

Examiners' Report

January 2011

Projects Qualification

Projects Level 3: Controlled Assessments

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P301 Dissertation

Learner Performance

At the upper end, material of impressive maturity was seen, characterized by depth of thought, dedicated research and meticulous presentation. At the lower end, whilst candidates may have shown commitment to their work, the level of research, development, analysis and review fell short of what would be expected in a Level 3 qualification.

There was some highly original work, as well as good treatments of more standard themes.

Suitability of Work Submitted

The recommended length for dissertations is 5-6000 words. They usually consist of a report containing abstract, introduction, literature review, discussion, conclusion, evaluation and bibliography. Candidates are also required to submit their project proposal forms and activity logs. Candidates should choose their own research question, which can be on a topic of their own choosing, which should normally complement their other areas of study, and involve significant extension, either via development of new skills, or through broadening perspectives, or through deepening understanding.

Weaker candidates often submitted largely factual reports, which, no matter how well researched, prevented the higher AO3 marks being obtained. This tended to happen in cases where the question invited a descriptive answer, rather than an analytical response which included elements of judgement, argument and counter-argument.

A small number of projects raised compliance issues due to unreferenced sections taken from websites

Assessment Evidence

There was evidence of a generally better understanding of the requirements of the project. This related both to the assessment evidence requirements and knowledge of how the marking grids should be applied. Many centres have grasped the formal aspects of dissertation writing and there was a further improvement in the submission of presentation evidence, with the vast majority centres now expecting candidates to present the findings of their research orally at the end of the project process and completing the oral presentation mark record sheet.

All learners completed the proposal forms and most learners were encouraged to include an activity log. Activity logs tended to be very brief and few learners referred to any modifications/ justifications made. Centres need to be reminded that the log should be a reflective document, not simply a description of what has been done during the project.

There was, however, still a tendency towards leniency in marking of AO1. This tended to happen when initial research questions were unsuitable, or when the level of ideas was not appropriate in a Level 3 qualification.

There was some improvement in the overall quality of AO2 material in this award. Most candidates attempted some form of research review. However, much of the research drew heavily on websites alone, rather than using a range of sources (e.g. books and articles).

Although most learners included bibliographies, these were often incorrect e.g. not in alphabetical order, or lacking dates of access when listing websites. Few learners provided a systematic form of referencing. A substantial number of learners failed to reference all quotes/ information/ statistical evidence in their work. There were occasions when learners gave sweeping generalisations without any supporting evidence.

Many centres showed no evidence that students had been trained to evaluate sources. Many centres still approach a literature review as a series of reflections on individual sources rather than a synthesised review of their research. Some learners simply included printouts of all their collected information in an appendix or at the end of their work and this was used and marked as evidence for evaluation of sources. Strong centres submitted projects with an impressive range of sources and with proficient bibliographies.

Although there were some very well argued discussions, the writing for A03 was often descriptive. The choice of topic chosen did not always allow learners to develop their analytical writing skills. The more experienced centres tended to guide their students into a clear defence of a position. Weaker submissions tended to be little more than an extension of the literature review. Too many contained almost no actual argument and some were very heavily reliant on re-writing website content. A small but significant number were simply below A level standard, and this must come down at least in part to poor advice during the project proposal phase. There was a tendency for centres to mark leniently; placing learners in band 3 for A03 when they were really band 2.

Most submissions had clear feedback on the student's presentation. There was also good evidence of evaluation of the project process; this was either included at the end of the work or as part of the PPT presentation slides. However, a worryingly large number of students are still not writing evaluations of their projects. Some do add comments to their PowerPoint slides, and some credit can be given for this, but it is limited. Candidates need explicit direction to carry out a written evaluation of the project process, addressing strengths and weaknesses in their project methodology, exploring potential areas of extension, as well as discussing what has been learned about the research process.

Few centres are showing effective evidence of internal moderation. This tended to be confined to a 'mark agreed' tick on the mark record sheet, with the occasional mark adjustment (which may subsequently have been ignored when the marks were entered). Given that an increasing number of centres are using more than one moderator, this is a matter for concern and should be addressed within centres.

