Philosophy

2012 Chief Assessor's Report

PHILOSOPHY

2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessor's Reports give an overview of how students performed in the 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

Moderators were generally pleased at the levels of achievement shown in the assessment design criteria Reasoning and Argument, and Critical Analysis.

Particularly successful assessment tasks included focus questions that supported students to provide relevant responses. An example of this was a task where students analysed Peter Singer's argument for euthanasia; this required students to put the argument in standard form, stating whether it was deductive or inductive. In addition, students analysed the premises in terms of whether they were opinion, empirical, metaphysical or analytical. Finally, students discussed the strength of the argument using appropriate terminology.

Another successful task involved the analysis of Sartre's analogy comparing God to a knife maker, and directed students to question the appropriateness of the analogy and analyse the premises as detailed in the preceding paragraph.

Less successful tasks were ones which provided limited clarification of the requirements of the task; this resulted in students providing an issues analysis rather than an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the central argument.

Assessment Type 2: Issues Analysis

The key term in both the title of the assessment type and in the subject outline is 'issue'. It is important to consider this when framing assessment tasks so that students have the opportunity to show they meet the specific features of assessment design criteria Knowledge and Understanding (KU) 1 and 2, and Reasoning and Argument (RA) 1, 2 and 3.

The issue needs to be a philosophical issue from the key areas of Metaphysics, Epistemology and Ethics; the subject outline suggests possible issues for consideration. For a chosen issue, students should be directed to consider different philosophical responses to the issue and what their position is with a justifiable defence for this position.

Although the majority of tasks supported students to produce evidence against the relevant assessment design criteria, there is one type of task which limits student achievement because it requires students to discuss the merits of a branch of philosophy such as metaphysics. This type of task does not allow students to analyse a particular issue within the key area, as required by the subject outline.

Students should be reminded to work within the word count written tasks and time limit for oral responses.

Students who showed achievement against the first specific feature under Communication, and the first part of the second specific feature, generally showed clear and coherent communication, with appropriate conventions consistently observed, with mostly accurate and relevant use of philosophical terminology. However, it was disappointing to see that sources were not consistently acknowledged by a number of students. Students should be reminded to use a referencing system in a consistent way.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Issues Study

The acknowledgement of sources is important in this assessment type and it is noteworthy that teachers obviously emphasised the importance of this acknowledgement in supporting ethical research practices.

It was noted that most students now frame their topics in the form of a question. However, questions still need to relate to one of the key areas listed in the subject outline. The question also needs to allow students to demonstrate the specific features under Knowledge and Understanding by supporting an in-depth consideration of a wide range of philosophical positions. Students should be able to demonstrate Critical Analysis through an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of arguments for and against philosophical positions. Students are also expected to demonstrate evidence against specific features 2 and 3 of Reasoning and Understanding by proposing a conclusion about the issue through formation and defence of the position adopted by the student.

A few studies did not follow this formula, thereby limiting students' ability to demonstrate higher levels of achievement. For example, simply comparing two philosophers is not an *issues* study. In this case, the student needs to compare philosophers' positions on a particular issue, citing the positions of other philosophers, and to develop a personal position in the process.

Some students limit their ability to achieve highly in the KU2 specific feature by referring only to philosophical positions without mentioning actual philosophers.

Philosophy
Chief Assessor