



LEVEL 3 EXTENDED PROJECT QUALIFICATION

7993

Report on the Examination

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This first June series since 2019 has seen great variation, both in the application of assessment criteria and in the general centre delivery of the qualification. On the one hand many centres have evidently continued to offer their students the fantastic opportunities that the qualification provides; students were well supervised, were taught appropriate skills and worked independently on their own unique projects, often with superb results. On the other hand moderators have seen poor supervision, weak or non-existent Taught Skills programmes and rubric infringements. Project submission and centre administration has varied from excellent to unacceptable. Inevitably this report will point out areas where misunderstandings were observed, but it must be stressed that the majority of centres were found to have assessed students' work within moderation tolerance, submitting work in exemplary fashion.

It was disappointing to moderators that despite repeated reports listing common centre practices that would be best avoided, these practices continued.

Rubric infringements were seen during the series and it was noted that the “*Please note that the failure to complete or submit a compulsory element may result in a mark of zero being awarded*” found on the Submission checklist (completed by supervisors) within the Production Log had been ignored by some centres. There are four compulsory items listed and unless all are included within a submission it cannot be assessed. The most common rubric infringement seen was failure to deliver a live presentation, but some projects had been submitted without a research-based written report. In cases where these infringements were discovered the mark awarded was zero.

Failure to comply with the specification requirement to avoid Dual Accreditation was, unfortunately, also seen rather frequently. A student cannot gain credit within the Extended Project Qualification for content that can be found within a specification of a Level 3 qualification being studied by the student, even where they have not yet been taught that content.

Failure to follow the JCQ instructions that this qualification is bound by was also seen too frequently. The most common infringements included:

- Plagiarism by the student
- Students receiving assistance from other students during production of the project (e.g. peer proofreading)
- Students receiving additional assistance (beyond the acceptable supervision provided by the supervisor) from either the supervisor or others without a record being made of the assistance and without account of the assistance being taken during assessment. For example, it was sometimes intimated in Production Logs that draft reports had been formally marked prior to submission.

It was evident that some students had submitted a project that did not take them 90 hours to complete.

A substantial number of centres were seen that reduced student autonomy by delivering the qualification in a highly structured fashion. Typically students in such centres were given examples of A* projects from previous series and were expected to follow a centre-devised template for success. From such centres the submissions were typically:

- Large, containing very similar and numerous appendices
- Lacking in individuality
- Template driven, with reports following an identical structure, source evaluation provided in an identical table, presentations following a centre-devised structure, etc.

Supervision of projects was variable, much excellent challenging supervision was seen. However over-guidance and over-specific feedback on draft reports by some supervisors was reported by moderators; there were a number of projects seen with significant supervisor influence, with a prescriptive format, students being told what to research or include in their project and/or how to change their title.

Project Approval

Scrutiny of students' proposals varied from excellent and thorough to scant. Where proposals did not receive suitable scrutiny and challenge topics were approved that often resulted in poorly focused projects. There were many titles seen which were too broad/far-reaching for students to tackle within the time and word expectations of the EPQ. Some titles were approved that could only result in a descriptive response, others contained subjective terms. Some topics were approved with insufficient evidence of there being enough research material available to students. Many titles beginning with 'To what extent' were seen with little or no consideration if or how extent will be measured.

Many Proposal part C pages were submitted without any comments; there was no evidence that any form of proposal scrutiny had occurred. In other cases 'copy and paste' coordinator comments were found at Proposal Part C with no personalisation. Frequently titles were approved without any indication of prior research. A lack of understanding that this is a research-based qualification was seen rather frequently; in some centres students had seemingly been approved to do pretty much what they liked without any challenge.

There were some inappropriate proposals approved such as a student acknowledged by the supervisor to be a young person 'with experience in mental health issues' being allowed to pursue the title 'Is social media making suicide appealing for young people?'. Moderators reported many concerns related to safeguarding.

A number of centres appeared to think that a 'creative' project with an artefact product would be a good way to showcase a student's writing or painting talent. The resulting artefacts were usually not firmly based on research and were untested on readers or viewers to establish fitness for purpose.

