EPQ artefacts virtual Q&A (part 1)

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Participant: Jennifer Obaditch (Head of Curriculum for Business, Economics and Projects, AQA)

Introductions

BN: Hi everyone, so welcome to part one of two of the artefacts session for the digitised EPQ teachers' conference. My name is Dr Becki Nash and I work for the Learn with US Transition team and I'm really privileged to be joined by my colleague from University of Leeds Matt Elliott and Jennifer Oberditch, who is the head of curriculum for business economics and projects at AQA. Kindly giving up her time to do another session for everyone. So how this session is going to work, is I'll let Matt and Jennifer introduce themselves. We will then have a short presentation from Jennifer outlining some of the commonly addressed areas to do with the artefacts specifically from the perspective of AQA. But lots of really useful information in there for other exam board users as well... and then to follow that there will be a question and answer session for Jennifer. This session will be followed up by an additional artefacts session with a couple of practitioners, so you can get their perspectives in the other part as well, and so I'm gonna pass over to you, Matt to introduce yourself and then to Jennifer.

ME: Thank you Becki, yep my name is Matt and I'm a senior education outreach officer at the University of Leeds. My role is to help kind of coordinate our program of study skills across the country with my colleague Sarah. And I'll pass over to Jennifer.

JO: Great, thank you Matt, I'm Jennifer Oberditch, I'm head of curriculum at AQA for a range of qualifications. Relevant today is EPQ and my role is to support specification, the delivery of EPQ and we have a team of projects colleagues who support that, we have NEA advisors who support that and my main aim really is to help schools and colleges and EPQ coordinators implement the EPQ as best as they can so students get the best experience of EPQ and the outcome, of course, for EPQ is valid for those students.

BN: Fabulous thank you so much. So what I'm gonna do now is hopefully without any stress, share my screen, and then we can start the presentations. Can everyone see that? Fabulous. OK Jennifer, whenever you're ready.

Slide 1

JO: Thank you Becki, if you could just click on to the next slide please. OK, so I tend to start a presentation on EPQ with this slide that for me represents what EPQ's about in terms of the holistic student-led project, and a research-based project qualification. So essentially as I'm sure you as practitioners watching this will know what we look for in EPQ is for students to choose an area of interest, draft a title and aims and objectives for their projects and that's formally approved by the centre coordinator, as you all know. Then we're looking for students to plan and research and carry out their projects, deliver a presentation on the projects, and provide evidence of all stages of the project development and production for assessment.

So EPQ is holistic in its approach and you'll see there on the screen that I've deliberately put independent research at the heart of this diagram and running alongside the EPQ from start to finish is your taught skills program. So what AQA look for in terms of EPQ. Is a project that's grounded in deep, rigorous research and coming out of that research is documentation that tracks the full project process, and that's the production log for AQA. I'm aware that there will be practitioners watching this that use lots of different exam boards. The principle of EPQ is the same across all exam boards, so this should be helpful to you all. So we're looking for a production log that represents the full project journey there. We're looking for a presentation that communicates to a non-specialist audience the project outcome and the project process.

And of course, we're looking for the project products. That's the outcome in terms of a 5000 word written report, or in the case of today's presentation, the artefact with a supporting minimum 1000 word written report. So this is what EPQ looks like to us at AQA and we've got the three outcomes: production log, presentation and project products and we'll be focusing on the artefact specifically. I know that you're going to get really fantastic insight from a practitioners point of view on artefacts in the second presentation, so I'll talk about what AQA look for in artefacts and sort of key features that make a great artefacts and sometimes why artefacts can be a bit tricky and might go wrong. So you can flip the next slide Becki, please.

Slide 2

So we'll look at what makes artefacts different in terms of EPQ. As I said, the features of successful artefacts, where it can go wrong and therefore how to mitigate against that. How you as practitioners can support your students in making the most of artefact projects and the evidence requirements for artefacts. Let's move on.

Slide 3

What makes an artefact different? So key things here in terms of artefacts and artefact should have a purpose or an intended user. We're looking for a student here to set out what is the point of this artefact? Who is going to be using this artefact? Because when they do that, what we're directing the student to do is identify the aims and the objectives, and that's really crucial at the start of an artefact project. What is the aim and objective of this artefact? Who is going to use it? What is the purpose? And by doing that with an artefact, we're also allowing the student to be able to test the success of that artefact at the end of the EPQ project. So what's the intended purpose and user is going to be one of the key questions you'll be asking your students right at the beginning of their artefact projects.

