

## OCR Report to Centres

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**June 2012**

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

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# CONTENTS

## Projects

### Level 3 Extended Project (H856)

#### OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

<b>Content</b>	<b>Page</b>
Overview	1
Moderation Report	3

## Overview

It was good to see a continued growth in the remarkable range and diversity of the projects submitted. An increasing number of centres are realising the opportunity that the EPQ offers to students to acquire and develop a range of skills which may prove invaluable at university and also in the world of work. We saw some remarkable plays written and performed, businesses set up, equine problems analysed, family histories researched; the list is almost endless and was a great tribute to the energy and enterprise of so many students.

There were, however, several aspects that caused some concern. The first was the evident lack of awareness on the part of some centres of what the project entails in terms of both commitment and focus. Successful centres run a comprehensive preparatory course in the region of 16 hours in order to provide their students with the necessary project management skills. There was evidence from some centres that the preparatory course had been a 45-minute session which not all candidates had been able to attend. The second concern was in the amount of time allocated by centre and candidate to the EPQ: as little as six weeks in some cases. The Level 3 EPQ is the equivalent to an A2 (not an AS) and is assessed by A2 standards, so the time and commitment is expected to be the same as that allocated to an A2. It may not need or get the same amount of class time, but it still needs a substantial amount of time allocated to it by both supervisor and student. The third major concern was the growing number of projects which seem to be little more than extensions to existing A Level work. Care needs to be taken if the project links closely to an A level being studied to ensure that there is real extension and a primary focus on skills rather than on content.

A concern that emerged for the first time this year was that centres may be following misleading advice given by universities regarding the EPQ rather than following the requirements of the specification. In one case, the moderator contacted a centre for further evidence to support the high marks awarded to candidates who had all written essays linked to their A level courses. The centre responded that universities did not want to see the evidence requested by the moderator and also that universities had said that students' EPQs must be essays related to the course they had applied to study. Centres are reminded that they must follow the assessment criteria and guidance given in the specification.

**AO1** The best candidates provided ample evidence that they had chosen their own topic for their project and that they had not been directed initially. There is still evidence of centres telling candidates not only the topic but even a specific title that will either help them get a better grade in their A level subjects or appeal to university admissions tutors. Centres can assist in guiding the student, after their own initial choice, to a more manageable project which will enable them to attain highly in all four assessment objectives, without prejudicing the student's marks. One moderator commented on how much more obvious the project management process was when the students were given free rein with how they produced their evidence and were not constrained by templates.

For the highest marks moderators expect to see clear evidence of comprehensive planning (not just an essay plan) of the entire project, and also evidence that the student has 'taken full responsibility for their project, skilfully planning and managing every aspect of the work'. The planning and managing aspect is often forgotten. Moderators are looking for something more than a photocopied Gantt chart which is the same for every student from the same centre.

Many candidates appeared to spend a lot of time worrying about getting the title right at the very beginning. Their focus should be on undertaking a project that lends itself to high attainment in the EPQ's assessment objectives rather than choosing the right title. There was also evidence that students were actively discouraged from doing anything other than a dissertation. In one case the centre hand-out given to all students at their introductory session simply stated that it 'had' to be a dissertation, with no mention of the other formats.

**AO2** The best candidates showed some enterprise in tracking down information and in overcoming real challenges. Obviously students will need a clear picture before they embark on a project of what a 'wide range' might be in the context of their project. The best candidates provide ample evidence – usually in a well-kept log – that they had 'obtained, selected, collated and analysed' the information and data they had got hold of for themselves. In the less successful projects, there was often a shortage of evidence that this had taken place and candidates need to be well trained in how to evidence this vital aspect of the project. Moderators often saw limited bibliographies which gave the candidate's AS and A2 textbooks and the first 10 sites provided via Google as the only two secondary sources. Centres need to ensure that candidates have careful training in carrying out independent research. Those who do well in this aspect invariably come from centres that have invested considerable time and effort on this in the preparatory course. There is a clear link between high attainment and an investment by the centre in training candidates effectively.

**AO3** Candidates scored high marks in this AO when there was the right focus on skills. The key factors moderators look for are whether 'a wide range of appropriate skills have been selected and used in a sophisticated manner in relation to the context of the project' and whether 'there is clear evidence throughout of the critical, creative and flexible use of skills in the furtherance of the project's development and realisation.' Too often the focus of the project was on content rather than skills and this could lead to very low marks. It often tended to be candidates who had moved away from their A Level or Diploma 'comfort zone' who produced the most outstanding projects and attained most highly.

**AO4** Candidates scored high marks in this AO had several features in common. There was a detailed log on the entire process, from beginning to end, which provided the evidence in a way that linked clearly to all four assessment objectives: the choice of project, the planning, the research, the skills and the reflection. There was also evidence of a good reflective focus on the whole project management process and a presentation focused on their project management ability rather than just on content or on the facts discovered. Moderators also look for comments on the link between the project and the candidates' career or HE aspirations. It is the on-going reflection on the process that is the real key to high marks, and the candidates who provided ample evidence of critical reflection on the process during the process rather than at the conclusion invariably did well.

## **Moderation Report**

There was much to praise this year in the sheer variety of projects that we moderated and the huge commitment that had so obviously been put in by centres and their students. The growing awareness of the opportunity that the Project offers to students at all levels is becoming more apparent and the more centres train students first and then allowed them to follow their own interests, the better the results were. Centre standardisation is clearly developing well and there was much fuller and more helpful use of the URS sheets and the candidates' PPRs. Centres which did not train and tried to exercise too much control and direction tended to get disappointing results. The focus must always be on project management and not on content. We need to see ample evidence of individual planning and reflection and much greater awareness that there are other sources of information than the internet.

**OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)**  
1 Hills Road  
Cambridge  
CB1 2EU

**OCR Customer Contact Centre**

**Education and Learning**

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: [general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk](mailto:general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk)

**[www.ocr.org.uk](http://www.ocr.org.uk)**

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OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)  
Head office  
Telephone: 01223 552552  
Facsimile: 01223 552553

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