

OIB History-Geography 2017-18

Cambridge Inspector's Report

Introduction:

- This is my second report as Cambridge Inspector for History/Geography, covering the year 2017-18. As well as considerable continuity, there has been much that has changed over the past twelve months, not only in terms of key personnel but also in the nature and format of the written paper. I would like to thank everyone in the OIB community for their support and I am especially indebted to 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, James Cathcart, Matthew Tomlinson, Richard Ewell, Darren Griffiths, Caroline Bretelle, and Anne Davis. The administrative staff at Saint-Germain deserve special praise and I am especially appreciative, as always, of Catherine Sagne's calm and efficient administrative skills. Catherine coped with a range of urgent and critical problems, many last-minute changes, and a huge amount of data, with unlimited patience, common-sense and charm. At Cambridge International, Sarah Lee kept a firm hand on the tiller, while Natascha Emrich provided valuable 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.
- Most importantly, I must mention how much we have missed Rob Miller's experience and guidance for most of this year. Alan Geary has taken on Rob's responsibilities much earlier than he expected and Alan has worked extremely hard to ensure the smooth running of the assessment in 2018. I am sure that we all wish Rob a full recovery and I very much hope to be able to benefit from his advice once again in the future.
- James Cathcart has succeeded Peter Woodburn as Schools' Chair and Shaun Corrigan has taken on the role of Deputy Schools Chair. Both have impressed with their forward thinking and their grasp of detail. There are other important changes expected in 2018-19, with several colleagues from within our community taking on greater responsibilities.
- 1391 candidates were entered for the assessment in June 2018, an increase of almost 100 compared to 2017. Several new centres entered candidates this year and we expect to welcome more new centres in the near future. *Viatique*, the online marking system worked very well this year but the deadlines for the written markers were still extremely tight. However, their professionalism shone through and the work was completed on time. 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 the moderation was completed in time for the marks to be issued as scheduled.
- There was, once again, a September session, and thanks are due to the colleagues who marked the written paper and conducted the oral examinations for this small number of candidates.

Subject Meetings and Training 2017-18:

- 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 very helpful in guiding colleagues in the preparation of their candidates for both aspects of the assessment and thanks are due to those colleagues who give up their time to plan and deliver these workshops. However, much time in 2017 was devoted to the potential introduction of a new annotated map question (AMQ) in Geography and the views expressed during the meeting were invaluable in guiding myself and the French Inspector (Olivier Delmas) in the preparation of this new assessment technique.

- I attended the oral examination training in Sevres in February 2018 and I cannot over-emphasise its usefulness. 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 oral examinations.

Syllabus Revision:

- The purpose of the revision of the syllabus for 2018-19 was primarily to provide greater clarity for those who teach the course and for those who set the examination questions. Several colleagues worked on this syllabus revision but special thanks must go to Matthew Tomlinson (History) and Richard Ewell (Geography).
- It is now important that the community provide useful lists of suggested reading and suitable resources to augment these revised syllabus documents.

Setting the Written Papers for 2018:

- 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. The draft papers were scrutinised and revised by the Assistant Cambridge Inspector (a historian) and were then finalised at a meeting in Paris in March 2018 between the French Inspector and myself.
- Colleagues who were disappointed that they did not see their questions in the examination paper should be aware that their questions may well have been included in one of the unused papers.
- When setting questions for 2019, colleagues need to ensure that the style of wording used in this year's June examination is used in all questions submitted for 2019. 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*'. As always, a French translation of each question needs to be submitted, together with the English language version.
- Finally, be aware of the need for security when you are compiling questions. A number of questions had to be rejected this year because the memory stick that held them was lost before the questions were submitted. The teacher involved did exactly the right thing by alerting me to this problem via ASIBA.

Compiling the Key content for the oral examinations:

- The system, whereby centres choose their Key issues from one of four master lists, was used again this year and the process appeared to run smoothly. When the Key terms were added, the lists of Key content were re-numbered 181M, 182M, and so on for schools within France and 181E, 182E, and so on for schools outside France. This was to avoid any potential confusion between the two sets of Key content lists in the run-up to the orals.
- The four lists of Key issues for 2019 will be numbered 191, 192, 193 and 194. Key terms will be added later and the full Key content lists for 2019 can be released to candidates on a date to be specified in April/May 2019, allowing them time to make their final preparations for the orals. 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 are a much larger number of Key issues and Key terms in the revised H/G syllabus, it is permissible to use all Oral 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:

