

Commentary on candidate evidence

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for each element of this project-dissertation course assessment component.

Candidate 1

Justifying an appropriate complex, contemporary political or social issue for research (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **8 marks** because they have a contemporary and relevant hypothesis, 'Women should not go to prison'. They explain the importance and relevance of the issue, commenting that the increasing female prison population throws up questions around whether this brings any benefits to society, particularly where the vast majority for offences are of a non-violent nature. They also clearly explain issues relating to female imprisonment such as the impact on families and children. There is consideration of the punitive aspects of prison and the negative impacts it has on women, particularly mentally, but a recognition that government approaches are changing. They clearly outline the aims, coverage and line of argument to come, and contextualise the wider relevance extent of the issue in relation to alternatives to prison and recognition of adverse childhood experiences and their impact on children and the cycle of criminality.

Evaluating research methodology (6 marks)

The candidate was awarded **5 marks** because they make several developed and relevant points that address both the validity and reliability of the research methodology deployed. They evaluate books, prison reform websites, the Guardian online and information gleaned from attendance at conferences. Issues explore benefits and limitations including the reliability of academic sources, cost and time

effectiveness of methods and lack of control and the validity of some approaches. Comments show a clear understanding of both the strengths and the limitations of the research carried out. The candidate takes an unusual approach in dealing with ethical issues by commenting on ethical concerns with official statistics, but this was deemed credible as it implicitly touches on issues of consent. However, the points about potential changes for improvement are superficial – commenting on making greater use of the index, only relying on government official statistics or using a range of newspaper opinion – and fail to adequately explain how these would improve the validity, reliability or ethical soundness of the research.

Using a wide range of sources of information (6 marks)

The candidate was awarded **5 marks** in this element because a wide range of relevant and contemporary sources are used including conference notes, an academic book, official statistics, newspaper articles and online resources. Sources are used convincingly throughout the dissertation. Nevertheless, there are repeated failures to use the correct academic convention to reference the source of information in several places across chapters 1 and 2.

Analysing the issue (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **8 marks** because there is impressive analysis of key aspects. In Chapter 1, the candidate shows an in depth understanding of the issue when discussing the harms to women and families of prison before widening this to critically consider the alternative approaches within the prison system such as Community Custody Units (CCUs) and mother and baby units. In Chapter 2, the candidate's analysis is particularly well-linked to evaluative comments when examining early interventions, alternatives to custody, and Community Payback Orders (CPOs) and the challenges these face in relation to issues including budgets and completion of CPOs. Although there is underdeveloped coverage of the needs of BAME groups and the questionable relevance of coverage of probation, evidence is clearly analysed throughout, for example 'The implication of this is that they will likely re-offend...' , 'These low uptake figures suggest that that these Centres have

fallen short ...', 'This suggests that the effectiveness of these centres varies significantly...', and 'This shows that not only does community service keep women out of prison but is also . . .'. Overall, the candidate shows an in-depth understanding of the issue, evidenced by a convincing line of argument drawing on a range of relevant contemporary supporting evidence.

Evaluating arguments and evidence (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **7 marks** because there is reasoned consideration and evaluation throughout, though alternative perspectives on the positives of prisons and more focus on the line of argument in Chapter 2 could be developed further. In Aim 1, the candidate considers the limitations of prison in meeting women and their families' needs and, whilst acknowledging the need for prisons, they could have expanded this further. In Aim 2, there are several good evaluative points made in relation to alternatives to custody, but there is a lack of an overarching coherent line of argument. This would improve their line of argument and ensure the points of evaluation were fully integrated.

Synthesising information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence (10 marks)

The candidate was awarded **8 marks** because there is a detailed overall conclusion that makes several judgements on the issue, as well as on each specific aim, though it is fairly one-sided. Synthesis is used throughout the piece of work to support the line of argument and there are detailed explanations for each judgement. For example, the candidate concludes in Chapter 1 that the harm of prison towards women is excessive and counter-productive in terms of rehabilitation. In Chapter 2, alternatives to prison are judged to be slightly effective. The overall conclusion is not as well reasoned and limits the marks awarded.

