

PROJECTS

Moderators' report

EXTENDED PROJECT

H857

For first teaching in 2017

H857/01/02 Summer 2023 series

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Introduction

Our moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Online courses

We have created online courses to build your confidence in delivering, marking and administering internal assessment for our qualifications. Courses are available for Cambridge Nationals, GCSE, A Level and Cambridge Technicals (2016).

Cambridge Nationals

All teachers delivering our redeveloped Cambridge Nationals suite from September 2022 are asked to complete the Essentials for the NEA course, which describes how to guide and support your students. You'll receive a certificate which you should retain.

Following this you can also complete a subject-specific Focus on Internal Assessment course for your individual Cambridge Nationals qualification, covering marking and delivery.

GCSE, A Level and Cambridge Technicals (2016)

We recommend all teachers complete the introductory module Building your Confidence in Internal Assessment, which covers key internal assessment and standardisation principles.

Following this you will find a subject-specific course for your individual qualification, covering marking criteria with examples and commentary, along with interactive marking practice.

Accessing our online courses

You can access all our online courses from our teacher support website [Teach Cambridge](#).

You will find links relevant to your subject under Assessment, NEA/Coursework and then Online Courses from the left hand menu on your Subject page.

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General overview

The Extended Project offers candidates the opportunity to engage in a project of their own choosing over an extended period of time. Submission is by portfolio and includes the URS, the PPR, the outcome of the project (or photographic/video evidence of the outcome), a presentation, evidence that the presentation has taken place, i.e. feedback sheets, and a range of evidence to support candidates' performance in AO1 Plan and Manage, AO2 Research, AO3 Develop and Realise and AO4 Review.

The outcome of the project can be a dissertation of around 5000 words, a report on findings (i.e. of scientific or social scientific studies or reviews of studies), an artefact, an event or a performance. Artefacts, events or performances must be accompanied by a written piece of around 1000 words, which demonstrates project development. The most useful format for this written piece, in terms of helping candidates to demonstrate the skills required to meet the Assessment Criteria, is a report on the project management processes and project development.

This year, moderators have seen a range of reports, dissertations and artefacts, along with a small number of events and performances. These have included academic dissertations on, for example theoretical physics, the effects of synaesthesia and the use of music therapy in neurology. Artefacts have included websites, graphic renderings of buildings, computer games, artwork and projects which make a real difference to the candidate's institution.

The more successful candidates produced some impressive projects in which they integrated the assessed skills effectively. They selected a topic or artefact which was individual, related to their interests and meaningful to them, often related to their career aspirations but sometimes related to a personal interest, which allowed them to develop skills relevant to their futures. These candidates all chose topics which allowed focused and targeted development. They set clear aims and objectives, and all the skills they developed drove the project forward. There was detailed and thoughtful planning, with broader tasks broken down into SMART tasks, and thought given to what needed to be done and in what order, to achieve project aims and planned outcomes. Any planning tools used, whether Gantt charts, to do lists, prioritisation, software such as Trello, were used as active project management tools, helping candidates to decide on specific actions and to keep to deadlines. These candidates conducted focused research, using a range of credible sources. Those writing dissertations and reports often included academic sources alongside government and organisational reports and other specific sources relevant to their projects. They narrowed and deepened their research as they refined their research question, and selected and used material effectively to inform their projects. Candidates producing artefacts used a range of specific and relevant sources, varying from well-managed sketchbooks, through coding and software tutorials to, in one case, for a candidate producing an architectural drawing, a request for information about water and gas pipes under the piece of land they had identified for prospective use. These candidates all produced analysis of their sources, but perhaps even more importantly, they simply didn't use problematic sources. These candidates developed their skills effectively and appropriately to their projects, identifying and solving problems, and using ongoing review and evaluation of their projects to keep them on track. Presentations and final evaluations were insightful, considering both the effectiveness of the candidates' project management and the overall effectiveness of their outcomes.

Less successful projects fell into two categories. In the first category, candidates focused on their outcomes, usually a dissertation (occasionally an artefact), but did not provide evidence of planning, management, research, skills development or review and evaluation. This was common to all candidates in a centre and was often accompanied by marking which was too generous. The moderator needs to be able to see a portfolio of evidence to support marks in all Assessment Objectives. In some instances, the outcomes demonstrated strong skills, but the Extended Project is not about the outcome alone – it's very much about the processes involved in managing the project to achieve and reflect on the outcome.

