



Qualifications and
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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
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Rewarding Learning

Consultation on the extended project (level 3)

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Purpose of the consultation

QCA has developed a draft framework and criteria for an extended project at level 3 in response to the DfES White Paper *14-19 Education*. The extended project is being developed primarily in England but, since the qualification will form a part of A level programmes and of specialised Diplomas, it could be available to students in Wales and Northern Ireland. Accordingly, the regulators in Wales (DELLS) and Northern Ireland (CCEA) are collaborating with QCA in this development.

The extended project will be a single piece of work, requiring a high degree of planning, preparation, research and autonomous working. Projects that students complete will differ by subject, but all will require persistence and use of research skills so that students explore a subject independently and in depth. QCA will work with higher education institutions and employers to create a framework and detailed specifications for different types of projects, and assess manageability of the qualification for institutions.

A taught element will involve the development of a wide range of skills. It will also involve the development of the students' meta-cognitive skills to enable them to reflect on and monitor their own thinking processes. Ideally, they will acquire a 'tool-kit' of skills, knowledge and understanding, which they will be able to use when tackling similar projects in the future.

This consultation concentrates on the draft framework and criteria for extended projects at level 3. The extended projects available for A level programmes and those embedded in the specialised Diplomas will work within the same framework.

This consultation document provides background information on the framework and accompanies the questionnaire. The questionnaire invites responses to questions on the proposed principles and on the requirements for the delivery and assessment of extended projects (level 3).

Four key questions underpin the consultation:

Q Do the proposed criteria permit **students** to choose and design an extended project (level 3) that has personal relevance to them?

Q Do the proposed criteria permit **awarding bodies** to design valid specifications for different models of extended projects (level 3)?

Q Do the proposed criteria permit the design of specifications that will be manageable and practical for delivery by **learning providers**?

Q Will the proposed criteria support the development of a qualification that has value and credibility for **students, employers and higher education**?

The draft framework and criteria

This section explains the rationale behind each of the sections in the draft framework and criteria and should be read with that document.

Introduction (section 1)

The aim of the proposed criteria is to provide a generic framework within which awarding bodies can create specifications for the extended project (level 3), the outcome of which will be a distinctive qualification available to a wide range of students.

As part of their level 3 studies, students should have the opportunity to develop extended projects relevant to their own lines of study and interests. Awarding bodies and skills sectors, employers and higher education institutions will also have an interest in the development of the types of extended projects relevant to their subject/sector. The criteria, therefore, have to be sufficiently flexible to permit different specifications and to support a variety of extended projects at level 3. At the same time, the criteria must ensure that assessments will be rigorous and standards will be comparable across the range of specifications.

The following questions were addressed to determine the detail of the framework.

- How can both breadth and depth of learning be incorporated?
- How can different types of specialist knowledge and understanding be credited?
- How can a common range of skills be identified?
- How can the learning and assessment for extended projects (level 3) be delivered alongside the entire range of programmes of study?
- How best can varied types of extended projects at level 3 and models of delivery be assessed by a common framework?
- How can the needs of all stakeholders reasonably be met – the learner, the employer, HE, the learning providers?

Aims (section 2)

The vision for an extended project (level 3) was first suggested by the Working Group of the 14–19 Reform and set out in the White Paper *14–19 Education and Skills*. The White Paper refers to ‘an education system more tailored to the talents and aspirations of individual young people, with greater flexibility’. The aims for the extended project (level 3) are designed to:

- reflect the opportunities, choice and flexibility that should be available at level 3
- emphasise the importance of personal thinking skills, which are necessary for most kinds of work and learning
- encourage an individual approach to lifelong learning.

Relationship between the extended project (level 3) and areas of study (section 3)

Students who carry out an extended project (level 3) will be following a variety of programmes of study. A level students may combine AS and A level subjects in any number of combinations. Specialised diploma students will have opted for one of 14 lines of applied learning. Many students will have additional interests, which may play an equally important role in their planning for future employment and higher education. Inevitably, the topics chosen for the extended project (level 3) will vary widely.

The criteria have been designed to:

- permit knowledge, understanding and skills to be drawn from existing areas of study (other level 3 courses)
- permit knowledge, understanding and skills to be drawn from a context outside the student’s areas of study (ie from a hobby, interest or additional area of learning)
- avoid duplication of units of study, assessments and qualifications already in existence, for example personal studies or synoptic projects in A level, or portfolio of evidence for key skills.

The specification content (section 4)

Common to specifications is the requirement that learners should:

- carry out activities to research their chosen task/topic
- provide evidence of their research process
- arrive at a conclusion/outcome to their task
- produce and/or deliver a presentation of the outcome.

