



PRINCIPAL MODERATOR'S REPORT

EXTENDED PROJECT QUALIFICATION

SUMMER 2018

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General Overview

This summer saw another excellent increase in the number of new centres choosing WJEC's EPQ. It is very pleasing to note that new centres have taken on board the advice and guidance given either at new centre visits or at CPD events. Thank you and welcome on board!

It was good to see a wide range of projects submitted this year, with candidates clearly pursuing topics for which they had a real passion. The majority of projects still follow the dissertation route but artefact outcomes are increasing in number. Moreover, it was good to see many centres responding to the advice in last year's report and at subsequent CPD events. For example, candidates were often explicitly researching not just the content of their artefact but also the nature of the artefact itself, thereby helping them to access Band 3 marks for AO2 LO4. In addition, moderators are now beginning to see much better presentation slide designs and EPF5 documentation, for example in the detailing of Q&A episodes than in previous years.

In terms of the submissions themselves, the vast majority of centres continue to submit moderation samples as paper copies. Whilst this is perfectly fine, it would help both the centres and WJEC if candidates were instructed to use double-sided printing, as many projects were single side printed, thereby adding needless weight to parcels. A minority of centres meanwhile took advantage of the new Surpass e-submission system, which appeared to work well and it is hoped that more centres will take up this option in future. Finally, on the topic of submissions, one note of caution for those centres who submitted their sample in CD format. Where links are provided to presentations, for example, in Microsoft Sway, these links must be easily accessible to the moderator. Submissions in Pdf format, for example, do not allow a link to be clicked or pasted and therefore are not readily accessible for the moderator.

Finally, it is important that all centre coordinators are aware that there are revised EPQ File Forms now available on the WJEC website for use from September 2018 onwards. There are a number of small changes that have been made in light of feedback provided at CPD events. For example, to help centres ensure that dual accreditation does not occur, the Learner Record has been amended to include an explicit statement from the Centre Coordinator. Furthermore, the EPF5 and EPF6 forms have been revised, as a number of centres are still not supplying sufficient evidence here. It is of course, appreciated that Year 12 students will already be working through the existing version and these can be submitted as normal next summer. However, in 2020, only the new style documentation will be accepted.

Project Title and Documentation

It was good to see fewer candidates pursuing questions that involved ‘future gazing’ this year. By enlarge, centres are providing sound guidance to their candidates and thereby helping them to refine questions appropriately. Remember that it is perfectly admissible for a candidate to refine their question at any time, even after having produced a first draft. There are still a few candidates, however, that are putting forward descriptive questions focused around ‘What are the’ and ‘How does the’ which are best avoided. Similarly, as in the past, centre coordinators would be well advised to steer candidates away from two part questions. Too often the first question is very descriptive and elements of this would automatically be covered in the second part of the question. An example here would be a question that asked, ‘How did the Germans try to capture Stalingrad in the Second World War and why did they fail?’ The best advice for candidates is to avoid over complicating their research question. Consequently, the question ‘Why did the Germans fail to capture Stalingrad in World War Two’ is a more analytically focused question that would allow the candidate to demonstrate higher order thinking in comparing and contrasting the importance of different factors before coming to an evidence based conclusion. Finally here, it is important that candidates do not see their question or artefact topic in isolation; rather it is underpinned by the identified aims and objectives stated in EPF1. There tends to be significant variation in how centres approach this area and it would be worth centre coordinators taking time to look at the guidance offered in the Guidance for Teaching document available on the WJEC website.

In terms of the Learner Record in general, it is good to see more candidates making good use of the documentation to explain their thinking at different stages of the project. It was also good to see more students looking at alternative planning tools to the now very familiar Gantt chart; for example, a number of centres were encouraging their candidates to use Trello as an alternative platform. As always, whichever tool candidates chose to use, it is important that they take the time to explain the thinking behind key planning decisions, as this will support both their AO1 LO2 and AO3 LO5 marks. This is particularly important as the most disappointing area of Learner Record completion remains EPF2c. The candidate’s write up of their taught course experience is a key piece of explicit evidence in judging the new skills they have acquired as a result of their 45 guided learning hours. Too often, candidates offer little specific detail here, which is something of a missed opportunity. The Specification clearly states that:

Learners will be taught both generic and specialist skills that will contribute to the completion of the project. These will include research methods, organisational, problem-solving and decision-making skills, evaluation and review skills that will enable learners to become independent, critical and reflective learners.

In other words, it is expected that candidates will do more than briefly identify time management and referencing as skill development points. Furthermore, candidates should be encouraged to use the final column to explain how the particular skills have influenced the development of their project i.e. the skills are not simply learnt but also applied.

