

## EXTENDED PROJECT EVALUATION (COHORT 1)

### Student Information

Anne Pinot de Moira

#### INTRODUCTION

Summer 2007 heralded certification of the first cohort of students entered for the pilot Extended Project Qualification (EPQ). As part 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. Furthermore, student questionnaires were sent to the EPQ coordinators for each of the nine centres with registered entries. The coordinators were asked to administer their distribution and subsequent return to AQA. Time constraints meant that the timing of the questionnaire dispatch was not optimal and seven of the nine centres failed to respond. However, the response rate within the centres that did return questionnaires was over 75% and pleasingly responses were even received from students who failed to submit a final EP. Because of the low number of responses, analysis of the questionnaire data has been largely limited to that which will aid refinement of the instrument with a view to a more comprehensive dispatch for the second and third pilot cohorts. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix A but there is only a little further discussion of the responses in this report. The main focus of the report is on entry patterns, concurrent areas of study, project formats and grade outcomes.

#### THE FIRST COHORT CHARACTERISTICS

##### Entry Details

There were 223 project proposals received from eleven centres for the first cohort of the EPQ pilot (Table 1). A total of 218 entries were made from nine of these centres; two centres having dropped out before the entry registration process. A further centre withdrew its students before the final submission date with a view to submitting their work into one of the later pilot phases. Just over half of the entries produced a project for moderation leading to 132 grade awards (or ungraded awards) on results day in August. Five of the graded EPQs were submitted by students for whom there was no project proposal.

**TABLE 1** Summary of student entries

Final Status	Project Proposal		
	Project Proposal	& Entry	Entry
Grade Awarded	127	127	132
Confirmed Absent	61	61	77
Not Entered or Withdrawn	35	8	9
Total	223	196	218

Four of the nine centres from which entries were made were secondary comprehensive schools. There was one secondary modern school and three sixth form colleges. The final centre was a further education establishment.

## The Students

The entry ranged in age from 17 to 20 years old, with over half the students finally awarded a grade being 17. For 103 of the 132 certificating students a measure of prior achievement was available (mean GCSE result<sup>1</sup>) and the youngest students appeared to be those of the highest ability (Table 2). It was also these students who had the lowest drop-out rate; defined by comparing the total number of students with a project proposal or entry with the number finally certificating. In fact while prior achievement seemed to decrease with age the drop-out rate seemed to increase.

**TABLE 2** Student characteristics

Age	% All Students	% Graded Students	% Drop-Out Rate	Mean GCSE
17	49.80	57.6	37.70	4.92
18	26.12	29.5	39.06	4.63
19	11.02	10.6	48.15	4.07
20	1.63	1.5	50.00	3.25
Missing	11.43	0.8	96.43	.
Students	245	132	113	103

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 A Levels, AS, BTEC Nationals, BTEC Firsts, Key Skills, Citizenship and NVQs amongst others. For the majority of students (63.6%), the highest stakes<sup>2</sup> qualification in their programme was an AS examination. However, there was one whole centre in which the EPQ appeared to be offered alongside a range of Key Skills qualifications. This centre used the EPQ to augment a course offering 'vocational tasters' for students who had yet to decide upon a future area of study.

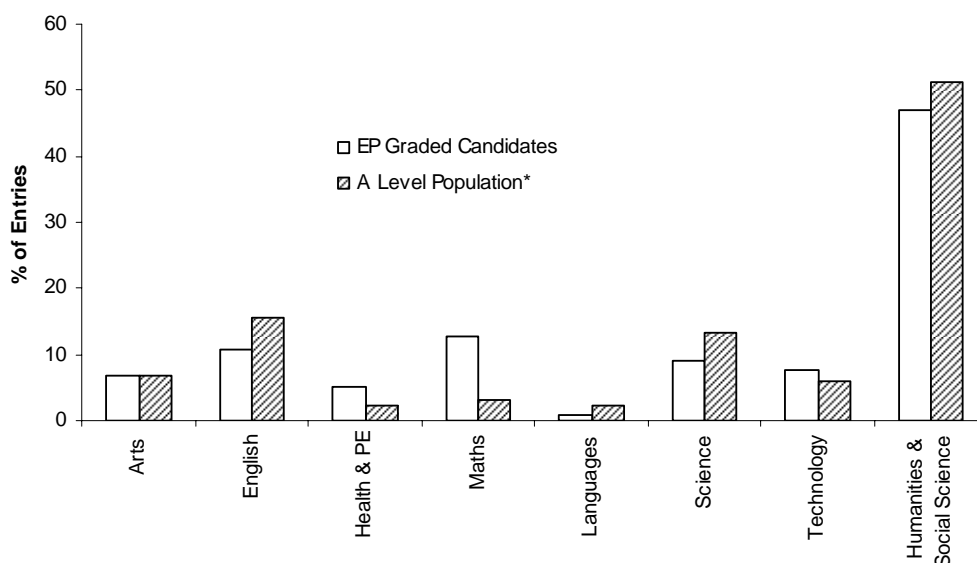
Despite the majority of the entry being from mainstream academia, even at this early stage the EPQ appeared to attract interest from vocational areas of study. The retention rate for the BTEC students, in particular, was very low. It remains to be seen whether this was a function of the idiosyncrasies of the first pilot series or whether it is an issue which requires future consideration.

