May 2019 subject reports

Personal project

Introduction

This report is for the May 2019 examination session and includes reference to the performance of candidates in the personal project. The report sets out to provide information about the examination session as well as to provide some advice to assist in improving the achievement of candidates in future examination sessions.

The MYP personal project subject report is organized into the following sections:

- The range and suitability of the work submitted
- Candidate performance against each criterion
- Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates
- Further information

Overall grade boundaries

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The range and suitability of the work submitted

During this session, school samples included a wide range of projects, many innovative and inspiring, from raising awareness about bullying at school to learning how to play a guitar and from writing an illustrated story-book for young children to coaching a school football team. The most successful projects were those that were closely aligned to the projects objectives and represented the development of knowledge in an area that was a personal passion for the candidate.

Projects reported this session focused mostly on two main global contexts: personal and cultural expression; and identities and relationships. The most effective personal projects were from those schools that had adhered closely to the task specific clarification and where candidates had developed their deeper understanding of global context and effectively extended their ATL skills.

Examiners noted a decrease in the number of reports that exceeded the permitted word limit or the appendices maximum. In many cases, the comments provided by the schools supporting
their decision making when awarding levels were helpful and based on the task specific clarification, although there were still some schools which provided very few or no comments at all.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

Most candidates were able to articulate a clear goal that was linked to personal interest. Many successfully used a global context to focus their project on a specific area. There were still a significant number of candidates who did not account for the challenge in their goal. Candidates should specifically address this in their report, providing a detailed justification for the personal challenge involved.

When talking about prior learning, many candidates were able to identify relevant learning in or out of school. The best examples were able to analyse exactly how this learning would contribute to the development of their project rather than just describe the learning. Some candidates did not provide examples of learning both in school and outside of school – which is a requirement for the highest mark-bands.

There was a wide range of research carried out, with many candidates using multiple sources effectively. Some candidates provided evidence of their research skills in the form of research plans, interview transcripts, evidence of data collection etc. Many candidates were able to provide evidence of source evaluation in their report or appendices, but some struggled with consistent formatting of the bibliography, and use of their sources throughout their report. The best reports specifically addressed the requirements of the task specific clarification, rather than just describing the research process. The findings of the research should not be included in the text of the report.

Criterion B

In general, most candidates were able to identify basic criteria for a successful product or outcome. While some of these were presented as a short list, many candidates developed these further, often to assess different elements of the product. Only a limited number of candidates were able to demonstrate how their product criteria were informed by research, usually pointing to information gained from a specific source. These examples were often supported by templates from the school or in-depth guidance.

Evidence of a plan was provided by most candidates in the form of timelines, calendar extracts or Gantt charts. The best examples were specific to the project and were able to detail changes in the progress of the project. Many candidates were not able to fulfil the requirements of this strand because they did not also address the development of their project with a detailed account.

Overall, the final strand of the criterion was the weakest, with many candidates struggling to find additional examples of self-management skills. Those who were successful used examples of skills found in the AtL skills framework and supported this with evidence in the appendices. Many candidates were able to describe their affective skills, usually in the form of relaxation.
techniques or exercises to achieve balance between their work on the Personal Project and other aspects of their life. Candidates would benefit from additional guidance on developing this into an analysis, rather than just an outline or a description.

Criterion C

Many of the sample projects were for innovative and exciting products. Most schools followed the requirements with regards to providing evidence of their product/outcome. However, candidates from some schools submitted photos of an exhibition event rather than focusing on the product itself. In this section of the report, candidates generally described the product, but struggled to reflect on the role of the goal, global context and criteria in its development. An increasing number of candidates accounted for the development of the project in this section of the report, which should be in Bii.

Most candidates were able to discuss some critical or creative thinking, with many identifying an example of problem solving to evidence this. The best reports including an analysis of the contribution of these skills to the project rather than just a description of the skill. Examiners noted that few candidates were able to analyse the transfer of information into the project, but those who did this, provided a detailed example of information they found during the research process and how they used this new knowledge in their project.

