Chief Assessor’s Report

Rest of Folio

General Comments

Moderators stressed the importance of the appropriate selection of evidence for the 10 pages (as described in the Research Project subject operational information). Better responses continue to be those which provided balanced evidence against all of the specific features. These responses tended to present a tight snapshot of the research undertaken and the research processes used. Moreover, higher grades were generally achieved by those who effectively used the entire space available on their 10 pages of evidence, often incorporating the students’ own highlighting and annotation of the material, providing evidence of how their research was developing in light of the question. Students who used signposts within their folios to clearly identify evidence of the specific features tended to be more successful than students who simply assembled together 10 pages.

Moderators expressed concerns about the following issues relating to the selection of the 10 pages, which tended to limit students’ capacity to achieve at the higher grades and made it difficult to confirm grades:

* inclusion of pages which appeared to have been part of formative work, such as how to create a survey, particularly when it had nothing to do with their research question; this appeared to be a wasted page in their body of evidence
* digital selections of evidence, such as 10-page PowerPoints, which did not address all of the performance standards
* use of sticky notes with labels such as ‘capability discussion’ which were placed over the top of the actual discussion, then photocopied, thereby obscuring the actual written evidence of the growth and development of the capability
* inclusion of one or two pages of glossary, which did not provide evidence of any of the specific features on which the folio is assessed
* imbalance of evidence, such as more for planning (specific features P1 and P2) than development; for example, where 5 pages were devoted to brainstorms and timelines, students had little opportunity to effectively demonstrate the development of their research, thus hindering their achievement of higher grades
* inclusion of journal material that appeared unrelated to the performance standards, or of downloads of articles with little or no analysis
* multimodal evidence in the folio which was not the ‘equivalent’ of 10 pages (according to the Research Project subject operational information, one A4 page of written evidence is equivalent to *two minutes* of oral evidence).

The discussion is not a compulsory component of the 10 pages, but it can be used as evidence of planning or development. If the discussion is included, it is advised that it is no more than one page of written material (or two minutes of oral material), provided that it enhances the evidence presented against the specific features. The bibliography is not an additional page to the 10 pages. Where folios comprised 10 pages and then the bibliography, this extra evidence is not considered.

Overall, moderators reported that the standard for detailing the evidence of research processes and general planning had improved, but some folios were still lacking in the depth of analysis and in the development of the capabilities. Where student grades were moderated down, it was generally due to specific features D2 and D4.

Specific Features: Development (Research Project A and B)

D1: Development of the research

Effective evidence of the thorough and resourceful development of the research included, but was not limited to:

* use of an annotated bibliography which provided comments as to why some sources were invaluable or not in being able to answer the research question
* documentation of decisions regarding research processes, before commencing research processes, and during and after using research processes
* reference to mentors or supportive primary sources which provided more detailed and insightful perspectives into their findings
* productive use of a range of strategies to document the research, such as audio files, photographic evidence, video journals, and students capturing texts or products visually on video with their voiceover in the background commenting on what they had discovered
* explicit evidence of the development of the research by coming back to the development of their understanding in light of the research question; such responses explicitly defined the student’s progress
* reference to databases that included periodicals/subscriptions/transcripts, which reflected the use of a variety of sources in order to answer the research question
* reference to carefully crafted surveys for which focus groups had been carefully selected and appropriate socio-economic, gender, or age groups considered.

Less effective evidence included:

* bibliographies which summarised what had already been evidenced in the 10 pages
* pages of screen shots and URLs as evidence of ‘resourcefulness’ without commentary or analysis, thereby ‘collecting information’ which is in the D grade band of the performance standards
* surveys which produced little evidence to enrich key findings (Moderators recommended that time be spent with students overtly teaching the skill of designing and implementing a survey, especially when considering sample size or range of questions).

