

CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS

Cambridge International Advanced Level

MARK SCHEME for the May/June 2015 series

9694 THINKING SKILLS

9694/42

Paper 4 (Applied Reasoning), maximum raw mark 50

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Page 2	Mark Scheme	Syllabus	Paper
	Cambridge International A Level – May/June 2015	9694	42

1 Make five criticisms of the statistics used in the passage or any inferences drawn from them [5]

1 mark for any of the following:

- Multiplying one month by 12 does not recognise variations in monthly expenditure, e.g. some months are during holidays.
- The month used could have been cherry-picked as a month of particularly high expenditure.
- The 'less expensive' items might have been low quality or less long-lasting.
- The schools involved may not have been typical of others in the county in terms of spending habits.
- The schools involved may not be average in size hence may not represent 5% of the children.
- The headline figure is rounded up for dramatic effect.
- 'as much as' could mean anything between \$0 and \$5 000 000', (and is potentially contradictory if the overspend at the schools involved is lower than average).
- Because of these factors, the headline inference is overdrawn.

2 Briefly analyse Student President's argument in Document 1: *Response by the Student Union of Barchester University to the draft proposals for a new degree of Bachelor of Humanities*, by identifying its main conclusion, intermediate conclusions and any counter-assertions [6]

1 mark for each element (maximum 4 if MC not identified).

MC – (We recommend that) the new degree should be assessed solely by essays and projects written during the course.

IC – implementing our suggestion will make us be seen as trend-setters.

IC – It is unfair that they [students] should be penalised for these difficulties

IC – These problems are especially relevant to this course

IC – These are not the skills which Higher Education should be developing.

CA – (The former dean has argued that) unseen written examinations produce a wider range of marks than assessment by essays

IC – that is not a valid reason for relying on them.

IC – (So) anyone who passes a degree assessed in these ways should be in a very strong position for gaining a job.

IC – (This is also the reason why) there is no merit in the superficial criticism (that students might "cheat" by obtaining their essays from the internet.)

CA – students might "cheat" by obtaining their essays from the internet.

IC – Assessing modules promptly has many advantages over the traditional pattern of assessment.

Page 3	Mark Scheme	Syllabus	Paper
	Cambridge International A Level – May/June 2015	9694	42

- 3 Give a critical evaluation of the strength of Student President’s argument in Document 1: *Response by the Student Union of Barchester University to the draft proposals for a new degree of Bachelor of Humanities*, by identifying and explaining any flaws, implicit assumptions and other weaknesses [9]

2 marks for a developed version of any of the following points.
1 mark for a weak or incomplete version of any of the following points.

Paragraph 1

The second sentence is to some extent *ad hominem*, although it does make a specific criticism of the draft assessment proposals.

Paragraph 2

Appeal to novelty / assumption – that innovation is a good thing.

Assumption – that other universities will follow in this direction.

Assumption – that ‘trend-setting’ is sufficient to elevate a university above the third rank.

Paragraph 3

Appeal to pity (but does not invalidate the point being made).

Assumption – that being cool under stress, having a retentive memory and being able to think quickly are not among the qualities which academic courses should develop or assess.

Assumption – that people should not be assessed on the basis of personal qualities (such as natural abilities) which are outside their control.

Paragraph 4

Generalization – from some of the subjects taught and studied at university (like Philosophy and History) to all subjects. However, this may be legitimate in the context of a degree in Humanities.

Inconsistency – regarding the purpose of universities with that assumed in paragraph 6.

Assumption – that degrees assessed without exams allow students time to “ponder unhurriedly”.

Paragraph 5

Assumption – that the range of marks produced by written exams does not measure “anything significant”.

Paragraph 6

Assumption – that at least part of the purpose of universities is to prepare students for the world of work.

Assumption – that this degree would be a sufficient qualification for employment.

Conflation – of “obtaining essays from the internet” (which actually refers to buying other people’s work and passing it off as one’s own) with “researching on the internet”.

Page 4	Mark Scheme	Syllabus	Paper
	Cambridge International A Level – May/June 2015	9694	42

Paragraph 7

Appeal to pity (but does not invalidate the point being made).

Assumption – that under traditional forms of assessment there were not other ways of identifying problems with student learning.

Page 5	Mark Scheme	Syllabus	Paper
	Cambridge International A Level – May/June 2015	9694	42

4 'Universities should award degrees on the basis of Continuous Assessment (CA).'