The report is different in terms of an artefact project. We require a written report for artefacts. It's a minimum of 1000 words for AQA. But the report is not the aim. The report underpins the research process and underpins the development of the artefact. The artefact is the aim of the project. When we're dealing with these types of projects, so the report length is not a consideration for us. The reason we specify minimum of 1000 words is because we see from projects that come into us that students need at least 1000 words to really comprehensively document the research, and artefact development. So we specify that to help students and encourage them to really focus on the report as an underpinning piece of work to their artefact production.

Artefacts can be produced by a group of students. So, artefacts - and I'm aware I'm saying artefact is a term that I'm assuming everyone understands, so let's just say an artefact is a catch-all term for a practical EPQ outcome. Something that's built, or made, or held in the hands or touched or felt. It can be a piece of electronic material. It might be a website a student produces, computer program, a game they've developed, or it could be, in this case, a group of students developing a performance

type artefact, so they might decide to produce, direct and perform and write a play. So artefacts can be produced by groups of students that needs careful managing. And as I mentioned at the beginning of this slide, artefacts should be tested and evaluated in terms of fitness for purpose. So identifying the purpose of the artefact up front so students can then test and evaluate the success of that is really crucial. So let's move on to the next slide, please Becki.

Slide 4

So, successful artefacts. What are the key features of successful artefacts that we see coming into AQA? We've got a clarity of aims and objectives, that's true of all EPQ projects of course, but crucial for artefacts. What are the aims and objectives? What's the purpose of this artefact? What problem

will it solve? What would you like it to do? How should it perform? I've dropped in this slide an example of a really good artefact title and project there to illustrate what I'm talking about - 'Can I send a weather balloon to high altitude to record temperature, humidity and pressure? Really clear aim there, down to the altitude that the student wants to achieve and behind that of course are going to be a set of objectives that they're going to aim to achieve. So we got a purpose. We've got aims and objectives, their meticulous planning, including how the artefact will be tested. So up front at the beginning of this artefact project, once the student had identified their project proposal, aims and objectives, they should be thinking ahead 'actually how am I going to prove that this has been successful? What are my criteria for success?' Because that will allow them to assess how the artefact has performed.

Now, this third bullet is the real key one in terms of successful artefacts detailed research. Sorry there is a typo there… 'detailed research' it should say at the heart of the artefact. And we're looking for the artefacts to be the project products. That's the word we use in AQA to describe the written report or the artefact approach and the research the student conducts should inform the outcome in terms of the artefact. We're not looking for students to just come up with an idea for an artefact from their head. We're looking for them to engage in research, to identify sources of information that will inform the development of the artefact. It is a research based project just like any other EPQ. Well written reports clearly showing how - sorry typos - you can see I pulled this together quickly. I'll make sure the resource that's downloadable is correct. Well written reports clearly showing how the artefact is underpinned by research, so that written research report is going to show us the research that the student has engaged in. I know some students can struggle and find it challenging to write that underpinning report. So if you position it in terms of documenting the research as they're gathering it, developing the research basis for the artefact, it might become a useful document for them to be working on to support the development of that artefact. Obviously I've mentioned testing we want to see testing against the intended purpose, or we of course, want to see a thorough evaluation of it from the students. So let's click on where things go wrong.

There are two key things we see coming into AQA when artefact projects go wrong. The first thing is that students think it's an easy option and they focus only on the project products and I'm sure as practitioners watching this, you've seen this - the student that will come along to you and say, 'oh brilliant, I'm gonna do EPQ, I'm gonna do my artefact on building a remote control hovercraft'. Why? What's the purpose? Where's the research? And so the key thing first of all where artefacts go wrong is the student will focus on just that artefact outcome. That's quite natural. We all do that. We all

decided we're going to build or make something and then just cracking on doing it, but again reinforcing EPQ is about research, and the research is going to inform the artefact, so helping students understand that full EPQ process, and that they really should be engaging in their initial ideas research.

Doing lots of investigating, looking at different sources of information, changing tack and working out what they really want to look at investigating. Finding out, answering, challenging in terms of hypothesis should help them come up with a suitable artefact project that's grounded in that research. We need to see a clear purpose. The artefact example here is titled 'Rocking Horse', now you know this student wanted to build a rocking horse for a younger sibling. Great, that could be a good artefact, but what we need to see is aims and objectives. We need to see a purpose for this artefact and we need to receive the research that's underpinning the development of this project product and that 4th bullet really hints to that. So many artefacts that come into AQA that have gone wrong are ones where there's insufficient research and that leads to the overuse of the student's idea. They create their artefact by trial and error, or they create the artefact from ideas in their own head and haven't actually sought out a solid body of research that will inform the production of the artefact.

