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Research Project A and  
Research Project B

2015 Chief Assessor’s Report

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## Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

Moderators and markers reported that a great number of students and schools appear to be valuing the Research Project. They also commented that the breadth of questions has increased over the years and students are now grappling with the inherent complexity of real research, often moving beyond background research into their own trials, experiments, observations, and/or interviews. Across all assessment types the standard of the student evidence has, in general, improved.

Students are also capitalising on the technology available to them, not only to document their research, such as with video or audio evidence, but also by accessing a variety of sources and making contact with others, whether that be through online forums, attending meetings, or visiting workplaces.

Both markers and moderators noted an increase in the use of templates, especially in evidence for Assessment Type 1: Folio. Templates were successful in assisting students in their planning and also the evaluation of a source’s validity and reliability in their folios. While templates can provide supportive scaffolding, it is advised that, if used, they should be designed to ensure they do not have the potential to limit the students’ capacity to achieve at the higher level. Templates which limit opportunities for students to personally engage with and explore their research limit the depth of responses, particularly where scaffolds provided inadequate space. Similarly, use of the SACE exemplars for capabilities and ethics could assist students as a starting-point for reflection; however, only including snapshots of the guiding statements limited student evidence of understanding.

Moderators noted (especially where schools had a number of classes but had submitted as one assessment group) that there had obviously been an element of ‘internal moderation’ to ensure consistency of standard between classes. This increased the likelihood of grades being confirmed.

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.

## School Assessment

Teachers and students are reminded that Assessment Type 1: Folio and Assessment Type 2: Research Outcome for both Research Project A and Research Project B are assessed according to the same standard with identical assessment design criteria and performance standards. While the outcome for Research Project A is only 1500 words, if written, compared to 2000 words for Research Project B, the planning and development of the folio and the quality of the findings as evidenced by the outcome are the same. The evidence of learning from students in a Research Project A and a Research Project B class should be assessed identically. Therefore, the comments on the folio and the research outcome for both Research Project A and Research Project B are treated together below.

Assessment Type 1: 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: Planning (Research Project A and B)

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.

P2: Planning of research processes appropriate to the research question

Stronger responses produced evidence of the planning being ongoing and included evidence of experimentation, field trips, or face-to-face interviews. Stronger responses also included thorough and in-depth timelines that delivered a clear outline of what exactly was done, as well as lotus diagrams and brainstorms which became working documents that the student added to, colour-coded, or adapted as the process evolved.

Weaker evidence included that where planning was only evident in a sparse mind-map or outline in the proposal.

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.

Assessment Type 2: Research Outcome

General Comments

As already mentioned, closed questions appeared to limit the quality of the research outcome. In general, well-refined questions tended to have a better quality outcome; if the scope of the question was too big, convoluted, or wordy, the outcome tended to become superficial and just a screed of generic information and/or facts. Moderators also reported that, in general, teacher assessment of the outcomes had improved, reflecting a solid awareness of the standard of the different grades.

A common characteristic of the most successful responses in 2015 was the provision of the explicit answer to the question at the outset, followed by continued reference to it throughout, leading to an informed conclusion. Excellent research outcomes displayed clear and sufficient synthesis and substantiation of the key findings, as well as higher-order thinking, engagement with sources, comparisons between perspectives, and balanced weighing-up of the evidence.

The format and modes of outcomes varied. Moderators were pleased to see students choosing a variety of modes to present their research outcomes and not appearing to feel restricted to a written report. In the more successful responses, the mode was carefully chosen and provided an appropriate vehicle for the presentation for the key findings and the resolution to the question. It was noted, moreover, that a written report does not suit all research questions. At times, some written reports tended to be somewhat formulaic and detracted from the presentation of the key findings.

It is even more apparent that students who drew together substantiated information were able to display the ‘insightful’ A grade aspect of S1 and S2; there is now a greater awareness that the outcome is not just collection of relevant facts and statements.

Another feature of the most successful responses was engagement with the information being presented, complete with purposeful commentary and analysis, rather than just grouping like information into discrete sections.

Features of less successful outcomes included:

* failure to produce a resolution to the question
* inclusion of sections irrelevant to the question
* questions that were too broad or had yes/no answers, which restricted the capacity to provide any depth in the findings
* absence of a question, leading to no question to be answered, which led to unfocused narratives and recounts
* outlining a set of facts with little critique or insight
* when the question did not actually match the information provided, making it difficult to provide insightful or considered evidence of the resolution of the question.

