OIB History-Geography 2018-19

Cambridge Inspector's Report

Introduction:

- This is my third report as Cambridge Inspector for History/Geography, covering the year 2018-19. As always, I am indebted to all my colleagues in France who have provided me with invaluable help over the last year. I would like to give special thanks to Olivier Delmas (IPR), Alan Geary, David Jackson, Agnès Perraud, and James Cathcart. The administrative staff at Saint-Germain deserve special praise and I am especially appreciative of Catherine Sagne's calm and efficient administrative skills. At Cambridge International, Sarah Lee kept a firm hand on the tiller, while Sarah Dickins provided administrative support. My fellow inspector Celia O'Donovan readily shared her experience and good humour during our time inspecting in France. I continue to be indebted to my predecessor Barbara Hibbert who helped me with the History questions and mark schemes.

- 1369 candidates were entered for the assessment in June 2019, a slight fall compared to 2018 but we expect several new centres in 2020. *Viatique*, the online marking system worked well this year (after some initial teething problems) but the deadlines for the written markers were even tighter than previously. However, their professionalism shone through and the work was completed on time. Once again, the different deadline dates for the foreign centres' written papers were provided at a very late stage, a situation that is far from ideal, and one that we hope to avoid in future. The oral examiners also deserve thanks and most of the observations and reports pertaining to the orals were positive. I am pleased to report that all marking and moderation was completed in time for the marks to be issued on schedule.

- This year, there were no candidates for the September session. This means that only three of the eight papers set were actually used in 2019.

Subject Meetings and Training 2018-19:

- The annual subject meeting is invaluable for the professional development of the teachers in the OIB community, as well as giving an opportunity to form and renew friendships and reinforce the collegiate approach which is so special to the OIB. The teacher workshops were excellent and thanks are due to those colleagues who give up their time to plan and deliver them. There was considerable discussion related to the revised syllabus for 2019 and the input of teachers in the workshops was invaluable. As a result, Olivier Delmas and myself were able to sign-off the revised syllabus shortly after the meeting.

- I attended the oral examination training in Lyon in January 2019 and I cannot over-emphasise its value. All centres should try to be represented at one of the oral training meetings. Not only do they provide invaluable training for the oral examiners but they also provide useful advice regarding the preparation of candidates for the orals.

The Curriculum Reform:

- Throughout 2019, James Cathcart, Alan Geary and several other colleagues, together with Olivier Delmas and myself, have been working hard to ensure that the OIB still has an important place in the French curriculum. These discussions have been difficult but generally successful and the final outcomes will be published in the Autumn of 2019.

Setting the Written Papers for 2019:

- As usual, a large number of questions were submitted by the OIB community by the agreed date. The French Inspector reviewed these and many of them were approved. Colleagues deserve praise for their hard work in setting a good range of acceptable questions. Eight papers were compiled in all and were finalised in March 2019 at a meeting in Paris between the French Inspectors and myself.
- Colleagues who were disappointed that they did not see their questions in one of this year's exams should be aware that they may well have been included in one of the four unused papers.
- When setting questions for 2020, colleagues need to ensure that the style of wording that was used in this year's June examination is used in all questions submitted for 2020. It is also important to keep questions as open as possible. Rather than specifying a particular case study it is better to use a phrase such as '*using a case study of your choice*' or '*with reference to a case study that you have studied*'. When compiling annotated map questions, it is important to keep the accompanying document as brief and focused as possible. Many AMQs were rejected in 2019 because the accompanying documents were too long. As always, a French translation of each question must be submitted, together with the English language version.

Compiling the Key content for the oral examinations:

- The four lists of Key issues for 2020 will be numbered 201, 202, 203 and 204. Key terms will be added later and the full Key content lists for 2020 can be released to candidates on a date to be specified in April/May 2020, allowing them time to make their final preparations for the orals. As in previous years, Key content lists for schools within France will be re-numbered 201M, etc. and the lists for schools outside France will be re-numbered 201E, etc. Release dates for schools within France and for the schools outside France will vary, reflecting the different starting dates of the oral examinations.
- Now that there is a much larger number of Key issues and Key terms in the revised H/G syllabus, it is permissible to use all the Key content (Key terms and Key issues) with your students, right from the start of the school year.
- However, oral lists will continue to be chosen by each school and sent to Cambridge in strict confidentiality before the Christmas holidays and these lists must not be shared with students or used with students before the official release date in the spring of next year. In other words, it remains strictly forbidden to use the ten official Key Issues with students once you have chosen your oral list in November.

