



PRINCIPAL MODERATOR'S REPORT

EXTENDED PROJECT QUALIFICATION

SUMMER 2019

Extended Project Qualification

Summer 2018

General Overview

This year's EPQ submissions produced an excellent range of material, both in terms of dissertation and artefact focused projects. Centre staff are clearly becoming more confident at advising their candidates on what questions work best and consequently there were fewer descriptive dissertations evident in the samples seen. In addition, centre coordinators appear to have heeded past advice regarding the need to avoid so-called 'future gazing' questions and two-part questions that can lack sufficient focus. Thankfully, for example, few candidates tried to research the consequences of Brexit, for which as we know, there is no real evidence base.

Project formats

One area, however, that needs to be flagged up this year is the alternative EPQ format option. The Specification makes clear that candidates can research and complete an artefact, performance or a field investigation-based project. This year, a few candidates were attempting alternative format projects that lacked clarity regarding the 'shape' of the outcome itself. Such approaches lacked validity as they should really have been re-worded as a dissertation question.

When advising candidates on alternative formats, it is vital that candidates think carefully about what the final outcome will look like; for example, a video game disk; a music CD; a video of an exhibition or event, or a manufactured object. In this sense, it is always worth focusing closely on the statement of intent and wording it with clarity; for example, 'To research, design and manufacture a' or alternatively, 'To research, compose and record an album of three songs in the style of'. The 'shape' of the artefact needs to be clear to both the candidate and supervisor from the outset to avoid difficulties later on. Overall, the development of artefact projects is being well evidenced, for example, in terms of annotated photographs and moderators have received fewer large artefacts through the post which is welcomed. However, there were still several alternative format projects this year where links between the research carried out and the development of the final outcome were not made explicit. This can be particularly evident in the cases of art, music and design & technology related work. Some candidates appear to be under the illusion that the EPQ can provide an additional opportunity to complete a piece of coursework in their favourite subject. It is not. The assessment criteria are very different and consequently, candidates need to be much more explicit in explaining their application of research and their decision making. It is worth restating here that, in the case of artefact projects, research into the nature of the artefact itself is vital. Hence, if a publication is the intended artefact, a moderator would expect to see some research into publishing formats. Whilst sympathetic to financial considerations here, candidates should at least research the costs of, for example, on-line publishing, rather than simply producing a hand stapled booklet. Alternative format projects will be a focus for this year's CPD events as it is clear that additional guidance may prove helpful for centres.

Learner Record Documentation

In terms of the Learner Record documentation, it was good to see the majority of centres using the new templates from the WJEC/CBAC website. There are several changes in these new templates, most importantly the need for candidates to flag up the other qualifications they are studying. This requirement is to help draw the attention of centre coordinators to possible issues of dual accreditation early on in the process, allowing them time to investigate and if necessary advise the student to change their EP focus. For the sake of clarity, candidates are allowed to base their project on a subject they study for A Level. However, there should not be a direct overlap of the content; for example, if a candidate is studying A Level History and an option that focuses on Germany 1871-1991, they would not be allowed to write a dissertation on the rise of Hitler as this is a key part of their A Level course. If, however, they were keen to research German history for their Extended Project, it would ideally be best if they opted for a topic outside the period 1871-1991. As a rule of thumb, if they could be asked an exam question on the topic, or it is the focus for a coursework assignment, they are barred from using this for their Extended Project under the Dual Accreditation rule.

Another area of the Learner Record that is worth mentioning, is the Content checklist. Many candidates do not tick off or enter dates of completion here and, as a result, sometimes candidates submitted work has material missing. The checklist is designed to help candidates prepare for the submission of their work as all of the items listed are compulsory elements of the qualification. As such, we would encourage supervisors to bring the Contents list to the attention of their candidates in the Final Interview. It is the responsibility of the candidate to ensure all their required documentation is submitted; it is not the role of the moderator to chase missing sections of evidence.

