LEVEL 3
EXTENDED PROJECT
QUALIFICATION

7993 Assessed
Report on the Examination

7993
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General

Another series has now been successfully concluded. Some truly exceptional projects have been moderated, and the moderation team feel privileged to have read and enjoyed this excellent work. Where a student has a really focussed interest, the results can be impressive. This was seen at its very best in those rare but extraordinary medical/scientific projects, and sometimes in historical/literary/sociological/psychological projects which reached the highest levels in all AOs. There have also been many spectacular artefact projects submitted this series.

It was pleasing to note that a large and improved majority of centres were awarded centre marks. The moderation team found a good understanding and application of the AQA assessment objectives and criteria by the centre staff. The evidence seen this series has reinforced the point that the way students are managed and supervised makes a significant difference. In some cases, one can almost feel the 'warmth' of the support. The positive relationship the supervisor has with the student really stands out.

However, there were a small minority of centres who do not yet appear to fully understand the standard of the qualification and most adjustments made to centre marks were downwards. A number of centres appeared to have little understanding of what the qualification involves, particularly the depth and level of research, and the level of detailed planning and monitoring required to access top band marks. Some Year 12 entries were made, and it was difficult for some of these students to demonstrate the mature analysis necessary to achieve highly in this Level 3 qualification.

As in previous series, there was a clear divide between the centres using the AQA Production Log effectively to develop evidence of process and those whose students appear to consider filling in the Log to be just a tedious task from which they 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 the qualification and of the central contribution of the Log to the evidence of process. Such centres largely apply the criteria accurately to provide marks that are well within tolerance. In many other centres, students add only minimal and descriptive detail to their Logs. There was also evidence in some centres of Logs being filled in retrospectively; this is not acceptable. However, it must be noted that those centres encouraging students to write several pages for each review in the Log were not helping their students achieve effective communication. Whilst both clarity and detail are required to obtain top band marks, concision should also be an aim.

This report will reflect the experiences of the moderators who have worked exceptionally hard, both in their moderation of projects but also in writing centre feedback. Centres are urged to read this feedback carefully since it will provide advice for improvements that can be made within centres to benefit future cohorts.

Project Approval

Some centres were not using the Project Approval stages robustly. Sometimes proposals without an identified research base were approved. In other cases the potential for dual accreditation was

not adequately checked. Projects were being approved that really should not have been, given the student's programme of study. Some centres were not supporting and challenging students sufficiently at approval stage. It was observed that where supervisors encouraged students to narrow the breadth of the initial topic, taking into account where really good sources could be found, the outcomes were generally better.

Whilst a wide range of topics were seen this series, quite a number of titles gazed into the future and speculated (especially with reference to Brexit and/or climate change), thus making the drawing of meaningful research-based conclusions very difficult. For example, 'How will Brexit impact the 37% of inadequate maternity services in the UK?'

Some centres were encouraging whole cohorts to insert 'To what extent…' in their titles as a means of encouraging analysis. Unfortunately, this did not always result in success. If 'extent' is included within a title it should be properly addressed within the report.

Many titles were submitted that were purely descriptive and offered little room for analysis. Others lacked focus, such as 'An investigation into…' or 'A brief history of…'.

Primary data

If primary data collection is considered by a student, the ethics of research including consent should be fully considered. For example, 'How does Down's Syndrome cause difficulties in growth and development?' was the title of a project for which the student interviewed people with Down's Syndrome and their carers. Students should be discouraged from carrying out such primary research with vulnerable groups. Similarly, centres need to be more wary of ethical and safeguarding considerations relating to primary research carried out on sensitive topics, particularly if involving young people and under 16s. There were many projects concerned with adolescent mental health / body image issues. Many of these involved some form of primary research (generally with peers but sometimes with younger children) which was ethically questionable. Whilst such topics are clearly of growing concern that deserves investigation this is an area in which centres need to be mindful of their safeguarding responsibilities. In some cases, supervisors gave advice to collect primary data when it was often unhelpful and potentially unethical, e.g. asking under 16-year olds about mental health issues.

