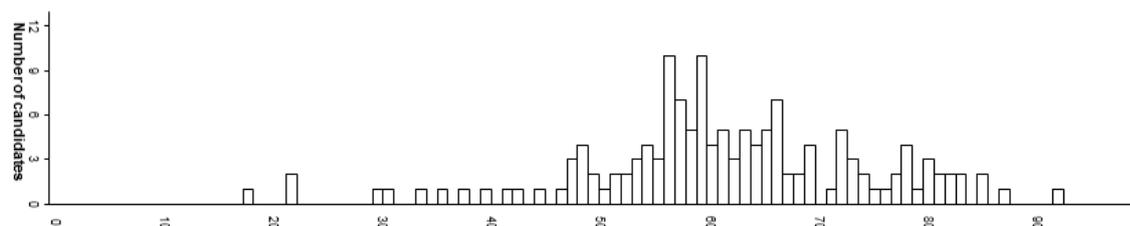




Summary report for candidates on the 2014 WACE examination in Philosophy and Ethics Stage 3

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2014	143	3
2013	167	4
2012	142	2

Examination score distribution



Summary

Overall the paper seemed to be well designed and effective in giving all candidates the opportunity to demonstrate what they had learned while providing a means to discriminate between different ability. The length of the examination was appropriate for the three-hour time frame. The level of difficulty of the paper was comparable to that of the previous year's paper as the overall mean, and section means demonstrate. The cohort of candidates in 2014 demonstrated a range of ability similar to that of previous years.

The mean of the paper was 61.59%, which is similar to the mean of the previous year's examination 61.49%.

Section means are as follows:

Section One: Reasoning and inquiry skills	Mean	62.73%
Section Two: Philosophical analysis	Mean	64.01%
Section Three: Extended argument	Mean	58.82%.

The examination seemed to function as a good discriminator, where the minimum mark for the examination was 17.50% and the maximum mark was 92.50%. The standard deviation for the examination was 13.24%.

General comments

As in 2013, Section One and Section Three of the examination appeared to be the most challenging for candidates, with some questions (for example, Question 2(b) and Question 5(c)) in Section One posing particular challenges. This section required a deep and broad understanding of critical reasoning. In Section two, neither item stood out as being particularly difficult and many candidates provided detailed critical analysis. In Section Three candidates could choose from five questions. Questions 12, 13, 14 and 16 appeared to be of a comparable level of difficulty attaining relatively similar means. Question 15 had a noticeably higher mean, however, the number of attempts at this question was only 6 and the level at which the candidates who chose this question engaged with the issues was highly sophisticated. The number of candidates who attempted each question in this section ranged from six to fifty-two.

Section One contained some items that have typically challenged candidates. The section contained similar items to 2013, and it was pleasing to see results that demonstrate that

there have been improvements in performance with regard to the nature of the items. This indicates that issues with the candidates' understanding of certain areas of critical thinking have been addressed in many schools.

Section Two was similar to past WACE examinations. With the community of inquiry dialogue (Question 10) there is a noticeable move towards succinct responses (e.g. three pages maximum) that engaged in the evaluation of cogency and argument structure rather than lengthy descriptive recounts of the dialogue. Overall the performance of the candidates in this was noticeably stronger in 2014.

This year there was an incredible preference for the second passage which made the discrimination between candidates an easier task for the markers. Generally candidates were far more succinct and targeted (e.g. three pages maximum) with their analysis and evaluation. Candidates also engaged better with the elements of cogency (statement acceptability and inferential strength) than in the past, but there is still room to improve.

The construction of passages expressly for the purpose of assessing ability on philosophical analysis and evaluation, rather than the choosing or modifying of passages from texts, seemed to be a successful change from previous years. It also has the benefit of eliminating copyright issues from the paper entirely.

Section Three was similar to previous trends of performance on this section in the paper. There were candidates who planned/constructed an argument exhibiting a strong performance on the criteria in the marking key and executed a commendable response to the question.

Advice for candidates

Section One

- A thorough understanding of the meaning of the connectives (if/then, and, or etc.) is essential for tackling this section of the examination.
- It is important to always check your work thoroughly if you have time.

Section Two

- Be very careful not to write too much and thus compromise your performance elsewhere in the examination (typically Section Three).
- Succinct analyses are far better than lengthy descriptions.
- Candidates are encouraged to summarise the argument in the passage accurately and succinctly.
- Lists of statements (premises and conclusion) are encouraged but should not be a rewording of the passage verbatim. Instead candidates are required to paraphrase the argument in the passage into a list of statements that is a succinct and accurate representation of the argument in the passage.
- Lengthy and verbatim descriptive recounts of the argument in the passage must be avoided.

Section Three

- It seems reasonably clear that inadequate time management on behalf of the candidates contributes to poor performance.
- There appears to be a pattern of poor performance where candidates invest greater time and effort in Section Two, which has a negative effect on their ability to perform successfully in Section Three.
- Another contributor to poor performance is the preference among some candidates to display all they know rather than engaging with the actual question.
- Candidates are urged to argue philosophically rather than emotively or factually with statistics.