Project Outcome

It was again good to see many centres, though not all, responding to last year's advice regarding concluding paragraphs. Moderators look closely at conclusions as part of their assessment of AO4 LO8 as when a candidate has supposedly carried out 'wide ranging research' and written in excess of 5,000 words, it is expected that the conclusion will not just be four or five sentences. The Band 3 descriptor for AO4 LO8 clearly states that candidates must demonstrate evaluation by, 'comprehensively evaluating the planned outcome against objectives'. Consequently, it is not unreasonable to expect a candidate to demonstrate their developed higher order thinking in the concluding paragraph(s). In terms of advice for next year, I would draw the attention of centre coordinators to the issue of referencing. This was an issue that came up at the inaugural EPQ Teachers' Conference held at Southampton University in May this year and is worth commenting on here. Just as there is no defined number of resources that qualifies as a 'wide range', similarly there is no defined number of references expected in a dissertation. Clearly, this depends on the topic and the candidate's selection of material. However, given that references demonstrate the application of the research, it is concerning when a candidate submits a 5,000 word dissertation for which there are only maybe ten references. Similarly, when a dissertation includes 150 references, it raises the question as to whether the candidate has included sufficient analysis, evaluation and judgement on the material they have synthesised. Finally, last year's report focused on candidates not meeting the minimum word count, especially in the context of the 5,000 word dissertation. In terms of an upper word limit, clearly the EPQ is not A Level coursework and therefore a maximum word count is not prescribed. However, in terms of general advice, it is not expected that a 5,000 word dissertation should become 10,000 words. Similarly, it is not expected that a 1,500 word artefact report becomes 5,000 words. Candidates who are well above the minimum word count would be well advised to demonstrate their précis skill at the drafting stage as this would help credit AO3 LO5 marks.

Project Presentation

As already mentioned, there was clear evidence that a number of centres have taken on board the recommendations in last year's report regarding the use of new technologies and the evidencing of Q&A episodes; for example, more candidates took advantage of Microsoft Sway and Prezi as alternatives to PowerPoint this year. However, it is worth reminding centres that candidates will not be penalised if they chose an alternative format such as an exhibition display. As always, it is the totality of the evidence that is important, which is why candidates must ensure cue cards or scripts are submitted as part of the final documentation. The key for the centre, meanwhile, lies in the detail of the Q&A write up in EPF5. As a reminder, general comments regarding how wonderful a presentation was are not deemed as being sufficient for an AO4 LO7 Band 3 mark. Hence, if the centre wants to hold an EP presentation event for parents to attend, that is fine, provided the supervisor still goes around his/her students and to ask the challenging questions and notes the responses given.

Assessment

In terms of assessment, a number of centres are unfortunately not following the advice offered in last year's report and hence it is worth restating the guidance here. Centres must not over reward the highest mark within a Band, especially regarding AO3 LO5 and LO6; instead, having decided which Band a candidate's work falls in to, the supervisor should start from a mid-mark within the Band. If they deem it a particularly good example, the mark should be moved up and explained in the EPF6 comment box. Conversely, if an element of the Band is more weakly evidenced, then a lower mark within the Band should be awarded. Of equal note, however, is that centres tend to be overly harsh at the lower end of the ability range. Candidates who complete all stages of the process and submit an outcome that is fit for purpose, it would not be expected that they would only achieve a mark in the range of 20/100 to 35/100. Whilst such candidates can be very frustrating for the Centre Coordinator and Supervisor with missed meetings and deadlines, staff should look closely at what has been achieved. Marks across all eight assessment strands that fall into Band 1 would clearly indicate that the candidate has not reached the Level 3 standard and if this is the case, they should be withdrawn from the qualification.

Finally, it is worth all centre staff noting that before moderating a Centre's sample, the WJEC Moderator will look back at the advice offered in the previous year's Centre Report, together with the Principal Moderator's Report. WJEC moderators will expect to see that Centre staff have responded to this advice in preparing their new cohort. At previous CPD events, it has been found that some coordinators have been unaware that individual centre Moderator's Reports are available to them on the secure website on the EPQ results day. Clearly, in such cases centre coordinators need to speak with their Examinations Officer to ensure future access.

It only remains for me to thank all centre coordinators and supervisors for their hard work in supporting candidates in this summer's entry; the highest entry on record for the EPQ at WJEC. As always, I look forward to seeing a number of you at this autumn's CPD events, scheduled in Birmingham, Cardiff and London. The events this year will focus on a number of key assessment issues including:

- How to make new technologies work for your candidates
- Dissertation conclusions
- Evidencing AO3 LO5 marks in the Learner Record
- How to plan and implement effective internal standardisation

Details of the WJEC Extended Project Autumn CPD events 2018 are available on the WJEC website.



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