OCR
RECOGNISING ACHIEVEMENT

GCE

Critical Thinking

Advanced GCE **A2 H452**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H052**

Reports on the Units

January 2010

HX52/R/10J

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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Advanced Subsidiary GCE Critical Thinking (H052)

REPORTS ON THE UNITS

Chief Examiner Report

Performance overall was pleasing in all four units of the examination. Candidates accessed the full range of marks, and there is evidence that there are enthusiastic, motivated teachers who have the time to inspire their students. Mark schemes in all four units allow students to gain some marks for answers which are heading in the right direction, even if not fully developed..

The AS is now in its second year, whereas the A2 units were sat for the first time this January. The cohort was relatively large for Unit 1 compared with Unit 2, and for Unit 3 compared with Unit 4. This indicates that centres are largely entering candidates for the units in the order in which they were designed to be taken, although there are some exceptions. The F502 cohort was predominantly composed of candidates in Year 13, many of whom were retaking the examination. However, all F504 candidates were sitting for the first time, and early indications are that it was not necessarily to their advantage to take Unit 4 before Unit 3. Centres are referred to the specification, which says of Unit 4, 'It is expected that candidates would normally study this unit at the end of their Critical Thinking course.'

Candidates were able to complete all four units within the time, and generally did not leave gaps or rush towards the end. In F501 there was some evidence of candidates performing well either in section A or in section B. Similarly in F502 there was evidence that some candidates were strong in the analysis and evaluation part of the paper but weak when developing arguments, or weak in analysis and evaluation but strong when developing arguments.

The new A2 units allowed more time than the legacy units for candidates to perform tasks. This seemed to allow candidates to really show their ability, and the best answers were outstanding. It was particularly noticeable in the final question of F503 that the new examination format allowed candidates to develop strong answers.

Despite the overall level of performance, the following areas could be improved.

- Argument elements. It was an issue in F501, F502 and F504 that candidates across the ability range struggled with questions asking for the name of argument elements. The correct answer would normally be, 'reason,' 'intermediate conclusion,' 'example,' or similar. There is a very short list of argument elements on page 10 of the specification, which is extended for F502 on page 13 and for F504 on pp19 – 20. Candidates should learn these lists. Flaws such as, 'straw man' and appeals such as, 'appeal to emotion,' are not elements of argument.

- Similarly in F503 candidates demonstrated some confusion between factors, criteria and principles/ethical theories. In the new unit, unlike the legacy unit, criteria can no longer be given to candidates in the examination paper.

F501 Introduction to Critical Thinking

General comments:

The number of candidates entering this unit was 13,000 suggesting that a large number of centres are now entering their candidates for Unit 1 in January and Unit 2 in May. The marks gained covered the full range, demonstrating that candidates are able to achieve high marks in this paper despite having studied the subject for only a term.

Performance over the two sections was relatively even, with particularly strong performances in questions 1 and 8, identifying the parts of an argument and the credibility of personal claims. The weakest answers were for question 2 where, as in May 2009, many students were unable to recognise and explain an argument element.

There were two areas where many students appeared not to read the question closely. As in May 2009, many candidates in question 8a failed to cover the strengthen/weaken element and in question 9 there was a failure to appreciate that the debate was about whether "turning off lights in suburban areas between midnight and 5 am would make these areas less safe at these times than if they were lit" rather than "whether there should be a blackout or not", which was the unasked question many candidates responded to.

Many students obviously understood and used specialist vocabulary appropriately, although there are still a substantial minority who appear to be unaware of the need to use the correct credibility criteria in questions 6 and 8.

There was little evidence that time was a problem with many candidates writing substantial and well constructed answers for question 9. There was less evidence of the use of NR (no response) than on previous papers, suggesting that a greater number of candidates had a wider understanding of the subject content and the type of questions to expect.

Comments on individual questions:

Section A

1 This question was generally well answered with many candidates scoring extremely high marks.

(a) The majority of candidates were able to identify correctly the main conclusion of the argument, many scoring 3 marks. However, there was a substantial minority who wrote "the blackout needs to be rethought" ie omitted the first half of the quote, which was awarded only 2 marks.

(b) Whilst a number of students received 3 marks for this question there were a number of others who did not seem to understand what is meant by an indicator word and wrote down words which cover argument elements eg argue, claim.

(c) Generally answered well.

(d) A substantial number of students were able to identify correctly the hypothetical reason, gaining the full 3 marks. However, a number of students tried to abbreviate it and as a result omitted the first section which meant that the answer was no longer "hypothetical reasoning" and so the marks could no longer be awarded.