Summer Examination Session – the written examination:

- This year, papers were available to the markers on the agreed date, six days after the exam was taken. A 'standardisation' meeting for the inspector and the two written paper team leaders was held in France as soon as the scripts became available on *Viatique*. This allowed us to e-mail four marked scripts to the *correcteurs* later that day, providing an agreed standard and helping to align marks.
- A total of 34 written examiners marked scripts this year, with 10 being new to the process, including the inspector who marked a small allocation. The markers were divided into three teams, headed by the inspector or by one of the written paper team leaders. I would like to record my thanks to the written examiners who did a really professional job and ensured that, despite the extremely tight deadlines, marking was completed on time.
- One of my main roles in the assessment of the written paper is the moderation of the marking. I would particularly like to thank my team leaders, Agnès Perraud and David Jackson, for their help, advice and support. The purpose of moderation is to ensure that all the markers are applying the mark scheme in the same way and that all the candidates are awarded a mark reflecting the quality

of their answers. Markers were encouraged to contact their team leader regarding any problematic scripts and this contributed to the moderation process. The team leaders re-marked 19% of the scripts to ensure that marking was thorough, reliable and fair. The sample chosen was guided by the statistical information available on *Viatique* and by the quality of the marking of each marker. In general, new markers had more of their scripts re-marked. If no problems emerged, the markers' marks were validated. However, the moderation sometimes led to a scaling of marks to bring them into line with the agreed overall standard. A third of the markers were scaled this year but most of the scalings were quite minor and usually affected the bottom end of the mark range.

- Because of the anonymisation and randomisation of the scripts within *Viatique*, scripts from any one centre are allocated to a range of markers. The markers do not know the name of the candidate or of the centre. This makes the marking fairer and more reliable.

- The results statistics for this session were comparable to previous years. Marks ranged from 2/20 to 20/20 and the mean mark was 13.52. As one would expect, the mark distribution was skewed towards the top end of the range and 89.5% of the candidates achieved a mark of 10/20 or more. I am pleased to report that 1.5% of scripts were awarded full marks, indeed, the number of scripts in the 'very good' range (18-20) greatly exceeded the number of scripts in the 'very weak' range (below 6/20).

- Finally, I must thank to those markers who completed detailed reports on the marking process.

Summer Examination Session – the oral examination:

- A total of 32 pairs of oral examiners assessed candidates. As in previous years, overseas centres had a slightly different arrangement, involving the use of video conferencing. I must thank the teams of examiners and assistant moderators who travelled widely in their work. I am also grateful to the Heads of Centre who run the oral session, most of whom make the experience as pleasant and comfortable as possible for examiners, students, moderators and the inspector. Organisation of the oral exams in most centres was efficient and professional.

- When examiners and/or AMs made me aware of circumstances that may have affected the oral examination for a candidate or a group of candidates, these were considered and acted upon as appropriate. If an issue regarding unexpected marks arose, I was able to contact individual examiners and ask for clarification. In all cases the detailed information that I received enabled me to make a decision based on evidence.

- There appears to be greater variability in the oral marks than in the marks for the written paper. This reflects the greater number of variables that apply to the orals, not least of which is the random choice of Key issue and Key term. Topics in the Key content are chosen to be comparable but each individual candidate may not regard the topics as comparable, depending on personal preference and the nature of their revision. This, together with a range of other variables, means that the estimated grade is a less reliable predictor of actual candidate performance than it is in the written paper.

- This year, I was able to inspect the work of 25% of the examining pairs but this is only 2% of the candidates. As a result, in 2020, we may ask oral examiners to provide more information on the *fiches d'evaluation* to bring the procedures in H/G closer to those in Lang/Lit, and to provide better evidence for the inspector when moderating.