Poor communication of the artefact can be a challenge as well. As I say if students are going to pick an artefact, perhaps dare I say to avoid writing 5000 words or pick an artefact because they want to do something very practical, they can neglect that written report. This is crucial in communicating the research process in the body of the research the student has accessed to develop the artefact and of course, leading on from that, they haven't been engaged in testing or evaluating the success of the artefact. Those are the key issues we see when artefacts go wrong. Let's move on.

Slide 5

So I've got here some examples of artefact projects that have come into AQA to give you an idea of the sorts of wonderfully diverse things we see, bottom right, there - We've got an artefact that might well have been a group project. I don't know the background to this, but directing an informative and entertaining production of a play. We do see many group artefacts based on putting on school plays or putting on events in schools and they lend themselves really well to groups because you can have each student developing their own individual unique EPQ that contributes to the group and they can focus on their own specific aims and objectives. You might have someone focusing on writing an original script that might be their EPQ focus. You might have someone focused on the production and the practical aspects of staging the performance, you might have someone else focusing on directing

that performance, someone else focusing their EPQ on costume design. So we do see group artefacts working very well in terms of putting on performance or events.

Some technical scientific engineering type artefacts here: can the student construct and test a small scale hybrid rocket motor? One that I've always liked: investigating the benefits of singing through creating a community choir, so there's a real purpose there and for this student, the artefact was actually the community choir they created, so artefacts are very often something we can see, touch, feel, hold, but they can be events, they can be human performance, so this gives you some ideas of artefact projects. Just incidentally, if you want to have a look at artefact EPQ projects, going into e-AQA via the AQA website, you'll find in the 'secure key materials' area lots of standardisation projects for EPQ. Many of them are artefact projects and you'll see artefact next to the number of the project. And if you go into 'teacher support materials' you'll find all the materials from our 'unlocking the potential of artefacts' course. You'll find some examples of really superb artefacts, and you'll find some examples of artefacts that were less successful so you can have a look at different artefact projects, give you some ideas about what seems to work well for students and the characteristics of those really strong artefacts. Shall we move on Becki?

Slide 6

So, how can you help your students in planning? I've got some key questions you can challenge your students with when they are looking to develop an artefact project. The first question is why do you want to make this thing or do this thing when they come rushing to you excited about doing an artefact - that's wonderful, but challenging them with some difficult questions, saying why do you want to make that? Why do you want to do that? And getting them to think about the audience, the intended user, the purpose, the aims, the objectives - who is it for? is another one. Narrowing this down to say who the artefact actually is for.

A great artefact - quite old now - is one to do with helping Infant School children understand and cope with their Type One Diabetes. So the student produced a book called 'My Diabetic Buddy', and one of the key strengths of this was that the purpose was very clear. It was to help very small children manage their diabetes and who was it for? It was for children within a specific age group. So if you could help learners narrow down - why do you want to do it? Who is it for? Has anything like this been made previously? What research are you planning to undertake? So finding out what else is being done in this area and what research you will do to support the development of the artefact and what will my criteria for success be? What will you use to judge the success, and that will help with their testing.

One other thing, just to be aware of in terms of where artefacts can go wrong, hints to... The issue sometimes we have students making artefacts that they already know how to do. So you need to help avoid them, so if I were to add another question here is: what new learning will come out of this artefact project for you? There can be a slight tendency for students to decide they're going to do an artefact on something they're already personally expert in... the expert dancer who decides to do a choreography artefact, the accomplished musician who decides to do a performance artefact. So you need to just prompt them and probe a little bit and find out that they're not going to base their artefact on something they already know how to do, and it will be new learning, and it will extend and develop from their course of study. So those are some useful questions to ask, and if we could move on now please, Becki.

Slide 7

So, the evidence requirements, finally. We get asked this a lot at AQA - How do I evidence the EPQ artefact? Obviously we're looking for the production log fully completed. We're looking for the presentation to have been completed. And the evidence of the artefact really depends on what that artefact is. If it's a large sculptural piece of work or a large piece of art, we're looking for photographic evidence of that artefact. If it's a performance, if it's a musical composition; recordings, video or audio of that.

If it's something like a science experiment, a student has designed, again, photographic evidence documenting the development of that science experiment, a sign off from an expert to say 'yes, I've observed this artefact operating, and it's operated as intended', those sorts of things provide solid evidence of the artefact. One point to make here, although we at AQA - in terms of moderation - accept photographic evidence or video recordings of artefacts, we do expect the supervisor to have seen the original and be able to assess the original artefact. And if we could move on Becki.

