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Level 3

# Extended Project Qualification

7993 - EPQ

Report on the Examination

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7993

June 2018

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Version: 1.0

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Another busy period of moderation has brought the June 2018 series for the Extended Project Qualification to an end. Moderators have seen much excellent centre practice and many superb student outcomes. A clear majority of centres were assessing projects accurately and these centre marks were found to be in tolerance of the AQA standard. However moderators have also found some misunderstanding of the specification, some poor supervision and some submissions from students that have not supported achievement as high as that anticipated by the centre marks. This was generally because of insufficient focus on, or a lack of understanding of, the assessment objectives. For example, students in several centres referred to their work as an 'extended essay' as opposed to a formal report resulting from a research process. These centres sometimes encouraged candidates to start writing the 'essay' early, sometimes even suggesting that students should divide the planning into sections, researching a bit and then writing this up and then moving on to the next bit of research and then writing this up, etc. This frequently resulted in fragmented reports with a lack of assimilation or developed conclusions.

It must be stressed that the Extended Project Qualification is process-based; it seeks to develop high-level skills. Assessment objectives refer to skills and assessment criteria refer to evidence of skill development that is found within a student's project submission.

### **Taught Skills**

Most centres were found to have good Taught Skills programmes in place.

The best Taught Skills programmes taught a variety of skills and let students choose the approaches to report writing, referencing and source evaluation, for example, that suited their own individual projects. However, in centres where students were directed to use a specified writing frame for the report, or a centre-designed 'source evaluation' table, for example, this did not usually prove to be helpful to students.

Some centres were delivering Taught Skills on an individual basis. This did not happen often but when it did it seemed that there was a greater risk of the supervisor falling into the trap of over-direction, especially when the supervisor was a specialist in the subject of the student's project.

### **Proposal**

At proposal stage there were some concerns. Sometimes supervisors were writing statements in Proposal part B such as "This is related to X's study of A level Y" without explaining how it extended beyond the confines of that particular A level. This sometimes raised dual accreditation concerns. Centres are reminded that students can gain no credit for content that forms part of a specification followed by them in another level 3 qualification, even if they have not yet been taught this content.

Sometimes supervisors stated clearly that the proposed work would be a genuine extension (and the plan was initially to do just that). However, at the end of the research process there had sometimes been a compromise made and some students, at times, ended up with a project that did not extend very much beyond their A Levels.

Several Psychology projects were seen that were essentially copies of studies carried out by previous researchers. This did not provide the students with much opportunity for 'extension' or independent decision-making.

Some proposals were approved without an evaluated and ethically sound research base having been established. This included proposed topics such as prostitution, LGBTQ, drug abuse and

possible drug legalisation, etc. where primary research was proposed by the student without any consideration of safeguarding and ethics.

By contrast there were many centres with a rigorous approval process in place with supervisors and coordinators working hard to challenge the student at this crucial early stage in the project process.

### **Production Logs**

The use of the AQA Production Log was variable. There was a clear divide between the centres using the Log effectively to develop evidence of process and those whose students considered filling in the Log to be just another tedious task from which they would derive little benefit. There remained a clear correlation between the effectiveness of completion of the Logs and the quality of outcomes. The quality of completion of the Log by the students identifies those centres that have a deep understanding of EPQ and of the central contribution of the Log to the evidence of process. Such centres largely were found to apply the assessment criteria accurately to provide marks that were well within moderation tolerance.

In many other centres, students added only minimal and descriptive detail to their Logs. Such centres usually considered planning to consist only of setting some target deadlines and too often these were set by the supervisors. It should be reiterated strongly in the Taught Skills programme that effective planning has a qualitative dimension and that meeting deadlines is an important but not all-pervasive aspect of planning. Many students did not have clear objectives so it was difficult to find monitoring against them.

Many handwritten Logs were submitted this series. These were rarely sufficiently detailed and they almost always contributed to instances where AO1 marks could not be awarded in the top band, despite the fact that the projects are marked holistically.

In some centres the Log entries were brief and other documents were submitted as substitutes. This is not good practice and where students choose to write a research journal, blog or diary they should be encouraged to use this as an 'aide memoire', to help them fully complete the AQA Production Log, and not to write the journal, diary or blog as a substitute.

It was disappointing to find that some Production Logs had clearly been written retrospectively. Once a page in the Log is completed, it should be dated and no further editing should take place. Supervisors should be monitoring the Log book completion.

