

Moderators' Report/ Principal Moderator Feedback

January 2015

Pearson Edexcel Extended Project
Qualification

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

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P301 Dissertation

Student Performance

The work at the top end of the range was impressively mature, with evidence of thoughtful, in-depth research, use of evidence to construct a line of argument and careful weighing of counter-argument. The sophistication of understanding that was present in the stronger pieces of work was impressive. There were some very well-written pieces which were interesting to read. At the very low end of the mark range, work tended to fall below what would be expected in an A level standard qualification and in some cases, understanding of the requirements of research dissertations was not in evidence.

Suitability of Work Submitted

In general, the work seen showed good understanding of the requirements and expectations for the Dissertation unit.

As in previous series, the choice of question was all-important. There were few questions open to clear alternative answers. Many started with "To what extent...?" This type of starting question can lead to less effective engagement with the process of argument and counter-argument.

The stronger projects contained well-written literature reviews. In other cases, the literature review tended to describe sources, without actually containing evidence that they had been thoroughly investigated, analysed and synthesized. A narrative form for the literature can, in many cases, prove an effective way of ensuring that these aspects of the criteria are met.

Assessment Evidence

AO1. Most Activity Logs were encouragingly full, so the rare thin ones stood out. On the other hand, thin Project Proposal Forms were quite common, such that one full of considered detail was a pleasant surprise. It is worth drawing students' attention to the requirement for monitoring of progress over time, and that therefore there should be a full plan of activities, with projected time intervals for activities and milestones.

AO2. It was pleasing to see more web citations which included dates and Harvard/Vancouver referencing, but even some of the best candidates were inconsistent in listing sources. However, there were more footnotes than in previous series. Some bibliographies were questionable, raising the suspicion that some students were simply listing as many books about their subject as possible. It is worth showing students the 'References', 'Insert Citation' buttons on Word, or their equivalent on other word processors, since these can greatly facilitate the creation of citations and bibliographies.

Full source evaluations were few and far between. There was a tendency for evaluation to focus on utility rather than reliability. Some very good

pieces did not actually have a separate literature review section, but maturely incorporated the review into the discussion.

AO3. Proper abstracts were a rarity and essays were not uncommon. There was a lot of descriptive material but a good number of dissertations contained elements such as comparison of sources and alternative views, with weighing of evidence. A small but significant number of pieces were being given high MB3 marks with no real counter arguments present.

AO4. Almost all work seen had slides included. The written reviews, though more full than in the past, rarely fully matched MB3.

Centre Performance

In general, there was evidence in many centres of a good grasp of assessment standards and the best format for submitting assessment evidence.

Logs have definitely improved in many centres and are taken seriously.

The weaker logs seen tended to use the original proforma from the website, which was limiting, as some students appeared to think that the log should not extend beyond this single sheet. The use of extra tables is to be encouraged as an extension to the original proforma.

A number of centres were still encouraging the 'series of book/web review' approach to the literature review, and not guiding students towards a thorough synthesis of research sources.

Most centres provided separate evaluations rather than conflating them with the conclusions.

Much work arrived on time. A small number of centres sent all the class notes, research material and drafts. There was a handful of missing EDIs and arithmetic errors, all of which were sorted quickly. A small number of centres entered work into the wrong unit or sent in work with multiple arithmetic errors.

P302 Investigation

Student Performance

This series there was only a small entry and most Centres only entered a couple of candidates. A number of interesting investigations were submitted. There was evidence of a taught skills course in most centres. Referencing has improved though there was still a lack of a structured Bibliography showing analysis of a wide range of types of 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 or 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. If students receive good guidance at the planning stages they can score highly in all areas.

Proposal forms were completed to a better standard, though the breakdown of tasks and assignment of milestones could have been fuller in many cases. 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. All projects fitted the expectations of Unit 2, however the quantity of raw data and detailed statistical analysis was still lacking.

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.

Assessment Evidence

There were some good Activity logs, though not all centres used the Edexcel form and some were too factual and brief. A thoughtful log can add marks in both AO1 and AO4. Questions/hypotheses were generally more focused but students should be discouraged from following projects that are too much of a single task. There must be an iterative development 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 organized, as if no tutor guidance was given in this area and they were predominantly web-based. 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 unanalyzed) 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. Some attempted t-tests or Spearman's correlation or similar and in the best an explanation of the results was given. 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. Students 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

Most centres are entering individual students in the January series. 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 most 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 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 Physics or Chemistry course.

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 small number of entries were seen this series, however this included a variety of types of work covering a range of performance disciplines along with sports events. The performance outcomes for the majority of students were fully realised. The responses seen this series confirm the unit provides the opportunity to serve an assortment of interests and abilities.