The knowledge and understanding required by the specifications should not be a repetition of a task that could be assessed as part of other qualifications. Instead, the project should

demonstrate 'extension' of the student's knowledge and understanding. This might be shown by:

- application in a new or unfamiliar context
- comparison between an existing situation and a new context
- 'in depth' development of a highly focused ('narrower') part of an existing study area
- researched knowledge and understanding that is additional to their existing studies
- a body of knowledge that is cross-curricular and links areas of study.

In each case, students will be required to demonstrate that they can identify links and connections between their other studies/interests and the work carried out in their extended project (level 3). Such connections, links and extensions should encourage learners to develop and display their understanding and application of concepts.

The skills required by the criteria are based on the skills that are most commonly recognised as being relevant and useful. They include:

- independent enquiry skills, such as the ability to identify questions, draft hypotheses, locate required information, handle source material, think logically about arguments, adopt a critical approach to carrying out research, and evaluation
- skills in self-management, such as the ability to take ownership and responsibility for project decisions, planning and organisational skills, including time-management
- creative thinking skills, such as asking questions, generating and connecting ideas and problem solving
- enhanced communication and IT skills, and data handling ('going beyond literacy and numeracy'), including the ability to produce presentations and/or structured essays or reports.

While skills that relate to working with others are not specifically required, they may be a feature of the project. The ways in which learners work with others in the context of their project may vary greatly. For the purposes of evaluation, these would fall under the heading of self-management and organisational skills. The criteria permit a specification to choose or emphasise a 'working with others' element. However, if a collective enterprise is the context for the investigation, the criteria require that it is the individual contribution and outcome that is assessed for the award of the qualification.

Functional and key skills (section 5)

The extended project (level 3) can also be used, where appropriate, to provide opportunities for developing and providing evidence for both key skills and, when developed, functional skills.

Assessment objectives (section 6)

The four assessment objectives require specifications to assess a range of level 3 skills. The relative weightings of the assessment objectives may vary according to the nature of the project. A project involving the production of a dissertation may have a greater weighting for research and analysis of data, while a project involving production of an artefact may have a greater weighting on the creation of the outcome itself.

The scheme of assessment (section 7)

Project characteristics

The extended project (level 3) offers the opportunity for students to choose a project that reflects their interests. Projects may be diverse, but each will require:

- an investigative approach that encourages extension of skills, the application of in-depth knowledge and the understanding and use of research skills
- research tasks that will provide information for analysis and a conclusion to the investigation (eg a musician may conduct a performance in a new way, an engineer may build a prototype, a geographer may apply GIS to a traffic-circulation problem related to a community event, or a health and social care student may conduct interviews and collect data)
- an outcome that can be evaluated.

The following examples illustrate the way in which a process might apply to different learning scenarios.

- A health and social care student helping to arrange a community-based project would not simply 'organise' or 'run' the event, but investigate and evaluate the extent to which the organisation and character of the event was truly inclusive. Running the event would serve the same purpose as a scientific investigation and provide information for analysis and evaluation. The outcome might be a presentation to an open community forum that develops an argument and comes to a conclusion.
- An A level student interested in a career in theatre management might research a suite of lesser-known Shakespearean plays and investigate the factors that affect the popularity and, therefore, the financial viability of productions for a national theatre. The outcome might be a research essay with modelled spreadsheets.
- A group of students following AS courses in the humanities might carry out a community project in another area or country. Students might follow lines of

investigation relevant to their own subject interests to evaluate how politics, economics and sociology in the local setting had an impact on the project. The students could all contribute to the production of a video to present the findings of the group project. The students would individually evaluate what they had learned and conclude with an answer to their own investigative question.

Assessment evidence

The evidence for assessment should include the following:

- a portfolio of documented evidence of the negotiation of the title, design, management and completion of the project
- the evidence of the tasks and activities completed to obtain information
- a conclusion to the investigation and a presentation on the project.

The aim of requiring a variety of evidence is to help assessors evaluate a process that includes investigation and the use of skills to address an issue, solve a problem, think logically and present a structured argument. The focus is not primarily on the assessment of subject-specific knowledge or technique, but on their application in achieving a planned conclusion. Students should aim to communicate their conclusions in a main outcome. This would probably include an extended piece of writing, but the type of outcome produced would depend on the type of project and other media used. The students would also produce a presentation for assessors. This would allow students to show that they can communicate clearly and to demonstrate their understanding by addressing questions on the extension of their knowledge, understanding and skills.