Centre Performance

There was evidence that more candidates had been well prepared for the demands of writing a research dissertation. The strongest centres had provided guidance to candidates which addressed matters such as research record keeping, the protocols of academic writing and referencing and skills in argument analysis and presentation. This meant that the work produced was well suited to the assessment criteria.

It remains the case that other centres seemed to have neglected to consider the recommendation that 40 guided learning hours should be assigned to the taught-course basis for the Extended Project. This provides an essential platform for successful project work. In centres where this was used, it significantly enhanced the quality of the work which emerged at the end of the process, by ensuring that candidates understood academic conventions and research methods, knew what counts as an appropriately academic form of expression and were equipped with an understanding of the techniques of argument and counter-argument which the dissertation is expected to contain. It also went a long way towards ensuring that, when project proposals were written, they were suitable in terms of scope, focus and level of complexity.

Training needs to be provided to teacher-assessors on the detection and management of plagiarism. There needs to be more systematic checking of work within centres. This should be taking place at an early stage in the project process, if at all possible, so that appropriate steps can be taken to address the problem.

Covering letters with the moderation sample which explained the internal moderation process were very helpful.

Most centres seem to be now using the forms correctly, particularly if they are experienced. Some new centres used almost none and seemed to be having difficulty locating them. A number of centres did not know the requirement to send the signed EDI.

Significant numbers of centres sent in samples of work which arrived after the January deadline. In many cases, administrative requirements were not well met and a significant numbers of centres had failed to check that marks were totalled correctly. The centres' co-operation in administering the moderation process is appreciated. Careful checking of each of the sampled scripts to ensure that marks are added and entered correctly and that the candidate authentication forms are signed by both candidate and assessor greatly assists the moderation process. Care also needs to be taken to ensure that the sample sent in for moderation contains both the highest and lowest marked piece of work.

P302 Investigation / Field Study

Learner Performance

The Proposal stage is critical to the pupil and it was disappointing to see some PPFs very incomplete with no planned timeline and minimal preliminary research. There was evidence of good time management and detailed activity logs being kept. Regular Tutorials and feedback enable a successful journey to take place. Again it is the quantity of Primary data which can play a key role. It is vital that sensible and critically selected but wide ranging techniques are used. Questionnaires do not tend to lead to the depth and breadth of data necessary. Presentation of data in bar graphs or pie charts alone is insufficient at this level; trends and correlations or testing must be carried out. It was pleasing to see a variety of statistical tests being applied in high marked projects.

Suitability of Work Submitted

There is perhaps confusion in that Unit 2 is taken to be more scientific/mathematical in its approach but that does not mean any scientific topic is suitable. For example, a research/field study on environmentally friendly housing does not fit Unit 2 unless there is data collection and analysis, not just analysis or comment on efficiency figures or secondary material.

The scripts that were submitted were of a much better quality in terms of matching the expectations and criteria at level 3. Some good narrow questions were posed and, where the hypothesis was testable, this led to a good project. In a small number of projects, though, the aims were very ambitious and no real test could be performed with any real significance or meaning. Projects with a strong rationale and clear personal motivation worked best. Questionnaire based data collection is obviously popular but can easily be both too basic and the cohort questioned too narrow (e.g. friends or classmates). It is vital that the limitations are appreciated.

Assessment Evidence

On the whole the standard of marking was better overall. There was still significant over-marking, mainly in AO2 and AO3. Though still generous at the top end (mainly due to not realising the expectations of the Bibliography, even in Unit 2) centres were largely accurate in their marking of AO1 and 4.

Dull, wordy Power Point slides did not really back up the effusive comments on the Oral Presentation Mark Sheets. There is some evidence that use is being made of exemplar material on the website.

The quality of annotations also greatly eases the job of moderation as does the production of evidence to support marks given. Those projects which did not include Power Point slides had to be judged more on their teacher comments and the written evaluation section.

Centre Performance

Very few Centres submitted by the January deadline, though the majority were received within a few days.