- The main change this year was the possible introduction of a Geography Annotated Map Question (AMQ). The AMQ was selected for use in the exam and proved popular with candidates who performed well (see below). In future, the Geography AMQ will continue to be a possible alternative to the traditional Geography DBQ.
- Thanks go to Barbara Hibbert who provided mark schemes for the History questions and to my colleagues in France for their comments on the draft mark scheme and their suggestions for improvements. This work had to be done very quickly after the candidates took the exam and before the markers started their work on *Viatique*. Several last-minute changes were made to make the mark scheme as open as possible.
- This year, the *Viatique* marking and moderating system worked efficiently and papers were available to the markers on the agreed date (four days after the exam). A ‘standardisation’ meeting for the three ‘team leader’ moderators was held in France as soon as the scripts became available on *Viatique*. This allowed us to make four ‘standardised’ scripts available to the markers early on, providing an agreed standard and helping to align marks.
- Cambridge is in contact with the French authorities to discuss the small number of scanning issues that occurred. No candidates were disadvantaged by these issues as procedures were put in place to ensure fair assessment took place.
- A total of 26 written examiners marked scripts this year, with 7 being new to the process. They were divided into three teams, headed by me or by one of my ‘team leader’ moderators. I would like to record my thanks to all of the written examiners who did a really professional job and ensured that, despite the very 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 leader’ moderators, Anne Davis 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. This year, each team leader sampled three scripts per marker early in the process, then re-marked these scripts and provided feedback to the marker. Markers were encouraged to contact their team leader regarding any problematic scripts and this contributed to the moderation process. Towards the end of marking, moderators sampled further scripts. The sample chosen was guided by the statistical information available on *Viatique*. If no problems emerged at this stage, the markers’ marks were validated. However, where a ‘lingering doubt’ remained, further scripts were sampled. This sometimes led to a scaling of marks to bring them into line with the agreed overall standard. Very few scalings were needed this year.
- Small changes were made to the generic mark scheme this year to make it clearer to markers exactly how the marks awarded related to the six levels. As a result, the problems we had last year with the use of the *appreciation* box were almost all eliminated.
- The results statistics for this session were comparable to previous years. Marks ranged from 3/20 to 20/20 and the mean mark was 13.15. As one would expect, the mark distribution was skewed towards the top end of the range and I am pleased to report that just over 1% 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 wish to record my thanks to the markers who completed detailed reports on the marking process.

Summer Examination Session – the oral examination:

- A total of 28 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. In several cases the AM also acted as an oral examiner in the centre. 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 centres was efficient and professional.
- Colleagues deserve praise for the excellent job they did in completing the *fiches d'évaluation* – no errors of addition were detected this year. When examiners and/or AMs made me aware of circumstances that may have affected the oral examination for a candidate, 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. In the orals, more candidates achieved full marks and more candidates achieved a mark below 10/20. 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, the number of oral examiners was just enough to provide the necessary number of teams, with no 'slack' at all in the system. The increase in candidate numbers without a commensurate increase in available examiners is a contributory factor. Illness and railway strikes had the potential to derail the smooth running of this year's orals. Thanks go to everyone involved for ensuring that no significant problems arose and that contingency plans were in place if they did. However, things are now so tight that, next year, some changes may need to be introduced to ease the pressure.

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) – 57%
- b) Percentage of candidates choosing Sujet B (Geog essay and History DBQ) – 43%
- c) Percentage of candidates choosing History essay 1 (Media) – 21%
- d) Percentage of candidates choosing History essay 2 (Middle East) – 36%
- e) Percentage of candidates choosing Geog essay 1 (Migration) – 18%
- f) Percentage of candidates choosing Geog essay 2 (Globalisation and NIDL) – 25%

