School Certificate in Philosophy

Examiners’ Report July 2020

375 entries were made from 19 schools.

In the top mark band, there were many well-written, interesting projects which explored some challenging philosophical topics. The work submitted for the certificate showcased some extremely bright minds.

On the whole, the standard of work produced was very high and it was clear that the majority of young people involved in the Certificate applied themselves with diligence and care. Students engaged in relevant research and successfully explored the arguments surrounding their chosen issue.

Schools have shown excellent management of the process.

Questions varied across a wide range of topics. It was pleasing to see work from students who chose explicitly philosophical or ethical questions. Those who chose topics with more philosophical scope generally fared better as this provided them with a clearer opportunity to present a line of argument and debate counter-arguments.

Conclusions were among the strongest parts of all of the entries, particularly when the student drew together a consistent line of argument from the entire project.

Sometimes templates were used to good effect however it would be good to see more use of the project planner as proof of organisation.

The presentation of the arguments was best when done via synthesis of good academic sources and the best entries integrated their own point of view with well-chosen sources.

It is important to note that the form of the project, referencing style, and word count is more open and free than some assessors assumed.

It was rewarding to see so many candidates who approached their projects with an open mind, demonstrated aptitude with analytical tools, and had a clear aim of answering a good question.

Bibliographies very well structured and referenced in some work. However, many students did not reference sources throughout their project. It would also be good to see more variation in source choice (i.e. not just websites). Students should also be reminded that sources should be appropriately cited and quotation marks used if material comes direct from websites.

Referencing is an important academic life skill and it is fair to expect students to do some form of referencing as a minimum. Tools for referencing are freely available online and could be used for this purpose. The exemplar projects on the NCH School Certificate in Philosophy website may also offer a helpful model.

Overall, there was impressive engagement with philosophy. The School Certificate has provided a well-utilised opportunity for students to nurture an interest in philosophical thought.