The use of templates also provided a hindrance in some responses, particularly when the template only led to the production of a recount.

Moderators also noted that in the assessment of some research outcomes, the quality of a product appeared to have distracted teacher judgment and led to the overlooking of the evidence of insightful synthesis to produce a resolution to the question or substantiation along the way.

Lack of adherence to word-limits was an issue when outcomes exceeded the word-limit, as the conclusion was not able to be considered for assessment.

Specific Features: Synthesis (Research Project A and B)

S1: Synthesis of knowledge, skills, and ideas to produce a resolution to the research question

Synthesis involves the bringing together of the main ideas and findings of the research. It necessarily involves the grouping of common ideas and prioritising the findings which are more prominent than others, rather than scanning superficially over all the information that was located, or repeating everything in the folio. To provide evidence at the highest grade, students are required to demonstrate *insightful* synthesis of knowledge, skills, and ideas to produce a resolution to the research question. It is evident that in the most successful responses, students had received explicit instruction from their teachers as to what this might look like.

Examples of the ways in which synthesis was successfully achieved include:

* providing a clear and explicit resolution to the question, which was then unpacked by maintaining an unwavering focus on answering the question throughout the body of the outcome and clearly reinforced in the use of appropriate and well-phrased subheadings
* clearly articulating each key finding and then weighing evidence from a range of sources and perspectives, which supported the assertion of the prominence of this finding to the research
* clearly articulating which were the most important ideas to emerge and providing evidence of why they were more important than others.

It also appeared that students who had accessed a wide range of sources and then brought together the common threads from the diverse range of perspectives, often in their own words, demonstrated stronger evidence of insightful evidence of synthesis of the ideas and knowledge they had obtained. Outcomes that were also targeted at an appropriate audience in relation to their chosen question achieved at a higher standard.

In less successful responses, evidence of synthesis was limited to a collection of information or a series of facts and recount. At times, the question resolution was mostly confined to the conclusion, or not concluded at all, which meant that there was limited or no evidence of a resolution to the research question. In regards to the synthesis of their key findings, some students included a very general introduction, often in the format of their proposal or evaluation and, as a result, did not make best use of their word-count.

S2: Substantiation of key findings relevant to the research outcome

Evidence of substantiation can be effectively provided in a number of ways. Thorough substantiation of the key findings is required to achieve at the highest levels. This was demonstrated successfully by students who provided multiple references, examples, or perspectives to the key findings and through the explicit mentioning of references within the text of their outcome. References were either embedded within the written report or oral/multimedia presentation (e.g. source reference on a PowerPoint). In less successful responses, substantiation was confined to a URL at the end of a paragraph. When this was done, sources were not contextualised and consequently the line of evidence to support the statements being made was lost. Less successful evidence of thorough substantiation was also presented in outcomes which were based on only three or four sources, or which had little variety in where the sources had come from.

It was positive to note that successful students who created a product for their outcome provided in-depth substantiation explaining processes and decision-making. Often this substantiation took the form of time-logs, or photographic evidence that validated the findings. Moderators noted that in some modes, such as pamphlets/brochures/articles, the key findings for the creation of a product were detailed and then clearly substantiated with reference to the processes undertaken throughout the pamphlet.

Moderators reported that some outstanding products had been created that were highly authentic, but teachers appeared not to be ensuring that in the outcome the substantiation of the development of the product was clearly articulated; more often than not it was implied rather than being overt. Where the outcome was a product or a Prezi or PowerPoint presentation, the substantiation often needed more development; choices of form/rationale for success of the product needed to be explained and supported by evidence. It is reference to the process that has led to the product being constructed in a certain way that best demonstrates substantiating of the key findings, rather than what has been created.

S3: Expression of ideas

Expression of ideas is more than just correct grammar and punctuation. Moderators noted that the most successful responses also made use of subheadings, graphs, or diagrams to support the clarity with which the resolution to the question was presented.

It was positive to see that in most responses a formal conclusion was provided at the end of the outcome to provide clear evidence of resolving the question.

A number of moderators reported that teachers were too hard in their assessment of this specific feature. Well-organised paragraphs (with subheadings) with each one addressing a significant key finding seemed to be best practice and should be rewarded.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3 differs between the subjects Research Project A and Research Project B. The comments for each subject are treated separately below.

Assessment Type 3: Review (Research Project A only)

General Comments

Overall, markers noted that there has been considerable improvement in the number of students meeting the specific features of the review format. However, some students continued to meet the criteria of the 2013 course, which is no longer applicable. As such, teachers are strongly advised to direct students to the most up-to-date support materials.

