
Examiners' commentaries 2015–2016

CO3320 Project examination – Zones A and B

General remarks

The purpose of the CO3320 examination is to play the role that would normally be played by a *viva voce* examination. Although a *viva voce* examination is impractical for students on the University of London International Programmes, the written examination has been found to be a suitable form of assessment to replace the more traditional 'Project viva'. The primary purpose of such an examination is to assess the degree to which a student can adequately account for and explain the work undertaken in their Project. However, this is not the only aspect of the examination from which candidates' answers can attract marks as we shall see in this report.

Bad projects can still have good examination outcomes:

This year, the examiners noted that that many students were able to considerably **improve** their overall mark. Students did this by demonstrating in examination answers that they understood what was **required** for a good Project. A student with a relatively poor Project report can obtain an excellent mark on the examination paper by showing they **understand the content** of and can **explain what is expected** in a good Project.

At the other end of the spectrum, a student can turn in an excellent Project report, but be unable to explain the content when they sit as a candidate in the examination. In extreme cases this can lead to failure. That is, if the candidate is woefully inadequate in their explanation of their Project in the examination component they may fail this component despite submitting a pass-worthy Project report.

Dependence between Project report and examination: The examination mark is partly coupled to the Project report performance. This is because the examination questions necessarily ask the candidate about what they have undertaken in their Project work. The student who has performed particularly poorly on the Project report will tend to have less material to offer in answer to some examination questions. Similarly, the student who has performed very well on the Project report will have plenty of material to draw upon when answering examination questions.

As with any examination, candidates can prepare and perform better in the examination as a result of good preparation. Answers to the examination questions are not so closely coupled to the Project report that a student who performed poorly on the Project report cannot retrieve part of their performance, by answering examination questions well.

Examiners look for two things when setting questions and assessing examination answers:

1. **Understanding what is required of all good Projects.** The examiners wish to see that the candidate **understands** the **process and procedures** that need to be undertaken in performing Project work. Candidates should have read the **CO3320 Project** subject guide, and have taken advice from a variety of sources, and will thus be

well aware of the challenges, success-drivers and coping strategies for doing Project work. Such candidates will be able to answer questions on this aspect of assessment (irrespective of their Project report).

The examiners are seeking answers that show an awareness of best practice. For example, candidates should understand good referencing and scholarly practices; they should understand how to scope a Project; they should understand how to make a presentation about the contributions of their work.

2. **Understanding the technical contributions of the Project:**

The examiners are looking for evidence that the candidate can explain clearly the contributions of their work, the steps taken to achieve these, and the technical and scientific aspects of the work they have undertaken.

A student who has performed poorly on the Project component is unlikely to be able to answer questions in the second category when they sit as a candidate for the examination; they will simply have too little upon which to draw. However, even in this unfortunate situation, a candidate can pick up considerable benefit from good answers to questions that aim to assess the first of these two aspects. This happened in many cases for the 2015–16 cohort, where examination marks were often higher than the mark for the Project report as a result.

Pacing: As in previous years, the examiners found some evidence of poor pacing in the allocation of time to each of the examination questions. Each question carries equal marks, and therefore candidates should attempt to allocate roughly equal effort to answering each question. There was evidence that some candidates simply ran out of time towards the end of the examination. However, students appear to have heeded this advice from previous years as there were far fewer cases of non-attempted questions/sub-questions towards the end of the examination paper.

Use the weight of marks as a guide: It was also surprising that candidates did not always appear to appreciate that the number of marks awarded to each sub-question is an indication of the amount of writing required for the answer. Again, students appear to have heeded this advice from previous years. The examiners were able to observe a close correlation between the weight of marks awarded to each question and the effort devoted to answering.

Avoid repetition: The examiners noticed an increasing prevalence for candidates to ‘pad out’ their answers with superficial, repetitive or otherwise irrelevant statements/prose. Students should be aware that such answers will not add to the number of marks awarded. Answers to examination questions for this course – as with others – should be to the point and as clear as possible.