Organising, presenting and referencing findings using appropriate conventions (4 marks)

The candidate was awarded **3 marks** because the bibliography, though not in alphabetical order, adheres to academic convention. Whilst the appendices could have been improved by the inclusion of the location, it is deemed acceptable. Data from primary and secondary research was used accurately and integrated throughout. Omissions in the referencing prevent full marks being awarded in this element.

Overall, this dissertation was awarded **44 out of 50 marks**.

This is a well-written and well-researched piece of work that shows clear understanding and analysis of a complex, relevant, contemporary issue. This could have been improved with more focused evaluation of the positives of prisons, a more focused line of argument, especially in Chapter 2, and more consistent referencing.

Candidate 2

Justifying an appropriate complex, contemporary political or social issue for research (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **7 marks** because the importance of the issue is explained and its relevance to society is largely addressed. There is an introduction that defines poverty, describes its growth and explains how the government measures poverty. The candidate sets out the significance and implications for learning more about whether poverty is an individual choice or whether society is to blame for high poverty levels in the UK. There are multiple perspectives shared on the causes of poverty in British society. While there is justification for the relevance of poverty in society, the candidate does not adequately develop and link together their aims to preview each chapter more fully in the final paragraph.

Evaluating research methodology (6 marks)

The candidate was awarded **6 marks** because this section demonstrates an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the research methodology employed. The candidate successfully evaluates semi-structured interviews and books they used while conducting their research. The candidate is reflective, gives specific examples and addresses the ethics of conducting their research. 'Before each interview I read my interviewee an ethical statement. This stated why I was speaking to them and what the information they gave would be used for. I also gave them the option to stay anonymous.' The candidate also points out in multiple places how they would specifically change their approach were they to begin their research again.

Using a wide range of sources of information (6 marks)

The candidate was awarded **5 marks** because all of the sources used are contemporary in scope and most support the candidate's line of argument, although not all. The 31 secondary sources used are wide-ranging and used accurately throughout the dissertation. The candidate follows academic convention throughout, drawing evidence from several books, journals, official government websites and poverty charities such as the Child Poverty Action Group and One Parent Families Scotland. Were the candidate's line of argument more convincingly used throughout both chapters, this would have led to an additional mark.

Analysing the issue (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **6 marks** because analysis and evaluative commentary are evident in both chapters. There is analytical commentary on alternative arguments in Chapter 1 as the candidate weighs up alternative views such as functionalism, Marxism and psycho-socialism. Factors such as gender, disability and race are analysed in Chapter 2. There are areas in which the candidate describes events or sources which comes at the expense of the candidate's line of argument.

Fewer instances of description may have allowed for a greater level of analysis contributing to a stronger line of argument.

Evaluating arguments and evidence (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **5 marks** because reasoned points are used to provide an overall judgement that individual choices are not the main cause of poverty in British society today. There are connections made between some of the sociological theories however, this dissertation could have a stronger line of argument that more persuasively discounts the view that poverty is to blame on the individual. Additional variables/factors are too often summarised, often from one source, in Chapter 2 which results in the candidate putting forth someone else's view rather than their own. While this dissertation is well-researched, there is a lack of evaluative points that are effectively integrated in this candidate's line of argument and weakens their view that it is society to blame for persistent and growing poverty in the country.

Synthesising information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence (10 marks)

The candidate was awarded **5 marks** because there are sub-conclusions for each chapter which suggest a level of synthesis supported by evidence, for example 'In conclusion, all of these factors have an impact on a person's likelihood of poverty, none of which are the individual's fault...Overall, Philip Alston was correct in stating...' The candidate concludes by refuting their hypothesis. There is some level of debate across both chapters but the quality of synthesis at the end of each chapter and in the overall conclusion does not warrant additional marks. The overall conclusion recaps the significance of all the theories and factors again before concluding that the factors discussed in Chapter 2 are to blame. The conclusion finishes with a paragraph on what the future of poverty holds for society, which does not bring the candidate any closer to definitively refuting their hypothesis. The lack of a balanced evaluative commentary throughout demonstrates why this element only gains 5 marks.

Organising, presenting and referencing findings using appropriate conventions (4 marks)

The candidate was awarded **4 marks** because references are clear, consistent and accurate throughout. The bibliography uses academic convention including the title of the article or report, author (if given), URL address and date the source was most recently accessed. Appendices are structured and organised and data from both primary and secondary sources has been integrated, although to varying degrees of success.

