

Critical Thinking

Advanced Extension Award AEA 9913

Report on the Components

June 2007

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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 syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Principal Examiner's Report

General Comments

Candidate performance was markedly improved this year with 59 representing the upper limit and the quality of succinct but perceptive responses being a delight to assess. Very few gained less than 25 of the 65 raw marks. There is some evidence of A2 skills impacting upon responses often enhancing those at the lower end of performance.

There were less single entries this year and an increase in those between twenty and forty candidates. Again the range of marks accessed was similar, regardless of the numbers entered. However there was a marked difference in performance between those who could offer an assured understanding of such specific skills as framing dilemmas and principles within the context of Critical Thinking and those who simply attempted to comment on, challenge or evaluate in each question, sometimes hitting the mark, but more often not.

Candidates at all levels engaged particularly well with the materials, offering a wealth of situations where bottled water was sensible and giving forcible responses regarding both parents working in out of school hours and the challenges posed by transport to the environment. In almost every script there was evidence of sound understanding of the materials, but lack of precision in written English occasionally meant that answers that were clearly headed in the right direction could not be fully credited.

The great majority of candidates completed all three sections, often prioritising the order of response. Where candidates tended towards prolixity, this occurred in questions 2(b), 2(f) and throughout question 3. Mini essays featured when the maximum mark in any subsection was never more than three. These candidates consequently were pushed for time elsewhere, with Section C being curtailed and Section A, where left to the end, in some cases not being attempted.

Comments on Individual Questions

Unit 01

The majority of candidates gained between six and twelve of the fifteen marks available. Most took the first four questions in their stride, but started to encounter difficulties with questions 5 (a) and 5 (b) and again with questions 10 and 11.

Distinction performance in this section was not always indicative of high performance elsewhere, but was rarely accompanied by weak performance in Section B. Weak performance in Section A, however was often overcome with strong and even distinction performance in the other two sections, again indicating that candidates who encounter difficulty with multiple choice questions should not be discouraged from entering the qualification.

Unit 02

Very few candidates accessed less than ten marks in this section, with the strongest gaining marks in the mid-twenties. Questions 1 and 2 were approached by the majority in a business-like manner with answers that directly targeted the marks. Question 3 answers however varied greatly in approach, with the strongest stating and explaining dilemmas succinctly and aptly framing two principles in two sentences. The weakest responses wrote up to half a page for each of these two questions, these answers often being very wide of the mark.

- 1 (a) Those who concentrated on the shape of the 'Best Bottle in Glass' were usually able to reach relevant conclusions relating to the storing, stacking, or redundant historic shape. Weaker candidates focused on the disadvantages of using corks or glass or both, whilst others simply pointed out the differences between the 1875 and 2006 bottles. These could not be credited, likewise the concern over neo-colonialism.
- 2 (a) Only the strongest candidates correctly identified three intermediate conclusions. When full marks were not awarded, it tended to be because supporting reasons had been added to the ICs or because a vital element had been omitted, such as the disposal of 'plastic' bottles 'that water comes in'. The weakest gave inaccurate paraphrases or quoted the wrong part of the text. Some were caught out by the 'so' in the last line of paragraph 4, giving as an answer, '*so will our reserves of water if...*'
 - (b) Most candidates were able to identify the function as being a statement that the writer had every intention of demolishing later, although only a small minority did so accurately, as 'an assertion to be countered'. Some thought it was a counter argument, despite the absence of a counter conclusion. Candidates found it harder to explain the weakness in the third sentence, the weakest responses simply countering the point made.
 - (c) The less ambitious took the image of a great number of bottles at face value, whilst a pleasing number went further and argued that the image did not have to be of empty bottles that could not be recycled. Some noticed that the bottles were of the same brand, but failed to go beyond this to make a relevant point.

