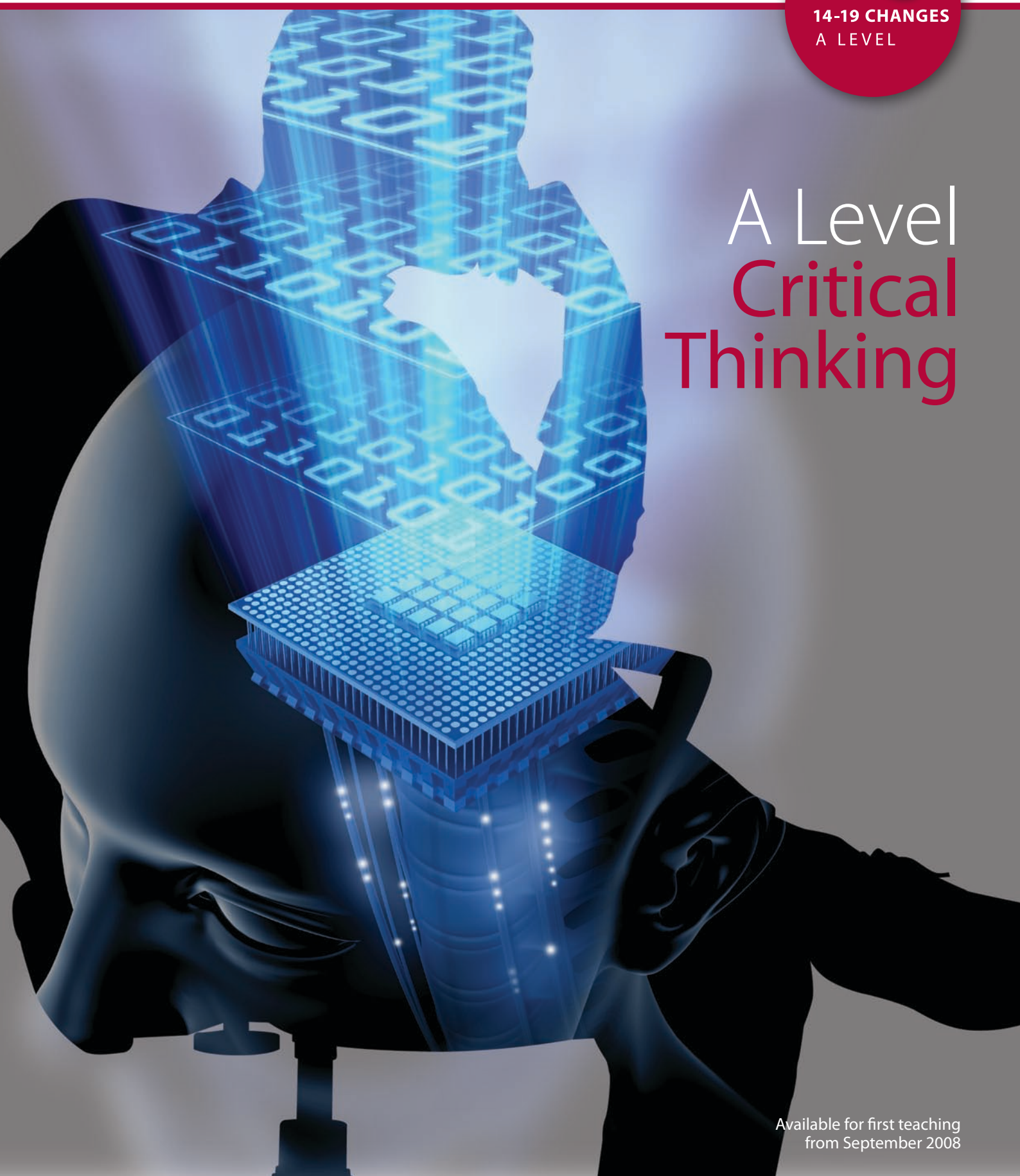




14-19 CHANGES
A LEVEL

A Level Critical Thinking



Available for first teaching
from September 2008

“Clearer demands, more obvious structure to what needs to be taught”

This following question is taken from the specimen assessment material for Unit 2.

Read this and choose the correct answer:

It is probably no surprise that the majority of graduates expect to change career during their working lives. Given that teaching is often reported in a very negative light, it is more surprising that a fifth of graduates in other careers want to become teachers. They are even prepared to take a cut in pay to do so. It must be the case that teaching is a more attractive career than suggested by many reports.