Slide 8

Final slide there in terms of AQA, the sorts of support we can offer you in terms of EPQ, and also artefact projects. I know these slides will be uploaded to the website, so you'll be able to have a look at them. Have a look at this support listing in the key bit of support, there: project@aqa.org.uk is the email address you can use and they can direct you to every single one of these resources listed here. Thank you, Becki.

Q&A

BN: Fabulous thank you so much. That was so comprehensive. Thank you so much. I think it is going to be so useful because without a doubt, artefacts are one of the key things that so many teachers are concerned about. Because I suppose the idea of an artefact, it can be so subjective and it can cover such a huge amount of different types of things, as you said, something that's tangible, and so I know that the delivery of the supervision and any assessment of an artefact is something that I see a lot in, terms of concerns expressed by teachers. One of the first questions and one of the main things actually a lot of teachers and students are concerned about is that research-based written report that accompanies the artefact and you did touch upon that in your presentation.

Question: What types of common mistakes do you see students making in their written reports and how should they go about structuring the report more effectively for an artefact?

JO: I think the common mistake we see is that the student is creating the artefact from their own imagination and we see that a lot with creative arts artefacts. So the student will want to produce a particular creative expression, and they will use the content of their head to do that, and unfortunately we're not looking for that within EPQ, we're looking for the research, so the common errors we see in these written reports is where the student will very beautifully document the development of their artefact, but there's no research sitting behind that. So really, I know that a lot of practitioners use source evaluation grids or encourage their students to record their sources for their EPQs, and that's a really good starting point with the written report. Where am I going to be getting the information from to support the development of the artefact? And I know it's a little bit frustrating 'cause we know students like to dive into their artefact, but holding them off from developing the artefacts until, you know, they're touching that mid project review so they've got a good body of research, they've got good analysis and evaluation and critical engagement with that research, they're selecting the research material that will support the information they need to create their artefacts. And if they can be encouraged to start to write that down into different sections based on the build or development of the artefact that should form the foundation of the written report for them.

BN: Yeah, fabulous - I just want... you said something really good in the new practitioners' session. I know another one of the concerns in regards to the written report is the types of resource that should be included, in that students doing the artefact are a little bit worried if they don't have solid academic research papers underpinning that resource.

Question: Are there any other places that students might look for resources to underpin artefact research?

JO: Absolutely. When it comes to very practical artefacts - the very practical make and builds type artefacts we see a lot of - the guiding principle here is the research should be appropriate to the aims and objectives of the project. So if you take, for example, the student who wants to build a piece of furniture for a particular setting, a particular age of child, or in the school setting, for example, they're going to be using resources such as instruction manuals, assessments of different tools, assessments of different materials that might be used to build that artefact. So please don't shy away from artefacts in terms of a concern about research basis, the research we're looking for is that which is appropriate to the type of artefact, so it could be very practical in nature. It can also be a whole range of media, so we see research in terms of students using video evidence, YouTube videos, instruction manuals, as I've said, websites that guide students on how to develop certain aspects of their artefacts. So provided they've got a good wide range of research, provided they've crucially, critically engaged with that research to assess and evaluate the suitability of it, it can be very practical in its nature if that's what the artefact requires.

ME: Thank you so much. I'll take the next question... both really good answers for those ones. My question is about the size and scale of artefacts and that some students are really eager to kind of create something, and that's something that have been planning for ages.

Question: Is there a limit on the scale and size of an artefact that a student can potentially propose to do for an EPQ?

JO: Well, it's always a challenge, whatever the EPQ project, to help a student understand what they might want to achieve versus the time and resources they have available to them. So right at the beginning in terms of the initial ideas, in terms of the project sign-off, the supervisor and coordinator need to be talking to the student about how much time they have available to develop their artefact and the resources they have available, and that's really crucial. Now we're in this period of virtual teaching and working from home, I know that students will be going back to school in September, but we don't yet know actually what access to resources they will have and need to be mindful of that, particularly so in terms of the ambition of the artefacts. I think it's for the teacher to have a mind on what the student is realistically going to be able to achieve in terms of the size of the artefacts. In particular if it's going to be a performance artefact or a production artefact, when is that going to happen in the school timetable? Is there space to do that? Are there other people available to support

that if that's necessary? Did you also mean the sort of physical size of artefacts that students look at producing, Matt?

ME: You can definitely expand on that. So yeah, I did... What you said is exactly kind of what I wanted. I know that some students will be thinking about in terms of what's manageable for their artefacts, yeah, please.

