

Philosophy

2014 Chief Assessor’s Report

# Philosophy

# 2014 Chief Assessor’s Report

## Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Argument Analysis

Students achieved at the highest level of the performance standards when assessment tasks required them to apply argument terminology to their analysis. Particularly for the specific features RA2, RA3, CA1, and C2 (as abbreviated in the subject outline), the task should guide students to show their understanding of and ability to use the following terms: ‘argument form’, ‘inductive’ and ‘deductive arguments’, ‘premises’, ‘opinionative’, ‘analytical’, ‘empirical’, ‘(in)valid’, ‘(un)sound’, ‘cogent’, and so on. Some logical fallacies may also be included where this is appropriate.

For the specific feature RA3, the task should also require students to present their own argument for a position they have taken on an issue, adding an analysis of their argument using the terms above.

One task which gives students appropriate opportunities involves an analysis of the arguments in the letters to the editor section of a publication, with students adding and analysing their own letter.

As mentioned in previous reports, a successful approach to this assessment type can involve one of the two tasks being analysis of an argument given by a philosopher about a philosophical issue. Here the specific features RA1 and C1 are also relevant. Peter Singer is a philosopher whose arguments lend themselves particularly well to this task.

Assessment Type 2: Issues Analysis

It is important to be aware of a major difference between Stage 1 and Stage 2 Philosophy. The issues at Stage 2 level are distinctly more philosophical and require a greater depth and breadth of analysis.

The difficulty with group tasks and debates is the provision of evidence to substantiate higher levels of achievement of the performance standards. There is also the risk that students are drawn away from philosophical issues or do not present philosophical perspectives. While these kinds of tasks may be interesting, students need to be given clear guidelines of what is required in terms of individual research and presentation. Teachers should consider adopting strategies that will support all students to make a meaningful contribution to collaborative tasks.

There is also a concern regarding tasks which do not allow students to present evidence for the specific feature RA3. Such tasks simply ask students to analyse the positions of one or two philosophers without requiring them to formulate and defend their own position. While it is possible to meet the requirements of the subject outline with just one of the three tasks in this assessment type complying, students may not be given the opportunity to practise and develop skills against this performance standard.

These concerns aside, students were generally given opportunities to perform well in the performance standards. One interesting task in the area of metaphysics required students to write letters to the editor discussing a recently committed crime from the points of view of a hard determinist, a soft determinist, and a free-will advocate, including the student’s own position.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Issues Study

The majority of students satisfy the requirements of this assessment type with considerable success, but there are still a few students who need to consider the most appropriate ways to provide evidence of their achievement.

Of particular concern is providing evidence for specific feature RA1, which can be easily overlooked. Perhaps the best approach is to include a direct reference to the philosophical nature of the issue in the early part of the issues study, rather than hoping that evidence can be inferred from the investigation.

There are also a few students who do not provide evidence for specific feature RA3 because they analyse the positions of a number of philosophers without formulating and defending their own position.

Students need to keep in mind that rhetorical questions within the body of the investigation are not of use unless the student goes on to either answer the questions or clarify their significance. In addition, as pointed out in previous reports, personal or biographical details of philosophers are generally unnecessary.

Students should be reminded that there is a 2000-word limit on the issues study.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

Philosophy

Chief Assessor