

Extended Project Qualification: a complementary approach to learning

With fierce competition for university places, students can find it harder than ever to stand out from the crowd and secure the course they want. For many, this is a key motivation for taking the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ). Our research has explored the wider benefits of taking an EPQ and how it can enhance learning.



What is the EPQ?

The EPQ is a standalone qualification equivalent to half an A-level. Students choose a topic they're interested in and then independently plan, research and carry out their project, under teacher supervision. Students keep a reflective log throughout the learning process and are required to present their project to an audience. As there's no exam, students can work at their own pace.

What are the benefits of taking an EPQ?

Stephenson and Isaacs¹ explored the experiences of 26 EPQ teachers and 15 undergraduate students who had recently completed an EPQ. The EPQ was seen to provide opportunities to enhance learning through:

- building learner agency
- enabling a journey of self-discovery
- advancing academic skills
- preparing for future success
- engaging both students and teachers.

Student interviews revealed that many found the EPQ helped bridge the learning gap between A-levels and university.

"I feel like I'm teaching them skills which they're going to find very useful in their adult life, which you don't always get time to do on top of your content that you have to deliver in lessons."

Sarah, teacher

¹ Stephenson, C., & Isaacs, T. (2019). The role of the Extended Project Qualification in developing self-regulated learners: Exploring students' and teachers' experiences. *The Curriculum Journal*, 30(4), 392–421. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2019.1646665>

Teachers and students alike reported that the EPQ helped develop independent learning skills such as critical and analytical thinking, time management, academic writing, researching and referencing.

Teachers reported seeing transformations in their students, such as increases in self-confidence, self-esteem and resilience, as a result of the EPQ process.

“It didn’t feel boring or taxing or like normal schoolwork because it was me looking into something I was interested in and then reporting my findings to other people.”

Adam, student



A positive impact on academic outcomes

Findings from our research suggest that:

- Students who take an EPQ are on average 22% more likely to obtain A* to B grades in their A-levels than students who do not complete an EPQ.
- English and humanities students stand to benefit the most from this grade-boosting potential of the EPQ – taking an EPQ increases the chances of achieving an A* to B by 39% in A-level humanities and 35% in A-level English.

Enabling opportunities for all

The EPQ addresses shortcomings of the post-16 curriculum by promoting self-regulated learning. Its benefits are recognised by many universities, with some making alternative or more favourable entry offers to students who complete an EPQ.

With this in mind, schools might want to consider pairing GCSEs with the Level 2 Higher Project Qualification in order that students may develop these skills earlier in their educational journey. This might also help to spark passion in students who may otherwise lose academic interest before the age at which they can take an EPQ.

In order to fully realise the potential benefits of the EPQ, serious consideration needs to be given to the resourcing and accessibility of the qualification to ensure equality of opportunity for all students.