

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Paper 8987/11

Written Paper

Key Messages

- The amount of time spent answering each question and the length of the answer should reflect the number of available marks.
- Answers to some of the earlier questions were too long.
- The key skill needed to score high marks is that of evaluation, supported by precise reference to the document/s, this is often aided by short but relevant quotations from the passage under discussion.
- A 'perspective', can be political, economic or social or global versus local, it is not simply the view contained in a document.
- Candidates need to answer the question set and focus on the key words in the question.
- **Question 3** brings together the skills that have been tested individually in the previous questions. It required candidates to consider both documents and go beyond a simple comparison of the content to evaluate the provenance, content and perspectives and reach an overall judgement.
- Brief and relevant quotations from the documents should be used to illustrate a point and to support the argument otherwise the answer risks being generalised or no more than a series of assertions.
- There is no requirement for candidates to bring in any of their own knowledge to answer the questions; it will not gain credit.

General Comments

The documents used this series were accessible to most candidates shown by their engagement with the issues, arguments and views being put forward. Candidates were able to reach judgements about the strengths or weaknesses of the document/s under consideration, but they do need to focus on the precise wording of the question; this was particularly true in **Question 1b** and **2**.

There were very few candidates who ran out of time, although once again the allocation of time is an important issue. There were a significant number of candidates who wrote over one side for **Questions 1(a)** and **(b)**, whereas a few lines would have been sufficient. As a result, some answers to the final question were too brief and ideas were not fully developed. Stronger responses selected relevant, concise and appropriate quotes from the documents demonstrating that they had a secure grasp of the arguments being considered, whereas weaker answers relied on sweeping generalisations or referred to only one document when answering the final question.

Many of the comments in the Key Message section have appeared in previous Principal Examiner Reports. Centres are urged to read and use these messages to help avoid similar mistakes/misinterpretations in particular on responses to **Question 3**.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

- (a) Virtually all candidates were able to score full marks on this question, but there were a significant number who spent time developing their ideas, despite the question simply requiring identification of four problems. Candidates did not need to explain the causes of the problems or evaluate these

issues, some wrote in excess of one page, and gained no extra credit for so doing. This had a detrimental impact on the time available for the later questions which carried a greater number of marks.

- (b) A differentiating factor in this question was between candidates who understood the nature of the evidence and those who wrote more generally about the problems cited in Document 1. There were a number of responses arguing that the evidence was strong, but then wrote about the claims made by the author, rather than the actual evidence itself. Those who identified the evidence were usually able to make some comment about the strengths or weaknesses of it, but in many cases this needed greater development and analysis, rather than simple and general assumptions, such as it is strong because it comes from a bank – why does that make it strong? Candidates should consider the purpose of any statement in order to assess its strength. Stronger responses did consider the reliability of the figures, such as the ‘hard facts’ that ‘13 out of 27’ mega cities are in Asia. Many of the strongest answers commented on the statement ‘By 2050, Asia will have 3.4 billion’ and noted that this was speculation and therefore not necessarily strong evidence.

Question 2

The responses to this question were often disappointing as a significant number of candidates misinterpreted the question and instead of evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the *argument* in Document 1, they evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the issue of urban centres or Tier II urban centres. As a consequence candidates considered whether the ideas suggested in the document would work in practice, rather than limiting themselves to a discussion of the document’s argument. The responses to this question show the importance of reading the actual wording of the question very carefully. The question specifically required candidates to consider the *argument* in the document and although the *evidence* used in the document is part of the argument it should not be the only element considered.

