EXTENDED PROJECT (COHORT 3) & PROJECT QUALIFICATION (LEVEL 1 & 2)

Student Evaluation

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INTRODUCTION

In summer 2008, the third cohort of students were awarded grades for the pilot Extended Project Qualification (EPQ). At the same time, awards were made to the first, and only, pilot cohort for the Level 1 & 2 Project Qualifications (PQ). As with the EPQ, it is planned that the PQs should be offered as a stand-alone qualification but will also form a key component of the appropriate level Diploma.

In a continuation of the pilot evaluation, entry data has been combined with grade outcomes and, where available, project proposal information, to provide a deeper insight into the EPQ and the PQ. For the EPQ, where appropriate, comparisons have been made between the first and second cohort entry and performance.

Student questionnaires were sent to the EPQ & PQ coordinators for all of the centres with registered entries. The coordinators were asked to administer their distribution and subsequent return to AQA. As with the questionnaire sent to students in the first and second cohort EPQ, the response rate was low and a decision has been taken to combine all quantitative student responses across each of the pilot cohorts for analysis. These data are reported herein.

A copy of the EPQ questionnaire is included in Appendix C. The PQ questionnaire was almost identical although the wording was slightly altered to make it appropriate for the PQ students and Section C was omitted altogether. Section C was also absent from the questionnaire sent to the first cohort of EPQ students.

THE LEVEL 1 & 2 PQ CHARACTERISTICS

Entry Details

For the Level 1 PQ pilot there were 39 project proposals received from 3 centres and, for Level 2, there were 65 project proposals from 7 centres (Table 1 & Table 2). At both levels the attrition rate between project approval and final certification was high, with only just over a third of the students who submitted a proposal finally awarded a grade. There were 14 Level 1 PQ grades awarded to the 39 students who submitted a project proposal (35.9%) and 25 Level 2 PQ grades awarded from 65 project proposals (38.5%). Including the considerable proportion of entries that did not submit a project proposal, an overall total of 25 grades were awarded to Level 1 students and 33 to Level 2 students.

One Level 2 centre entered project proposals but submitted no work for certification and, across the two levels, several made formal entries for students for whom there was no accompanying project proposal.

TABLE 1 Summary of student entries (Level 1)

Final Status Level 1	Project Proposal & No Formal Entry	Project Proposal & Formal Entry	No Project Proposal & Formal Entry
Grade Awarded	0	14	11
No Grade Awarded	24	1	9
Level 1 Total	**24**	**15**	**20**

TABLE 2 Summary of student entries (Level 2)

Final Status Level 2	Project Proposal & No Formal Entry	Project Proposal & Formal Entry	No Project Proposal & Formal Entry
Grade Awarded	0	25	8
No Grade Awarded	31	9	2
Level 2 Total	**31**	**34**	**10**

Both the Level 1 & 2 PQ attracted entries from a special school which regrettably experienced a high drop-out rate between submission of the project proposal and final entry, perhaps due to the sometimes short term nature of attendance (see Pinot de Moira, 2008b for further details). The remaining centres were mainstream comprehensive schools and further education establishments.

The Students

Students awarded the Level 1 PQ ranged between 15 and 18 years of age on certification and those awarded a Level 2 PQ between 16 and 18 years of age (Table 3).

TABLE 3 The age distribution of Level 1 & 2 students on certification

Age at certification	Level 1	Level 2
15	20.0%	
16	56.0%	9.1%
17	16.0%	78.8%
18	8.0%	12.1%
Total certificating entry	**25**	**33**

The project proposal form allows for the collection of information regarding each student's current programme of study. Students were following a wide range of programmes including qualifications such as GCSEs, NVQs, Key Skills and Foundation Level FSMQs, amongst others. The majority of Level 1 PQ students (55.6%) were concurrently undertaking at least one GCSE and a third were entered for vocational qualifications. On the whole, the concurrent qualifications were of similar stakes in terms of the National Qualification Framework but, notably, 44.4% of students were taking no GCSEs at all.

Although the majority of Level 2 PQ students were entered for other qualifications at the same level of the National Qualifications Framework, 11 students were studying for AS/A Levels at Level 3. Over half of the entry was studying for at least one GCSE but the project proposal forms highlighted a large number of students entered for minority qualifications, such as OCR National Awards and Basic Skills qualifications.

The aim of the PQ is to provide extension from studies for other qualifications or to allow learners to explore an area of personal interest or activity outside the main programme of study (AQA & City & Guilds, 2007). Compared with the EPQ, the projects submitted for Level 1 & 2 appear to be less influenced by personal interest and more focussed towards the areas of citizenship and health & well-being (Table 4). However the pilot project topics, as described by the title on the project proposal form and listed in Appendix A, suggest that the PQ is indeed fulfilling the aim of introducing learning outside the main programme. As with the first cohort of the EPQ, at Level 1 in particular, the PQ has been regarded by some centres as a route to for introducing citizenship to the curriculum. Broad topics such as drugs, youth offending and alcohol abuse feature widely. It remains to be seen whether, as with the EPQ, future entries will include a greater proportion of projects chosen because

of a personal interest or whether the age profile of the entry for the Level 1 & 2 PQ will necessarily introduce limitations on area of study.

Neither the Level 1 nor the Level 2 PQ attracted any students studying languages (Table 4). Perhaps unsurprisingly the most common areas of concurrent study were the core subjects: English, mathematics, science and ICT. With the limited sample of data, and the tendency to cover topics in the areas of citizenship, health and well-being there was little evidence to suggest that concurrent study influenced project choice.