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. However, the 'pass' rate was higher this year (4% more reached a mark of 10 or above) and the number gaining top marks was down slightly (1.0% compared to 1.9% last year).
- There was some criticism of the History essay questions, but the statistics show that these questions were popular and that they performed better than any of the other four questions on the paper.
- The Middle East topic was introduced onto the written paper for the first time this year and proved to be the most popular essay question, with a relatively high mean mark.
- The introduction of the Geography AMQ was another innovation. This question gave the candidates few problems, was popular, and scored slightly higher than the History DBQ. However, the fears expressed last year that it only tests knowledge recall may be justified, *but only for the map and the key*. The 'commentary' and the second part of the question, where the candidates had to use a document on megacities, meant that a range of skills were tested and, overall, the mean mark was comparable to the History DBQ. This comparability is important in an examination where there is a choice of questions.
- 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 through the structure used 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 strategies 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 developing 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 *Media and public opinion* was quite popular and produced the highest mean mark. The quality of the answer often depended on the suitability of the case study covered in class. There were some poor choices of 'political crisis' e.g. World War Two. The Falklands War is not an especially good choice as it did not really 'divide a country's opinion'. The Vietnam War was a popular choice and those who chose it often did well, although a common weakness was that examples were imprecise e.g. a failure to name newspapers. Evaluation, as always, proved to be difficult – for example the limitations of the influence of the media were rarely mentioned and many answers lacked balanced arguments.
- **History essay 2**, on the *Middle East* was the most popular essay on the paper. Uncertainty over the acceptable time frame caused some difficulties and this was clearly a weakness in the question. The better responses were able to differentiate clearly between the two parts of the question and the better candidates were able to provide balanced arguments e.g. the attempts by the Great Powers to broker peace and reconciliation in addition to their contribution to the 'conflict'. Often the focus was purely on Israel and not on the wider Middle East. There was more reference to the actions of the USA than to those of the USSR and the weaker answers focused solely on the actions of the USA. As usual, the candidates found it difficult to 'Assess the extent to which...' Despite all of this, this question produced the second highest mean mark of the six questions on the paper.
- **Geography AMQ**, this was more popular than the History DBQ and scored a slightly higher mean mark. Most candidates had been well prepared and produced a well-learned map and key but some forgot to add the names of relevant places to the map. Part a) often scored well but many candidates failed to mention limitations in their commentary. In part b) there was some confusion between global cities and megacities but most candidates were able to refer to their map and to the document in their answer. There was evidence of 'own knowledge' but megacities other than Jo'burg and Mumbai were rarely mentioned. Once again, evaluation was the hardest aspect of part b), for example most candidates were able to list the challenges facing megacities but the **relative importance** of the different challenges was not always assessed. There was some evidence that a few students did not have enough time.
- **Geography essay 1**, on *international migration* was the least popular essay on the paper, with the lowest mean mark. Weaker candidates confused internal with international migration, source country with destination country, and made vague statements e.g. 'The Syrian refugee crisis' showing a lack of precise knowledge. Some candidates seemed to have chosen this question so that they could express extreme political views. Reasons for migration flows were often well explained but they were rarely quantified and examples were basic. Some good case studies would have helped many of the answers. There were a few really good answers but many were mediocre.
- **Geography essay 2**, on *Globalisation and the NIDL* was quite popular and scored a good mean mark. This is a big topic and weaker candidates tended to ramble. The better candidates focused their arguments and did not try to cover every aspect of the topic. Introductions sometimes tended to focus too much on the distant past and were often too long, at the expense of the body of the essay. Despite this, part a) of the question was usually answered well. Part b) caused more problems and a significant number of candidates confused the NIDL with globalisation in general, or focused too heavily on TNCs. The effects of the NIDL on LEDCs was covered more thoroughly than the effect on MEDCs, despite the wording of the question. Candidates should be encouraged to avoid vague

examples such as 'in Asia' or 'in the countries of Africa'. Despite this there were many good answers, containing detailed and relevant case studies.

- **History DBQ**, this was less popular than the Geography AMQ but many of the answers were of a pleasing standard, although very few were aware that Churchill was no longer Prime Minister in 1946. Similarly, very few commented on the 21-year time gap between the documents. In part a), 'How useful...' expects a discussion of *usefulness and uselessness* and few candidates were able to do this well. Weaker candidates tended to be vague and were too willing to take the documents at face value, often simply paraphrasing the documents with no attempt at evaluation. In part b), the better answers placed the issue in a broader global context (big picture approach) and most responses included some attempt to 'evaluate'.
- **Finally**, I would like to quote one of my experienced examiners who made the following comment; *"I was surprised by the high proportion of students who chose Sujet A, which seemed to contain the most feared questions, but the majority of them proved successful."*

Recommendations:

- A larger 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.
- Submissions should include a good selection of Geography AMQ questions **and** Geography DBQ questions.
- Ensure that teachers submit lists of suggested reading and suitable resources to augment the revised syllabuses.
- Review the procedure for oral examinations to reduce the pressure on examiners and the examination system.
- Centres should ensure that they are represented at one of the training meetings early in 2019. 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.
- We need to be aware of the proposed changes to the *Bac Generale* and how these may impact on the OIB.

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 the key members of the OIB community. Some of those key personnel have changed over the past 12 months but all of them have done a great job. 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 2018

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