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Moderators' Report/ Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2015

Extended Projects Qualification

Dissertation (P301)
Investigation (P302)
Performance (P303)
Artefact (P304)

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P301 Dissertation

Student Performance

As in previous years, impressive work was seen at the upper end of the mark range. In-depth research, in which sources were investigated, analysed and synthesized and the creation of lines of argument and counter-argument tended to produce the strongest pieces of work.

A significant number of projects were mature in both style and substance, lucid and highly focussed. A small number of highly articulate students produced studies worthy of undergraduate programmes. These were a delight to read and justifiably scored maximum or near maximum marks.

Projects which led to largely descriptive responses scored less well. Many students opted for 'analyse'/'evaluate'/'to what extent'/'discuss' questions that can tend to lead to less engagement with the process of argument and counter-argument.

There was some improvement in the work submitted for AO1. Proposal forms were often well filled in and most logs were at least of a decent length.

The use of handwritten Project proposal forms in some of the projects tended to limit the candidate to recording initial thoughts. It is recommended that proposal forms are typed, and viewed as 'work-in-progress' documents, to be updated as the project unfolds.

The best students provided logs containing reflective detail about issues encountered and evidence of the management of ideas, although some still provided little more than a short list of activities.

The strongest activity logs are not necessarily the longest; what is looked for is thoughtful reflection about the project process, with consideration of problems and solutions. It is not necessary to include detailed reviews of sources in the log.

There was very little evidence of monitoring against the original plan.

In AO2, the best students submitted maturely written literature reviews. There also seems to be a greater focus on ensuring that candidates have access to academic resources with evidence of visits to local universities and libraries a common feature.

In the middle or low mark bands, research tended to consist of summaries of sources, and the quality of referencing was low.

In general, the quality of referencing was variable. Some centres had obviously taught a style (such as Harvard) whilst others had not given sufficient guidance in this area.

The use of journal articles was rare. Students may be helped by being pointed to repositories of open-access research journals, such as OPENDOAR.ORG or CORE.AC.UK. Dates of access for web sources were frequently not included in bibliographies.

Few students were aware that word processors contain functions for creating in-text citations and automatic bibliographies.

Some students presented a small number of in-depth book reviews rather than a synthesised literature review. In terms of organisation, a literature review in which sources are connected to form a coherent narrative is preferable to one which simply lists source after source.

Source evaluation in the weaker projects tended to veer towards discussion of the utility of the source rather than the status and stance of the author.

Students would be well advised to avoid extensive quotations from sources, as the assessed skill in AO2 is the ability to analyse and synthesise research from a variety of sources.

In AO3, the best projects showed evidence of the construction of good lines of argument, with systematic consideration of counter-argument. The quality of the title was again the biggest limiting factor here; where the chosen title lends itself to descriptive writing it is difficult for the candidate to meet the criteria relating to the construction of argument.

It was good to note some effective 'signposting' throughout projects, some of which contained section headings and a detailed table of contents (this is also a function which can be created automatically, through use of the Styles bar on Word, for example).

Students should be encouraged to state the point they will defend at the start of a discussion section, rather than leaving the expression of their own views to the conclusion.

One feature of weaker projects was a tendency for discussions to take the form of presentations of personal opinion, with a lack of evidence drawn from the research literature. Such dissertations felt more like essays. Guidance on the differences between a dissertation and an essay is available on the Project website.

Few candidates demonstrated an understanding of the quality of argument or that some arguments might be stronger than others.

In AO4, the normal expectation is that candidates will submit a written evaluation of the project process. This provides evidence which, taken together with the teacher-assessor's remarks on the oral presentation, should support the mark for AO4.

Oral presentation mark record sheets were often helpfully filled in, providing evidence of good performance in this area, though in some cases annotation of these was limited.

Written reviews of the project process were more common but few mentioned the complete set of aims, limitations, possible alterations and lessons learned from the project process. At times, the depth of reflection was insufficient to warrant the mark awarded, or the comments lacked precision, being of a general nature. There was also a tendency to rely mainly on the presentation when awarding the AO4 mark. Centres are reminded that the AO4 mark should reflect the quality of the review of the project, typically constituting a written evaluation and an oral presentation.