TABLE 4 Level 1 & 2 project subject area cross-tabulated against areas of concurrent study (column percentages)

Project Area \ Concurrent Area of Study	Arts	English	Health & PE	Languages	Mathematics	Science	Technology	Humanities & Social Science	Citizenship	Total
Level 1										
Health & PE	100.0	60.0	**0.0**	0.0	41.2	34.8	46.2	22.2	75.0	46.2
Humanities & Social Science	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	17.6	30.4	0.0	**33.3**	25.0	15.1
Citizenship	0.0	40.0	0.0	0.0	41.2	34.8	53.8	44.4	**0.0**	38.7
Total Concurrent Entries	2	25	0	0	17	23	13	9	4	93
Level 2										
Arts	**0.0**	5.9	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7
English	0.0	**5.9**	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.0	0.0	1.7
Health & PE	28.6	11.8	**11.1**	0.0	21.1	0.0	40.0	0.0	36.8	20.3
Science	0.0	11.8	0.0	0.0	10.5	**0.0**	25.0	24.0	15.8	15.3
Technology	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	**10.0**	8.0	0.0	4.2
Humanities & Social Science	57.1	35.3	44.4	0.0	31.6	100.0	25.0	**64.0**	47.4	44.1
Citizenship	14.3	5.9	44.4	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	**0.0**	5.9
Missing	0.0	23.5	0.0	0.0	21.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.8
Total Concurrent Entries	7	17	9	0	19	2	20	25	19	118

A single student may be represented in one or more of the columns.

Project Format

Within each centre the nature and format of the Level 1 PQ differed. Most of the students appeared to undertake group work, with only nine students out of the 39 who provided project titles working on individual projects. In contrast, for the Level 2 PQ most students were supervised in an environment where individual project work was encouraged. There was one Level 2 PQ centre where the majority of students opted for group work and all of these students certificated. So, in contrast to the findings from cohort 1 & 2 of the EPQ, group work did not seem to imply a high attrition rate for the Level 2 PQ.

The final submission for the project was in variety of formats and in a variety of combinations of these formats (Table 5 & Table 6). Of the 25 Level 1 PQ students who certificated, all but one of the students who submitted a written document also submitted an electronic element in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. Four of the certificating students submitted a poster as part of their evidence. While there was no live evidence for the Level 1 PQ, a large proportion of the Level 2 entry proposed the submission of live work. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the students from centres supporting group work were more likely to work towards a live performance. Indeed, 11 out of the 29 projects with a live element involved group work.

TABLE 5 Format of Level 1 PQ submission (column %) for certificating students

Project Type	Written	Live	Electronic	Artefact	Poster	Total
Individual	7.7	0.0	77.3	0.0	100.0	24.0
Individual & Small Group	92.3	0.0	22.7	0.0	0.0	68.0
Unknown	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.0
Total Entries	13	0	22	0	4	25

The work of a student may contribute to one or more of the columns.

TABLE 6 Format of Level 2 PQ submission (column %) for certificating students

Project Type	Written	Live	Electronic	Artefact	Other	Total
Individual	40.00	20.00	100.00	100.00	0.00	39.4
Individual & Small Group	60.00	80.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	36.4
Unknown	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	24.2
Total Entries	20	15	3	3	0	33

The work of a student may contribute to one or more of the columns.

PQ Grades

The grade boundaries for the PQ were determined in a grade award meeting which closely followed the practices and procedures used for all other AQA examinations. The QCA Code of Practice guided the award, as far as it could be generalised to cover a new type of qualification. The grade boundaries and cumulative grade distribution for Level 1 are reported in Table 7 and in Table 8 for Level 2. No student was awarded maximum marks for the PQ. The highest mark achieved for Level 1 was 37, by a student discussing the media's influence on young girls. For Level 2, the highest mark was 42 and, although the entry was from a different centre, the area of study in this project was almost identical to that of the best Level 1 PQ.

The mean mark awarded to both the Level 1 and Level 2 PQ was close to the centre of the mark range (26.6 and 25.8, respectively). However, for both levels, the grade distribution was skewed towards the lower grades. Disappointingly, over a third of the Level 2 students failed.

TABLE 7 Level 1 PQ grade boundaries and cumulative grade distribution

Grade	Grade Boundaries (Max Mark 50)	Cumulative Grade Distribution
A*	37	4.00
A	28	36.00
B	20	96.00
U	0	100.00

TABLE 8 Level 2 PQ grade boundaries and cumulative grade distribution

Grade	Grade Boundaries (Max Mark 50)	Cumulative Grade Distribution
A*	46	0.00
A	38	17.86
B	30	42.86
C	22	60.71
U	0	100.00

The small number of students entered for the PQ renders comparisons of the performance of subgroups of the population relatively meaningless. Nevertheless, for both Level 1 & 2, there was some evidence to suggest that those students submitting work in the area of Humanities and Social Science performed better than others. For Level 2 in particular, a large proportion of these students worked in groups; a mode of learning that, based on the limited evidence particularly regarding attrition, seems to suit students at this academic stage.

THE EPQ THIRD COHORT CHARACTERISTICS

Entry Details

There were 1,170 project proposals received from 68 centres for the third cohort of the EPQ project. This represented a fourfold increase in the entry from the second cohort. There was also an approximate fourfold increase in the number of students certificating; implying that, despite the increased interest in the EPQ, the retention rates remain low. Of the students that submitted a project proposal only 498 (42.5%) were finally awarded a grade (Table 9). There were, however, 177 students awarded a grade who had not submitted project proposals in advance of certification.

