CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL PROJECT QUALIFICATION

Paper 9980/01
Project

General comments

A fundamental element when taking on a project of this size is good planning and a high level of preparation. In addition, it is important to have a positive working relationship between the candidate, their supervisor and the centre coordinator, with the candidate taking the lead. This requires all parties to have a good understanding of the elements which come together to make a successful project; there is extensive support in the form of resources on the subject pages of the Cambridge School Support Hub. Centre coordinators and supervisors should acquaint themselves with these and encourage candidates to read them carefully, so they have the best opportunity to achieve success. The material giving guidance on the choosing of the project title is of real importance; this is because the title sets the focus for the project. Thinking about this in relation to the assessment criteria, with their focus on analysis and evaluation, and the academic basis of this qualification helps the candidate explore their topic in a way which helps them access all areas and levels of the assessment criteria.

In this series, most centres managed the practical issues around submission well. Projects should be submitted once in Microsoft Word (.docx) format. Some centres submitted one or multiple extra documents such as appendices, results of surveys or definitions of terms – such documents do not attract credit and all the relevant material should be included in the 5000-word report. It is also worth noting that text clearly beyond 5000 words will not be included in the assessing of the project. An acknowledgements section is not required, and reference to suggestions for further research will not be credited unless very specifically linked to the assessment criteria. In this series, a number of projects were submitted with teacher comments; centres are reminded that only a final 'clean' version should be submitted. The bibliography should be submitted as a separate Word file, as should the research log.

The research log is a very important document. In this series a good number of logs were seen in various formats such as Excel files and photographs of either typed or handwritten documents and these methods should not be used. Some logs are a school generated document detailing teaching sessions and assessment levels as well as other centre focused information such as plagiarism reports; this makes the submitted log extremely long and the extra information does not form part of the assessment process. In this series a number of logs were submitted in which the candidates had addressed the strengths and weaknesses of the sources they had used, their research methods, the project itself and their reflection. Although some of these documents were impressive in their quality this material only attracts credit when it is included in the project report. Some logs were a list of sources with the candidate's comments on the usefulness or otherwise of each source and this material needs to sit as part of a chronological record of the project journey as a whole. The log should be more than just a list of what happened and when but rather include thoughts and actions relating to the development of the design and planning, as well as evidencing sources so as to demonstrate the overall development of the project. Some logs included extensive content on early lessons relating to the Cambridge IPQ process and research on discarded questions – such material does not fit within the assessment criteria and does not need to be included. A number of logs also detailed extensive meetings with teachers and their directions to candidates; this suggests that the candidate is not the driving force in their project and the log should focus on their journey in terms of research, thinking and writing.

Comments on specific assessment objectives

AO1 Research

In this session most, but not all, reports began with a title page – this helps to settle the title in the mind of the reader and gives a useful focus on what the candidate is aiming to achieve. A table of contents also helps to understand the flow of a report. The best projects use a question as the basis of their reports which is helpful in moving them away from a narrative approach; this is important as the assessment criteria have a clear analytical and evaluative focus. Candidates who use a statement as a title often find it harder to meet all the assessment criteria and to reach the higher mark levels. It is helpful to justify the title, perhaps by explaining why the candidate is interested in a particular topic as well as any personal reasons they might have for their choice.

The most successful projects use their question to guide the material included in the report and link this to a justification of the research methods they have chosen. This is often secondary research and it can be useful to explain why this method has been selected as well as including some reasoning as to why an alternative method, such as primary research, was not appropriate. There were a number of projects where candidates did use an appropriate research method but without any discussion of their reasoning, which restricts the assessment level which can be reached.

AO1 Research is also where a candidate can be rewarded for evidence of design and planning if, for example, they have conducted an experiment or a survey; design and planning can also be evidenced in the table of contents, by the use of relevant and structured subheadings which guide the reader through the report and in the accompanying log. In AO1 Research the log provides a timeline for the project, showing its evolution through the planning and research the candidate has undertaken; a simple list of dates and the activity undertaken is unlikely to access the higher levels of the assessment criteria. There is no optimum length for a log but, as noted above, material on source evaluation, strengths and weaknesses of methods and the project as well as reflection are not credited if included in the Research Log.

