



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

Critical Thinking

CRIT4

(Specification 2770)

Unit 4: Reasoning and Decision Making.

Report on the Examination

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CRIT4 A2 Reasoning and Decision Making

General Comments from the Principal Examiner

Question

In a great many respects candidates demonstrated a better understanding of the specification for the award than last year, in particular the role of consequences in the process of decision-making. This emerged most noticeably in the extended answer, in section C, where some impressive reasoning was evident. Many of the shorter responses were also answered with considerable confidence and competence. However, relatively few candidates managed to maintain the same high standard across the whole paper. One encouraging observation is that many centres are clearly teaching the subject very well: candidates in the main appear to have a stronger grasp of the concepts involved than this time last year. Many also have clearly given prior consideration to the pre-release materials and the issues with which they are concerned.

Overall the paper discriminated well with marks ranging from 64 out of a total of 70 down to fewer than 20. Despite much success, there is also no doubt that some candidates struggled with the demands of the subject.

Specific comments

Section 1 divided candidates quite sharply between those who are confident in the handling of simple probability, decision trees, etc., and those who were mystified by the tasks. Just under half of all candidates scored full marks for Question 1, the decision tree and accompanying question; but this was balanced by a similar proportion who obtained few if any marks because they clearly lacked understanding the basic methodology. A smaller number took a broadly correct approach but made some arithmetical errors which cost them some but not all of the marks.

Question 2 produced a range of marks, most candidates suggesting one or more reasons for questioning the significance of the data. It should be noted that a considerable number gave as their answer that the sample was not representative, despite the question telling them to assume that it was representative and unbiased. The oldest advice in the book still needs saying: read the question carefully!

Question 3, like Question 1, split candidates between those who scored full marks (35%) and those who simply did not understand the basic operation that was required. Some acquaintance with probability is important as it will occur regularly in the examination paper. See 3.4c of the Specification: “Students should know how to express simple probabilities descriptively, arithmetically or diagrammatically...”

Question 4: this question was generally well answered, though some candidates oversimplified by saying that the paragraph assumed that Irving's Holocaust denial would not incite hatred and/or lead to violence, whereas what is assumed is that it was not *intended* to incite etc., or could reasonably be *expected* to do so. Just under half of the candidates recognised this critical distinction and qualified their answers accordingly.

Question 5 produced a full distribution of marks from 0 upwards, with around 25% of candidates achieving the top or upper-middle band. This required recognition by the candidate of the straw man fallacy in the reasoning and the overgeneralisation present in it. Many went on to give additional critical comments, such as the author's failure to treat Elton John's remarks as "throwaway", and the pejorative tone of his own dismissal of "these people".

Question 6. There was a similar distribution of marks for this question. Most of those who gave good answers recognised that Peter Hain's argument relied upon precedent or tradition (in that the BBC had never invited someone like Griffin on to Question Time before); but also rightly pointed out that this was not a knockdown argument for never doing so. Taking a more positive line, some defended Hain's viewpoint by arguing that the BBC had good reason to exclude people who had incited hatred, etc., and that this was a good reason to invite Griffin now or to depart from the norm.

Question 7. This proved a relatively straightforward question and was answered well, with the majority of candidates obtaining half the available mark or better. The support that Mark Thompson gives for his earlier comment is in the form of a comparison between Griffin's legitimate entitlement to campaign politically and his entitlement to speak on the programme. Most candidates saw this is a fair comparison and justified it accordingly. However there was a somewhat surprising number who missed the point of the question and scored no marks at all.

Question 8. This was a straightforward identification question which gave the majority of candidates no problems: it was generally well answered.

Question 9 was a full-length essay question which required candidates to decide how the British government should respond to the complex issue of freedom of expression and the opposite expedient of some degree of censorship. The key to success in this question is in the careful reading of the instructions: it is not an invitation for merely expressing opinions or embarking on flights of rhetoric. It is an exercise in considering options in the light of possible consequences, giving most weight to those that are most likely and / or most serious. Consequences may be advantageous or disadvantageous. The most obvious downside that can be envisaged for freedom of expression is that it will cause offence or even rouse people to violence. One extreme example of this, as noted in the pre-released material, is the historical one of the rise of Hitler. As a number of candidates rightly observed, a similar event could occur again if no curbs are placed on what extremists of one persuasion or another are permitted to say, but, as they also observed, this is relatively unlikely. Is it serious enough to warrant censorship even if it is unlikely? That is the kind of question that the best candidates developed in their responses.

As well as considering consequences and pragmatic issues generally candidates are also required to make some reference to values and / or principles. Again many did this effectively, citing for example the notion of the right to speak freely, and the fact that if this is a right, in the full sense, it applies even to those whose views are ugly or potentially offensive. Many candidates also picked up JS Mill's harm principle, and the fact that it did not apply to mere offence.

Another important requirement was to state the decision clearly which in turn required stating the options clearly. Some candidates failed to meet these requirements, thus depriving

themselves of a straightforward way of earning credit. It is a failing most likely to occur when candidates simply start writing without first planning what they are going to say and on what grounds. In one way or another their essays should clearly convey to the reader:

- (1) These are the options.
- (2) This is the option I advocate / would take.
- (3) These are my reasons why.

These statements should constitute the core of the response, with the consideration of consequences and principles providing the development. Practice in writing that justifies decisions along these simple lines is essential for success.

Last but not least candidates should relate their answers either to one or more of the documents in the pre-release materials or to other sources of information that they have thought about in advance of the exam; or both. For the highest marks reference to these sources should involve more than simply noting, e.g., 'So and so says S', or, 'As it says in document X....' There should be some critical engagement with the materials, agreeing with the points they make or interpreting the data they provide.

There is no doubt that to obtain the top band of marks for this question the candidate must show considerable intellectual skill and write clearly and persuasively – though not necessarily eloquently. So it was very gratifying to see that 15% of candidates achieved the top band (see accompanying mark scheme) on this question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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