TABLE 9 Summary of student entries

Final Status EPQ	Project Proposal & No Formal Entry	Project Proposal & Formal Entry	No Project Proposal & Formal Entry
Grade Awarded	0	498	177
Not Entered or Withdrawn	570	102	77
EPQ Total	**570**	**600**	**254**

Thirteen of the centres who initially submitted project proposals for the third cohort of the pilot failed to enter any students for certification. These centres represented a fairly small proportion of the potential entry. Most had planned to offer the EPQ for fewer than fifteen students, although one centre submitted 35 project proposals.

The majority of the certificating entry was from one of 20 sixth form colleges (44%) and 26 secondary comprehensive schools (39%).

The Students

In the third cohort of the EPQ, the vast majority of graded students were 17 or 18 years of age at certification (Table 10). Of these, the entry was split roughly in half between year 12 and year 13 students. The pattern of entry in the second cohort, where November was the project submission deadline, was markedly different. The majority of students were 18 years of age at the end of the academic year and Pinot de Moira (2008a) observed that

> *"The year 13 students entered for the second cohort were exploiting the remainder of their year 12 teaching time available after AS examinations to start the EPQ. It is probable that they were chosen as a group of students who were capable of independent learning and could therefore continue their investigations throughout the summer holidays. The time available for their investigation was much shorter than that for the first cohort. The first cohort had a more conventional end point in the summer and so teaching and support could be given over the whole academic year."*

So the age profile of the third cohort seemed to suggest greater similarity with the first in terms of entry pattern. However, the first cohort attracted students with relatively poor levels of prior achievement, measured by mean GCSE score. Students entered for the third cohort achieved an average GCSE result of grade B and this compared reasonably favourably with the average grade A achieved by the second cohort students.

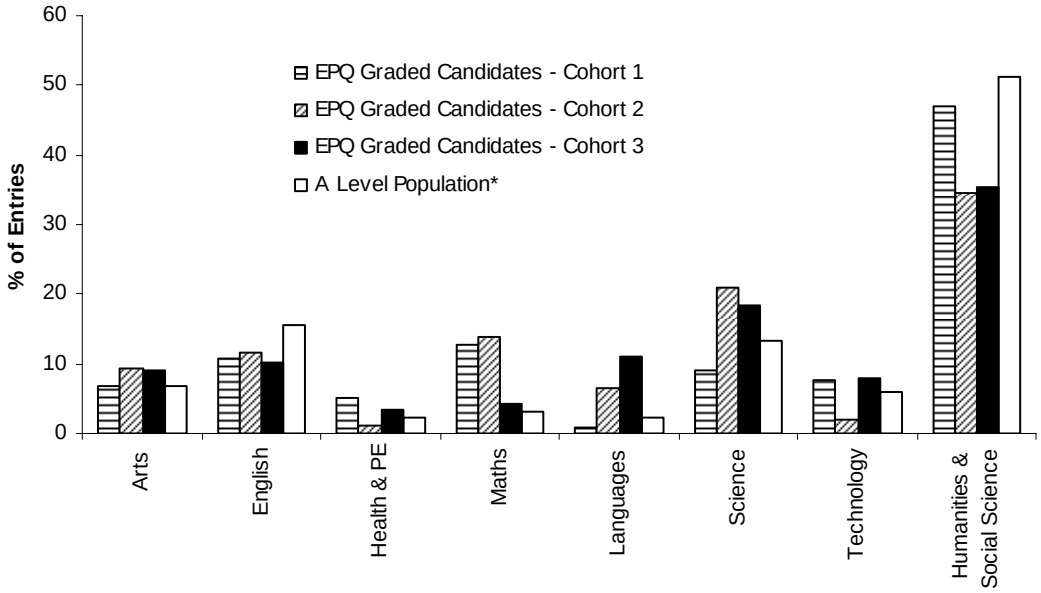
TABLE 10 Certificating student age distribution and mean GCSE result by EPQ entry cohort

Cohort	16	17	18	19	20	Entries	Mean GCSE
Cohort 1	0.0	57.6	29.5	10.6	1.5	132	4.74
Cohort 2	0.0	1.2	95.8	3.0	0.0	166	7.03
Cohort 3	0.1	47.6	44.1	6.7	1.5	675	6.00

The distribution of concurrent subjects of study for third cohort EPQ students appeared relatively similar to the A Level cohort (Figure 1). As with the second cohort, there were slightly more student entries for the mathematics, languages and science subject areas than in the A Level population and slightly fewer in the humanities and social science subject area.