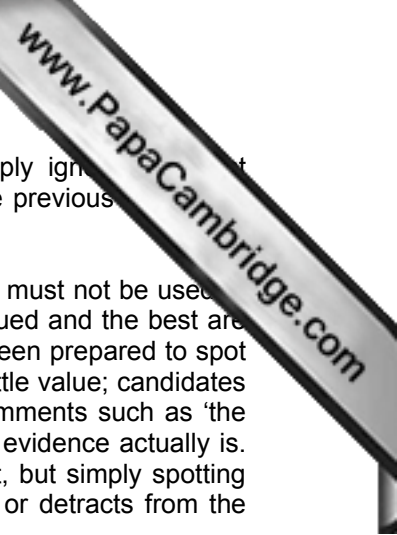
Some responses suggested that the argument was strong because the reasoning was logical, but they did not show how the reasoning was logical so it was little more than a simple assertion; in order to score well claims must be supported by precise reference to the actual document. Answers which comment on the structure of an argument must analyse the structure in depth, rather than make comments such as ‘the writer went from point to point in a logical manner’, without providing any evidence in support. On the other hand, there were some answers that noted that much of the argument rested on unsupported assumptions, for example, the author provided no evidence that ‘Mega cities can not be contained.’ Some also drifted to the authorship of the document, but were unable to link this to the strength or weakness of the argument other than to suggest that the author would or would not be well informed about the issues under discussion. There were some comments about the language used, but again this would have benefited from evidence from the document to support the claims being made. However, stronger answers did comment on the issue of strong and emotive language with a number making reference to the phrase ‘chance-erected hell-holes.’

Question 3

This question continues to be the one that causes the most difficulties for candidates. Although there were some encouraging signs of candidates attempting to evaluate the documents, there are still a significant number who struggle to go beyond a simple comparison of the content. Most are able to show an understanding of the views offered by both documents, but are distracted by this and offer no more than a comparison of the content or views offered. There is also a tendency for many to forget the evaluative skills that they have applied to the previous questions and this also restricts the level that can be achieved.

The strongest answers often commented on the different styles of the two documents and were able to draw a distinction between opinionated and persuasive writing. At the highest level candidates commented on the tone of the two documents, often commenting on issues such as formality and neutrality. These responses were also able to comment on the writer’s choice of individual adjectives and how they can subtly direct or persuade the reader in a particular direction. Many of the strongest answers were also able to handle nuance and suggested that one document might be stronger, rather than simply asserting that it was. Stronger answers fully developed their points, for example if they identified a logical fallacy it was fully explained in its context. Stronger answers also noted where an author made unsupported assertions or generalisations and commented on how this weakened their argument.

At the lower level candidates simply compared the content, with the very weakest responses simply paraphrasing the two documents and not even drawing valid comparisons. At this level comments were often very general and there was limited or no reference to the actual content of the documents. Many answers at the lower end of the mark range also spent much time comparing the author’s backgrounds,



rather than the views they put forward. There were also some answers that simply ignored Document 2, and some that ignored Document 1. Some candidates ignored Document 1, presumably because they felt that they had already written at length in the previous question, but in ignoring Document 1 candidates did limit the final mark that could be achieved.

Although candidates should be encouraged to use quotations from the documents they must not be used simply to extend the length of an answer, they need to be relevant to the point being argued and the best are often shorter and pertinent. Although it was also apparent that some candidates had been prepared to spot techniques, such as the absence of a counterargument/counterpoint, this in itself is of little value; candidates need to be able to offer reasons or evidence for them. Candidates need to avoid comments such as 'the evidence is strong because it supports a claim' as it does not tell you how strong that evidence actually is. Some answers also made reference to the range of perspectives within the document, but simply spotting the range did not gain credit, they must say why a wider perspective either adds to, or detracts from the argument.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Paper 8987/12

Written Paper

Key Messages

- Candidates should ensure they read the question carefully and answer the actual question set.
- The length of the answer does not reflect the number of marks available. Many candidates spend too long on **Question 1** and leave insufficient time for the demands of **Question 3**.
- The key skill, particularly in **Question 3**, needed to score high marks is that of comparative evaluation, supported by precise reference to the documents in relation to the actual question set.
- **Question 3** requires candidates to consider both documents and go beyond a simple comparison of the content in order to evaluate the provenance, content *and* perspectives to reach an overall judgement. This question brings together the skills that have been tested individually in the previous questions.
- Brief and relevant quotations from the documents should be used to support arguments otherwise the answer risks being generalised or no more than a series of assertions or claims and will not reach the higher levels. This is crucial in **Questions 2** and **3**.
- Candidates will not gain credit by bringing in material from outside the documents.
- The strongest responses reached a supported judgement about the issue under consideration.