Taught Skills

Delivery of Taught Skills was very variable. Some superb programmes were seen, delivery of which had equipped students well. However in many cases skills were listed but evidence of their use was thin. From some Production Log entries it was clear that students had just been given hand-outs and access to some online resources. In other centres it became evident that Taught Skills were being delivered on a one-to-one basis, which gave the impression of 'as and when' the supervisor thought they were needed, as opposed to being seen as skills that were fundamental to the success of every research project as well as the additional benefits of group interaction when this teaching is delivered collectively. In many cases it appeared to be the case that far fewer than 30 hours were being allocated to the Taught skills programme.

Production Log

Many students were not making effective use of the Production Log to evidence their project journey. Other students went for a 'quantity' approach, often producing dense paragraphs of unfocused content, (which were then sometimes inappropriately awarded high marks by the centre for AO1).

Poor use of the Log was particularly evident with respect to planning, if it was evident at all, planning was only offered in general terms, e.g., "I have split my 'essay' into subsections". No indication of what students were actually researching was given nor how this was driving the development of the project. Generic Log pages were seen discussing Gantt charts, speed reading, Cornell note-taking etc, without any link being made between these skills and the student's unique project. There was evidence that many students completed their Production Log retrospectively.

Planning in terms of the 'essay' was often before there was any indication of research being carried out. In some centres titles were fixed from the start and without any indication of prior research. Project planning was then confused with 'essay planning'. This frequently resulted in students commencing the writing of their report very early, indeed in many cases students were seen to determine 'paragraphs' at Planning Review and then research to fill each paragraph, bit by bit. More than one centre had the students writing first drafts by the Planning Review stage and these were obviously not research led, but driven by student/supervisor ideas.

Source evaluation

Evidence of resource selection and evaluation was variable, in many cases source evaluation was merely mentioned in passing, but no detailed scrutiny was evidenced. Many students did not seem to understand the concept of source evaluation, often mistaking it for utility. Some students relied almost entirely on media sources, with apparently little idea that these might have any bias or political agenda.

A substantial number of centres indicated a specific number of sources to be found and evaluated but then the body of the report did not reference a good proportion of these sources but relied heavily on a small number of resources with little synthesis. This evidence of evaluation (often found within a table) was then used inappropriately by the supervisor to support a higher AO2 mark.

Primary research

Some centres were seen insisting on the collection of primary data when it was clear that it would be inappropriate and add little. Coupled with this some students collected data on socially sensitive issues and should have been advised against it. Examples of poor practice seen include interviewing teenagers about mental health issues and failing to anonymise data. Many students undertook primary research but barely analysed the results, often this was because it was not actually relevant to the focus of the report. There were very few examples of projects where primary research was used effectively and overall there was a misunderstanding of the requirements of primary research. Questionnaire evidence was frequently tagged onto the end of a report with a few graphs or pie charts, but these were often not referenced in the body of the report. There was rarely a clear rationale for the primary research or evidence that the devising of questions within a questionnaire had been research-led.

Presentation

Presentation evidence was also variable:

Good supervisors advised students to go beyond their report content in the presentation to consider aspects on the project as a whole, including for example their experience of research and divining the extent to which sources were reliable, commenting on how far evidence could be trusted. Good practice was seen from such supervisors in Presentation Part B, with a few questions selected from those asked for extended written records. These supervisors recognised the opportunity to support the evidence-base for students by asking about planning, research and the whole EPQ experience.

However, in many centres the supervisor completion of Presentation Part B in the Production Log offered little by way of assessment evidence. Some centres asked every student two content-based questions only, others asked solely generic questions that seemingly came from a 'question bank'. Many supervisors provided handwritten notes which were difficult to read.

Assessment

Assessment of projects was of variable quality. There was some very accurate marking from centres. The AQA marking criteria were referenced in 'Record of marks' comments; Logs and products were annotated clearly and indicated the band, sometimes, as well as the assessment objective.

A small number of centres were justifying the marks awarded "due to the impacts of the pandemic, Candidate XXXX did well" rather than using the evidence provided within the submission.

A lack of evidenced planning and monitoring for each aspect of the project: research, design schedules, report plans, presentations and any other aspects was the most common cause for low marks for AO1. A common error seen in the marking of AO1, involved good top band marks awarded by centres for AO1 on the basis that the students had 'met deadlines' set or 'worked hard'...the actual assessment criteria had apparently not been considered. In addition to this some centres failed to consider the appropriateness of the proposed project aims. Another aspect of AO1 overlooked by centres was where students with artefact products omitted to plan for any form of testing or evaluation of the completed artefact.