A number of centres seemed to be under the impression that some sort of primary research evidence is a compulsory element of the qualification. This is not the case. Much of the primary research seen this series was too poorly conceived to be meaningful, with, for example, insufficient attention given to the purpose and formulation of questions, sample size and composition and the limitations these considerations might impose. In some cases, supervisors recommended the use of primary research. This frequently resulted in the collection of some poor data, e.g. asking for opinions about whether respondents think that serial killers are influenced by their childhood, or posing vague questions about what respondents think regarding a particular shoe design. The results from many questionnaires were not presented diagrammatically. Some barely got a mention in the report. Graphs were often printed in black and white so subtleties of colour grading for different data were lost. Sometimes such primary research took up to a third of the report's word count without adding much of significant value.

However, there was some evidence of more meaningful primary research undertaken by some students, more so with interviews than with surveys, questionnaires and similar. However, very few students understood the need to obscure email addresses where email print-outs were included.

Centres should also be addressing risk assessment when students are approaching strangers to ask questions, even by e-mail.

Artefact projects

Some centres did not advise students that artefact projects must be primarily research projects. Some artefacts (paintings/dances) were produced as a response, reaction or illustration of a theme or idea of interest to the student. The product sometimes came first and the research into the topic was researched afterwards. The idea of research as being the prime mover was not understood by the supervisor. This invariably resulted in low marks. Any artefact produced as an Extended Project should be fully grounded in research. Insufficient research was demonstrated underpinning many artefact projects. Some artefacts seemed to evolve from nowhere with reports being largely an extension or replacement of the Log, rather than showing how research had informed decisions linked to format and content. Many artefacts were submitted without identifying a clear purpose/audience/user, nor any planning for an objective check/evaluation by the intended audience and/or expert. Moreover, some centres were not advising students correctly with respect to the purpose of the research report that should be written to 'underpin' an artefact. Some students submitted a commentary, with little or no research basis for the artefact and this prevented the student from receiving much credit for what was frequently an effective artefact. Artefact reports did not always meet the criteria sufficiently to support the centre's AO3 mark. There was a noticeable lack of objective evaluation of some artefacts, affecting the AO4 mark. Students tended to give the impression that if they completed the task and liked the outcome themselves, then this was sufficient as far as any conclusion was concerned.

Presentations

There was considerable variation in the way the presentations seemed to be managed at centres. In some cases, it was treated as a troublesome 'bolt-on' extra, seemingly rushed at the end of the process – with minimal notes from the supervisor. In others, students clearly enjoyed discussing what they'd learnt and achieved, and this was reflected in the quality of evidence generated.

There were some issues with the timings of presentations. One centre scheduled presentations three months before students were required to hand in their completed projects. At this stage, students could not evaluate the entire EPQ experience and there were even examples of students predicting what they might find. Such timing was a wasted opportunity for the students to showcase their work and it also interrupted the flow of research and the development of the product.

The increasing use of 'marketplace presentations' where staff, students and family/friends were invited to witness presentations was observed. This allowed for a diverse non-specialist audience and some excellent feedback was provided.

Generally, moderators found much more expansive documenting of the Question and Answer session (Q&A) in Presentation Record Part B. This served students extremely well and provided a real insight into their understanding and delivery of the topic. However, some centres did not record the actual questions posed in the Q&A. In other centres the Q&A were based only on the process and no questions were asked that would allow the students to show expertise and real understanding of their topic of study.

Assessment

There are various observations relating to centre assessment.

The general trend was to see much helpful annotation against AO coverage within submissions, together with detailed supervisor comments in the majority of cases. This really helpful marking commentary from most centres this year was much appreciated.

However, sometimes a poor understanding of the assessment criteria was observed. Supervisors spoke in terms of 'effort' rather than evidence. Supervisors seemed to be marking 'the student' and stated in their supporting comments for marks that such-and-such a person 'deserves a good mark for …', 'has worked really hard at their planning and decision-making' or 'is a really pleasant and hard-working student'. Comments of this nature have no evidential basis, or place in the assessment criteria.