Markers also noted that there appears to be some confusion regarding the review format. To clarify, Research Project A does meet the same performance standards for school assessment as Research Project B. However, the external assessment is assessed against a separate set of performance standards that require review, as opposed to evaluation. Research Project A requires students to produce a 1500-word written report (or equivalent oral or multimodal piece) that reviews the knowledge and skills developed during the research (addressing specific feature R1), reviews the effectiveness of decisions made in response to challenges and opportunities encountered within the project (R2), and reviews the quality of the outcome produced (R3). It is also assessed for the expression of ideas (S3). Many students were limited by responses that met incorrect assessment criteria.

Students were generally able to provide clear summaries of their research project and adhere to the specified maximum of 150 words (or equivalent in oral or multimedia form). The clarity of this section was enhanced by a specific statement of the research question, an outline of the research undertaken, and a clear explanation of the final format and success of the outcome. Some students chose to include a justification for their research question, which was useful when it incorporated some review of the knowledge and skills developed. Generalisations, unclear statements, and summaries that exceeded the word-limit limited student success.

Specific Features: Review (Research Project A only)

R1: Review of the knowledge and skills developed in response to the research question

This section was most successfully completed when students engaged in review of their knowledge by establishing the information that they previously knew and how this had developed over the period of research. Stronger students included review of information and noted it as confirming, surprising, valuable, and so on.

More successful responses:

* highlighted examples of knowledge
* provided a review of how this development of learning had enhanced their overall project
* clearly identified the skills which had been developed
* outlined how these skills had been developed
* explained why these skills were essential for the research undertaken
* included specific examples
* recognised the importance of findings and conveyed the development of new learning within a structure that ranked development, as opposed to a chronology of discovery
* frequently commented on findings that had been surprising, confirming, conflicting, etc.
* discussed how their personal response had been developed by this information
* made clear connections between learning and the examples provided.

Insight was shown when these skills were clearly linked to the research question. Time words (such as ‘before’, ‘after’, ‘having completed’, ‘prior to this’) and descriptions (‘became clearer’, ‘suddenly made sense’, ‘was unclear until’), as well as qualifiers (‘most’, ‘somewhat’, ‘to an extent’), were often a successful delineator for students to show how far knowledge and skills had developed.

Less successful students:

* deviated from research skills and knowledge relevant to the research question
* provided generic statements of skills used in the research process (note-taking, reading, using the Internet)
* included copies of their outcome
* omitted providing the necessary reflection on how the knowledge included within the outcome had developed
* included irrelevant knowledge and skills which were not explicitly linked to the research question
* recounted the refinement process without showing how knowledge developed as a part of this process.

Recounts of research in chronological order were often limited, as they were unable to show the insight required for the higher-level responses. While some recount could show the development of research, students who were more successful reviewed how their knowledge and skills had developed with explicit links to the research question, which often meant grouping ideas without chronology.

Markers noted that while fewer students included responses to the capabilities, many student responses were weakened by this practice which limited the number of words available for the review of other specific features. As a reminder, students should not address the capability at all within the external assessment.

R2: Discussion of decisions made in response to challenges and/or opportunities

Students are encouraged to devote approximately equal proportions of the word-count to the three sections of the review. A heavy emphasis on the review of knowledge and skills development often meant that students were limited in their discussion of the decisions made as a response to challenges and opportunities.

Importantly, markers noted that students did not often review the decision as a response to the challenges and opportunities, but rather reviewed the challenges and opportunities themselves. Markers strongly suggested that teachers make the ‘decision’ part of the performance standards as the central feature of scaffolding.

More successful students:

* focused on reviewing their response and its impact on their research
* briefly outlined the challenges or opportunities faced
* clearly stated the decisions that had been made
* justified why these decisions had been made
* focused their discussion on this response to the challenges or opportunities
* discussed the influence of decisions on their research development
* recognised the positive and negative impact of their decisions and reviewed these comparatively, especially noting that all decisions have some merits and some consequences
* reviewed how successful decisions in response to challenges had led to new opportunities for the research to be extended
* discussed the appropriateness of the decision by reflecting on the consequences
* included judgments about the significance of a decision and how this impacted on research validity, appropriateness, etc.