Commentary on the written examination papers:

The following statistical information is of use;

a) Percentage of candidates choosing Sujet A (History essay and Geog AMQ) – 50.2%
b) Percentage of candidates choosing Sujet B (Geog essay and History DBQ) – 49.8%
c) Percentage of candidates choosing History essay 1 (USA/isolationism) – 29.4%
d) Percentage of candidates choosing History essay 2 (Thatcher) – 20.8%
e) Percentage of candidates choosing Geog essay 1 (Megacities) – 23.8%
f) Percentage of candidates choosing Geog essay 2 (Population structure) – 26%

The following general points can be made;

- Many candidates wrote balanced, well-supported and comprehensive answers, showing a broad knowledge of the syllabus content, a good understanding of the concepts and a high level of skill – both in responding to material provided to them and in constructing a coherent and well-argued essay.
- Overall statistics show that this year's paper was comparable to last year's paper (see previous page).
- Feedback suggests that the paper was well received by candidates and the inspector was pleased to see that the balance of responses between Sujet A and Sujet B was almost perfect – 50.2 % against 48.8%. Choice of essays also showed a good balance, with no question proving really unpopular.
- Although the essay questions are not divided into sections a) and b), it would help the markers if candidates could make it clear where one part of their answer ends and the next part begins. Leaving a couple of lines is a useful strategy but actually using a) and b) would be helpful. Candidates who run the two parts of an essay question together are putting themselves at a disadvantage because each part has a different focus, requiring different knowledge and structure – as can be seen from a cursory glance at the mark scheme. Examiners reports suggest that this problem was seen in a significant minority of scripts and was one of the main reasons why some candidates achieved a mark much lower than their teachers' estimate.
- The structure of an answer is important, especially in the essays, but in all of the responses a good structure will increase the mark awarded, indeed, one of the five statements in the generic mark scheme specifically refers to structure. Introductions are important but they should be brief and to the point, possibly laying the foundations for the arguments which will follow. The conclusion should do more than just repeat statements that have already been made – it is an ideal place to hammer home the 'evaluative' part of a question, making an overall judgement on the issue under discussion. The conclusion is also one place where the 'big picture' approach can be demonstrated but in the very best answers this 'big picture' approach is shown in the 'meat' of the essay. Quite clearly, planning an answer is important here and if candidates spent a little more time planning their answers, perhaps some of the irrelevant material that we often see would disappear. ***Examiners have pointed out that the structure required in an OIB answer is different from that required in a Bac Generale answer. Teachers need to be aware of this.***
- Another difference between the OIB and the Bac Generale, is the importance of command words. The command is clearly linked to the nature of the mark scheme and failure to respond to these commands can result in a very low mark because the candidate is not answering the question (NAQ). The commands that seem to cause the most problems are '*Evaluate…*', '*Assess the extent to which…*', and '*How useful are…*'. These commands are asking for the higher-level cognitive skills and failure to respond to them means that a candidate cannot be awarded the higher-level marks.

- Some time spent in class, discussing and practising exam technique is highly recommended. Highlighting the key words and commands in a question can often focus a candidate's mind on a suitable answer. The advice **RTPA** – '***read*** the question, ***think*** about the question, ***plan*** your answer, before you ***answer*** the question' is worth considering. The importance of <u>developing</u> simple points cannot be over-stressed. Development can come via a phrase such as 'this means that…' or by providing an example to back up a point. Evaluation can be achieved through such phrases as 'the most important aspect is…' or 'this can lead to X, which is one of the most important aspects of…'

The following points refer to individual questions;