The distribution of concurrent subjects of study for EPQ students appeared relatively similar to that of an A Level cohort (Figure 1). There were slightly more students entered in the Mathematics and Health & Physical Education subject areas than in the A Level population. Notably the representation of these subjects was not boosted by entry for vocational qualifications, although there were thirteen students who were taking GCSE Mathematics while working on the EPQ.

<sup>1</sup> GCSE grade was converted to points (A\*=8, A=7, ..., U=0) and these points were combined to give the mean GCSE statistic for each student.

<sup>2</sup> Where highest stakes was defined by reference to levels on the national qualifications framework.

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



\* Source: 2006 Market Share Statistics

The EPQ was conceived to develop and extend one or more of a learner's study areas or an area of personal interest outside his or her main programme of study. Over 60% of the projects which were finally graded appeared to be in the area of Citizenship. Table 3 cross-tabulates the areas of concurrent study with the subject matter of the EPQ (crudely determined from the project title). Even when the dominating effect of Citizenship is ignored, there appears to be little evidence to suggest that the content of the EPQ is determined by a student's other learning. There is a preponderance of EPQs which fall loosely into the category Humanities & Social Science. Many of these projects are in the areas of history, ethics and politics. A full list of the project titles is given in Appendix B.

**TABLE 3** Project subject area cross-tabulated against areas of concurrent study (column percentages)

Project Area	Concurrent Area of Study								Total
	Arts	English	Health & PE	Languages	Mathematics	Science	Technology	Humanities & Social Science	
Arts	12.5	2.8	0.0	0.0	3.8	4.2	3.1	4.0	3.0
English	12.5	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.0	3.0	2.3
Health & PE	4.2	11.3	13.6	0.0	3.8	9.4	9.4	7.9	7.6
Languages	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mathematics	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Science	0.0	2.8	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.0	0.0	2.0	1.5
Technology	4.2	4.2	0.0	0.0	1.9	2.1	6.3	1.0	2.3
Humanities & Social Science	29.2	9.9	13.6	0.0	3.8	12.5	3.1	11.9	10.6
Citizenship	37.5	64.8	72.7	100.0	84.9	69.8	78.1	70.3	60.6
Missing	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.1
Total entries	24	71	22	4	53	96	32	101	403

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

## Project Format

Within each centre the nature and format of the EPQ differed. Just over half of the students were supervised in an environment where both individual and small group project work was being undertaken. A further quarter were in centres where only individual projects were on offer. The remainder were working in small or large groups to achieve the objectives of the EPQ. The drop-out rate appeared slightly higher for group projects than for individual projects but this statistic was skewed by the centre which deferred its entry to a later pilot cohort.

The projects were submitted in a variety of formats and in a variety of combinations of these formats. The project proposal form suggested that nearly two thirds of the graded projects had some written element. Perhaps unsurprisingly, electronic submissions and artefacts were more often produced by individuals and those working in small groups of two or three (Table 4). Larger groups were more inclined to work towards a live performance. Indeed one of the centres entering joint work for cohort 1 organised a conference and another, a show.

**TABLE 4** Format of EPQ submission (column percentages)

Project Type	Written	Live	Electronic	Artefact	Total
Individual & Small Group	91.5	50.0	100.0	100.0	81.1
Group	8.5	50.0	0.0	0.0	18.9
Total Entries	82	14	46	18	132

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

## EPQ Grades

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 to the extent it could be generalised to cover a new type of qualification. The grade boundaries and cumulative grade distribution are reported in Table 5. The highest mark awarded to a student was 45 out of a possible 50 marks. The mean mark was 22.7 and the distribution of marks was slightly skewed towards the lower end.

**TABLE 5** EPQ cohort 1 grade boundaries and cumulative grade boundaries

	Grade Boundaries (Max Mark 50)	Cumulative Grade Distribution
A	42	4.55
B	35	11.36
C	28	34.85
D	21	52.27
E	15	76.52
U	0	100.00

Because of the small entry, there was little scope for exploring performance across different subsets of the population. However, there was some evidence to suggest that, in the first cohort, the 19 year old students achieved higher grades than other entries. There were four students who were studying for language qualifications; two for NVQ Spanish, one for AS Urdu and one for AS Dutch. These students also seemed to excel and were all awarded a grade C or higher.

