LEVEL 1/2 FOUNDATION/HIGHER PROJECT QUALIFICATIONS

7991/7992: Level 1/Level 2 Project Qualifications
Report on the Examination

7991 and 7992
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General

It is pleasing to note that the entry numbers for both the Foundation and Higher Projects were significantly higher than for previous years. Moderators saw a wide variety of projects with, at the top end some quite exceptional submissions, and elsewhere much evidence that students had both enjoyed and benefitted from completing their projects. Popular themes explored by students included Artificial Intelligence, climate change, feminism and serial killers – although those exploring the latter frequently submitted restricted and broadly descriptive accounts of a number of such individuals. Also popular were titles exploring some variety of 'rights-based issues'.

Moderators noted that, in some cases, students had been entered for the Higher Project whereas an entry for the Foundation Project would have been appropriate. These students failed to produce the evidence necessary to achieve a Grade C pass for the Higher Project and therefore failed to achieve an award.

An understanding of the key role played by the AQA Production Log in evidencing the project process seemed a key determinant in terms of the quality of the project outcome. Effective centres evidenced a clear understanding of the qualification and recognised the crucial role played by the Log in evidencing process. In other centres, however, it appeared that the importance of the Log had not been recognised and, in these, entries were minimal and descriptive, failing to provide evidence for AO1 (Manage) and AO4 (Review). Students should be encouraged to use their Logs to provide detailed and reflective comments.

A small proportion of projects seen at moderation were artefact-based projects. In a number of cases centres appeared not to have consulted an up-to-date version of the Specification and informed their students that the word count for the accompanying written report should not exceed 250 words (Foundation Project) or 500 words (Higher Project). The Specification (section 2.5.1) states that, 'Where the chosen product is an artefact there must also be a research based written report of a **minimum** of 250 words (Foundation Project) or 500 words (Higher Project)'.

Very few instances were seen in this series of centres 'requiring' students to evidence primary research as well as the use of secondary sources as a means of conducting their research. The Specification does not require this. It would be expected that centres would include the teaching of primary research methods in their Taught Skills delivery, as well as a consideration of their limitations, but the choice of what might be appropriate methods for a particular project should be made by the student.

The report that follows comments upon key issues noted by moderators following their work this summer.

Administration

In the great majority of cases centres submitted marks promptly via e-submissions, and in many cases, in advance of the May 15th 'deadline'. Unlike in previous series few centres delayed sending the required sample of Projects to their moderator and this was helpful to the moderation team. Conversely, there were a few centres where the despatch of the required sample of projects was greatly delayed. There were only a few instances of centres failing to submit the required Centre Declaration Sheet.

Moderators noted that Projects from some centres were poorly organised, consisting of loose pages, and often with an absence of centre and student numbers. Centres are reminded that the pages of the Project should be attached with a treasury tag and that both the centre and candidate numbers should be entered on the cover sheet and the student number and name shown on each page of the submission. Please do not submit projects in plastic wallets or document wallets as these delay moderation.

Whilst, in the majority of cases, marking was accurate, moderators were concerned that in a few centres, large adjustments to centre marks were necessary. In the centres where this occurred it was usually the case that supporting comments on the Record of Marks sheets were cursory and there was an absence of evidence for the internal standardisation of marking. Where more than one person is involved in the marking of the projects, it is a requirement that the 'centre coordinator standardises marking within the centre to make sure that all students at the centre have been assessed to the same standard' (Specification Section 2.5.4). Where Centre Coordinators, in conducting the internal moderation of marking, make changes to original marks it would be helpful if the reasons for these changes might be clearly explained.

It is also a requirement that 'Supervisors ... show clearly how the marks have been awarded in relation to the marking criteria defined in the specification' (Specification 2.5.4) with two approaches being permissible, either 'key pieces of evidence flagged throughout the work by annotation', or 'summative comments on the work, referencing precise sections of the work' (Specification 2.5.4). In signing the Centre Declaration Sheet, the centre coordinator is confirming that these processes are in place.

Centres should be aware that the completion of projects is covered by the requirements of the JCQ Instructions for conducting coursework document. Reference is made to guidance relating to the need to avoid plagiarism, but centres should also be aware of the need to ensure that guidance to students is at a general level only. Instances were seen, in a small minority of cases, where this advice might not have been fully understood by centres. It is incumbent upon centres offering the Foundation and Higher Project qualifications to ensure that they are fully conversant with the JCQ regulations regarding the conduct of coursework.