General Comments

The overall standard of the responses was encouraging. There was no evidence of candidates misunderstanding the documents and most showed a good understanding of the demands of the questions. There were a number who did not pay careful attention to either the marks available or the command words in the questions and this limited the level achieved, particularly when it came to **Questions 2** and **3**. However, it is encouraging to see that an increasing number of candidates are able to apply the higher level skill of comparative evaluation on the final question, although there are still a number who rely on solely comparing the content of the two documents. Stronger answers often showed evidence of clear planning for the higher mark questions and this certainly helped candidates structure their answers in a coherent and logical manner.

There were very few candidates who ran out of time, although the allocation of time relative to the number of marks available is an important issue. There were a significant number of candidates who wrote over one side for **Question 1a**, whereas a few lines or even four bullet points would have been sufficient. As a result, some answers to the final question were brief and ideas were not fully developed or supported by precise reference to the documents. Stronger responses selected relevant and appropriate quotes from the documents demonstrating that they had a secure grasp of the arguments being considered and reached a supported judgement about the issue in the question.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

- (a) Candidates who read the question carefully were usually able to score well but some did not address the impact of rising food prices and wrote more generally about Westhoff's views. This was especially in relation to the biofuel argument which was tangential to the question as it relates to reasons not impacts. The question carried only four marks and did not require lengthy answers, looking only for clear identification of the points Westhoff made. Four concise sentences or bullet points were sufficient for this question. It was also possible to score up to two marks for developing a point further. Those candidates who wrote extensively on this question tended to leave less time for the more valuable **Questions 2 and 3**. An example of a full mark response is:

Firstly, the rise in food prices led to 'concern in the US' with many families finding it hard to "make ends meet". Secondly, the rise in food prices led to hunger and malnutrition on a global scale - it became a "crisis in much of the developing world".

- (b) This question related to strengths and weaknesses of the **evidence** used to show there was a rise in food prices. The strongest responses showed clear understanding of the concept of evidence, whereas many looked in a less focused way at the document; some extending into analysis of the argument – an approach more appropriate for **Question 2**. It is important for candidates to be able to understand the key command words. Many candidates did not appreciate that the question required assessment of the evidence rather than an explanation for the impact of the price rise or the reasons for it which was a feature of weaker responses.

The strongest candidates identified the evidence, for example, the figure an average family spends, (\$8671), but recognised that in itself this did not reflect an increase without evidence of previous years' statistics. The lack of sources for some of the statistics was generally recognised as a weakness but some candidates routinely applied this to all evidence showing the detail of the document had not been fully appreciated. This formulaic approach, whilst providing structure, led to statements that were not always relevant to this specific document or question.

Question 2

This question, like **Question 1 (b)** referred to strengths and weaknesses. However, in this question, the requirement to evaluate the argument in relation to biofuels was the differentiator. Generally candidates found it easier to deal with weaknesses than strengths but it was pleasing to see that the coverage of strengths is improving. Almost all candidates managed at least partial balance with recognition of the counter-argument. Stronger responses quoted briefly from the document to focus their evaluation, while weaker responses often made valid points that were not linked clearly enough to the document to be credited as evaluation. Some candidates followed a formulaic approach, which, although providing structure, led to assumptions about strengths and weaknesses in the argument. The use of specific terms like, "straw man", "slippery slope" etc. can be used when applied accurately and in a relevant way, but knowledge and understanding of these concepts alone will not gain direct credit. Candidates should ensure that the argument used has substance within the document. Candidates should avoid lengthy description or summaries of the document as this will confine their answer to the lowest mark band, but should focus on the key skill for this paper, evaluation.

Some candidates did not evaluate Westhoff's argument but gave their own opinion as to the relevance of biofuels. It is the evaluation of the author's argument that is relevant to the question. There is no credit for bringing in material, including their own opinion, from outside the documents.

Most candidates recognised the strengths of the argument; the balance supported by the credibility of the author. Some identified the strength of presentation of the argument in relation to its logical structure and use of non-emotional language. Most recognised the main weaknesses; lack of evidence and identification of sources. The weaknesses were frequently given as generic statements with only the strongest candidates clearly referencing the assertions made which were particularly clear in paragraph 5.

An example of an approach to answering the question and getting into Level 3 is:

Westhoff presents well balanced evidence to support his argument...in the third and fourth paragraph he presents two balancing views about biofuels strengthening his argument by reaching his neutral standpoint.

