



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2017

Pearson Edexcel Projects P301

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P301 Examiner's Report

In general this is now a mature qualification with many returning centres which have taken on board guidance and have a very good understanding of the standard.

Student Performance

At the upper end we continue to see work of truly impressive depth and maturity, and there is a sound appreciation of the nature of an academic dissertation, which is in evidence even lower down the mark range.

The general standard of work has risen and the standard of centre administration and accuracy of marking is better. More students are choosing sensible topics which are challenging but not overly ambitious. A significant number of studies were seen that were mature in style and substance. The quality of work in the best dissertations is well beyond A level.

Suitability of work submitted

Weaker projects made less effective use of proposal forms and logs and tended to involve choice of titles that made it difficult to access Mark Band 3. For example, a title such as 'How has fashion changed?' is liable to lead to a descriptive answer, with limited engagement in argument.

It was common to see good structure, with contents pages, headings, sub-headings and page numbers. Centres may help students by pointing out the use of the 'Headings' tool in the Styles bar on Word, that stylizes headings and enables automatic creation of a contents page.

Assessment evidence

AO1

There are still some activity logs which contain solely single sentence entries. The best activity logs seen were reflective, providing evidence of ongoing management of the ideas being explored in the project and discussing problems and solutions.

Whilst inappropriate questions still occur, there are many appropriate ones. In projects which contain the strongest AO1 evidence, it is common for there to be a clearly recognizable process of refinement of the research question, until a clear focus for the project emerges.

The phrase 'To what extent...' tends not to be helpful, since it is difficult to make precise sense of the scale being assumed. Bolder titles are often better. Thus, 'Is stem cell research ethical?' is a better title than 'To what extent is stem cell research ethical?'

AO2

In the stronger dissertations, students wrote literature reviews in which they analysed, synthesized and evaluated sources. In weaker projects, students reviewed sources individually, and some students omitted a literature review entirely, or simply provided tables listing sources with evaluative remarks.

Whilst evaluation of sources is expected in literature reviews, this is not the sole purpose of the review. A literature review should contain an integrated study of the evidence base for the dissertation and appropriate contextualization (for example, through a chronological review of the development of the topic).

Centres should note that the focus of the literature review should be on the topics being explored in the dissertation; a literature review is not simply a collection of comments about the sources that have been read.

The quality of referencing remains variable. Centres are advised to guide students to use the automated bibliography builders that are available on word processors or through apps or websites that produce appropriately formatted citations when source details are entered.

A03

There is widespread appreciation of the need for dissertations to include argument and counter-argument, or the exploration of alternative possible answers to the research question.

This point needs to be borne in mind when students are setting the objectives for their project. Some students still opted for titles that led to factual reports (e.g. about the history of computer games) instead of open-ended questions that encourage discussion of alternative answers.

A04

This was generally a strong area though some projects were submitted that lacked written evaluation. Whilst in some cases evaluation formed part of the presentation, this wasn't always well done. Powerpoint slides alone tend to lack sufficient evidence of detailed, in-depth reflection.

The best reviews showed precise and deep understanding of the extent to which aims had been met, the limitations of the project, possible alterations and lessons learned. It is particularly impressive when a student puts their finger on exactly where the project's weaknesses lie (e.g. if they are able to identify problems with their choice of title, for instance).

Centre Performance

Administration of project samples was generally well done and punctuality was generally better.

There was evidence of data entry and / or arithmetic errors in some samples. A lack of evidence of internal moderation remains an issue. There were also some cases of projects belonging to other EPQ units being mixed in with dissertations at the point of submission.

Whilst mark record sheets were usually filled out in detail, there were cases in which projects themselves lacked any annotation. Brief annotation of the work is helpful.

Some centres supported students well, with feedback on their work; it was less successful when students were set the project as a totally independent piece of work, with little guidance.

Centres can and should assist students with the 'structural' features of dissertations, guiding them to include appropriate citations and bibliographies, evaluations of source reliability, argument and counter-argument and written evaluations of the project process.