It should be noted in advance of the next grade award meeting that, because of the small entry, the mean GCSE result was not a convincing predictor of EPQ grade outcome. When mean GCSE result is used in AS and A Level awards to help inform the grade boundary decisions, it is classified into deciles. The strength of the model lies in the prediction of a probability distribution for each decile based on a large number of observations within the decile. The predicted probability distribution should be expected to improve monotonically as prior performance, measured by the mean GCSE decile, increases. The small number of candidates in each mean GCSE decile for the EPQ would result in a set of predicted probability distributions for the deciles where this was not the case.

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

The teachers' comments on the project proposal form were of more relevance to the approval process than to the evaluation of the EPQ. However, it is interesting to note that over a quarter of the supervisors who included a comment on project focus made reference to the student's personal interest in the topic.

## STUDENTS COMMENTS

Nearly half of the students who returned a questionnaire extended their responses with some qualitative commentary in answer to question B17. Five were students who did not complete their EPQ and they all cited the additional pressures on their time as the reason for drop-out.

*'I hadn't enough time with other commitments and didn't believe I could complete the project to high standard. This is why I dropped out the project.'*

*'I did not complete it as I was under too much pressure from other subjects.'*

All other comments were very positive with the students talking of their enjoyment and of what they had learnt. They spoke of the challenge, the opportunity to work independently, the incentive of deadlines, the dynamics of group work and the chance to make a contribution towards the community.

*'I feel the extended project was a good opportunity for me to show the independence of my studies/revision and the ability to develop/practice using my own initiative and learning skills in depth and within my own research.'*

*'I enjoyed this extended project because the way we did it was different from normal. We did much work in group form and made it easy for me to share great ideas.'*

There was one student who touched on the issue of the wider recognition of the EPQ when she commented that the EPQ was not 'greatly advertised'.

## CONCLUSION

In the consultation paper for the EPQ, the regulators for England, Wales and Northern Ireland set out the draft framework and criteria (QCA, DELLS, & CCEA, May 2006). Even within the first cohort of entry many of the high level aims have been realised. The EPQ pilot seemed to attract students from a wide variety of backgrounds and age groups. The consultation document asserted that,

*‘students who carry out an extended project (level 3) will be following a variety of programmes of study.’*

Many of the projects which were finally graded were in the field of Citizenship and there was little evidence to suggest that the content of the EPQ was overly influenced by a student’s other learning. Indeed over a quarter were explicitly described as projects in an area of personal interest. Although the EPQ criteria were designed to:

- *permit knowledge, understanding and skills to be drawn from existing areas of study (other level 3 courses)*

the criteria also quite clearly stated that the EPQ should:

- *permit knowledge, understanding and skills to be drawn from a context outside the student’s areas of study (ie from a hobby, interest or additional area of learning)*
- *avoid duplication of units of study, assessments and qualifications already in existence, for example personal studies or synoptic projects in A level, or portfolio of evidence for key skills.’*

Despite the fact 19 year old students had a comparatively low measure of prior achievement and a high drop-out rate, it was the certificating 19 year olds who had the best EPQ grade outcomes. Across the whole of the first cohort, the drop-out rate was just under 50% and the pass rate was 76.5%. Were one to consider a student who dropped-out to have failed, then the pass rate would decrease to 41.2%. Similarly, the grade A rate would fall to 2.4%.

Those students from whom a questionnaire response was received were very positive about the experience of study for the EPQ. The comments made by the students confirmed that the EPQ was fulfilling the aims set out in the consultation to:

- *reflect the opportunities, choice and flexibility that should be available at level 3*
- *emphasise the importance of personal thinking skills, which are necessary for most kinds of work and learning.’*

However, they also highlighted the issues of time planning and lack of wider recognition as hurdles in the provision of the new qualification.

Finally, and of interest from an internal AQA operational point of view only, exploration of the relationship between mean GCSE result and EPQ grade outcome uncovered a problem with the use of these data in the December award for the second cohort. This problem occurred because of the small entry for the first cohort and is unlikely to resurface for future awards.

## REFERENCES

QCA, DELLS, & CCEA. (May 2006). *Consultation on the extended project (level 3)*. Available: [http://www.qca.org.uk/libraryAssets/media/qca-06-2705\\_EP\\_background.pdf](http://www.qca.org.uk/libraryAssets/media/qca-06-2705_EP_background.pdf) [2007, 27th September].