On the other hand he uses little evidence to support his argument...most evidence is from... ignores global aspects...

In relation to the assertions made in paragraph 5 the following example illustrates a strong response:

...though his logic and chain of reasoning may be strong, such as how he suggests that “more grain and vegetable oil” is used of biofuels, the less there is for people, the majority of his assertions and statements are completely unsupported. In the fifth paragraph of Document 1, the author makes multiple claims ranging from how expanding biofuel production has increased the demand for grain to how government policies affected world food prices. This severely weakens his argument as there is no evidence to support the claims he makes and thus he is making assumptions. Whilst specific case studies are mentioned such as “poor weather in 2006 and 2007”, there is no source for this information.

Question 3

Candidates continue to find this the most demanding question. It brings together the skills that have been tested in earlier questions; however, these are often ignored when tackling this question. Despite this, it was pleasing to see that a significant number of candidates did make an attempt to evaluate the two documents and not simply summarise the content in a comparative way. As this is the most demanding question, candidates would be well advised to allow a significant amount of time to address it. It might help candidates if they produced a plan, which indicated how the points and evaluation relate to the actual question. Candidates should also check to ensure that they have reasonably balanced coverage to the two documents as there were a number, who having evaluated Document 1 in the previous question, chose to either ignore it or treat it in a superficial manner. Once again, candidates would be well advised to support their arguments by precise reference to the documents, but need to avoid lengthy quotations that detract from the overall argument. An example that does this well is:

Document 2 supports its argument with evidence such as: “the calorific value of US wheat is only twice the amount of calories expended to produce it” This supports his argument that too much energy is spent importing food which could be grown locally. This is more convincing than Document 1 as Baker’s argument is logically supported by evidence. In comparison, Document 1 makes unsupported statements such as “poor weather in 2006 and 2007 did reduce grain production” thus weakening the argument.

The strongest answers considered an evaluation of the provenance of the two authors. Many recognised that they had similar academic pedigree but the strongest responses saw that Baker contributed to a not-for-profit organisation compared to Westhoff who was selling a book although the expression “vested interest” was frequently misused. Most also recognised the wider global perspective that Baker offered and compared the type of language used. Some felt that the more emotive language and rhetorical questions used by Baker were strengths of the argument but others held the opposite view. It is important to realise there is no required answer and it is up to the candidate to evaluate and put forward an argument to support their point of view when answering the question.

The strongest responses reached a supported judgement about which document was more convincing. The strongest responses often used intermediate judgements after a point had been discussed, which then fed into an overall judgement. Candidates should be encouraged to reach an overall judgement, but it does need to be based on the argument that has been pursued throughout the response and must be more than assertion.

An example of a justified conclusion is:

To conclude, Document 1 is more convincing than Document 2 as it explains counterarguments and does not use emotive language. Despite the use of evidence and global impacts in Document 2 it fails to cite sources or fully explain its argument stating instead, “we are intervening in complex systems”.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Paper 8987/13

Written Paper

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There were very few candidates who ran out of time, although once again the allocation of time is an important issue. There were a significant number of candidates who wrote over one side for **Questions 1(a)** and **(b)**, whereas a few lines would have been sufficient. As a result, some answers to the final question were too brief and ideas were not fully developed. Stronger responses selected relevant, concise and appropriate quotes from the documents demonstrating that they had a secure grasp of the arguments being considered, whereas weaker answers relied on sweeping generalisations or referred to only one document when answering the final question.

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- (b) A differentiating factor in this question was between candidates who understood the nature of evidence and those who wrote more generally about the problems cited in Document 1. There were a number of responses arguing that the evidence was strong, but then wrote about the claims made by the author, rather than the actual evidence itself. Those who identified the evidence were usually able to make some comment about the strengths or weaknesses of it, but in many cases this needed greater development and analysis, rather than simple and general assumptions, such as it is strong because it comes from a bank – why does that make it strong? Candidates should consider the purpose of any statement in order to assess its strength. Stronger responses did consider the reliability of the figures, such as the ‘hard facts’ that ‘13 out of 27’ mega cities are in Asia. Many of the strongest answers commented on the statement ‘By 2050, Asia will have 3.4 billion’ and noted that this was speculation and therefore not necessarily strong evidence.