A significant majority of candidates submitted a report that followed the required structure in terms of sections, but sometimes the content was included in the wrong section (for example it was common to find an account of the development of the project in section Cii rather than Bii). When reporting on communication skills, many candidates described their interactions with their supervisors or teachers in a general sense, but struggled to develop this any further.

Criterion D

Candidates should provide a reflection of the quality of the product as required in the task specific clarification. Candidates who set specific criteria for their product/outcome generally at least outlined the quality of the product against them. Many were unable to develop this into an evaluation or analysis (with reasons and causes) and therefore could not access the highest achievement levels in this strand. A few candidates simply stated that the criterion had been met. Good examples often included a table with specific examples of how each criterion had been met.

Strand Dii had varied response levels. Most candidates were able to identify specific examples of the extension of their knowledge of the topic, but often they did not reflect on an ‘extension’ of understanding of the global context.

Candidates did a better job of reflecting on their progress as an IB learner, with a significant majority of candidates using traits from the IB Learner Profile to evidence their development. The best examples focused on a few traits, and provided an analysis (using a specific example) of how these skills had progressed, and what was still left to develop. Candidates who continued to focus on the AtL skills did not provide the required content for this section. Many candidates still struggled to access the highest marks in this strand because they were unable to progress beyond an outline or a description of the learner profile trait they used.
Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

Templates to guide candidates’ reports have become more common, but schools should be careful to ensure that the templates they provide meet the requirements of the assessment criteria and the detail of the task specific clarification. Candidates should be guided to specific requirements such as an evaluation of sources and a bibliography, and templates are an effective way to do this, but they need to be in line with the guide and task specific clarification in order not to limit achievement against higher descriptors.

Although the majority of schools had obviously used the task specific clarification to guide candidates through the process and mark the resulting reports, it was clear that again this session some schools had not used the document at all. Schools should ensure that all candidates and supervisors are aware of the task specific clarification and use it as the primary tool for assessment.

Candidates who had clearly put in considerable effort and produced innovative and inspirational products often struggled to achieve the highest grades because of a lack of understanding of the meaning of the command terms. Many candidates failed to go beyond descriptions or outlines of AtL skills. Schools should ensure that candidates have support in this area and that they understand the difference between a description and an analysis.

In some instances, schools are still submitting supporting work (in the appendices) that is illegible. This often includes hand-written work, poor quality scans, work that is too small to view on screen and work in a language other than the report. Schools should ensure that all supporting work can be easily accessed. Candidates should guide examiners to the relevant evidence by labelling appendices and referring directly to them in the body of the report.

Most candidates adhered to the 10-page limit for their appendices, but some did not select wisely to make the most of these extracts. The most successful appendices contained evidence of AtL skills (such as an evaluation of sources, interview transcripts, research collection, brainstorming etc), with those that were less effective often presented in a diary style, with short and frequently irrelevant paragraphs.

To ensure consistency in marking, it is highly recommended that schools carry out a standardisation process. This includes preparation that could include marking of official samples or review from the standardisation webinars. When marking reports, schools should design a thorough standardisation process to ensure consistency.

Further comments

The examining team found a significant number of reports that were not anonymized. These often included the name of the school and candidate.

Some schools submitted work with few or no comments supporting decision making during marking, which made it difficult for examiners to understand the levels awarded.

Resources on the Programme Resource Centre (PRC: https://resources.ibo.org/) provide schools with access to:
• The projects guide (published 2015 and updated in September 2017)
• The projects teacher support material
• Further guidance for projects (published 2015 and updated in March 2018) which includes the important assessment document, the task specific clarification
• Middle Years Programme Assessment procedures (formerly Handbook of procedures) for the relevant session
• Assessment principles and practices – Quality assessments in a digital age

It is essential that MYP schools regularly consult with these documents and ensure they are using the most recent version, regardless of previous experience, and make appropriate information available to candidates during the course.