

CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL PROJECT QUALIFICATION

Paper 9980/01
Project

Key messages

The Cambridge International Project Qualification (CIPQ) continues to experience growth in entries from an increasing range of countries and centres, which is encouraging. Candidates explore a very broad range of topics and without exception demonstrate real enthusiasm for their research topic in the production of their report. The CIPQ provides a valuable opportunity for candidates to explore a topic they have selected in depth and develop independent research and writing skills which are useful for progression into higher education or the world of work.

General comments

The most successful projects are the product of good planning and preparation. The Cambridge website provides a range of support materials. Candidates are encouraged to pay careful attention to these and to use them when planning the delivery of the CIPQ. The Assessment Objectives are set out in the syllabus and using these as a guide when constructing a project gives a candidate the very best chance of meeting the full range of the assessment criteria; many projects do not do this, which inevitably makes it hard to access higher marks. Particular areas to focus on are the question the candidate chooses, the log and its contents, the evaluation of sources used and the reflection by the candidate at the end of the project journey; these features will be explored in more detail in this report.

In essence the CIPQ is a candidate led qualification; it is important that there is a good relationship between the candidate, their supervisor and the centre coordinator but the ownership of the project belongs to the candidate. Helpful material which explains and illustrates this relationship can be found in the syllabus, the Teacher Guide and the Learner Guide. Also available are Example Candidate Responses and time spent becoming familiar with these materials and using them as support will give candidates the best chance of success. Of particular relevance is material giving guidance on the choosing of the project title – this is worthy of close attention. The title sets the direction for the project so choosing one in conjunction with the assessment criteria, with their focus on analysis and evaluation, helps a candidate explore their chosen research topic from a perspective which will allow them to access all areas and levels of the assessment criteria. The log is an important method by which the candidate can demonstrate their learning journey through their project and how their research has prompted refinements and developments from their initial idea to the final written report.

Most centres manage the practical issues around submission well. Projects should be submitted once in Microsoft Word (.docx) format as the final version without teacher comments. The report has a limit of 5000 words; text beyond this limit will not be included in the assessing of the project. An acknowledgements section is not required and neither is a section with suggestions for further research by others. The bibliography should be submitted as a separate Word file, as should the research log. Excel, electronic, hand written logs as well as photographs of logs should be avoided; there is no need to submit documents detailing questionnaire responses or interviews and viva slides. The log is a key element as it supports the research process; the most successful logs provide a clear but succinct record of the candidate's thoughts and actions alongside references to their design and planning, evidencing the way their research has supported the development of the project. The log cannot be used to include material for which there is no space in the report due to the word count and it is not the document in which to evaluate sources.

Comments on specific assessment objectives

AO1 Research

The vast majority of reports begin with a title page; this helps the reader clarify the title and a word count should be included. A table of contents helps the reader understand the flow of a report. The best projects use a question rather than a statement as their title to provide an analytical and evaluative focus, although the question should be one which reaches more than a purely affirmative or negative answer. Projects with a statement as their title often contain extensive and detailed information of a largely descriptive or narrative flavour which means that all the assessment criteria are not easily accessed. The candidate can explain in an introduction why they have chosen their topic and it is interesting to read the range of factors which lie behind project title choices as well as giving the candidate a stimulus for the rest of their report.

A successful project uses the question to guide the material included in the report; an element of this is the use of appropriate research methods and the justification for the candidate's choice. This might be driven by the type and amount of research available, the candidate's skills or practical issues such as limitations linked to resources and facilities. An explanation of why particular research methods are chosen, even if they are appropriate, is an important element in accessing the higher assessment levels.

Projects should also demonstrate good planning and design; this might be seen, for example, in the table of contents, the use of relevant subheadings, details about experiments conducted or how a questionnaire was set up as well as in the log. A project log should chart a timeline for the project and evidence its development by explaining how a candidate has used particular sources in its evolution in terms of their usefulness or otherwise. There is no need to include detail on topics explored in the early stages of the CIPQ or on skills based lessons – a focus on what happens once the Project Proposal Form has been accepted is sufficient. Although a simple list of dates and the activity undertaken will struggle to reach the higher levels of the assessment criteria focus on what is needed is much more important than the length of the log; there is no need to include schools based monitoring and assessment guides. Importantly, the log should not contain evaluation of sources other than a simple comment about usefulness or otherwise, strengths and weaknesses of the project or reflections of the candidate; these elements only attract credit when they are included in the report.