Question 2

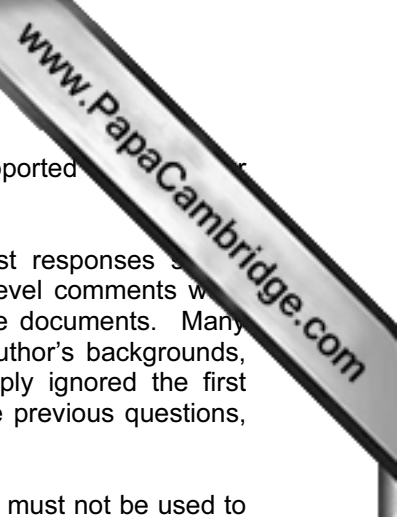
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The strongest answers often commented on the different styles of the two documents and were able to draw a distinction between opinionated and persuasive writing. At the highest level candidates commented on the tone of the two documents, often commenting on issues such as formality and neutrality. These responses were also able to comment on the writer’s choice of individual adjectives and how they can subtly direct or persuade the reader in a particular direction. Many of the strongest answers were also able to handle nuance and suggested that one document might be stronger, rather than simply asserting that it was. Stronger answers fully developed their points, for example if they identified a logical fallacy it was fully



explained in its context. Stronger answers also noted where an author made unsupported generalisations and commented on how this weakened their argument.

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Although candidates should be encouraged to use quotations from the documents they must not be used to simply extend the length of an answer, they need to be relevant to the point being argued and the best are often shorter and pertinent. Although it was also apparent that some candidates had been prepared to spot techniques, such as the absence of a counterargument/counterpoint, this in itself is of little value; candidates need to be able to offer reasons or evidence for them. Candidates need to avoid comments such as 'the evidence is strong because it supports a claim' as it does not tell you how strong that evidence actually is. Some answers also made reference to the range of perspectives within the document, but simply spotting the range did not gain credit, they must say why a wider perspective either adds to, or detracts from the argument.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Paper 8987/02

Essay

Key Messages

- The title must always be in the form of a question.
- There is a need to show awareness of further research.
- An excellent way to evaluate a source is to research its provenance and content.
- To succeed, an essay must show an ability to empathise with widely differing global perspectives.
- Examiners enforce the word limit rigorously. If an essay is too long, its reflection and conclusion are often not credited, as they usually form the last part of the essay, and therefore fall outside the word limit.
- A descriptive approach cannot meet most of the criteria of assessment.
- A perspective is not the same thing as a source.
- Candidates need to make a decision: in the final analysis what do *you* think? Where do *you* stand?

General Comments

Length continues to be an issue for some candidates. Candidates are reminded that any work exceeding the word limit will not be marked. This includes comments in footnotes where the text is already 2000 words long. Similarly, diagrams and charts will only be considered if doing so does not take the considered text over 2000 words. Conversely, some essays were 200 or more words short, often there was room for a short paragraph of reflection or ideas for further research.

Comments on Specific Questions: examples of effective and less effective practice from this series

Effective questions

It is very important that essay titles are in question form. It is recommended that questions are kept simple as simple questions frequently generate complex answers without the need for lengthy description of key terms and concepts. Questions beginning “Should” were often the most successful:

- Should drones be used in war?
- Should governments of developing countries fund space research?
- Should the personal income taxes be progressive, flat or regressive?
- Should we be concerned about the effects of globalization on indigenous people?
- Should certain vaccines be mandatory?
- Should child labour in developing countries be banned?
- Should governments subsidize religious education?

All of these questions set up an argument between differing moral, ethical or geographical views – between global perspectives. Of course “should” is not mandatory. Other titles worked well:

- How ethical is human cloning?
- Is it ever ethical to spy on allies?
- To what extent can capital punishment be seen as a justifiable alternative to life imprisonment in modern society?

In the last example the candidate was able to present a variety of perspectives and tackle the question from different and productive angles. However, the phrase “to what extent” was redundant in the answer and is an interestingly a common feature of less successful responses.

Less effective questions

Less effective questions included those where many terms in the title needed to be defined (but often were not defined by the candidate). Examples include:

- Is it possible to have religion infused into government, without conflicting with the society as a whole?

