PRINCIPAL MODERATOR'S REPORT

EXTENDED PROJECT QUALIFICATION

SUMMER 2022

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General Overview

Administration

A return to a normal full season of summer moderation, the first of course since 2019, was a strange but welcome experience. WJEC staff were very conscious of the particular pressures on centres this year and hence the decision was taken to continue to accept postal moderation for Summer 2022. This option was taken up by a number of centres and so, as a temporary measure, this appears to have been welcomed. However, for series onwards, on-line moderation via the Surpass platform will be an expectation.

For those centres using Surpass, most appeared to have found the system straightforward. However, I would ask, where possible, the work of each candidate is uploaded as a single PDF document. Similarly, there were a few incidents where centre staff had uploaded incomplete documentation. It is important that the work is checked before uploading to help avoid such cases in future. There were also many cases of missing signatures, again these should be double checked prior to submission. These are important regulatory requirements.

Overcoming challenges of pandemic

Many candidates explicitly referred to how they had successfully adapted project plans and timescales in the face of either personal illness or lockdown regulations. Such diligent and flexible approaches had clearly helped candidates to fulfil the requirements of the qualification successfully, despite the challenges of the last two years. As a result, the 2022 moderation series saw a wide array of interesting and imaginative research work. As in previous years, the vast majority of the projects seen were in a dissertation format, with the best examples emphasising analysis over description. However, the minority of candidates who had chosen the artefact route produced an equally impressive range of outcomes, from published books to podcasts.

Thankyou

As always, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all centre staff for their hard work and commitment in delivering the Extended Project Qualification. As someone who has been involved in the qualification since its inception, I fully appreciate the hours of work spent in guiding, cajoling, and encouraging candidates towards the finish line. This is of course then supplemented by hours watching presentations; writing up witness statements and assessing their final work. The reward is that many of our young people go on to secure university places on the back of EPQ grades. However, more telling than this, is that we also know they are more likely to be successful in higher education, given the independent learning skills they have developed through the EPQ.

Project Title and Documentation

I would like to begin by offering some initial feedback on question setting which is a vital first step in any successful research project.

The majority of centre co-ordinators appear to have robust systems in place to advise their candidates on effective question setting; something that is usually very evident in their detailed feedback at Stage 2 Question Approval. Hence, the majority of questions seen this year had a strong analytical focus. For example, 'to what extent…' and 'how valid is it to argue that…..' questions were both popular and effective. However, there were still a sizeable minority of candidates who chose very descriptive questions, such as 'what are the…..,' or just opted for a statement rather than a question. The problem of course is that such dissertations simply become a list of what the candidate has learnt about a given topic, thereby reducing the opportunities for showcasing their higher order thinking skills. Such candidates invariably then find it difficult to develop and sustain any kind of meaningful concluding judgement which makes a Band 3 mark for AO3 LO6 much more challenging to secure.

Project Outcome

Research sources

The majority of students are using internet-based material which again, given the recent pandemic and move to online learning, is perfectly understandable. However, again a significant number of candidates are failing to explicitly evaluate their material, for example in terms of utility and credibility. This is a key component of AO2 LO4 and should not be short-changed by a candidate expecting to achieve a Band 3 mark.

Personal bias

There is a need to reiterate a point that was made a number of years ago regarding personal bias. Centre co-ordinators would be well advised to watch out for candidates who have a strong personal political or socio-economic standpoint and who then seek to undertake a research project in a related field. Although we want candidates to pursue research topics for which they have a clear passion, some candidates can drift into articulating dubious assertions when they hold strong pre-existing views. On some occasions, such candidates resort to small scale survey questionnaires of friendship groups which, unsurprisingly, support their ideological standpoint. Where appropriate, there is nothing wrong with using primary evidence, but the focus always needs to be on validity, or a great deal of time can be spent for little reward. Academic peer reviewed surveys are always going to be of more use to candidates at Level 3, given their larger sample size and diverse respondent profiles.

Synthesis

Synthesis is one of the most challenging skills for a student, given they are unlikely to have undertaken such a lengthy dissertation before. It is therefore surprising that so few candidates identify it as a skill they have developed through the taught course, for example in EPF2c. Synthesising materials from a wide range of complex research sources into a single coherent argument is something that many undergraduates struggle with and therefore, centre co-ordinators may wish to give this skill greater emphasis in their taught course. That is not to say that the majority of dissertations are badly written. On the contrary, there were many examples that moderators felt went beyond a Level 3 standard. However, there were a significant minority that were less effective with whole pages being referenced to one or two writers or where the dissertation became a list of descriptive case studies, one after another.

Artefacts

There was a wide variety of outcomes seen this year with some candidates able to demonstrate significant skills in the area of new technologies. The creation of coded games, podcasts, and online book publishing, all helped candidates to demonstrate significant learning gains which was obviously good to see. However, perhaps because fewer candidates undertake such projects, the titles seen were sometimes rather vague. As a general rule, although an artefact-based project should not be phrased as a question, it should have a clear statement of intent. For example, 'To research, design and publish a book on challenging mathematical skills aimed at able Year 7 students.' In addition, such candidates need to research not just the content of their topic but also the nature of the artefact. In the instance above, the candidate would be expected to show research in the field of mathematical skills and the teaching of such skills; the Year 7 curriculum and online publishing. As always with artefact projects, it is not just about going and 'making' something; the candidate needs to explicitly demonstrate how the research has influenced the development of the outcome.

Autumn Professional Learning

One aspect of this autumn's event will be a focus on project outcomes and how to approach both dissertation writing and artefact development. Further details will be made available on the WJEC website in early September.

Project Presentation

One area of candidate skills development that can still disappoint concerns presentation slides. Many add little to the experience of their audience, being mainly text based and repetitive in terms of format. As a general rule, centre staff would be well advised to encourage candidate use of infographics, embedded video clips, and summary diagrams which will provide a different dimension to the spoken word. Similarly, they perhaps need to be clearer regarding the number of slides that can reasonably be used in a 15 to 30 minute presentation. Certainly, candidates that include over 40 slides in their presentation should expect a high audience attrition rate.

Assessment

Internal standardisation is an important element of the assessment process, especially where a centre has a significant number of supervisors involved in delivering the qualification. Ideally, when a centre's entry is modest, the EPQ Co-ordinator should look to moderate all projects before marks are submitted. In the case of larger centres, sampling across the full range of supervisors is vital in ensuring a consistent standard of marking. In many of the samples seen this year, however, internal standardisation appeared to be a perfunctory task with the original marks simply reaffirmed and ticked off. Where mark adjustments were made, they often tended to increase the original mark, thereby tipping a candidate over an historic grade boundary, with little precise justification offered. The workload of teachers, especially leading up to the summer exam season, is not underestimated by WJEC staff. However, it is important that centre staff work together and agree the final marks awarded. Given the nature of the qualification, some disagreement between supervisors during internal standardisation is expected, as are subsequent mark adjustments prior to submission.