- (d) Many candidates were able to explain a weakness in the case made by the American scientists, with a surprising number identifying the assumption that bacteria are not necessarily harmful. Weakness in the case made by the New Zealand dentists was less often correctly stated, with some becoming completely confused arguing, 'People are inadvertently cutting fluoride from their diet by drinking tap water.' Others were distracted by other possible causes of cavities.
 - (e) Candidates were seldom well off-target when explaining the effectiveness of the parallel between water resources and those of oil and gas. However the weakest simply stated the similarity between the two resources, rather than identifying 'excessive usage' or that both were claimed to be 'running out'. The majority were able to identify the weakness relating to the differences in renewability, but few identified a further weakness in a form that could be credited.
 - (f) Virtually every candidate contrived to think of occasions to weaken the claim, with most identifying unavailability and contamination of tap water. There were some extremely ingenious and imaginative responses to this question, with some clinching the mark in the first sentence but elaborating extensively thereafter.
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- (a) Only the strongest of candidates were able to frame a relevant dilemma, which incorporated the possible negative consequences of each option, thus gaining three marks. Those that did state two conflicting options, however often did not access the third mark, as they identified the positive consequences of one side and the negative consequences of the other, which inadvertently pointed to a solution rather than a dilemma. Some gained two marks by using 'whether' as in 'whether Kelly hours should go ahead,' the 'or not' being implicit. Others gained one mark by simply raising an issue. The weakest wrote a rambling paragraph or two on the predicament of working parents with school age children. This question discriminated well between the levels of response.
 - (b) Pleasingly more candidates than in previous years were able to express a relevant principle, doing so in a sentence and moving on. Amongst the strongest candidates, technical name dropping sometimes got in the way of a clearly stated principle with no additions. Weaker candidates surrounded a statement that had the potential to be a principle with both an introduction and a justification. The weakest candidates rambled extensively with no apparent principle explicit or implicit. This question again discriminated well between different levels of skill offered.
 - (c) The most successfully identified weaknesses were the post hoc flaw relating to the effect on examination results and the ad hominem comments, whilst some successfully wove in pertinent points of credibility. Weaker candidates simply provided counter arguments rather than identifying weaknesses in the opposition's case.
 - (d) Most candidates managed to gain some credit for counter-reasoning, with the stronger candidates making clear the contention they were trying to rebut. Weaker candidates did not concentrate their fire on the opposition's case detailed together on page 5, but widened their coverage to include the whole debate regardless of which side they were countering. The weakest candidates tended to produce further arguments rather than addressing points made by the opposition. Again, this was a very discriminating question.

Unit 03

Many candidates produced well-structured and fluent arguments which gained some credit for these qualities. A significant proportion of the candidates additionally showed commendable discipline, paying heed to the bulleted guidance on the question paper. There were not too many who wrote in a vacuum on the objections to 'green taxes', though there was a tendency by some to become carried away by detail.

More than previously, candidates specifically set out parameters, with the strongest responses assessing how the interpretation of the question in a particular way would limit or extend the argument required. However weaker responses merely defined green taxes in a very general way, whilst the weakest offered no more than an introductory paragraph that either paraphrased chunks of the documents or repeated the rubric.

The majority attempted an assessment of credibility, with strong candidates focusing upon three or four sources in depth, quickly gaining the three marks available for this assessment. The weakest wrote extensively stringing together overstated assessments for virtually everyone who had made a comment or produced facile assessments that could gain no more than minimal credit.

The vast majority of candidates made an attempt to address the key issues, although only a minority went on to effectively illustrate these from the material provided. There was usually far too much or no quotation at all to reinforce the argument. Some candidates aptly identified freedom of choice v prevention of harm but did not always apply this appropriately to the material, proffering the right to have the freedom to choose as against the harm caused by the green taxes. The weakest candidates confused key issues with specific examples such as parking charges in Richmond-upon-Thames or the DTQ scheme. A significant minority simply strung together quotations with little or no attempt to do anything other than describe the arguments presented in the documents, whilst others used these as an opportunity to rant against taxation policies.

The strongest of candidates attempted to evaluate the reasoning and when they did so, gained worthy marks for accurate and perceptive assessments. Further arguments were less rare, and when present often evidenced imaginative thinking around alternative possibilities.

Overall

This session evidenced a distinct improvement in performance as well as a very pleasing increase in the quality of the responses made. More candidates appeared confident in their application of the skills required, although the framing of dilemmas and principles remained problematic for a vast number of candidates. For those wishing to hone their skills further, the AEA mark scheme will be available alongside this document on the OCR website. Additionally sample candidate responses at both Distinction and Merit performance from the 2007 examination will be used as a marking exercise at the OCR AEA INSET in Nottingham on Friday 19th Oct.

**Advanced Extension Award Critical Thinking (9913)
June 2007 Assessment Series**

Component Threshold Marks

Component	Max Mark	Distinction	Merit	Ungraded
1	15	9	6	0
2	30	19	14	0
3	20	11	8	0

Overall

	Distinction	Merit	Ungraded
Percentage in Grade	23.2	49.2	27.6
Cumulative Percentage in Grade	23.2	72.4	100.00

The total entry for the examination was 269

Report on the Units taken in June 2007

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