Then there were questions which did not lead clearly to a comparison of perspectives:

- To what extent is it true that the UN contributed to the cause of the 1975 East Timor invasion?
- To what extent will UN mandated military intervention be useful to ending the Syrian Civil War?
- To what extent is it true that the UN is guilty of ‘selling out’ the people of West Papua?
- Were the floods in Jakarta caused by human behaviour?

Some other questions did not lend themselves to debate:

- Should forced marriage be criminalised?

This question very hard to oppose, therefore encouraging a one-sided essay.

Performance across the Assessment Criteria

Many candidates scored their highest marks on the first two criteria. The quality of written expression was often excellent. Clear ideas expressed in simple style invariably earned higher marks than over-ambitious attempts to display the vocabulary of argument and Critical Thinking. There was a small minority of essays of high quality which did not address the AOs.

Evaluation of sources is not easy, and was often seen to be done simplistically. Too many candidates seem to feel the success of their argument rested on insisting that their sources were fully robust, reliable and defensible. In fact the mark scheme rewards an acknowledgment of sources’ limitations. These can and should be explained. If the candidate succeeds in entirely discrediting a source the question of why the source was used to support the perspective must be asked. An alternative source should probably have been chosen. Some candidates adopted an unsuccessful approach to evaluating sources by identifying (but not fully understanding) logical and rhetorical fallacies (e.g. “Hamilton creates an ad hominem attack on the progress of China’s greenhouse gas emissions prevention in the statement, ‘China’s efforts to constrain the growth of its emissions have been substantial, and certainly put to shame those of many developed nations.’”). This fallacy-spotting approach was seldom seen to be effective. Many others argued, unconvincingly, that sources that did not declare full details of their authors’ educational backgrounds were inherently suspect. In doing so they raised the possibility that they themselves had not fully researched the source.

Criterion six of the mark scheme expects candidates to consider the limitations of the research and comment on any further research that would be useful on that particular topic/issue. Too many candidates adopted a generic approach to this criterion and did not take the opportunity to fully develop their thinking in this area. It is not sufficient to “bolt on” a comment to the effect that it would be good to carry out more research on the topic/question. The comment needs to be fitted to the question being addressed. The essay has attempted to address a question of global importance in 2000 words. Candidates should be encouraged to think about how the argument *could* be developed and *further* researched to enrich the understanding of the perspectives and improve the answer.

Successful essays were characterised by the following:

- A clear question of global relevance, simply expressed and to which different people have clearly differing answers.
- Effective selection of several exemplar sources to support the differing perspectives embodied in those answers.
- Effective evaluation of those sources – content and provenance.

- The ability to empathise with the differing perspectives raised by the question, and a balanced and even-handed treatment of them.
- Personal reflection to a conclusion, showing where the candidate stands and why. This conclusion need not be a central position, but one which acknowledges the counter-arguments.

The candidate who does this will have achieved good marks, learned some valuable research and argument skills, and, more importantly, gained an enriched understanding of at least one issue dividing people in the world.

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GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Paper 8987/03

Presentation

Key Messages

- More successful presentations use their question to locate a sharp focus within a topic based on the pre-release materials.
- Candidates should be able to differentiate issues, arguments and perspectives in their presentations.
- Reflection and empathy are useful characteristics in deepening and broadening the engagement of a presentation with its topic.
- Supported arguments remain at the heart of successful achievement on this paper.

General Comments

Responses to the Pre-Release Material

The pre-release material for this session consisted of two topics: a main focus on e-readers and books in Documents 1-6, and a subsidiary one on open access to scientific data in Documents 7 and 8. The intention here was to give candidates a broad range of starting points for further research, both between topics and within each individual topic. The vast majority of candidates produced presentations on e-readers, although these varied in the success of their approach. A very large number of candidates formulated questions which were variants of 'are e-books better than printed books?' These did allow for a focus on the resource material and a general debate between opposing arguments, but offered less scope for identifying and organising broader perspectives. Another consequence was that the arguments which were selected, despite often responding directly to the source material, tended to be personal rather than academically conceptualised. An example of this is the candidate who set themselves the question: 'Traditional books vs e-books: which is better for the 21st century reader?' and made the following comment in response:

One of the main advantages of eBooks over physical books is their ability to hold a huge amount of books and still weigh no more than your average paperback. As stated in Document 6, they grant you the ability to carry hundreds of books – without having to lug them all around separately and give yourself crippling back ache!