Although many of the projects appeared to cross several areas of study, for the purpose of further investigation they were crudely allocated to a single subject area to allow comparison of the project content with concurrent area of study. Table 11 cross-tabulates this information. The number of projects submitted in the area of citizenship continued its decrease in the third cohort. This perhaps indicates that the EPQ is now merited in its own right, rather than because it provides a vehicle for other areas of the curriculum. As with the overall A Level cohort, topics in the area of humanities and social sciences continue to attract the vast majority of students. Very few submitted project proposals indicated that students were planning to tackle work in the areas of mathematics and languages despite, as mentioned earlier, concurrent study in these fields being higher than that seen in the population of A Level students (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1 Distribution of concurrent qualifications across subject areas for EPQ students compared with the AQA A Level population



* Source: 2006 Market Share Statistics

TABLE 11 Project subject area cross-tabulated against areas of concurrent study (column percentages)

Project Area \ Concurrent Area of Study	Arts	English	Health & PE	Languages	Mathematics	Science	Technology	Humanities & Social Science	Citizenship	Total
Arts	**29.3**	12.5	1.8	6.5	8.7	6.4	16.6	8.6	2.8	10.5
English	11.1	**15.9**	5.4	12.2	3.1	4.3	7.3	7.1	7.7	7.6
Health & PE	10.4	10.4	**37.5**	7.9	14.9	17.7	16.6	14.8	10.5	14.9
Languages	1.0	1.2	0.0	**4.3**	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.7
Mathematics	0.3	0.6	0.0	2.2	**2.5**	1.3	0.4	0.5	0.7	0.9
Science	3.4	5.2	5.4	12.9	20.8	**30.6**	3.9	7.5	2.1	12.0
Technology	6.1	4.6	7.1	1.4	7.6	6.9	**15.4**	7.1	4.9	7.1
Humanities & Social Science	35.7	45.4	40.2	47.5	37.4	30.6	36.3	**48.6**	52.4	41.7
Citizenship	2.7	4.3	2.7	5.0	4.5	1.7	3.1	5.1	**18.2**	4.5
Missing	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.7	0.1
Total Concurrent Entries	297	328	112	139	356	598	259	1147	143	3379

A single student may be represented in one or more of the columns.

Project Format

Because of the increased entry for the EPQ, the previous visual classification of projects into joint and individual work was not possible for the third cohort. Suffice to say that centres continued to use the EPQ as a vehicle through which group and individual learning could be channelled. A few examples of group projects are listed below and a sample of individual project titles is given in Appendix B.

- A students' guide from a students point of view.
- To investigate cyber bullying on the internet and the possible effects it may have on society.
- Has the media created a moral panic in relation to hoodies?
- Live and let dance.

There seemed to be no clear pattern in the format of projects over the three cohorts. In the third cohort, the proportion of written submissions was at its lowest (Table 12). There were more projects submitted as artefacts or in electronic form. In the early stages of the pilot, it is possible that time and resource constraints led centres to favour written submissions. As practices and procedures within the centres and at AQA have become more established, other formats may have become more accessible.

TABLE 12 Format of EPQ submission (row percentages) for certificating students

Project Type	Written	Live	Electronic	Artefact	Total
Cohort 1	62.1	10.6	34.8	13.6	132
Cohort 2	84.9	12.7	9.0	9.0	166
Cohort 3	53.6	8.4	32.1	17.3	498

The work of a student may contribute to one or more of the columns.

EPQ Grades

As with the Level 1 & 2 PQs, the grade boundaries for the EPQ were determined in a grade award meeting which closely followed the practices and procedures used for all other AQA examinations. The QCA Code of Practice guided the award, as far as it could be generalised to cover a new type of qualification. The grade boundaries and cumulative grade distribution are reported in Table 13. Five students were awarded maximum marks. The titles of the projects achieving full marks are shown below:

- An exploration of Jewish faith responses to the holocaust.
- To what extent does the 1815 congress of Vienna support the theory that Austrian decline in the nineteenth century accelerated the emergence of a Prussian-dominated German empire?
- Response to population pressures.
- What could be done to get the teenage voters of Bury South to the polls?
- To explore the process involved in filmmaking by writing, producing and directing a short film of my own.

The mean mark was 30.44 (equivalent to a C grade) and the distribution of marks was slightly skewed towards the bottom end. There were 34 students who completed projects but, after the awarding process, were judged not to have achieved the standard worthy of a grade.

TABLE 13 EPQ cohort 3 grade boundaries and cumulative grade distribution

Grade	Grade Boundaries (Max Mark 50)	Cumulative Grade Distribution
A	38	28.08
B	32	50.95
C	26	71.40
D	20	87.35
E	15	94.97
U	0	100.00

In the second cohort, within the boundaries of the limited evidence, it was suggested that students submitting live work as part of their EPQ scored less highly than students submitting work in other formats. This pattern did not re-emerge in the third cohort. In fact, it was the students who submitted electronic material that faired most poorly.

TABLE 14 Grade distribution by format of project for the EPQ (Cohort 3)

Grade	Written	Live	Electronic	Artefact
A	41.6	31.0	13.1	24.4
B	61.8	52.4	31.9	51.2
C	79.4	66.7	53.1	70.9
D	88.4	83.3	80.0	86.0
E	94.8	92.9	91.3	94.2
U	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total	**267**	**42**	**160**	**86**

In terms of the mean grade awarded, those students who were concurrently studying a language performed best on the EPQ and those studying for health and PE subjects performed worst. With the paucity of data, and the limited background information about students, it is impossible to conclude, however, that certain areas of study better prepare a student for the EPQ.

