



PRINCIPAL MODERATOR'S REPORT

EXTENDED PROJECT QUALIFICATION

AUTUMN 2021

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General Overview

Firstly, it was good to see a number of centres taking the opportunity to enter candidates for the 2021 Autumn series. Centre staff obviously had to work to tight deadlines in submitting entries and moderation samples and I would like to thank them for their professionalism and efficient administration in meeting these requirements. That said, there were some moderation samples that were submitted late and some individual projects where the Learner Declaration had not been signed by either the candidate or the teacher. Moderators also have to work to tight deadlines and late submissions and missing signatures slow down the process. Help to avoid such added pressures in the system are always appreciated.

Having been involved in the delivery of the qualification for over ten years, it is clear that the Project is more valued now than ever by both teachers and students. The fact that many universities now include the Extended Project grade in their UCAS offer has a part to play in this but, more importantly, there is a realisation that getting to university is just the start; being successful there is another matter. The Project continues to provide an excellent preparation for undergraduate study, and it is gratifying to hear from centre coordinators how former students have commented on the value of their EPQ studies in completing later degree programmes. Of course, this is in no small way due to the quality of the taught course provided by centre staff. The Autumn series offered clear evidence of this, with significant numbers of candidates able to articulate their decision making and reflect in detail upon the development of their individual research. Moreover, it is also gratifying to see centre staff following the advice and guidance offered by WJEC at CPD events and through website documentation.

Project Title and Documentation

The philosophy behind the qualification is that research is complex, meaningful and rewarding. To this end, the most effective centres encourage their candidates to fully explore a range of potential topics before making a final decision. This is time well spent, allowing candidates to reflect on what really interests them by carrying out initial research in the completion of EPF1 Section 2. Such an approach ensures ‘buy-in’ by the candidates and usually leads to well researched and thought out Project outcomes. This Autumn’s entry was no exception with a wide range of challenging topic research being successfully undertaken by candidates.

From the projects moderated, it is clear that centre staff are becoming more experienced in guiding their candidates in the wording of dissertation titles. This is good to see as no one wants to see candidates being set up to fail with a flawed title. To this end, it was good to see targeted question feedback comments from supervisors and centre coordinators at Stage 2 Question Approval. Moreover, it was good to see candidates acting upon this advice and amending their titles accordingly. The result was that far fewer candidates embarked on needless two-part questions or vague titles that offered little opportunity for focused, evidence-based conclusions. This is perhaps why it was noticeable that few questions had undergone further revision late in the process; again, credit to centre staff here.

In terms of the wider Learner Record documentation, it was clear that the majority of centres appreciate the need for candidates to regularly reflect on the development of their Project, rather than belatedly completing documentation at the end of the process. It is straightforward for moderators to spot the latter as they tend to offer little beyond generic comments, given the candidates concerned have long forgotten the detailed thought processes that lay behind particular decisions. Again here, it is worth emphasising the importance of EPF1 Section 7 and EPF2c regarding skills development. In the past it was always surprising to see how many candidates had given so little thought to the wide-ranging skill development opportunities provided by the EPQ. It was not unusual for candidates to limit their comments to time management and research skills only. As the Autumn series submissions demonstrate, the vast majority of candidates are now being made more aware of the importance of skills development and are able to fully articulate these learning gains in the documentation. One possible area, however, where there is still some room for improvement is synthesis. This is a particularly challenging skill area for candidates, especially at the lower end of the ability range, and accordingly, centres are encouraged to review how they help prepare future cohorts. If the taught course does not explicitly address the issue of synthesis, then it is understandable that candidates faced by a dissertation for the first time, will simply write up their research in blocks, rather than integrating the researched sources into an effective and personalised argument.

In conclusion, there were many positives regarding both Project titles and the quality of the documentation submitted for the Autumn series. As a result, many candidates were able to successfully complete the Project and access high band marks and grades. As always, if centre staff have any doubts regarding particular titles in future, they should feel free to contact the EPQ Subject Officer for further guidance.