This approach to organising advantages and disadvantages has a tendency to limit the opportunity for engagement with sources and evidence as well as arguments and perspectives at a level which is challengingly evaluative. More successful candidates took the same debate and source materials, but identified more focused themes, topics and concepts within this. The question, 'is the e-book inherently democratic?' uses this political concept to respond to Document 1 as a starting point in a highly sophisticated but also engaged manner:

...upon reading document 1 of the booklet I was most struck by the "radical contingency" claim made by the author Jonathan Franzen, who essentially argued that e-books were not all that "compatible" with democracy or justice. This sharply contrasts with the popular and often accepted beliefs and claims of the technophiles or 'digiterati' as they have come to be known who argue precisely the opposite, that e-books and all new information technology are working to advance mankind to 'ideals' like democracy.

This candidate uses the introduction of their presentation to sharpen its focus in no uncertain terms, moving beyond a reductive contrast between physical and electronic books to one which reads the debate in terms of a struggle over the definition of 'democracy' between opposing ideological perspectives.

The subsidiary topic, on open access to scientific data, in general produced a larger proportion of high level responses, largely because they took up the invitation to focus on key ideas such as openness and the nature of scientific research. Candidates were often able to use this as a starting point for precisely configured configurations of ideas, as in the question, 'Do the positive effects of open data sharing outweigh the threat to personal privacy?'

Perspectives and sources

A key aspect which differentiates candidates is their understanding of what a 'perspective' is and the extent to which they can identify and organise sources within perspectives. For the purposes of clarity, the definition of 'perspective' with which this paper works is a coherent world view which responds to an issue, made up of argument, evidence, assumptions, and/or from a particular context. An 'issue' here is a topic (e.g. reading) or a concept (e.g. literacy). An argument on the other hand is a line of reasoning leading to a specific conclusion. Successful candidates need to integrate arguments within larger perspectives as they respond to their chosen issues. It is important that these terms do not become confused, as they have done in the case of this candidate's presentation:

In this presentation I hope to highlight 3 perspectives surrounding my question which is "Do the benefits of reading E-Books outweigh the disadvantages?" Perspective 1 is an interview given by Jonathan Franzen, a novelist, who feels that E-Books are damaging society because of its "lack of permanence". Juxtaposing this to Perspective 2, an article by Suzie Boss...

Here, the idea of a 'perspective' has become blurred with the notion of a source, and individual sources are identified as perspectives in their own right. This can be compared to the following candidate who does distinguish the two:

But I want to start with discussing the opinions of the proponents of sending e-readers to developing countries. In the article "Curling Up with E-Readers", published in the winter of 2011 by Suzie Boss, it is said by Worldreader founder, David Risher, that e-books have solved the lack of access to books...

There is a clear sense that the 'proponents of sending e-readers' constitute a 'coherent world view' or perspective, and then the candidate can go on to evaluating individual articles (i.e. arguments) which exemplify that perspective.

Reflection and empathy

The candidate's degree of reflection and empathy are assessed by the third and fifth bullet points on each level of the mark scheme, so together constitute a significant dimension of the overall achievement. By 'reflection' we broadly mean the degree of thoughtfulness with which the issue and the perspectives on it have been approached; 'empathy' is concerned with the space given to each overall perspective and the arguments within it. One successful candidate demonstrated sympathetic reflection on the issue of 'gratification' in their question, 'have technological advances resulted in a society that demands instant gratification?' They note Jonathan Franzen's belief that

capitalist society has convinced the general population that they need to have the latest technology, which has resulted in people purchasing e-book readers, as well as electronic copies of the books that they already own. He uses Marxist analysis to infer that capitalism has blurred the distinction between needs – the things that human require in order to survive – and wants – the things people believe they need, usually in the form of material things. ... This made me think that advances in technology are leading to consumers demanding instant gratification

Franzen's argument is placed into a larger ideological perspective – that of Marxism – which is used in turn to enrich the issue of 'gratification' by reflecting on it more deeply. It is harder to produce focused quotations of genuine empathy with other arguments and perspectives as this is necessarily a cumulative process over the course of the presentation. However, one can cite here a presentation on whether e-books have 'negatively affected how we process information?' Leah Tether's arguments from Document 6 are first used as the framework for exploring a number of studies which do seem to show – in various ways – that the use of e-books does have a negative impact on information-processing, before turning to 'the other side of the debate' and the perspective that it is 'not just about whether e-books do negatively affect how we process information, but whether it is entirely their own fault and whether we should isolate different purposes for the different mediums.' This counter-perspective is then patiently explored through a number of individual arguments as a challenge to and interrogation of the assumptions of the first perspective.

