

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

Extended Project Level 3
(P301, P302, P303 & P304)
Paper 01.

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Extended Project

Level 3 Unit 1:P301 - Dissertation

Learner Performance

The quality of work at the upper end continues to impress. A small number of highly articulate students produced studies worthy of undergraduate programmes. These were a delight to read. It was notable this year that more centres had clearly understood what is expected of a good dissertation. The quality of writing, depth of research and the level of sustained argument and counter-argument led to work of impressive maturity.

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. Whilst stronger candidates chose titles which allowed the development of argument, weaker candidates tended to choose questions which were closed, or which led simply to descriptive writing. Many of the titles beginning with "How..." ended up as descriptive summaries of research undertaken. The weaker dissertations also tended to attempt to cover subject areas that were too wide ranging.

In some cases, there was limited variety in terms of subject matter between candidates within a centre and dissertations tended to be written as reports, which, whilst often very informative, lacked the breadth and depth of argument and counter-argument associated with the extended project qualification (EPQ). Without development of argument and consideration of counter-argument, it is difficult for projects to achieve high marks in AO3.

Whilst there was evidence of more detail in project proposal forms, many still lacked detailed time scales and the log was often in the form of a list of activities completed. There was often limited detail of objectives and reasons for the choice of project. Reflection was missing from many 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.

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. The stronger centres had obviously taught the students the importance of referencing. Nevertheless, the most common areas requiring development were the evaluation of source reliability and the need to increase the number of sources used. It is important too that sources are investigated; 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.

Learners are still not providing a full critical evaluation of reliability and objectivity of sources, though more attempt to do this was seen. Where this was done well it was included in the footnotes. Bibliographies were often incorrect e.g. not in alphabetical order or lacking access dates when listing websites.

Centres are advised to teach students about research methods, including citation of sources, construction of bibliographies and the importance of evaluating each source, using footnotes for the evaluations so as not to interrupt the flow of the research section.

Learners would be well advised to avoid extensive quotations from sources, as the assessed skill in AO2 involves synthesis of research from a variety of sources. Work remains to be done in selection of sources and particularly in finding sources that support a counter-argument to stimulate a genuine discussion and challenge.

Centres where learners were accessing a range of sources 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

justified 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.

Several candidates seemed intent on using primary research even where it was unnecessary or tangential to their question. In some cases this meant candidates surveyed several people regarding their opinions on a matter even where the niche nature of the subject would mean that a lay person's opinion is likely to be inaccurate. In other instances candidates had completed a great deal of primary research and laid out the results in detail but then did not analyse or evaluate the results meaning the research itself did not further the aims of the project.

The strongest candidates developed coherent lines of argument with consideration of counter arguments. Some projects would benefit from greater use of sub-headings to structure the dissertation, especially when several lines of reasoning are being developed or the subject matter is very technical. Candidates should be reminded that a high mark in AO3 depends on the development of a strong central line of argument, with consideration and response to counter-arguments. The argument should be of A Level standard.

Suitability of work submitted

Choices of initial title tended to limit candidates in cases where they did not lead naturally into argumentative material.

Titles whose main thrust appeared to be fact finding made it more difficult for learners to develop strong lines of reasoning and consider counter-arguments. Questions/titles which make deliberately contentious claims, or provoking questions, were more successful in generating arguments and thus accessing higher mark bands in AO3.

A small number of projects raised compliance issues due to unreferenced sections taken from websites though this was less problematic than in previous series.

Assessment Evidence

Most centres used the appropriate forms. Most included teacher annotated mark record sheets. Almost without exception, centres provided oral presentation evidence and assessment sheets. Almost all learners completed the proposal forms and most learners were encouraged to include an activity log.

There seemed to be more centres marking accurately though there was still some generosity. Generosity tends to be most apparent in AO2 and AO3. Some centres did not pay close attention to the criteria when awarding marks, or use sensible judgement about what constituted level 3 work.

