

Critical Thinking

Advanced Extension Award **AEA 9913**

Report on the Component

June 2006

9913/MS/R/06

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All Examiners are instructed that alternative correct answers and unexpected approaches in candidates' scripts must be given marks that fairly reflect the relevant knowledge and skills demonstrated.

The reports on the Examinations provide 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 syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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General Comments

The performance this year was very pleasing, with candidates accessing a wide range of marks. At the lower end few gained less than 20 of the possible 65 raw marks, so that most were within striking distance of a Merit, whilst a creditable 52 represented the upper limit. The highest scoring candidates performed well in all three sections of the examination paper, although the norm was to excel in one section and to do moderately well in the other two.

The type of Centre entry varied greatly, with the usual number of single-candidate entries, more between eight and thirty candidates and one Centre in three figures. Interestingly, roughly the same range of marks was accessed in each type of Centre entry.

This year, candidates appeared to be much more aware of what was expected, with very little loss of marks or time due to misinterpretation of the question, although there were still those that gave an explanation as well as the letter for the multiple choice answers. Higher marks were reached in Section B, with better use of specialist terminology. Evaluation skills were also more fully evidenced, especially in Question 3.

The change in format to Question 3, requiring the elements of an argument rather than the argument itself, meant that more candidates had time to develop fully fledged answers in Section C. There was increasing evidence of candidates leaving the multiple choice questions in Section A until the end, perhaps to give themselves stricter control over the time spent in this section.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Encouragingly, this year several candidates gained full marks for the multiple choice questions, the standard of response appearing to have risen overall. The most accessible proved to be Q2a, 5, 6a, 6b, 7 and 12, whilst those marks least accessed were Q2b, 3b, 9 and 10.

Where there was a low level of response on this section, it was often the weakest performance of candidates who reached distinction levels in one other section. This patchy performance is typical of an overall Merit. Difficulty with multiple choice questions alone should therefore not be a determining factor in discouraging candidates from entering the qualification.

Section B

Pleasingly more candidates accessed over 20 marks on this section than last year. The majority performed better in Q3, where the questions were more predictable. Unfortunately some candidates lost time by writing at length when there was no need, appearing to be reluctant to abandon an apposite point once they had located it. Candidates need to be made aware that Section B calls for focused, *short* response answers.

- 1 (a) The majority of candidates that latched on to the credibility issues raised by the material in Document 1 identified either vested interest or expertise, usually the former. Stronger candidates used vested interest in a focused manner, whilst the weaker expressed this as bias, although they usually went on to explain the potential motive of the Solid Fuel Association.
- (b) Those who homed in on the photographs readily saw how they contradicted the assertions made in Document 2. A pleasing number identified either the 'backward looking minority' or the 'barely controllable' claim, usually the former, and successfully demonstrated how it was countered.

Weaker candidates concentrated on the wording in Document 1 and found great difficulty in identifying direct challenges to claims in Document 2.

- 2 (a) Surprisingly few candidates correctly identified the intermediate conclusion, 'burning fires involves too many dangers', many homing in on one of the reasons that supported this. Those who did identify it, quite frequently loosely paraphrased it, or added additional reasoning. Nevertheless the majority identified efficiency as one of the additional factors, although few identified the outmoded practice. The weakest answers appeared not to be aware that pollution simply referred to another danger.
- (b) The majority of candidates identified at least one correct assumption; usually that central heating is safer or more efficient than open fires. The weaker tried to introduce a new element of comparative cost.
It was pleasing that only the weakest candidates used absolutes instead of comparatives, such as 'no pollution' or 'no danger'.
- (c) This was the least successfully answered question. Relevant further evidence was rarely presented in an appropriate format, although many did manage to convey in general terms the idea that there were other factors giving rise to pollution.
However, many identified that central heating still consumes fossil fuels and therefore contributes to the depletion of resources, whilst a few identified that the ease with which central heating can be turned on can make it much easier to use wastefully.
- (d) Most candidates correctly identified the assertion countered as the 'symbol of warmth, light and security'. Of these, many either correctly identified the weakness in the counter as an Ad Hominem flaw or expressed it in words that could be credited. A few identified an Appeal to Modernity, whilst no one sought to explain a conflation of terms.
- (e) The strongest candidates scored well, identifying the analogy between young chimney sweeps and adult miners. A minority omitted the question, suggesting a lack of understanding of the word analogy. Of those that suggested an alternative, 'an imaginary Dickensian past of toasting crumpets' featured strongly.

About half of those who correctly identified the analogy managed to adequately express reasons for the weakness, with the weakest seeking to focus incorrectly upon the issue of women.

- (f) Most candidates managed to score some marks for the further argument although few accessed full marks. Quite often the reasons given did not follow on from one another or relate to the regulations in question and many omitted an identifiable conclusion. A surprisingly small number suggested that it would be better to concentrate on developing renewable energy.

