answered very well, with most candidates receiving maximum marks. However, as in previous sessions, the question about necessary and sufficient conditions proved more challenging. In this case, the first two options were necessary but not sufficient conditions for winning the race.

Question 5

In part (a) the majority of candidates completed the venn diagram successfully. Credit was given to candidates who reasoned that the 11 customers who fed their dogs some tinned and some dried food could have included the six who fed their dogs all three types, but these candidates were a small minority. In part (b) candidates who used credibility criteria tended to produce better answers and only a minority seemed unaware of this terminology. However, answers which used credibility criteria without any explanation did not gain credit. The majority reasoned that the vet's credibility was strengthened by relevant expertise but was weakened by financial vested interest. Answers using a lack of expertise as a criterion for weakened credibility tended to be unsuccessful.

Question 6

The most popular correct answers to this question related to crossing time zones and stopping off overnight, arriving at 16.00 the next day. Many incorrect answers refused to accept the premises of the question, for example suggesting that clocks were wrong or that the couple were stuck in traffic, which would have meant the journey taking longer than five hours to drive.

Question 7 (a)

This question asked candidates to suggest alternative options (alternatives to grade retention) for students who have not met the required standard. Successful answers were those which suggested something extra that could be provided for the underperforming students, for example summer school or extra tuition. Less successful answers were sometimes changes that could apply to all students and so would not close the gap, for example longer school days.

Question 7 (b)

There was evidence in this session that more candidates understand what is required by "criteria" when it relates to choice. Far fewer candidates confused this with credibility criteria. Some candidates repeated answers for part (a) thus confusing choices and criteria. This question recognises that, when a child fails to meet a required academic standard, there are choices that could be made and it asks candidates to suggest what criteria could be used to select between these choices. Successful answers included cost, effectiveness, how much effort the child has made, whether or not the child has missed time through illness and the likely effect on the child's behaviour.

Question 8

More successful candidates recognised that the sample size for the survey was too small for accurate conclusions to be drawn and that the circumstances in which the survey was taken could have led to biased results. As in previous sessions, less successful candidates gave answers such as, "they didn't ask everyone", thus indicating that they did not understand the idea of a sample being extrapolated to a wider population. In part (b) successful candidates were able to show that they understood that people may be afraid of something, for example global warming, even though it may not be their top fear.

Question 9

As always, the more successful candidates tend to be those who plan their answers and use a structure. Examiners are looking for arguments containing two developed reasons and so it makes a great deal of sense to use paragraphs to show where one reason ends and another begins. Many candidates argued that grade retention might actually make students regress, with many candidates referring to the evidence of the academic researcher in Document D. However, some less successful candidates tended to quote this evidence without any expansion or development and such reasons were derivative and undeveloped. Candidates are welcome to refer to the material in the documents but simply repeating this material without any development is not creditworthy. Some candidates referred to the survey to show that students would be afraid of grade retention but, without development, this is not a reason in itself. Some candidates argued that candidates who had failed in one year would be bound to fail if they repeated the year because they would be tested on the same material, even though there are

plenty of cases where people do succeed on the second attempt (for example passing a driving test second time around or re-taking an AS exam unit).

Question 10

Most candidates started by reasoning that teachers are there to provide opportunities for students but the student needs to engage with the teacher by making an effort, doing homework, revising for exams, and so on. Less successful candidates struggled to develop their answers beyond this point, often resorting to rhetorical questions such as, "how can it be the teacher's fault?" More successful candidates recognised that there are different factors that may contribute to the success of students and that some of these are beyond a teacher's control, for example, unsupportive parents, illnesses and learning difficulties.

In questions 9 and 10, this session seemed to see an increase in candidates using made-up evidence to support their reasoning. It should be stressed that examiners are looking to credit reasoning rather than evidence. Candidates are not expected to have facts at their fingertips in the examination. Fabricated evidence in the form of statistics, survey data or quotations generally did not help to develop the candidates' reasoning.