Evaluations at the end of the project tended to be better than in previous years, but could still 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.

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.

Many centres failed to put a treasury tag on candidates' portfolios. Plastic wallets do not aid the moderation process.

Many centres had not completed the administration of the coursework sample correctly. Centres are reminded that they should carefully check the totalling of marks on projects, and that candidate authentication statements are signed by the candidate and the teacher-assessor. The centre should ensure that the correct mark has been entered and that a printed-out, signed copy of the mark sheet showing all candidate marks is included with the moderation sample.

Some centres seemed to have neglected to consider the recommendation that 40 guided learning hours should be assigned to the taught-course basis for the Extended Project. This provides an important platform for successful project work. Guidance about the taught-course basis, and schemes of work to assist in its planning, are available on the Project website.

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.

Whilst there was evidence of internal moderation, this still tended to be less effective than it might be.

Extended Project

Level 3 Unit 2: P302 - Investigation / Field Study

Learner Performance

This series saw a significant number of mainly stand-alone centres tackling a wide variety of interesting topics. It was good to see some highly motivated and sustained Investigations generating original primary data.

Only the top scoring projects managed to use statistical methods and though data sizes were larger than seen in the past, there was a disappointing lack of analysis with results simply shown in charts.

It was heartening to see an increased occurrence and depth of literature reviews and source evaluation, however detailed referencing and the need for a comprehensive mixed media bibliography is still underestimated by many centres. There continues to be too much reliance on web based bibliographies. Many centres failed to realise that though references were given throughout the work, there is still a need for a coherent and properly structured bibliography at the end. The number of projects that lacked bibliographies at all was not insignificant and resulted in many centres marking too leniently.

Projects with a strong personal rationale, either through hobbies or deep personal interest outside other A level studies worked better than rather vague statements about 'interest in future careers' or 'the subject I am studying at School'.

Use of graphical display and mathematical analysis was variable and still limited in many cases to pie/bar charts or simple percentages. When little analysis is seen (simple graphical or pie chart display and finding % or means) this does not reach the level of band 2 in AO3.

More variety was shown by centres in topic selection. It must be emphasised that though group work is acceptable, a centre must clearly identify which candidate contributes what to the overall results and each must be assessed individually. The report itself needs to contain identifiable and considerably different inputs from each candidate, or ideally each candidate should write their own report, even though this may use the same data.

Questionnaire-based data collection is still popular and the quality of questioning and the thought and planning put into the sample selected is improving but rarely leads to the highest marks. There were no single day field trips and though some projects still showed a rather short timescale of only a couple of months, the majority showed sustained effort over 4 months or more and in an increasing number the use of the end of year 12 summer holiday.

Suitability of Work Submitted

There is still confusion about the meaning of the word 'Investigation'. This is meant to be interpreted as an analytical, iterative testing process, producing primary data, not as several projects interpreted it, namely as a process of research and comparison. Unit 2 is taken by those who wish a more scientific/mathematical approach, but that does not mean any scientific topic is suitable. For example research/field studies on environmentally friendly housing or engineering construction projects do not fit Unit 2, unless there is primary data generation and subsequent statistical analysis rather than just comment on efficiency figures or secondary performance data.

Assessment Evidence

The number of centres applying the marking criteria with real accuracy has certainly grown, which is pleasing. Annotations on scripts showing where marks had

been awarded have increased and there was a strong correlation between the depth and frequency of annotations and the accuracy and reliability of assessment. Comments on the teacher-assessor marking grids indicated how closely the marker had inspected the marking criteria. There were some weaker projects which were not worthy of level 3 and some very generous marking at the top end of the range, where projects lacked the depth, synthesis, counter argument and especially wide ranging analysed bibliographies needed, but it was pleasing to see a good number that did have these features.

Overall the level of Evaluation was much improved as was the apparent management of the projects, thus much of the improvements seen were in AO1 and AO4. Rather too many activity logs seen were either very brief or lacking in the self-reflection, thoughtful development and cataloguing of problems faced and overcome.

