Level 2 Award

Thinking and Reasoning Skills

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

OCR Report to Centres January 2016

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OCR Level 2 Award in Thinking and Reasoning Skills (J930)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

B901 Thinking and Reasoning Skills

General Comments:

The paper performed well and the level of challenge proved to be similar to previous sessions.

In Section A, it is again necessary to remind candidates of what is required from questions asking them to identify patterns in a table of data.

In Section B, the theme of non-essential cosmetic surgery proved to be engaging and accessible for almost all candidates. Most candidates were successful in evaluating the usefulness of the analogy.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Question1 (a):
This question was answered very well by the overwhelming majority of candidates, with candidates distinguishing correctly between reasons and the conclusion.
Question 1 (b):
The successful candidates were those who understood the distinction between joint and independent reasoning. The two reasons in the argument did not depend on each other. If one reason was taken away, the argument would still work.
Question 1 (c):
A small minority used credibility criteria, suggesting that most candidates are now aware of the difference between credibility criteria and criteria for making choices. Some unsuccessful candidates confused the issue of whether children should get pocket money with how much they should get.
Question 1 (d):
This question was generally well answered, with the most common successful answer being that there was no conclusion.

Question 2 (a):
The majority of candidates successfully completed the matrix problem. As always, candidates may use the table to help them if they wish but they must also write their answers in the space provided.
Question 2 (b):
This proved a much more challenging question. The successful candidates were those who understood that people may vote for a candidate without necessarily caring more about his main policy than that of an opponent.
Question 2 (c):
The successful candidates were those who understood that the motive of selling newspapers is a vested interest.

Question 3 (a):
The successful candidates were those who used the venn diagram to solve the problem, recognising that the 12 students who wrote to pen pals in Europe included the five who also wrote to pen pals in the USA. The less successful candidates did not make this distinction.
Question 3 (b):
There are five names flaws in the specification. Most candidates who were aware of this language recognised the false dilemma and were able to explain the weakness in the reasoning.
Question 3 (c):

Successful candidates were those who recognised that, in the language of argumentation, an assumption is an unstated reason. The less successful candidates simply quoted part of the text. At Level 2, candidates are not penalised for overstating assumptions, as in "All people in the USA speak only English." However, it is good practice for candidates to be encouraged to be more precise.

Question 4 (a):
Successful candidates were those who identified a pattern linking together two or more columns. Successful responses also tended to begin with the words "all", "none" or "only". An answer beginning with "some" or "most" can never be successful in this type of question. Candidates should be aware that we are looking for patterns rather than general observations. For example, a common unsuccessful response was to note that "the more films watched, the higher the English grade", which may have been a general trend but was not a clear pattern.
Question 4 (b):
Successful candidates were able to identify whether or not the evidence presented was sufficient for the conclusion to be drawn. Successful candidates recognised that Qasim had watched six films, but not more than six.
Question 4 (c):
It was acceptable for candidates to recognise that the survey was limited to only two types of film, because this was stated as being the original purpose of the survey. However, the method of watching the films was not relevant.
Question 4 (d):
The majority of candidates were able to identify alternative explanations, such as cost and availability.
Question 4 (e):
In Part (i) candidates often gave vague responses such as "they are experts in this field", when examiners would have preferred them to have been more precise about the nature of the expertise. In Part (ii) candidates who named a credibility criterion with no explanation could not gain credit. Successful candidates were those who could name the criterion and explain how it weakened the credibility of the video streaming company.

Section B

Question 5 (a):
There was only one acceptable answer, which was "analogy". Of the unsuccessful candidates who failed to identify the correct terminology, many named flaws such as "straw man".
Question 5 (b):
Most candidates were successful in evaluating the usefulness of the analogy, with most recognising that dyeing hair, changing clothes and having piercings are temporary.
Question 5 (c):
Most candidates were successful in evaluating the usefulness of the analogy, with most recognising that cosmetic surgery is more difficult to reverse.
Question 5 (d):
Many candidates recognised that 4700 procedures is not the same as 4700 men. Other successful candidates recognised that people may have cosmetic surgery for other reasons. Some unsuccessful candidates cited problems with the presentation of the graph.