AO1 Analysis

The best projects in this series demonstrated excellent analysis of the secondary sources the candidate had used and any findings as a result of primary research; a good way to do this is by explaining what the research or data shows in their own words. In projects reaching the higher assessment levels, the analysis is clearly identified as the candidate's own thoughts, which can be done by the use of speech marks and citation for work taken from sources, and it is clearly and systematically focused on the research question. The clarity of the analysis can also be enhanced by using subheadings which guide the reader from point to point in a candidate's thought process as they build an argument in their report. This kind of structured analysis helps the candidate consolidate their evidence into clear, supported and reasoned conclusions based on their research evidence. This can then build through the report into a logical and evidence based overall answer to their question. Projects which contain large amounts of unattributed research material struggle to move up the assessment levels as it is often unclear whether the words are taken directly from the source or are the candidate's own analysis; in some instances the quality of the language used in sections of the report is so different that it is clear material has been taken from sources without any acknowledgment of that fact. Some projects include a large amount of narrative content and this can make it hard to see the development of the candidate's argument as analysis is often lacking. Many projects have a section headed 'Conclusion' and this can be a useful way of drawing the strands of a report together into a cogent and coherent overall answer to the research question, although this is not a prerequisite for success.

AO1 Evaluation

The best projects in this series discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the research methods used; perhaps by exploring gaps in data or pointing out advantages or shortcomings of the method or methods they had used. Less successful reports often used valid research methods but did not discuss the reasons for their choice; others focused on only one of strengths or limitations. The other element of this Assessment Objective is evaluation of sources used; this might be 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. In a lot of reports there was no evidence of evaluation of sources, limiting the opportunity to move up the assessment levels. A successful report demonstrates the candidate's ability to use sources and to explain what is a good source; this might link to the academic standing of the author, the unbiased nature of the organisation from which the source is taken or the evidence of peer related work which gives increased credibility. At a basic level evaluation may be a comment which indicates that a source is by a well-known expert in their field from a reputable university and so their words have value.

AO2 Reflection

The first element of this Assessment Objective is reflection of the strengths and limitations of the project. In this series there were some good examples of candidates considering the quality of the evidence they had used, what had gone well or not in their research and data collection; they also considered particular issues relating to their situation such as difficulties in accessing research or conducting interviews and experiments. More detailed and insightful reflection allows the candidate to move up the mark levels. The other element is that of reflection in terms of the impact the project has had on the candidate. Some reports have a section headed 'Reflection', but it is equally possible to have points of reflection throughout the report. Reflection in this context means the extent to which the project process has solidified, changed or developed the candidate's views on their topic and how this links to the evidence they have researched and used in their report. In some projects there was little or no evidence of reflection; in others the candidate focused on the development of skills, which is not the focus of the assessment criteria. Some candidates discussed what other researchers might do in the future but the best focus is on the candidate's own research and its value.

AO3 Communication

The most successful projects in this series were logical in their structure, which makes them clear and easy to follow even when the subject matter is complex. These reports often use clear and straightforward language; the use of complicated or overly florid language in the belief that makes a project more academic can often make it harder to follow. Many candidates communicate effectively by using subject-specific terminology accurately; this is especially useful when reading more technical reports. However sometimes this can reveal a stark difference between words which are clearly the candidates' own and those which, although unattributed, are more sophisticated and so likely to be taken from sources. Where it is relevant to do so, successful reports use appropriate methods to clearly demonstrate results drawn from their research material, experiments or surveys such as tables, graphs and charts; this is done by not simply repeating the data in another form but using it to make an analytical point, draw a conclusion or develop an argument. The most successful reports also include bibliographic references for all the sources used in a consistent and appropriate format - including the author, title and date, with a working link for internet sources and the date the material was accessed; in some reports inconsistency in referencing is evident. Some bibliographies are very brief, some do not include any citation or it is insufficient to find the source, or the links provided do not work. Sources of a popular nature might provide context but are insufficient on their own to allow a candidate to build an argument likely to reach the higher assessment levels. The bibliography is an important element of a successful project and merits the same level of attention as the report and the log.