Source evaluation

The assessment of source validity varied somewhat in the moderation samples seen this year. Some candidates used the 'literature review' section of the Learner Record to develop insightful analysis and evaluations of their resources, whilst other candidates favoured a source evaluation table, inserted at the end of their dissertation. As always, the advice is that candidates should explicitly be commenting on the credibility and utility of their research material. The best candidates use specific criteria to assess their sources, for example vested interest and expertise are often referred to. However, some candidates go further by researching authors which allows them to offer detailed and insightful evaluations that go beyond superficial comments. In this context, Centre staff should remember that it is not essential that candidates evaluate every single source. It is more important that key sources a candidate selects as being particularly useful, are assessed in a convincing way. One final point here on source validity relates to timing. Some candidates refer in their planning to the need to evaluate their sources at the end of their Project. This seems counter intuitive as surely they need to assess material before completing their dissertation or outcome.

Presentations

Another area that has been highlighted in reports over recent years, has been the presentation component of the EPQ. The best candidates are now developing engaging slides that make effective use of new technologies. However, there are still many candidates who produce overly wordy and dull slides that can add little to the experience of their audience. Similarly, the best supervisors have heeded advice in recent years regarding Witness Statement evidence. It is perhaps worth restating the point that Band 3 marks for AO4 LO7 will not be justified if key questions and the candidates' responses are not sufficiently evidenced. In particular, candidates need to be able to demonstrate their authoritative and detailed knowledge and understanding of the topic. This requires some searching questions to be asked of the candidate, thereby forcing them to think on their feet. Their accurate use of key terms; application of key concepts and recounting of appropriate examples can all help to justify Band 3 marks. Generic supervisor comments that 'all questions were answered well' will not suffice. It is perhaps also worth stating here that candidates are expected to explicitly evaluate the extent to which they have achieved their original aims and objectives in the presentation; not just address their final judgement on their question or their realisation of the artefact. The depth of this evaluation will be considered by moderators when assessing AO4 LO7 when they assess the extent to which a candidate has comprehensively evaluated the planned outcome against the objectives.

Project Submissions

A mixture of postal and e-submitted samples was received, and it was pleasing to note that the majority of centres sent/uploaded the samples in the correct way. As a reminder, candidates should submit their Projects printed back to back and held together with treasury tags. No staples, poly pockets or ring binders should be posted. For online submissions, all documents should be uploaded via individual candidate zip folders containing all the required paperwork.

It is confirmed that postal and e-submitted entries will be accepted for the Summer 2020 series. If any centres have queries regarding e-submission, they should contact WJEC for further advice and guidance.

On the note of further support, centre coordinators may be interested to note that details of this year's CPD events are now listed on the WJEC website. Given that the new Specification is now bedded in, the decision has been taken to limit this year's events to on-line webinars. However, if you feel that a face-to-face meeting would still be useful, please contact WJEC to arrange a visit from one of our Regional Support representatives.

Finally, it would be worth highlighting the issue of internal standardisation which is an important element of the assessment process. When the qualification first started, several centres took the view that each individual teacher working in a particular school or college could supervise an Extended Project student. However, many have abandoned this kind of loose structure as it poses real difficulties for the Centre Coordinator in trying to ensure a consistent application of the assessment criteria. Best practice in recent years has been to approach the qualification in terms of a smaller, dedicated team with supervisors working directly under the Centre Coordinator or a designated team leader. Such a structure helps everyone as it avoids the danger of a rogue supervisor whose understanding of the assessment criteria is flawed.

The new method of sampling introduced by WJEC this season ensures that, where one supervisor is inconsistent in their application of the criteria, the moderation process will identify this. This can lead to the calling of a second sample and/or mark regression. It is strongly suggested that the EPQ is viewed by all centres for what it is; an A Level standard qualification which requires curriculum time and a planned approach to its delivery.

Conclusion

In concluding the 2019 report, I would like to thank all Centre staff for their hard work in preparing candidates for the qualification this summer and their diligence in assessing completed projects against the assessment criteria. The efficient administration of moderation samples by centres is also much appreciated as moderators have to work within narrow timescales.

Undoubtedly, the EPQ continues to represent an excellent preparation for the independence of undergraduate study and it is gratifying to see so many candidates achieving positive outcomes. To this end, the growth of the qualification nationally is likely to continue as educators see its long-term potential in developing research and independent learning skills in our young people.



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