Several centres did not submit Power Point slides and those that did still tend to be rather overgenerous to the number of slides used and credit what are sometimes wordy or dull slides. Some Proposal Forms still do not show the planning required, especially as far as a sensible timeline with specific deadlines and were not signed off by Centres in advance of the Project commencing.

Centre Performance

Most Centres managed to submit within a few days of 15th May deadline, but it was disappointing that some centres had to be contacted due to missing forms, signatures, incorrect addition or discrepancies of one sort or another.

Several projects lacked primary data altogether (or it was peripheral) and thus would have been better submitted as Unit 1 Dissertations and there are too many Centres interpreting 'Investigation' as a rather general need to 'find out', perhaps simply by interviews or reading, rather than the anticipated generation and analysis of primary data. Though some Centres showed real support for candidates and there was growing evidence of taught courses having been undertaken, in some cases good tutorial direction was lacking and the quality of reports was markedly weaker.

Centres should consider carefully at the entry stage whether a project might fit better into Unit 1 (albeit with supporting primary data) or indeed Unit 4 if the emphasis is on following some design or testing brief, with no data collection being involved. Several projects this series did not match the format of Unit 2 and thus could not access the highest marks.

Extended Project

Level 3 Unit 3: P303 – Performance

Learner Performance

A range of titles and performance outcomes and events encompassing dance, drama, sport, engineering and catering were presented. The most effective titles had a research focus as the title or commission. Many project titles would benefit from refinement, especially in regard to the target audience or the genre of the performance outcome. Greater focus on pre-planning and identifying potential difficulties could also be encouraged. Planning was at times implicit in the performance outcome, but not obviously documented.

Suitability of work submitted

Most centres performed work involving dance, drama or music. However a few centres presented based on a wider understanding of performance, including delivering lessons and holding sports tournaments and charity events.

Where the target audience and intended effect were fully considered the type of performance was not an overriding aspect. Talent shows were less effective as they were created based on a general brief and research opportunities were often limited or overlooked. However this type of project was seen less than in previous series.

Detailed and focused commission briefs are being used by some centres and this should be further encouraged as it enables learners to respond to specifics. Some learners are still struggling to create a question to answer. If trying to incorporate a question into the work leads to confusion, it is best that the work is simply focussed around trying to meet the commission brief.

It was encouraging to see work that genuinely extended aspects of the performance curriculum.

Assessment Evidence

A range of titles and performance outcomes and events encompassing dance, drama, sport, engineering and catering were presented. The most effective titles had a research focus as the title or commission. Many project titles would benefit from refinement, especially in regard to the target audience or the genre of the performance outcome. Greater focus on pre-planning and identifying potential difficulties could also be encouraged. Planning was at times implicit in the performance outcome, but not obviously documented.

At the top end there was some excellent practice and detailed bibliographies referenced a range of primary and secondary sources. Again research was sometimes implicit in the outcome and there was a sense that some centres were not sufficiently confident to include primary research in the form of practical performance skills research as evidence. Candidates placed downloaded material in the main body of the work, rather than appendices, which would have been more appropriate. Greater links between this research and the performance outcome were needed in many cases. This point was noted by some centre assessors. There was quite often leniency around the band 2 /3 boundary in AO2.

Thorough preparation and rehearsal were evident at the top end of AO3, with high quality performance outcomes. Detailed logs were methodical and gave an on-going synoptic overview of the development process. The considering and evidencing of the exploration of alternative ideas could be encouraged as this was often lacking in the mid-range and often the reason for assessment being found slightly lenient. At times the performance material was not sufficiently challenging and again a more ambitious focus on a genuine and creative research-based project could facilitate this. At the lower end logs identified very limited time had been given to the development of the piece.

