

Unlocking Skills and Mobility through the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)

Presented by the University of Southampton and Ashton Sixth Form
College

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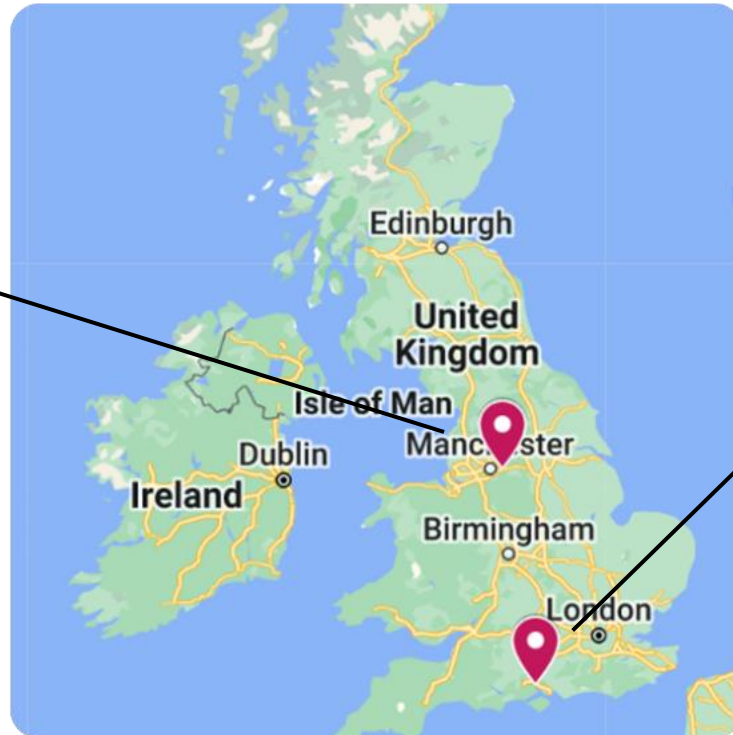
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Our Partnership



Dr Rachel Allen
EPQ Coordinator



Katrina Lueddeke
Academic Skills Manager (Pre-
entry)



OVERVIEW

Part One:

- What is the EPQ and Models of EPQ

Part Two:

- Benefits of the EPQ, including social mobility

Part Three:

- Meeting regulatory requirements – partnership working with Universities (Ofsted – Office for Students)
- Innovation with the EPQ



Part One

What is the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) and models of EPQ



The Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)

- “The Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) is a single piece of work of a student’s choosing that demonstrates evidence of **planning, preparation, research and autonomous working.**”
- “Students can undertake a project on a **topic of their own choosing**, which may or may not be linked to their **A-level subjects.**”

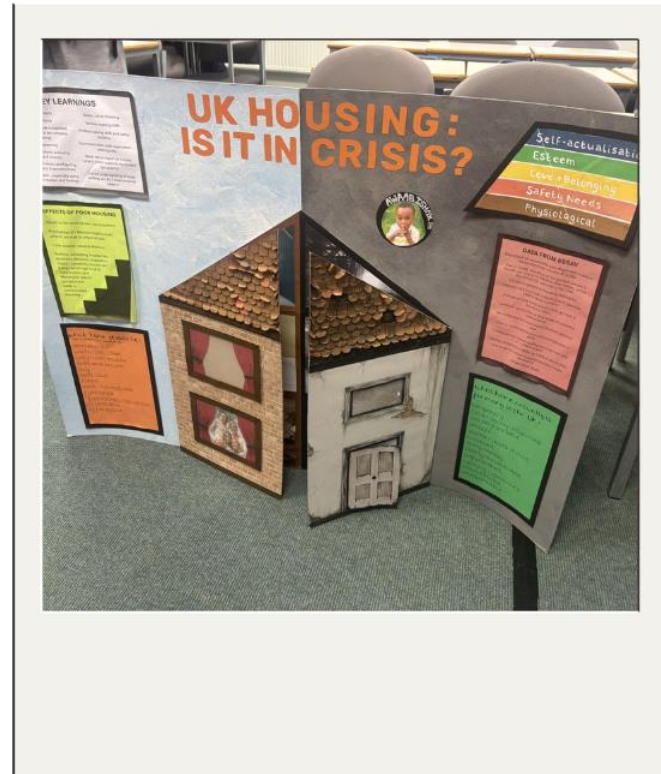
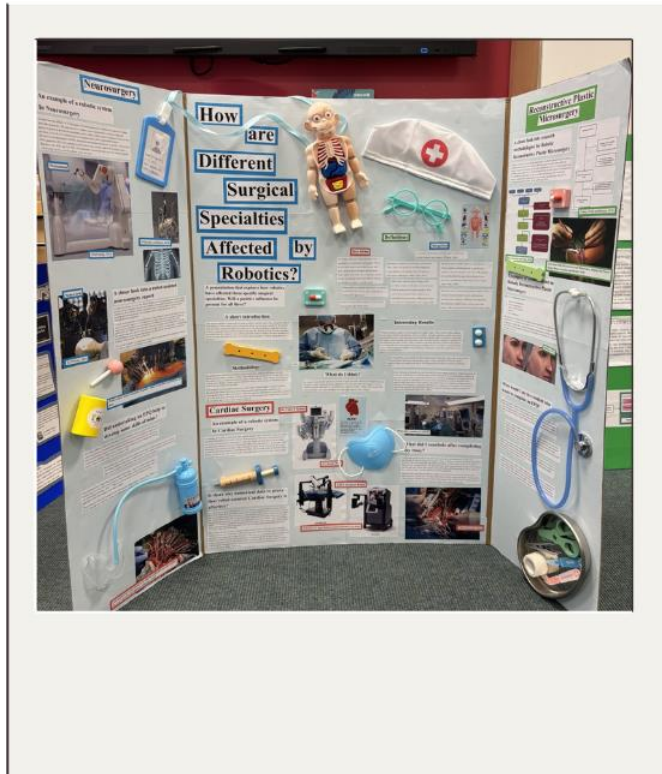