Candidates need to be guided by the number of marks available. Three marks should indicate that a mini essay is not required. There were many overlong answers with convoluted sentences, sometimes from an entirely personal angle, 'If I was to challenge the regulations, I would first of all point out...' Further arguments need to have a tight structure whereby reasons support a relevant conclusion. It may be that three or four sentences will access the marks in this way.

- 3 A few candidates treated the four questions as a single exercise, or at least merged together (c) and (d) which made it difficult to disentangle weakness from counter argument and to credit each part appropriately. The answers to (a) and (b) would suggest that there needs to be more direct guidance upon how to express dilemmas and principles, if candidates are to access these marks.

- (a) Only the strongest candidates correctly expressed the key dilemma. Almost invariably, conflicting options were explained somewhat verbosely, but not the dilemma itself. Most identified the harm of going ahead with the wind farm, but expressed the counter as the benefits of renewable energy rather than the corresponding harm of missing out on the opportunity that it would represent.
- (b) The strongest candidates expressed succinct, relevant principles. However some simply referred to an ethical theory such as Utilitarianism, without constructing a principle from it that would be relevant to this issue.

The weaker constructed maxims that were so specific to North Lewis that they could be considered to be advice or recommendation, such as 'The Scottish Executive should listen to the people of North Lewis' often followed by, 'because they are the ones that elected them.' The weakest simply drew up an agenda of suggestions based on Document 3.

- (c) The strongest candidates correctly identified claims from the text before attempting to counter these. The most commonly correct counter reasoning focussed upon the idea that the wind farm might actually promote tourism rather than detract from it.

Only the weakest candidates tried to counter the proposition rather than the opposition. By way of contrast, many more simply provided fanciful counter arguments, rather than countering the reasoning of the opposition.

- (d) The strongest candidates produced creditable points of weakness. Of those that did, the most common were the implied generalisation of the Galway bog slide to other wind farm projects and the possible bias of the North Lewis poll.

The weakest answers cited lack of evidence or disappointingly enlarged upon what they had introduced in (c).

Section C

This Section was tackled far more successfully than in the past, with many candidates producing well structured and spirited arguments in favour of the idea of lowering the drinking age and introducing a drinking licence. However for some, this was all they gained credit for, as not enough attention was paid to the requirements of the bulleted guidance. The weakest candidates tended to plod from one document to the next, making the same points, instead of using the rubric to aid the structure of their answers.

Only the strongest candidates specifically set out parameters, although several mentioned (seemingly by accident) things that could be credited as parameters. Early clarification of parameters was sometimes confused with outlining what the candidate intended to write about.

Assessment of the credibility of the documents was perhaps the most successful element of this Section. Often, however, exhaustive examination of credibility was merely superficial and precluded much else. In weaker answers many points were too facile to gain credit, such as 'The Independent is a broadsheet newspaper, even though it has been reduced in size, and therefore it is still a reputable source.'

The strongest candidates addressed the key issues, explicitly addressing both sides of the conflict. These were included implicitly by weaker candidates, although often only one side was discussed - such as the need to address the problem of under age drinking without consideration of the ability to address the problem. On the whole the harm to the individual was the greatest concern, whereas the harm to society was largely unaddressed. The weakest of candidates simply strung together a plethora of quotations, with little attempt to do anything other than to describe the arguments presented in the documents.

Very few candidates attempted anything recognisable as evaluation of the reasoning. Of those that did, the most commonly evaluated was the weak parallel between the US and the UK and the significance of the £20 billion cost of alcohol related harm not referring specifically to underage drinkers.

Further reasoning, where present, went little beyond that which was presented in the documents. Most candidates wholeheartedly agreed with the recommendation and could find little to challenge it, other than the possibility of a new class of underage drinkers at 14-16 yrs.

Overall

Encouragingly in this session there were more precisely focused answers using appropriate specialist terminology. If Centres wish to improve the performance of their candidates, the areas that can be usefully addressed are the expression of dilemmas and principles in Q3 and closer attention to the bulleted guidance in Section C. Other useful guidance can be gained from exemplar Distinction scripts examined in the OCR AEA Inset feedback in the autumn term. If candidates spend time working by themselves, the skills required are introduced in the OCR endorsed Heinemann texts 'Critical Thinking for OCR.'

**Advanced Extension Award Critical Thinking (9913)
June 2006 Assessment Series**

Component Threshold Marks

Component	Max Mark	Distinction	Merit	Ungraded
1	15	9	6	0
2	30	16	11	0
3	20	10	7	0

Overall

	Distinction	Merit	Ungraded
Percentage in Grade	23.23	51.18	25.59
Cumulative Percentage in Grade	23.23	74.41	100.00

The total entry for the examination was 297.

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