Anne Pinot de Moira  
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## APPENDIX A

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

(Please turn over)



**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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B2. I saw no point in gathering material which was not likely to form part of my final Extended Project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B3. I feel that nearly any topic can be highly interesting once I get into it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B4. I am discouraged by getting poor marks and I worry about how I will do on the Extended Project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B5. I worked hard on my Extended Project because I found the material interesting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B6. I like constructing theories to fit odd things together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B7. Even when I have studied hard, I worry that I may not be able to do well.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B9. I try to relate new material, as I am reading it, to what I already know on that topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B10. I have found that studying for the Extended Project made me feel really happy and satisfied.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B13. When I read something, I try to understand what the author means.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B14. I intend to pass my Extended Project because I feel that I will then be able to get a better job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

B17. Have you got any other comments that you would like to make about the Extended Project?

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**Thank you for completing the questionnaire.**  
Please could you return it to your tutor/supervisor.

## **APPENDIX B Cohort 1 EPQ Titles**

*(As transcribed from the project proposal forms)*

- A community based project working with people of age in the Asian community in Leicester. Specifically exploring their experiences of immigration in the UK
- Addictions: what? Who? Why? How to fight them.
- An exploration of multiculturalism in Leicester and focus on interculturalism through the medium of a magazine aimed at college students in the city.
- An investigation into different attitudes towards mixed race relationships.
- An investigation into drug use amongst teenager and in response the product of teaching and media resources to educate students at Regent College.
- An investigation into homelessness in Leicester.
- An investigation into how the success of a sporting academy can be judged.
- An investigation into negative media representation of young people and how direct involvement with the local community can counteract these stereotypes.
- An investigation into whether ASBOs are a effective method of solving antisocial behaviour.
- Analysis of screen plays using the theories of Todorov and Propp.
- Anti-Bullying - What is bullying and what are its factors?
- Are ASBOs effective in our local community?
- Are ASBOs good for Britain?
- Are bike lanes suitable for users?
- Are mobile phones affecting health?
- Attitudes to smoking and an anti-smoking campaign.
- Beating Bullying (creating a webpage on the schools website).
- Celebrating cultural diversity.
- Childbirth before marriage. Why is this increasing?
- Cultural comparison of Japanese Manga and American superhero comics.
- Cultural sub-groups and music genre.
- Cystic fibrosis: how to make people more aware of what it is and its consequences.
- Development of games consoles.
- Differences between Ultimate Spiderman and Amazing Spiderman graphic novels.
- Education not for sale.
- Effects of global warming on Inuit.
- Factors in decision to decommission Concorde.
- Factors influencing split between Rugby Union and Rugby League.
- Fast food advertisement and obesity.
- Forming impressions of people.
- From Sony Walkman to iPod video.
- Healthy eating in school. Is it possible?
- How has life improved for black South Africans since demise of apartheid.
- How has the size zero debate affected teenagers self image?
- How have advances in technology affected globalisation.
- How important is body image in society today?
- How litter affects the environment in any area and what can be done.
- How local communities can respond to issues surrounding the disadvantages amongst women of ethnic minorities
- Immigration: effects and benefits for the economy.
- Impact of WW1 on soldiers and families - literary and historical sources.
- In my community I believe that people do not understand recycling and waste management. I would like to investigate why there is a lack of understanding of recycling.
- Influences on smoking and school policies
- Influences on the paintings of Tamara de Lempicka.
- Information leaflets about cannabis.
- Investigating under age smoking - is it an issue in my local area?
- Investigation into the state of the parks in Leicester.
- Investigation into the stereotypes of youth culture.
- Is car insurance fair to teenagers
- Is graffiti Art or vandalism?
- Is the media to blame for causing Islamophobia?
- Islamophobia and the media. Does the media cause Islamophobia?
- Issues raised by science fiction.

- Junk food / childhood obesity relationship.
- Lack of social space in colleges. It needs changing
- Level 8.
- Litter and recycling / How does litter ruin the environment?
- Obesity, anorexia / body image. Who is responsible?
- Origins of animal life - God or Science.
- Perceptions of martial arts.
- Promoting healthy eating in early years setting.
- Self-perception by Asians post 9/11.
- Sexism in the workplace.
- Should the voting age be lowered to 16?
- Size zero models and influence on female self-esteem.
- Statistical analysis to find the best cricket team of the last ten years.
- The Global and Local Community Project (incorporating Fairtrade and working in partnership with a local school)
- The United Kingdoms love affair with the anti-social behaviour order.
- To raise awareness of the risks of cannabis.
- Underage binge drinking. What can be done?
- Vandalism is it a problem?
- What are the causes and influence of the under achievement of students of mixed heritage background?.
- What sorts of crime are committed by young people?
- With the increase of traffic in my community traffic and parking pollution are a major problem.
- Young people and sport at ???