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Moderators' Report/
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Pearson Edexcel Extended Project Qualification
Dissertation (P301)

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Student Performance

Work across a wide range of marks was seen. At the upper end, material of impressive maturity was in evidence.

Centres which had more success in accessing the higher mark bands were those which encouraged learners to select research questions that were appropriate in terms of the sophistication of the ideas being addressed, with a clear base of Level 3 material being used, and with scope for the development of argument and counter-argument.

Weaker projects tended to lack the structural features or style of written communication expected in a dissertation, to lack careful editing or proof-reading, or tended to be submitted with relatively thin supporting evidence of the project process. Weaker dissertations tended to consist of presentations of information and lacked evidence of in-depth investigation of sources or engagement in argument and counter-argument.

In general, the ability to use an appropriately academic style when writing remains a very good indicator of the quality of the work. The best projects seen could be described as 'genuinely scholarly'.

Suitability of work submitted

Learners, in the main, used a good range of relevant resources and overall were able to make clear and relevant links in their work.

There is wider appreciation of the importance of argument and counter-argument

Some learners had carried out questionnaires and then used the data to inform their discussion. The questions asked did not always produce sufficient data or information and the number of questionnaires completed was often quite small. It is difficult to make effective use of questionnaire surveys without rigorous methodological development and data analysis; if work of this nature is intended, it may well be that the project is a better fit to the P302 Investigation / Field Study unit.

More effective use of primary research within the scope of the Dissertation unit may come through interviews, particularly with experts, as these can provide a source that guides and informs the project.

Learners can be reminded that the normal length of a Dissertation is 5000-6000 words, and projects need not greatly exceed this length unless there is a specific need arising, for example, from the technical depth of the topic.

Assessment Evidence

AO1

Learners who achieved higher marks were able to identify the challenges they encountered and how these challenges were addressed. Ongoing reflection and monitoring of the project process characterise strong performance in this area.

There were some excellent examples of students using a diary-style activity log, which generally allowed learners to include much more detail. Use of a calendar to identify project milestones was a good way to monitor and track progress. Activity logs were also useful in identifying

how project titles had been amended or changed in the light of the initial stage of the research process.

At times, project titles lacked focus and more thought was required to make sure the project has appropriate aims and objectives. In some projects, timescales were vague.

Stronger project titles generally allowed students to formulate questions which allowed them to explore different perspectives on their chosen areas of study. There were, however, still some where this was not the case, and this should be considered by teacher-assessors when reflecting on how they guide learners.

From reading learners' evaluations, it is evident that some learnt about the importance of planning their research and time for writing as they went along. The use of Gantt charts by learners appears to have been of benefit to them.

AO2

Bibliographies were generally more consistent, as was referencing. It was also clear that centres encouraged learners to select varied and relevant sources and then evaluate the reliability of their choices.

The quality of source evaluation remains an area for development. The best-focused evaluations addressed source reliability and objectivity, exploring this through investigation of the professional credentials of authors and publishers, rather than commentary on the utility of sources. Some learners did this as a separate section, ensuring that it is given the right focus. Others did this effectively through footnotes. However, some projects were placed high in AO2 even though source evaluation was lacking, making it difficult to support the mark awarded.

Although not required, a discrete Literature Review can help learners to focus on the overall structure of the dissertation. Guidance on this and other aspects of the Dissertation writing process is available in the form of student webinars on the Future Ready Project Learning microsite.

AO3

The writing for AO3 was descriptive at the lower end of the mark range but centres now tend to be aware of the importance of argument. The choice of topic did not always allow learners to develop their analytical writing skills.

Most projects were well-structured, with content pages, page numbers, headings and subheadings, although those scoring lower marks tended to be written in an 'essay-style' format rather than using a conventional research presentational style.

There were some excellent examples of scholarly work. The use of an Abstract section at the commencement of a project is to be commended. Engagement with scholarly sources was found amongst some of the strongest projects, with consideration of alternative interpretations and counter-arguments.

One particularly pleasing observation is that many learners were able to present a balanced view of the different perspectives in their area of research even when they held their own passionate views about a particular subject.

However, some projects did not engage in argumentative discussion, instead providing work that amounted to a presentation of research of a certain topic, sometimes of an academic and complex nature, but lacking a sense of engagement in the processes of argument and counter-argument.

While most learners made good or sometimes proficient use of appropriate academic language, at times other learners used a journalistic, personal or informal tone that was not suitable.

Some outstanding learners produced extremely well-structured, academically written, in-depth perceptive dissertations with conclusions that proficiently summarised their point of view. However, in the conclusions of some learners, the mention of suggestions for future work and wider implications were either missing or very brief.

AO4

In some cases, the marking of AO4 focused mainly on oral presentations and did not credit some excellent written evaluations that had been included. In other circumstances, high Mark Band 3 marks were awarded despite a written evaluation not being included and despite slides demonstrating a focus on project content and lacking an evaluation of the project process.

It is recommended that a written evaluation section is incorporated into the main written dissertation which can then be referenced in the formal presentation. Where evaluation takes place primarily through an oral presentation, the justification for the mark awarded should include detailed commentary to explain how the presentation provided evidence that specific mark band descriptors had been met.

Slides were often well-presented and well-designed. The best evaluations were perceptive and precise, with links to further studies and skills clearly articulated.

Centre Performance

Most centres were using the appropriate forms. Most included teacher-assessor annotated mark record sheets and most included oral presentation mark record sheets.

Many centres incorporated internal moderation in the assessment process. This is good practice but where the internal moderator recommends changes to the teacher-assessor's marks it is recommended that the moderator makes a note of why the mark should be amended. This could be as brief as a notation referencing the assessment criteria in the Marking Grid.

In a significant number of cases, centres had not included the highest and lowest projects. Centres are reminded that the submitted sample should include the highest and lowest mark projects, and that if learners have been withdrawn, others should be substituted so that a full sample is always provided.

The more submissions via the Learner Work Platform created issues for some centres in completing the submission process. The Project Qualification Digital Submission Guidance outlines the process to be followed.

Where centres uploaded different sections of the dissertation as multiple separate files, this did not aid the moderation process. Submissions with a single file or small number of files are preferable for moderators.

Those Centres with the higher performing learners were characterised by the following best-practice features:

- The students had been well-prepared and supported with many exhibiting a clear personal commitment to their chosen subject matter.

- Project titles were selected which allowed for different perspectives to be considered.
- Activity logs clearly identified how challenges and issues were addressed.
- Research source materials were investigated in an evaluative literature review.
- There was clear engagement in the creation of argument and the consideration of and response to counter-argument or exploration of alternative interpretations.
- The style of written communication was appropriate (i.e. formal and objective, not conversational or casual).
- Assessors provided detailed feedback on each of the 4 sections of the Marking Grid, with annotation.
- The system of moderation was effective with clear reasons identified for amendments to the marks.

A series of webinars providing freely available guidance on the Dissertation writing process can be found at the link below.

Future Ready Project Learning - Student webinars

<https://www.pearson.com/uk/web/future-ready/project-learning/student-webinars.html>