Student achievement was limited by:

* recounting generic challenges such as time management, the lack of emails being returned, and technical difficulties with USB drives and the Internet
* identifying a challenge briefly and without further elaboration
* focusing on challenges and opportunities without mentioning decisions
* summarising a single decision without clearly elaborating on its purpose.

R3: Reflection on the quality of the research outcome.

More successful students:

* reviewed how the features of the outcome format assisted in the answering of the research question
* explained how well the research question had been answered
* pointed out pertinent findings and discussed how this added value to the outcome
* considered the purpose of the outcome and the intended audience
* established clear parameters for the success of their outcome and reviewed against these
* considered the clarity of their outcome
* considered the relevance of the outcome to the project and if it had been a suitable choice
* included examples
* used the vocabulary of qualitative judgments.

Less successful responses were limited by:

* generalisations that did not clearly articulate the success of the outcome or review the features of the outcome in light of the research question
* comments that discussed the source material without relating to the outcome success
* discussion of the outcome as a personally meaningful experience without mentioning the features of the outcome that enhanced personal understanding.

Specific Features: Synthesis (Research Project A only)

S3: Expression of ideas

Markers noted that subheadings that related to the specific features helped provide a scaffold for thinking. However, these subheadings must relate specifically to the performance standards to avoid misdirecting student attention. Integrating specific features into a more holistic response sometimes assisted students in engaging in a more natural review of the research, but it also sometimes led to repetition and reduced clarity.

Students were more successful when they:

* used a range of vocabulary to show their review of the specific features
* grouped judgments and reviews, e.g. things that developed well, successes
* used clear, coherent prose
* used topic sentences and paragraphs that assisted in the clarity of the expression of ideas
* carefully edited grammar, spelling, and syntax.

Markers were pleased to note that students were able to present information in a variety of formats that generally assisted in communicating their review. However, markers suggested that students have some preparatory notes when the review takes place in the form of a discussion so that they are able to articulate ideas clearly. Multimodal and audio materials must also be recorded clearly to assist markers in their assessment.

Markers noted that students were restricted when the teacher provided leading questions that limited student evidence of self-directed review. While some teacher input could assist in scaffolding student discussion, student responses must make up the bulk of the discussion, as opposed to the teacher’s questions.

Assessment Type 3: Evaluation (Research Project B only)

General Comments

Markers noted that, in general, the quality of the evaluation has improved; however, issues that previously hampered achievement still continue.

Of particular concern was that despite the subject outline having changed two years ago, many markers reported that student evidence was directed towards the 2013 subject outline, including reflection on the capability. This seriously hampered the capacity of students to provide evidence against the specific features on which they are actually assessed in this assessment type.

The provision of templates should be carefully considered, particularly when the template invites students to discuss matters which cannot provide evidence against the specific features of the evaluation. Also not helpful for providing evidence were responses in which a very lengthy introduction recounting the stages of the research project was provided.

Markers noted the use of subheadings relating to the specific features helped provide clear guidelines for the evidence being presented. When these were absent, it sometimes led to a blurring in the discussion, making it very difficult to ascertain what was evaluation of the research processes and what was evaluation of the decisions made.

Markers reported that photocopies of evaluations were at times problematic, particularly if margins or words were cut off. Many markers noted that difficulties were also experienced with overly small fonts. At least size 11 is recommended.

Teachers are reminded to not provide corrections and grades.

Specific Features: Evaluation (Research Project B only)

E1: Evaluation of the research processes, specific to the research question

Markers reported that this was, on the whole, the most successful part of most evaluations. In most responses, judgments about the research processes were made in relation to the findings and information generated. In the more successful responses, however, specific judgments were provided which related to the specific research question. This was done in relation to the type of information required to adequately address or answer their question. The strengths and limitations of processes were also contextualised in relation to their specific question.

In addition to this, the most successful evaluations provided clear links between the research process(es) and its value to the research in terms of providing valid and credible evidence regarding its contribution to an increase in breadth of the research and/or subsequent quality of the outcome. They also made judgments about which research processes were the most effective in comparison to other processes used, applying a range of qualifiers. Further features of successful responses included appropriate distinctions between validity and reliability, and the judgments being based on a number of features.