Suitability of work submitted

More students made use of the recommended dissertation format (abstract, introduction, literature review, discussion, conclusion, evaluation, bibliography and presentation).

Most of the reports had abstracts that appropriately introduced the details of the study.

The focus of the discussion should be on the development of argument and counter-argument; where primary research has been carried out, it should be used to inform the process of argument, but should not be the focus of the discussion.

Assessment Evidence

In some cases, the assessment of AO1 was generous, as for example when assessors awarded full marks in A01 for poorly drafted and badly conceived project proposal forms and superficial activity logs.

Generosity in AO2 was seen in cases where the range of sources consulted was small, bibliography construction and referencing were weak and when there was a lack of analysis and synthesis of sources.

In some cases, whilst there was use of argument and counter-argument, the level of understanding of the material being discussed was not sufficient to support the AO3 mark awarded. At the upper end of AO3, the discussion should be marked by rigour and maturity of thought. In weaker projects, discussion sections were really quite short – these often coincided with literature reviews that were very lengthy.

Generosity in the marking of AO4 tended to be seen in cases where the written evaluation of the project was brief, superficial, or entirely omitted. Some students combined their conclusions and evaluations; it is preferable to write the evaluation as a separate section, focussing on a review of the project process.

Centre Performance

The best centres are very effective in their tutoring and preparation of candidates and punctilious in their assessment and standardisation processes.

Some centres clearly supported students well, with feedback on their work. Less successful centres simply set the project as totally independent work, with little guidance.

More centres are now using distinct sections (activity log, abstract, introduction, literature review, discussion/conclusion, bibliography, evaluation and presentation) ensuring that candidates have the best opportunity to achieve well in all of the objectives.

There were issues concerning a lack of highest and lowest marked pieces in the moderation sample, missing or unsigned EDIs, samples being sent with less than the required number of scripts (10, if the cohort size allows) and a number of incorrectly totalled marks.

There was evidence of internal standardisation of marks, though this was not uniform. Internal standardisation did not always take place, but of more concern was that fact that where it did, it did not always pick up major errors in assessment or even errors in addition.

A small but significant number of submissions contained material which had been taken word-for-word from websites, with little or no editing.

The general presentation of the samples was usually good, with use of treasury tags being more frequent.

P302 Investigation/Field Study

Student Performance

This series there was a good entry and many returning centres entered a number of candidates. Some interesting investigations were submitted and more are exhibiting mathematical analysis of large quantities of data. There was greater evidence of a taught skills course in many centres. Referencing has improved though there was still a lack of structured Bibliography showing analysis of a wide range of types of secondary source.

Suitability of Work Submitted

Where a narrow, testable hypothesis was proposed, projects had the focus required to meet the expectations of depth and analysis. This unit is differentiated from Unit 1 by the expectation of a more scientific and mathematical approach and thus the conclusion should involve the rejection or acceptance of the starting hypothesis at a declared level of significance. It is acceptable for students to receive guidance and supervision from a tutor throughout, but it is expected that, to access the higher mark positions in AO1, the student will refine their hypothesis or research question independently and show an independent self-reflective journey and a clearly understood conclusion. It is abundantly clear that candidates who receive good guidance at the planning stages are able to score highly in all areas.

Proposal forms were completed to a much better standard, though the breakdown of tasks and assignment of milestones could have been fuller in many cases. It was pleasing to see the majority of Proposal Forms being signed off in advance of the research journey. Where a focused question was chosen and a decent amount of data gathered, students were able to produce detailed conclusions. Projects based on mainly qualitative results are more limited. There are still projects which do not fit the expectations of Unit 2 and would be better submitted as Unit 1 Dissertations. The quantity of raw data collected does affect the quality of statistical analysis; more mathematical testing was seen in good projects including Spearman's Rank, Chi-Squared and Mann-U.

The majority of projects were generally well-structured and showed clear headings, labelling and illustrations. Projects are sometimes still hard to read and would profit from a more in-depth introduction as to what is being tackled. The more complex the subject, the clearer the communication should be. Too many projects assume prior knowledge.