(e) Many candidates correctly identified the other reason in the counter argument, gaining full marks. However, a substantial number included the preceding evidence in their response ie "With sodium street lamps costing between £20 and £40 a year to run and many councils having at least 100,000 lights...." which meant they could only be awarded 1 mark, since this is a technical question asking only for the reason so marks were deducted for superfluous material (see mark scheme).

2 (a) This question produced the most disappointing answers, with very few recognising the material as an example. There was some sympathy for those candidates who wrote "evidence" as their answer and these were awarded 1 mark. However, a very large number wrote "counter claim/counter argument or claim" ie candidates were writing about the nature of the whole sentence, rather than the argument element within it. Some candidates named flaws in this section but this would not appear on this paper as flaws are part of the content for F502. For F501 there is a list of the required argument elements in the specification and candidates should be able to recognise each of these.

(b) Obviously those who failed to recognise the correct argument element in (a) struggled to answer (b) correctly. However, even those who recognised the quote as an example rarely scored higher than 1 since their explanation was restricted to the idea of an example giving support to a reason, with no reference as to how that support is given. To gain both marks there needed to be some idea that the support "helped the understanding" or "illustrated the reason".

3 Many students achieved full marks in at least one section of this question, recognising that factors such as "longer winter nights" would mean that the lights were on for a longer period of time, resulting in higher bills than areas where nights were shorter. Where students received only partial marks (ie 1 out of 2) it tended to be because they did not link the factor to the level of the bills eg they wrote that "Fairbanks has longer winter nights than many cities in England" or they merely gave the position in Fairbanks eg "Fairbanks has long winter nights so the lights are on for a long time."

4 (a) A majority of students recognised the assumption but it was often overstated by the candidate either implying or writing "all" councils use sodium lights or "all" street lights are sodium, which reduced the mark which could be awarded to 2.

(b) Most candidates accessed at least 1 mark but a substantial number did not gain the 3 marks available. This is because, despite this question having appeared previously, too many students still cannot resist adding a conclusion and an example or a second reason. It is appreciated that in any other subject this would probably be acceptable but in an AS Critical Thinking examination this is both a technical and a creative question and the candidates need to recognise it as such.

5 This question discriminated well in that marks could only be accessed if the candidate clearly identified the reason and the conclusion. Candidates who fail to do this cannot answer the question since it is not possible to assess the link between the conclusion and the link without referring to something in the reason that connects or disagrees with something in the conclusion. A number of centres seem to have taught this well and candidates were able to lay side by side the content of the conclusion with the nature of the reason and realise that they were dealing with different subject matter.

In the mark scheme there are more examples of weaknesses in the link than strengths and the many candidates who gained full marks for weaknesses did so by pointing out that cutting crime/reducing road accidents does not directly save energy etcetera but those who saw the seriousness of crime and accidents respectively as justifying the rethinking of the blackout were also credited.

There are some candidates who are still trying to respond to this question by looking at the absence of evidence/examples as a weakening of the reason or trying to assess the reason in terms of credibility criteria but responses such as these were not correct here as the question was not about the strength or weakness of the reason but at how well the reason supported/linked to the conclusion.

Section B

6 This question proved to be a good discriminator. Stronger candidate responses applied credibility criteria accurately to the document which were then supported by the rest of the assessment. For example, where the candidate used expertise as the credibility criteria they were able to develop this by quoting the fact that the "AA had been in existence since 1905" and that this would mean they had built up their experience about motoring and factors which affect motorists over a considerable period of time. Weaker candidates often gave quotes which were not related to the credibility criterion being discussed and/or did not explain in sufficient detail to make a full assessment of the credibility of the document. In expertise they perhaps did not explain how the experience of over 100 years of working with motorists would have built up the expertise or they quoted the fact that the AA is "looked to by government etc." which is a quote more appropriate for the criterion of reputation or vested interest.

Although this question appears regularly there are still some candidates using unacceptable criterion such as reliability. Others refer to individuals within the document, such as the President of the AA, restricting their potential marks to 1/3.

7 (a) A substantial number correctly identified the corroborating quote and source, the majority doing the question totally correctly and gaining the 2 marks with very few omitting the name of the source. However, there are still a substantial number of students who do not understand the word "corroboration" and gave answers which conflicted with the quote.

(b) The word "inconsistent" is obviously better understood and most students correctly answered this question.