In the second category, candidates tended to be less focused. Topics were too broad, too generic or did not effectively engage candidates' interest. Alternatively, they may have lacked sufficient scope for 120 GLH at Level 3. Other candidates chose projects that were too demanding or the scope was too great for a single Level 3 candidate in 120 GLH. This tended to result in a panicked last-minute attempt to finish one part of the project, often something which then lacked scope. In this group of less successful responses, planning and project management tended to be lacking, retrospective or performative, for example a rough timeline with research assigned to October, planning assigned to November, writing to December, paperwork to January, or a Gantt chart which had been coloured in with little thought to its usefulness. Research tended to be minimal, and usually from sources such as Wikipedia, fan blogs or the Daily Mail and the tabloid press generally, or basic information sources such as the NHS website – a good starting point but not sufficient. These sources tend to include facts and offer speculation or opinion, but usually lack not only credibility but also the kinds of evidence, arguments and ideas which encourage the kinds of thinking necessary for stronger performance at Level 3. Dissertations at this end of the range tended to be collections of facts or opinions, often organised into sub-topics beneath a broad question, with the sub-topics not always helping to respond to the broad question. There was a general need for the higher-level thinking and reasoning skills that would be expected in a stronger dissertation. Artefacts tended to be unfinished, completed to a very low standard, or unsuitable for a Level 3 project of 120 GLH. At times, artefacts in this weaker group of projects were unfocused, perhaps a collection of two or three smaller outcomes which did not form a coherent project. Skills were developed – but these did not always drive the project forward. Candidates in this group usually offered some evaluation of their performance, often a belated realisation of the benefits of planning.

There were instances of candidates whose overall performance was not as successful in comparison to the national standard, but where it was evident that they had been effectively supported to achieve well for them, it is important to emphasise how valuable this is.

Importance of project topic

The importance of guiding candidates to support their choice of a project topic which is individual, specific and appropriate cannot be overstated. It informs the whole project. Refining research questions and artefact briefs from the original is also vital.

Driving project outcomes

Every aspect of the project should be used to drive project outcomes and achieve aims and objectives.

Candidates who did well generally:	Candidates who did less well generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chose an individual, focused project topic and refined it as the project progressed • identified aims and objectives necessary to achieve the project outcome effectively • broke down tasks into SMART sub-tasks with mini milestones • narrowed and deepened research as the research question was refined • used selected ideas, arguments and evidence to support their own thinking, often researching further to check facts or develop their understanding • engaged in effective practice-based research (for artefacts), effectively trying a range of options to identify the best solution (whether in art, coding or other projects) • used relevant primary research only when it serves project aims • referenced and cited diligently and effectively, using an appropriate format such as Harvard, IEEE or APA, often selecting the format most appropriate to their field of study • developed a range of skills appropriate to their project and deployed them effectively to achieve planned outcomes • evaluated their project management and the extent to which their project outcomes met aims and objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chose a generic, broad or inappropriate project topic • identified aims and objectives that did not link to achieving project outcomes • kept tasks broad and vague with only overall deadlines • researched broadly and shallowly, often by topic rather than focused research question • adopted and presented ideas from research sources with little selection, manipulation or question whether this information was correct or useful • tended to take the first solution that presented itself, often then dealing with further problems later because the first solution was not the best solution • sent out weakly constructed surveys which did not serve project aims • produced a list of URLs or hyperlinks (which could not be followed in printed formats), with no or limited citation, at times to the point of academic dishonesty • developed a range of skills, but not necessarily to serve project aims or achieve planned outcomes • made some evaluative comments about aspects of their performance.

Assessment for learning



The PPR is a compulsory document. It is also an extremely useful document which can be used to provide evidence for a range of skills. The whole document should be completed as fully as possible. The 'Qualifications' box is often left empty. Candidates should write down the qualifications they are working towards. This allows the moderator to judge skill progression.

Most common causes of candidates not achieving higher marks

Most common causes of candidates not achieving higher marks include:

- a focus on the project outcome rather than the whole process of project management
- a lack of evidence to support development against the Assessment Criteria
- unfocused or generic topic choices
- unclear outcomes i.e. two or three smaller, incoherent outcomes, or a lack of clarity regarding whether the candidate is producing an artefact or a dissertation
- overfocus on production of specific documentation, with insufficient focus on using it to achieve project aims or to improve candidate performance.

Common misconceptions

There seem to be misconceptions around the extended writing supporting an artefact, event or outcome, around the nature of research, and around the requirement for certain pieces of evidence.

Misconception



'Candidates producing an artefact also have to write a short academic essay'.

