

Commentary on candidate evidence

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, 'Prison is a costly waste of time'. They explain the importance and relevance of the issue, commenting on the comparatively high imprisonments rates in Scotland, England and Wales, relative to Western Europe, the projected trajectory of these figures without interventions and the associated costs this will bring. There is consideration of the solution to this being to 'stop sending people to prison' and recognition of public, media and political opposition. The coverage and line of argument to come, which will look at Scotland, the UK and the US's punitive penal approaches in contrast to Norway's humane approach as well as community-based alternatives, is clearly outlined. The wider relevance of the issue is touched on with discussion of the effectiveness of prison and community-based sentences in reintegrating people back into society.

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 methods used. The candidate successfully evaluates and justifies their use of an online questionnaire, lecture-type presentations, online articles, government sources and media outputs. In their evaluation of these methods, they comment, either explicitly or implicitly, on a range of benefits and limitations relating to authority, expertise, validity, reliability and accessibility. The candidate addresses the ethics of conducting research, commenting on the respondent to their online questionnaire giving informed consent. The candidate points out in two places how they would specifically change their approach were they to begin their research again. Credit is given for the alternative approaches they actually took to overcome the lack of relevant detail from presentations. No credit was given for the final comment that they '...would have

more heavily consulted official statistics. . . ' as this is deemed to be a comment on 'doing more' rather than an evaluation of how to improve the quality of the research.

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

The candidate was awarded **6 marks** because they use a wide range of relevant and contemporary sources including presentation notes, email questionnaire correspondence, online articles, government sources and media outputs. Source evidence is used convincingly throughout the dissertation and referenced in a credible academic convention across the appendices and alphabetically bibliography.

Analysing the issue (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **8 marks** because there is impressive analysis of key aspects. In chapter 1 the candidate demonstrates in-depth, sophisticated and critical consideration of prisons. This chapter covers problems of prisons and the high reoffending rates associated with retributive approaches. It also considers the alternative view of the positive aspects of prisons by analysing the progressive approach of Norway and the Bella Centre in Scotland. This is balanced with evidence of the high costs of these approaches and insightful comment on the fact that Scotland and the UK has still only extended this 'normalisation' model to 'low-risk prisoners' whereas Norway has integrated this to serve 'high-security prisoners'. In chapter 2, the candidate's analysis covers alternatives to prison including Community Payback Orders (CPOs), Drug Treatment and Testing Orders, (DTTOs), the public and the media's resistance to progressive community-based alternatives and electronic monitoring of offenders. Evidence is clearly analysed throughout both chapters, for example, 'This suggests that prison is less effective than the cheaper alternative' and 'The prevalence of these misconceptions about community justice and the idea current sentencing legislation is too lenient fuels the constant increase in sentence lengths . . .'. Overall, the candidate shows an in-depth understanding of the issue across a convincing line of argument which draws on a wide and varied range of contemporary supporting evidence.

Evaluating arguments and evidence (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **8 marks** because there is reasoned consideration and evaluation throughout. In chapter 1, they consider problems of prisons and evaluate and respond to alternative views noting that ‘Punishment may make us feel a sense of justice, but it fails to reduce crime . . .’ before going on to conclude that ‘. . .this kind of approach is difficult to implement and not only from an expenses point of view’. Reasons for accepting and discounting other views on alternatives to prison are also made in chapter 2. For instance, in discussion of public fears about community sentences, risk and public protection, the candidate acknowledges that while there are community programmes that have been shown to be effective for sexual offenders not ‘. . . every violent or sexual offender can or should be placed in the community . . .’. Chapter conclusions provide clear evaluation and strengthen the candidate’s line of argument.

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

The candidate was awarded **9 marks** because accurate and reasoned points of evaluation are made throughout when discussing the effectiveness of prisons and community-based alternatives. Synthesis is clear throughout the piece of work in support of the line of argument. Both chapters reach valid conclusions based on the presented evidence. For example, the candidate concludes that, ‘While there is promise of future reform in the Bella Centre project, the overall picture of the prison system is one not fit for purpose’ (chapter 1), and that ‘. . . it is evident that community alternatives to prison are both more effective than prison in terms of reducing re-offending, and more financially viable’ (chapter 2). Despite this, the overall conclusion lacks enough detail on the alternative viewpoint that prisons may work in some instances.