The EPQ Assessment Objectives



	Assessment Objectives	Weighting
AO1	Manage: Identify, design, plan and carry out a project, applying a range of skills, strategies and methods to achieve objectives	20%
AO2	Use Resources: Research, critically select, organise and use information, and select and use a range of resources. Analyse data apply relevantly and demonstrate understanding of any links, connections and complexities of the topic.	20%
AO3	Develop and Realise: Select and use a range of skills, including, where appropriate, new technologies and problem-solving, to take decisions critically and achieve planned outcomes.	40%
AO4	Review: Evaluate all aspects of the extended project, including outcomes in relation to stated objectives and own learning and performance. Select and use a range of communication skills and media to present evidenced project outcomes and conclusions in an appropriate format.	20%

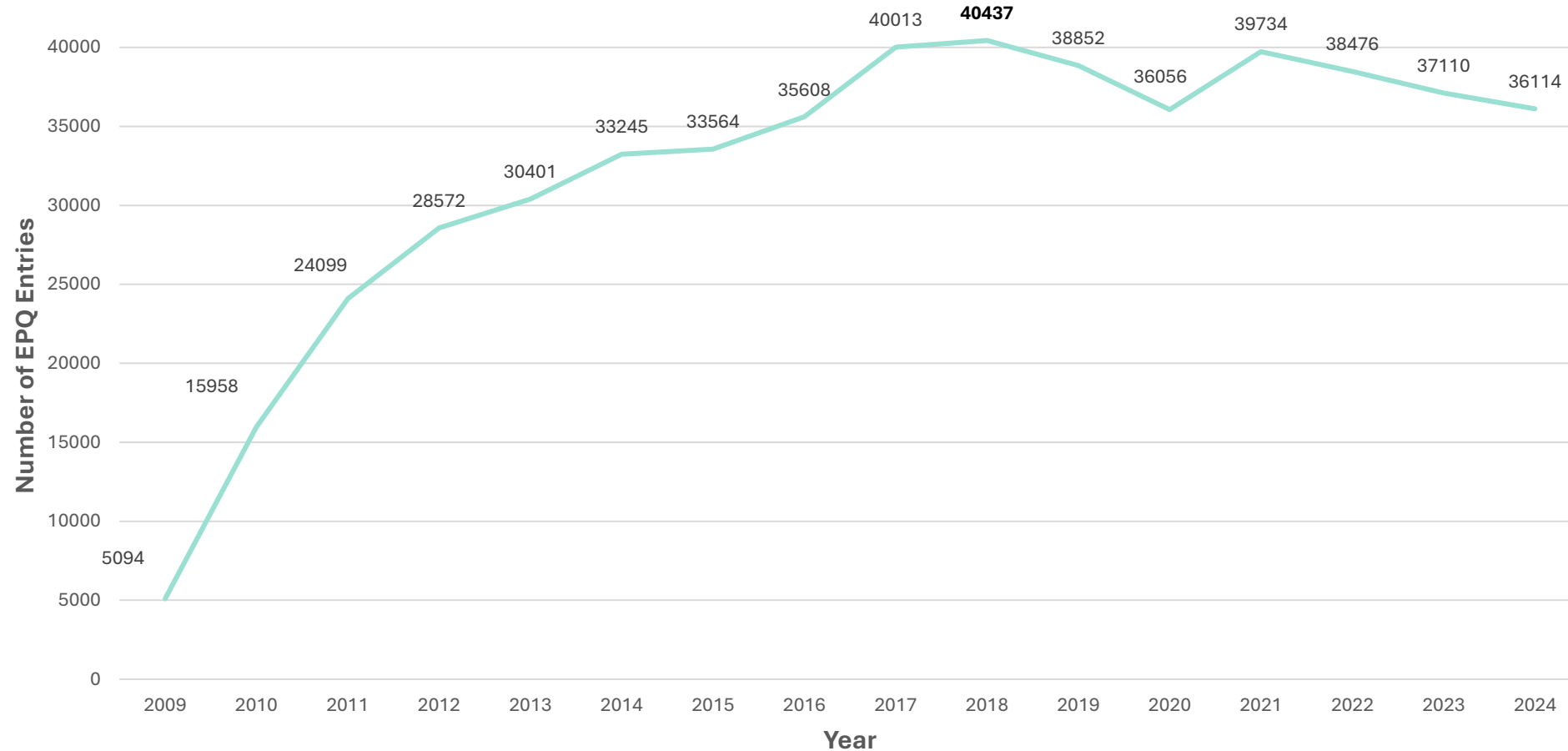
Examples from Ashton Sixth Form College



EPQ Entries



Number of EPQ Entries across (2009 - 2024)



Data source: [JCQ website](#)

