



Projects

Extended Project

OCR Level 3 H856

OCR Report to Centres for June 2015

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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General Comments:

A diverse and absorbing range of projects were seen once again in this series that continue to showcase the immense capabilities of the candidates entered. The very best projects happened when the Centre had understood the emphasis that the qualification places on the project management process, and had trained their candidates to produce suitable evidence accordingly. When coupled with the candidate choosing a topic that they were clearly passionate about this led to some excellent examples of true candidate independence.

There were a couple of areas that caused some concern. Comments on the URS sheet were variable in quality. Mentors should be aware that moderators are looking for guidance from these comments as to the justification of the marks awarded in each assessment objective. Many comments were read that constituted a regurgitation of the mark-scheme descriptors and did not add any value to the portfolio itself. The centres that got it right were those that personalised the comments to the candidate, explaining the nature of the skills developed for that individual and really allowed the moderator to see the level of development for that candidate. They also understood that comments for Assessment Objective 3 “Develop and Realise” should be skills based and not a critique of the topic content of the project.

Secondly, it was concerning that the quality of work produced by the candidates in some centres did not seem to reflect the recommended guided learning hours, and as a result candidates were producing work that might have been more appropriately entered for level 2. Centres are reminded that this qualification at level 3 is equivalent to half an A level and whilst it is not expected that it should be given equivalent class time, it is expected that the candidate should be committing significant time to it themselves. To this end centres are advised to think about the timescale over which the project is conducted – many of the most successful centres ensure that the summer period is well utilised by the candidates.

AO1 Most candidates started well with a good rationale and project plan. Students' choices were interesting and diverse, demonstrating that they had chosen topics independently. Occasionally project titles were chosen which were bound to lead to a descriptive essay, and therefore failed to achieve the marks they might gain through a more evaluative starting point.

Many centres recognised the need for the candidates to produce evidence of every stage of their planning but there was still much inconsistency in this area. Candidates who created a project log or journal really captured the project management process and provided “live” evidence that allowed us to agree with the top band marks awarded in these cases. The very best journals were those which provided evidence of ongoing reflection by the candidate and were not purely descriptive in tone.

Many centres are training their candidates to produce timelines in some form or other and this is excellent practice but it is only effective if they are then trained to revise and refer to these timelines as they progress. Creating a Gantt chart that they then evaluate as having been disadvantageous because they didn't keep to it provides little in the way of evidence to support sophisticated project management. Centres need to be mindful in their training to ensure that candidates understand the reasoning behind the processes being followed and that they are not completing a box ticking exercise.

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It was disappointing to see that some centres are still advising their candidates that they need little more than an essay plan for this objective. This does not fulfil the criteria of providing evidence that every aspect of the project has been managed and led to moderators finding it very difficult to justify the marks awarded. It is also worth reflecting again that the recommended 5000 words for the dissertation is a guideline only – many candidates made comments such as “I went over the word limit and needed to remove several paragraphs of my dissertation”. This is an unnecessary process and could actually be more damaging to the candidate’s mark overall if they are removing high quality evidence.

AO2 The best candidates provided good evidence that they had thought critically about the sources that they were using and had selected them carefully. Many students planned a pathway for their research, including a rationale for the research undertaken, research diaries/logs and subsequent evaluation. They provided evidence that the range of sources used were the most appropriate to the topic chosen. It was noted however that some centres seemed to be following a prescribed formula in which all candidates carried out an internet search (starting with the same search engine) and then conducted a questionnaire. This did not always seem appropriate to the topic chosen and it was apparent in many cases that the students were not being given the correct guidance as to how this research should then be effectively utilised. Many candidates appeared to carry out primary research for the sake of doing it rather than thinking through how well it was going to help them with the realisation of their project. Correct referencing and the correct use of bibliographies was apparent for many, but not all.

AO3 Candidates scored high marks here when the correct emphasis was placed on skills. The majority of candidates produced a product which met their intended outcomes, but at times there was limited explicit evidence of how they had developed and/or used skills appropriate to developing and realising the project. Stronger candidates worked outside their comfort zones, stretching themselves with unfamiliar processes and topics and successfully learning and applying new skills.

Centres that understood the need to individualise the comments on the URS to inform about the stretch and challenge for that particular candidate really helped to support the marks awarded.

AO4 Candidates that kept a detailed log of their process were well served to score highly in this area. They provided evidence of having taken a reflective approach throughout the entirety of the project and not just at the end, providing evidence of adapting and improving along the way. Less able candidates did not recognise that this is evidence of effective project management and that the project needing no improvement along the way was not necessarily a “good thing”.

Some presentations still did not get the balance right between process and content and laboured heavily on the topic, but many candidates provided good evidence of audience reaction that allowed the moderators to see how the presentation had been received. The best candidates provided an honest reflection at the end in which they addressed their own learning habits and made it clear that they understood the benefits that completing their project had provided.

Overall it was heartening to see how many Centres are really embracing the purpose of the Extended Project and are supporting their candidates appropriately.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

Education and Learning

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

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OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
Head office
Telephone: 01223 552552
Facsimile: 01223 552553

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