Moderators' Report/ Principal Moderator Feedback

January 2013

Level 3 Extended Project

P301 - Dissertation
P302 - Investigation
P303 - Performance
P304 - Artefact

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P301 Dissertation

Learner Performance

The quality of writing, depth of research and the level of sustained argument and counter-argument led to work of impressive maturity at the upper end of the performance range. Weaker project work tended to come from candidates whose research skills were not well developed, so that the range of research was limited and referencing and source evaluation were weak.

Some candidates chose titles that attempted to cover subject areas that were too wide ranging or focused only on factual closed questions. This led them into projects that were too weighted towards a descriptive style of writing and could be better described as reports rather than dissertations.

Whilst there was evidence of more detail in project proposal forms, many still lacked detailed plans of activities. There was often limited detail of objectives and reasons for the choice of project. More learners produced logs with a good amount of detail and with rather more reflective comment than in previous sessions. However, reflection was missing from some logs. A well written log should provide a reflective account of the project journey, addressing problems encountered, as well as solutions, and showing evidence of on-going reflection.

Candidates need to realise that changes to the proposal forms can be recorded within the activity log and any changes can be justified through these working logs. Candidates should give the final title at the beginning of the work so that the moderator is aware of the final focus of the work.

Referencing and the presentation of the bibliography were very variable. This was carried out to some extent in most of the work seen and in the best work, footnotes were used effectively. Bibliographies were often incorrect e.g. not in alphabetical order or lacking access dates when listing websites.

The stronger centres had taught the students the importance of referencing. Nevertheless, the most common area requiring development was the evaluation of source reliability. Effective source evaluation was rarely seen. Candidates should be encouraged to write evaluations which address the provenance of source material directly (e.g. the status of the author, institution responsible for publication, location of publication etc). Evaluative comments need not be lengthy, but they should address the crucial issue of reliability, rather than, for example, simply discussing utility.

It is important too that sources are investigated, and the investigation should be in-depth for the higher mark band positions. Some candidates interpreted the 'research review' to mean literally a review, in which the sources were described, but not investigated to find information which bears on the research question.

Where learners were accessing a range of sources and that included good quality sources (i.e. books or journals for specialist/academic audiences) tended to produce better titles, provide stronger, more coherent arguments, draw better reasoned conclusions and adopt recognised academic referencing conventions more accurately. Here, it may be useful to centres to note that an increasing range of academic journals are now being made freely online and can be found by typing 'open-access journals' into a search engine. There was evidence of the use of academic material from search engines such as Google Scholar, which lifted the tone of writing based on the sites accessed.

Some candidates seemed intent on including bulky primary research. The general quality of writing in the discussion section was high, with a few notable exceptions, although it was felt that in general, centres were spotting the weak pieces and marking accordingly.

Written reviews appeared more frequently but were often brief and very rarely covered all the aspects in the first two paragraphs of the AO4 marking grid and suggestions for further work on the topic. Some evaluations were completed extremely reflectively and showed good insight into practice could be improved.

In general, the written evaluation could be improved by more thoughtful, perceptive consideration of the extent to which objectives had been met, together with thought about weaknesses in the work, possible extensions, and lessons learned.

Suitability of work submitted

Choices of initial title tended to limit candidates in cases where they did not lead naturally into argumentative material. There were many questions that limited the students so that the highest marks could not be awarded.

An area of concern remains the fact that centres seem to prefer to use an essay format, instead of guiding candidates towards the fulfilment of the requirements of an academic dissertation. For example, there was a tendency to mix research and discussion within a single section (rather than separating the review of research from the discussion section). Whilst in principle a mixed format is acceptable, the result was often that the work felt more like an essay, with less emphasis on reflection on sources, for example. Guidance about the difference between a dissertation and an essay is now available on the Project website (see 'getting started, implementation section').

Assessment Evidence

A significant number of centres submitted samples with missing EIE forms, work from other units mixed in, addition errors, with the highest or lowest mark piece missing, or without the ten requested samples.

Almost without exception, centre's provided oral presentation evidence and assessment sheets. Almost all learners completed the proposal forms and most learners were encouraged to include an activity log. The general presentation of the samples was very good, with treasury tags or single sided wallets being sent. However, a number of centres still are failing to use treasury tags. The use of poly-pockets or the placing of the dissertation within A4 folders was a real obstacle to moderation, making it difficult to find and access information effectively, particularly when candidates had not included page numbers.