The Rise of EPQ at Ashton Sixth Form College

- Ashton Sixth Form sits within a demographically mixed area, with 17.5% of Tameside residents living in income-deprived households. **A significant proportion of our students meet widening participation criteria**, with around 50% of students living in ward uplift areas and around 20% of our students claim the 16-19 bursary.
- Since 2018, students select EPQ as an additional qualification (not as an enrichment).
- The EPQ has increasingly become a **key qualification in supporting the transition to university**, whether through full-time study or degree apprenticeships. It plays a significant role in shaping how taught skills, marketplace presentations and additional **activities foster a strong sense of ‘university culture.’**



39

ENTRIES IN 2018

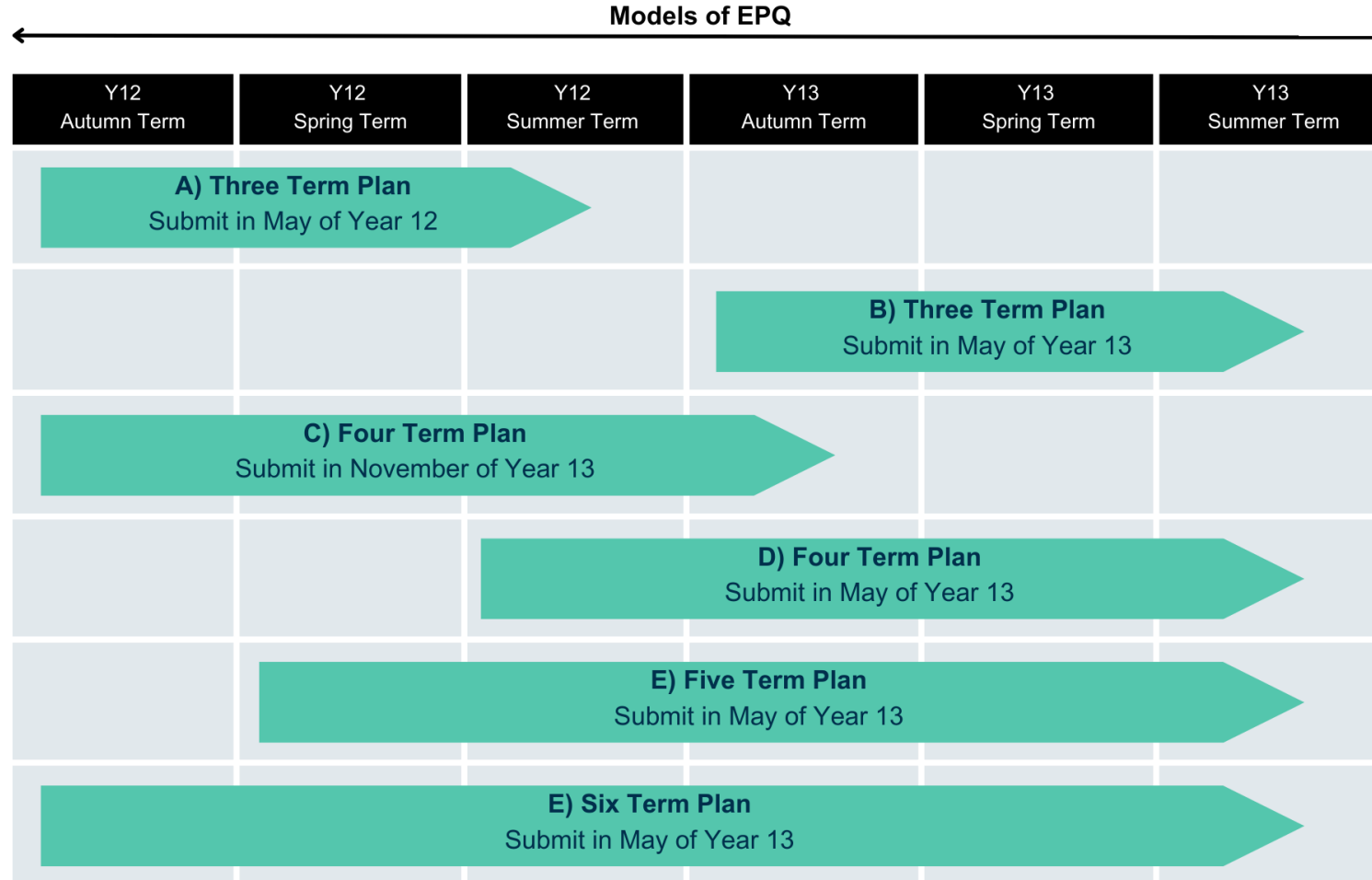
163

ENTRIES IN 2023

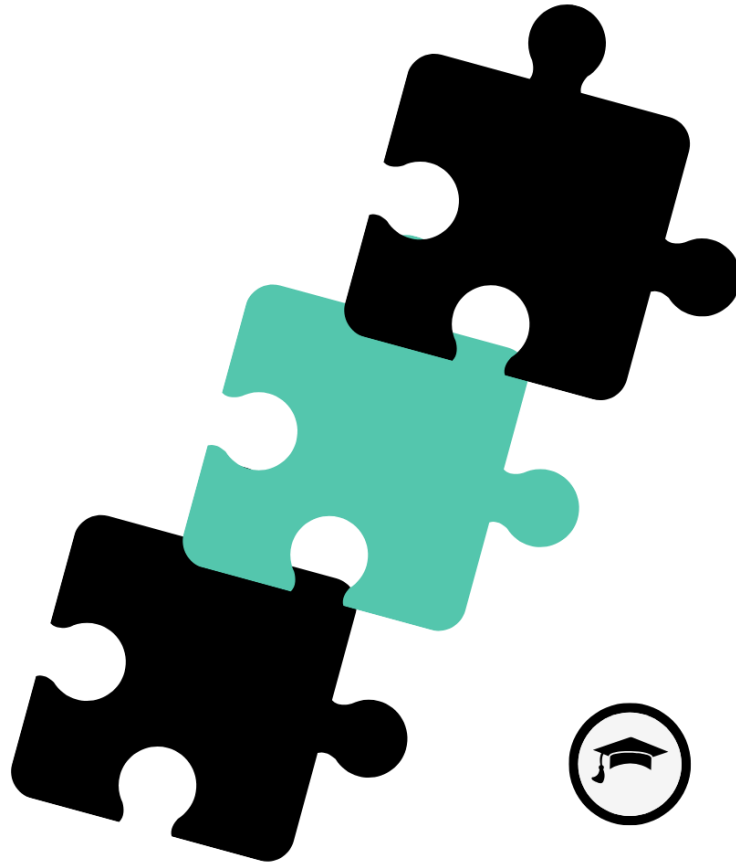
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ENTRIES IN 2024

Models of EPQ



University of Southampton's Approach – Learn with US Transition Programme



EPQ Students

- Increased participation in the EPQ programme
- Increased confidence and academic self-efficacy
- Improved perception of HE as accessible
- Improved Key Stage 5 attainment



EPQ Teachers

- Increased confidence for teachers delivering Extended Project Qualifications



Undergraduate Students