Structure

Candidates for this paper are assessed on the quality of their argumentative structure in response to a question they have posed. 'Lines of reasoning', well-argued and supported, are central to this, and candidates should work to make coherent connections between stages of their argument. A number of candidates chose to structure their presentations by briefly identifying a source, assessing its credibility then evaluating strengths and flaws in its argument before moving on to the next source and following exactly the same sequence. This approach produces some structure but is not 'well-structured' as this quality requires fluent and purposeful connections between stages of the claims it makes. Well-structured and logically structured presentations, on the other hand, made consistent use of discourse markers to coherently link lines of reasoning. Here, for example, are the openings of successive paragraphs in a Level 5 presentation: 'First of all ... However ... On the other hand ... Also ... After contrasting both sides ... Despite ...'.

Use of sources

Previous reports have commented on the degree of use of sources as being important to the success of presentations. At Level 3, individual sources need to be highlighted, or 'selected' and not simply 'used' in the course of making points. Beyond this, achievement at Levels 4 or 5 requires increasing consistency in 'synthesising' or combining sources to make supported claims. An excellent example of this comes in response to the question, 'Is modern technology having a harmful effect on the way we learn?'

Professor Patricia Greenfield, in Science Daily, again concurs that the brain is constantly developing according to use. She states that visual media use enhances data processing, in agreement with Dr Taylor, and also that visual media such as videogames can develop multitasking skills, in agreement with Dr Small. However, Professor Greenfield also expresses the idea that an emphasis on use of visual media may lead to those areas of the brain responsible for analysis, and critical and imaginative thinking...

The arguments of Small and Taylor have already been developed in dialogue with one another, and now Greenfield's ideas are combined with these in order to enrich but also complicate the perspective which is being developed. Sustained synthesis of sources combines here with a developing line of coherent argument in order to reflect sympathetically on a perspective responding to a specific issue.

Comments on Specific Questions

The invitation for candidates to set their own questions is both an opportunity and a challenge. It is also expected that they receive support from their teachers in this task: although candidates should not be supported in the drafting of the work itself, they should have guidance in approaching the pre-release material and developing a question which responds to it.

The majority of candidates were able to create questions which identified some kind of debate between printed and electronic books. Less successful attempts in doing this were very general: 'are e-books better than printed books?' does not allow for the identification of an issue which could allow for a specific line of argument. Another category of less successful question was the speculative: 'will e-books become a thing of the past?' or 'will e-books replace paper books?' are equally resistant to evidence and conclusions as they rely on events which may or may not occur in the future.

On the other hand, questions such as 'is literacy the key to combating poverty?', 'are e-readers more environmentally friendly than books?' or 'does technology enhance literacy?' are all successful because they construct a debate around one or two key ideas within the topic (such as literacy, poverty or the environment) which produces a more controlled line of argument.

Most impressive were questions which appeared at first sight not to be relevant to the pre-release material but were made so by the sharpness and engagement of the candidate's argument. For example, 'should vandalism be considered self-expressive art?' takes as its starting point the artist Lisa Occhipinti, and her destruction of books to make works of art described in Document 5. Even less obviously promising is the question, 'To what extent should the private lives of politicians be opened up for public view?' Yet the candidate began by firmly identifying the presentation as a response to Documents 7 and 8, continuing 'instead of examining to what extent scientific data should be open for public view, I have decided, given the huge interest and a great debate at the moment into MPs expenses and private lives of politicians in general, to extend this theme of openness to the necessity to publish and release data about the private lives of all

political figures and to determine to what extent is this beneficial to the individual and society.
Candidates who do this, sharply defining terms and using them to develop supported lines of
which engage empathetically with opposing views, continue to be successful.

