

OCR Report to Centres

January 2012

H56/R/12J

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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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Overview

It was good to note the increase in entry again, particularly at Level 3 and Level 2. A growing number of centres are clearly appreciating the value of the qualification and the variety of ways it can be adapted to suit the particular needs of their students. It was also good to note the increasing variety of outcomes and the delightful diversity of so many of the projects. The projects provide the opportunity to demonstrate enterprise and individuality and it is refreshing to see students doing just that. Supervisors should always make full use of the comments section on the URS sheets as this is invaluable in understanding the marks awarded. It is important to give the moderator as much indication as possible where key evidence lies.

There were still quite a few projects where it was very apparent that neither students nor supervisors were aware of the assessment criteria. Some had submitted a highly academic essay for Level Three, with no plan or evidence of independent research. There were also some examples of rebadged coursework for Level 2 with a focus purely on content. Students need careful training before embarking on a Project, so they are fully aware of what is going to be assessed. Comments by supervisors on the URS sheets also show a lack of awareness of the assessment criteria. There is detailed guidance for both students and supervisors in the student and teacher guides as well as at INSET.

H856

General Comments

As always there was a fascinating range of projects, on topics ranging from rugby injuries to tax havens, animation DVDs to investigations into the impact of the loss of the EMA. It is delightful to see so many centres and students grasping fully the potential of the qualification, and using the opportunity it offers candidates to demonstrate independence. The number of centres who understand the importance of giving their students comprehensive training in project management before embarking on their projects is also growing.

The key to success, centres are finding, is

- to ensure that students and supervisors are fully trained
- to give the students enough time to do their projects.
- for both students and supervisors to be aware that their projects should have the same 'substance' as an A2 unit and that it will be assessed at the same level as an A2 unit.
- ensuring that there is ample documentary evidence to back up the marks awarded.

Centres that have fared less well this series are those that

- were unaware of the time and effort that the qualification requires.
- did not give their students enough time to complete the work. There were several instances where only a few weeks had been given. A2 units are not done in three or four weeks and good projects cannot be done in that time either.
- showed that neither students nor supervisors were aware of the criteria by which the projects are assessed and of the need to provide evidence. Some encouraged students to work on a topic linked to their A levels, giving them reading lists, and assessing them against A level criteria. Comments about the content of the essay for AO1 showed clearly that the supervisor had not understood that evidence of project management skills and planning are required for AO1. Although a huge amount of time and effort had been put into such essays, many contained no evidence of planning, independent research or skills development/progress, and had very little evaluation.
- discouraged their students from 'doing their own thing' and undermined the aim of the qualification by telling students what to do. Some students had clearly been encouraged to do an academic dissertation, perhaps close to their supervisor's own area of expertise, and discouraged from doing a group project or something more adventurous.

AO1 Often there was good evidence of an outline plan, but the key to high marks is to ensure that all aspects of the project, the major as well as the minor, are carefully planned and the evidence is provided for this. Make sure that the whole planning process is reviewed throughout the process as well as at the end.

AO2 The best centres took care to ensure that ample evidence was provided of independent research, of challenges being overcome, and that there was a wide range of sources used. Rather than heavy use of Wikipedia or A Level textbooks, moderators are looking for a lot of thought and effort being put into the research, for which good training is vital. Always ensure that evidence is provided of resource evaluation that students really reflect on what resources they have used and how they have used them, and also how they might do it differently next time.

- AO3 This is about skills and their development and use. While some centres recognise this, some do not and submit good A level essays. It is worth stressing that the specification says 'the learner will provide evidence thata wide range of appropriate skills have been selected and used in a sophisticated manner... in the context of the project....in order to solve problems....there is clear evidence throughout of the critical, creative and flexible use of skills in the furtherance of the projects development and realisation.'
- AO4 It was good to see so many centres doing so much better here. There was much more evidence of review and evaluation of the process as opposed to some reflection on the outcome. The best centres put more emphasis on training for this AO, with focussed presentations with good evaluations and critical, reflective logs covering the whole period of the project, (instead of those hastily put together at the end). There was also much more evidence of how the project fitted into career/university aspirations.

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