Overall, this dissertation was awarded **38 out of 50 marks**.

This is a well-researched and reasonably well-written dissertation that has sub-conclusions, but a line of argument that could be stronger by discounting and weakening alternative factors. The two-chapter approach works well for this candidate as it allows them to highlight two clear and distinctive views on this topic (individual vs societal causes) but it is too often descriptive and lacks the sophisticated evaluation and persuasive line of argument that is needed for a higher marks.

Candidate 3

Justifying an appropriate complex, contemporary political or social issue for research (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **4 marks** because they have a relevant and contemporary hypothesis. The candidate introduces several issues over which there has been political division in recent years, including Covid and Brexit. The candidate explains the importance and relevance of the issue, in respect of how parties seek power, the political landscape changing and parties moving towards the centre of the political spectrum. The candidate considers one viewpoint, ie that there is division,

however, there is a lack of data or contemporary evidence to explain the presented viewpoint. The candidate also does not consider alternative theories therefore the mark is capped at 4 out of 8 marks.

Evaluating research methodology (6 marks)

The candidate was awarded **5 marks** because they make developed points of evaluation about the effectiveness of their Google forms survey and articles from the BBC, explicitly assessing the extent to which these methods were reliable and implicitly exploring their validity. They refer to the ethical issue of anonymity in their analysis of their survey. While there is scope for greater detail regarding the articles used, the candidate has done just enough to warrant the marks awarded. The candidate's potential change, ie 'getting more responses on my online survey', lacks clarity as to how they would make this happen, and detail as to how this would improve the validity, reliability or ethical soundness of their research. This prevents full marks from being awarded in this element.

Using a wide range of sources of information (6 marks)

The candidate was awarded **3 marks** in this element because they use a range and variety of relevant, contemporary sources, including their own survey, and a range of secondary sources. The candidate's sources support their concluding remarks, but the line of argument is not as coherent as it could be. The candidate does not use the sources persuasively and convincingly enough to score more marks.

Analysing the issue (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **4 marks** because there are relevant analytical comments throughout the main body of this dissertation. The analysis includes relevant supporting contemporary evidence about Conservative infighting over Brexit in Chapter 1, divisions between Labour and Conservatives over Covid restrictions in Chapter 2, and divisions between the Republicans and Democrats over gun control in Chapter 3. However, the depth of this candidate's analysis throughout, falls short

of earning more marks. The chapters are largely descriptive accounts of singular issues, and do not link analytical comments to evaluative comments nor comment on alternative arguments.

Evaluating arguments and evidence (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **4 marks** because they made some reasoned points of evaluation and related points to their line of argument. In Chapter 1, the candidate makes a judgement that Brexit was 'a peak point of division' for the Conservative Party and how scandals during periods of Covid restrictions led to greater division. In Chapter 3, there is evaluation in respect of gun control being a 'key source of division within US Politics'. There is no consideration or evaluation of alternative arguments, with the candidate failing to recognise areas over which there is unity, rather than division, within or between parties.

Synthesising information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence (10 marks)

The candidate was awarded **4 marks** because synthesis is evident in supporting a line of argument and the overall conclusion offered follows on from what the candidate has argued throughout, ie that political division is present now more than ever. However, a lack of detailed evidence limits this dissertation's quality. The response is very one-sided and fails to discuss aspects of unity within and between parties, focusing instead wholly on divisions. The candidate does not draw sub-conclusions at the end of each chapter aim, which further limits the breadth of synthesis on offer.

Organising, presenting and referencing findings using appropriate conventions (4 marks)

The candidate was awarded **3 marks** because data from primary and secondary research is integrated into the main body of the text to support evaluation and conclusions throughout. Appendices and the bibliography are organised and follow standard academic conventions. Several citations are missing, so the candidate does not achieve the mark for clear, consistent and accurate references being present throughout.

Overall, this dissertation was awarded **27 out of 50 marks**.