8 (a) Generally the claims were clear and the best answers completed the assessment in the context of both the claim and the person making the claim. In order to gain the full marks in this question each credibility criterion had to be fully explained eg if the candidate said that the Councillor had a vested interest to support the blackout, the explanation had to say why this was the case ie some reference to the fact that the council he was a member of would be able to save money to use for other ventures. High marks were not awarded for merely saying that "being a councillor" gave him a vested interest. Candidates also needed to answer the question if they were to gain more than 1 mark. This meant they had to say whether the credibility criterion weakened or strengthened the claim being made. A number of candidates failed to do this or they said that this made the claim believable or not, which is not the question asked. Candidates should also be aware that the credibility criterion is being used to assess whether a claim being made by a particular person is strengthened or weakened by that criterion and there are a number of students who are focussing on the individual with no link to the claim. Perhaps they need to think a little more carefully about the question, rather than merely following a formula they have learnt.

There are still a number of students confusing bias and vested interest. People have a vested interest because they have something to gain or to lose, they have a bias towards a particular point of view because of a belief in something. It is the gain/loss or the link between the belief and the point of view which the candidate needs to

elaborate to gain high marks. If they use vested interest candidates should also explain whether there is a vested interest to lie/exaggerate or tell the truth.

There are still a number of candidates who are using unacceptable criterion, particularly reliability, which they seem to view as synonymous with reputation or expertise and there were also examples of corroboration being wrongly used as a credibility criterion.

(b) This question was not well answered with many candidates failing to understand that the extra information should refer to a credibility criterion used in 8a. Others added extraneous information rather than what might expand our ability to assess the credibility of the Hampshire resident in relation to the criterion used.

9 There were some good answers to this question where candidates addressed correctly the issue as to whether areas were "as safe or less safe" if a blackout was introduced. However, candidates should be aware that they must try to address all four areas if they are to achieve a high level in this question. In general, the credibility section was answered more effectively than the plausibility but for a "strong" credibility answer there must be some reasonably substantial development eg how does the expertise of the Police Superintendent make him more/less credible (seen the effects of blackouts/absence of lighting on the number of car accidents as he will have attended road traffic incidents; knows about the types of crimes which prevail during periods of darkness as he will have been involved in arresting criminals). Similarly, does the vested interest of the councillor make him more/less credible (would want to save money from street lighting to meet other demands on the council such as the need to provide for the elderly so may be less concerned about whether safety will be compromised or not if there is a blackout). The candidate then needs to state clearly which side is the more credible ie those claiming that having a blackout will/will not affect the safety of the residents. For even a "weak" credibility mark candidates need to do more than merely state that an individual has expertise, vested interest etcetera. For example they need to state that the Police Superintendent's expertise means he knows about the higher risk of accidents in areas of poor lighting.

It is harder to write as much about plausibility and here the question demands that the candidate makes personal judgements but if these are merely stated without evidence from the text or the candidate's own knowledge then they will be credited at only a "weak" level. A "strong" plausibility answer to support the idea that a blackout would make an area "less safe" could include reference to the AA statistics about insurance claims and a comment about crimes such as burglary being more likely to take place under cover of darkness since there would be fewer witnesses around so burglars would be less intimidated A "weak" answer would be a simple statement such as "burglars would prefer to work in the dark so it is more likely that crime will increase if a blackout is introduced."

Candidates should also take care to make a judgement which is connected to the question asked – which was not about carbon footprints or saving money.

In conclusion, generally candidates are showing a greater understanding of the subject and the demands being made in the examination, for which the centres should take the credit.

F502 Assessing and Developing Argument

1 General Comments

The entry for this paper was as expected significantly higher than in January 2009, although lower than in June 2009 and was mainly comprised of year 13 students re-sitting the examination.. There was a good spread of marks on the paper and in general the candidates answered the questions clearly and argued well. The candidates looked well prepared for the paper and the skills required. There was no evidence of time being too short on the paper.

There were few questions left unanswered with good attempts being made by the vast majority of candidates on all questions. The further arguments questions in section C often showed good structure and the vast majority used several reasons and intermediate conclusions to good effect.

On the 'state' questions, the vast majority correctly used the words in the passage and it was rare to see candidates incorrectly try and paraphrase content in their own words.

The candidates explained the flaws well, showing a good understanding of the weakness of the reasoning and the use of evidence.

Multiple Choice

Candidate performance on the multiple choice questions was very strong with just less than half of the candidates scoring double-figures on the 15 marks available for the questions.

In general the questions that candidates found the easiest were the main conclusion question and identifying argument element questions.

2 Comments on Individual Questions

Section A – Multiple Choice Section

<u>Feedback on performance on some individual questions:</u>

Note that the mark scheme has a rationale on the correct and incorrect options for each question, and this should help to make this paper a good teaching aid to prepare for future exam sessions. The feedback below does not reproduce this rationale.

Q1 – A large number of candidates got this right, with not many confusing it with evidence, which was encouraging.

