

CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL PROJECT QUALIFICATION

Paper 9980/01
Project

Key messages

The Cambridge International Project Qualification (Cambridge IPQ) is growing in entries from a range of countries and centres. It is encouraging to see candidates exploring a broad range of topics and demonstrating enthusiasm for their research and topics of choice in the production of their report.

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 important that candidates develop research skills which are appropriate for a project at this level. Many projects demonstrated that these skills had been acquired. In some instances, candidates appeared to be very reliant on their supervisor for the development of their project through the use of remarks such as, *'I met with my supervisor and he said I should...'*; it is important that the centre is providing support rather than active direction to ensure an active learning experience for the candidate. There are resources to support both centres and candidates on the subject pages of the Cambridge International website.

Most centres have managed the practical issues well relating to the submission of a considerable amount of information for projects to be assessed. Projects should just be submitted in Microsoft Word (.docx) format; there is no need to submit a second version in a PDF format. The report has a limit of 5000 words; any text beyond this limit will not be included in the assessment. A small number of projects contained comments made by teachers during the project's evolution and only final versions should be submitted. The bibliography should be submitted as a separate Word file; other information should also be in a separate Word file. The log is an important element of the project; it supports the research process, it demonstrates planning and organisation and shows the time span over which the project was completed. Logs submitted in Excel or in electronic formats are often hard to read and handwritten logs should be avoided. The best logs were submitted as separate Word file and provided a purposeful, succinct record of the candidate's thoughts and actions alongside reference to design and planning and evidence of the how research supported the development of the project.

Comments on specific assessment objectives

AO1 Research

Many projects began with a title page which was helpful to clarify the final title of the project and most provided a word count, the latter is an important requirement. Many projects also included a table of contents which was useful to understand the flow of a report. The best projects used a research question to provide a clear focus for their research. Once the question had been stated it was then thoughtfully justified in a short introduction, often by explaining why the particular topic was of interest to the candidate or commenting on their personal connection to the area they had chosen to focus on in their research. Some projects used a statement as their title, which made it harder to adopt the required analytical and evaluative stance.

In the most successful projects, the question had clearly guided both the candidate's research and the material in their report. The best projects explained clearly why they had selected their particular research methods and they also justified their choice. This might be linked the kind of research available on their chosen topic area, the skills the individual candidate possessed, or limitations placed upon them by factors such as the pandemic. 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 projects also demonstrated a clear sense of planning and design throughout the process. This was often evidenced in the log and by a focused contents page, which guided the reader through the report in a structured and appropriate way with subheadings. The most successful research logs contained a timeline of what happened and charted the project's development, showing how candidates planned aspects of their research as well as how particular sources impacted on how their project evolved. Less successful projects included 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. The briefest logs were less than a page long and the longest ran to over 100 pages; there is no optimum length, it is what the log demonstrates rather than its length or brevity which is critical. In some instances, the log contained evaluation of sources, strengths and weaknesses of the project or reflections of the candidate – these features must be in the report to receive credit.

AO1 Analysis

The best projects demonstrated excellent analysis of the secondary sources they had used and of any findings they made through their research, often by explaining what the sources or findings showed and or drawing out connections or differences between them. This analysis was then focused on the research question consistently throughout the report; some candidates did this through the use of subheadings and rhetorical questions. This approach facilitated the consolidation of evidence into reasoned conclusions by consolidating the evidence which had been analysed to build an argument in an incremental way. These conclusions built up a clear overall answer to the research question, reached logically and reflectively. Projects which did not score so highly did include information from different sources, but there was little or no attempt to analyse them or to use them to construct an argument. In some instances, the report contained large amounts of research material, but this was presented rather than analysed and it was not always when if the material was being reproduced from sources or interpreted in the candidate's own words. A more descriptive approach also made it harder to see the development of an argument or incremental conclusions which could build towards an overall answer to the research question. An outline section which provides an answer to the question can be helpful later in a report as a logical, thoughtful and summative conclusion to what has gone before.

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 exploring gaps in data or pointing out shortcomings in a particular research method. The sources used were also evaluated, often by explaining whether the author was 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 the strengths and weaknesses of the research methods. 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', but it is equally acceptable to have points of reflection throughout the report. The most successful reports reflected on the strengths and limitations of their project, perhaps by exploring the range of evidence available, successes and challenges in data collection or in experiments conducted, or special difficulties caused by the pandemic. Successful reports also reflected on the impact the project had on the candidate themselves in terms of the extent to which their research had reinforced or changed their views of their research topic. Some projects which did not score so highly contained very little or no reflection at all. Some projects did refer to learning gained but with more of a focus on skills rather than the impact of their research on their views about their topic area. Some projects made detailed recommendations as to areas future researchers might investigate but this aspect is also not within the parameters of the assessment criteria.

AO3 Communication

The most successful projects had a logical structure and were clear and easy to follow, even when the subject matter was complex. Many candidates communicated effectively using subject-specific terminology accurately, which enhanced the report's overall quality and was a way in which the reader could be supported, particularly in projects of a technical nature. Successful reports used appropriate methods to clearly demonstrate results drawn from the research material they had used or from experiments or surveys they had conducted using methods such as tables, graphs and charts. The most successful reports included bibliographic references for all sources used in a consistent and appropriate format and included the author, title and date, with a working link for internet sources if this was possible. Less successful reports 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 helpful place in the report in terms of helping the candidate to build an argument. Some bibliographies were very brief, some were erratic 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. The bibliography is an important element of a successful project and should be given the same level of attention as the report and the log.