Similarly, the importance of marker comments which not only explain the band awarded but also the specific mark within a band was not always understood.

Generally in this series, there was more explicit evidence of internal moderation, supported in the main by a detailed rational. However, for some centres there was no evidence of internal moderation. In others it lacked evidence/justification for moved/agreed marks. Some centres still consider it acceptable to change a mark without providing a clear explanation.

Some centres are using many supervisors, for example 16 entries with 16 different supervisors; this was not conducive to consistent marking and in some cases ineffective internal moderation was found which led to inconsistent centre marks.

In some cases, the inevitable relationship between AO1, AO2 and AO3 was not recognised by supervisors when assessing projects. In other cases, there was little understanding demonstrated that the outcome of an Extended Project should be equivalent to half of an A level.

Considering the assessment objectives (AOs):

AO1
There was some exemplary planning/project management seen by moderators. The best recorded initial plans, evaluative monitoring and consequent changes, and they were evaluative throughout. However, in many centres leniency in marking persists in AO1. There was a tendency to highly reward Logs that were inconsistent in places, had uncompleted pages and/or were lacking justification for modifications made. Some students made generic statements, eg 'I will expand my research' or 'I will set some deadlines', without specifying what these might involve (the 'what, how and why' which is required). Some Logs were very repetitive.

Some students made complete changes to their project topics and titles at the Mid-project Review stage but then, instead of submitting a new Record of Initial Ideas and Proposal, merely continued. This left little scope to evidence the planning required for the new topic and thereby did not provide the evidence to support the top band mark awarded by the centre.

Planning that was detailed – but clearly not of L3 standard - was also rewarded with top band marks. Some centres considered planning to consist only of setting some targets, too often by the

supervisors. Effective planning has a qualitative dimension; meeting deadlines is an important but not all-pervasive aspect of planning.

Some centres appeared to have confused project planning with 'essay' planning starting at Planning Review, i.e. ahead of the research which was to inform the project's direction and scope.

Some centres advised their students to complete a journal/diary. This is good advice, but the diary was often filled in with much detail, to the expense of the Log. Diaries were usually completed retrospectively, and some centres saw this as a good example of planning, however there was no forward project planning and there was nothing to measure for monitoring progress. Diaries should be used by students to help them write accurate Log entries; there is no need for these diaries to be submitted. Retrospective editing of Logs was also evident in some cases.

Students who produced long reports did not demonstrate planning and monitoring skills at a high level.

AO2 – There was some exemplary use of resources seen by moderators. This included very detailed and reasoned research appropriate to the task, detailed bibliographies in accepted formats, clear and documented evaluation of sources, detailed citation and detailed and critical analyses of sources. Many students, however, presented evidence that did not support top-band marks.

Whilst there was much more evidence of source evaluation this series, the need to consider source validity in terms of origin was missing in some projects. Where 'source evaluation' tables were included they did not always provide this, or students chose only to evaluate a very small number of the sources used. Some students continue to interpret source evaluation as the usefulness of the source to the project. Indeed, some centres encouraged students to submit (what they term) a literature review, which was in many cases a table focussed on how useful the source was to the student rather than any real analytical review of the reliability or validity of the resources. Some centres were encouraging students to evaluate sources in the report *as a separate section* but in the report itself which interrupted the flow for students. This was sometimes seen as a way increase the word count. Obviously, it might be appropriate in some reports to evaluate the sources in the report, but not in others and certainly not for this purpose.

Some reports included a bibliography but no referencing with the report, making it difficult to identify how the research base had impacted upon the outcome. Even when referencing was included in the taught skills programme it was often not done well. Students frequently claimed to have learned how to use the Harvard referencing system, but the evidence did not always support this claim.

