

Extended Project Qualifications (EPQs)

The recent A Level reforms have seen a return to the standard 3 A Level diet for most students. Many schools have embraced other qualifications in order to add depth and substance to students' school programme. EPQs are a skills-based qualification that has been one of the most popular innovations in this area.

The Extended Project Qualification is designed to develop the practical skills of candidates and allow them to gain experience outside of their academic programmes. Worth the equivalent of an AS grade (A* = 28 UCAS points, A= 24, B= 20 etc), they also can count significantly towards University entry. Increasingly universities and employers are looking for wider experience and skills in their successful applicants. The EPQ provides valuable evidence of this as well as providing for an enriching and rewarding experience. Students can essentially study anything that interests them at a depth that they would not otherwise be able to reach.

Most EPQs are completed over a 12 month period (although they can certainly be achieved in less than 12 months if the student is sufficiently committed and organised. Projects are selected from within four broad areas:

A dissertation - this type of project is akin to a university style dissertation on any topic that can be researched and argued about. This might be a controversial scientific, historical, economic or philosophical issue and could well be linked to one of the A Levels you are studying. Examples might include debates such as 'Is war ever justified?' or 'Is it ethical to use Stem Cells for scientific research.'

An investigation - this type of project is normally of a scientific nature and requires the collection of data from primary research. Again there is great scope for tying your EPQ to one of your A level subjects, in particular if you are studying a science, Psychology or Geography. Examples might include: The Impact of Tourism on the Studland Heath Sand Dunes or How does Ph value influence Plant cover?

A Performance - this involves the development of performance skills and techniques in a range of fields such as Music, Drama or Sport. This might involve something as diverse as the production of a Drum and Bass EP to the development of a dramatic production.

An Artefact - this is a broad process of research, design and application of creative skills in realising a piece of work. Types of project are hugely diverse and might include creating a painting or sculpture solving an engineering problem, producing a film, creating a website or developing a service project.

The process and assessment criteria require students to demonstrate a capacity for **planning, researching, delivering and reflecting** on their particular project. This will be done through a mixture of teacher-led activities and students own research and exploration tightly aligned to the needs of their individual project. The typical breakdown would be as follows:

- **Teaching Time** – there is a period of weekly sessions that teach the theory elements to the course. This will include support for the proposal and providing the structure and organisation for a successful EPQ. This would typically be for around 30 hours. Students are taught key skills such as planning and research techniques, developing arguments and academic writing, analysis and evaluation skills, Harvard referencing and citation/avoiding plagiarism, problem-solving, and how to conduct interviews and questionnaires.
- **Preparation Time** – this is the main body of work where the student is turning their proposal into reality. We would expect this process to be completed within 12 months depending on the nature of the EPQ, and involve 90 hours of independent work by the student.
- **Presentation and Submission Time** – this involves presenting the project to an audience and completion of all of the necessary project logs and paperwork and judging the success of the process rather than the end product.

All students have a ‘supervisor’ who guides them through the selection and production of their project and will mark it initially, prior to marking and moderation by the Claremont centre coordinator (Mrs McNally) and by an external examiner from the AQA. Students can submit their projects by October Half Term for the November assessment round; or by the end of the Spring Term ready for the May assessment round.

EPQs and Universities

Universities have become increasingly interested in EPQs as a way of differentiating between students. A relevant and interesting EPQ will immediately be of interest and will evidence a student’s suitability and/or commitment to a particular course or area of study. Universities understand that the skills that are developed through the EPQ process ‘provides an excellent preparation for University Level Study’ (University of Manchester).

The EPQ is a fantastic opportunity to enhance a student’s skills and awareness and they are in keeping with the activist spirit we are seeking to develop at Claremont Senior School. Whether you are a strong academic looking for something to set you a part from the crowd or a student for whom the EPQ represents a vehicle to develop your skills (and employability), this is a qualification that appeals on many levels.