Project Outcome

The majority of Project outcomes continue to be in the dissertation format, though a significant minority clearly continue to value the alternative artefact approach. The best dissertations seen in the Autumn series were analytically balanced and well referenced. Moreover, the research undertaken had been effectively synthesised into a fluent and engaging argument. In terms of structure, not all of the dissertations seen had included an Abstract, but this is not seen as being detrimental at Level 3. More concerning, however, were the projects that lacked either a formal bibliography or evidence of detailed source evaluation. It is important that, as part of a centre's taught course, candidates receive guidance on the inclusion and layout of a bibliography, as well as systems of referencing. Similarly, it is important that candidates give explicit attention to source evaluation before they begin the final write up. It always seems incoherent when candidates leave the source evaluation until after they have completed their dissertation; a case perhaps of closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. This is an issue of timescale that centre staff could perhaps explore more explicitly at the EPF2a planning stage. As you would expect, the best projects seen offered impressive bibliographies and detailed source evaluations that investigated both the utility and credibility of the material selected. A small number of candidates had clearly researched the background of individual authors and used this information to evaluate relative expertise in particular fields which was impressive. In terms of manageability, it should be pointed out that if a candidate uses a very wide range of material, there is no expectation that every source will be evaluated. Indeed, candidates that evaluate over fifty sources tend to produce similar and quite superficial comments. It is a far better approach for candidates to focus on the sources that they see as being central to their study and therefore produce more thorough evaluations of the sources that matter. They are, of course, also able to highlight some of the sources they rejected and the reasons why.

In terms of the artefact outcomes seen, it was clear that the format had been appropriate, given the research topic. Again, credit must be given to centre staff for the effective guidance provided to candidates here. As in previous years, the best artefacts were those that had been developed in-line with the research undertaken. It is very important that the link between the research and the development of the artefact is explicit and that candidates articulate this effectively through the Learner Record. It is not sufficient for a candidate to simply write about their research and then separately 'tell the story' about how they made their artefact. Although practical skills development will be credited in AO3 LO5, marks will be lost in AO2 and AO3 LO6 if the research links are not fully explored.

Finally, it was good to note that centre staff are no longer providing excessive feedback during the drafting process of either the artefact report or dissertation. Directing candidates to add, change and amend particular sections of a dissertation denies the candidate the opportunity to take full responsibility for the outcome, thereby significantly undermining their mark across all four Assessment Objectives. Restricting draft feedback to critical questions is far more in the spirit of the qualification and more meaningful for candidates in terms of long-term learning.

Project Presentation

The presentation remains an area of challenge for many candidates. Part of the problem here perhaps is that familiarity tends to breed contempt. Many candidates are asked to produce PowerPoint presentations for A Level homework but with little guidance regarding preparation or evaluation of the final outcome. The result is that when it comes to the Project, many candidates continue to produce slides that are underwhelming and do little to engage their audiences. Candidates need to be encouraged to be more critical in their approach, for example, regarding the number of sides and the balance of text to imagery. It would also be worth centre staff exploring alternatives to the traditional PowerPoint slide approach, for example an exhibition stand or academic research poster. At present, there is a sense that very few candidates really develop their presentation skills which is a great pity. One way centres could start to address this is by encouraging their candidates to formally plan the presentation and include the plan, either at the end of EPF2a or at the start of EPF4.

That said, it is clear that progress is being made regarding the evidencing of the Q and A episode. In the projects sampled, supervisors are now typically recording both the questions asked and the candidates' responses, thereby providing explicit evidence for AO3 LO7 in particular. It is appreciated that this level of detail adds to the workload of centre staff, but it is an important element in documenting the learning gains made by candidates.

Assessment

As always, it was good to see so many centre staff paying close attention to both the initial marking of projects and internal moderation in EPF6. Overall, detailed comments were provided that substantiated the reasoning behind the awarding of certain marks and, in the best centres, these comments were backed up by detailed supervisor annotations in the projects themselves. Again, I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise that, having decided on the appropriate mark band for a particular assessment strand, supervisors should start at the mid-point and then adjust up or down, depending on the relative strengths of the evidence seen. It is not good practice to start at the top of the mark band as this leads to over generous marking.

In terms of internal moderation, it was good to see a number of marks being adjusted in-light of discussions between centre staff. This is an important part of the process as it helps to ensure consistency between supervisors, thereby providing a quality assurance check before final mark submission. Problems can, however, occur when internal moderation is carried out very close to the final WJEC deadline. In a number of the projects seen, the alteration of marks led to inaccuracies of mark addition. Moreover, the marking grid on the front cover of the Learner Record, is for the final marks awarded to be listed. However, some centres had left the original pre-moderation marks here, thereby causing some confusion as to the actual final mark. It would therefore be advisable for centre coordinators, especially in larger centres, to involve the exams officer in double checking final mark submissions for accuracy.

Finally, I would like to again thank all centre staff for their hard work in preparing candidates for the Autumn 2021 season. In preparing future candidates, centre coordinators are encouraged to make full use of the resources available on the WJEC website. If centre coordinators have further specific questions, these should be directed to Glenda Kinsey, the EPQ subject officer via email at epq@wjec.co.uk

In addition, a CPD event is being planned for Spring 2022 and further details will be made available to centres in due course.



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