The inclusion of unnecessary documents was also an issue. Print-outs of resources consulted simply make for weightier documents without adding anything to the projects submitted.

In a small number of projects, material was found which had been taken directly from sources without quotation, although the incidence of this was lower than in previous series.

Centre Performance

Some centres appeared to misunderstand the nature of a literature review. Instead of guiding learners to integrate source material into a synthesized review, they expected learners to summarise the information from each source, almost as a list, without making connections between sources.

Some centres seemed to award AO4 marks largely on the basis of the presentation and then take no account of any written evaluations the learners had produced, even where they were detailed and reflective. Conversely, it was quite common for high AO4 marks to be awarded even when there was a lack of detailed written evaluation. It is normally expected that the AO4 mark will be awarded based on a combination of the oral presentation and written evaluation.

In some cases, the amount of time spent on development of work seemed to be less than the recommended 80 guided learning hours. Centres should bear in mind that the Extended Project is assessed rigorously as a Level 3 qualification, and that, in size and level of demand of the work, it is comparable to half of an A level, and should therefore attract comparable teaching support.

P302 Investigation / Field Study

Learner Performance

The cohort for this series was small and generally consisted of one or two candidates per centre.

The breadth and depth of secondary research required is still underestimated. Good critical selection of secondary sources from wide media types is expected to support and put into context the Primary research being carried out. End notes are not generally sufficient to show where individual data, images, dates etc have been sourced.

The whole should be an iterative study showing critical evaluation and analysis, informing each new step of the journey. Too many projects are still little more than a single task, albeit with a number of variables being tested. Analysis is needed to draw out trends and to come to statistically valuable conclusions. Specifically, if a hypothesis is stated, this should be tested.

Evaluation sections are being tagged onto Conclusions and are still rather project content orientated, whereas these should be substantial areas for self-reflection of the journey from inception to completion. The Activity Log is also an excellent vehicle for evidence of reflection and should show the developing thought process.

Suitability of Work Submitted

The work seen was in general a better match to the Unit 2 criteria and some excellent, unusual, personally motivated Investigations seen. It is pleasing that topics are moving away from simple questionnaire based data gathering and beginning to be driven by the need to answer and test a specific hypothesis using scientific experimentation and statistical analysis of data sets. There are however, still too many projects which are essentially Unit 1 Dissertations and the word 'Primary' research is still being mistaken for secondary research undertaken by the candidate. Unit 2 must be dominated by Primary data; data gathered and analysed by the candidates themselves. Data should be copious if it is to be statistically relevant and in such cases the analysis should be statistical and mathematical and refer to significance, if high marks are to be accessed. Display of data is essential for the detection of trends, but pie or bar charts and simple arithmetical means are not sufficient for Band 3.

Assessment Evidence

A successful project will have been refined independently to include a rigorously testable, stated hypothesis. The planning and structure should be evident in the Proposal Form, where the proposed timescale and breakdown is evident. The Activity Log should then monitor progress and few of these referred to alternations to plans, problems encountered and then overcome.

Centre Performance

Work is now being presented in a more ordered form. The application of the AO mark grids is increasingly accurate from returning centres. Only the signed EIE form is generally still lacking from Exams Officers. Most centres did use the Extended Project level 3 Edexcel forms and most, though not all, annotated the scripts to show how AO marks had been awarded. In the majority of centres there was evidence of IV and this is critical if there is more than one Tutor-Assessor. Larger Centres do need to check that the work of highest and lowest candidates is also added to the requested sample. Fewer plastic wallets and folders are being used, which greatly facilitates postage.

P303 Performance

Learner Performance

A small number of pieces of work were submitted for moderation in this award.

The projects that were particularly successful in terms of the project title were ones where learners were able to marry performance style or genre with target audience and were aware of the need fully to consider the significance of both form and content.

Weaker project ideas were more task-based and linear in their development.

There were drama, dance and music projects along with some events being staged and a lesson being taught.

Suitability of work submitted

Consideration of audience and the intended effect of the work should be fully considered at the planning stages to give focus and to refine the idea for the intended outcome.

