OCR
RECOGNISING ACHIEVEMENT

ADVANCED GCE

CRITICAL THINKING

Critical Reasoning

F504/RB

RESOURCE BOOKLET

To be issued with the question paper

Wednesday 2 February 2011
Morning

Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

*   Read and use Documents 1, 2 and 3 to answer the questions.

INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES

*   This document consists of **4** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

INSTRUCTION TO EXAMS OFFICER / INVIGILATOR

*   Do not send this resource booklet for marking; it should be retained in the centre or destroyed.

Background Information

When the internet was launched, it was thought to be a truly free environment. Many people still believe that a free internet is possible and desirable. However, there are increasing calls for regulation of the internet. Questions being raised include:

- Regulation of business practices
  Should regulations protect singers and writers from free file sharing?
  Should targeted advertising be regulated?

- Regulation of content
  Should sites which promote terrorism / racism / hatred etc be blocked?
  Should inaccurate or biased websites be altered?

- Regulation of activity
  Should acts which are criminal in everyday life be regulated online?

- Who should regulate the internet?
  Companies, governments, international organisations, police, individuals, parents, schools?

Document 1

China not alone in internet regulation

US President Barack Obama asked China to abandon the so-called practice of "internet censorship" during his China trip (in November 2009), calling for the freedom of expression and non-censored internet. **1**

However, internet censorship is far from a simple issue of right and wrong. Even in Obama's own country, whether to censor the internet or not is under intense debate. **2**

Two federal laws intended to censor offensive online content were passed at the turn of this millennium, while four states – New York, New Mexico, Michigan and Virginia have passed Internet censorship legislation restricting/banning online distribution of material deemed "harmful to minors" since 1996. **3**

In Germany, German Internet Service Providers (ISPs) once demanded to block access to some Internet content outside Germany containing material that is illegal under German laws, particularly race hate propaganda and child pornography. In 2001 and 2002, German authorities issued takedown notices to a number of web hosts in the US. **4**

In South Korea, the Korean Communications Commission, which regulates the industry, has created its own rules to oblige portals to suspend sites stepping outside the limits and require Web sites to disclose the real names of anyone posting comments. **5**

"We have to guard against 'infodemics', in which inaccurate, false information is disseminated, prompting social unrest that spreads like an epidemic," Lee Myung Bak, the South Korean president told the parliament in July, 2008. **6**

Lee is right. While facilitating the flow of information, the internet is making it much, much easier for ill-intentioned people to wreak havoc, cause harm to others and bring about social unrest for their own selfish benefits. **7**

The government has a responsibility to better manage the internet, keeping harmful content out of public view. Anyway, the Internet should also serve public good, instead of becoming a tool of illicit activities. **8**

Source: www.chinadaily.com.cn

Document 2

United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

1

Document 3

Easily caught in a web of sinister untruths

By David Aaronovitch

Sir Tim Berners-Lee, one of the genius originators of the World Wide Web, has announced the setting up of a new foundation, called the "World Wide Web Foundation", which intends to research what has been happening on the internet, and make suggestions on how to improve it. Which is a very good idea.

1

Sir Tim mentioned his worries about one aspect of weblife: using the net, a cult of 12 people with deep personal issues suddenly finds an idea which appears very believable, "a sort of conspiracy theory which you can imagine spreading to thousands of people and becoming deeply damaging".

2

Of course, the dissemination of stupid ideas, and their equation with sensible ones, didn't need the internet. There have always been panics caused by ignorant journalists and media folk who were unable to distinguish between an unsubstantiated theory on the one hand and a scientific consensus built around significant studies on the other.

3

On the one hand a scientist says X, on the other hand another one says Y, so X and Y are roughly to be accorded equal respect. You get this in the creationist versus evolution debate, too. But evolution is the best scientific hypothesis we have, by miles, for how species develop. By contrast creationism is readily falsifiable by scientific method.

4

But you know, folks, why don't we just teach people what they want to hear? A bit of creationism next to evolution in biology, a bit of flat Earth versus round Earth in physics, a bit of anti-Semitism versus Judaism in RE. That'd be fair.

5

Speaking of which, here's my tale. At the weekend I was tidying up some footnotes for my book on conspiracy theories, which is to be published next spring. In one chapter I deal fleetingly with a dead American conspiracist called Harry Elmer Barnes, and mention his affinity with/for a French Holocaust denier called Paul Rassinier. I was after a date and found it after a quick Google, but not before noticing that the Rassinier biography on Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia, was a little bit odd. I let it go. Then, yesterday, I read Berners-Lee's comments and returned to the site.

6

I was right - righter, in fact, than I had realised. The biography begins with what seems to be a neutral introduction, but is in fact a selective description of Rassinier as a pacifist, activist, as anti-Nazi, a former concentration camp prisoner, and then, at the end of the introduction, comments that Rassinier has "come to be remembered for his views on the Holocaust, which have caused some to call him the 'father of Holocaust Denial'". Note that "some", as opposed to the positive things.

7

The Wikipedia entry suggests a scholarly neutrality while, at the same time, normalising Rassinier's easily refutable views on the Holocaust. For example, Rassinier believed there was no deliberate Nazi policy of extermination of the Jews and no gas chambers. The entry is supported by doctored quotations from a controversial historian and a biography written by a Holocaust denier. **8**

So it took me an instinct, one morning, three hours, and a background in this material, to realise that the Rassinier Wikipedia entry – the first item on Rassinier that appears when you search for his name – had probably been written by someone with sympathies for the Holocaust denial camp. The ordinary reader, however, would never know, for not once does this poisonous bias reveal itself. **9**

One of Berners-Lee's ideas was for a kind of Kitemark – or series of Kitemarks – of website quality. Of course people must learn to discriminate themselves, but it would be naive to suppose that they won't need some help. Yesterday's small trawl suggests to me that it can't come a moment too soon. **10**

Source: The Times newspaper