



LEVEL 3

EXTENDED PROJECT

Extended Project L3
Report on the Examination

7993
November 2021

Version: 1.0

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After a year without any moderation, it was great to be back to 'business as usual' for the Extended Project. Moderators have been very busy throughout November. Much admiration has been expressed for the way most centres had successfully delivered the qualification, despite the inevitable pressures caused by the pandemic. Very effective remote delivery of the specification was frequently seen. Many students produced work of a very high standard, showing clear development of a range of skills. In a clear majority of centres, the standard of the qualification was fully understood and accurate application of the assessment criteria statements to the evidence submitted by students resulted in marking that fell closely in line with the AQA standard. Moderators noticed, whilst undertaking moderation, that most centres had been consistent, both in their assessment and in the delivery of the EPQ. Indeed, in general, a real improvement in standards of projects and administration has been noted. It was a privilege for moderators to read some exceptional project submissions from some very talented students.

Topic Choice:

The project proposal and approval process, whilst excellent in many centres was not satisfactory in others: some Centre Coordinators approved very vague topics and ideas as working titles, with minimal evidence of availability of appropriate research materials/any scope for analysis. Moreover, some final titles were seen this series that did not encourage the skills that this qualification seeks to develop. Some titles were seen that encouraged description; others invited speculation. Some supervisors seemed to think that the EPQ report offers an opportunity to express student opinions, and research should only be sought to find 'facts' to support these opinions; in one project seen, a supervisor even advised a student not to make their work 'too dry and research-based' and to show their personality. However, it must be emphasised that in most centres a robust approval process was in evidence; topics had been carefully thought about and encouraged the skills of critical reading and analysis that this qualification seeks to develop.

Supervision:

Many supervisors demonstrated great skill during supervision of projects. They encouraged students but resisted the temptation to over-direct the projects, they did not suggest resources or skills to use, and they did not seek to influence the product outcome. However, there were instances seen of subject-specialist supervisors taking decisions for students that ultimately reduced the opportunities for the students to evidence their own selection of sources and/or of skills to use in their project. It is understood that in small centres it is not always possible for supervisors to avoid projects undertaken in their personal areas of expertise, but it is important that such supervisors do not reduce student autonomy by offering too much subject-specific advice and guidance.

Whilst most supervisors used Presentation part B to great effect, providing valid additional evidence that could contribute to assessment there were some very scanty Presentation Part Bs seen, especially with regard to Q&A, with questions either minimal or generic. This is a real wasted opportunity.

Student evidence:

In some centres the use of 'EPQ templates' resulted in rather formulaic submissions: apparently detailed Production Logs were submitted - but they were full of general comments rather than

comments specific to what the student was doing and how their research was driving decisions and changes. What is required is evidence of key planning, management and decision making, rather than the somewhat unfocused streams of consciousness that were found in some submissions. The prime use of the AQA Production Log should be to chart concisely and clearly a student's unique EPQ 'journey'. In some cases, long and wordy pages in a Production Log were completed but they could have been written for any project because there were no references at all to the specifics of the student's actual project.

Conversely, many Production Logs were treated somewhat perfunctorily, in favour of centre-inspired appendices of all sorts. This did not always result in well-communicated planning, monitoring and decision-making

Some students were using the planning review in the Production Log to set out essay plans rather than project plans. Students should be reminded that the planning of a report should be undertaken after research has been undertaken, indeed it should be research that drives the student decisions about the wording of the final title. The Production Log is designed so that the Mid-project review should take place once the bulk of the research has been completed and this page in the Log specifically requires the statement of the (research-driven) final title.

A number of poorly thought-out attempts at primary research were seen, such as asking six peers their views on diplomatic immunity or asking teenagers in the UK whether attitudes towards racial minorities in the USA have changed in the last 30 years. The issues of consent, risk assessment, reliability of data and other important issues were never raised by many students undertaking primary research. Some primary research was seen which would potentially cause safeguarding issues, e.g. asking peers about their mental health in relation to social media. Whilst some centres understood the responsibility of safeguarding, we saw a student interviewing a school child about their mental health during lockdown, parental consent had not been sought, no proper consideration of the potential harm that could be done by such an interview, including disclosure, had been considered. It must be stressed that there is no requirement within the specification that students should undertake primary research.

