CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL PROJECT QUALIFICATION

Paper 9980/01
Project

Key messages

Candidates explored a broad range of topics and demonstrated enthusiasm for their research topics in the production of their report.

General comments

Planning and preparation are key to a successful project, with a productive working relationship between the candidate, their supervisor and the centre coordinator central to success. A key element alongside this is that candidates develop an appropriate level of research skills, which will also be helpful for higher education or the world of work. Many candidates, supported by their centres, were able to demonstrate impressive skills in research and project planning. In some instances, candidates appeared to be very reliant on their centre for the development of their project through the use of remarks such as 'My Supervisor told me to…'; it is important the centre is proving support rather than active direction to ensure an active learning experience for the candidate. There are resources to support both centres and candidates; making use of these can have a beneficial impact at all stages of a project and for all parties involved in its creation.

Most centres have managed the practical issues well relating to the submission of a considerable amount of information for projects to be assessed. Projects must 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 5 000 words; any text beyond this limit will not be included in the assessment. The bibliography should be submitted as a separate Word file; other information should also be in a separate Word file. The research log is an important part of the project; it supports the research process, it demonstrates planning and organisation and shows the time span over which the project was completed. Some logs were submitted in Excel and in electronic formats, whilst others were photographs of hand written documents. The best logs were submitted as a separate Word file and formed a purposeful but succinct record of the candidate's thoughts and actions alongside some reference to design and planning and evidence of the research supporting the development of the project. In less successful instances, the log was a simple record of what was done with no evidence of the impact this had.

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 also provided a word count, the latter is an important requirement. Many projects also included a table of contents which was useful in terms of being able 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, 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 reports provided little or no context as to why the candidate had selected their research topic. The most successful projects used the question to guide the candidate's research and the material they selected for inclusion in their report. Research lies at the heart of success in this qualification and the best projects, as well as justifying their choice of question, also explained and justified their choice of research methods. This could be linked to the kind of research available, the skills of the candidate or limitations placed upon them; the pandemic clearly had an impact on the research some candidates were able to undertake but it was interesting to read how they tackled this. Some projects used appropriate research methods but without

providing any explanation as to why this was done and an exploration of this area is an important aspect in terms of the overall success of a project. The most successful reports also demonstrated a clear sense of planning and design, from the initial idea through to the final report. Evidence for this could be provided by a focused table of contents, which often gave rise to useful subheadings to guide the reader, and could also be clearly evidenced in the log. The most useful research logs were supporting documents which contained not only a timeline of what happened but also charted the developmental steps the candidate had taken as a result of their research. Some logs provided clear evidence of planning and often included brief reflections on key sources which then had an impact on the way the project evolved. Less successful logs were often simply a list of dates and what was done, without evidence of how this had an impact on the evolution of the project. Logs ranged enormously in length and quality; the briefest was less than one page long and the longest ran to 146 pages. Some logs contained detail written in the candidate's first language and if this is not English it cannot gain credit. In several instances the log detailed information about sources which was then repeated in the report, and this can only be credited once. There were also some instances where the log contained a reflection section as well as addressing the strengths and weaknesses of the project; both of these aspects need to be in the report to gain credit and it is part of the skill of a project at this level for the candidate to tailor their content to meet the assessment criteria and the 5 000 word limit.

AO1 Analysis

The best projects demonstrated excellent analysis of the sources used and of any findings conducted through primary research, often doing so with an explanation of what the sources or findings showed and drawing out connections or differences between them. This analysis was clearly focused on the research question at regular points in the report, either by the flow of the candidate's paragraphs or by the use of techniques such as subheadings or rhetorical questions to which the analysis was used to provide an answer. This structure enabled a candidate to consolidate their evidence into reasoned conclusions based on the evidence provided, which in turn created a framework which led to a clear overall answer to the research question, thus demonstrating that it was logical and reflective as well as soundly based on evidence. Some projects included information from different sources but with little attempt to analyse them or to use them as building blocks in an argument, making it hard to move up the assessment levels. In some projects a large amount of factual information was included but in a descriptive or narrative way rather than engaging in any clear analysis; it was sometimes not easy to know if the material was being reproduced from sources verbatim or had been put into the candidate's own words. This more descriptive approach, which was often linked to a project where a statement rather than a question had been used, also made it harder to see the development of an argument or any ongoing conclusions which could help the candidate build towards an overall conclusion. Some projects began with an outline section which provided an answer to the question in the first few paragraphs of the report but in the best projects it was seen later in the report as a logical, thoughtful and summative conclusion to what had gone before.

AO1 Evaluation

The best projects contained a high level of evaluation of both strengths and weaknesses of the research methods they had used. This could be done in a myriad of ways and might include interrogating gaps in data or the charting of difficulties experienced in administering a research method, the latter being especially relevant given the ongoing impact of the pandemic. The sources used in the report were also evaluated; this was sometimes by explaining the legitimacy of the source or its author, or by discussing the strengths and limitations of the argument an author had developed in the source. Less successful reports often did not give any detail on the strengths and weaknesses of the research methods or sources used whilst some were one sided in their evaluation, often focusing on weaknesses rather than strengths. A few projects did contain some evaluation at a basic level. Some reports referred to appendices which did contain some evaluation, often linked to primary data, but this could not be credited as it was not contained in the 5 000 word report.

AO2 Reflection

Some of the best reports included a section headed 'Reflection', but this was not essential as the reflection could be woven into the report. The most successful reflected on the overall strengths and limitations of their project; this might be in relation to the range of evidence they had found, as well as what had gone well and not so well during the process such as the workability of internet surveys, the availability or otherwise of interviewees and particular difficulties linked to the pandemic. Successful reports also reflected on a second strand in relation to the impact the project had on a candidate; this was focused on the role of their research in reinforcing or altering the views they held when they began the project. Some projects contained only glimmers of reflection, frequently in the form of passing comments rather than as a considered and focused section and others contained no reflection at all, either as a discrete section or in the report. Some projects reflected on the skills a candidate had acquired, and this could be very detailed, but in other instances a

candidate simply stated that they had enjoyed their project or had learnt a lot. Some projects used many words to make detailed recommendations as to what other researchers might work on in the future rather than being a reflection on the impact their research had had on their views and so did not meet the assessment criteria.

AO3 Communication

The most successful projects communicated clearly throughout their report, with a logical structure that was easy for the reader to follow. Given the time candidates had spent researching their chosen topic many were able to communicate effectively using subject-specific terminology accurately; this enhanced the overall quality of the report and was especially useful in supporting a reader through a particularly technical research topic. Successful reports used appropriate citation to highlight the source of ideas and information presented, including methods such as tables, graphs and charts. The most successful reports included bibliographic references for all sources used in an appropriate format and included the author, title, and date, with a working link for internet sources if this was possible. Some reports were less organised in their referencing and in their presentation of data – there might be a lack of consistency in referencing, data might not be in the most appropriate format or it might not be in a place in the report where it could help a candidate build their 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.