AO1 Analysis

Successful projects demonstrate excellent analysis of the secondary sources used and findings from primary research if this is undertaken. The best way a candidate can do this is through an explanation in their own words of the analysis they can make of their sources, or what their findings show, and make connections or explain the differences between them. Analysis should be clear and a linking back to the research question at regular points helps the candidate maintain a stance which is not merely narrative in the report. Paragraphs and subheadings can be used to good advantage to help the candidate consolidate their evidence into clear, supported and compelling conclusions based on the research evidence; this can run through the report or be collected into a section of conclusions. A systematic approach can help a candidate reach an overall answer to their research question which is, clear, logical and reflective of their evidence. Projects which use information from different sources without any real attempt to analyse them or use them to construct an argument struggle to move up the assessment levels.

It is also important to acknowledge which words are from sources and which are the candidate's own; source material might be acknowledged by the use of quotation marks or by citation and reference but to attract credit it must be clear to the reader when it is the candidate's own analysis and conclusions which are being expressed. A lack of clarity on this point was a recurrent theme in many projects this session as it was often not clear if the material was simply being reproduced from the sources. A descriptive approach makes it more challenging to pick out the development of an argument and interim conclusions can often be subsumed in narrative content.

It is acceptable to provide an answer to the question posed at several different points in the report; it may be seen in the introduction and then the candidate sets out to demonstrate how they can justify this, it may appear at different points in the report or there may a final summation section; it is the reaching of an answer reflective of the candidate's research which is more important than the point at which it appears.

AO1 Evaluation

Evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the research methods used is an important element of a successful report; this can be done by exploring gaps in data or pointing out advantages or shortcomings of the research method(s) used. Many reports this session contained extensive generic strengths and limitations of particular research methods. To attract credit, these need to be focused on the candidate's own selection and use.

The other element of this assessment criteria is the evaluation of the 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. Some reports in this session used valid research methods but without any assessment of their strengths and limitations, whilst others made comments on just one of these aspects. A good number of reports contained no evaluation of the sources used and others made only very basic comments, such as the writer being an expert or a set of statistics being published by a government body; these type of comments limit the candidate's opportunity to move up the assessment levels.

AO2 Reflection

A successful report might include a section headed 'Reflection', but it is equally possible to have points of reflection throughout. One key element is the candidate's reflection on the strengths and limitations of their project. They might link this to the quality of their evidence, what had gone well or not in their research and data collection as well as particular issues such as difficulties in accessing research or conducting interviews and experiments.

The other aspect in this assessment criteria is the candidate's reflection on how their views about their topic have been reinforced, modified or changed completely due to their project journey. Comments on what a candidate has learnt about research and its associated skills does not attract credit, neither does detail about what future researchers might focus on as a result of the candidate's findings. In this session many candidates did not gain any credit for this aspect of their report; some produced comments to say that their views had changed but the most successful explained their views at the start and the end, alongside comments to show clearly how their research evidence had influenced any hardening or development of their views.

AO3 Communication

Successful projects use a logical structure as this makes them clear and easy to follow for the reader, even for complex and technical subject matter as the structure can guide and shape the report in a constructive way.

Many candidates use subject-specific terminology accurately, which is often very useful when reading a technical report. However it can also shine a light on a difference in linguistic skills between material taken from sources and the candidate's own words, often suggesting that more sophisticated language is not the candidate's own, even if this has not been acknowledged by appropriate punctuation or citation and referencing.

In this session many reports used appropriate methods to clearly demonstrate results drawn from the research material, experiments or surveys such as tables, graphs and charts. It is important for the candidate to think carefully as to the value of how sources and data are produced as they only attract value if they add to understanding and help to develop the argument the project is putting forward.

The bibliography should be submitted as a separate Word document and use a consistent and appropriate format including the author, title and date, a working link for internet sources and the date the material was accessed. Many reports were seen where there was inconsistency in referencing and citation; alongside this it was not uncommon to see authors referred to in the report whose work was not cited and referenced in the bibliography, rendering it incomplete. Some bibliographies were very brief, some were mixed in the level of citation given or provided links that did not work and some had little information to help the reader find the source. In an academic report, 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 is deserving of the same level of attention as the report and the log; in many instances in this session it was brief and not of the same quality as the report.