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Title: **The extended project qualification (EPQ) – opportunities for developing e-learning solutions for effective transition**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Develop an understanding of the structure , learning outcomes of, and skills assessed in, the EPQ
- Understand the implications of the EPQ for transition to HE and its potential for academic skills development in pre-entry students
- Consider how HEIs (or employers) can develop and capitalise on these skills
- Identify the role Universities can play in supporting the EPQ and thus, pedagogies for transition through the use of technology to engage students in their learning development
- Consider how engaging pre-entry staff and Universities can develop joined-up approaches, using e-learning technologies, to take mutual responsibility for skills development

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

There is a breadth of literature identifying the factors that lead to non-progression, and once in HE, to non-completion (Aynsley & Jacklin, 2009; Childs & Spencer, 2002; Crabtree, Roberts & Tyler, 2007; Tinto, 1993; Yorke, 2000). Increasingly, however, more attention is paid to the correlation between effective preparation pre-entry to retention and progression rates in HE (Currant & Keenan, 2009; Yorke, 2000).

HEIs should take interest in the Extended Project Qualification and its requirement for "persistence...and research skills to explore a subject independently and in real depth" (DfES, 2005, p. 6). Increasing numbers are participating with 5,094 awarded in 2009 and 15,958 in 2010 (Source: JCQ). An AS-level equivalent at Level three (16-19 year olds), students accrue UCAS points whilst autonomously exploring an area of interest, positioning themselves as the 'expert'. They are assessed on the basis of:

- A production log
- Extended piece of work
- Presentation

A number of exam boards operate EPQs; the main providers being AQA, EdExcel and OCR (see references).

The EPQ poses problems for Post-16 institutions in terms of supporting, resourcing and assessing outside of the existing curriculum. Here arises an opportunity for HE to invest in academic skills development and transition pedagogy, through engagement with school colleagues and students; thus, influencing the development of pre-HE skills.

The University of Wolverhampton has worked with the EPQ since its emergence, developing practice towards a model of using e-technology to support staff and students. We will explore innovative approaches to facilitating skills development and reflection, effective support models and staff collaboration, using e-portfolios (PebblePad), with vodcasts, embedded activities and blogs, to provide a scaffolded platform for learning, recording and reflecting. Student e-portfolios are 'shared' with supervisors for monitoring and support.
EPQ students use web-based collections to support their research, thus familiarising themselves practically with both modes and content of university-based study.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Presentation of a discussion paper (25 minutes) focussed on effective strategies for supporting the EPQ based on experience from the University of Wolverhampton's partnerships to support academic skills development. This will include: approaches using e-technologies, student and staff testimonies and the implications for HEIs. In the context of the increasing marketisation of Higher Education and a plethora of research focusing on skills deficits of HE entrants, the presenters will argue a case for Universities using innovative collaborative approaches to pre-entry skills development. These approaches include: supporting resource access, developing student independent learning capacities, CPD and highlighting of transitional skills.

Discussion (20 minutes) including:

- Who is responsible for the development of independent learning skills and critical enquiry?
- How can HE effectively engage for benefit to transition and retention?
- What are the benefits and pitfalls of using e-technologies for academic skills development with pre-entry students? How might this inform e-technologies and skills development in the Year 1 curriculum?

Given the presenters' assertion that HE should be involved in the EPQ, discussion will focus on the identification of how this work can be embedded into institutional practice and possibly considered in strategy, particularly in the areas of:

- Admissions & the transition into HE between the application and enrolment phases
- Implications for Learning & Teaching
- Implications for pedagogy, including the use of e-technology and virtual learning environments to scaffold and further develop academic skills across a broad institutional curriculum

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