Which of the following is the main conclusion of the above argument?

- a) *Teaching is a more attractive career than suggested by many reports.*
- b) *Teaching has always been a very attractive career.*
- c) *The majority of graduates expect to change career during their working lives.*
- d) *Teaching is often reported in a very negative light.*

Learners and teachers find these questions quite compelling. Brain-teasers, logic problems, something more?

Of course, not all questions are multiple-choice; the assessment includes short-answer questions and questions requiring more discursive answers.

Hopefully you selected a) as the correct answer!

“The units are challenging and do differentiate really well between students. The skills acquired do have obvious cross-curricular links.”



What is Critical Thinking?

One definition, *“Critical thinking is a form of reflective reasoning that analyses and evaluates information and arguments by applying a range of intellectual skills in order to reach clear, logical and coherent judgements within a given context”*, rightly hints that it is a discipline driven by skills rather than content.

Why is Critical Thinking so popular?

It is certainly one of the fastest growing AS/A Levels around. Many find that proficiency in the core skills of Critical Thinking is vital to successful academic study at all levels. And the good news is that research provides evidence that these skills are transferable into achievement in other school subjects (eg Higgins *et al*, 2004). In many ways, this is not surprising. A good grasp of analysis, an understanding of what constitutes a sound argument, knowing how to spot flaws and weaknesses in the reasoning, and the ability to compose coherent and focused arguments are all at the heart of academic endeavour.



“Retained the good points while reducing the amount of material required for processing in order to demonstrate skills.”

The new A Level in Critical Thinking

This skills-based course has been updated and improved, giving a greater clarity that makes it easier to teach and to learn. The new specification offers easy continuity from the current one making the transition as smooth as possible. It also retains its key focus on the interpretation and evaluation of ideas and arguments across a broad base of subjects, including sciences and humanities. OCR is committed to offering you the support and training you need to deliver this exciting new course successfully to your learners.

Why learners should study for an A Level in Critical Thinking

- It provides learners with skills such as analysis, evaluation and the ability to compose reasoned and coherent arguments which can benefit their performance across a range of subjects both in the humanities and sciences.
- It provides opportunities for learners to think deeply, and in a structured way, about issues that are key to participating in society, eg ethical questions, cultural issues and issues of personal responsibility.
- A Level Critical Thinking drives higher-order thinking skills and is valued by universities as well as employers. It offers excellent preparation for study at Higher Education level but also prepares learners for the tests they will be asked to complete while looking for employment.
- Learners with an A Level in Critical Thinking have secured places in some of the country's most reputable universities.



“The section on flaws and writing your own arguments and the opportunity for more creativity particularly excite my students. They love to break down an argument!”

Why offer OCR's A Level in Critical Thinking?

- OCR has eight years' experience of offering Critical Thinking at AS Level and hundreds of schools and colleges have successfully delivered our Critical Thinking as a four-unit A Level since 2005.
- The specification and support materials are written in a language and style that makes it easier for teachers from any background and discipline to understand and deliver. And the support package has been developed to match the specification.
- For those of you who are currently offering Critical Thinking in your school or college and are familiar with the specification, you will be pleased to know that the skills assessed remain the same. This will minimise the amount of additional time and effort required in transferring to the new specification.

Outline of key features

Critical Thinking A Level is one of the fastest growing A levels, with OCR being the only awarding body to have offered the qualification over the last eight years.

- As hundreds of schools and colleges having successfully delivered our four-unit Critical Thinking qualification since 2005, we have been able to build up extensive expertise and knowledge.
- OCR's new specification has greater clarity and is therefore easier for you to understand and teach.
- The assessment of OCR's specification includes multiple-choice questions, an effective tool in assessing particular skills in Critical Thinking. It also brings variety to the paper and in combination with short-answer and extended writing questions, contributes to a balanced paper.
- We offer excellent support comprising OCR schemes of work, lesson plans and exemplar answers to specimen assessment material. Our publishing partner, Heinemann, produces a suite of resources which match the specification. These resources feature student books for AS and A2, which include a free LiveText CD-ROM, giving an electronic version of the book and interactive activities and additional material to support learning and revision.
- Heinemann will also publish a planning and delivery resource file for teachers, which will include differentiated activities, guidance on teacher planning and answers to student book activities.

