

The Experience of the Scottish Baccalaureate in Language

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Abstract: This article highlights the experiences of a teacher who is both assessor and external verifier for the Interdisciplinary Project of the Scottish Baccalaureate in Languages.

Keywords: Scottish Baccalaureate; Interdisciplinary Project; assessment; internal verification

Introduction

In June 2010, two pupils in my school opted to do the Languages Baccalaureate. The Local Authority subsequently approached me and asked if I would be willing to take an additional pupil from another school. Although I had attended the SQA Development events on the Languages Baccalaureate, I felt I needed further assistance, in particular in taking the Interdisciplinary Project (IP) forward with the pupils.

I decided to contact SQA who arranged a development visit and sent Lorna Grant, SQA Baccalaureate Development Manager and Hannah Doughty, Professional Development Officer at Scotland's National Centre for Languages, out to see me.

This was hugely beneficial, as it not only gave me all the information I needed, but it also gave me advice on timings of the project deadlines. My candidates had broad ideas for their projects, but we used the toolkit from the Assessment Support Pack to test the robustness of their project objectives and this allowed me to advise the pupils on their proposals.

First Experiences

It quickly became clear that getting the proposal and project plans in place were key parts of the process and that, if these were well thought out, the rest of the project would fall into place. I was lucky to have one timetabled period a week with the pupils and this gave continuity of support and allowed me to see how things were progressing.

The role of assessor depends very much on effective questioning. As the pupils wish to develop their generic and cognitive skills, it's hugely important that the teacher takes a step back, and allows them to shape the process for themselves. The urge to tell them what to do, or even do it for them, can at times be overwhelming. However, a key question from the teacher can guide and allow pupils to make their own decisions.

Regular contact allowed me to give informal feedback. However, as the paperwork was submitted, progress could be formally acknowledged as each section of the project was signed off.

The SQA events throughout my first year of presentation were extremely helpful and the workshop sessions reassured me that I was on the right lines.

External Verifier

In January 2011 I was approached and asked to work as an External Verifier. I decided to get involved, believing that any insight into the process would also be helpful.

As the March deadline for the projects came closer, a few issues started to emerge. Of my three candidates, one was ready to present his PowerPoint, one was writing up a report and another, working on a DVD of his project on foreign film, seemed to be avoiding me! However, it did all work out in the end. The PowerPoint went well. The pupil engaged his audience and demonstrated his in-depth knowledge, following the research he had undertaken. The DVD by another blew us away with its subject matter, skilful use of ICT and research interviews, carried out with academics and pupils. Finally, the third pupil's report arrived eventually after some frantic phone calls.

I graded the projects and added assessor comments to the final section. These were then presented to our internal verification panel. This included a seconded member of the SMT as well as PT Languages from two other secondary schools. Once agreed, the grades were submitted electronically to SQA and the paperwork collated and sent off.

As External Verifier (EV), I was able to see all parts of the process, and was immediately aware that the assessor comments were essential in conveying the view of the project and the candidate's development to the EV team, where only the five mandatory pieces of paperwork are on view. The Quality Forum also allowed the assessor to talk through the Internal Verification process and also answer some questions the EV team might have, not only to create a fuller picture of the candidate's performance, but also to give the opportunity to share good practice and peer-assess projects from other centres.

I have now completed my second year of presentation with one candidate this time and still as an External Verifier. I've found it an enjoyable and rewarding experience. Although it can be stressful at times, I would encourage others to take on the role. There is good support from SQA and the website offers a wealth of information and exemplification to keep you and your candidates on track.