Assessment Evidence

There were some good Activity logs, though not all centres used the Edexcel form and some were still too factual and brief. A thoughtful log, showing the iterative nature of the project with decisions made and problems overcome add marks in both AO1 and AO4. Questions/hypotheses were generally more focused but some projects are still too much of a single task or

experiment. There must be extensive development over time, involving self-reflection and re-appraisal to fulfil the idea of an Investigation.

AO2 continues to be the weakest section and the most leniently marked by centres at the top end. Bibliographies tended to be poorly organised if present at all, as if no tutor guidance was given in this area and they were predominantly web-based and just lists of references. At the top end of the mark bands there was evidence of academic referencing systems or at least efforts to put them in alphabetical order. Often resources were web-only (with no date of access given) and few could manage Harvard/Oxford referencing or the use of Word's bibliography function. It was rare to see sources commented on – only the very best students managed this. The mark scheme specifies evidence of critical selection and analysis. Data gathering varied in success. Sample sizes in questionnaires have improved but the realisation of statistical significance is still barely addressed. The use of extensive data sets is still rare (these do not have to be gathered by the student, though they must be raw and unanalysed) but where used, they gave easy access to analysis marks and allowed standard statistical correlation tests to be used. The depth and extent of statistical analysis really continues to separate the best projects and there needs to be an explanation of how the test works and the results mean. The majority of projects however still do not go beyond finding means and pie/bar chart display.

Often the self-reflective evaluation of the project process was too brief and lacked depth or substance. Oral presentations were predominantly judged to be of high quality but often slides showed them to be wordy and there was insufficient evidence presented to support some of the marks awarded. Candidates clearly find this process difficult to engage with effectively and need more guidance from centres. Several centres did not match comments to ticks on the Oral Presentations Forms. Several centres did not supply copies of Oral slides and this does make it hard to assess the quality of the content delivered and especially to support the high marks awarded in AO4.

Centre Performance

Many centres are now entering multiple candidates in the June series and this does imply the need for some internal moderation. There were too many cases of different projects and different tutors submitting marks where agreement at moderation was found in one case but not the other. Samples were generally in accordance with expectations. Packaging is much improved in the majority of cases, though plastic folders are still being used and greatly increase the bulk and weight of samples submitted. The use of paper envelopes should be discouraged, as any dampness can cause these to split. Edexcel grey plastic envelopes should be used. If scripts are loose in a clear thin folder then it is essential that page numbering is used. Simply hole-punched and tagged is the preferred option. In general the quality and accuracy of marking was good and many centres used an internal moderator to check the marking. Centres continue to show evidence of responding to external moderator feedback from previous submissions, which is pleasing. The level and frequency of annotation was much better and, where the wording from the marking criteria is used to highlight the

award of marks, this greatly aids moderation, though individualised comments are also needed. Proposal Forms were correctly credited for good time management, though as stated above, breakdown of timings at the proposal stage continues to be a weakness. Some good data gathering projects with proper statistical treatment were seen and these tended to score much better than those involving questionnaires. It must be made clear though that a data gathering exercise must be extended beyond the type of single task/experiment which might be seen in a typical A-level Science or Geography course.

Nearly all projects seen matched the level 3 criteria, with all projects showing the basic format and number of guiding learning hours expected at this level.

P303 Performance

Student Performance

A range of work was presented covering the full range of performance disciplines including music, dance and drama along with performance and sports events. The performance outcomes for the majority of students were fully realised with clear intentions. The responses seen this series again confirm the unit can provide the opportunity to serve a diverse range of starting points, interests and disciplines, both in form and content. Some highly original ideas were explored and some very engaging work was seen.

The projects that were particularly successful in terms of the project title were ones where students were able to combine performance style or genre with target audience and had the awareness to consider fully the significance of both the form and content of the project. Weaker project ideas were more task-based and linear in their development. However, this series saw a better attempt to focus and refine ideas.

Suitability of work submitted

This series saw mostly appropriate work submitted. Both group and individual projects were submitted and for both types of project, the most successful were those that were genuinely informed and led by the project objectives, rather than 'fitting' a project to a current talent or general area of interest. Where genuine enquiry was taking place and a selection and rejection of ideas and techniques was being applied to a rigorous process, aimed at meeting the objectives, original and creative work was produced. We saw some rigorous research processes being undertaken and where findings were used to inform the development process and there was sufficient consideration of alternatives, the work was a better fit to the demands and requirements of the unit.