Construct a reasoned argument to support or challenge this claim, commenting critically on some or all of Documents 1 to 5 and introducing ideas of your own [30]

Level	Structure	Max 8	Quality of argument	Max 8	Use of documents	Max 8	Treatment of counter positions	Max 6
4	<p>Precise conclusion and accomplished argument structure with consistent use of intermediate conclusions. Likely to include at least two of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strands of reasoning • suppositional reasoning • analogy • evidence • examples <p>Argument is structured so the thought process is made clear. Uses vocabulary of reasoning appropriately and effectively to support argument.</p>	7–8	<p>Cogent and convincing reasoning which answers the question which was asked. Subtle thinking about the issue. Use of relevant own ideas and ideas from documents. Very few significant gaps or flaws.</p>	7–8	<p>Perceptive, relevant and accurate use of documents to support reasoning. Sustained and confident evaluation of documents to support reasoning. (Two or more valid evaluative references to documents). Able to combine information from two or more documents and draw a precise inference.</p>	7–8	<p>Consideration of key counter arguments and effective response to these. Use of own ideas in response to counter arguments. Use of valid critical tools to respond to counter arguments. Effective use of appropriate terminology.</p>	5–6
3	<p>Clear conclusion that is more than "I agree". Clear argument structure, which may be simple and precise or attempt complexity with some success. Appropriate use of intermediate conclusions. Use of other argument elements to support reasoning. Generally makes thinking clear. Appropriate use of vocabulary of reasoning.</p>	5–6	<p>Effective and persuasive reasoning which answers the question which was asked. (Although there may be some irrelevance or reliance on dubious assumptions.) Use of own ideas and ideas from documents. Few significant gaps or flaws.</p>	5–6	<p>Relevant and accurate use of documents which supports reasoning. (Must reference 3+ documents.) Some evaluation and comparison of documents to support reasoning. Inference drawn from ≥ 1 document.</p>	5–6	<p>Consideration of key counter arguments and effective response to these. Some use of appropriate terminology.</p>	3–4

Page 6	Mark Scheme	Syllabus	Paper
	Cambridge International A Level – May/June 2015	9694	42

Level	Structure	Max 8	Quality of argument	Max 8	Use of documents	Max 8	Treatment of counter positions	Max 6
2	Conclusion stated but may be “I agree”. Sufficient clarity for meaning to be clear throughout. Structure may be easy to follow but brief or a longer argument which has a less clear structure. Uses reasons. Some appropriate use of vocabulary of reasoning.	3–4	A reasoned stance which attempts to answer the question which was asked. Some support for the conclusion. (Although there may be considerable irrelevance or reliance on dubious assumptions.) Some thinking/own ideas about the issue. Use of rhetorical questions and emotive language. Some significant gaps or flaws.	3–4	Some relevant use of documents to support reasoning, but some documents used indiscriminately. Some (perhaps implicit) comparison of documents or some critical evaluation of documents.	3–4	Inclusion of counter argument or counter assertion but response to this is ineffective.	2
1	Attempt to construct an argument. Unclear conclusion, multiple conclusions or no conclusion. Disjointed, incoherent reasoning. Use of examples in place of reasoning. Possibly a discourse or a rant. Reasons presented with no logical connection. Documents considered sequentially. Substantial irrelevant material.	1–2	Attempt to answer the general thrust of the question. Attempt to support their view. Excessive use of rhetorical questions and emotive language. Ideas which are contradictory.	1–2	Some use, perhaps implicit, use of documents. No attempt at critical evaluation. No comparison of documents.	1–2	Inclusion of counter argument or counter assertion with no response.	1

Page 7	Mark Scheme	Syllabus	Paper
	Cambridge International A Level – May/June 2015	9694	42

Example Level 4 Answers

Support (634 words)

Document 1 argues for an extreme form of CA (eliminating unseen examinations entirely), but the benefits of CA are entirely compatible with a varied pattern of modes of assessment, which includes some exercises undertaken under exam conditions and some synoptic assessment at the end of the course. For the purpose of this discussion, I will interpret CA in that way.

Document 1 identifies two important arguments in favour of CA and against the traditional pattern of assessment. It is true that some students under-perform in exams (paragraph 3), and that others perform badly on particular occasions, because of illness, bereavement or other unavoidable problems (paragraph 8). CA overcomes both these problems.

Document 4 shows that CA is taking over university courses, and (in paragraph 2) identifies the main reasons why this is so. Now that students are increasingly recognized as “customers” of universities, it is natural (and right) that student learning should be put at the centre of the whole enterprise, and as this document shows, this implies that courses should be assessed by CA. Paragraph 8 of Document 1 makes a similar point, that assessment should be used to help students improve, rather than simply label them as having failed. This would be a good reason why marks might have improved on CA by comparison with exams (as indicated in respect of one university in Document 5, although this example may have been chosen for that reason, and the improvement in results may be coincidental).

The argument in favour of exams attributed to the former Dean in Document 1 paragraph 5 (which appears to be supported by the graphs in Document 5) relies on the assumption that there is a wide range of ability and achievement amongst students, which may well not be the case. Perhaps only relatively few students perform significantly better or worse than the majority, in which case the narrow range of marks produced by non-exam assignments may be a more accurate indication of their achievement.