- **History essay 1**, on *USA/Isolationism* was quite popular and produced a mean mark of 13.8. Many answers were heavy on knowledge but light on analysis. Many of the best answers dealt with the full time-period, realised that isolationism is not just about economics, and were able to convincingly argue that 1941 was not the only turning point – often quoting 1947 as being more important. Weaker answers adopted a narrative approach, lacked specific detail, and failed to evaluate and provide a judgement.
- **History essay 2**, on *post-war UK history and Thatcher* was the least popular essay on the paper but it produced the highest mean mark of 16.4. It appears that the stronger candidates chose this question and the best answers showed extensive knowledge and were able to evaluate how successful Thatcher's policies were. Perhaps the nature of Thatcher's policies lends itself to evaluation because very few candidates failed to analyse effectively. Weaker answers focused on the beginning of the time period in part a) and did not keep their focus on the economy.
- **Geography AMQ**, this was only marginally more popular than the History DBQ but scored a significantly higher mean mark – 13.8. This probably reflects the fact that straightforward knowledge recall can gain quite high marks in the first part of the question. In part a), more locations could be included on the maps and it appears that the maps that are being taught are out of date – by over 20 years – and this affected the candidates' ability to cope with the document. In part b), there was not enough focus on 'current dynamics' in many of the responses and some of the weaker answers simply regurgitated generalised information about the development of globalisation.
- **Geography essay 1**, on *megacities* was chosen by almost a quarter of the candidates, and achieved a mean mark of 13.4. There was some confusion between megacities and global cities but, even though London's most often quoted population figures don't make it a megacity, the 'ESPON metropolitan area' of London has a population of 14.2 million. This was taken into consideration in the marking. Case studies were generally used well but weaker ones lacked adequate place specific detail. In part b), responses tended to focus on the negatives rather than the positives of life in megacities, but the similarities and differences were often dealt with quite well.
- **Geography essay 2**, on *population structure* was chosen by just over a quarter of the candidates and the mean mark was 14.2. Some of the responses did not define population structure and this led to rather rambling answers, which lacked focus on the question. Many responses failed to understand the very specific nature of the term 'youthful population' but the mark scheme did compensate for this. Weaker candidates sometimes confused causes and consequences. Many candidates used case studies to good effect but some just named a random African country and then invented some statistics – not realising that the markers are only a Google search away from disproving them.
- **History DBQ**, this was almost as popular as the Geography AMQ but the mean mark was lower at 12.9. There were a wide range of marks and the best answers were impressive, showing a skilled interpretation of both documents, extensive and detailed 'own knowledge' and evidence-based judgements. Weaker responses tended to simply paraphrase the documents, showing little knowledge of the topic, a lack of explanation, and a mainly narrative approach. The command 'how

useful' needs to be dealt with better, as there is often a focus on the usefulness of the documents and a neglect of their limitations. Document B contained much useful information but it was often ignored by many candidates, or dealt with superficially. Although the question asked about 'international relations' many responses focused only on Sino-Soviet relations.

- **And finally**, several examiners complained that the introductions and conclusions are not specifically credited in the mark schemes. This is not the case. One of the six strands in the generic performance descriptors deals specifically with the structure of the response. Introductions and conclusions are part of this structure.

Recommendations:

- Once again, a large number of questions need to be submitted to the French Inspector. They must be accompanied by a French translation and they need to be as 'open' as possible.
- Try to ensure that the resource submitted with a Geography AMQ clearly relates to the topic of the sketch map, is brief, concise and of a suitable level of difficulty.
- Submissions should include a good selection of Geography AMQ questions **and** Geography DBQ questions. Both styles of question can appear on any of the eight examinations that are set each year.
- Do not try to predict what questions could be coming up on the examination. A topic used in 2019 could appear on any of the 2020 papers, but with a different emphasis or focus.
- When marking practice questions, use the 'generic' mark scheme. This will ensure that your students are familiar with the demands of the exam.
- Colleagues should try to attend one of the oral training meetings held early in 2020. These meetings are not just useful for oral examiners, they can provide essential advice on what the oral examiners are looking for and therefore, how to prepare candidates.

A personal note in conclusion. The work of the Cambridge Inspector is challenging yet interesting. I could not do my job without the help, advice, patience and good humour of my colleagues in the OIB community. The OIB is a very special qualification and its success is largely due to the commitment and professionalism of those who teach it and examine it. Thanks to you all.

John Nanson

September 2019

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