



Subject: Extended Project Qualification Pre-A-level

What is the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)?

It is the equivalent of half an A-level. It is studied across one year, and it is expected to take 120 hours of work.

EPQs take one of four forms: a dissertation, an investigation/field study, a performance, or an artefact. The majority of Highsted students follow the dissertation route, but there is scope to pursue the other routes.

The EPQ is worth up to 70 UCAS points. This can be used towards a points-offer from a university (for example, to make up 350 points). The EPQ grade cannot be used against a grade offer (such as AAA), but some universities may offer an alternative for candidates studying EPQ (such as ABB instead of AAB, provided that you get an A in your EPQ).

Many Highsted students have benefited from having their offers reduced. Even where they have not, they have gone on record that it has helped them to be independent learners, and to learn how to do things like academic referencing.

There is a tried-and-tested track record of success with EPQ at Highsted: in 2019 the school achieved 99% A*-B grades.

How do I formulate a question/topic?

Most students at Highsted select the Dissertation route.

Whichever route you go down, you need to make sure that the project will provide enough work for a piece of appropriate length/depth/quality, but not so much that the project becomes unmanageable within the suggested 120 hours.

Remember too that this is an opportunity for you to explore something you are passionate about. Consider your interests, your university applications, and any career aspirations you may have. If are still stuck, consider whether any debates have come up in your forthcoming A Level subjects which you might like to explore in more depth, or have a look at the BBC News website (www.bbc.co.uk/news) to see if there are any topical issues which could be followed up.

After this, these are the qualities of a good subject for a dissertation:

There is **clear evidence of a debate**: different people argue different things about the topic. There must be **at least two sides** to the debate you explore.

There are **enough sources** (articles, books, websites etc) – at least 10, but to aim for a high mark at least 20 – to explore different viewpoints in depth.



You will then need to 'build' your own question. Consider these:

'What is the most important cause of **X** amongst **Y**?'
eg 'What is the most important cause of mental health issues amongst young British adults today?' (This would involve analysing and comparing different people's views about the most important reason for mental health issues before giving a view of your own – *eg* social media, body image, exam pressure, bullying. Don't stretch yourself across too many factors – 4 or 5 would be enough – as you will be stretching your analysis too thinly.)

'To what extent is **X** the most important reason for [**given outcome**]?'
eg 'To what extent is **funding** the most important reason for the **NHS's current crisis**?' (This, a variation on the question-type above, would involve evaluative comparison of funding as a problem in the NHS against three or four other problems, *eg* the ageing population, antibiotic resistance, etc. This could easily be rolled out for anything requiring an explanation when there are different possible interpretations.)

'How far is **X** likely to be of help in **Y**?'
eg 'How far are **advances in sodium-based drugs** likely to help in the **regulation of pain suffered by humans**?' (This kind of approach works especially well when there is evidence for and against the viability of new scientific/medicinal approaches.)

'Is the practice of **X** ethical?'
eg 'Should **human cloning** be allowed?' (Just remember with questions like these to remain objective, at least until your own conclusion. Both sides must be outlined and evaluated objectively before you reach a view.)

'To what extent is **X** the case in **Y**?'
eg 'To what extent is there **prejudice against African-Americans** in the **American legal system** today?'

'How successful was **X** at **Y**?'
eg 'How successful was **Margaret Thatcher** as **Prime Minister** between 1979 and 1990?' (This would invite debate between critics and admirers of Thatcher within a number of areas – economics, foreign policy, etc – and also give scope for some discussion of what is meant by 'success' in politics.)

'Was **X** the most important reason for **Y**?'
eg 'Was **fear** the main reason why **ordinary Russians didn't resist Stalin**?' (This would obviously give itself to historical questions where there are several possible explanations.)

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You can find further examples of questions on the Edexcel Level 3 Extended Project Qualification website. Here are some examples of recent dissertations undertaken by Highsted students:

- How effective are sports officials at identifying and dealing with drug doping in sport?
- To what extent does gender violence in video games have a negative impact on players?
- Do advertisements and promotional campaigns do more harm than good for women today?
- Could performance-related pay be a bad business tactic for the private sector?
- To what extent is platelet-rich plasma therapy an effective treatment in sports medicine?
- How appropriate are psychological approaches for understanding anti-social behaviour?
- Does vaginal seeding benefit childbirths through C-section?
- To what extent is the UK film industry becoming more inclusive of women?
- Did Lady Jane Grey have a legitimate claim to the throne of England?