Quality assurance

The specifications will need to identify systems and guidance that can support centres and students. This may include:

- how to negotiate and approve topics
- how to train students to use resources correctly and to avoid plagiarism
- training for internal assessment in the use of common criteria across many types of project
- training in the assessment of oral presentations, if these are included
- how to manage large numbers of students carrying out a diverse range of projects.

Annex

Example 1: A research project that forms the major part of a single unit qualification

Preparatory/taught component	Project proposal	Project plan	Project activity	Project presentation	Assessment
<p>A year 13 student attended taught sessions in extra-curricular time to explore a range of ethical, philosophical and scientific issues, learn about research methods and to help choose an individual topic from a list of themes provided by the awarding body.</p>	<p>Research issue: the ethics of genetically modified (GM) crops.</p> <p>Research question: is the use of GM foods justified in providing food aid to developing countries?</p> <p>Rationale: a contemporary issue in science and of personal interest.</p> <p>Relevant concepts: the nature of ethics and values arising from scientific developments.</p>	<p>Outline of tasks, resources and deadlines for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • undertaking initial research, including a literature review • drafting the research report • preparing the presentation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature review, using a range of source material, including case studies, newspaper reports and information from the internet about GM food production and food aid activities. • Organising a class debate to argue the case for and against the production of GM foods to help clarify and synthesise the issues, and practise presentation skills. • Drafting of the discussion part of the report, setting out the main findings from the research and developing a critical perspective on the arguments for and against the use of GM food in food aid. • Ongoing collation of bibliography. • Writing the introduction to the report and the conclusions, with supporting evidence drawn from the research; producing the abstract. • Preparation of the presentation – speaker notes and visual aids, and a rehearsal to a small group of students. • Presentation. • Evaluation of the project – reflection on the processes of research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual word-processed research report (6,000 words), using the required structure: abstract; introduction; literature review; discussion; conclusions; bibliography. <p>And</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral presentation (10 minutes) to two teachers and other students, with questions. 	<p>100% linear assessment of: word-processed report (80% of the marks); presentation (20% of the marks).</p> <p>Report assessed by a teacher using a mark scheme provided by the awarding body.</p> <p>Presentation assessed by two teachers, including the report marker.</p> <p>Report externally moderated.</p> <p>Graded on A – E scale.</p>

Example 2: An in-depth focus on an aspect of an A level

Preparatory/taught component	Project proposal	Project plan	Project activity	Project presentation	Assessment
<p>Year 13 students were offered a taught element (specialist knowledge/concepts) through A level politics, with additional input on project research methods and support from both the politics and citizenship tutors.</p> <p>The topic was decided by a group: to look in more depth at an issue relating to the EU (the EU features on paper 5 of the politics A level).</p>	<p>Research issue: Turkey's membership of the EU.</p> <p>Rationale: an issue currently in the news; it is important that people understand the different sides of the argument so that they can form their own opinions.</p> <p>Relevant concepts: democracy; identities and communities.</p>	<p>Outline of tasks, with individual responsibilities, project methods, resources and timescales for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initial research; • organising a cultural event – a 'democracy dinner'; • presenting findings and conclusions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection from: different media sources; the internet; interviews with staff at the Turkish embassy; participants attending event. • Production of a short video on findings from initial research (shown at event to provide background knowledge, stimulate debate). • Hosting of a 'democracy dinner' for local MP and MEPs, and other students, to debate and discuss the issue and record views and proposals. • Critical analysis of data from the initial research and event, and synthesis of views on the issue in relation to student's own understanding of the concepts of democracy, identities and communities. • Evaluation of the project – reflection on processes of research and organising the event, drawing of own conclusions, wider consideration of the UK's relationship to Islamic countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual report on findings from the project (written to the European Parliament). • Oral presentation to teachers, guests and other students, with video clip and questions. <p>Supported by a skills profile with record of functional, personal, learning and thinking skills demonstrated, as well as reflections.</p>	<p>Assessment by teachers of individual reports and oral presentations, including the application of relevant specialist knowledge and key skills, eg communication, ICT; improving own learning and performance.</p> <p>To be externally moderated.</p>