Assessment Evidence

A range of titles, performance outcomes, workshops and events encompassing dance, drama, sport, fundraising and teaching were presented. The most effective titles had a research focus as the title or were in the form of a clear commission brief. Where a question was forced it was often the reason the process strayed from the original idea. Centres should be confident to use a brief or commission as a title for this unit if that is more appropriate.

Several project titles would benefit from further refinement, especially in regard to the target audience or the genre of the performance outcome. In the weaker projects, limited information was included on the project proposal form, giving little suggestion of how objectives would be met. Where there is a clear context to understand the creative intentions it helps understand the validity of the process.

Research was sometimes implicit in the outcome. However, it should be an

aim for all projects to be informed by clearly referenced sources. Some centres are still not confident to include primary research in the form of practical performance exploration as part of the student evidence.
We saw fewer students placing downloaded material in the main body of the work. It should be noted that this only adds value to a project if it is clear what and how information has been applied.

Greater links between the research and the performance outcome were seen this series which is encouraging. Thorough preparation and rehearsal were evident with high quality performance outcomes being produced. Detailed working logs gave an on-going synoptic overview of the development process.

The considering and evidencing of the exploration of alternative ideas still requires further encouragement, as this was often lacking in work. For some projects the performance material was not sufficiently challenging and again a focus on a research-based project could facilitate this.

Summative evaluations included some excellent practice, with centres including recordings of the review presentation that greatly aided the moderation process. For others, it seemed that evidence was only focused on their ability to give a good presentation, rather than critical reflection and analysis.

Centre Performance

Most centres delivered a complete sample with the relevant paperwork. Errors in addition occurred in a small number of centres and not all centres provided the work with the highest and lowest marks if they were not included in the sample identified.

A majority of centre assessors precisely used the language of the assessment criteria on the Candidate Record Sheets, which supported the moderation process. Candidate identification must be provided at the start of all recordings.

P304 Artefact

Student Performance

Overall centres entered individualised projects linked to the learners' skills and interests. Artefact outcomes submitted this series included paintings in a range of media, printed short stories, musical instruments, digital games and apps, architectural designs for eco-buildings and innovative new surf boards and equipment for disabled children. At the very top end the work was outstanding and demonstrated awareness of professional practice in terms of the research, design, development and realisation of the chosen artefact.

Fewer group projects were presented, but as in previous series' these tended to offer less opportunity for individuals to achieve full coverage of the range of marks available. A small minority of students presented joint projects with shared evidence (e.g. duplicate Project Proposal Forms, Activity Logs, portfolio entries and/or evaluation). Future learners should ensure that they present individual records and evidence for all assessment objectives.

As previously, outstanding projects had a detailed design brief as their starting point. Successful design briefs demanded a challenging initial research phase. For example engineering projects that provided innovative solutions and filled a 'gap in the market' and fine art projects that necessitated initial investigation into theme and relevant artists as well as experimentation with a range of techniques and materials. It was apparent that stronger centres had given appropriate time and consideration to the development and refinement of the brief. Where consideration was given to specifics such as style, medium, influence, purpose, materials, genre, user-group etc. learners were able to plan, research, develop and evaluate with all these in mind. A tight commission brief should be formulated to initiate the Artefact Extended Project. This initial brief does not have to be phrased as a question for P304. Proposals phrased as a question tended to be less effective starting points for the students.

Suitability of work submitted

Most students correctly submitted photographs of the final artefact, rather than the artefact itself. However, this series more centres (including international centres whose work cannot be returned) posted original bulky and/or fragile original artefacts. Working links to individual students' online evidence were included in individual portfolios on discs or USB sticks and this greatly aided the moderation process.

A small minority of learners appeared uncertain which unit they were attempting and selected titles that could have been refined to provide a more suitable starting point for a dissertation, field study or performance.

