

CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL PROJECT QUALIFICATION

Paper 9980/01
Project

Key messages

The Cambridge International Project Qualification (Cambridge IPQ) is a relatively new qualification and entries are being seen 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 also important that candidates develop research skills which are appropriate for a project at this level. 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. In some instances, candidates appeared to be very reliant on centre-based help for the development of their project, through the use of remarks such as 'My Supervisor told me to...' and it is important support does not become instruction so the candidate learns as much as possible from their project journey.

In terms of practical issues, 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 5 000 words and this must be adhered to as any text beyond 5 000 words will not be included in the assessment. In this session, some projects appeared to be much longer but on investigation this was usually because the bibliography and supplementary information such as data and results of surveys was included in the report. The bibliography must be submitted as a separate Word file, other information the candidate wants to include must also be in a separate Word file. The research log is an important part of the project as it supports the research process, it helps demonstrate planning and organisation, as well as showing the time span over which the project was completed. Some logs were submitted in Excel and in electronic formats but again this document must be submitted as a separate Word file. In many instances the log was used purposefully, for example, to record briefly thoughts, actions required, 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

Most, but not all, projects began with a title page so there was no doubt as to the topic area the candidate had chosen. In some instances, the title was only seen in the OPF which was submitted separately and it was not clear if the title had been developed, amended or changed completely by the time the final report was submitted. The title page should also contain a word count. 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 be by exploring the reason why the candidate found the particular topic interesting 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 particular 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, the opportunity to explore a particular issue as a precursor to further study at undergraduate level, or the 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 reports also had a clear sense of design – from the conception of the idea, through to the planning stage, the research process and, finally, the realisation into a 5 000-word report. This was often evidenced in the log and 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 brief 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. In some projects the log was extraordinarily long – one example ran to 48 pages. Some logs contained information about the value of sources which was then repeated in the report and it is important to remember that such material cannot be credited twice. There were a few instances where the log also contained the reflection section and remarks on the strengths and weaknesses of the project; this appeared to be because the 5 000 word limit had been reached in the report. Such information cannot be credited in the log and part of the skillset in this qualification is the ability to edit material so that all the requisite sections are covered in the report itself.

AO1 Analysis

The best projects demonstrated excellent analysis of the sources they had used and of any findings they made in the course of their research, often 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; some candidates did this by the use of subheadings and rhetorical questions to which the analysis was used to provide an answer. This then formed the basis for conclusions by consolidating the evidence and findings which had been analysed to build an argument in an incremental way. These conclusions built up to an overall clear answer to the question, 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 instances, the report contained large amounts of research material, but this was presented rather than analysed and it was not always easy to establish whether the material was being reproduced from the source or interpreted in the candidate's own words. This also impaired the ability to see the development of an argument or any incremental conclusions which could build towards an overall answer to the research question. In some instances, an answer to the question was provided in the first few paragraphs of the report but in the best projects it was seen later in the report as a summative end to all that had 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 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 was 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 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 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 seen in 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 or otherwise 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 glimmers 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 but with more of a focus on skills rather than the impact of their research on their views about their topic area, 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; this was rarely linked to their reflection but was often a reference to what other researchers might explore in the future.

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 used appropriate methods to present data, such as tables, graphs, and charts too. Successful reports also had a bibliography or list of references/works cited. The most successful reports included bibliographic references for all sources used, in an appropriate format and 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 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.