A Level Critical Thinking **course details**

For AS

Teaching units	Assessment Method and Weighting
<p>F501: Introduction to Critical Thinking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The language of reasoning • Credibility. <p>This unit provides an introduction to important skills in critical thinking. It also covers the area of credibility and recognises that the plausibility of an argument or the evidence used to support it, is influenced by its origin, be that a person or an organisation.</p>	<p>Mandatory unit</p> <p>1 hour 30 mins written exam</p> <p>AS – 50%</p> <p>A Level – 25%</p> <p>Section A: Short-answer questions and part-questions</p> <p>Section B: Short-answer questions and questions requiring more discursive answers</p>
<p>F502: Assessing and Developing Argument</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of argument • Evaluating arguments • Developing own reasoned argument. <p>This unit covers a wide range of argument components building on the skills developed in Unit 1. Analysing and evaluating arguments including assessing strengths and weaknesses, and writing of original arguments in response to stimulus material.</p>	<p>Mandatory unit</p> <p>1 hour 30 mins written exam</p> <p>AS – 50%</p> <p>A Level – 25%</p> <p>Section A: Multiple-choice questions</p> <p>Section B: Short-answer questions</p> <p>Section C: Short-answer questions and writing of one or more further arguments</p>

For A2

Teaching units	Assessment Method and Weighting
<p>F503: Ethical Reasoning and Decision Making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical reasoning • Dilemmas, applying principles and decision making. <p>In this unit the skills developed at AS Level are applied in the context of ethical reasoning and decision making. Learners advance their skills in the analysis and evaluation of conflicting ideas and arguments.</p>	<p>Mandatory unit</p> <p>1 hour 30 mins written exam</p> <p>A Level – 25%</p> <p>Short-answer questions and questions requiring more discursive answers</p>
<p>F504: Critical Reasoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis and evaluation of complex arguments • Developing own cogent and complex arguments. <p>This unit includes similar concepts and ideas to previous units but presents a different level of challenge. In addition, it includes analysis and evaluation of material based on typical arguments found in newspapers, journals, books and magazines.</p>	<p>Mandatory unit</p> <p>1 hour 30 mins written exam</p> <p>A Level – 25%</p> <p>Short-answer questions and questions requiring more discursive answers as well as writing of further argument</p>

What stays the same, and what changes?

“This is an improvement on the current specification. Well done!”

If you’re already working with the current OCR A Level Critical Thinking specification, you’ll want to know which parts of this remain in the new specification – and what the main changes are.

The table below outlines the key points.

Main aspects that stay the same	Most important changes
Key components of this course remain: developing learners’ ability to interpret, analyse and evaluate ideas and arguments across a broad range of subjects.	Although the credibility content remains largely the same, the assessment of credibility now represents half of the assessment for Unit 1 . This is because the introduction of the language of reasoning provides a better stepping stone towards the skills assessed in Unit 2 .
The content for the credibility element remains the same. You can carry on teaching it in the same way you currently do.	Progression is clearer through Units 1–4 and from AS to A2. Unit 1 gives a basic introduction to critical thinking (learners have no prior knowledge of critical thinking through Level 2 qualifications). In Unit 2 learners use their new skills to recognise, explain and evaluate the components of an argument. In Unit 3 learners evaluate source material by applying ethical theories and principles. They also construct their own arguments which should incorporate the different components of an argument. Unit 4 differs from previous units by presenting a greater level of challenge rather than by introducing new concepts and ideas.
	The amount of source material in the exam paper has been reduced overall to allow more time to complete questions.
The multiple-choice section in Unit 2 has been retained.	The number of multiple-choice questions in Unit 2 has been reduced to 15 to enable learners to think before answering. Also, in places, there is more than one question per passage. The multiple-choice section has been removed from Unit 4 to reduce repetition of this question type.

For more information on A Level Critical Thinking, visit www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/1419changes/alevels

'Stretch and Challenge'

A new Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) initiative for A Levels, 'Stretch and Challenge' is designed to give learners the opportunity to demonstrate their potential, and to help universities differentiate between applicants. It will be part of the A2 units, so it won't involve additional questions or exam papers.