SUPERVISORS' COMMENTS

The supervisors' comments on the project proposal form were of more relevance to the approval process than to the evaluation of the EPQ and PQ. However, for the EPQ, it is interesting to note that many of the supervisors who included a comment on project focus made reference to the student's personal interest in the topic. In contrast, the comments on the PQ proposals indicated that the project was supporting current learning.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Response Rates

A total of 227 questionnaires were received across all pilot cohorts of the EPQ and of the PQ (see Appendix C for a copy of the questionnaire). The overall response rate was low; 12.4% of the students who submitted a project proposal returned a questionnaire (Table 15). Furthermore, the number of centres represented by the responses was low, particularly for the Level 1 & 2 PQ, where there were few centres taking part in the pilot. The low response rate was perhaps unsurprising, as difficulties were experienced with targeting the dispatch and reply dates so as not to interfere with project submission while, at the same time, catching students before they started study leave. Nevertheless, viewed as a whole, the responses received provide an overview of the students' perception of the new qualifications.

Section A

Section A of the questionnaire comprised a series of fourteen items designed to elicit students' views of the Extended Project, the Production Log and the Presentation (Appendix C). The questions were on a five point ordinal scale where Strongly Agree was coded as five and Strongly Disagree was coded as one. For each pilot EPQ and PQ cohort, Table 15 shows the mean response for each item; the higher the mean, the stronger the agreement with the statement.

On the whole, the questionnaire responses from the EPQ students, particularly for cohorts 2 & 3, were more positive than those for the Level 1 & 2 PQ students. Students indicated that they really enjoyed studying for their EPQ and PQ (A1, Table 15) and there was a strong feeling that the project provided an opportunity to learn things not otherwise covered in their curriculum (A6, Table 15).

> *"I enjoyed doing it as I was able to choose a subject interesting to me."*
>
> *Cohort 2 EPQ*

> *"I really enjoyed my project because it was something I really enjoyed learning about."*
>
> *Level 2 PQ*

> *"Was fulfilling, enlightening, and very enjoyable."*
>
> *Cohort 3 EPQ*

Perhaps because of their intrinsic interest in the subject matter, the majority of students disagreed that the project was harder than other subjects they were studying concurrently (A10, Table 15).

> *"I found that extended project easy and interesting."*
>
> *Cohort 1 EPQ*

They recognised the value of the qualification as an addition to a Curriculum Vitae (A4, Table 15) and, those entered for the EPQ and Level 2 PQ, thought that employers, universities and colleges would be impressed by the work they had produced (A14, Table 15).

> *"I found the project an extremely valuable experience which could be the perfect bridge to university."*
>
> *Cohort 2 EPQ*

> *"Would take my project to an interview if I had one because it relates really well to my area."*
>
> *Cohort 2 EPQ*

At the beginning of the EPQ, there was some issue about the timing of invitations to participate in the pilot and this led to some problems, within centres, of timetabling and delivery of the qualification (Pinot de Moira, 2007). These teething troubles did not seem to filter down to the students who generally agreed that they had been given enough time to complete their projects without rushing (A5 & A13, Table 15). However, for the first cohort of the EPQ the students did identify a need to spend more time with their supervisors, a need which to some extent appeared to have been fulfilled in later cohorts of the EPQ and for the Level 1 & 2 PQ (A11, Table 15). There were some students for whom this issue remained into the second and third cohorts of the EPQ.

> *"Better timetabling and more structured time with a supervisor would help in the process of the extended project."*
>
> *Cohort 3 EPQ*

Although most students seemed to agree that the Production Log reflected the effort that they had put into their project (A3, Table 15), they did not find the completion of such a log an enjoyable task (A9, Table 15).

> *"Although I see it provides a summary I felt the AQA production log was pointless. I was duplicating my own work from my personal log onto a computer produced log. Waste of time!"*
>
> *Cohort 3 EPQ*

> *"Production log isn't all that helpful, perhaps maybe as an appendix may have helped slightly more."*
>
> *Cohort 2 EPQ*

Generally, the presentation was regarded favourably, but the Level 1 PQ students did not enjoy this part of the qualification (A2 & A7, Table 15).

> *"presenting my project helped me in my confidence as I am terrified of standing up in front of people."*
>
> *Cohort 2 EPQ*

TABLE 15 Mean item scores for section A of the questionnaire

	PQ		EPQ			
	Level 1	Level 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Total
A1. I enjoyed studying for my Extended Project	3.80	4.22	3.94	4.47	4.17	4.23
A2. I gained nothing from having to present my work at the end of the Extended Project	3.33	2.33	2.21	1.89	1.94	2.07
A3. The Production Log accurately reflected the effort that I put into the Extended Project	3.67	3.00	3.40	3.17	3.38	3.31
A4. I think that an Extended Project qualification will be a valuable addition to my Curriculum Vitae	3.71	4.00	3.89	4.25	4.32	4.18
A5. The whole of my Extended Project was rushed	2.60	1.56	2.17	2.30	2.36	2.29
A6. I learnt things from my Extended Project that I would not have learnt otherwise	3.64	3.89	3.60	4.46	4.27	4.19
A7. I enjoyed presenting my work to others once I had completed my Extended Project	3.21	3.67	3.50	4.03	3.81	3.81
A8. The Extended Project took up too much of my spare time	2.53	2.63	2.83	2.62	2.66	2.66
A9. I enjoyed completing the Production Log	3.07	2.11	2.80	2.57	2.63	2.64
A10. The Extended Project was harder than the other courses I am studying at the moment	2.80	2.00	2.09	2.43	2.47	2.40
A11. I would have liked more time with my supervisor	2.67	2.67	3.23	2.82	2.90	2.89
A12. I did not gain any new skills by studying for the Extended Project	3.07	2.00	2.46	1.62	1.89	1.96
A13. I had enough time to complete the Extended Project	3.47	3.78	3.31	3.74	3.74	3.65
A14. I think that employers, universities and colleges will be impressed by my Extended Project	3.53	3.22	3.43	4.09	3.94	3.86
Number of Responses	15	9	35	87	81	227
Response Rate (as a % of project proposal forms)	39	65	223	337	1170	1834
Number of centres represented by responses	38.5	13.8	15.7	25.8	6.9	12.4