There was sometimes a very brief mention made by a student of the need to evaluate sources in the Production Log, but on completion there was nothing submitted by the student to evidence this. In other cases, analysis and evaluation of sources was in evidence but not at a critical level. Quite a number of students seem to confuse 'Evaluation' and 'Utility'. Some students incorporated literature reviews to good effect, but others used them to pad out a thin report. In the majority of cases the inclusion of a literature review proved to be a poor decision because students did not appear to understand how to write one.

A lot more unreferenced and partially/scantily referenced work was seen than usual. Such practice inevitably affects marks in both AO2 and AO3.

Some highly dubious artefacts were submitted this series. In some cases, these were 'add-ons' to a report with no apparent purpose or link to any research. One student wrote a 5,000-word report on the impact of the Beatles on American youth culture and then recorded a medley of their songs as an artefact they wished to "add" to their submission. In other cases, moderators saw an 'I'm being inspired by...' idea, with little to no research basis, especially as to format, e.g. creative writing, music or documentaries, where only the content was researched as inspiration. In several cases accrediting hobbies for artefact projects was encouraged and students just seemed to make something for the fun of it, there was little real purpose or research. By contrast some truly

excellent artefact projects were submitted achieving very high marks in all four assessment objectives.

Large numbers of 'To what extent...' titles were submitted with varying degrees of success. Many students failed to set out clearly the criteria by which 'extent' would be measured or judged.

The reflection of many students was disappointingly brief, but one excellent comment was seen that it is worth sharing:

"If you fail to plan, your EPQ journey will be needlessly difficult".

Assessment:

The standard of assessment was variable. Some very lenient marking of projects that evidenced few skills was seen. There were instances of significant over-marking of projects with students presenting thin Production Logs and research of insufficient range, depth and criticality. AO1 in particular seemed to be misunderstood by some supervisors. Over marking of AO1 was a common theme where there was lack of detail in the Production Log. Supervisors thought that a diary would be enough or a list of dates to show what students had done. Too much credit was given by some supervisors in AO2 for thin research, little referencing and evaluation tables with scores out of 10 for usefulness.

Credit was sometimes awarded without submitted evidence to support it. It must be stressed that credit can only be awarded for explicit and relevant evidence. Sometimes reasons relating to hard work or effort were given to support inappropriate high marks and centres are reminded that all marks must be awarded by comparison of submitted evidence to the assessment criteria. It should also be noted that the assessment criteria do not suggest that student opinion is creditworthy. There was a trend within some centres to over-credit their Year 12 students. Many of these students had produced good work but it lacked the maturity and depth to justify the very high marks that had been awarded.

Some inconsistent marking was found within centres, despite having internal moderation procedures in place. This was particularly evident where large numbers of supervisors were supervising just one or two projects each.

The JCQ instructions that govern the EPQ are still not fully understood. Proof reading by friends or relatives was positively encouraged by some centres but marks were not adjusted to acknowledge this additional assistance. Please note JCQ instruction 2.7: " If a student requires additional assistance.....the teacher **must** award a mark which represents the student's unaided achievement..."

However, it must be stressed that most projects moderated this series were found to have been marked closely in line with the AQA standard.

Administration:

Whilst it was understood that centres have been under immense pressure dealing with COVID-19 there were many issues with poor presentation of projects, incorrect student numbers on work, incorrect marks entered, and various other issues that required moderators to contact centres.

Whilst most projects submitted were concise, well-organised and easy to handle there were some centres submitting materials in excess of 100 pages for each project. It was also disappointing to see some submissions arrive as piles of loose sheets inside a plastic polypocket. Centres are reminded that the use of treasury tags or staples is preferred and that every page should include the student details. Report pages should be numbered.

Only a few centres omitted to send a completed Centre declaration sheet.

In terms of rubric infringement only a few instances were seen.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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