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

The candidate was awarded **4 marks** because there are consistent and accurate academic citations and references throughout. Appendices A-C provide detail and information on the provenance of primary research while the bibliography follows academic conventions and orders citations alphabetically. Data from primary and secondary research is integrated in support of analysis and evaluation throughout the main body with footnotes.

Overall, this dissertation was awarded **49 out of 50 marks**. This is a well-written and researched piece of work that shows clear understanding and analysis of a relevant contemporary issue. It is worth noting that this candidate could have achieved full marks by drawing on coverage in chapters 1 and 2 of instances where prisons are effective or the only option for certain offenders.

Candidate 2

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

The candidate was awarded **5 marks** because it is a contemporary and relevant hypothesis with chapter aims that link. The importance of the issue is explained, and relevant issues are addressed to standard. There is context around the growing use of false and misleading information online. Important statistics are cited to frame the issue for the reader. The Labelling and Rational Choice theories are introduced to help explain why criminal activity can occur online, however, there is an absence of a clear alternative viewpoint or perspective to the hypothesis.

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.

There is a description of the research methods but also effective commentary acknowledging bias when evaluating a primary source and the National Policing Digital Strategy (PDS) website was scrutinised for both reliability and validity. Commentary on the sample size and the origin for much of the information appearing on the PDS website was weighed up for the reader. The candidate does not evaluate any ethical issues related to their own research.

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

The candidate was awarded **3 marks** in this element because a wide range of relevant and contemporary sources were used including guest speaker notes, university and official government produced statistics, news magazines and online resources. These wide-ranging sources could have been used more convincingly throughout the dissertation. In particular, the candidate's primary research could have been better integrated to support their conclusions and line of argument in chapter 3.

Analysing the issue (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **5 marks** because there is sound analysis of key aspects. In aim 1, the candidate shows an in-depth understanding of how the media can skew and distort crime stories. This is exemplified with contemporary examples, for example from The Sun newspaper. In aim 2, the candidate's analysis informs the reader how crime can occur through social media by referring to the enforcement of age restrictions and how many young people are attracted to the glorification of crime. Aim 3 gives the reader a sense of the sheer quantity of crime that occurs online although this would have been better placed as the first chapter. There is an alternative viewpoint cited, for example, '... with the rise of social media, traditional crime is facing a shift, which is leading more crime' which is then supported by the Routine Activity theory.

Evaluating arguments and evidence (8 marks)

The candidate was awarded **4 marks** because there are reasoned points of evaluation which relate to the line of argument and these are used to make an overall judgement. However, alternative arguments are not sufficiently explored and

evaluated well enough to earn additional marks. Aim 2 should demonstrate a greater awareness that some crimes which appear online have always been occurring. For example, the financial rewards of crime often carried out by gangs fails to recognise that these types of criminals are not a new breed of criminal. In aim 3, there are some good evaluative points made in relation to the extent of cybercrime, but there is a lack of an effective, coherent line of argument in this aim. This lack of debate throughout the dissertation detracts from the candidate's line of argument.

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 is synthesis that supports a line of argument, but the line of argument does not build convincingly over the course of the project-dissertation. The overall conclusion does not fully show a balanced alternative argument that explores and criticises an opposing view of the stated hypothesis. Although the overall conclusion is well-structured and shows an understanding of a complex issue, there is not sufficient evaluation of an alternative viewpoint.

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

The candidate was awarded **4 marks** because the bibliography, though not in alphabetical order, adheres to academic convention. While some sources do not have the date the source was accessed, there was enough information in each source listed for the reader to locate the source online. Whilst appendix 3 should have listed the location of the group interview, it is assumed the guest speaker was hosted at the candidate's school. Data from primary and secondary research was used accurately and integrated enough to meet the necessary standard for this element.

Overall, this dissertation was awarded **31 out of 50 marks**.

This is a well-written and well-researched piece of work that shows an understanding of a complex, relevant and contemporary issue. While it is well-researched with both

primary and secondary research, is does not have sufficient critical opposing analysis in its aims or overall conclusion to warrant top marks. This could have been improved with a more focused evaluation on an opposing viewpoint in each chapter or across the dissertation. For example, many would suggest that the internet is simply used to amplify many existing crimes.