Q2 – A large number of candidates got this right, with a small number of candidates being evenly spread amongst the incorrect answers.

Q3 – The candidates were fairly evenly spread amongst options A, B and C with very few going for D. Option B has no reason supporting it. Candidates would be advised, when seeing two conclusions (A and C), to try them in different orders and imagine using indicator words to see which could support which.

Q6 – The majority of candidates got this right. The other candidates were fairly evenly spread amongst the incorrect answers.

Q8 – A significant number of candidates incorrectly went for option B, a statement that is already in the first sentence of the passage.

Q9 – A large number of candidates got this right. The incorrect option C could arguably be viewed as an intermediate conclusion, but is a reason, with evidence supporting it, which supports statement D.

Q10 – A large number of candidates got this right. Of the ones that got it wrong, a significant number went for option D.

Q11 – This was found to be the most demanding of the fifteen questions, by a significant margin. Although option C was the most commonly picked option, the candidates were fairly evenly spread amongst the options. The argument's conclusion is a general one, not only for people in Japan.

Q13 – A large number of candidates went for the incorrect option D.

Q14 – Significant minorities went for options C and D.

Q15 – More than half the candidates incorrectly went for options A and B and were fairly even across these. Both of these options if anything gave strength to the argument rather than weakened it. Candidates need to check that they are sure of the sense of the question and not look for options which affect the argument the most.

Sections B & C – Written Answer Sections

The candidates generally found the argument element questions (Q18 and 25) challenging, with many answers which gave the names of flaws or considered it to be an assumption. Candidates should know the list of argument elements in the specification. The justifications were variable and were often not technical explanations of the role the element was playing.

Q16 – The vast majority of candidates wrote the exact wording of the author; there were not many examples of paraphrasing.

Q16 (a) – This question was well answered with an impressively large number of candidates correctly stating the conclusion without the counter-assertion clause before it. A significant minority lost credit by either stating the intermediate conclusion (the last sentence of paragraph one), or by giving the counter-assertion along with the conclusion by writing the whole of the first sentence. A small number of candidates lost credit by stating the conclusion as "..to have **a** mobile phone…".

Q16 (b) – A small number of candidates scored zero by not understanding the role of counter-assertions and stated other elements instead such as reasons or evidence. Common ways of losing credit other than this were:

- stopping the quotation of the assertion early and not including what were judged to be important parts of the clause;
- writing several assertions together as one, for example the complete quotation from Mark Sullivan in paragraph 6.

Q17 – It was clear that nearly all candidates recognised the intermediate conclusion, although no mark was available purely for this. Due to this, most candidates scored 2 marks, being able at least to give a partial evaluation and relate to the intermediate conclusion. Most answers evaluated whether the consequence followed from the premise,

although some did evaluate whether the hypothetical reason gave support to the conclusion. The most common error was to evaluate the evidence before the hypothetical reason instead.

Q18 (a) – Many candidates seemed unaware of the list of argument elements so there were a large number of answers not meeting this description, such as "assumption", flaw names, etc. The most common incorrect element given was "reason".

Q18 (b) – This was marked independently of Q18(a), so candidates who said "reason" for part (a) often attained 1 mark here for "supporting the conclusion". A small number of candidates who got part (a) correct did not give technical enough answers in part (b) for full credit, such as "a partway conclusion" or "strengthens the argument".

Q19 – Weaker candidates answered this as a credibility question, and did not score. There were many good answers, the most common either pointing out the time difference or explaining that other factors may have caused the issue. In both cases, candidates often scored 2 rather than 3 for not explicitly saying that the mobile phones may not therefore have been a contributing factor.

Q20 – Many candidates scored 2 marks and gave good points of relevant comparison, but then did not relate this to whether this strengthened or weakened the argument for banning the mobiles. Centres should encourage candidates to evaluate similarities or dissimilarities and then take the evaluation back to the original reasoning and how the analogy is used within it.

Q21 – Only a very small number of candidates gave correct answers for the flaw, although a large number of candidates showed that they understood the flaw in their explanations. Common alternative names were 'hasty generalisation' and 'straw man'. A number of candidates pointed out the difference between parents being concerned and to not wanting the mobiles, but did not explain explicitly enough that this did not follow or that parents would not necessarily therefore not want their children to have mobiles.

Q22 – Many candidates gave clear statements of strength of weaknesses for 2 marks but then missed out on the 3rd mark by not relating to the author's reasoning by going on to say whether the negative physical effects of mobiles was supported or not. As in Q20, centres need to encourage candidates to relate back carefully to the use of evidence in reasoning when evaluating. A small number gave points about credibility, scoring zero, but not as many as in Q19. There were a small number of candidates who criticised features of the evidence such as sample size, etc, which was suppositional and did not answer the question which asked for an evaluation of evidence use.

