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13 November 2026

The Extended Project (EPQ) at Ampleforth

What is the EPQ?

The EPQ is a high quality opportunity for academic enrichment open to students in year 12. It is an accredited course worth half an A level (marked at A level standard). It is highly valued by universities for the skills it demonstrates and, for some students, will also be useful for the UCAS points it carries. We have been particularly pleased with recent results with students achieving over 90% A*-A and 100% A*-B over the last three exam sessions.

The EPQ was modelled off the process of a Phd and so is a significant research project. Students will pick a topic to research, conduct reading around this topic, decide upon a 'question to answer' for their project and then complete either a 5000 word essay or an 'artefact' with a 1500 word supporting essay outlining their research. They will then present their findings. Many students choose topics linked to subjects they want to go on and study (although they cannot directly overlap with A level work) although many also opt to do an EPQ in a subject they have an interest in or enjoy.

Example topics include:

- Is technology making us more depressed?
- What is the most effective way of teaching year 2 students?
- What extent of someone's sporting ability comes from their genes?
- Is it possible to build a professional standard stop motion camera for less than the lowest market price?
- What does it take to create an effective and original children's story?
- What was the most important factor in the expansion of the British Empire?
- What has been the most significant impact of Brexit on the UK economy?
- Can anything be art?

Students are assessed on the planning and management of their project as much as the final project (via a log they complete throughout) and so must demonstrate significant self-motivation and independence to complete an EPQ (see below).

Why should my child undertake one?

Firstly, we think the EPQ is an academically enriching experience in its own right. However, there are many other reasons to undertake one.

An EPQ is evidence of independent working, time management, planning, resilience, self-motivation and ability to conduct academic research – vital skills top universities (and employers) look for and a chance to develop a significant base of wider knowledge (eg. for Oxbridge interviews). According to the exam board AQA, taking an EPQ increases the chance of getting high A level grades (students are 29% more likely to get A*-B grades) and students who have taken EPQs are more likely to get 1st or 2:1 degrees and are less likely to drop out of university.

It can be very useful in demonstrating interest if applying for a university subject you may not have studied before (eg. law) and some Universities make alternative (lower) offers to students who complete EPQs (or they can be useful to have if grades are missed on results day). It should be stressed that they are a useful part of an application even if not directly included in a university offer. For universities that make offers based on UCAS points it is an additional source of UCAS points.

It is the only real chance in A level/GCSE to pursue a topic of a students' choice and, for some, can be a chance to gain recognition for a skill you possess (dance, engineering, music, creative writing) which may not otherwise be assessed.

Completing an EPQ at Ampleforth.

At Ampleforth, all students undertaking an EPQ will attend a sequence of whole group lessons to cover the basics of what the course is, how to choose a question, how to use the log, how to conduct good quality research etc..

They will then work with an individual supervisor for the remainder of their project who will deliver further taught content as required and guide the student for the remainder of the course. Students will approach a member of staff they would like to work with to be their supervisor (and I can also help with this process). This may be a member of staff with a particular interest in their topic (although does not have to be) but I recommend it being someone the students will see regularly (one of their subject teachers or member of staff in their House often works well). I recommend that students schedule a regular meeting with their supervisor every two weeks (mainly to ensure students are keeping steadily working on their project – and they should not schedule a meeting if they have not made progress with their project).

It should be noted that students need to be in control of their project (as they are assessed on their management of it) and so students must take responsibility for progressing their own project and arranging meetings with their supervisor – students must show independence and self-motivation in order to succeed.

Students have significant flexibility over the timescale of their project (planning is assessed and integrated into the log). We do final presentations in January of year 13 before submitting the projects to be marked by March of year 13. Marks are returned along with A levels in the following Summer. Students may aim to complete their project earlier than this (although it will not be sent to the exam board earlier). This is certainly possible, and eases pressure on students at the end of year 13, but students should be conscious of the need of an extended log record of meetings with supervisor, planning and research phase in order to access the highest marks.

Signing up for an EPQ.

Students have had a talk from me about what an EPQ entails and there has been the opportunity to go to a drop-in session to ask further questions. Students have until the 27th November to complete the short sign-up form to enrol on the EPQ (which they have been sent via email).

Following this, whole group taught course sessions will take place between December and last until February half term. By the end of this students will have arranged a supervisor who will continue to work with students on their projects as described above. Students are encouraged to come and try the EPQ for the taught course and this gives them a considerable amount of time to see if it is an opportunity they want to pursue. However, once students have submitted their formal proposal (by March) and start working individually with their supervisor we expect students to commit to and complete their EPQ.

If you have any further queries about the EPQ, please contact ralph.pallister@ampleforth.org.uk.

Kind regards,

Mr. Pallister (EPQ coordinator)