Please read in conjunction with the information provided in the introductory section above.

DRAFT VERSION OF THE CRITICAL THINKING TEST SPECIFICATION

1 DEFINITION AND AIMS

Critical thinking is defined as a form of reflective reasoning which analyses and evaluates information and arguments by applying a range of intellectual skills in order to reach clear, logical and coherent judgements within a given context.
The AEA in Critical Thinking should encourage students to:

- develop an understanding of why critically examining knowledge claims is important;
- demonstrate a critical capacity to analyse and evaluate their own and others' beliefs and knowledge claims in a variety of contexts;
- understand the selective and interpretative nature of information including personal and ideological bias;
- evaluate reasoning of different kinds;
- make interdisciplinary connections and synthesise information and arguments;
- generate their own arguments and alternatives.

2 CONTEXT

There are no specific prior knowledge requirements for the AEA in critical thinking.
The AEA in critical thinking should allow students to demonstrate critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis within the areas of:

- Society, Politics and the Economy
- Science and Technology
- Mathematics and associated reasoning skills
- The Humanities
- The Arts

3 ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE

The AEA in critical thinking will assess candidates' abilities to apply and communicate their understanding and skills in critical thinking.

4 SCHEME OF ASSESSMENT

Supervision and duration of assessment
The AEA in critical thinking will be a timed, written test taken under controlled conditions. It will have a duration of three hours. Different question types will be used including multiple choice, open ended items and essays.

Use of resources
The use of dictionaries/calculators will/will not be permitted.

5 PERFORMANCE LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

Distinction
Candidates:

- demonstrate, across a wide range of issues and contexts, a high level of ability in critical thinking by critically evaluating statements and complex reasoning deriving from them, accurately assessing the nature and strength of justification, even when measures are taken to disguise this.
- identify and discount the effects of subtle biases and disguised persuasive devices in written, diagrammatic and numerical sources.
- select and summarise fully arguments clearly and accurately and produce their own well developed, or critical pieces of successful argumentation
- collect, organise and synthesise subtle arguments across a wide range of subject matter.

Merit
Candidates:

- demonstrate, for a range of issues and contexts, a reasonable ability to evaluate the reasonableness of statements and a line of complex reasoning, assessing the nature and strength of justification;
- identify and discount the effects of biases and persuasive devices in written, diagrammatic and numerical sources;
- select and summarise anecdotal and descriptive and produce their own adequately developed persuasive or critical pieces of successful argumentation;
- collect, organise and synthesise arguments across a range of subject matter.

Appendix 1

EXPANSION OF ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE

Expansion of the Assessment Objective

Assessment Objective Component 1: Demonstrate a critical capacity to **analyse** different kinds of reasoning in a range of contexts, from different academic disciplines and everyday life.

- **Analysis** - the ability to analyse arguments, and further break these down into claims, reasons or conclusions. Identifying missing information and underlying assumptions is an important part of analysing arguments effectively. Also important is the ability to determine whether particular evidence is relevant to the area under debate (regardless of the quality of the evidence in terms of its own logic and authenticity of source).
- **Inference** - the ability to judge whether the reasons given in an argument are sufficient to justify a conclusion. This includes assessing the nature and strength of justifications offered in support of statements, including the evaluation of the use of evidence. Also covered in this area is the assessment of the credibility of different sources of information.

Assessment Objective Component 2: Demonstrate a critical capacity to **evaluate** different kinds of reasoning in a range of contexts, from different academic disciplines and everyday life.

- **Evaluation** - the ability to evaluate how well the component parts of an argument together constitute a valid argument form. As such, the evaluation of lines of reasoning is a core element of critical thinking. A further element of critical thinking involves the evaluation of beliefs and claims, drawing on more than the statements in isolation.

Assessment Objective Component 3: Demonstrate an understanding of the interpretative nature of information including intentional and unintentional bias, and the techniques utilised in persuasive communication.
Key areas within this component include:

- **Emotive language** - the ability to detect the use of strong emotional language or imagery designed to trigger a response, for example, the ability to critique an advertisement or propaganda.
- **Misleading language** - the ability to recognise the use of misleading language such as exaggeration or downplaying of an important topic.
- **Irrelevancies** - the ability to detect use of irrelevancies introduced to divert attention from the issue at hand.
- **Bias** - the detection of slanted definitions or comparisons which express bias.

Comments on Assessment: Short reports and essays may be particularly useful assessments of this area. For example, test takers could be asked to write both sides of a debate, or evaluate reasoning in a variety of passages with differing ideologies.

Assessment Objective Component 4: Make connections and synthesise arguments, locating, selecting, categorising, comparing and integrating information.
This component consists of the following areas:

- **Connecting and synthesising arguments** - recognising how information from different areas or points of view can be combined, either to build a coherent argument or to represent differing points of view. Also identifying the main theme within an argument, and how the various lines of reasoning support this, if they do. In doing this, showing an awareness of the context and audience.
- **Locating and selecting information** - identifying information and selecting the parts that are relevant to a specific argument and those which are irrelevant. This includes the ability to ask relevant and penetrating questions to clarify facts, concepts and relationships. Also identifying and seeking additional resources, such as resources in print, that can help clarify comprehension.
- **Comparing and categorising information** - the ability to identify similarities and differences and to formulate and use categories, distinctions or frameworks in order to organise information and aid comprehension.

Assessment Objective Component 5: Develop and communicate arguments and alternatives clearly and accurately in a concise and logical manner.
There are two aspects of this area: developing arguments and then communicating them.

- **Developing arguments** - requires the generation of relevant considerations, other scenarios, examples and counter examples. This includes the ability to develop analogies and other forms of comparisons to clarify meaning, or examples that help to explain something or remove troublesome ambiguities.
- **Communicating arguments** - requires the presentation of arguments that are clear, logical and coherent. That is, the skills used to critique others should be applied to one's own reasoning. General criteria for good critical thinking and therefore students' written work include clarity, relevance, accuracy, fairness, completeness, precision, depth, breadth and adequacy.

Comments on Assessment: The main methods of assessment in this area will be short reports and essays, as extended answers will be necessary to evaluate the generation of robust arguments in able students, and the ability to communicate these. Whilst aspects of writing such as fluency and clarity can be considered important in presenting arguments, and critical thinking generally, it is important that in marking written answers these are not evaluated for irrelevant factors (e.g. style) - a person may be a good writer but not a good thinker, and it will be important to differentiate between the two.

Language of Critical Thinking
No questions specifically addressing the language of critical thinking will be included within the examination paper for the Advanced Extension Award in Critical Thinking. Instead, the extent to which students understand the language and processes of critical thinking should emerge from their responses to the examination. Additionally, as part of the preparation for the examination, students will be given guidance information which describes technical terms relating to critical thinking. If these were explicitly tested, the guidelines could become a 'mini syllabus', rather than preparation materials. Because of this, evidence that students understand the language and processes of critical thinking will be examined through the assessment objective components set out above.