Candidates were frequently assessed slightly leniently against AO4. There were examples of excellent practice, with centres including recordings of the review presentation that greatly aided the moderation process. The Oral Presentation Record Form frequently commented on high mark band 3 achievements against all criteria and yet candidates had not provided evidence of their resources or their ability to assess the project or how well they had performed. At times it seemed that evidence was focussed solely on their ability to give a good presentation, rather than their evaluative skills overall.

Centre Performance

The majority of projects were presented by individuals and so candidates were clearly identifiable in the performance outcome. However some centres would have benefited from using group work as there were clear collaboration opportunities between projects which may have generated more challenging and ambitious performance opportunities.

Extended Project

Level 3 Unit 4:P304 – Artefact

Learner Performance

Candidates have continued to focus the Artefact on a question nominated in the Project Proposal. Although the question allows the development of thought it does not enable the production of an artefact that explores materials, techniques and processes and this often leads to a lack of focus in AO2 and AO3. This continues to be a problem as the question tends to be too complex and unattainable in the time frame targeted.

The best work seen did involve the creation of a physical artefact, evidence of the design/visualisation process, especially 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.

Planning and then managing the schedule of making often left insufficient time to develop and make. Managing the completion of the artefact, allowing time for review and practical realisation, should be emphasised more in the context of managing of the process.

Activity logs have generally improved and many were at a good standard. Most were informative of the stages of the project, however many lacked content that evidenced monitoring and problem solving.

Suitability of Work Submitted

In past moderations many artefacts were sent for moderation when photographic evidence would have been sufficient. This series there was some improvement in with fewer large items being sent.

Group work still causes some issues, particularly in extracting the information needed to moderate. It is difficult if the roles are not clearly defined and each member is then producing documentation that supports their role and contribution.

Assessment Evidence

AO1: This objective was well understood by some centres who fully utilised, and expanded on, the appropriate forms, to create individualised, ambitious and mature Projects that were professional in character. Guided, realistic and thorough planning underlined most successful Projects. However, some centres had scant regard for the forms and offered single phrase or simplistic targets for work planned with little regard for timescales. Project Proposals could be too complex and conceptual, sometimes not achieving an Artefact as an outcome while others were over-simplified, ill-focused and not developed further to extend the learner.

Overall this assessment outcome was positive and lots more of the project proposals were developed to a good standard, high in some cases. In higher-marked bands proposals had been clearly well developed and supported by additional evidence. Weaker proposals lacked development and tutor input, in some lower mark bands these read as a first draft. Lots of more detailed information such as aims and objectives were embedded into written documentation such as 'introductions' or 'project outline'.

Activity logs have generally improved and have shown learners working to a good standard. Most were informative of the stages of the project, however lots of these lacked monitoring and problem solving.

AO2: 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.

Higher mark bands were inclusive of primary and secondary research and the analysis of findings which was positive to see. Most candidates referenced in some way but not always appropriately. The main issues in this AO were to do with demonstrating the 'use' of materials and techniques and the 'selection' of resources.

AO3: There were some learners who 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.

Candidate performance overall was positive and artefact products were of a good standard and in some cases excellent. However some outcomes were not easy to locate/identify and some outcomes were multiple. The link from the initial proposal to end product was quite disconnected for some candidates.

Sketchbooks, video evidence and photographs of learner input was very useful evidence as assessors did not always provide tutor observation records.

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.

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

Evaluations were generally quite strong, reflective and informative; however in weaker-performing centres evaluations were descriptive and lacked identification of future improvements. The majority of candidates presented their final outcome.

Centre Performance

Evidence of Oral Presentations has improved. Most candidates included presentation notes and supporting material.

Fewer centres sent huge artefacts such as paintings or boxes of files rather than photographs or CDs/DVDs.

Guidance and support in the formation of a question or brief should be seen as positive and not diminishing candidate independence. In some work this was severely lacking.

Sketchbooks, video evidence and photographs of learner input were very useful evidence as assessors did not always provide tutor observation records.

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