Question 6 (a):
Candidates were generally successful in distinguishing between the conclusion and the intermediate conclusion.
Question 6 (b):
Candidates found this more challenging than the earlier assumption question, with many identifying something that was explicitly stated. Successful candidates recognised that an assumption is an unstated reason. It was not an assumption to say that people have cosmetic surgery because they are aiming at physical perfection (because this is stated) but it was acceptable to say that the author was assuming that the procedures were not for other reasons.

Question 7:
Successful candidates were those who took the time to complete the venn diagram accurately. Many less successful candidates confused the positions of claims 2 and 3.

Question 8:
For this quesiton the quality of the reasoning is the most important consideration when examiners are awarding marks. Successful candidates were those who were able to write two developed reasons. Reasons can be developed with the aid of evidence, explanation and examples. Developed reasons usually include indicator words. Undeveloped reasons are likely to invite the response, "and so…."

Candidates may refer to the documents for help and ideas, but their answers may be overly derivative if they do so excessively.

Successful candidates structured their answers through the use of paragraphs to separate their reasons.

More successful candidates were able to argue from the psychological and social benefits of non-essential cosmetic surgery and many made references to the economic benefits of the industry.

Question 9:
For this question the quality of the reasoning is the most important consideration when examiners are awarding marks. Successful candidates were those who were able to write two developed reasons. Reasons can be developed with the aid of evidence, explanation and examples. Developed reasons usually include indicator words. Undeveloped reasons are likely to invite the response, "and so…."

This question proved more challenging than the previous own argument. Quite a few saw it as a re-run of the question about cosmetic surgery and many answers were based heavily on that issue. More successful candidates went beyond cosmetic surgery and considered freedom of expression more generally.

Less candidates referred to "rights" without justifying these rights. Less successful candidates relied on simple assertions, such as "it is wrong to judge others" or "people should be themselves". More successful candidates turned assertions into developed reasons.

Many candidates contradicted themselves by saying that there should be no limits and then listing limits such as the need to avoid giving offence or preventing harm.

B902 Thinking and Reasoning Skills Case Study

General Comments:

It was pleasing to see a consistently good standard displayed by candidates in the January season, with very few really weak scripts seen. Candidates had clearly been well prepared for the paper and many engaged very enthusiastically with the topic of gaming, with a significant number using their own personal experience to answer some of the questions. Whilst this is to be encouraged and the themes of B902 papers are carefully chosen to engage candidates, it is important that answers continue to focus on the skills being assessed. In particular, it is always better to use carefully chosen evidence and examples to support the reasoning in longer answers assessing AO3 skills, rather than relying too much on personal anecdote.

Candidates demonstrated clear strengths in answering questions assessing skill 1 (understanding an argument) and also most skills assessed in AO2 (using and applying wider thinking skills). Very few weak answers were seen to questions assessing the AO3 skill of developing arguments. Candidates found it more difficult to access the higher mark bands for AO3. On this particular paper, candidates found the questions assessing skill 2 (evaluating arguments) particularly difficult and it was quite surprising to see that many candidates also lacked confidence in answering some skill 4 (evaluating the credibility of sources) questions.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A

Question 1 (a):
Candidates found it relatively straightforward to identify both the conclusion and the reason within the argument given. It was not necessary to underline the final clause of the conclusion to be given the mark, although the small number of scripts where the beginning of the conclusion, referring to parents, was missed out could not be rewarded as this was fundamental to the argument. For the reason, as long as the key element about video game violence having increased over time was included, more latitude could be allowed as to how much of the full reason was included within the answers given.

Question 1 (b):
Most candidates correctly identified the structure of the argument. The most common answers which failed to gain credit here were from candidates who did not see the counterargument at the beginning.

Question 2:
Nearly all candidates were able to give at least one valid option available to parents and/or teachers to prevent teenagers becoming addicted to gaming. Common successful answers here involved limiting the time allowed on gaming, taking games or consoles away altogether and teachers educating students about the dangers of excessive gaming. Answers which focused on the types of games being played were less successful as this question addressed the issue of gaming addiction rather than anything to do with levels of violence contained within the games.

Question 3:
It was very pleasing to see how well this question was answered, with the vast majority showing good skills in understanding which conclusions could and which could not be drawn from the data provided. The only conclusion here which candidates experienced some difficulty with was the first one given in the question. It is important that candidates recognise that a more extreme conclusion can't be drawn when negative answers are given in a survey. In this instance, with

49% of parents saying they find age ratings 'useful', it cannot be concluded that the other 51% think the age ratings are a 'waste of time'.