This dissertation contains some good evidence and analysis, but it is disadvantaged by a descriptive approach in the main body. The initial aims set out by the candidate have led to the coverage being somewhat narrow and they fail to recognise the nuance in each issue being explored. Bringing an international element into this dissertation in Chapter 3, meant less attention and time was given over to properly exploring the divisions and unity on other areas. Reflection on two or three issues over which parties are sometimes in agreement, rather than setting out to discuss just one or two parties' views being divided, would have helped this candidate to form a clearer line of argument. This would have likely resulted in more analysis, evaluation and synthesis marks being awarded.

Candidate 4

Justifying an appropriate complex, contemporary political or social issue for research (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **3 marks** because although there is a contemporary and relevant hypothesis with linked aims, the introduction is very short, descriptive and has a notable historical focus. While the candidate explains the relevance of the issue to the contemporary world by acknowledging the increasing polarisation of US

political parties, there is a lack of discussion as to why the issue is an important one. Different theoretical perspectives and viewpoints are not considered and thus the candidate is limited to 3 out of 8 marks in this element.

Evaluating research methodology (6 marks)

The candidate was awarded **0 marks** because they provide no evidence of evaluation of the research methods used. This is an unusual response for this section as the candidate simply describes the research they carried out for each chapter. There is no evaluation or discussion on the effectiveness of these research methods and therefore, the candidate cannot be awarded any marks.

Using a wide range of sources of information (6 marks)

The candidate was awarded **3 marks** in this element because they use a range of sources that are contemporary and relevant. These sources support the concluding remarks, but there is a lack of a coherent line of argument. Each chapter tends to be too descriptive and veers away from the hypothesis, weakening the line of argument.

Analysing the issue (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **5 marks** because they make developed and relevant analytical comments that use contemporary evidence. Although there are parts of each chapter that are descriptive and dated, each chapter does also contain contemporary evidence and subsequent analysis, and it is important to credit this accordingly. While Chapter 1 begins with an interesting, though not fully relevant, description of the Wild West and discussion of the dangers of mountain lions, it then develops to make some insightful and creditworthy points about guns and their links to crime and violence. For example, the international comparisons between the US and other countries are well written. When comparing Seattle to Vancouver, the candidate writes 'This shows that the abundance of guns in the hands of the average citizen causes greater loss of life'. Similarly, Chapter 2 is more descriptive than analytical, but does contain some interesting comparisons between the UK and the

US. Chapter 3, once again, uses dated examples at the start, but then makes some valid points for example 'This shows the contrast between the views of the most recent GOP and Democratic presidents on gun control'. However, there is a lack of analytical comments on alternative arguments which caps the candidate at 5 marks out of 8 in this element.

Evaluating arguments and evidence (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **4 marks** because there is a lack of consideration and explanation of alternative arguments. Chapters 1 and 2 contain many reasons why there is a case for gun control, yet do not consider any opposing or alternative views. Chapter 3 mentions the political difficulties in changing the constitution but does not develop or fully explain why this could be an alternative argument to the hypothesis. Despite this, there are points of evaluation throughout the response. For example, in Chapter 1 when the candidate writes 'This shows that at greater access to guns increases gun ownership, and consequently, increases the rate of crime'. The candidate makes reasoned points of evaluation and uses them to make an overall judgement on the hypothesis and thus is awarded 4 marks out of 8 in this element.

Synthesising information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence (10 marks)

The candidate was awarded **4 marks** because there is a clear conclusion that follows from a line of argument, although this line of argument is not particularly clear or coherent. There is a lack of developed sub-conclusions in each chapter which may partly be due to aims that are simply headings. Aims that are structured as 'To what extent...?' questions would have made it easier for the candidate to create a clear line of argument throughout the dissertation. The overall conclusion contains a summary of each chapter but fails to pull together and make judgements on the key arguments both for and against gun control.

Organise, present and reference findings using appropriate conventions (4 marks)

The candidate was awarded **3 marks** because while most of the organisation of the dissertation gains credit, there are no appendices. There are one or two omissions of references but in general, the referencing, bibliography and presentation of data is accurate.

Overall, this dissertation was awarded **22 out of 50 marks**.

At points, this is a well-researched dissertation that is written in an entertaining and engaging manner. It contains some interesting examples and many relevant statistics, although a significant proportion of each chapter includes content that is too historical. All three of the chapters tend to be too descriptive and contain information that is less relevant to the hypothesis. Furthermore, the lack of examination of alternative arguments and the weak research methodology section significantly hampers the marks awarded.