PRINCIPAL MODERATOR'S REPORT

EXTENDED PROJECT QUALIFICATION

SUMMER 2015

Principal Moderator: Roger Lane

General Overview

Each year that passes sees WJEC's Extended Project gain a clearer identity as a free-standing qualification that offers wide choice and individuality in a context that rightly demands intellectual and academic rigour. WJEC and its centres strive for ways to reduce bureaucratic demands (particularly in the area of administrative repetition), but set against that wish is the recognition that the qualification is 100% internally assessed (externally moderated). This means that the project process has to be carefully verified. Fortunately, the scrutiny also brings rewards, because 'managing' and 'reviewing' a project are assessment objectives.

Project Title & Proposal

Skills in question-setting may be under-rated in project circles. Understandably, candidates may want a quick start and early progress, but they and their tutors ignore the fine-tuning of their question at their peril. Increasingly the distinction between a proposal and a detailed plan become sharper. One might say that the proposal (a structured justification of a page or two of writing) tests the viability of the project question. The detailed plan follows, and itself will be subject to amendments from 'day one'.

Two 'titles' from one centre illustrate instantly that caution in proceeding is very wise:

> The Design and Production of a Snare Drum
> Development of fingerprinting techniques in convicting criminals 1890-1950.

Both of these were successful projects, but each of them in the wrong hands could have been disastrous. That is a quick illustration of the challenge that faces centres new to the qualification. The enthusiasm may be almost tangible with some candidates, and hopefully it will not be tempered by the hard work that has to follow.

Project Record

In practice, project records include a diary/journal, a teaching and learning programme, the project plan, interviews with the supervisor/tutor and even the steps taken in researching the outcome. For artefact projects, the 1500-2000 words of notes required further complicates the issue. It is clear that the potential for repetition and duplication is considerable. However, as the qualification develops, and with a new specification in position (for first entry 2016), there is now some prospect of greater economy and efficiency from a combination of selection and cross-referencing. There are definitely signs already that centres understand the intentions and the value of keeping the records.

Project Outcome

Written project outcomes (under the generic term 'dissertations') thrive or disappoint on the back of the quality of reading and writing, understanding and expression, research and delivery. Candidates do not always value the final appearance of the project outcome or truly know what the process is to achieve a polished result of 5000 words.

Research is the backbone of the project, and all too often 'using resources' AO2 is the weakest of the assessment objectives. Centres could help their candidates by helping them to manage their research in stages, encouraging them to - find a range of resources that <u>could</u> be relevant for the completion of a successful project outcome; select and <u>reject</u> material in order to inform and direct the project outcome; develop links and connections between sources to structure the project outcome; and use the material to formulate opinions and arguments. In other words, a genuine process. First, reading, then reading into writing, the reading converted to a large extent into the candidate's own words.

Writing too is often too casually treated for best effect. Project writing is - perhaps unfashionably - coursework writing and candidates here need to be reminded of the process again - drafting, revising, editing and proof-reading, each stage more important than the last, as the outcome gets closer.

Some candidates, of course, are masters of their own destiny, and write in an authoritative manner, with hardly a word out of place and hardly a misjudged punctuation mark. Frankly, that is how it should be, at least for those candidates aspiring to Higher Education, and for many others too. It should also be the case that the 'expert in the field' candidate should write in an accessible way for the non-specialist intelligent reader, with a sense of audience and purpose.

The final imperative for a strong candidate writing a dissertation is that the conclusion to a study should be developed, interesting and somewhat positive. In keeping with the advice in these preceding paragraphs, the revising and editing will determine the final shape of the project outcome, so the conclusion must carry its weight, even if 5000 words have already been achieved. The conclusion of a written outcome pre-empts the presentation, for which the candidate should be ready with answers to reasonably challenging questions.

Non-written outcomes are often enviably attractive. Project outcome notes need to be substantial, not only explaining how and why, but also evaluating and reflecting on the process. The whole point is for candidates to sell themselves, and to take part generously in the sharing of the making or performing process. An artefact without its narrative and analysis is only half-done.

Project Presentation

Project presentations are beginning to come alive. The role of the PowerPoint slide is diminishing, while candidates' understanding of it is growing. Fewer slides, and considerably less writing on each slide, imply a better 'spoken' event, a sharper focus to the occasion. Insights into the performance given, the questions asked and the way they are responded to also aid attainment and differentiation. Furthermore, an individual presentation should be the climax of a candidate's project experience, and ideally part of an enriching communal activity.

Assessment

As one would expect, understanding of how to assess a project is growing, but wisdom dictates that it will never be easy. To state the obvious, evidence is needed, and where it is possible, it should be first-hand from the candidate, rather than second-hand from the teacher.

Evidence for AO1 (Manage) and AO4 (Review) can be elicited from any part of the project, from beginning to end. AO2 (Resources) and AO3 (Develop and Realise) are similarly close-cousins. All four assessment objectives are inter-linked. The project outcome and the presentation need a visible process behind them. The active engagement of a candidate in the selection, the proposal, and the plan of the project rightly earns credit. So, there is some correlation between the marks awarded for the different assessment objectives, and although the project outcome is the prize asset of the project, the less readily visible qualities should be cultivated through the words of the project documentation.

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