The use of a Commission or Brief, rather than a question, may serve the learner better in terms of giving focus and challenge to the intended performance outcome.

Assessment Evidence

The planning stages should include a strategy for how to record / capture the more ephemeral development process that can be where some of the most relevant decisions and selection and rejection of ideas takes place. This could also cover how to show evidence of the consideration of alternative ideas (often an area overlooked).

The research stage should cover both form and content; these should be conditional on each other where appropriate to the planned outcome and desired effect.

The creative journey should show evidence of the process as a whole, and include learner evidence of changes and decisions made in rehearsals / preparations.

If audience feedback can be measured against initial objectives, this could effectively inform the review.

Centre Performance

If at all possible centres should be encouraged to consider all the options for a 'performance' response to an Extended Project, which allows for more than the more traditional music, dance and drama projects.

P304 Artefact

Format of submission of artefacts was an issue during the award. Centres should not send bulky live work, but instead follow the guidance in the instructions to centres and submit photographic evidence. It is also not appropriate to send work in the form of multiple digital scans of individual sheets. The guidance in the instructions to centres indicates the appropriate formats for submission.

In P304, tactile development of work should be well-evidenced for AO2 and AO3. Clear objectives at the outset help to give more direction and focus to project work, and allow better evaluation at the end of the process.

Learner Performance

Candidates continue to focus the Artefact on a question nominated in the Project Proposal. Often the question tends to be too complex and unattainable in the time frame targeted and leads the research into subject content rather than the production of an artefact that explores materials, techniques and processes. This often leads to a lack of focus in AO2 and AO3 but also affects AO1 and AO4 as clear objectives are not set, monitored or evaluated.

The best work involved the creation of a nominated artefact and provided evidence of the design/visualisation process, showing clear documentation of the methodology involved in making, the choice of materials, techniques and processes, together with clear progress through the refinement of these processes.

Lower achieving learners did not produce their intended outcome. Sometimes the final piece was decided upon at the onset of planning and its making was then recorded, but without development.

Group work is still causing problems especially with the extraction of information relevant to each individual. It is difficult if the roles are not clearly defined or if each member does not produce documentation that supports their role and contribution.

Suitability of Work Submitted

Some Project Proposals were made too complex, without the nomination of an Artefact as an outcome, while others were over-simplified, under-focused and not developed further to extend the learner. Some centres paid little regard to the forms and offered single phrase or simplistic targets for work planned with little regard for timescales. As a result, inappropriate objectives were set that did not target the physical development of an artefact. However, more detailed information such as aims and objectives were embedded into written documentation such as 'introductions' or 'abstracts'.

Activity logs have generally improved but many still read as diary entries beginning 'I did'. Most were informative concerning the stages of the project; however many lacked monitoring and problem solving.

Research at many centres concentrated on the subject or topic of interest. In many, only a small portion of this material was then used towards the Artefact. In these cases, candidates did not focus on the selection of materials and processes based on their research.

Candidates operating in higher mark bands made use of primary and secondary research with analysis of findings and of sources. Most candidates used reference systems in some way but not always appropriately. The main issues in AO2 were to do with demonstrating the 'use' of materials and techniques and the 'selection' of resources.

The assessment outcome AO4 was clearly evidenced by candidates but mostly supported by presentation evidence (PowerPoint slides, notes etc) and oral presentation records. Additional evidence such as video footage was extremely useful when provided and clearly demonstrated candidate input and valuable evidence across all assessment outcomes.

Evaluations did not always reflect on the aims and objectives set out in the project proposal; there was a tendency towards the descriptive, and reviews often lacked identification of future improvements.

Assessment Evidence

Sketchbooks, video evidence and photographs of learner-input provided very useful evidence and gave supplementary confirmation for teacher-assessor written observations.

Weaker areas tended to be the documentation of supporting material such as experimentation and trying out alternative ideas. Evidence did not consistently reflect the activity logs and therefore the refinement and modification of the artefact was quite weak and yet seemed to be dismissed by some assessors.

Centre Performance

There have been problems with many large artefacts being sent for moderation when photographic evidence would have been sufficient. This is becoming less of a problem and in this series only two centres sent large items.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx

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