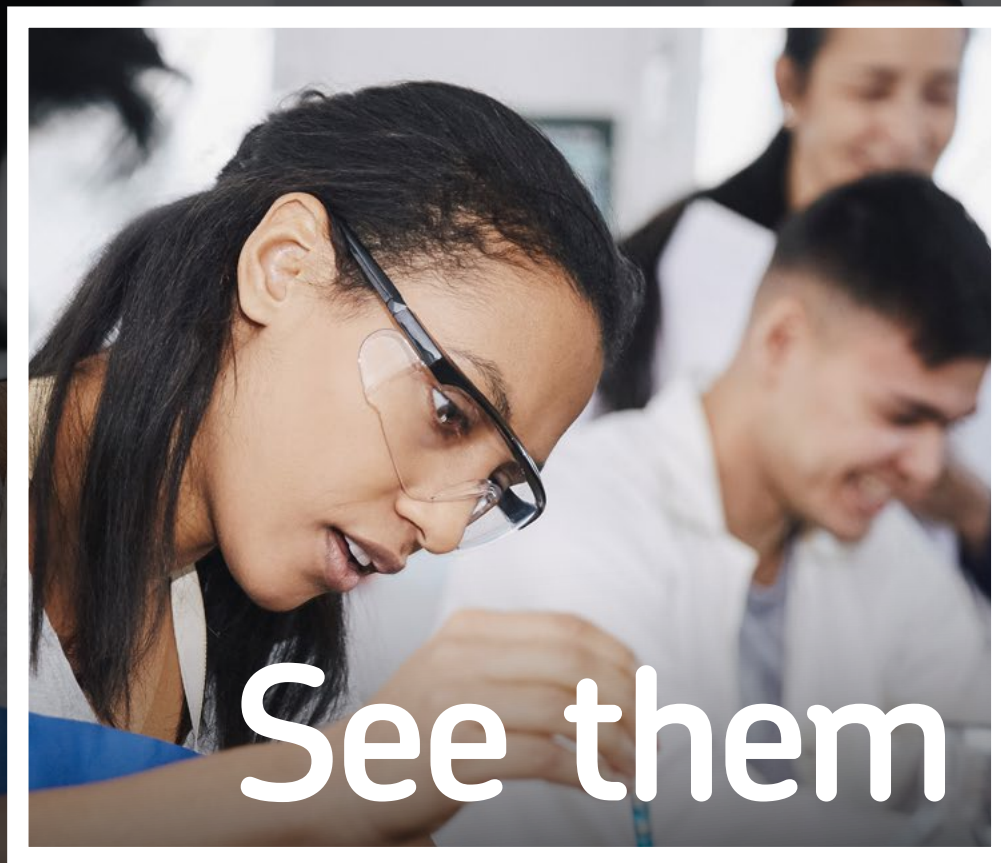


EPQ case study

Michelle Hackett

Director of Key Stage 5,
The Dukeries Academy



See them



THE DUKERIES
ACADEMY

Michelle's story

Michelle Hackett is Director of Key Stage 5 at The Dukeries Academy in New Ollerton, Nottinghamshire. She's been involved with the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) for six years, and has been the school's coordinator for the past two years. Here she shares her thoughts on why offering the EPQ is important.

Supporting A-level study with the EPQ

We currently aim the EPQ at students who are predicted the top grades, but would like to offer the qualification to a wider group in the future as the EPQ teaches students many skills that some will not experience in their other studies. As a lot of A-level subjects no longer have a coursework element, opportunities to learn and assess research skills have been reduced. The EPQ requires a lot of independent work and time management which plugs this gap.

Rather than following the content on a specification, the qualification encourages different thinking. Some students feel overwhelmed by this at first and struggle to prioritise and organise their ideas – support from the supervisor is really important here to prevent the students giving up. Other students relish the thought but can often start with a very wide area of research. Encouraging them to streamline their topic through literature reviews can be very productive. I've

found that encouraging students to use a Gantt chart and a diary helps them to plan their projects. Students that take the time to do this at the start usually have the best outcomes.

Developing independent learning

The academic skills, such as analysis of resources and checking their validity and reliability, is a new skill to most students who are used to information being checked first by subject teachers. Also, the diverse range of resources they can use to acquire information leads students to branch out more. We've had students who start to follow blogs or Twitter accounts of specialists in the area they are researching, some making contact with individuals who will support their project. Referencing is also a skill that is not taught routinely in the sixth form and yet prepares students for higher education. The EPQ can therefore be thought of as a formal way of preparing students for the independence and rigour of higher educational study in a subject they have a personal and academic interest in.

Using the EPQ to invest in their futures

The opportunity to study a wider curriculum broadens students' surroundings. This is especially apparent, but not limited to, disadvantaged areas with a large number of pupil premium or bursary students. Research from the Government report *The long shadow of deprivation* suggests EPQ completion is much lower in schools in disadvantaged areas, however it aids the development of cultural capital and helps support students in interviews, especially for the more competitive universities, so is worth offering to students in those areas. We've seen contextual offers from Russell Group universities based on a student's EPQ grade. This has encouraged the students to apply for courses with higher grade requirements, again benefitting students from more disadvantaged areas as research shows that they tend to apply for courses that are secure rather than aspirational.

EPQ is rewarding for both students and teachers

I'd recommend teachers to get involved with EPQ at their school or college as it's both challenging and rewarding to teach students the skills needed for the qualification. The project topics are varied and not necessarily in your area of subject knowledge, and it's seeing the student's keen interest in their chosen topic that makes being involved so rewarding.

Find out more about the EPQ

aqa.org.uk/extended-project-qualification

aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2021 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved. AQA Education (AQA) is a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723). Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

September 2021