There were commendable examples of learners working to 'real' commission briefs set by external clients, but also instances where the client's brief

seemed to limit opportunities for more sophisticated research and development phases.

At the lower end, there were a significant number of projects sampled that lacked the 'stretch and challenge' demanded by the Extended Project. Basic outcomes were produced in a short timeframe.

Assessment Evidence

AO1
As in previous series planning was un-detailed in some portfolios; timescales and resources were areas that often lacked thought. Project Proposal Forms could be re-visited and amended/updated as the Project aims and objectives become more refined. The evidence provided by stronger students identified very specific tasks to complete and the resources that would be needed, whereas weaker students included generic lists that were not specific to the needs of their individual commission brief. Timescales sometimes revealed that the time spent on the Extended Project fell well short of the guided learning hours.

The activity logs were sometimes over-rewarded lists of actions, with little reference to on-going planning and management and the steps take to overcome any problems.

Moderators reported that some students are placing a disproportionate emphasis on the 'write up' of the project and this is being allocated greater time than the development of the artefact itself. It is intended that the supporting materials capture an in-depth design and realisation process, rather than leading it.

AO2
This assessment objective was most likely to be over-rewarded. At the top end a rigorous research phase was identified from the outset. Effective primary and secondary research was documented and informed the final outcome. However, some learners are still presenting content-based research alone, rather than investigation into materials, techniques and processes. There was a tendency to over-reward collations of research material that lacked analysis, synthesis or links to the project outcome. Research was also often 'narrower' than the 'wide-ranging' assessment suggested. Some portfolios contained undigested downloaded material that cannot be rewarded. Referencing and citation was variable. At the higher end it was apparent that stronger centres had used an effective initial taught course to embed these skills. Primary research in the form of questionnaires tended to be narrow in its scope and lack sophistication.

At times it appeared that skilled learners had produced an artefact using existing knowledge and skills and then attempted to retrospectively produce evidence of a research phase.

AO3
This assessment objective was often over-rewarded. The importance of the supporting material in providing evidence of a rigorous development

process and the consideration of alternative approaches is stressed. Although evidence of the process and the ideas being selected was sometimes implicit, evidence should be compiled to make these practical decisions and developments explicit. Where there was leniency, there was a tendency for assessors to over-reward the product, when there was a lack of evidence of a sufficiently lengthy development process. This was a particular issue when the artefact was a relatively straightforward build of bought-in component parts. More experimentation and the investigation of alternative materials, processes, techniques and design were often required to justify the marks awarded. Stronger evidence documented a multi-stage development process with designs, initial drafts and/or prototypes refined by the learner.

Sketchbooks, design 'journals' and photographs were often used effectively as a way to evidence the visual development of the making process.

At the top end of the range, students documented moments of a genuine innovation; finding new engineering solutions to difficult manufacturing problems or presenting complex moral questions to a new audience through visual or digital media. These students were able to access the full range of marks.

As previously stated, a significant number of centres are over-rewarding projects that do not have appropriate extension, challenge or sophistication. When less appropriate basic initial aims were fulfilled, the outcome was sometimes described as 'highly successful' and the evidence over-rewarded against AO3.

AO4
Stronger responses included sophisticated summative evaluation, the completed Oral Presentation Record Form and a copy of well thought-out accompanying slides. At the lower end written evaluations were often brief and lacked genuine reflection against the initial idea. Where AO4 was over-rewarded some centres did not reflect shortcomings in presentation skills noted on the Oral Presentation Record Form in the mark awarded.

Centre Performance

Most centres delivered a full sample with the relevant paperwork, including the work of the highest and lowest candidate. There were occasional mark submission errors or arithmetical discrepancies on the candidate record sheets.

Centres are reminded of the importance of the internal standardisation process to ensure consistency of marking across a team of assessors.

The majority of centres linked their teacher-assessor comments to the assessment criteria and this greatly aided the moderation process. These comments were frequently detailed and communicated the assessment decisions taken. However, a significant number of centres were slightly lenient or lenient in their assessment of P304. AO2 and AO3 were again identified as the areas most likely to be over-rewarded.

Centres again supported the very varied interests of their students, ensuring that individual Artefact projects developed and extended personal skills for progression.