

CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL PROJECT QUALIFICATION

Paper 9980/01
Project

General comments

Planning and preparation are key to a successful project, and a productive working relationship between the candidate, their supervisor and the centre coordinator lies at the heart of this. It is also important that candidates develop research skills which are appropriate for a project at this level and these skills will also prepare candidates for experiences they will meet in higher education or in the world of work. Many candidates, supported by their centres, were able to demonstrate impressive skills in research and project planning.

On a practical note centres are to be commended for the way in which they have managed the submission of a considerable amount of information for projects to be assessed. Projects must be submitted in Microsoft Word (.docx) format. The report has a limit of 5000 words, and this must be adhered to as any text beyond 5000 words will not be included in the assessment. In this session some projects appeared to be much longer but on investigation this was because the bibliography and supplementary information such as data and results of surveys was all included in the report. The bibliography can be submitted as a separate Word file, as can other information the candidate wants to include. The research log is an important part of the project as it supports the research process and helps demonstrate planning and organisation. In the most successful projects, the log was used purposefully, for example, to record thoughts, actions required, and important information, evaluative comments, and reflections which were later written up in the report. In less successful projects, the research log was simply a record of things the candidate did at particular times.

Comments on specific assessment objectives

AO1 Research

The best projects used a question rather than a statement as the basis for their report. Once the question had been stated it was then thoughtfully justified; this might have been by exploring the reason why that topic had piqued the candidate's academic interest or their personal connection to the area they had chosen as the focus of their research. Some projects used a statement as their title, which made it harder to adopt the required analytical and evaluative stance. In addition, some projects provided little or no context as to why the candidate had selected their research topic. In the most successful projects, the question had clearly guided both the candidate's research and the material in their report. Research lies at the heart of success in this qualification and the best projects explained clearly why they had selected their research methods and they also justified their choice; this might be linked to the kind of research available on their chosen topic area, the skills the individual candidate possessed or the opportunity to explore a particular issue as a precursor to further study at undergraduate level. Some projects did use appropriate research methods but without any explanation or justification for their choice and an exploration of this area is an important aspect in terms of the overall success of a project. The most successful reports also had a clear sense of design – from the conception of the idea, through the planning stage, the research process and, finally, the realisation into a 5000-word report. This was often evidenced by a focused contents page at the start of the project which guided the reader through the report in a structured and appropriate way with subheadings or rhetorical questions marking staging posts on the project journey. In successful reports, the research log was a critical supporting document which contained not only a timeline of what happened, but also charted the twists and turns the candidate had taken. Successful research logs provided evidence of planning and often included reflection on accommodations the candidate had made as they got deeper into their research. Less successful projects often included research logs which were simply a list of dates and what was done, without evidence of how this had an impact on the evolution of the project. Some logs were very brief,

suggesting that either the development of the project had not been recorded or that it had been rushed, whilst others were notes in a book, often without a clear sense of chronology.

AO1 Analysis

The best projects demonstrated excellent analysis of the sources they had used and of any findings they made during their research. This was often done by explaining what the sources or findings showed and drawing out connections or differences between them. This analysis was then focused on the research question consistently through the report. A way to make good use of this analysis was as the basis for conclusions and in the best projects this was often a device to consolidate evidence and findings which had been analysed to build an argument in an incremental way. Such conclusions could then support an overall clear answer to the question which had been reached logically and reflectively on the evidence which had been presented and analysed. Projects which did not score so highly did include information from different sources but there was little or no attempt to draw analysis from them or to use them in a summative way to make conclusions or build up an overall answer. In some projects several sources were dealt with one after another in a way which made it difficult to distinguish between the words of the author and the summation by the candidate; this reduced the impact of the source. Such sources were often treated in isolation which made it less easy to see the development of an argument or any incremental conclusions which could build towards an overall answer to the research question.

AO1 Evaluation

The best projects contained a high level of evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of the research methods they had used. This took a variety of forms, such as interrogating gaps in data or unexpected difficulties experienced in administering a research method, such as not being able to access sources physically or struggling to get responses to a survey due to the pandemic, through to explaining what it is about the specific research method that made it particularly suited to the type of data the candidate collected. The sources used were also evaluated, often by explaining why the author is a credible source on the topic or by discussing strengths and limitations of the argument the author had developed in the source. Less successful reports often omitted any detail on the strengths and weaknesses of the research methods or sources used. Some projects dealt with only strengths or weaknesses, with a tendency to focus on what had not gone well. Some projects did contain evaluation of methods or sources, but it was superficial and lacking in detail and depth.

AO2 Reflection

The best reports often included a section headed 'Reflection' although in some reports excellent reflection was weaved throughout the body of the report. Successful reports reflected firstly on the overall strengths and limitations of their project, perhaps by exploring the range of evidence available, the successes or challenges thrown up by aspects of the project process such as the availability of interviewees and, again, any special difficulties caused by the pandemic. Successful reports also reflected on the impact their project had on them as a direct consequence of the research they had conducted in terms of the extent to which it had reinforced or changed views/ideas they held when they began the project. Some projects which did not score so highly contained small amounts of reflection, frequently in the form of passing comments rather than as a considered and focused section; others omitted this aspect altogether. Some projects did refer to learning gained or a change of views, but this was often in the form of a simplistic comment about 'learning a lot', for example. Some projects spent time on potential next steps flowing from their research, but this was not necessarily linked to their reflection.

AO3 Communication

The most successful projects communicated clearly throughout their report, with a clear structure that was easy for the reader to follow. Given the time candidates had spent researching their chosen topic it was important to communicate effectively using subject-specific terminology accurately and effectively throughout their report as this enhanced its overall quality and was another way in which the reader could be supported, particularly in projects of a technical nature. Successful reports also used an appropriate form of citation and referencing throughout the report to highlight the source of ideas and information presented and the range of sources used. They also used appropriate methods to present data, such as tables, graphs, and charts. Successful reports also included a bibliography or list of references/works cited. The most successful reports included bibliographic references for all sources used, in an appropriate format, including, author, title, and date. Less successful projects were usually less organised in their referencing in their report and in their presentation of data – the latter might not be in the most appropriate format or in a less than helpful place in the report in terms of helping the candidate to build an argument. Some bibliographies were very brief, some

were patchy in the level of citation given or provided links that did not work, whilst others referenced sources that could provide context but were not of a suitably rigorous nature to be used in a report at this level.