CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL PROJECT QUALIFICATION

Paper 9980/01
Project

Key messages

The Cambridge International Project Qualification (Cambridge IPQ) is growing in entries from an increasing range of countries and centres. This series, candidates explored a very broad range of topics and demonstrated commendable enthusiasm for their research topic in the production of their report. The Cambridge IPQ provides a valuable opportunity for candidates to explore a topic of their choosing in depth, develop independent research and writing skills and experience taking the lead on an academic journey.

General comments

Planning and preparation underpin a successful project; the Cambridge School Support Hub provides a range of support materials which centres and candidates will find helpful in the delivery of the Cambridge IPQ. The Assessment Objectives are set out in the syllabus; using these to construct a project gives a candidate the very best chance of accessing the full range of the assessment criteria. All areas are important in creating a balanced report but worthy of particular attention are the research question, the log and its contents, the evaluation of sources used and the candidate's reflections at the end of their project journey.

The Cambridge IPQ is a candidate led qualification so a good relationship between the candidate, their supervisor and the centre coordinator is important with, crucially, the candidate taking the lead. This relationship is explained and illustrated in the syllabus, the Teacher Guide and the Learner Guide. Also available are Example Candidate Responses; time spent becoming familiar with all these materials and using them as support will give candidates the best chance of success. Of particular relevance is the guidance on the project title; this rewards close attention as it sets the direction for the project so choosing one which fits with the assessment criteria, and their focus on analysis and evaluation, gives a candidate the chance to access all areas and levels of the assessment criteria.

Several practical matters relating to submission are important. Projects should be submitted once in Microsoft Word (.docx) format. The report has a limit of 5000 words; text beyond this limit will not be included in the assessing of the project. As words are at a premium there is no need for an acknowledgements section, nor suggestions for further research by others. The bibliography should be submitted as a separate Word file, as should the research log. No additional documents are required – such as Excel spreadsheets, questionnaire responses, interview transcripts and viva slides. In this series a good number of projects submitted substantial amounts of extra content; in some instances this was over 20 files, some of which were uploaded multiple times.

Comments on specific assessment objectives

AO1 Research

The best way to start is with a title page which includes a word count; this helps the reader clarify the title. A table of contents is also useful so the reader understands the flow of a report. A question rather than a statement as the title provides an analytical and evaluative focus, although it should be one which reaches more than a purely affirmative or negative answer. A title in the form of a statement often leads to extensive and detailed information which is descriptive or narrative, meaning that the full range of the assessment criteria is not easily accessed. An introduction can provide a helpful insight into the range of factors which lie behind project title choices and gives a focus for the report.

The candidate can then use their question to guide the material they include in their report as well as detailing the use of appropriate research methods. Relevant issues might be the type and amount of research available or practical issues linked to resources and facilities. A justification of why particular research methods are chosen is an important element in accessing the higher assessment levels. It is also important to use methods which are relevant to the project title and not, for example, to engage in primary research when there is no good reason to do so.

Good planning and design is also an important feature and might take the form of, for example, a table of contents, helpful subheadings, details about experiments or how a survey was conducted and analysed. The log has several functions, one of which is to provide a timeline for the project and an explanation of any notable gaps. Another is to explain how a candidate has used particular sources in their project's development, such as whether they were useful or not. Lastly, the log can also be another place in which the candidate can give details of their design and planning. The submitted log should focus on what happens once the Project Proposal Form has been accepted. A simple list of dates and the activity undertaken will struggle to reach the higher levels of the assessment criteria; the focus should be on illustrating the development of the candidate's project journey. There is no need to include school-based monitoring systems and assessment guides or evaluation of sources other than a simple comment about usefulness or otherwise as this element only attracts credit when in the report. The log cannot be used to include material which will not fit the report's 5000-word limit and is not the document in which to evaluate sources.

AO1 Analysis

Projects reaching the highest assessment levels demonstrate excellent analysis of the secondary sources used and the findings from any primary research. A candidate should analyse, using their own words, their sources and findings, and make connections or draw out differences as appropriate. Clear analysis, which may well link back to the research question at regular points, helps the candidate maintain an approach which is more than narration or description. Using paragraphs and subheadings can help order the evidence presented so that it supports clear and evidence-based conclusions, either throughout the report or in a section focused on conclusions alone. Building such a picture helps the candidate reach a clear and logical overall answer to their research question reflecting the evidence they have used. Projects which use information from different sources in a random way without any or much attempt to analyse them, or to build an argument, are less likely to reach an overall answer to their question and so struggle to move up the assessment levels.

When using sources it is important to make clear which words are the candidate's own. Source material might be acknowledged by the use of quotation marks or by citation and reference; it must be clear to the reader when the candidate's own analysis and conclusions are being expressed. In this series it was often unclear when words were those of the source author or the candidate – unless this is done credit is not awarded.

Reaching an answer to the research question can happen at different points in the report; it may be in an introductory abstract which the candidate then sets out to justify, in the body of the report or in a final summary section. Reaching an answer reflective of the research presented is more important than where it appears.

AO1 Evaluation

Evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the research methods used is important and can be done by exploring gaps in data or pointing out advantages or shortcomings of research method(s) used. Strengths and limitations need to be focused on those chosen and used by the candidate rather than a generic list to attract credit.

Evaluation of the sources used is of equal importance, perhaps by comparing and contrasting different views, commenting on the legitimacy of the source or its author, or discussing strengths and limitations of arguments seen in the sources. Some reports in this series included thoughtful and insightful evaluation of a range of sources, and some commented on just one source whilst a good number made no evaluation of sources in the report – although it was seen in in some instances in detail in the log. Simple comments such as the writer is a professor is insufficient to gain credit and evaluation must be in the report, not in the log.

AO2 Reflection

Reflection on the strengths and limitations of the candidate's project in a holistic way at the end of the project might link to the quality of the evidence produced by their research, what has been successful or otherwise

gone well in their research and any data collection as well as specific issues such as, for example, difficulties in setting up an experiment, finding relevant research, or accumulating sufficient responses to a survey. It should be more than a simple summary of the strengths and limitations of research methods.

Reflection on the candidate's project journey is also important and be clearly focused on their views about their topic – what they thought at the start, what they thought at the end, and the impact of their research on their final view. Often seen in this series were extensive reflections on skills acquired and the process of research – this only attracts credit if it is framed in a way which shows the impact of the research process on the candidate's views. Candidates sometimes reflect, at some length, on their journey and what they have learned in their log – such material must be in the report.

AO3 Communication

A logical structure makes a project easy to follow for the reader, even for complex and technical subject matter, and the use of headings and subheadings can be a helpful way of making any report clear.

Most candidates in this series used subject-specific terminology accurately, which is helpful when reading a technical report. It often also makes clear when material is taken from sources and when words are the candidate's own; sophisticated language is often from sources which have not been properly cited and referenced.

In this series many reports used appropriate methods to evidence results drawn from their research, and might include tables, graphs and charts. These should be placed near to text related to them and add to the report by helping to develop the candidate's argument rather than just explaining data in a different way.

The bibliography should be submitted as a separate Word document, using a consistent and appropriate format – including the author, title and date, a working link for internet sources and the date the material was accessed. In this series there were some excellent bibliographies but in many instances referencing and citation was inconsistent. It was also not uncommon to see authors named in the report but not included in the bibliography. A successful bibliography is logical in its format and gives sufficient information that the reader could easily find the source if they chose to do so. The use of sources of a popular nature might provide context but are rarely sufficient on their own to build an argument likely to reach the higher assessment levels. The bibliography is an important element of a successful project and should receive the same level of attention as the report and the log.