Less effective responses:

* relied on narrative, explaining what was done firstly, secondly, and thirdly, providing little or no evaluation of the processes
* provided evidence that simply described the research process used and what information was found from this activity
* demonstrated confusion between planning processes and research processes, leading to words being devoted to activities such as choosing and refining questions, creating mind-maps, thinking about their question, writing summaries of sources, visiting the library, and how they referenced or used highlighters when reading
* appeared to lack direction as to how to evaluate processes such as experimentation and trial and error with respect to practical research
* displayed confusion regarding the meaning of ‘validity’, ‘reliability’, and ‘bias’, and used these terms interchangeably
* made judgments which were not supported by examples or reasons
* referred to overly broad processes, such as the Internet, and lacked specific examples to support the discussion, and/or based the judgment on ease of accessibility
* misused ‘bias’ as an adjective
* passed judgments on specific sources, rather than the research process
* used tables too much (sometimes spending over 1000 words on this section) to the detriment of evidence for other specific features
* based judgments of usefulness on general matters such as qualifications and experience without elaborating.

E2: Evaluation of decisions made in response to challenges and/or opportunities, specific to the research processes used

Generally, markers commented that this part of the evaluation was the least successful. This suggests that explicit teaching of the multiple parts of this specific feature is recommended. Teachers are directed to the support materials on the SACE website for such materials.

Markers reported that successful responses related their evaluation to research processes that had been used. They then evaluated the impact of the decision made on the breadth of the research and/or quality of the outcome. A clear focus was given to the actual decisions made, with the consequences of the decision for their research being weighed up in a balanced manner, considering both positive and negative ramifications. They also may have identified how the decision provided further opportunities, such as opening up new avenues for research, leading to different sources and/or perspectives.

Successful responses clearly identified the challenge or the opportunity and provided judgments about the decision they took with respect to its impact on their research in a number of ways, including the validity, reliability, and authenticity of their research.

Some responses included identification of decisions made, but not in response to the problem or opportunity. Other less successful responses:

* discussed challenges and or opportunities that had little or no relevance to the research processes used, such as time management, their own shyness, deciding on the format of the outcome, too much or too little information, and waiting for email responses
* tended to leave it to the reader to infer what the actual challenge or opportunity was
* focused overly on emails not being returned
* described what they did and omitted any reference to the decision that was taken
* were overly general in relation to the responses or challenges and did not relate them to the research
* shortened their subheading to ‘evaluation of decisions’ and then only wrote about this
* listed things that went wrong
* focused overly on what they could have or should have done, without overt reference to any challenges or opportunities.

E3: Evaluation of the quality of the research outcome

More successful responses:

* began with a general statement about the quality of the research outcome and then discussed specific aspects of it that either strengthened it or weakened it; this included aspects such as the quality of the sources used, the originality of the findings, the forms of substantiation used, its suitability for its intended audience, its depth, and the breadth of perspectives provided
* clearly articulated the purpose of the research outcome and why or how the purpose was met or not met, as well as explicitly identifying how well the question had been resolved
* weighed up the strengths and limitations of their research outcome, in terms of the quality of the resolution they provided to their question, covering the breadth of research conducted to arrive at their resolution and the quality of findings.

Less successful responses:

* overly focused on the value of the research outcome to themselves or the impact of the development of their skills, or attributed the success or lack of success of the research outcome to external factors, absolving themselves of responsibility
* overly focused on the format of the research outcome, rather than the quality of their resolution to the research question
* overly focused on the research project as a whole
* discussed elements that were irrelevant, such as how well the chosen capability was developed, how much they had developed as a person, or how they would manage their time differently if they did it again.

Specific Features: Synthesis (Research Project B only)

S3: Expression of ideas

In successful responses, clarity of expression was aided by structural features such as topic sentences which introduced the main idea of the ensuing paragraph.

Use of subheadings often appeared to lead to more focused discussion of the material providing direct evidence towards the specific feature. The appropriate use of subject-specific vocabulary such as ‘biased’, ‘credibility’, and ‘validity’ also aided the clarity and coherence of expression.

In less successful responses, clarity and coherence were hampered by the use of informal registers and colloquialisms such as ‘heaps’ and ‘lots’, headings which did not appear to match the subsequent content, absence of paragraphing, or repetitive content.

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

It is beneficial for purposes of moderation to include the assessment sheet with the performance standards clearly highlighted in order to assist moderators as to the rationale for why a certain grade was submitted: this is for both the folio and the research outcome. All materials submitted for moderation need to be clearly labelled and teachers also need to ensure that work submitted in a digital format can be easily accessed; teachers also encouraged to use SACE Board cover sheets on student work in order to make identification of student work easier.

For the external assessment, teachers are reminded that teacher grades or remarks should not appear on the student evidence. Moreover, a font size of at least 11 is recommended.

Research Project A and Research Project B

Chief Assessor