- Increased participation in HE from underrepresented groups
- Improved degree-level attainment

Part Two

Benefits of the EPQ



WHY THE EPQ IS IMPORTANT AT ASHTON SIXTH FORM



- **The development of academic skills to support both the transition to university** is highly valued and emphasised when launching the EPQ to students and parents/carers.
- Anecdotal evidence gathered (Alumni Students) highlights **the importance of academic skills** such as critical thinking, reading writing skills, referencing, researching, using a university library, and building confidence.
- Destination data for 2023 highlights how 93% of the EPQ cohort continue into higher education with the remaining 7% either taking a gap year or have successfully secured a degree apprenticeship. **46% of those moving into higher education are with Russell Group universities or those ranking within top 10 in the UK.**
- University offers add to the value by considering grade reductions if achieving EPQ A* to B grades, whilst this helps with the consistency of high grades achieved, **we do not encourage students to complete an EPQ based on grade reductions.**



93%

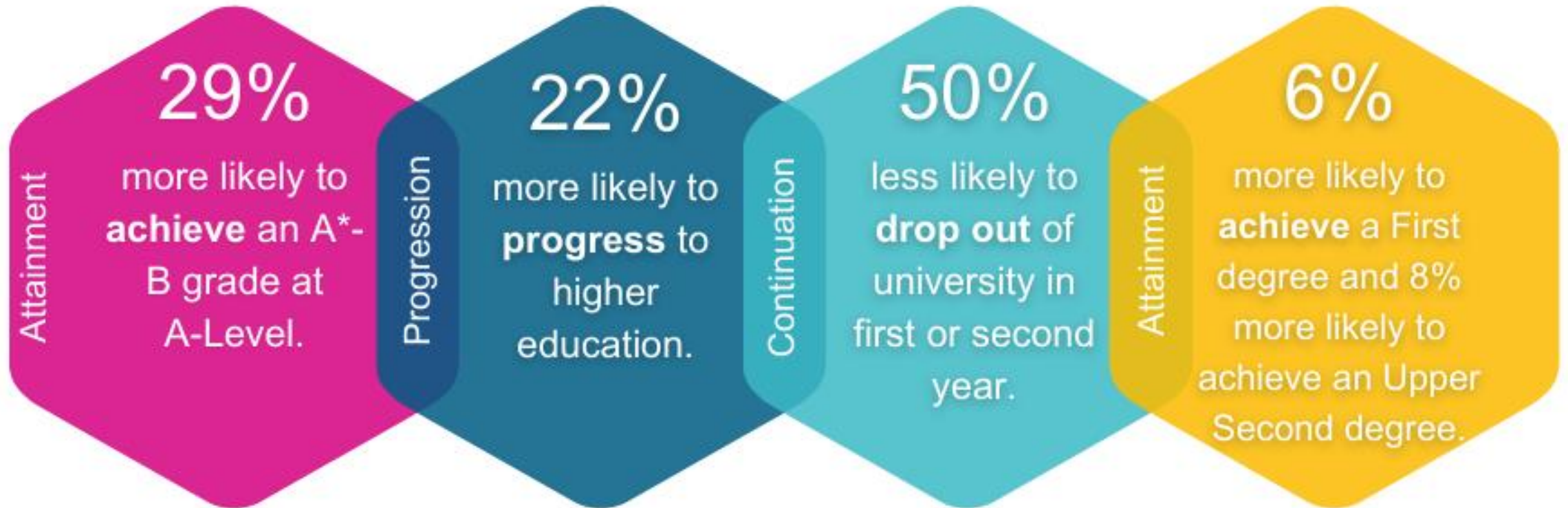
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The Value of the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)

When compared to students without an EPQ, students with an EPQ are...