D2: Analysis of information and exploration of ideas to develop the research

Analysis continues to be a good discriminator, yet an area that varies from school to school and teacher to teacher. Moderators highlighted the need for awareness that the better evidence of analysis and exploration of ideas is provided in responses where the key ideas from a source or progress are discussed with reference to new evidence or thinking relating to their research, rather than just highlighting or restating key points. They reported less evidence of the view that ‘analysis = annotations on a source (with sticky notes)’, which has often been a features of less successful responses.

Successful responses incorporated consistent and insightful analysis on each of their selected 10 pages, demonstrating an engagement with and development of their research question within this analysis. There were no empty statements, as every sentence was specific to the research and explored the development of the answer to the research question. Moreover, the analysis extended beyond discussion of the validity, reliability, currency, and bias of their source and what they discovered (which becomes a summary of the source/interview), but included where their research was going and why, what they needed to do next and why, challenges and opportunities that were being presented, and how these were affecting their research. They also drew the threads together of what they had already discovered. Further effective evidence was provided in those responses where links and cross-references to other sources was made, which built the research, rather than isolated source analysis.

Ongoing reference to ethical issues, including the influence of the student’s own bias, also featured. When elements of the included discussion provided strong evidence of analysis and exploration of ideas, it was valuable to be included.

On the other hand, less successful responses included those in which templates seemed to be more of a hindrance in regards to in-depth analysis; for example, if they only allowed students the space to write one or two sentences. This was particularly noted in prescriptive templates which limited students to superficially addressing their knowledge or awareness of the source’s value or relevance to their question. Moderators also suggested that explicit teaching of the concepts of validity and reliability may enhance students’ ability to provide evidence. Often these terms were used interchangeably or with little thought, such as ‘this source was valid because it was written by a professional and it will help me answer my question’. Although less prevalent than in previous years, some folios included multiple pages from the same article/text, thereby limiting the ability to demonstrate their development of research and analysis at the higher grade bands.

D3: Development of knowledge and skills specific to the research question

Successful responses demonstrated the development of knowledge and skills in a number of ways, including exploring their ideas through extended reflections, development of interview questions that had been annotated and revealed knowledge, and documentation of experimentation, graphs, tables, photographic evidence, or conceptual diagrams. The responses then engaged with this information in light of the development of their research question. They also tended to provide evidence of continuously building on their knowledge and staying ‘on track’. More successful responses also consistently pulled together the threads and development of their findings and engaged in an insightful manner with their sources; such as grappling with contradictory information or coming to some form of a resolution to their research question. Evaluating the success of a product and trying to obtain feedback was another way shown in successful responses to applying their knowledge, as it provided evidence of growth of knowledge and skill development.

Moderators, on the whole, did report that the development of knowledge and skills is an area that still needed greater attention in most folios.

D4: Understanding and development of one of more capabilities

Students who achieved the highest grades fully engaged with the nature of the capability, providing evidence of both the growth of understanding and awareness of the chosen capability. Often in these responses the chosen capability was referred to consistently throughout their 10 pages (more so than just having a one-page reflection). In some responses, strong evidence of the development of the capability was evident in the included discussion.

Responses in which only one capability was examined tended to lead to a stronger series of reflections and insights, as they were able to provide a consistent application and the growth of knowledge and understanding in relation to it. When two or more capabilities were chosen, the reflections tended to be briefer and more superficial. Moreover, some students only commented on the capability within their proposal, making it difficult to demonstrate development of either the capability/capabilities or their understanding. Such responses often resorted to generic statements, for example, ‘I will ask permission when I interview someone about …’ in reference to the ethical understanding capability.

For the most part, moderators noted that the evidence regarding the capability was one of the weakest areas in 2015. In much of the material, only superficial evidence was provided. It appeared that some students may have experienced difficulty in determining how the capability directly related to their research question. A feature of the most successful responses was how the capability became the lens through which the entire research was conducted and viewed; the capability was constantly referred back to and became an intrinsic component of the research.