

Examiners' Report

January 2010

Projects

Projects Level 3 Controlled Assessments

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Extended Projects Qualification

Level 3 Introduction

Projects follow the same processes as traditional GCSEs and GCEs. As with any GCSE or GCE, each unit is awarded to ensure that the standard is established and will be maintained. It is necessary to ensure consistency of standard in each examination window and as a consequence of this, grade boundaries could be subject to change.

Level 3 Unit 1: Dissertation

Learner Performance

An impressive range of titles was seen. The vast majority of pieces, at all levels, were genuinely interesting to read. It is clear that the EPQ is encouraging student to engage more deeply with topics of personal interest, which immediately inspires a greater enjoyment and therefore more successful outcome to their project work.

Amongst Diploma centres, there was a marked tendency to develop themes very closely linked to Principal Learning (e.g. for SHD Learners, obesity, body image or binge drinking) and often, a number of Learners in a centre chose exactly the same question. There was more variety of types of project amongst those dissertations submitted by stand-alone centres.

In many of the projects, evidence of significant extension was seen. This was achieved in some cases by broadening the perspective of the candidate - for example, by linking two different subject approaches when addressing a research question. The best projects had a clear central focus.

Weaker projects tended to address one subject area only. They were also marked by writing which was mainly descriptive and lacking in analytical depth. In some cases, the choice of initial question invited a descriptive response, thus making it difficult for the candidate to access the mid or higher marking bands. As a rule 'Why' questions are more likely to lead to the right sort of analytical writing than 'How' questions.

Project management was generally done well. Students are producing clear and detailed activity logs and more are writing abstracts or introductions that clearly define the aims of the research. Some did not include a project proposal form

The standard of research was generally fairly high, and students are synthesising source into a research section more and more often. By far the biggest issues were failure to evaluate the sources critically, or to properly reference within the text. Bibliographies were mostly well written, although weaker ones were rather thin.

In terms of development and realisation, the biggest weakness was a lack of serious counter argument or consideration of different positions. This was sometimes due to a limiting title, but often students seemed to think that they were simply required to present their own ideas or summarise a topic. This is not in the spirit of the dissertation. However, there were several outstanding pieces of work evident, often those that were clearly based on the Perspectives on Science approach.

Suitability of Work Submitted

The strongest projects were those which clearly synthesized more than one subject perspective, hence satisfying the objective of extending learners. There was impressive work seen which integrated philosophical exploration of ideas with considerations from psychology, sociology and history. At the upper end, the maturity of the work submitted was remarkable.

The lower marked pieces often contained lists of information, and some contained far too much directly quoted material (although all was properly acknowledged). Weaker pieces were marked down because the subject matter was simply not of an A level standard.

Assessment Evidence

As a rule, centres showed a good understanding of the assessment evidence requirements. The standard format for the dissertation was widely used, and the accompanying evidence in the form of project proposal form, activity log, and hand-out sheets giving evidence of the presentation were usually present.

The candidate mark record sheets were often annotated well. Oral presentation record sheets were also annotated, but at times, the comments were not particularly informative and therefore had less value as evidence to support the mark awarded.

Some centres had overloaded the portfolios with extra materials that were not needed for moderation (e.g. marking grids giving PLTs marks).

Some small administrative points: 1.5 spacing enhances readability, and plastic wallets tend to slow down the moderator's work, which is why treasury tagged dissertations are preferred.

Centre Performance

This was a very small award. The majority of centres demonstrated a good understanding of the assessment criteria, which were applied accurately and consistently.

Centres are once again reminded about the need for proper teaching of both research methods and suitable level 3 ideas and frameworks which can then be used in Learners projects.

Review of work

Most centres included clear evidence of the presentation with appropriate comments. However, a number of the weaker pieces (and, sadly, some of the otherwise stronger pieces) did not include any clear evaluative comments. Centres should be aware of the need for clear evidence of personal reflection on the skills and process used/followed by the students in a separate, clearly labelled section.

Level 3 unit 2: Investigation

Learner Performance

From standalone centres a good range of topics were seen, though the level of source evaluation, use of resources and the data sample sizes often fell short of expectations at level 3.

For students taking the EPQ as part of their Diploma, P302 may seem a natural choice of unit, in view of the potential for use of methods such as questionnaire surveys. However, it is not recommended that this unit is taken by students who are not ready to attempt the mathematical analysis of data which is expected in AO3.

Questionnaire based data collection was popular but this can easily be both too basic and the cohort questioned too narrow (e.g. friends or classmates). It is vital that the limitations are appreciated. This also applies to the limitations of a single piece of data collection taking place in one location or instant, as may be the case in a Geography field trip. This does not lend itself well to the iterative journey expected.

A significant number of Learners did not appreciate that investigative work needs to be based around a clear, testable hypothesis.