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.

Suitability of Work Submitted

This series saw mainly individual projects submitted, the most successful were those that were genuinely led by the project objectives and creative intentions, rather than 'fitting' a project to a current talent or interest. Where open enquiry was taking place and selection and rejection of ideas and techniques occurred as part of a rigorous process, all aimed at meeting the objectives, original and creative work was produced.

Assessment Evidence

A range of types of performance outcomes and events including music, theatre and sport was presented. The most effective work had a research focus as the title or was in the form of a clear commission brief with clear intentions and demands.

Again, some project titles would benefit from refinement, especially in regard to target audience or the genre of the performance outcome. In some cases, limited information was included on the project proposal form, giving little suggestion of how objectives would be met. 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 sufficiently confident to include primary research in the form of practical performance exploration as part of the student evidence.

Direct links between the research and the performance outcome were seen again this series which is encouraging. Some projects changed their intention during the process and where this is justified it should not necessarily have a negative effect on assessment.

Evidence of the consideration and exploration of alternative ideas still requires further encouragement, as this was often lacking in work. Again, we saw evidence that at times the performance material was not sufficiently challenging and again a focus on a research-based project could facilitate this.

Review and evaluation evidence varied, with the strongest work covering genuine critical thought linked to intentions.

Centre Performance

Not all students had been entered for the right unit. There was again some confusion between P303 and P304. It should be noted that although work may be captured on DVD or CD this does not make it an artefact. If the content relates to performance work, it should be entered under P303.

A majority of centre assessors used the language of the assessment criteria on the Candidate Record Sheets precisely, which supported the moderation process.

P304 Artefact

Student Performance

Overall centres entered individualised projects linked to the learners' skills and interests. Artefact outcomes submitted this series included ceramics, novels, go-karts, interactive displays and recorded albums of original music. 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, there was a tendency for these to offer less opportunity for individuals to achieve full coverage of the range of marks available. Challenging individual responsibilities had not always been identified from the outset and weaker learners fulfilled simple tasks, rather than completing a truly 'extended' project.

The creation of an opportunity for a process that genuinely allows for the full consideration of alternative techniques, materials or outcomes should be facilitated. This tended to prove more difficult for learners who had identified a project, without guidance, that was based on an existing hobby or interest. This seemed a particular issue when CDs or DVDs were the outcome. On these occasions artefacts were produced based on existing knowledge and skills and the opportunities to achieve marks for AO2 and AO3 were diminished.

Outstanding projects had a detailed design brief as their starting point. Successful briefs necessitated a challenging research phase; for instance genuinely innovative engineering projects that solved complex problems and a visual arts project that used a morally contentious issue as its stimulus. 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. It should be borne in mind that 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.

Suitability of work submitted

In the main, students correctly submitted photographs of the final artefact, rather than the artefact itself. As in previous series a minority of centres are still posting original bulky and/or fragile original artefacts. Working links to individual students' online evidence should be included in the individual portfolio, preferably on a disc or USB stick.

A very 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, investigation / field study or performances.

Assessment Evidence

AO1

Planning was lacking detail in some portfolios; timescales and resources were areas that often lacked thought. Project Proposal Forms can 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. The activity logs were sometimes over-rewarded lists of actions, with little reference to on-going planning and management and the steps taken to overcome any problems.

AO2

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 criterion suggested. Some portfolios contained undigested downloaded material that cannot be rewarded. Analysis and opinion were almost lost in these downloads and centres should highlight the need to digest and interpret such data. Referencing and citation construction was variable and it was apparent where 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

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.

Sketchbooks, design 'journals' and photographs were often used effectively as a way to evidence the visual development of the making process. Musical recordings, DVDs and literary submissions sometimes lacked sufficient exploration of the development process to achieve coverage of the higher mark band descriptors.

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

AO4

Stronger responses included sophisticated summative evaluation, the completed Oral Presentation Record Form and a copy of well thought-out accompanying slides/handouts. At the lower end written evaluations were often brief and lacked genuine reflection on the initial idea and sophisticated self-assessment. There was again a tendency for centre assessment to focus on the students' presentation skills alone, rather than the full Review criteria.

Centre Performance

Most centres delivered a full sample with the relevant paperwork, including the work of the highest and lowest candidate.

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, but a significant number of centres are 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 supported the very varied interests and skills of the learners.

There were commendable examples of learners working to 'real' commission briefs set by external clients. However, at times more prescriptive and narrow briefs limited the learners' responses. Centres are encouraged to ensure that learners producing a project outcome for a client initially identify extensive research and development phases that will extend their breadth of knowledge, depth of understanding and/or level of skill.