Some centres taught the evaluation of the credibility/reliability of sources eg using acronyms like RAVEN or CRAAP. This was good practice in that it helped students consider credentials, but some weaker students fell into a trap of justifying their use of a source at length without really analysing what the source was actually saying. Some centres over-credited AO2 when research was taken at face value; evidence of critical reading was absent.

Over-high marks for AO3 were frequently awarded to submissions with virtually no decision-making documented anywhere, and descriptive/opinionated reports not written in academic style or tone, sometimes not referenced or making use of many (good/appropriate) resources. Much unreferenced assertion was seen. Moreover, the relationship between AO1 and AO3 is still underappreciated by some centres.

There was a misunderstanding from some centres about AO4; high marks for AO4 were awarded citing the presentation as "superb" or "excellent" or "outstanding", with claims that students

reflected verbally maturely and in depth about their EPQ journey. Moderators duly scrutinised the presentation slides, plan and cue cards but found not a single word about this aspect of the qualification, not a single image, not a single question asked with a detailed written response. It must be stressed that assessment can only be made on the strength of submitted (hard copy) evidence.

Further misunderstanding with respect to AO4 was seen in the assessment of artefact projects. Many supervisors did not seem to understand the need for objective evidence from which success/fitness for purpose might be judged. Students had not been encouraged to plan for this evaluation (AO1) and no evidence-based conclusion could be drawn without it (AO4). Moreover many artefact projects were seen with a disconnect between the artefact and the accompanying report; the report might be generally related to the same 'topic' but with a different aim entirely. Artefact reports should show how fully referenced research (AO2) underpins every single design decision (AO3) related to the artefact.

Many record of marks pages contained very few comments. Some internal moderation was very effective and centres marks were brought into moderation tolerance, but ineffective internal moderation was seen; internal moderation appeared to be cursory with all marks agreed, no adjustments and no comments were made. Much internal moderation was seen without any evidential reasoning.

Administration

Moderators found themselves dealing with many administrative errors: There were a lot of errors regarding the marks awarded to projects and the marks entered by centres, including frequent addition errors on the 'Record of marks' page in the Production Log. Sometimes the 'Records of marks' total did not match the submitted mark.

An increasing tendency was observed of centres overlooking important administrative requirements (e.g. not providing names of supervisors on Approval part C, failure to check boxes regarding approval status, failure to identify the nature of project or whether it is part of a group project on the submission checklist, writing down incorrect final titles, failure to sign supervisor and /or candidate declarations, failure to provide a countersignature when the coordinator is also supervisor).

Many incorrect candidate numbers were found in Production Logs, so that moderators had to match the student name with the marks entered.

There were many missing Presentation Part B records which had to be requested by moderators.

Many centres failed to send a Centre Declaration Form with their sample.

These frequent administrative errors resulted in much moderator-centre correspondence

Candidate submissions

Provision of suitable evidence by students was variable:

- Many students failed to submit adequate evidence of their artefacts, so that quality of outcome was very difficult to judge. For artefacts students need to show development, progress and completion in clear detail. Some students seemed unaware of the JCQ prohibition of making their work available to others and uploaded their artefacts to YouTube or similar. This is not permitted practice. Any video or audio evidence should be submitted via USB.
- Presentation of hard-copy evidence was variable. Moderators found some centres submitting loose sheets in plastic poly pockets, frequently these loose sheets were without page numbers or candidate identification.
- Some students submitted far too much material and had failed to select appropriately. Some presented complete printouts of the whole of their Project Q folder, (some of these were 50 sheets of paper). Others included pages of highlighted articles to demonstrate research, diaries, multiple copies of questionnaires etc.
- Many students failed to consider that their evidence needed to be legible. Frequently slides, graphs, pie charts and illustrations were printed in black and white or were printed with a font size that was too small to read.
- Students in future cohorts could usefully be advised to give more consideration to:
 - Font size and line spacing;
 - Provision of a title/cover page;
 - Contents page (which, inter alia, should encourage pagination);
 - Consistent use of a (properly researched) reference system.

Looking forwards

Despite the various issues identified in this report it must be stressed that much excellent centre practice was seen. Moderators look forward to the next series in November. When this qualification is delivered well in a centre, the outcomes for the students can be truly breathtaking and moderators feel privileged to share the results of the students' EPQ research journeys.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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