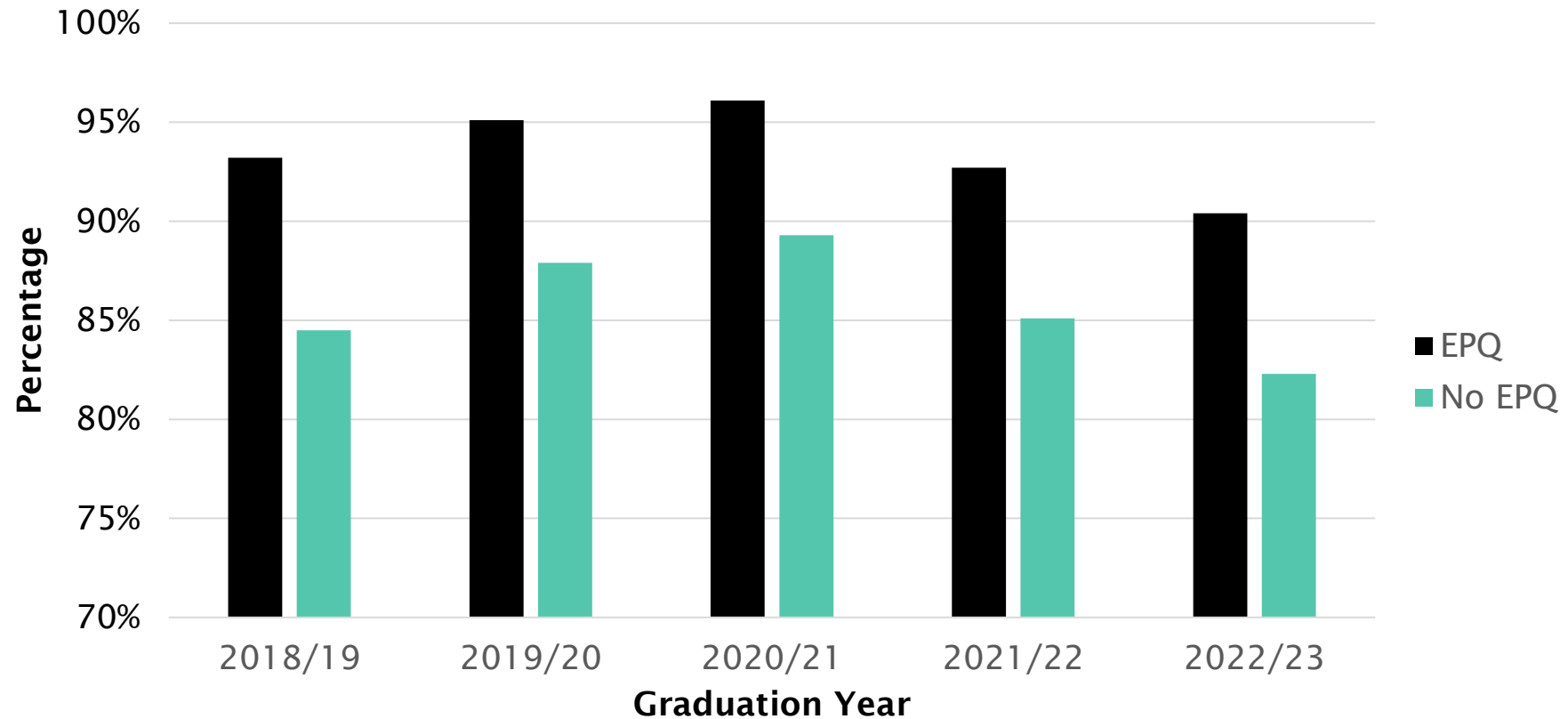


Jones (2015)

Gill (2022; 2024)

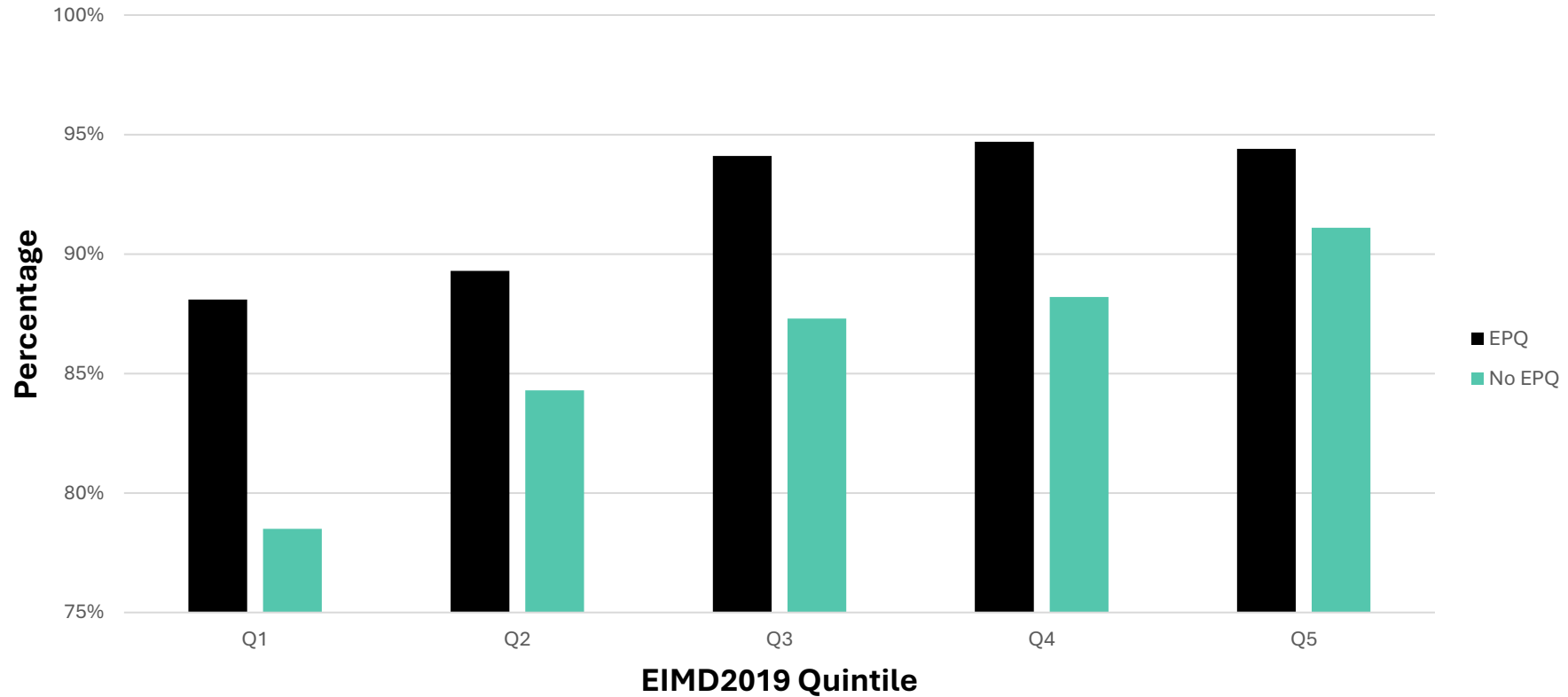
The Value of the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)