Response: The specification requires a piece of extended writing to explore project development where candidates produce an artefact, event or performance. This is flexible to meet the needs of individual projects but is often best used as a report on project processes and development. This can include reference to candidates' research and how it informed project development, and can usefully also refer to planning, management, realisation of the project, skills development and evaluation.

Misconception



'Research is finding information'.

Response: Finding information for a purpose is one aspect of research but effective research places that information in a broader context of perspectives, ideas, arguments, and other evidence in order to develop knowledge and understanding. Effective research includes analysis, evaluation and synthesis of others' ideas, in order to develop one's own ideas.

Misconception



'Candidates need to produce a Gantt chart/mind map/skills audit because it's an EPQ requirement.'

Response: Gantt charts are very helpful if they are well used and if they help candidates to manage their projects. Gantt charts which are little more than colouring-in are not helpful. If a candidate finds Trello or handwritten to do lists more useful in managing their project, then they should use these methods. This is true of almost every document which can be included in a portfolio. They should be included because they are useful to candidates in achieving their planned outcomes. Although portfolios should contain a range of documents offering supporting evidence of skills development across the assessment objectives, the only specific documents which are requirements are the URS, the PPR, an outcome or photographic/video evidence of the outcome (plus extended written piece for artefacts, events and performances), a presentation and evidence of the presentation taking place such as feedback. All other documents which provide evidence should be there because of their usefulness.

Avoiding potential malpractice

In order to avoid malpractice, it is important that:

- teachers do not provide written comments to candidates
- candidates must use in-text citations every time they use material from a source, whether directly quoted or paraphrased, and provide references. Even less successful responses need to understand that this is necessary to avoid academic dishonesty and not an optional extra
- candidates need to select material from their sources rather than copying and pasting whole chunks of source material and adopting it as their own.

Helpful resources

OCR provides a range of resources to support delivery of the Extended Project Qualification.

[Extended Project Qualification](#) on Teach Cambridge

Additional comments

Centres are thanked for generally effective administration of the Extended Project and support for candidates in developing their independent work. Particular thanks to those who submit work to the repository, which facilitates OCR's procedures, and those who use treasury tags to bind work. These are most effective at keeping projects together while being easy to handle and surviving the delivery system, while also minimising plastic.

However, there are a few administrative areas where there is room for improvement.

URS – arithmetic: Moderators all reported seeing more clerical errors this year. This slows moderation. Please make sure that the marks for each AO add up to the total on the URS, and that the correct total is transferred to Moderation Manager.

URS – teacher comments: Moderators all reported seeing a mixture of effective teacher comments which effectively link candidate performance to the Assessment Criteria and teacher comments which were absent, brief or insufficiently relevant to the Assessment Criteria. There were also more typographical errors than usual. While moderators understand the pressure on centres and teachers at the moment, the URS is an opportunity to justify marks given.

URS – internal moderation: it is always welcomed when there are signs of internal moderation keeping the standard within a centre consistent. However, in some instances, this led to confusion about which mark was supposed to be given. It is helpful where amendments due to internal moderation are consistently indicated within a centre – perhaps by using a green pen/type.

Use of the PPR: Most moderators reported an increase in the proportion of PPRs which are submitted incomplete, or which are not submitted at all. This is a compulsory document with the potential to provide significant evidence of many of the assessed skills in a relatively compact space.

Moderators generally look at the PPR and the URS first. They are important documents which help the moderator to understand what the project is about, how effectively first markers understand the Assessment Criteria and how effectively the candidate is demonstrating evidence of their skills in the different Assessment Objectives.

Labelling: It is most useful to moderators if every candidate's work is labelled on the outside with centre and candidate numbers. This facilitates the selection of the initial sample for moderation. Candidate names should also appear on the URS and PPR, but moderators work by candidate number rather than name, using names only if there is a need to check. Ideally, each document that a candidate produces would include centre and candidate numbers, on the document and, where appropriate, in the file name. This is particularly useful in those instances where folders have not sustained the rigours of the delivery system. Lever arch files are inclined to explode and manilla folders tend to disgorge candidate work – so labelling becomes even more important.

All centres are to be congratulated in supporting candidates through their Extended Projects – it is wonderful to see candidates developing. As one moderator put it, 'While I am aware of the direct impact the EPQ has on our students, it is satisfying to see it happening to students across the country and of many different abilities. The EPQ is such an important qualification and every student benefits, irrelevant of their mark. They all learn how to do things, or how they could have done it.'

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ExamBuilder is **free for all OCR centres** with an Interchange account and gives you unlimited users per centre. We need an [Interchange](#) username to validate the identity of your centre's first user account for ExamBuilder.

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