B902 Thinking and Reasoning Skills Case Study

General Comments:

It was very pleasing to see so many strong scripts this season with a significant proportion of candidates very well prepared for the test of their skills which B902 presents. It was noticeable how few blank responses to questions were seen. Nearly all candidates worked their way through the whole paper and made positive attempts to answer questions assessing all the ten skills. It was clear that the Bentley case had captured the imagination of candidates and as a result they engaged positively with the issues raised. This helped them to demonstrate their thinking and reasoning skills effectively.

A significant majority of candidates demonstrated a strong familiarity with the pre-release material and this enabled them to use their knowledge of the case to support their skills and produce effective answers. In some cases candidates had researched the Bentley case beyond the material available in the pre-release documents. This is not necessary and is certainly not required in order to answer any questions successfully. It did, however, show how engaged some candidates were with the issues involved in the case study.

Familiarity with the facts behind the case and the evidence presented in the documents was most obvious and most well used in Q17. This was also a positive feature of the other AO3 questions and also of some AO1 questions in Section A. It was pleasing to see many candidates providing strong answers to Q3 and to both parts of Q6, as questions on assumptions and analogies have proved more challenging than most in many previous seasons.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A

- Q1** Most candidates were able successfully to identify this as an explanation. They correctly identified that as there was not attempt at persuasion it could not be an argument.
- Q2 (a)** Many candidates successfully identified the final sentence here as the intermediate conclusion. Many incorrectly underlined the first sentence, which was actually the main conclusion in the argument structure. Most candidates were able to bracket the reason at the start of the second sentence for the second mark.
- Q2 (b)** Most candidates successfully spotted that this was an irrelevant appeal, in this case to popularity. The most common incorrect answer was to see this as a 'tu quoque' flaw.
- Q3** Most candidates were able to produce a credible answer to this assumption question. The most common correct answer identified that it was necessary to assume that children as young as 11 should not be punished for their crimes. Few candidates made the mistake of repeating the argument, which can never be the correct answer to an assumption question.
- Q4 (a)** Most candidates correctly identified the sentence as a reason within the argument.
- Q4 (b)** Most candidates in this skill 7 question were able correctly to identify the correct meaning of the word 'justice' in this context.

- Q5 (a)** Many candidates were able to identify the false dilemma within the reasoning. A number of other flaws were amongst the incorrect responses, including most commonly 'ad hominem' and 'tu quoque'.
- Q5 (b)** Most candidates who correctly identified the false dilemma in Q5 (a) were successfully able to explain how the judge was restricting the options for the jury. Some candidates, although unsure of the correct terminology in Q5 (a) were nevertheless able to gain the mark here for correctly explaining the flaw or weakness.
- Q6 (a)** The key to success in this question was to state a similarity which strengthened the analogy. The judge was trying to say that when two people engage in criminal activity together they are both equally culpable, so successful candidates here identified a similarity based on two people working together in some way. The most common answer which didn't gain credit was that both scenarios involved crime or breaking the law. This sort of approach did not gain a mark because this similarity does not strengthen the analogy in any way.
- Q6 (b)** Candidates found it easier to explain a difference which weakened the analogy and most were able to gain at least one mark here, often by pointing out that a murder is more serious a crime than burglary. The most successful answers here explained that Bentley did not knowingly or intentionally assist in the murder in the same way that the lookout did in the burglary. Most answers correctly referred to both parts of the analogy in their explanation and didn't leave the difference to be inferred.
- Q7 (a)** This was a well answered question which discriminated well. Many candidates confidently made reference to the use of emotive language and rhetorical questions and successfully backed this up with examples from the document to gain both marks.
- Q7 (b)** Candidates found it slightly harder to explain why Lord Goddard might have been biased, although again most candidates were able to gain at least one mark here, with many again being awarded both marks. The best answers here made sure the explanation was plausible and often focused on the natural affinity between the police and judges or his desire to send out a powerful message to deter violent crime. Answers which suggested the murdered police officer might have been a friend of Lord Goddard were less plausible and therefore gained only partial credit.
- Q8 (a)** This was another well answered question which also proved to be a good discriminator. Most candidates were able to identify points of agreement between the two accounts which were significant.
- Q8 (b)** The first part of this question was even better answered with nearly all candidates identifying McDonald's evidence saying there was a delay between the shout and the shots as a significant difference. In part (ii) some candidates found it more difficult to explain the importance of this, but most were still able to identify the significance of the 'Let him have it Chris' shout in Bentley's conviction and thus the importance of the time gap between this and the shooting.
- Q9** Another very well answered question with most candidates able to provide two very reasonable alternative explanations. The most common correct answers were that Bentley was unable to use the weapons as he was being restrained, that he was too scared to use them or that he didn't want to get into more trouble by fighting with a police officer.