Wide ranging activities should be carried out over an extended period, facilitated by constant centre monitoring. Some work submitted was based on short duration tasks, carried out unsupervised, leading to single data sets. Sample sizes must be large enough to allow mathematical analysis and some statistical significance in findings to be present. Presentation of data in bar graphs or pie charts alone is insufficient at this level; trends and correlations or testing must be carried out. The level of referencing and secondary source analysis is no less than in Unit 1.

Suitability of Work Submitted

There was a very small volume of work submitted for this award.

Small ($n < 20$) data sets were often used and gave little evidence from which to reach conclusions and indeed little analysis was seen. Poor topics were less focussed. No clear hypothesis was given and thus no clear conclusion could be reached.

Assessment Evidence

Project work tended to be well formatted, and the necessary pieces of assessment evidence were typically present.

Centre Performance

On the whole there was evidence of consistent application of the marking grids so that the ranking of scripts was in good agreement with that of the moderator in most cases. However, in some cases a lack of annotation or evidence did not support the high marks awarded. There was a tendency to apply the criteria to what were basically level 2 projects, which did not show the extension required. Thus overall consistency was better than accuracy.

Review of work

In the majority of cases, there was evidence of oral presentation as well as written evaluation of the project process. Learners are expected to reflect honestly and with some depth on the strengths and weaknesses of their research methodology. Significant weaknesses (e.g. such as limited sample size, or the lack of a clear hypothesis) should be explored to support high marks in AO4.

Level 3 unit 3: Performance

Learner Performance

Examples of work seen in this small award included a charity variety show including music, dance, comedy and drama. Popular music bands performed their song choices at a professional venue and again at their centre.

Centres are reminded to provide clear evidence of the development process to support marks and that a focal point for research is essential if learners are to access the full range of marks.

Suitability of work submitted

Centres selected events that were appropriate platforms for their learners skills. Events were accessible to the full range of candidate ability. Events could have generated effective planning, research, development and evaluation opportunities.

However, it was felt that the important issue of the target audience was not fully considered.

Assessment Evidence

In some of the work seen, teacher assessor comments were not supported by the evidence put forward for moderation.

Centre Performance

There was a mixture of consistent and lenient marking in the work seen.

There were indications in some cases that the standard of performance is being used to place learners in high mark bands rather than the evidence presented for each assessment objective being looked at against the assessment objective requirements.

Clear evidence of the development process is vital to support the higher marks; it appears centres may be rewarding motivation, interest and talent without sufficient evidence.

Review of work

Written evaluations tended to be brief. Centres should ensure that learners provide comprehensive evaluations to ensure access to the higher mark bands.

Level 3 unit 4: Artefact

Learner Performance

A significant number of projects did not involve the creation of an actual artefact; instead, development work was focused on designing and planning (for example, drawing up architectural plans for an extension to a building).

There were also a number of projects in which the artefact consisted of publicity leaflets or booklets. These potentially offered scope for meeting the assessment objectives, but the levels of skill in evidence tended not to be high.

The best work seen did involve the creation of a physical artefact, and also included evidence of the design process, especially demonstrating the reasoning which lay behind the choice of materials, techniques and processes.

Suitability of Work Submitted

A common weakness in the work submitted was a lack of evidence of the development of ideas. The best pieces seen by the examining team were those in which there was clearly recorded evidence of thought about the design process and led to higher mark bands being achieved.

Assessment Evidence

In most cases, Learners had submitted appropriately formatted portfolios of work. Project proposals were very often filled in extremely briefly.

Centre Performance

There was a very small entry cohort for this unit in this series.

Marks were wide-ranging but there was often leniency in the application of the marking grids. Lack of detail in planning affected marks for AO1, and the lack of evidence of the design process, including consideration of alternatives, meant that AO3 was often generously marked. It was also common for research to be interpreted in terms which would be more appropriate to an investigation or dissertation, with a focus on secondary literature, but with a lack of visual research or research into techniques for design and manufacture.

Centres are advised to note the need for proper teaching of both research methods and suitable level 3 ideas and frameworks which can be used in Learners projects. They should be advised to conduct proper research into materials, techniques, media and processes, and to ensure that the design process is properly represented in the evidence submitted, with a particular focus on evidence of the reasoning which has gone into the design process.

Review of Work

There was evidence of evaluation through both presentations and written comments.

Statistics

Level 3 Unit 1 Dissertation

	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	54	47	42	37	32	27	22
Points Score	28	24	20	16	12	8	4

Level 3 Unit 2 Investigation

	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	54	47	42	37	32	27	22
Points Score	28	24	20	16	12	8	4

Level 3 Unit 3 Performance

	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	54	47	41	36	31	26	21
Points Score	28	24	20	16	12	8	4

Level 3 Unit 4 Artefact

	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	54	47	41	36	31	26	21
Points Score	28	24	20	16	12	8	4

Notes

Maximum Mark (raw): the mark corresponding to the sum total of the marks shown on the mark scheme or mark grids.

Raw boundary mark: the minimum mark required by a learner to qualify for a given grade.

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