### **Research**

Most projects sampled researched their topics, but in variable depth. The quality of evidence for AO2 was probably the most obvious divider of the good, average and poor projects. The best students selected only sources that were highly relevant to their work, evaluated and recorded them assiduously and referenced their work precisely. At this top-end, the candidates researched from a wide-ranging portfolio of academic articles, both from the internet such as JSTOR as well as from written texts and journals, often having visited university libraries. The most able students fully evaluated their sources, in terms of bias, cross-referencing and consideration of when they were published but many less highly achieving students did not critically evaluate their sources. Far too often research appeared to comprise carrying out some sort of internet search and recording the hits by copying and pasting URLs, often long and convoluted, into the student's work. Such searches were rarely supported by evidence of evaluation. Many students felt that media alone (such as newspapers and videos) were good enough resources for their topic so resulted in using sources that did not reflect the higher level of working expected by this level 3 qualification.

Source evaluation tables were being used by some students instead of a bibliography or reference list. These 'source evaluations' often lack reasons for the judgements made, for example - "it is reliable", "it is out of date".

References were not always being completed effectively, with a lot of missing data. Websites were missing access dates and books were missing publishers and dates.

There are some centres who seem to believe that it is essential for projects submitted for this qualification to include primary data. This is not the case. Some rather pointless surveys were seen by moderators. Some students prioritised primary research (a questionnaire or an interview) as the major part of their research but the data thus collected were not analysed well nor applied to the discussion. These projects were often undertaken without any secondary research at all or maybe a very little. This does not constitute 'a wide range of relevant resources' and a top band mark in AO2 was thus not attainable.

In many cases, students who clearly found undertaking the qualification more challenging often failed to reference a range of sources and did not evaluate them fully.

## **Reports**

Many excellent reports were seen, both as long 5000-word products but also as shorter reports, written to underpin artefacts.

For some students little synthesis was found within their reports because they included a 'literature review' that was separate from the discussion of issues. The use of literature reviews, if used to gain an overview of the field to be studied, and not as discussion of the reliability and validity of the individual resources to be used, is acceptable. However, much inappropriate use of report sections entitled 'literature review' has been seen by moderators. The use of 'literature review' seems to be extending beyond the social science context with which it is normally associated into a range of contexts including literature and history. Some candidates are considering only how useful sources were to them, rather than the literature being reviewed critically to develop the argument in question.

Some students decided to use 'chapter' divisions. This sometimes produced a sectionalised effect which did not support a gradually unfolding debate. What is required of a report is to set up sections which show the unfolding debate that the resource analysis has revealed. Once a report has been sectionalised this can easily lead to a lack of synthesis.

Some centres appeared to encourage a mixture of personal narrative and academic discussion within reports and this was not usually successful. In some cases this resulted in conclusions that were not evidence-based and students sometimes could not resist using their conclusions to expound their personal beliefs and opinions.

## **Artefacts**

Moderators saw many artefacts this series, many of which were exceptional but some were disappointing for the following reasons:

- the research undertaken by students was sometimes all about how to make the artefact, there was little context or theory considered at any point

- the written reports were often too brief and some did not show in depth the research into the topics that the artefacts had been designed around
- sometimes reports described what had been done, step by step; these reports did not evaluate the artefact
- supervisors were often over-impressed by the resulting artefacts (which were possibly outside their subject area) and marked them too highly, often crediting ‘hard work’, ‘effort’, ‘a good achievement for this student’.

In summary, students producing artefacts did not always show full details of their planning and monitoring, resources used were often few and students did not evaluate their progress or the finished artefact itself.

### **Presentation**

In many centres presentation evidence was extremely useful and carefully recorded with supervisors asking project-specific questions that enabled candidates to show high level of knowledge, reflection and evaluation of the topic and the process and to develop/refine interesting conclusions.

At presentation stage, however, there were various areas of concern:

- many centres failed to provide adequate Q&A evidence in Presentation Record B. Some just recorded a bland statement that the candidate ‘dealt well with a number of questions’ or stated a couple of questions but provided no evidence of the actual candidate answers
- some centres only asked their candidates pre-scripted process questions
- some centres record nothing in the Log and attach a DVD of the presentation. In such an instance valuable presentation evidence is effectively lost since moderators do not have time to play and watch these recordings
- some candidates had written up their own Presentation Record B page in the Log.