A student in Document 2 explains why – when given the choice – she prefers modules assessed by a single exam rather than {essay + presentation + exam}. That is understandable, although it is no bad thing if students are made to work all year instead of for a fortnight in the summer. It is important that assessment should not dominate the learning process. If there is a choice of modules, the burden of assessment should be equal between them, and each module should be assessed by no more than two elements.

The most powerful argument against assessing by essays and projects is that candidates can easily cheat. The advertisement in Document 3 shows how easy it is to buy assignments, and other students may have friends or relatives who will write the work for them. The attempted rebuttal of this criticism in Document 1 paragraph 7 is fatally flawed. So it is vital that the assessment of university courses should include a significant proportion of exercises in which candidates are forced to rely on their own knowledge and skills. These may include unseen exams and essays or projects undertaken under exam conditions, with limited or no access to the internet. This is perfectly compatible with CA, and therefore does not constitute an argument against it.

Document 1 is right (in paragraph 6) to point out the benefits of group projects. Although it is admittedly not fair that the marks of able students can be pulled down by a weak member of the group or that an incompetent or lazy student can achieve a pass mark without doing any work, it is not difficult to avoid these disadvantages, e.g. by including work diaries in the assessment, identifying each person’s contributions and awarding differentiated marks accordingly.

Therefore universities should award degrees on the basis of Continuous Assessment.

Page 8	Mark Scheme	Syllabus	Paper
	Cambridge International A Level – May/June 2015	9694	42

Challenge (733 words)

There are two major flaws in the arguments in favour of CA, as depicted in the documents provided. Firstly, they confuse learning with assessment. The purpose of assessment is not to show students where their weaknesses lie – important though that is, it is part of the teaching and learning process, not of assessment. The second flaw is they have a “modularized” understanding of learning; in other words, they think that a three-year degree course consists of separate chunks of knowledge which have to be memorized, at least for a short while. In fact, learning should be incremental, each segment of the curriculum building on the last and preparing for the next. The development of skills is more important than the acquisition of knowledge – especially now that facts are readily available at the click of a mouse. These two errors are fatal to the case for CA, and firmly imply that assessment should come at the end of the course, when it can assess the overall outcome of the learning process.

The student in Document 2 explains why CA is a bad thing from a student perspective. Admittedly, parents and tax-payers may think it no bad thing for students to work hard throughout their course instead of for only a few weeks in their final term; however, feeling “under constant pressure” is not good for young people in the formative years of their lives, and preparing for assessments is not the only worthwhile kind of learning activity in which conscientious students should engage.

The most powerful argument against assessing by essays and projects is that candidates can easily cheat. The advertisement in Document 3 shows how easy it is, and the arguments presented there will probably convince some students that there is nothing wrong in buying coursework from this company. Others may have a friend or relative who will write the work for them. The attempted rebuttal of this criticism in Document 1 paragraph 7 is fatally flawed. So it is vital that the assessment of university courses should consist entirely – or at least mainly - of exercises in which candidates are forced to rely on their own knowledge and skills. These do not necessarily have to be in the form of a set of essays written in three hours, but they do need to be undertaken under exam conditions.

Although Document 1 is right (in paragraph 6) to point out the benefits of group projects, it is not fair that the marks of able students can be pulled down by a weak member of the group or that an incompetent or lazy student can achieve a pass mark without doing any work. So such projects should not count towards the degree result of an individual student.

The value of timed, unseen examinations is under-estimated by some of the documents. Contrary to the claim in Document 1 paragraph 4 that exams test the wrong skills, the ability to remember information and reproduce it accurately and to think quickly are valuable skills, and prospective employers are entitled to expect that university graduates have proved themselves to have them.

Another important problem which can occur with CA is mentioned in the second bullet-point of Document 4. Depending on the subject, it may be that the skills and knowledge developed in one module can be forgotten once the assessment for that module has been completed. The necessity of synthesizing all the skills and knowledge at the end of a course is the main advantage of the traditional method of assessing courses by unseen exams at the end of three years.

The argument in favour of exams attributed to the former Dean in Document 1 paragraph 5 appears to be supported by the graphs in Document 5. Although the apparent rise in student performance could be due to a rise in ability or devotion to study, it is more likely that CA exaggerates the ability and performance of students. Since a major purpose of the assessment in a degree course is to differentiate between students in relation to the level of their achievement, this aspect of CA is a serious disadvantage. Any former student whose degree result was based on the traditional method of assessment can reasonably feel quite aggrieved that the next generation appears to be achieving better, just because it is assessed less rigorously.

Therefore universities should not award degrees on the basis of Continuous Assessment.