'Stretch and Challenge' is achieved through a new approach to exam questions:

- The questions invite a greater variety of thinking and type of answer. For example, the introduction could ask the learner to 'analyse', 'evaluate' or 'discuss'.
- The questions are structured to show more connections between different sections of the specification.
- Extended writing is encouraged in all subjects (except in areas such as Maths, where it is clearly inappropriate).
- There's a wider range of question types – such as case studies and open-ended questions – rather than just short-answer questions.
- There are more synoptic assessments – exploring connections between different areas and levels of a subject – over and above the superficial links within question types.

You'll find examples of 'Stretch and Challenge' style questions in your specimen assessment materials.



"Skills are the same or have had content removed, so it should be fairly easy to adapt what we already do."

Support for A Level Critical Thinking teachers

To help you get started with the new A Level Critical Thinking specification, OCR will run a number of training courses. We will also provide a range of detailed support materials and resources – some produced by OCR, some by our publishing partner.

Training

The following INSET courses will be available from September 2007:

Get ready – introducing the new A level specifications (first teaching from September 2008)

These **free** half-day (morning) sessions are designed to give you an overview of the new OCR specifications. They will:

- **Look at the structure of the new specifications**
- **Compare the new specification content with the old, including coursework and 'Stretch and Challenge' implications**
- **Discuss the support and resources available from OCR**
- **Summarise the benefits of the OCR specifications.**

Get started – towards successful delivery of the new A level specifications (first teaching from September 2008)

These full-day sessions will give you guidance and support in planning to teach the new AS/A Level specifications.

They will:

- **Give an introduction to the structure and content of the new specifications**
- **Consider approaches to first teaching, and suggest best practice**
- **Look at coursework and 'Stretch and Challenge' implications**
- **Review the support and resources available from OCR.**

This course will have some similarity to the half-day 'Get ready' sessions, but will look at the new specifications in more depth, with the emphasis on first teaching.

Places are allocated on a first come, first served basis – so if you're interested in attending one of these events, visit www.ocr.org.uk/training to find out the dates of the events nearest to you.

Support materials

OCR is producing the following materials to help you prepare for the new A Level in Critical Thinking:

- **Scheme of work:** topic outlines, suggested teaching and homework activities, suggested resources and points to note. Available autumn 2007.
- **Sample lesson plans:** detailed breakdowns of suggested teaching formats for the more difficult concepts within the units. Available autumn 2007.
- **Exemplar candidate work:** real learner answers to specimen assessment material, including indicative marks and examiner commentaries. Available spring 2008.
- **OCR glossary of terms:** Available autumn 2007.

For more information on all these support materials, visit www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/1419changes/alevels



We're also working with our publishing partner, Heinemann, to provide further resources to support the new specifications:

AS Critical Thinking: Student Book featuring exam-café*

It includes a LiveText CD-ROM with an electronic version of the textbook and extra features. Available spring 2008.

A2 Critical Thinking: Student Book featuring exam-café*

It includes a LiveText CD-ROM with an electronic version of the textbook and extra features. Available spring 2008.

AS Critical Thinking: Teacher Planning and Delivery Resource File with LiveText CD-ROM

Available autumn 2008.

A2 Critical Thinking: Teacher Planning and Delivery Resource File with LiveText CD-ROM

Available autumn 2008.

For more information on these resources, visit www.heinemann.co.uk

* Exam-café is an exciting new feature which will be part of both the printed and electronic resources. It gives learners a motivating way to prepare for their exams - with advice from their peers, teachers and examiners. It includes tips on revising for exams and interactive activities.

Other publishers may also produce support material, and we will consider them for endorsement after we've assessed them against the OCR Quality Assurance process.

Background to the changes

Following a review of 14–19 education, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has revised the subject criteria for A Levels. These changes are intended to reduce the volume of marking for teachers, and the amount of assessment for learners – and to ensure that every young person has the opportunity to realise their full potential. Along with all awarding bodies, OCR has developed A Levels for first teaching from September 2008.

We've made sure it's a change for the better

QCA's decision to revise A Levels has given us a great opportunity to make further improvements to our qualifications. We've been talking to teachers, heads of departments, local authority advisers, subject experts and examiners to make sure the new specifications, support materials and schemes of work meet your needs.

Other OCR qualifications you may be interested in:

A Level Psychology

A Level History

A Level Philosophy

A Level Religious Studies

A Level Sociology

Want to find out more?

For more information on the new OCR A Level Critical Thinking, visit www.ocr.org.uk or call **01223 553998**

www.ocr.org.uk

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