

## EPQ Guidance #3 – 4th June 2020

### Critical information – To formalise your EPQ application

Email me your proposal by **Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> July** (pages 1, 5-6). I will email you back ASAP with recommendations (hopefully by **Friday 10<sup>th</sup> July**). You must check your school email after you have sent me your proposals.

I have sent a pdf link to the log book but you can access a word or pdf copy from the website below (word is best for the school computers) – **make sure you select academic year 2020/21**

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/projects/project-qualifications/EPQ-7993/administration>

I may approve your proposal (which means it seems appropriate and you'll need to go and research it and write about your next steps on page 9), I could approve with recommendations (You must address these recommendations in page 9 of the log book and address any concerns) or I could reject it outright. If I reject your proposal you'll need to resubmit if you want to complete your EPQ. My advice would be to have a talk via email with me first before resubmitting, but the sooner you talk with me the better. I rejected 17% of proposals last year.

I am hopeful that in September/October I may be able to get some form of university library access.

### General information

#### If you decide to conduct your own primary research (i.e. a questionnaire or interview)

Big question – is it really necessary?

An example of this;

*“Discuss the extent to which the New Kingdom of Ancient Egypt was a revolutionary society”*

This student thought it appropriate to devise a questionnaire as a way of answering the question – his results;

*“After completing a survey of a sample of 15 people between the ages of 14 and 46, I found that 7 of the 15 had never even heard of the New Kingdom. After giving some brief information to each person about the rough time period when the New Kingdom occurred, 10 of the 15 people believed that New Kingdom society treated women badly/unfairly or as lower class citizens. Finally, 9 of the 15 believed when asked if New Kingdom society was barbaric/primitive or not that it was barbaric or primitive or even both.”*

This question isn't going to be answered by a questionnaire. However, the candidate also interviewed two university professors, took notes and attached them as an appendix to his EPQ – this was much more effective (although still it is not really what his question is asking.)

My advice – if you are thinking of doing some research then this should be the focus of your EPQ (not a tag on). For a start, you will need to learn about methodology. Take the above example – I, as a sociology teacher can be savage about this research, first it is unrepresentative; second the questions asked were not written down in the EPQ so I have no idea whether they were leading or not; third, when the student says they 'gave brief information' suggests they influenced the data collection (one of the main points of doing a questionnaire is detachment). So in short, I can say the data collected is neither valid nor reliable and actually demonstrates incompetence because they

haven't thought about purpose. This research moved the final grade from an A\* to an A (because there was some decent academic research in the EPQ).

A second example;

*"Is there a gap between medical education and acting as a physician, and if so how does this gap affect the quality of healthcare provided?"*

This student read about this through the General Medical Council and decided to find out for herself – she decided she wanted reliable data, chose a questionnaire, devised it and sent it out – she was able to get 97 responses from 7 medical schools (she tried to contact 33 medical schools). This is actually not a bad response rate – she evaluates her questions – she herself admits that on reflection some of the questions were leading but she uses the data to make an informed discussion about bedside manner and doctors. She reads about the relevant academic research and uses hers to complement what is already out there. In short, this student looked found an issue, hypothesised, created a research topic and then used the data she found to complement her reading about the subject. This was exceptional and fully deserved an A\*.

Anyone who is considering social research **should be looking at sociological material on methodology** and this will form part of your reading for an EPQ. **Actual Research should be something that you come up with after looking at an issue and not something you do as an afterthought or have predetermined that you must do research.**

A third example from last year was a project on cuts to the ambulance service. The student originally wanted primary research to see if ambulance drivers were being affected by austerity cuts from 2010 more than government reports let on. He devised a questionnaire (by interviewing a couple of ambulance drivers to get an idea of good questions). He sent this out through identified contacts in the St John's Ambulance service and managed to get about a 20% response rate. On reading the responses he realised that it didn't really expand on what he already knew. He wrote about his primary research only in the log book – and reasons why he rejected his research. This gave him lots of credit as he had the academic sense to reject his own data and gave suitable explanations how he would do things differently.

### **Health and Safety in research**

If you do choose to do your own research you must consider this and make yourself safe. There are various horror stories from sociological researchers – James Patrick ('A Glasgow Gang Observed'; 2013; Neil Wilson publishing) studied gang life in Glasgow in the 1960s – he published under an alias as he feared for his life – he ended his study after being handed an axe before a gang fight. Or Sudhir Venkatesh ('Gang leader for a day'; 2009; Penguin) who wrote about crack cocaine gangs in South Chicago. During his initial research he went round high rise tenements in Chicago and was abducted by a gang as they thought he was working undercover for the police. He was very lucky that they didn't kill him.

Some methods are more risky than others but do consider the following document;

[http://the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/safety\\_code\\_of\\_practice.pdf](http://the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/safety_code_of_practice.pdf)

Choice of method can reduce risk (questionnaires), interviews should be conducted on work premises and not in private homes, interviews should be done in pairs, contact the interviewee prior to an interview to assess risk, assess the safety of a site etc. Because of the coronavirus pandemic it is likely that the only form of acceptable research would be a written questionnaire delivered by the internet, or possibly a telephone interview.

You will be given credit if you use this document to assess safety. **Talk to me about your research prior to doing it.**

You also must consider the ethical implications of any research – subjects might be very sensitive and provoke a strong response – poverty, exclusion, inequality, ill-health, bereavement etc. It is part of research to consider the implications of questions set.

You will get credit if you devise a social research experiment but realise that it is not safe to carry out at this stage. Do not feel that you must complete it because you said you would. Part of the process of the EPQ is a journey about what is and isn't possible and setbacks can provide an excellent opportunity to analyse and evaluate solutions.