Section B

Section B of the questionnaire comprised a series of sixteen items designed to provide an understanding of the way in which students studied for the EPQ and PQ (Appendix C). The items were adapted from the revised Learning Processes Questionnaire (Kember, Biggs, & Leung, 2004). They were on a five point ordinal scale where *Always or Almost Always True of Me* was coded as five and *Never or Only Rarely True of Me* was coded as one. For each pilot EPQ and PQ cohort, Table

16 shows the mean response for a selection of the more interesting items; the higher the mean, the stronger the agreement with the statement.

Collectively, the EPQ and PQ cohorts showed an intrinsic interest in the work that they were doing. They indicated that they worked hard on the project because they found the material interesting (B5, Table 16). In their response to item B8, the students showed that, rather than minimising scope of study, they were devoting considerable time to completion of the project. Their research appeared to include in-depth study and efforts to understand the bibliographic resources referenced (B13 & B15, Table 16). There was also recognition among those that completed the questionnaire that one of the motivating influences was the ultimate qualification and its value for future life (B11 & B14, Table 16).

TABLE 16 Mean item scores for selected items in section B of the questionnaire

		PQ		EPQ			
		Level 1	Level 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Total
B5	I worked hard on my Extended Project/ Project Qualification because I found the material interesting	3.20	4.00	3.74	4.37	4.05	4.07
B8	As long as I felt I was doing enough to pass my Extended Project/ Project Qualification, I devoted as little time to working on it as possible	3.00	2.22	2.13	1.47	1.65	1.76
B11	Whether I like it or not, I can see that doing well in school is a good way to get a well-paid job	3.67	3.67	4.29	4.39	4.21	4.23
B13	When I read something, I try to understand what the author means	3.20	3.00	3.94	4.22	3.91	3.96
B14	I intend to pass my Extended Project/ Project Qualification because I feel that I will then be able to get a better job	4.07	2.67	3.44	2.81	3.06	3.08
B15	I find it is not helpful to study topics in depth. You do not really need to know much in order to get by in most topics	2.80	2.22	1.94	1.41	1.78	1.75

Section C

Section C of the questionnaire was only presented to the EPQ students entered for cohort 2 and 3. It was included to consider stakeholder perception from the viewpoint of the student. The students were asked about the ways in which they planned to use the Extended Project in the future.

Nearly all of the students who responded to the questionnaire planned to proceed to Further Education (93%) and the vast majority of these had mentioned the EPQ on their UCAS application form. Some of the students who had not mentioned the EPQ were frustrated in their attempts to promote their achievements by the stringent word limit for the personal statement and also by the technical limitations of the online application form. Others were in Year 11 and had not, therefore, completed UCAS forms.

Very few students had taken a copy of their EPQ to an interview (15%). Of those that did, most indicated that the interviewer was impressed and two thirds reported that the interviewer wanted to know more about the project. Nevertheless, there were students who perceived little or no interest from their interviewer.

> *"Some universities don't recognise the Extended Project qualification as they don't know what it is and that was one of the reasons I was unsuccessful at one of my universities. Therefore leading me to question, was it really worth the effort?"*

Comments

When asked whether they had any further comments they would like to make about the EPQ/PQ, most students reiterated and expanded upon issues already raised in the questionnaire. However, there were a number of responses which identified areas of training need for centres and supervisors.

Some questionnaires were returned by students who failed to make a final project submission. Amongst other things, these students cited time pressures as a reason for drop out.

> *"I hadn't enough time with other commitments and didn't believe I could complete the project to high standard."*
>
> *Cohort 1 EPQ*

> *"I quit the extended project after starting it because I had fallen behind in my AS subject."*
>
> *Cohort 1 EPQ*

However, it was not just the students that dropped out who experienced time pressures. In some cases, these pressures seemed to be exacerbated by a lack of clear guidance explaining the scope of the EPQ.

> *"… it was a bit hard to know how much in depth we had to do on the research."*
>
> *Cohort 2 EPQ*

> *"More time needed to complete it! Had to know what depth of detail is mandatory regardless of what is interesting."*
>
> *Cohort 2 EPQ*

The students themselves recognised that, given the burden of work implied by the Year 12 curriculum, the EPQ might be better delivered so that final submission is in the winter. However, as one student pointed, out the winter submission dates are also bedevilled by UCAS applications and other school work.

> *"Maybe introduce it at the end of AS and get us to work over the summer holiday. Extra work to an already busy A2 schedule is quite hard."*
>
> *Cohort 2 EPQ*

> *"It was admittedly very difficult to organise time and research into the project especially as we had only a month and it was the same month as all the UCAS deadlines and personal statements on top of school work."*
>
> *Cohort 2 EPQ*

Such responses indicate that a clearer dialogue is needed between the student, the supervisor and the coordinator to help in the management of both time and expectation. Teacher Support Meetings, Standardisation Meetings and exemplar material are already offered by AQA to participating centres and it is essential that this high quality of provision should continue in order to support effective delivery. One enthusiastic student who dropped out lamented her choice of project; her plight highlights the importance of the supervisor role, and further, the need to train supervisors.