The quality of evidence for AO2 was probably the most obvious differentiator between good, average and poor projects. Most projects researched their topics, but in variable depth. The most able students selected only sources that were highly relevant to their work, evaluated and recorded them assiduously and referenced their work precisely. However, some centres highly rewarded projects that relied on low level sources, crediting a "wide range" of sources when only online journalistic/reference websites were used (in areas where there were academic sources readily available). 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. Students carrying out Google searches and copying entire strings as references appears to be an increasing trend. Such searches were rarely supported by evidence of evaluation and/or referencing.

Some supervisors did not always consider the presence of critical analysis or, indeed, analysis of any variety to access the top band for AO2.

AO3 –Descriptive projects continued to be over-marked, as well as poorly documented artefacts. Some students were putting material into the report that has already been recorded in the Log, e.g. the discussion and selection of the topic and the rejection of discarded ideas, project development information etc, which did not relate fully to the title of the report. There seemed to be some confusion about the purpose of the report in this respect in some centres. Where there were issues with a lack of referencing, synthesis was sometimes difficult to see.

The most effective projects showed clear and reasoned decision-making. These reports were fit for the purpose of the project and had a clear outcome, and submissions included evidence of each of the higher-level skills used consistently throughout the work. Where the product was an artefact, it was fit for purpose and based clearly on research documented in the short report.

There were a number of features commonly found in less strong projects. Issues included:

- Aims not fully met
- Plan not fully implemented
- Little evidence of decision making, usually when the Log was purely descriptive
- Little or no evidence of changes made, again often a function of the Log
- Artefacts not fit for purpose
- Lack of cohesion, especially when report was sectionalised.

AO4 – Some extremely detailed Summary and Reflection review pages were seen which were well-balanced between process and product, but some students did not always consider the holistic needs of AO4. At times, they focussed on only one element to the exclusion of others. For example, students sometimes reflected on the practicalities such as effective time management rather than the skills acquired and next steps. Moreover, under-developed Summary and Reflection pages within Logs that did not offer much review evidence elsewhere, coupled with conclusions that did not offer clear and detailed evidence, were marked generously. Where conclusions were undeveloped, this was not always recognised by the centres.

Practicalities

Hand written Logs and hand written assessor comments caused problems for many moderators because it was hard to decipher much of what had been offered. Similarly, very small font submissions also caused problems for moderators. This was because some reports were printed in 'review' format with teacher comments down the right-hand side without making an appropriate adjustment to the font size. Students sometimes printed off PowerPoint slides that were illegibly small.

Logs were frequently presented out of the correct order, with sheets inserted and with the Taught Skills page sometimes used to list some personal advice given to individual students.

Some projects were sent as piles of loose sheets; sometimes pages had no names/numbers and the pages were in the wrong order.

Many submissions were sent in plastic wallets.

Samples were sometimes badly packaged.

Some centres sent work with no student numbers and the Logs were undated.

Some supervisors were writing in Logs where students should report their comments.

Many students seemed unable to use paragraphs in the Production Log, particularly on the Summary and Reflection page, this created very large chunks of prose without any subdivisions.

Some students included too much extraneous material such as photocopied and highlighted articles that were appended to projects. This not appropriate for submission.

There were far more problems with incorrect centre additions this series. Some errors identified were as large as a 5-mark discrepancy.

JCQ regulations

Moderators observed some draft marking of projects. This is not permitted. Formative assessment is not permitted practice**.** Similarly, if supervisors take too many decisions for a student so that the work is not truly owned by the student this can, in extreme cases, be deemed 'malpractice'. In some cases, uses of 'mentors' by a centre removed students' autonomy and in extreme cases the over-direction by mentors was excessive.

In summary

Despite the issues identified in this report, the June 2019 series has seen good centre practice in the clear majority of cases. The very hard work undertaken by Centre Coordinators and Supervisors, with great attention to detail in assessment and internal moderation, is much appreciated. Most students have received supportive but non-directive supervision that has enabled them to undertake valuable independent research whilst developing a wide range of skills. The moderation team has been truly impressed by the results of this excellent centre practice.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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