JO: There's no limit on the physicality, as I said, as long as we can see the evidence in terms of video, audio, photographs that it's really up to the student and also up to the school in terms of what they can manage and support. It is important with artefacts for the school to be confident to approve that and the coordinator needs to be confident in their approval of the artefact, because ultimately the coordinator is looking at whether this artefact is feasible and meets the requirements of EPQ, and you don't want to allow a student to engage in an artefact that that you know is just going to be too ambitious for them to succeed in.

BN: Thank you very much. It can be a real issue that we encounter a lot. Students - and it's great they're so ambitious – but sometimes maybe a little too ambitious to the point of non-feasibility. My question is drawing upon another really pertinent point you made in the presentation, which is about group EPQs, and so I've seen a few successful examples of group EPQs, and then I've seen centres that specifically kind of say we've seen examples where this perhaps hasn't gone as well as it could have, previously.

Question: How can supervisors advise students who want to undertake a group project?

JO: OK, so the group project can be very challenging. It can be brilliant if it's successful, but can pose particular challenges. We limit group projects to four students. The first thing to say is that the EPQ that comes out of the group project needs to be unique to the student, and those students need to understand that. So in the example I gave in the presentation of a production, you might have a group project with someone doing costume design, someone producing someone, directing someone, script writing. Those are four distinct EPQs in themselves. The aims and objectives for each individual's activity will be unique. The production log, therefore, will be unique to that aspect of the group. The written report will be unique to that individual student and of course, the group outcome of this production being performed will be the bringing together of those four EPQs in the Group.

A top tip with groups is to give each student a different supervisor so they're working on an individual EPQ with their supervisor that's part of the group and making sure that those supervisors are very aware of the requirements of the group as well. So if you've got some experienced supervisors in your

team, then it's probably better to give those supervisors students that are involved in a group project. Also, commitment from the students upfront. I've seen so many group projects where you've got four incredibly keen and enthusiastic students, and then for whatever reason one of them drops out. And that can pose a problem for the group achieving their full aims and objectives for that project. We've got a 'Quick Guide' to group projects on the resource for EPQ on the AQA website. So do have a look at that and make use of your EPQ advisor up front as well. If you've got students that are suggesting they want to do a group project, get in touch with the EPQ advisor, outline what the students are hoping to do and they will be able to give you help and support on the detail of how that might operate.

ME: So my last question, Jennifer.... I think you really covered quite a lot in that presentation, it was really comprehensive. So what I'm going to ask you now is... kind of give you an opportunity to reiterate anything that you would you really want to kind of emphasise with that as well, especially for... I know for some teachers I've had experience working with, it's the advice that they give to students.

Question: Are there any points from your presentation that you feel should be re-emphasised for teachers when considering the EPQ artefact?

JO: I think when supervisors are working with their students at the beginning of the EPQ projects and you have students that express the desire to do an artefact, and that's absolutely fine, students will say I want to do this thing up front, it's natural. I think that initial ideas stage where they're doing their initial research. If that can be a real focus for the student and supervisor in terms of the initial research, because there are so many projects that could actually go either way. If I take, for example, the project on investigating the benefits of singing through creating a community choir. Now, as I said, the artefact for that project was the actual community choir. It would have been just as successful actually, if the student had written a 5000 word report on their investigation and their work with the choir to understand the benefits of singing.

So very much at the beginning of the artefact project or the EPQ project, I would recommend that supervisors give a really solid amount of time to those initial ideas and meetings to explore the research the student is coming back with and help them appreciate where that research is going to lead them to. Because the artefact brings out of the research and the student needs help in assessing the best way to present the outcomes of their research. I think the other thing to do which students can be very inclined to do with artefacts, is to look to do something they can do already, and I've

mentioned that just previously. So really helping the students to understand that the artefact should be about them learning to do something new that develops beyond their course of study is important and sometimes you find with students is that they take a little pause there when they're thinking about artefacts and realise that it's not an easy option. It's a very exciting option, and it can be a very creative and rewarding option, but it's not an easy option. So helping them develop their project proposal that is genuinely extending beyond their existing course of study and knowledge is a really valuable use of time as well.

BN: Thank you. I think we found this really informative and I know 100% that the teachers who watch this will find it amazing as well, so thank you so much. As I said at the beginning this is part one of two parts of the artefact, and so our practitioners will be in the in the next session. But Jennifer, thank you so much for your invaluable contribution as always. So, happiness! I will end things there. Thank you.