- How do different factors shape the ethical issues surrounding the use of CRISPR-Cas9 gene-editing?
- Was Jane Austen a feminist?
- Is dairy fit for human consumption?
- Does family influence have a positive or negative impact on a child's education?
- Were corporate psychopaths responsible for the financial crash of 2008?
- Which French Revolution was the more significant – 1789 or 1848?

Getting started: Dissertations

1. Start thinking about topics you might like to explore.
2. If you think you have found a viable topic, start to investigate potential sources for it. Remember that the important things are (a) it's a debate (there are several potential views or factors or explanations involved), (b) you're able to find a range of sources for it. Don't panic about generating a lot of sources at this point – but you should have gained a rough sense of the range of potential sources out there.
3. Start to arrange your findings:
 - What does each source seem to be saying about the debate? (You may need to be patient here: the sources weren't written with your EPQ in mind!) Can you find some relevant quotes? (A good quote would be an expression of opinion or a definite judgement – not simply a bit of description.)
 - Can you arrange the points made by the sources into 'Points for' and 'Points against' the debate? Or into areas of the issue being discussed (eg 'economic points', 'political points')?

You will need to impose a structure on your material. As suggested above, you might start with a broad 'points for' and 'points against' structure. Let's imagine that your EPQ title is 'Should the meat supply be restricted in the UK today?' The points from your research might be something like this:

Points for	Points against
Experts say too much red meat can cause cancers	Fewer animals being kept would harm the financial interests of many meat farmers, butchers, abattoir owners, etc.
It might encourage people to eat more healthily (vegetables etc)	It is against liberal values – people shouldn't be told what to do/how to live
More vegetables being grown would benefit the agricultural industry	It could drive up the cost of meat because there is less available – the poor would suffer
Large numbers of animals kept in the UK produce methane which adds to global warming	It would be very difficult and costly to enforce
Animal welfare supporters welcome fewer animals being killed for food	Meat is a good source of protein



Then you might try to find patterns within the points – potential sections, with appropriate subheadings, each of which explores an aspect of your central question and is made to relate back to it. See if you can stage arguments and counter-arguments within sections. How about –

The financial dimension

More vegetables being grown would benefit the agricultural industry **VERSUS** Fewer animals being kept would harm the financial interests of many meat farmers, butchers, abattoir owners, etc. AND It would be very difficult and costly to enforce.

Ethics

Animal welfare supporters welcome fewer animals being killed for food **VERSUS** It is against liberal values – people shouldn't be told what to do/how to live AND It could drive up the cost of meat because there is less available – the poor would suffer.

The medical debate

Experts say too much red meat can cause cancers **VERSUS** Meat is a good source of protein.

Environmental arguments

Large numbers of animals kept in the UK produce methane which adds to global warming.

You won't always find arguments and counter-arguments, but where you do make sure you play them up as arguments versus counter-arguments, and have a little evaluation of which side seems more persuasive in light of your big question: here, should the UK meat supply be restricted?

Alternatively, if you are exploring to what extent X is the most important reason for Y (eg 'To what extent is funding the most important reason for the NHS's current crisis?'), the obvious sections and subheadings would be the different potential factors affecting the NHS's current crisis. The logical thing would therefore be to analyse the nature of the NHS's current crisis and to generate four or five potential explanations for it – funding as your given factor, then perhaps three or four more (eg ageing population and the strains it puts on medical care). At the end of each section you should evaluate whether this factor is more or less important than funding as a major cause of the NHS's crisis.

Next Steps...

Now it's over to you! It would be an excellent idea to use this time before Year 12 to:

- Think about topics which might interest you.
- Begin to think about debates within them.
- Start to gather and order research.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask Dr Gardiner – gardiner@highsted.kent.sch.uk.