



# Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change through Project Learning

## The challenge we all face

As the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) takes place in Glasgow, it is increasingly evident that the question of how we respond to climate change is one of the major challenges facing the world today. Young people have a particularly important role to play in leading the way in responding to this important challenge.

How can we as teachers assist them in taking the lead? One valuable way is through helping them to engage in meaningful project activities that relate to the challenges that we face with climate change. The Pearson Edexcel Level 3 Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), which has grown in many schools and colleges in the UK in recent years, provides one setting for such engagement.

## Addressing the climate challenge through project work

Successful projects relate to challenges that people find personally engaging and for many students, relating their EPQ to climate change makes a great deal of sense. The questions raised by climate change are of great social importance as well as being matters of real personal concern to those students who wish to play a part in meeting the challenge. It is this sort of combination of personal engagement with a significant challenge that forms the starting point for many successful projects.

Whilst many EPQ students write dissertations, the EPQ is much broader in scope than a big essay. Students can create artwork, carry out performance work or engage in investigations, collecting data and analysing it, looking at trends and patterns and shaping and testing hypotheses. Each of these different forms of project can be valuable and meaningful responses to the challenge of how we should address climate change.

- Dissertation – A student could choose to carry out research and develop arguments and counter-arguments in response to the question ‘Is it the responsibility of developed nations to do more to combat climate change?’

- Investigation – A student could carry out primary research through piloting and conducting surveys to test the hypothesis that attitudes towards climate change vary significantly with age group.
- Performance – A group of students could research, storyboard, script, film then edit a 10-minute documentary designed to explore how young people can take the lead in responding to climate change.
- Artefact – A student could research ways of making sustainable fashion then select some old garments to repurpose.

## The power of interdisciplinary thinking

One of the reasons that the EPQ provides a valuable opportunity for real-world engagement is that it allows students to integrate ideas from different disciplines. So, for example, learning that has gone on in geography about sustainable development can be integrated with ideas from history, politics, philosophy or sociology in order to produce a rich project that crosses disciplinary boundaries. A question about the responsibility of different stakeholders when it comes to meeting the climate crisis could usefully draw on ideas from any of these fields.

The EPQ encourages students to learn to engage in exactly the kind of interdisciplinary thinking that is going to be needed to tackle the climate crisis. Many successful projects explore a central question using perspectives and ideas drawn from a range of overlapping disciplines.

Arguably, it is this kind of wider thinking that is going to be needed on a global scale and project work that helps students learn to think across subject boundaries is a valuable starting point.

## Making it real

Another reason that the EPQ has much to offer when we are considering climate change is that learning can take a practical form. A student may decide to take on the challenge of seeing if they can reduce their school's



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carbon footprint. What could they do to promote more sustainable use of resources around their school? Could they work with the school canteen to source ingredients from more sustainable providers? Could they publicise lifestyle changes that will enable individual students to lower their own carbon footprint? With questions like these, we move from the global to the local level and there is a chance for students to be active in making a real difference.

## Linking EPQ with Geography

Geography students can benefit from engaging in EPQs exploring questions about sustainable development, globalisation and climate change. The skills that they learn during the course of an EPQ will be advantageous to them when they are working on their A level Geography independent investigation. For example, one of the skills that they will use in their investigation is the analysis of sources. EPQ provides the opportunity to learn and practice techniques such as creating questions to investigate and a research methodology. The links below provide guidance on all aspects of the project process, including a series of free student webinars which explore literature reviews, bibliographies, structuring written work, critical thinking and more besides.

## Projects as a way of thinking and learning

The EPQ offers students the chance to explore a question which is intrinsically challenging and open-ended. Successful projects usually take the form of responses to questions or practical challenges which have no obvious right answer. It is quite clear that the question of how we deal with climate change is one such challenge. There is clearly no simple single easy answer to this question. Thinking about it therefore requires students to learn how to balance evidence, weighing up the merits of arguments and counter-arguments and considering a range of alternative interpretations.

This kind of rich, open-ended learning in response to a complex, challenging problem is exactly the kind of thinking that is going to be needed as we come to terms with the

challenge of climate change. Exploring an open-ended question through an EPQ gives students the chance to learn more about how to think in this rich, deep and complex way. Through the topics they choose to explore and through the methodology of project learning, students are being prepared to deal with the kind of challenge that we all have to face and take seriously as we respond to the climate crisis.

All of us have a part to play in the project of responding to climate change. One way we can help students is by equipping them with the tools to be successful learners, with the skills and confidence to think and act creatively and independently in the face of real-world challenges.

## Find out more about the EPQ

### Project Qualification Guide

Find out everything you need to study or teach our Edexcel Level 3 Extended Project qualifications, including key documents and support.

[Download the guide](#)

### Free Project Qualification teacher and student webinars

These free videos cover the principles and value of project learning as well as the key skills to help with your project or think ahead to your university studies or future work.

[Take a look](#)

## About the author

This piece was written by Dr John Taylor, Director of Learning, Teaching and Innovation at Cranleigh and EPQ Chief Examiner.

<https://blog.pearsoninternationalschools.com/author/dr-john-taylor/>

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