Project Approval

A number of centres were not using the Project Approval process sufficiently robustly. Project Proposals were being approved where there was a lack of evidence for the student having identified suitable sources. There were instances of students identifying 'Internet', 'books' or 'Google' as their intended sources and this was not challenged by either the Supervisor or the Centre Coordinator. Students should not move to the completion of the Project Proposal until they have identified several suitable sources. Often titles that were approved were too broad in scope and here it would be expected that Supervisors would challenge students to consider this aspect of their title before completing the Project Proposal. More prominent this series were titles being approved that inevitably led to a broadly descriptive outcome. The marking of these projects generally indicated a centre that did not understand the nature of the Project qualifications, often with an attempt to award marks for the Project on the basis of the perceived quality of the Project outcome (which was frequently seen to be an 'essay'). Such centres did not serve their students well.

Assessment Objectives

Most submissions evidenced a sound understanding of the Assessment Objectives. There were, however, a few instances, and these were mostly centre specific, where some of the assessment objectives appeared not to be fully understood.

AO1 - Manage

Students who performed well in terms of this objective had fully understood the need for a carefully completed Log. Entries in these Logs were both detailed and reflective, and evidenced how students responded to Supervisor guidance. At the Initial Ideas stage, these projects evidenced the choice of topic and title, set out aims and considered a number of potential sources.

At the Planning Review stage a time-referenced plan was established showing how the student proposed both researching and producing the project outcome. The Mid Project Review, conducted at the completion of the research phase of the project, confirmed the agreed project title and product. In completing the Log, high-performing students evidenced how they responded to supervisor guidance, how their plan might have evolved in the light of the research carried out or problems they encountered. It is evident here that a well-completed Log also contributes to the evidencing of AO3 Develop & realise, as well as AO4 Review.

It was of concern that a few students changed to a completely new topic after their original title had been approved. In such cases a fresh Proposal should be submitted.

A number of Logs inspected contained only restricted entries. Little detail was provided relating to the choice of title, aims were poorly expressed or were absent, and entries beyond this point were brief. Moderators noted that restricted Logs of this type were common across a centre entry, indicating a misunderstanding by the centre of the importance of the Log. Sometimes centres appeared to have encouraged students to complete a 'diary' logging all project activities and seeing this as a 'replacement' for the AQA Log. Centres should recognise that entries in these diaries generally only record what has been done and are not 'forward looking'.

AO2 - Use resources

Moderators expressed concern at the small, but significant, number of centres where students, whilst (usually) providing a bibliography, submitted reports either completely or largely without referencing. The JCQ Instructions for conducting coursework set out specific requirements for the referencing of material from both printed sources and the internet, and specify that a bibliography is required and that this must list the full details of publications used to research and support their coursework, even when these are not directly referred to in the report. Where such deficiencies are evident it is not possible for students to evidence satisfying the criteria for AO2. For students entered for the Level 2 Higher Project it is expected that they will also seek to evidence how they were able to evaluate the sources that they employed. More centres are encouraging their Level 2 students to create source evaluation grids, although it was noted that in some cases students use these to assess the utility of sources rather than attempting a fuller evaluation. However, it was seen that more centres were encouraging students to apply the CRAAP (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy and Purpose) test when evaluating their sources.

AO3 – Develop & realise

Reference has already been made to descriptive reports and these were frequently over-marked by centres, thus displaying a misunderstanding of the Project qualification. Moderators also noted reports containing evidence of the Project process that had already been evidenced elsewhere in the submission, such as a discussion of how and why the topic was chosen. Also noted were reports that did not evidence the student's aims being met, or even there being clear evidence for Project aims.

AO4 – Review

Many well-organised and quite detailed Summary and reflection pages were seen in student submissions, having a balance between both product and process. However, it was noted that many students might have produced fuller accounts of the skills that they developed in their Projects. In some cases, centre marking greatly over-rewarded students who provided only very brief comments in the Summary and refection page and a paucity of evidence elsewhere in their submission e.g. elsewhere in the Log or in the Presentation evidence.

Specification requirements

Many sound artefact-based projects were submitted this series. However, in a few cases, it seemed to moderators that some students might have been encouraged to 'choose' an artefact-based project concentrating upon the 'making' or 'building' aspect of the undertaking to the detriment of the appropriate evidencing of the project process. These submissions often failed to evidence students recognising the need for their project to be research-based, with a clearly defined 'audience' and allowing for an independent assessment of the 'success' of the outcome.

Moderators were encouraged by the evidence showing a good understanding by students of the use of the presentation to 'tell the story' of their project, rather than just present information about what they had 'found out about', and by supervisors of the opportunity to ask focused questions of students to elicit additional evidence for assessment.

Conclusion

Despite the issues discussed above moderators saw many successful Projects, that bore testament to the hard work and enthusiasm of students. There has been good centre practice in the clear majority of cases and the hard work undertaken by both Centre Coordinators and Supervisors must be acknowledged in what, in many respects, have been less than ideal circumstances.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.