- Q10** Most candidates were able to reach at least half marks for this question by either correctly identifying two relevant claims or by successfully explaining the relevance of one of them. Most successful answers identified claims which showed that Bentley was unaware that Craig either had a gun or had an intention to fire it and went on to explain that this meant he had to be innocent of the charge of inciting Craig to murder the police officer. Answers in which the explanation focused on the fact that Bentley did not personally fire the gun were not relevant here to the case against him, so could not be credited.
- Q11** Nearly all candidates were able to identify at least one relevant claim here with many gaining full marks for identifying three. Candidates who had a strong prior knowledge of the pre-release document or who reminded themselves of the whole of Bentley's statement were rewarded here as some of the relevant claims came later on in his evidence. For instance, 'I knew we were going to break in' and 'we were going to get ... anything that was going' are relevant claims in the final paragraph, whereas 'we were stopped going out by our parents' at the start is not relevant to this question.
- Q12** Most candidates gained both marks here, most commonly for explaining how Hugh Maw's expertise as an educational psychologist strengthened his credibility. Some candidates did not seem to recognise this as a credibility question and wrote about facts which corroborated his claim. Such answers could not be credited here.
- Q13 (a)** Most candidates here gained at least three of the four marks, demonstrating their skill identifying which conclusions could and could not be drawn from a set of statistics. With four marks available, this was quite a high tariff question, so candidates who spent time thinking this through were right to do so and were rewarded for their time. As is usually the case with such questions, it is the more qualified conclusions which are the more likely to be reliable and the more dogmatic which cannot be drawn.
- Q13 (b)** Most candidates gained at least one mark here with the most common two mark answer identifying the problem of trying to draw conclusions about the UK based on data drawn from the USA. Some candidates tried to identify weaknesses in the data, rather than in the reasoning of the argument arising from the data and this was unsuccessful.
- Q14** There were lots of good answers to this question with candidates demonstrating their ability to construct a short argument with one developed reason. Most candidates were able to achieve at least two marks here by arguing that the police do a job which warrants the use of the death penalty for somebody who murders them. Fewer were able to gain full marks, but many achieved this by developing their reason to justify why the murder of a police officer deserves a harsher punishment than other murders.
- Q15** This question was generally well answered, with most candidates able to provide at least one reason to support the counter argument. Focus on the benefits of deterrence and on the potential harm which weapons can inflict were successful approaches here. It was important for candidates here to focus on the counter argument and not to provide reasons to support Abigail's main argument as these would support the wrong case.
- Q16** There were some excellent arguments constructed in response to this question which proved to be a strong discriminator. Most candidates reached at least level 2 and some very strong level 3 answers were seen. Candidates found it slightly easier to argue that it is not a waste of time to campaign for a pardon than to argue the opposite, but good answers were seen on both sides of the debate. Level three

answers (7 marks and above) contained at least two developed reasons and often made use of the evidence from the Bentley case, particularly the reaction of the family to the pardon, to support the reasoning and provide the development. There was also some excellent reasoning about the benefits or otherwise to the justice system as a whole to be gained from the campaigns.

Q17 This question produced a very similar distribution of marks to Q16. Again, there were some very strong answers and most candidates gained at least half marks. Strong answers here benefitted from a clear familiarity with the pre-release material and often the ability to explore some aspects of the conviction and sentence which had not already been raised by previous questions on the paper. As with Q16, a number of candidates reached the top of level 2 (6 marks) by providing a whole series of valid reasons to support the conclusion. Such answers were often prevented from reaching level 3 by the lack of development in the reasons.

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