Chief Assessors Report

Question choice

Moderators and markers commented positively on the increased range of questions and ideas explored — from highly technical research questions involving in-depth qualitative research to basic data collection of analysis-type questions. This year it was also positive to see that many research questions had a practical application. Some questions related to specific businesses, community projects, or sporting organisations, and these entities were then able, or had the future capacity, to act on the research.

As in previous years, students who were passionate about a topic or who were investigating a topic that was clearly relevant to them tended to achieve the highest grades. These topics were most successful when they were phrased to elicit argument. Questions such as ‘Is an electrical apprenticeship the choice for me?’ were less successful than those that considered factors that could influence suitability, achievement, and so on, and evaluated these factors as a part of the research. Moreover, questions that continue to facilitate higher levels of achievement were those that were developed, achievable, doable, clear, concise, specific, and accessible questions that can be achieved within the timeframe. It is recommended that teachers devote time to each student to ensure that the question optimises the opportunities to provide evidence towards the highest grades.

Some examples of the many questions which were interesting this year include:

* To what extent do freedom-of-speech liberties in Australia and France impact on each country’s ability to use satirical cartoon as a form of political comment?
* To what extent are current shark-attack mitigation methods viable and effective and what other options could be practically implemented in Australia?
* What have been the positive and negative aspects of the extension of the tramline through the city of Adelaide and down Port Road to the Entertainment Centre?
* How does the overuse of technology affect a child’s cognitive and social development?
* How can track-sprinting performance be improved for an adolescent female?
* Can the technique of dry needling be as effective as traditional options in treating neuromuscular skeletal and chronic pain?
* In what ways is feminism relevant to Indigenous Australians today?
* What are the challenges facing same-sex couples raising children?

As previously reported, markers and moderators repeated that some questions appeared to restrict students’ capacity to achieve at the higher levels. Such questions included those:

* to which the answers are already well known and clear cut
* that provide a yes/no answer
* that are closed questions that prevent higher ordering analysis or evaluation
* that commenced with expressions such as‘What do you need to become a …’

Concern was again expressed by both moderators and markers regarding questions with questionable ethical appropriateness. These included the impact of physical and sexual abuse, the impact of abortion on an individual, and experimenting with the impact of sleep deprivation. Research questions on such sensitive topics make it difficult and ethically questionable for students trying to find individuals to talk to for primary research, especially when it can lead students into ‘unsafe’ territories that they are not equipped to deal with.

P1: Consideration and refinement of a research question

The best responses provided evidence of the refinement of the research question in either the proposal or, even more successfully, in documentation of the changes undergone. Other effective evidence included that in which the refinement of the question was referred to and explained in the analysis of sources, including how their research was leading to the refinement or modification or validation of the focus of their question. Moderators further noted that thoroughly refined research questions that were succinct and resolvable were more likely to lead to higher grade levels in other specific features, such as D2 and D3. Successful responses also provided question-appropriate and targeted planning of research methods and development, which showed progression throughout the 10 pages.

Less successful evidence was provided when the refinement of the question was limited to the change of the research question from one topic to another.