Example 3: A themed approach across different AS subject areas

Preparatory/taught component	Project proposal	Project plan	Project activity	Project presentation	Assessment
<p>First year college students undertaking AS level courses in social science, world development and politics, came together for a taught component to support project work relating to the study of the economic, social and political circumstances of Kenya.</p> <p>They negotiated with their tutor to carry out a community project involving a visit to a school in Nairobi.</p>	<p>Research issue: Kenya's education system.</p> <p>Rationale: this contemporary international issue would provide an opportunity to apply concepts relating to 'economics', 'equity and justice', and 'power and authority', from the subjects being studied to understanding the Kenyan education system. The project would also be of practical benefit to others.</p>	<p>Outline of tasks, individual responsibilities, resources and time-scales associated with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initial research • organising a visit to a school in Nairobi • presenting the findings from their research, project outcomes and conclusions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial research using a variety of source material, including direct contact with the chosen school, to extend knowledge of Kenya's economic, social and political circumstances and the educational needs of pupils. • Fundraising events to raise money to buy equipment and materials for the school and to finance the visit. • Talks during assemblies at local primary schools to raise awareness of the educational needs of the Kenyan pupils, and reinforce the presenters' learning about the topic. • Preparation for and visit to the school during the Easter holidays. • Critical analysis of project findings and outcomes from the visit, in relation to the relevant economic, social and political concepts studied. • Evaluation of the project, reflections on the processes and drawing of conclusions in relation to the wider topic of world poverty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual contributions to a video report on findings from the project and personal reflections; • Group presentation of the video to an invited audience on the topic of world poverty. 	<p>Co-assessment by two teachers of the video reports and presentation, including individual speaker notes/handouts, in relation to the application of specialist knowledge and skills in synthesising and communicating project findings.</p> <p>Self and peer assessment of the development of key skills and wider skills, using evidence drawn from the project.</p> <p>To be externally moderated.</p>

Example 4: An extension to a subject area

Preparatory/taught component	Project proposal	Project plan	Project activity	Project presentation	Assessment
<p>An IT student participated in an Enterprise workshop run by a national organisation, involving business planning, finance and marketing activities.</p> <p>This was followed by a session on what was expected of project work and a tutorial to negotiate the project topic with her tutor.</p> <p>It was suggested to the school that it would be helpful for the student to have support from a business mentor. This was arranged through the local Education Business Partnership.</p>	<p>Investigation: the website needs of a local small business (retail outlet wanting to market its products more widely).</p> <p>Rationale: to apply IT skills and knowledge to a business enterprise and extend understanding of economic and business concepts through practical experience.</p>	<p>Business plan, outlining tasks, time-scales and budget for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initial research to establish the website needs of the small business • development work on the prototype website • present the outcomes to the small business owner, business mentor and tutor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial research involving visiting the business to discuss its needs and to become familiar with the products sold and the way the business operates. • Investigation of other small business websites and discussion of ideas with business mentor. • Development of a prototype website, with feedback from the small business. • Critical analysis of project processes and outcomes, with synthesis of findings from research and own ideas, to show understanding of relevant economic and business concepts. • Evaluation of the project, reflections on the processes in developing the website, and drawing of conclusions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PowerPoint presentation to owner of small business, business mentor and tutor, with demonstration of website features. <p>Plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A briefing document describing the creative and business concepts behind the design of the website • Questioning from the audience, eg on how specialist IT knowledge and skills were used, and student's understanding of the needs of small businesses. 	<p>Assessment of the presentation and support documents by the project tutor and business mentor.</p> <p>Feedback from the owner of the small business.</p>

Example 5: A focus on a subject or theme outside of the main programme

Preparatory/taught component	Project proposal	Project plan	Project activity	Project presentation	Assessment
<p>A Year 12 student attended a careers session to discuss plans for pursuing an interest in sports psychology as a career and to explore post-school options.</p> <p>Follow up discussion with his careers teacher to negotiate a project based on his career interests.</p>	<p>Research: career opportunities in sports psychology and related courses in higher education.</p> <p>Rationale: project of personal interest and use to the student. It would provide an opportunity to explore career options, and develop more specialist knowledge in the area of sports psychology to inform career choices.</p>	<p>Career plan, outlining resources, methods and timescales for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research to explore opportunities in sports psychology and relevant higher education courses, and to learn more about the subject • analysing and presenting findings to firm up career plans. <p>The plan was subsequently amended to include links with a local university to further research the area of sports psychology.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial desk-based research using the Internet and careers library to identify career and higher education opportunities in sports psychology and entry requirements. • Further research on the subject of sports psychology through discussions with students from a local university, and recommended reading. • Participation in a coaching course at the university, to extend knowledge of motivation theories and techniques. • Critical analysis and synthesis of research findings in relation to own career plans. • Evaluation of the project, and personal reflections, drawing of conclusions in relation to own plans. 	<p>Electronic careers portfolio, including an in-depth description and synthesis of research findings and reflective diary on project processes.</p> <p>A careers plan.</p>	<p>Self-assessment and assessment by project tutor.</p>