

**OXFORD CAMBRIDGE AND RSA EXAMINATIONS**  
**Advanced Subsidiary GCE**

**CRITICAL THINKING**

Unit 2: Assessing & Developing Argument

Friday **13 JANUARY 2006** Afternoon 1 hour 45 minutes

**F492/01/RB**  
**F492/02/RB**

**Resource Booklet**

**TIME** 1 hour 45 minutes

**INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES**

- Use Documents 1 and 2 to answer the questions in Sections B and C.

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**This Resource Booklets consists of 3 printed pages and 1 blank page.**

## Document 1: Degrees of value?

A degree used to be the pinnacle of education. However, there are now many reasons why degree level qualifications are of very little value and are not worth having.

1

School leavers are having second thoughts about university, aware that an average graduate starting salary of £17,000 is hardly going to cover debts of up to £15,000 after three years of university. Even graduates from Newcastle University, where 96% find a job within six months of graduation, manage average salaries of only £17,900. It is obvious that graduate salaries no longer match the crippling costs of getting a degree.

2

Recently 16,000 university students were interviewed and only one third expected to get, or look for, a graduate-level job when they left university. When this is combined with the 26% (an all-time high) who go on to take further qualifications, it becomes clear that getting a degree does not lead to better employment prospects. Evidence from employers has also shown that 11% of graduates who are in work have jobs in sales and customer support. Sadly, it won't be long until all the checkouts in supermarkets are operated by highly skilled graduates unable to get more suitable jobs.

3

If we want our young people to go on to have marketable skills, we must ensure that we give them all the information they need about future employment prospects. The British Chamber of Commerce has suggested that the real skills shortage is in skilled construction and engineering technicians. This shows that degrees are not reflecting the needs of the economy.

4

The situation is worsened by the increasing numbers entering university. Twenty years ago only one in eight young people went to university. Now it is one in three. This lowering of entrance standards has devalued degrees. Confirmation comes from the fact that there are now more students studying for a degree in management than in the traditional subjects of physics and chemistry put together.

5

Some have argued that the planned increases in vocational degrees will result in higher status for degrees, as vocational graduates are currently less likely to be unemployed than graduates with academic degrees. However, vocational degrees such as acupuncture and aromatherapy have been given the 'thumbs down' by some employers in these areas because they do not give sufficiently specific skills and are not academically rigorous.

6

Currently, the high level research carried out by universities has helped keep standards high. In the future, further education colleges, that do not carry out high level research, may also be allowed to call themselves universities. Breaking the link with high level research will further erode the academic rigour of degree courses. The principals of many further education colleges may have welcomed these changes, but their support can be dismissed as they are bound to want the extra status that being a principal of a university would entail.

7

**Document 2: What's the point of chemistry?**

Two universities in as many weeks have closed their chemistry departments, bringing the total to five closures in 18 months and suggesting that the subject is in serious decline. This lack of interest in chemistry may be explained by the long list of scientific disasters, such as GM crops and pollution. In addition, the success of TV shows like *Silent Witness* and *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* has spawned a wave of forensic science courses that have taken students away from chemistry.

1

For some, a last ray of hope comes from the toy store, Hamley's, which stated that Christmas sales of chemistry sets were up. However, expecting that this will lead to more chemistry graduates is hardly scientific thought. After all, the millions of Harley Davidson Barbie dolls sold has not led to a dramatic increase in the number of Hell's Angels and biker gangs!

2

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