Percentage of EPQ Students vs Non-EPQ Students Achieving 2.1 or 1st Class Degree Outcomes



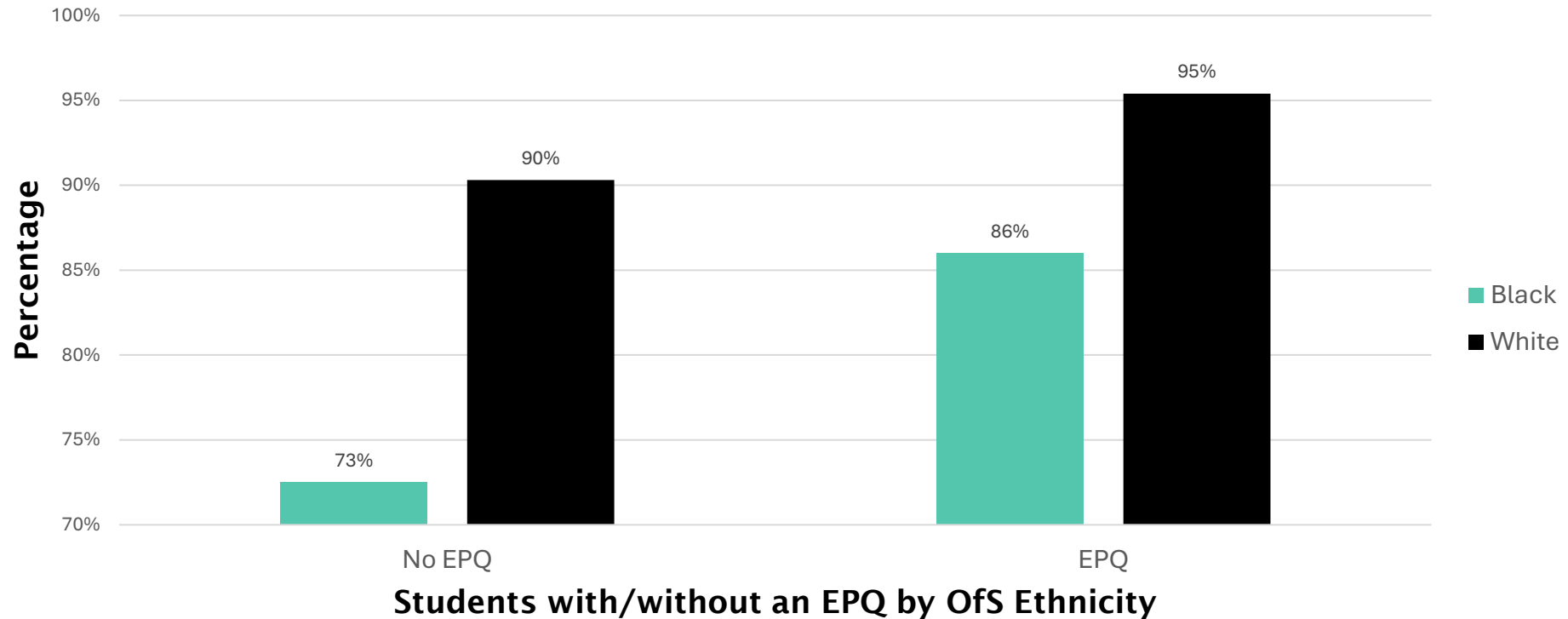
The Value of the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)

Percentage of EPQ Students vs Non-EPQ Students Achieving 2.1 or 1st Class Degree Outcomes by IMD Quintile Between 2018/19 – 2022/23



Narrowing the Awarding Gap

Percentage of Black and White Students Achieving 2.1 or 1st Class Degree Outcomes with/without an EPQ 2018/19 - 2022/2023



Admissions Offers at the University of Southampton

- The University of Southampton was the first university to introduce an alternative offer scheme for applicants who excel in the EPQ.
- Under this scheme, eligible applicants to subjects across our humanities, business, law, social sciences and related programmes may receive two offers – our usual offer plus an offer of an A in the EPQ and one grade lower in their A level subjects (e.g. AAA at A level; or AAB at A level AND an A grade in EPQ).
- This additional offer reflects our confidence in the EPQ as an excellent preparation for the kinds of independent study necessary for students to succeed at a research intensive university such as Southampton.