Q23 – This was well answered with nearly all candidates getting at least 1 mark. Many candidates referred to the fact a debate was occurring for the second mark.

Q24 – A large number of candidates correctly labelled the flaw. Some of the explanations were then generic so did not get much credit. Better explanations made clear that the attack did not relate to the reasoning given in a clear way, whereas some focussed on detailing how the personal attack was being made, and then only gave a cursory statement that the reasoning was not addressed. Many candidates included extensive quotations within their explanation. This was not asked for, and did not gain marks, but often was in the place of evaluation. Candidates are recommended not to include quotations in evaluations, but just clearly relate to the reasoning within their evaluation without the need for quotation.

Q25 – A number of students left this blank. The comments on argument elements and the non-technical justifications in Q17 went for Q25 as well. It is a clearly designed part of the specification that candidates need to spend time understanding.

Q26 – This was well answered with many candidates thinking creatively of different reasons, and the vast majority scored at least 4 marks out of 6. A number gave answers which related to the fact the parents "could not" rather than "should not", such as "the parents could not afford it", etc. Some candidates lost credit by it not being clear that their reasons showed something that was a problem. Others had answers that overlapped and were too close as reasoning strands to get full credit.

Further Arguments

These were generally well answered with a range of reasoning and good structure. It was felt that the answers were better on average than in the past with clearer use of intermediate conclusions and fewer examples of argument elements that were included for the sake of it, such as over-precise and invented evidence. It was again commonly the case that evidence did not particularly contribute to the argument and that counter-assertions were just included to 'tick boxes' and added little to the argument. In most cases examples were utilised well and did not suffer as often from these problems.

Q27 – Stronger candidate responses considered different reasoning strands, in many cases with evidence of some planning first. These were more impressive because they did not stay to the same line of reasoning, with different examples.

Q28 – Candidates found this easier to find a range of different reasoning than in Q27. Many focused on advantages of phones, which are not necessarily the same as the phones being essential, but in general this was well answered. Perhaps it was due to the many different strands of reasoning, but there were a number of candidates who jumped between these, albeit convincingly, but without the use of intermediate conclusions. A number of weaker candidate responses gave reasons that did not really develop from the text such as "distractions", "physical negative effects", "calling parents", etc. The candidates who considered fresh reasons often scored well and had more persuasive and convincingly structured arguments.

F503 Ethical Reasoning and Decision-making

Initial evidence suggests that the aims of the new specification, especially providing opportunity for the ablest candidates to show what they can do in Q4, have been achieved. There were a few outstandingly good answers. Conversely, the fear that some candidates would make use of the increased time and reduced number of tasks by writing lengthy responses of little relevance to the task have not been realised: instead, they seem to have run out of ideas and stopped early. By contrast with the old specification, very few candidates ran out of time. This evidence strongly suggests that the new specification fulfils the aims of the Stretch and Challenge initiative.

Q1
A variety of answers was encountered and the complete range of marks was used. Regrettably, the date of the statistics was a popular answer (at least one candidate demanding the statistics for 2010, which seemed a tall order in January). Candidates should realise that statistics cited in an exam will always be a little out of date, but may be the latest available. Many candidates spotted the vested interest to exaggerate the statistics, in order to make the problem seem more shocking than it is, but fewer pointed out that the statistics of illegal activities are inherently unreliable.

Q2
Candidates found Q2 more difficult than the examiners had expected, but it differentiated well towards the top end. Some candidates were awarded 0 marks for explaining the views held by various people from Document 3, instead of identifying influences which might have led them to hold those views. The most popular correct answer was that Hasima was sympathetic to benefit cheats because she had been unemployed herself and had first-hand experience of the restrictions imposed on claimants by the benefit system. It has been suggested that candidates may not have understood the word “factors”, but it has been used in this way in previous sessions and candidates should have been taught what it meant.

There is a limited range of formats which may appear in questions 1 and 2, and students should be given practice in all of them, so that they can recognize them when they occur and respond appropriately.

Q3
Most candidates chose more or less appropriate criteria in Q3, but it was impossible to give many marks to those who did not. This part of the new specification is significantly harder than the old specification, where choices and criteria were stated on the question paper. Students now need to be taught how to choose and articulate appropriate choices and criteria. Several candidates used criteria to explain why someone took the view they did, rather than evaluating that view (cf Q2), while others referred to ethical principles (cf Q4) instead of criteria. Some of the more successful criteria were fairness, cost, legality, effectiveness and ease of implementation, while inappropriate suggestions included vested interest, egoism, utilitarianism, media and conscience. Morality is a valid criterion, but not a good choice because it duplicates the focus of Q4. Although public opinion is often an appropriate criterion, in this case the documents gave very little evidence to go on and so discussions of this criterion tended to be speculative.