### **Assessment**

Marking by supervisors was found to be variable. Sometimes this variability existed within a centre, with some supervisors demonstrating a clear understanding of the standard whilst others demonstrated very little understanding:

- sometimes supervisors do not appear to have read the context paragraphs before the detailed assessment criteria in the specification, and seem to feel that if a skill is evidenced once it can merit a mark towards the top of a band, rather than where and when it ‘is judged to meet the criteria readily, consistently and across the different elements of the project’
- some supervisors seemed not to have read the assessment criteria and awarded marks based on their perceptions of the candidates rather than work presented
- sometimes the full scope of each AO was not addressed by supervisor comments and ‘cut and paste’ supervisor comments were in evidence in some centres

- in some centres no evidence was found of internal moderation. Where internal moderation had taken place some centres gave insufficient justification for changes made to marks.

There was some misunderstanding evident from some supervisors of the criteria for AO1, especially for the top band. The principal source of over-marking was placing work in the top band on evidence that was lacking in one or most respects; the reasoning seemed to be that the work was completed so planning must have taken place. Some supervisors gave high marks for timetables and Gantt charts and did not seem to realise that the student also needed to show how and why they decided what to research and what to include/exclude etc. Sometimes supervisors rewarded effort that they had presumably seen during the course of the research period but which was not tangibly documented.

Marking of AO2 was sometimes over generous because despite the submission of a bibliography there was little compelling evidence that sources had actually been used:

- a significant number of students were given high AO2 marks for using a limited number of sources
- supervisors did not always consider the presence of critical analysis or, indeed, analysis of any variety required to access the top band for AO2
- some supervisors were unduly impressed by long lists of sources even when there was no selection or validation evidence or even much referencing
- consideration of source validity in terms of provenance and reliability was frequently missing

Marking of AO3 was sometimes over-generous when a student had submitted little evidence of planning, development or decision-making thus it was impossible neither to judge if their plan had been implemented nor discern when and why decisions had been made. There were many excellent 5000-word reports submitted, but not all of them were well-supported by evidence of process. This lack of process evidence was often ignored by supervisors at assessment; the marking for AO3 had clearly been based on the quality of the report only. Some supervisors over-marked descriptive outcomes, others failed to recognise that a student had not produced a coherently argued outcome to the question posed in their title.

The evidence for AO4 was consistently the strongest offered by students. Moderators saw many projects in which the student offered only weak evidence for AO1, 2 and 3, but identified the strengths and weaknesses in their work and delivered evidence-based conclusions. The weakest factor in AO4 was identification of skills developed. Students invariably reported that they missed their deadlines, but that their organisational and time-management skills had improved. Many also considered that their presentational skills had developed, the EPQ presentation often being the first time they had been required to present anything orally. However, very few students identified that their high-level skills had been developed, even where the evidence presented showed clearly that they had.

### **Administration**

It would help the moderation process a great deal if moderators did not need to contact centres asking them to correct administrative errors:

- centre declaration sheets were frequently missing

- many projects had not been properly signed and dated by either or both of the candidate and supervisor
- moderators frequently reported errors in centre addition and /or mark entry
- in many cases inadequate evidence of artefact products was submitted so the quality of the product could not be fairly judged.

Submission materials continue to be variable. On the one hand many centres are encouraging neat, concise submissions. On the other hand some centres allow candidates to append much extraneous material to their project submission, frequently using awkward and unnecessary poly-pockets. However most of the work moderated was submitted in an appropriate format, secured with treasury tags or the equivalent but some centres continue to submit projects in either bulky folders or in plastic wallets with the individual pages not secured together.

To end this report on the high note that this qualification deserves. Moderators have seen much exceptional work from students and some truly excellent centre practice. As an example, one centre had the Taught Skills programme timetabled with visiting speakers/experts involved. It had 15 members of staff working as supervisors, all of whom signed the Centre Declaration Sheet. There was clear evidence of supervisors supporting and challenging candidates throughout the project process. Presentations involved staff, governors and other students; presentations were given significant status and time. Five probing questions were asked of and answered by each candidate with all Q&A recorded in the Log. Highly detailed mark comments and annotation and thorough internal moderation were in evidence.

Centres are reminded that AQA provides free face-to-face Teacher Standardisation events twice a year. Moreover there are online Teacher Online Standardisation materials available via the AQA T-OLS system. These materials relate exclusively to artefact projects but the principles of applying the assessment criteria are identical for both artefact and non-artefact projects.

Centres are also reminded that they have an AQA appointed Project Adviser. If any centre does not know the name or contact details for their adviser they should contact AQA. Advisers will not approve titles for centres but they will provide excellent advice with respect to the delivery of this specification.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

### **Converting Marks into UMS marks**

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)