University of
Southampton

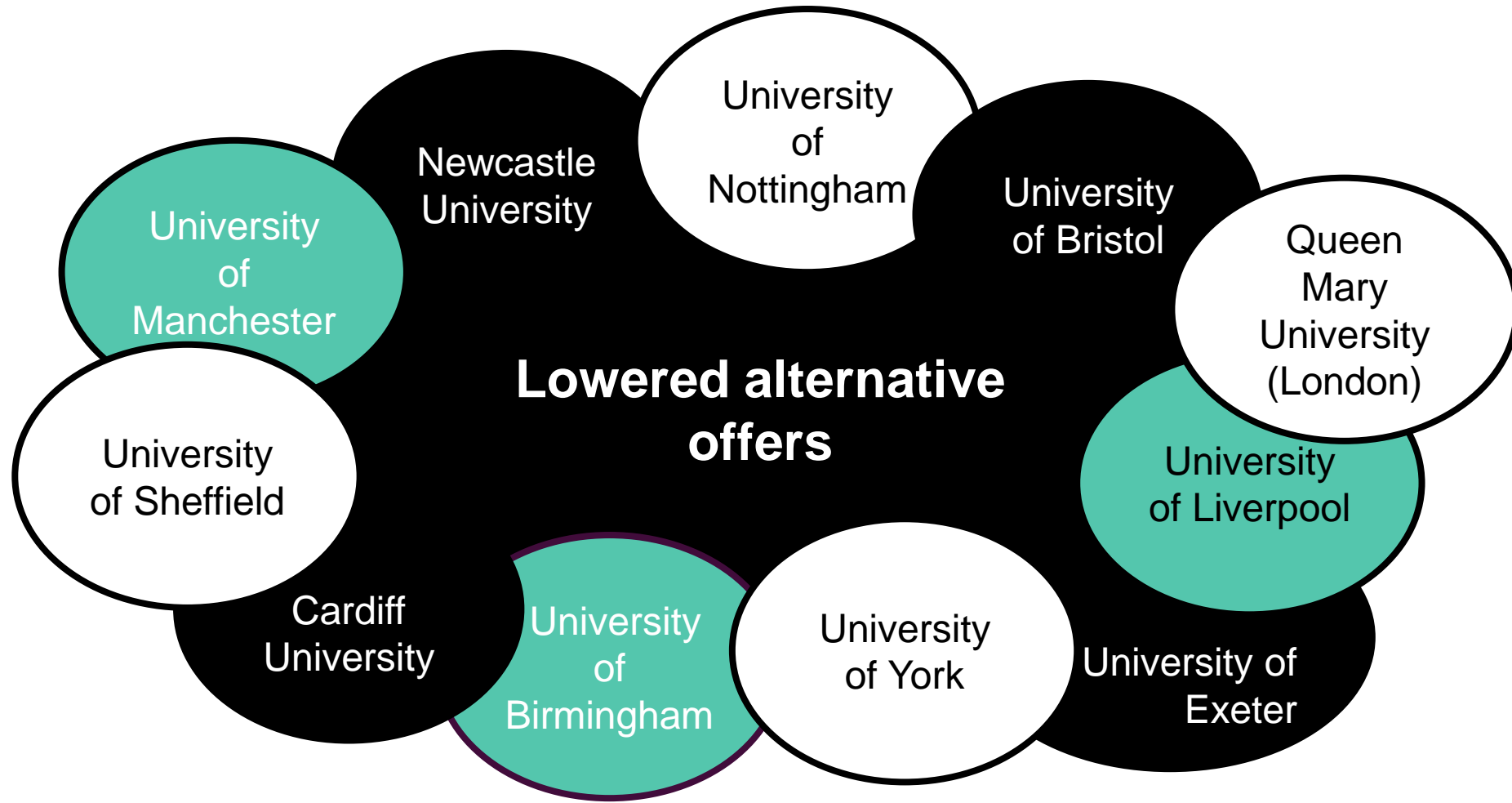


From the
RUSSELL
GROUP

The screenshot shows the 'Psychology (BSc)' course page on the University of Southampton Course Finder. At the top, the course name is displayed. Below it, a table provides key details: Award (Bachelor of Science), Typical Offer (AAA-AAB), Duration (3 years), Course Type (Full-time), Campus (Highfield), and UCAS Course code (C800). Three action buttons are visible: 'Apply for this course', 'Order a prospectus', and 'Open days and visits'. A left-hand navigation menu includes links for 'About this course', 'Entry requirements', 'Course structure', 'Modules', 'Learning and assessment', 'Careers', 'Fees, costs and funding', 'How to apply', and 'Related courses'. The 'Entry requirements' section is expanded, showing a green checkmark icon and the heading 'A-levels'. The text below states: 'AAB including one subject in Psychology, Mathematics or a Science subject, or AAA if not studying a required subject.' It also includes sections for 'A-levels additional information' (noting that offers typically exclude General Studies and Critical Thinking) and 'A-levels with Extended Project Qualification' (explaining that an EPQ can lead to a lower offer than the typical one).