> *"Unfortunately I didn't complete my EP ... I hope to have another try next year and choose a topic that I am less emotionally attached to, which is the reason why I gave up the first time."*
>
> *Cohort 3 EPQ*

While the majority of students were enthusiastic about the project, there was one who expressed doubts as to whether the EPQ fulfilled its aims.

> *"[I] sometimes felt the aim of the project was more about fulfilling all the assessment objectives rather than researching a topic in depth and writing an assignment."*
>
> *Cohort 2 EPQ*

At its inception, the EPQ was clear in its aims and these aims were distinct from those of a general qualification.

> *"The extended project at level 3 should offer opportunities for candidates to:*
> - *have a significant input to the choice and design of an extended project (level 3) and take responsibility either for an individual task or for a defined task within a group project*
> - *develop and improve their own learning and performance as critical, reflective and independent learners*
> - *develop and apply decision-making and, where appropriate, problem-solving skills*
> - *extend their planning, research, critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, evaluation and presentation skills*
> - *develop, where appropriate, as e-confident learners and apply new technologies in their studies*
> - *develop and apply skills creatively, demonstrating initiative and enterprise"*
>
> (QCA, DELLS, & CCEA, 2006)

It is important that the features which make the EPQ and PQ unique are not compromised by over-specifying the qualification in the admirable drive for robustness and reliability.

CONCLUSION

Review of the previous pilot cohorts has shown that the EPQ is already fulfilling its aims. The depth and breadth of topics studied shows that the project has captured students' imagination. The supervisor comments clearly record the enthusiasm with which it is being approached.

Perhaps because of the age of students entered for the Level 1 & 2 PQ, or because they are still in compulsory education, any enthusiasm seems more muted. Student responses to the questionnaire were slightly more subdued. Furthermore, supervisors often cited the role of the PQ in supporting other awards as the rationale for pursuing the qualification, rather than a personal interest.

> *"Compliments and build upon work carried out in the Post 16 Business Enterprise and PSHE work."*
>
> *Level 2 PQ*
>
> *"Builds on work in COPE."*
>
> *Level 1 PQ*

As the Level 1 & 2 pilot continues, and provision within centres develops, it will be interesting to see whether the PQ comes closer to satisfying some of its key aims. The PQ was designed, in part, to offer the opportunity for independent learning and to inspire students with new areas or methods of study (AQA & City & Guilds, 2007). The preponderance of citizenship projects and projects which were chosen to support concurrent learning suggests that the pilot might be falling slightly short of expectation. However, it is clear that other aims are being met. There is no doubt, for example, that those entered for the PQ were using their learning experiences to support their personal aspirations for further study and career development (see B11 & B14, Table 16).

The unique access to both project proposal and entry data afforded by the pilot status of the qualification, shows that the issue of student retention remains a problem. Given the supervisor and student commitment that even project approval requires, the student attrition rate seems to be an area for improvement. Indeed, the QCA consultation paper included a clear statement that completion of the EPQ should require persistence. At the start, help in identifying students with potential to complete the project could be provided and greater levels of pastoral support could be offered throughout; the latter suggestion being endorsed by comments made in the student questionnaire responses across all cohorts. Furthermore, the student responses indicate a clear view on when the project should be completed. Improved dialogue within centres might help in choosing the best opportunity for project submission.

Finally, in a speech made at a road show in Southampton just before the issue of the summer 2008 examination results, shadow education secretary David Willetts said too many teachers now found themselves under "enormous pressure not to teach their subject, but to teach to the test" (Jozefkowicz, 2008). Some months before this speech, one of the EPQ students raised just this issue in a questionnaire response.

> *"[I] sometimes felt the aim of the project was more about fulfilling all the assessment objectives rather than researching a topic in depth and writing an assignment."*

It is therefore worth reiterating that the features which make the EPQ and PQ unique should not be compromised by over-specifying the qualification in the admirable drive for robustness and reliability.

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Anne Pinot de Moira
Katherine Tremain
Wednesday, 24 September 2008

APPENDIX A Level 1 & Level 2 PQ titles for certificating students

(As transcribed from the project proposal forms)

Level 1

- Why does the media effect so many young girls?
- Healthy eating.
- Youth offending.
- Money, Power, Respect, How Far Would U Go.
- Size 0 models, eating habits and effects on teenagers, 16-18 years.
- The law should be tighter because of binge drinking.
- The effects of violence due to alcohol.
- Diets - Do they work and what health effects do they have.
- Drugs. Is it worth it.
- Long and short term of smoking cannabis.
- Does the media make decisions for young teenage males.
- Does under-aged drinking encourage teenagers to take part in criminal activities?
- Drugs…is it worth it?
- Is peer pressure giving us teenage mothers.
- Long term and short term effects of smoking cannabis.
- Size 0 models and the pressure to lose weight.
- The long and short term effects of cannabis (smoking it).

Level 2

- Raising awareness for NSPCC/bullying.
- Is media influencing our youth today?
- Is the media influencing our young youth today.
- Embroidered Felt Creatures.
- Is the media influencing our young youth body.
- Is the media to blame for the size 0 epidemic and weight issues in young people?
- The media influence on youths today.
- Your guide to the mountain tapir.
- Encouraging females to participate in sport.
- Educating children about recycling.
- Raising money and awareness.
- A guide to your pet tortoise.
- An investigation into 4 concept cars.
- Celebrities and their right to privacy.
- Educational DVD on drugs.
- Fashion magazine.
- How to guide.
- Kick out hooliganism.
- The development of Dubai as a holiday destination.
- Why is San Francisco the ultimate Holiday destination?