Centres are generally annotating better. It was again apparent that several of the scripts would have been better entered for P301, given the dominance of secondary research and paucity of primary data gained from very limited cohort questionnaires. Teacher training should emphasise the need for topics with a clear testable hypothesis (as some conclusion can be reached) and if questionnaires are used the structure of questions and the 'population' questioned must be thought through. Centres should consider carefully whether a project might fit better into Unit 1 (albeit with supporting primary data) or indeed Unit 4 as the emphasis is on following some design or testing brief, with no data collection being involved.

P303 Performance

Learner Performance

A very small number of entries were seen. Most were an individual project which is to some extent unusual for this unit.

The majority of the performances were in the form of dance, drama or music. However a few centres employed a wider understanding of performance, which included, for instance, delivering a lesson.

Suitability of Work Submitted

Where the target audience and intended effect were fully considered the type of performance was not central to the success of the project. However, where learners were producing work without addressing these considerations, the quality of the production of the outcome was often their sole focus. Such projects did not fit as well with the criteria for this unit.

Where work developed from a general idea, creative intention and research opportunities were often limited or overlooked.

Some centres would have benefited from commissioning learners so they could respond to a focused commission brief, rather than struggling to create a question to answer.

Some learners added unnecessary additional tasks to their project.

Assessment Evidence

On the whole centres accurately applied the assessment criteria.

The evidence from a few centres indicates the standard of performance is being used to place learners in high mark bands rather than the evidence presented for each assessment objective being looked at against the assessment criteria. AO's 2 and 4 are the most often over marked.

Clear evidence of the development process is vital to support the higher marks.

Fewer centres are rewarding motivation, interest and talent than in earlier series.

Centre Performance

The projects that worked particularly well were the ones where the candidates took time to refine the title, question or commission brief. This in turn led to focused research that would have an impact on the practical development of the work. Clear and unambiguous objectives that could be reviewed were evident in the strongest responses. Rigorous rehearsal or preparations were detailed in the Activity Log for the candidates achieving high marks.

Group work was not as popular as before. This is something we would encourage for this unit as the development process can be helped by learners focusing on how they communicate and develop ideas with other performers towards a shared goal. Some individual projects suffered from candidates not having the challenge of responding to the ideas of others.

The vast number of opportunities for performance projects should be considered by centres as there are opportunities for production and administration aspects of the performing arts industry to be explored.

Internal centre standardisation was present in the majority of centres.

P304 Artefact

Learner Performance

Fashion design and garment making was frequently used as a project idea to generate ideas for final artefacts that are made and worn by the candidate. Many artefacts were sent for moderation when photographic evidence would suffice. Many candidates focussed the Artefact on the question nominated in the Project Proposal. Although a research question allows the development of thought it does not necessarily enable the production of an artefact that explores materials, techniques and processes and this often leads to a lack of focus in AO2 and AO3.

Suitability of Work Submitted

Previous reports commented on a significant number of projects that did not involve the creation of an actual artefact; instead, development work was focused on designing and planning. This seems to have improved although there were still instances of this occurring.

The best work seen did involve the creation of a physical artefact and evidence of the design/visualisation process, showing clear documentation of the methodology involved in making, the choice of materials, techniques and processes, together with clear progress through the refinement of these processes.

Assessment Evidence

The majority of centres that entered work for moderation had applied the marking criteria accurately and when inaccuracy occurred it was due to slight leniency, most commonly in AO2 and AO3.

All assessment criteria had been consistently applied and teacher-assessors had used the full range of marks across the mark bands, although there was in some centres a tendency to polarise achievement towards the top or bottom of the mark bands.

Centre Performance

There were some excellent digital portfolios that utilised new software packages such as Prezi to organise and present any research, resources, documentation of the development and realisation of artefacts, whilst enabling regular review and evaluation.

Centres should ensure that learners understand the need to produce an Artefact and not only a response to the question posed in the Project Proposal. The better the focus on the objectives set out in the proposal, the easier it is to evaluate the project and explain how the aims have been met.

There are no expectations of size limits for the artefact but centres are advised that large and bulky work should be submitted as photographs or video clips indicating the scale and dimensions of the piece.

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