Question 4 (a):
In past papers candidates have often found questions relating to necessary and sufficient conditions challenging and this was the case here as well. Most were able correctly to classify up to three of the five statements, with very few getting all five correct. Necessary and sufficient conditions appear twice in the specification, in skills 6 and 8, so it is important that candidates are confident in their understanding as to whether a condition is enough on its own to explain or define something (sufficient) or whether it has to be true for the explanation or definition to be valid (necessary). It was not needed for this particular question, but it is often the case that there will be conditions which are neither necessary nor sufficient, and some which are both necessary and sufficient.

Question 4 (b):
It was pleasing to see that the difficulties which candidates have often found with evaluating an analogy were not as apparent in this question. Candidates found it slightly easier to provide a relevant difference than to give a relevant similarity, but there were far fewer answers which simply responded that the two things being compared were 'completely different' than has been the case in past papers. As well as relevance, candidates also had to make sure that their answer on the similarity did not simply repeat the point already made in the analogy about avoiding real life problems and responsibilities. For the difference, with only one mark available, it was sufficient for candidates to provide an answer which only referred to one side of the analogy, with an implied difference from the other aspect. For instance, 'alcohol causes physical damage to the body' was enough to gain the mark. It is important to remind centres that often two marks will be available for a question asking for a difference and in these cases both sides of the analogy need to be explicit in the answer.

Question 4 (c):
This skill 5 question was generally well answered and proved to be a good discriminator. Most candidates were able to identify two weaknesses in the survey or to explain one weakness clearly. The most successful answers made use of good terminology to attract the second mark for explaining the weakness. Phrases such as the sample being 'unrepresentative' when referring to the narrow age profile, or the tiny sample size being 'too small to draw reliable conclusions' were particularly effective. Some good answers were also seen identifying the questions as 'closed' and explaining that these resulted in less accurate results being gathered.

Question 5:
Whilst this question discriminated well, it proved to be one of the most difficult on the paper. The skill being tested here was the ability to distinguish between correlation and causation and the most successful answers used this terminology to provide an effective explanation. Many candidates interpreted the weakness in the reasoning as being based on assumptions being made. This could only be credited if it was clear from the explanation given that the candidate understood the weakness as being based on the lack of justification for a causal relationship between the 'dark and violent games' and the shootings.

Question 6:
In this question candidates found it easier to identify the conclusion than the counterargument. The mark scheme allowed for various elements of the counterargument to be included or not, as long as the key phrase at its core was included. Many candidates were distracted by the phrase 'Watching TV is passive', possibly because it was followed by the word 'whereas'.

Question 7 (a):
The vast majority of candidates were able to identify this as an explanation, recognising that the use of the indicator word 'because' was not leading to a conclusion of an argument meant to persuade, but was instead being used to provide an explanatory reason.

Question 7 (b):
Whilst a good majority of candidates correctly identified the criterion which would weaken credibility here as vested interest, most were unable to explain why this was the case. Many of the answers which could not be credited talked of Oliver Jenkins' 'bias', which is different from vested interest and fails to identify the key issue of what he has to gain from obscuring the truth here. The key to success here was to mention his desire to sell more copies of his book.

Question 7 (c):
Most candidates were able to gain some credit here, with many using expertise as the criterion which most clearly strengthened the claims. It was not necessary to use the term expertise to gain both marks and many strong answers referred to his knowledge gained from researching for his book. It was surprising to see how many candidates found it difficult here to explain aspects of credibility, with a number relying, unsuccessfully, on hypothetical reasoning rather than on the solid information given in the resource booklet that Jenkins is the author of a book on gaming. This points to the need to remind candidates that, although extracts from the documents will be included in the stem of a question to avoid time being wasted searching through the resource booklet, it is nevertheless often essential that the context of the extract is fully understood by reference back to the original document.