APPENDIX B A sample of project titles from Cohort 3 of the EPQ

(As transcribed from the project proposal forms)

Cohort 3 EPQ

- The importance of early childhood experience in developing delinquent personality.
- Hammer house of horror - how it has adapted to meet the audience needs.
- The psychology of detective fiction.
- The engineer and significance of the Brooklyn Bridge.
- An investigation into whether record sleeve art gives a reflection of the popular culture of the time.
- Is it ethical to use animal prosthesis?
- I propose to do a study of the psychological well being of elderly people.
- How far was the soviet union until 1939 a betrayal of Marxist theory.
- Angels, Myths & Demons.
- The use of chest physiotherapy in children with cystic fibrosis and the use of limb physiotherapy in children with cerebral palsy.
- Designing and making a high fashion garment: cultural couture.
- Anti-bullying.
- Environmental video.
- Health & fitness need when hip-hop dancing.
- Fashion and illustration and its development in the last 100 years.
- A guide to non-allergenic cakes.
- Is cardiovascular disease the number one killer in UK.
- Is the purpose of life up to you to create.
- Why does the positioning of functional groups effect the function of drug molecules.
- An investigation into how high profile professional golfers have influenced the way in which the game of golf is perceived in the sporting community and the public.

APPENDIX C

Extended Project Pilot

Candidate Questionnaire

As you are one of the first students in England to work on an Extended Project, we would be interested in what you think about the qualification. We would be grateful if you could complete this questionnaire as honestly as possible. There are no right or wrong answers and we would like to know about your experiences so that we can continue to make improvements to the qualification. All the things that you tell us will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be made anonymous.

Your school/college name: .....

Your name (or candidate number): .....

Section A – Questions about the Extended Project, the Production Log and the Presentation	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A1. I enjoyed studying for my Extended Project.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A2. I gained nothing from having to present my work at the end of the Extended Project.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A3. The Production Log accurately reflected the effort that I put into the Extended Project.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A4. I think that an Extended Project qualification will be a valuable addition to my Curriculum Vitae (CV).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A5. The whole of my Extended Project was rushed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A6. I learnt things from my Extended Project that I would not have learnt otherwise.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A7. I enjoyed presenting my work to others once I had completed my Extended Project.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A8. The Extended Project took up too much of my spare time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A9. I enjoyed completing the Production Log.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A10. The Extended Project was harder than the other courses I am studying at the moment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A11. I would have liked more time with my supervisor.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A12. I did not gain any new skills by studying for the Extended Project.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A13. I had enough time to complete the Extended Project.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A14. I think that employers, universities and colleges will be impressed by my Extended Project.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section B – Questions about the way you studied for the Extended Project and your views on studying	Never or only rarely true of me	Sometimes true of me	True of me about half the time	Frequently true of me	Always or almost always true of me
B1. Doing the Extended Project allowed me to relate what I have learnt in one subject to what I have learnt in other subjects.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B2. I saw no point in gathering material which was not likely to form part of my final Extended Project.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B3. I feel that nearly any topic can be highly interesting once I get into it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B4. I am discouraged if I get poor marks and so I worry about how I will do on the Extended Project.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B5. I worked hard on my Extended Project because I found the material interesting.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

(Please turn over)

	Never or only rarely true of me	Sometimes true of me	True of me about half the time	Frequently true of me	Always or almost always true of me
B6. I like constructing theories to fit odd things together.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B7. Even when I have studied hard, I worry that I may not be able to do well.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B8. As long as I felt I was doing enough to pass my Extended Project, I devoted as little time to working on it as possible.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B9. I try to relate new material, as I am reading it, to what I already know on that topic.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B10. I have found that studying for the Extended Project made me feel really happy and satisfied.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B11. Whether I like it or not, I can see that doing well in school is a good way to get a well-paid job.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B12. I generally restricted my work on the Extended Project to what was specifically needed as I thought it was unnecessary to do anything extra.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B13. When I read something, I try to understand what the author means.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B14. I intend to pass my Extended Project because I feel that I will then be able to get a better job.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B15. I find it is not helpful to study topics in depth. You don't really need to know much in order to get by in most topics.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B16. I found I was continually going over my Extended Project work in my mind at times like when I was on the bus, walking, or lying in bed, and so on.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section C – Questions about the way you plan to use the Extended Project

	Further or Higher Education	Employment	Other
C1. What do you plan to do after you have finished your Extended Project and current programme of study?	☐	☐	☐

	Yes	No
C2. When you have filled out UCAS or job application forms, have you mentioned the Extended Project?	☐	☐

C3. If you did **not** mention the Extended Project on your UCAS or job application form, could you explain why?

.....

.....

	Yes	No
C4. Have you taken your Extended Project to a Further/Higher Education entry interview or to a job interview?	☐	☐
	Go to C5	Go to C6

C5. Which phrases best describe the interviewer's response to your Extended Project (tick all that apply and add any other responses)

Impressed by my Extended Project	☐
Never heard of the Extended Project	☐
Not interested in the Extended Project	☐
Wanted to know more about the Extended Project	☐
More interested in my other qualifications	☐

Other responses .....

C6. Have you got any other comments that you would like to make about the Extended Project?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.

Please could you return it to your tutor/supervisor.