University of Southampton's
[Course Finder](#)

Other Russell Group Universities and the EPQ



Part Three

Partnership Working



OUR REGULATORS



Ofsted

- The EPQ can **provide valuable evidence for Ofsted's graded judgements** based on the four key areas identified in Ofsted's [Education Inspection Framework](#) (Quality of Education, Behaviour and Attitudes, Personal Development, Leadership and management).
- Enables providers to demonstrate a clear vision, ambition, commitment, and **inclusive practices**.
- Offers high-quality learning opportunities that enhance students' skills **beyond the standard curriculum**, equipping them with the essential abilities needed for future education, employment, and training.
- **Bridges the skills gap** between the academic and research skills expected in HE and the capacity of the Level 3 curricula to develop these skills ([Thompson, 2023](#)).

Office for Students



- The University of Southampton's [Access and Participation Plan \(APP\)](#) for 2024 – 2028 commits to increasing applications, offers and enrolments of students from low socio-economic groups to the University of Southampton.

Target 1:

To raise enrolments of entrants from IMD Quintile 1 postcodes from 7% to 10.4% by 2027/28

Target 2:

To increase enrolments of entrants **eligible for Free School Meals** from 9% to 14.6% of the UG student population by 2027/28

Innovation at Ashton Sixth Form College

- Embedding a 'university culture' has enabled our EPQ students to access a wide range of activities:
- *EPQ Learner Conferences*: sessions covering a wide range of research related activities including why we research, the research question, critical thinking, reading and writing, making good use of statistical data and primary research, academic integrity and AI. Sessions delivered by academics from the universities of Huddersfield, Leeds and Southampton, as well as the college EPQ supervisor team.
- Research Workshop and Research Day with the University of Lancaster – developing research skills and making good use of a university library.
- 'Shut Up and Write' and 'Writing Café' weekly sessions provide opportunities to develop academic writing skills, time management, decision making, prioritising work load, communication skills, etc.
- *Master Classes* cover in demand topics where there is a need to provide additional guidance, such as academic writing, referencing using tools such as APA 7.

Note: We recognise and value the support from universities such as the University of Southampton, Leeds, Lancaster and Huddersfield. Their help and support for the activities we run provide our students with outstanding advice and guidance.



SUMMARY

- The EPQ is a **Level 3 qualification** that allows students to explore a topic of personal interest through independent research.
- Ashton Sixth Form provides a **successful example** of how the EPQ has been embedded within a large sixth form college, demonstrating how our partnership strengthens their programme to equip students with the skills needed to **access and succeed in Higher Education**.
- The EPQ can play a significant role in **promoting social mobility** and can benefit students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Emphasising the **development of key academic skills** is essential when promoting the EPQ, rather than focusing solely on the potential for lower university entry requirements.
- The structure and delivery of the EPQ **should be tailored to fit the specific needs and context of each school**.



EPQ TEACHERS' CONFERENCE 2025

The University of Southampton and the University of Leeds are excited to be partnering again to deliver a free one-day EPQ Teachers' Conference on **Thursday 19th June 2025**.

This conference is aimed at practitioners from state schools/colleges seeking to develop and enhance their project qualification programmes.

This annual event provides a space for teachers and other professionals to share their experiences and expertise.

This conference and its programme will also take place at the University of Leeds on Friday 4th July 2025.



Scan the QR code to book your free
place

Your Questions

Thanks for listening and engaging!



REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

Gill, T. (2022) Are students who take the Extended Project Qualification better prepared for higher education?, *Cambridge University Press & Assessment*, pp. 1-55.

[Gill, T. \(2024\) 'The extended project qualification in England: does it provide good preparation for higher education?', *Oxford Review of Education*, pp.1-21.](#)

Joint Council for Qualifications. (2024) *Examination results*. Available at: <https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/> (Accessed 24 January, 2024).

Jones, B. (2015) *Does the Extended Project Qualification enhance students' GCE A-level performance?* Available at: [https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/content/research/CERP_TR_BEJ_21052015.pdf?download=1#:~:text=Those%20results%20indicate%20that%2C%20after,B\)%20by%2029%20per%20cent](https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/content/research/CERP_TR_BEJ_21052015.pdf?download=1#:~:text=Those%20results%20indicate%20that%2C%20after,B)%20by%2029%20per%20cent) (Accessed 24 January, 2024).

Thompson, E. (2023) 'Preparing sixth-form students for the transition into higher education: developing key research skills through the EPQ', *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education* 29(1), pp. 1-11.

Thompson, E., Yuskaitis, V. and Lueddeke, K. (2024) '[Supporting widening access, continuation and success: the positive impact of the Extended Project Qualification \(EPQ\)](#)', *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* 26(1), pp. 166-182.



Links

- [Ashton Sixth Form College's website](#)
- [University of Southampton's Learn with US Transition Programme's website](#)
- [University of Southampton's Access and Participation Plan](#)

Blogs:

- [How the EPQ drives social mobility and university success](#)
- [Students taking an EPQ have better higher education outcomes \(Gill, 2023\)](#)
- [Project Qualifications; The Benefits and Barriers \(Osler, 2023\)](#)
- [What is an EPQ and why should I do one? \(Romana, 2024\)](#)