Some candidates referred to the resource documents in support of their answers. Although such references are no longer required, they are, of course, not forbidden, and they are one way of supporting evaluations. If candidates do refer to resource documents for this purpose, they should ensure that they use them relevantly and credibly.

Q4

A wide range of marks was awarded for Q4. Although the bottom of the mark scale was barely used, this was because virtually all the answers had some merit. An improvement over previous sessions was that by far the majority of candidates did attempt a real resolution. A few candidates rewrote the question in terms of a dilemma, presumably under the influence of the old specification, but this did not compromise their performance much. The best candidates were able to give a developed and sophisticated discussion based on three or four well-chosen, contrasting ethical theories.

Most candidates chose Utilitarianism, but many of them considered numbers only, concluding that since there are many more tax-payers than benefit cheats, the welfare of the former takes precedence over the latter; better candidates, however, included other dimensions of the Hedonic Calculus and recognized that tax-payers would not notice the difference whether benefit cheats were detected or not. Many candidates cited the name of Kant in support of various ethical theories, but far fewer applied the Categorical Imperative to the issue. Some candidates made good use of the Social Contract. Candidates from several centres recognized that the thinking of John Rawls was especially relevant to this issue, and made good use of the Veil of Ignorance and/or the Difference Principle.

It appears that many candidates are still being encouraged to use certain ethical and psychological theories which were mentioned in the legacy specification, even though experience has shown they are limited in their value; the guidance offered in the new specification is more helpful in this respect. Candidates who attempted to use elitism or egoism as ethical principles found unsurprising difficulty in applying them to this issue, and many of those who appealed to egalitarianism thought it meant treating everyone in the same way. As on previous occasions, some candidates tried to differentiate between Consequentialism, Utilitarianism, Hedonism and Prudentialism, even though there is in practice little or no difference between them.

The two most common mistakes in answers to this question were using principles to explain why someone held a view instead of supporting or criticizing it and focusing on benefit theft itself instead of whether to report it or not. Some candidates put their comments about resource documents at the end of their discussion, instead of using them to support their use of principles. Similarly, a few candidates inserted evaluation of documents without reference to any point they were making. Candidates need to realise that use of documents is credited only when it is used in support of their discussion.

F504 Critical Reasoning

General comments

This was generally a pleasing first session in the new specification. There was a range of performance and candidates generally responded well to the new question types – indeed, in some instances candidates performed better in the new question types, because they were required to think rather than relying on pre-prepared, generic formulae which never quite answer the question.

This was the first session in which candidates have had no multiple choice in this paper. The reduced tasks and extra time meant that most candidates were able to spend more time thinking, which raised the quality of their answers.

As with all January sessions on this unit, the cohort was small, as most centres enter candidates for this final unit at the end of the course in June. This makes it difficult to make general comments, although some trends from past sessions are evident. Some of the students entered at this early stage seemed disadvantaged by the early entry, perhaps in terms of maturity, perhaps in terms of not having consolidated and developed their understanding of the preceding three units. Other students performed at a high level, demonstrating intellectual maturity and sound, developed understanding of all the concepts tested.

Q1
Candidates who knew what to do were able to name the elements and locate them in the structure of this particular argument. A significant number of otherwise high performing candidates treated this question as an exercise in English language. These candidates talked about appeals to emotion, arousing fear in the reader and the effect of the words 'weary, 'lurking' and 'sneaky'. On their own terms these answers were often insightful and interesting. However, the question is about the structure of the reasoning, not about the quality of the language used, so these answers accessed no marks. These four marks may well have made a significant difference to many candidates' grades.

As in the legacy specification, a significant minority gave generic, stock answers to these questions, without locating the element in the structure of this particular argument. For instance, 'example that supports the reasoning,' can gain only one mark for 'example'; to gain the second mark, the candidate would need to be specific. In the case of Q1b candidates needed to show that the example 'shows how the mindset and methods of the Stasi live on in modern Britain.'

a) Many candidates were able to say that this element was a response to the counter claim that, 'some may think all this surveillance is rather chilling,' and/or that the element acted as a reason to support the author's conclusion that 'Me, I don't think all this surveillance is such a big deal.' Either part of this answer was sufficient for two marks.

b) Many candidates were able to say that this was an example, and a minority were able to say that this example showed the mindset and methods of the Stasi. A small number of candidates thought that this was 'an example of how we, like the Stasi, assume the right to pry into the lives of others.' This was regarded as an acceptable variant, also worth two marks. A number of candidates talked about 'scene-setting,' which was accepted for one mark, but only rarely developed sufficiently to gain the second mark.