Question 8:
There was a very clear contrast seen in this question between the ability of candidates to identify a slippery slope flaw and their ability to explain what the key features of this flaw are. Most recognised the familiar steps in the argument from a straightforward starting point, through increasingly unlikely consequences, to an extreme conclusion. Relatively few, however, were able to explain this. In the specification a slippery slope is defined as 'jumping to unlikely or distant consequences'. It is important to stress that this is not the same as jumping to conclusions, nor is it simply about things getting worse as the argument progresses. Successful answers here stressed the lack of reasoning to support the jumps or the extreme nature of the conclusion as being the key things which made this a slippery slope.

Question 9:
As with the previous question, this one highlighted the difficulty which most candidates have with some of the flaws contained in the specification. This turned out to be the most difficult question on the paper, with very few candidates successfully identifying this as a straw man flaw. Of the small minority who did recognise this as a straw man, many were able to gain the second mark available by saying that Daryl misrepresented or distorted the original argument in order to make it easier to attack. The most common incorrect answer seen here was to suggest that this was an example of a false dilemma. In studying the resource booklet in pre-release form, centres are advised to encourage candidates to identify and explain any flaws which are apparent in the documents in advance of the examination.

Question 10:
This question was well answered, with the vast majority of candidates correctly placing at least three of the five comments accurately on the Venn diagram. Many gained full marks here, demonstrating the value to be gained from spending time on higher mark tariff questions such as this in order to arrive at the correct answers.

Question 11 (a):
Questions assessing the skill 7 focus of clarifying the meaning of ethical concepts are usually well handled by candidates. In this case, correctly identifying the best description of the use of the word 'fair' proved to be much more challenging. Perhaps because candidates most commonly experience the concept of fairness in terms of treating people equally, this was by far the most commonly chosen incorrect answer identified on scripts. In the context of the claim used in this question, this was not the best description, as to say that it is fair that people choose for themselves is more about doing what is appropriate in the circumstances.

Question 11 (b):
The big majority of candidates were able to provide at least one counterexample here. Many chose to place their answer in the context of the purchase of video games and were able to provide situations in which it would be fair to prevent someone buying games, usually related to age. Some, possibly more confident candidates, went outside the confines of the paper's theme to identify broader reasons. Common successful answers dealt with mental capacity, those intending to cause harm to others and illegal acts, as well as issues relating to young children.

Section B

Question 12:
Nearly all candidates wrote answers of good length in response to this question, with the vast majority developing their arguments sufficiently to gain at least level 2 marks of 4 or more. There was a fairly even split between those who chose to argue in favour of a ban on violent video games and those who argued against such a ban. As is often the case with questions testing AO3 skills, the most successful candidates' answers identified two reasons to support their case and then developed these, mainly using evidence gained from the documents and sometimes from their own wider knowledge and understanding. There was a trend seen in this question of a number of candidates choosing to present reasons both for and against a ban. This almost inevitably weakens the argument given, as a clear conclusion is not being fully supported and the reasoning becomes diluted. The use of a counterexample can strengthen an argument, but this must be used in such a way that this can then be dismissed as being much weaker than the reasons presented in support of the conclusion. It will often be the case that candidates are given the choice of arguing one of two ways in section B, but it is important for centres to stress to their students that they must choose either one definite conclusion or the other to display their AO3 skills, as the presentation of a balanced argument does not fulfil the criteria required.

Question 13 (a):
Most candidates were able to provide at least one reason here which gained some credit, although it proved much more challenging to develop the reasons and few scripts were seen which gained full marks here. The most successful answers addressed the conclusion directly, that the NHS should provide help for gaming addiction, and identified medical consequences of the addiction that should be the responsibility of the NHS. Other successful routes which gained credit used the fact that the NHS is publically funded to justify its requirement to treat anybody in need. Answers which focused on non-medical effects of gaming, such as lower grades at school, could not be credited as these are not reasons for NHS treatment.

Question 13 (b):
This question saw more level 3 answers than question 12 and elicited some strong responses with well-developed reasons to support the argument that the NHS should not have the responsibility to treat gaming addicts. Many of the answers focused on the differences between addiction to alcohol and addiction to gaming and as long as this was developed to focus on the idea that the medical needs of the latter are far less and could not be considered the responsibility of the NHS, then this line of reasoning gained good credit. A significant number of candidates argued that it should be the responsibility of parents and families to support gaming addicts and, again, as long as this was directly connected to the required conclusion, this could also be a successful route to a strong mark.