

'A Comparison of Barack Obama and Abraham Lincoln'

(C Grade)

Introduction

This project evidence was submitted with evidence for all five stages clearly presented using the SQA templates, along with an assessor report. The centre had supported the candidate using a team structure, with three members of staff involved across different social science departments including History, Modern Studies and Psychology. They also worked together to internally verify the assessment.

Proposal

The proposal showed a clear academic aim — comparing two American presidents — and expressed a desire to link in aspects such as Psychology and Philosophy to broaden what was primarily a History/Modern Studies project. As the assessor feedback mentioned, it was a fascinating idea for an interdisciplinary project.

However, the exact way in which these subjects were to be linked in is not clearly argued in the evidence. The outline subsection is rather vaguely expressed, and it is not clear how the candidate intends to investigate some of the stated aims, eg the role of race in Lincoln's decisions, making it hard to determine whether these aims are realistic and achievable.

A very clear statement of learning environments is made — mentioning specific university lecturers, an author, and a historical society — and this showed evidence of the candidate having given thought to the needs of the project and done some preliminary research ahead of the proposal.

Skills analysis covered a broad range of skills. This section was adequate but again rather vague.

Overall the proposal was clear, made provision for skills development and for accessing unfamiliar learning environments. For the proposal to meet the Grade A criteria, it would be necessary for the rationale to be more clearly stated, and for the links between the disciplines to be better explained; in places the emphasis was very strongly on History and the American Civil War. The candidate could also have made more precise links between the skills development and the project itself.

Plan

The candidate identified seven itemised objectives, and the candidate explained how she proposed to complete each one in turn. This made for clear reading.

Timescales were included in a list form, breaking down the key tasks over the autumn and winter months. This was clear enough, but lacked detail. A stronger plan would have included more detail, perhaps in line with the objectives listed, or a Gantt chart could have been used to show dependencies that are implicit in the timeline but not actually specified in the evidence.

Some aspects of the plan were not well thought through. For example, it was unclear from the evidence why surveying a Higher Psychology class was a good way to find out about leadership skills, rather than, for example, looking at contemporary theories of leadership in a textbook or online. The Grade A criteria of 'careful selection and effective use of research techniques' was not clearly evidenced.

There were numerous strands to the project, and while the assessor expressed confidence that the candidate could reconcile them, this did not come through strongly in the early stages of the assessment materials.

The dependencies section shows good awareness of the people and resources needed, though it lacked any mention of steps which would need to be completed before other work could be done. In practice, it transpired that such dependencies played a large role in the project, as from later sections it transpired that the candidate spend a long period of time waiting for responses to her e-mails, holding her back from making progress. This was an issue that a more thorough plan might have predicted. Some thought was given to this and related problems in the contingencies section; suggested solutions were logical but lacked detail.

The candidate's method for recording skills development was clear and appropriate.

A strength of this plan was that it identified a sustainable educational use for the findings, in the form of educational materials, and this was helpfully highlighted in the assessor feedback.

Presentation

The candidate described how, as planned, the findings of the investigation were presented to school pupils. On the basis of the form of presentation used, eg the inclusion of word clouds, this was made accessible and visual for the school pupils. The candidate showed the PowerPoint presentation and gave a talk to pupils. The assessor comments were very helpful in determining the success of the talk, which was completed well and confidently. The presentation had rather too many words on screen, and may need adjustment for use as teaching tool in future.

In terms of the assessment criteria, the Grade C criteria were fully met. In terms of Grade A, there was some evidence of 'Skillful and creative use of resources', but critical thinking/analysis/ reflection was limited, as were the depth of knowledge and understanding, and the meaningful connections established.

Evaluation of project

The candidate had apparently learned a lot and given some thought to such issues as the quality of her sources. She correctly identified that hearing from only one of her outside contacts by the time of her presentation was a problem, but didn't link this to earlier weaknesses in contingency planning. She appreciated that the subject matter required narrowing down but does not explain what aspects were omitted or should have been further developed.

The candidate had made good use of the expertise of the supportive teachers and notes that relying on email to experts proved a very limited way of gathering information. She has gained from producing and giving an oral presentation. She relied overly on asking 'experts' for information, primarily by e-mail, and looking at websites. There is a lack of incisive critique of these communication techniques. Overall the evaluation makes some good points but omits many important strengths and weaknesses of the project. The evaluation of the outcome against the project aims was certainly not as incisive or convincing as would be expected to meet the Grade A criteria.

Self-Evaluation

Many of the subsections here — such as time management, interpersonal skills and research skills — describe what was done, and do not contain much in the way of reflective self-evaluation. The candidate clearly has some awareness of her own cognitive skills, and how these have improved. She refers back to her goals and describes some of the challenges which were overcome, such as making time for her Interdisciplinary Project alongside the other demands of S6. She also shows adaptability in finding ways of working around when her skills were weaker, for example limited IT skills. She also refers to feedback and evidence, and describes how her improved sense of independent learning that has arisen from the project.

This section meets the Grade C criteria but was limited in depth and could not be described as 'insightful, balanced and well-structured' or as using 'assertive and justified use of feedback' as stated in the Grade A criteria.

Overview

This is an enthusiastic candidate who has chosen a topic of personal interest and spent a considerable amount of time researching it. She has taken steps to contact academic experts, and has produced a potentially reusable educational resource. The candidate has worked independently, looking at numerous sources and websites, though seems to have been easily put off by difficulties, eg not receiving responses to e-mails. She was highly reliant on staff for information and for help in preparing her presentation.