Q2

This was a new question form, 'Is Document 1 an argument? Briefly justify your answer.' It was answered very well on the whole, and some candidates who had clearly been taught to answer the other questions in very specific (and not always successful ways) were able to answer this question from their own thinking.

Candidates were able to access full marks by answering either, 'yes, it is an argument,' or 'no, it is not an argument.' The marks were gained by the quality of the justification. For example, both of the following answers would be worth high marks:

'Document 1 is an argument because it has a main conclusion, 'I don't think all this surveillance is such a big deal,' supported by a reason and an extended example of the weary couple. It doesn't seem like an argument straight away, it seems to be telling a story, reporting events and presenting other people's opinions. But the story and example do support the conclusion, which makes it an argument.'

'Document 1 is not an argument because it does not persuade us to accept the author's opinion, that 'I don't think all this surveillance is such a big deal.' He doesn't seem to mind if we accept his opinion or not, he's not trying to persuade us. He's telling us the story of the weary couple, explaining why he thinks that the surveillance is ok, and reporting the opinions of the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph (and implying that they have extreme opinions). But all the reasoning is done by language, by implication and by suggestion; he doesn't give rational reasons for anyone else to accept his opinion, so it's not an argument.'

Q3

This question was familiar from the legacy specification, and candidates answered with a similar mixture of approaches. Many candidates performed the right task this session, but a significant number evaluated or paraphrased the reasoning without clearly analysing. The task required is to break down the reasoning into its elements, label them and consider the structure of the argument.

Where candidates did perform the right task, there were two common problems. One was writing more than necessary. Many wrote more than a page, when a few lines would have been enough to access full marks. The best way to set out answers to this question is as follows:

Counter argument:

R (with Ex):	Fly-tipping, selling counterfeit goods, fouling pavements and cheating taxpayers infuriate voters, who frequently urge their councils to crack down on such abuses.
C (of CA):	It seemed sensible at the time to delegate some powers of investigation to relevant local officials.

Main Argument which responds to counter argument:

R1:	Dictatorships are upheld not by daily terror but by giving petty, unchallenged powers to minor officials.
R2:	This is how freedom is eroded.
R3:	And such powers are being used more and more.
Ev (to support R 3)	In 2007 there were 12,494 applications for directed surveillance, almost double the number for 2006.
IC2	Allowing councils to give themselves permission to carry out surveillance sets a dangerous precedent.
IC3 (C of para)	Governments should beware of such knee-jerk response.

Candidates should then either draw a diagram or use a short sentence to show that Reasons 1, 2 and 3 support IC2 which supports IC3. (See the mark scheme for other approved structural variations.)

Setting the argument out in this way is clear, which makes it easier for markers to be sure that they are giving the right mark to candidates. It is presumably also quicker for the candidates, who can then spend time on other questions.

The second main problem with this group of candidates who attempted the right task, was difficulty in identifying the main conclusion of this paragraph. Many candidates who produced an otherwise good analysis thought that 'but governments should beware of such knee-jerk response' was a 'response to counter argument' which they treated as a stand alone element. This is actually the conclusion of a sustained response to counter argument. Many candidates generally found it hard to identify any of the conclusions, and thought that, 'this is how freedom is eroded' was the main conclusion of the paragraph. Some even thought that 'and such powers are being used more and more' was the conclusion of the paragraph.

A significant minority of candidates evaluated the language and/or reasoning rather than breaking the argument into its constituent elements. This was not a successful strategy.

Q4

This question was a new variety of evaluation question. Most candidates did attempt to answer the question that was asked, and many showed a very high level of performance. It was possible to access high marks either by saying that the reasoning in Document 1 was stronger, or that the reasoning in Document 2 was stronger. The marks were awarded for the quality of the justification.

The strongest candidate responses considered the strength of the reasoning in each document in the light of what the author was trying to achieve. These candidates were able to say that the author of document 1 was supporting only a limited opinion, with simple reasoning, whereas the author of document 2 was attempting to demonstrate much more, with more complex reasoning. The most successful candidates considered key strengths and weaknesses in both documents with a view to showing how these strengths/weaknesses helped or hindered the author in achieving their aims. For example,

'Document 1 is emotive, appealing to sympathy for the weary couple, but here this is a strength, because sympathy here is a reason to think that surveillance in cases like this is not such a big deal, and it explains well why the author holds his opinion. The weakness is that the author implies that none of the surveillance is a big deal, just on the basis of one example. It is likely that some of the surveillance is much more 'chilling', so we can't accept the implication here. Document 2 is also emotive, and here it is much more of a weakness, because the author is trying to write a rational argument rather than a report which explains his opinion. There is a huge appeal to fear with lots of emotive language throughout Document 2, trying to make us afraid of dictatorship and the Stasi. This fear is extreme and unrelated to what is happening, unlike the sympathy in Document 1 which is proportionate. There is much more to dictatorship than surveillance, such as beating people up and locking them up and hanging them without trial for minor offences. So we don't need to be as alarmed by the use of surveillance as the author implies.'

Very few candidates realised that the last line of Document 2 was not a main conclusion. It is an opinion that the author holds, but, if anything, it is a principle that would support the implied main conclusion that governments (and specifically our Government) should not over-use surveillance. The claim in the last line is not supported by the reasoning that comes before it; it is an emphatic ending rather than a main conclusion.

Many candidates thought the presence of evidence was enough to guarantee a strong argument. This was clearly not the case.
Many candidates thought that the reasoning in Document 2 was stronger simply because there was more of it, and because it was organised into something that looked like an argument. These candidates did not consider the quality of the reasoning.

One particularly weak strategy was to make a point about emotive language in Document 1, then to make a point about hyperbole in Document 1, then to make a point about the use of evidence in Document 1, then to find a flaw in Document 1, and then to repeat the formula for Document 2, without coming to an overall judgement about whether the reasoning in Document 1 or 2 was stronger. Candidates who took this approach tended to pick on insignificant details to discuss and make generic evaluative comments. For example, one weak response stated,

'The author calls the couple weary. This is an example of emotive language. Impact: Replaces reasoning with language. Weakens.'

Centres would do well to encourage all candidates to be brave enough to engage with the reasoning in the stimulus material and to express their own thoughts on it, rather than relying on stock phrases or pre-prepared formulae. At AS it is quite reasonable to expect candidates to come across a limited number of specific patterns of reasoning, which candidates can name and explain in a fairly predictable way. There is, however, some evidence that centres are transferring this approach to advanced level without considering the need for greater flexibility of approach, synthesis or overview.

In this question, in contrast to Q3, continuous prose is desirable.

Q5

This question tests AO3, Development of Reasoning. The most important thing that candidates need to do is use reasons which support their intermediate conclusions and the main conclusion they have been given.

In this session some candidates produced very high quality reasoning, with strong logical structure, apt examples and perceptive, independent thinking, which was pleasing.

A number of candidates trotted out what they knew about ethical theory, often veering away from the given conclusion, 'the end can never justify the means.'

Some candidates produced an answer as if they were answering a unit 3 question, even though in unit 3 ethical reasoning is used for the purpose of making a decision in specific situation, which is a very different sort of task from forming a judgement about an ethical principle.

Some candidates clearly had not come across the concept of ends and means. Some of these did their best to define the terms in their own way, and were able to produce reasonable reasoning, thus accessing marks.

Many candidates were able to say that the end can sometimes justify the means, and to give the example of the end of doing well in exams justifying the means of revising rather than partying (and the associated suffering). The most able were able to contrast the simply unpleasant with the ethically dubious, and to argue that a good end can justify a difficult, unpleasant means, but cannot justify an ethically wrong means such as killing. A worrying minority believed that the end of gaining information from terrorists to save lives justified the means of torture. Most candidates who used this example, however, felt that by torturing the torturer became as bad as a terrorist, and that different means could achieve a similar good end, so torture was not justified as a means to the end of preventing terrorist attacks.

Weaker responses thought that the end 'never' or 'always' justified the means. Many of these candidates appeared to have a tick list of elements to be included, but very little concept of what it actually means for a reason to support a conclusion. Candidates who wrote their arguments as if they were analysing an argument, with each 'element' labelled, irrespective of the logical links between them, tended not to gain high marks.

This question, in contrast to Q3, is best answered in prose. The argument structure should be evident in the logical support offered by reasons to intermediate and main conclusions, rather than through labels. Analysing and labelling arguments which students have written can be a useful teaching technique, but it is not a successful examination technique.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced Subsidiary GCE Critical Thinking (H052)
January 2010 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
F501	Raw	75	55	48	41	34	28	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
F502	Raw	75	55	49	44	39	34	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
F503	Raw	60	42	37	32	27	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
F504	Raw	60	45	39	33	28	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
H052	200	160	140	120	100	80	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
H052	10.5	32.0	56.7	76.7	90.6	100.0	1449

1449 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums/index.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication

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