The Extended Project

Some of the students in year 11 might want to make a start with or even complete an Extended Project during the current lockdown. This is a very good idea and should be achievable.

The Extended Project is quite different from all other A-level subjects because the student is fully in control. It is independent work, so the student chooses the topic and type of project but will be supported by their teacher, receiving feedback and comments on the work as it progresses, as well as guidance on how to research, use footnotes, compile a bibliography and assess sources.

At The Henley College, the Edexcel specification for the Extended Project is used and as a college student you would have 2 lessons per week (2x 1 hour) on your time table for this with a teacher to guide you through the process.

There are four different project types to choose from:

1. Dissertation
2. Artefact
3. Performance
4. Investigation

Dissertation

This is very much like a piece of coursework, only longer. You choose your topic (it could be anything you are interesting in) and then formulate a question that can be answered by arguing for and against. For example: Has mountain biking changed in last 30 years? Should trial by jury be abolished? Will Brexit be good for the UK?

It is important that you present arguments for and against, examined and looked at in detail, and then arrive at a clear, well considered conclusion. You need to have a topic that can be researched, i.e. where information for both sides is available. You dissertation will be structured into different (compulsory) sections: Introduction, Literature Review, Discussion, Conclusion, Bibliography, Abstract.

Artefact

Those who have done Art as a GCSE subject might recognise some similarities between the Art coursework and the Artefact project. Artefact in the context of the Extended Project means anything that can be held or touched, so it could be a painting, drawing, photography, wood work, pottery, cookery, metal work, textiles, etc. Also, a short story, a collection of poems or a video count as Artefacts. In addition, anything virtual (website, computer game, etc.) is an Artefact.

You choose what you want to make, then have a look at what others have done that is similar and analyse their work. You will need to demonstrate how you develop your own Artefact idea (from first sketches to finished product), how you have refined and improved it as well as actually making the thing.
You need to be careful not to be too ambitious, remember what tools and equipment you have readily available, especially now in the lockdown scenario where you can’t access workshops or go out and buy material.

Performance

This involves staging a performance (could be music, dance, ballet, theatre). It is probably not feasible in the current situation because you would need to have a live audience. You start by deciding what you want to perform (cover version of a song, or several songs for example). You will then research artists who have performed this piece and analyse how they have done it. You will need to work out how you are going to do it, what you found inspiring in others and how to include your own ideas. Following on from this, you would rehearse your performance and analyse it. Again, you need to show how you refined your performance until you are happy with it and can perform it in front of an audience. You would need to be aware of the audience’s reaction. A good idea is to give them a questionnaire to complete so that you have evidence of how your effort was received.

Investigation

An investigation is a science based project. You choose a question to research and then develop and carry out an experiment to prove a hypothesis. This could be biology, chemistry or physics based, could relate to sport science but could also be social science or psychology. Again, be careful, this project type might be rather difficult to complete during the lockdown when you have no access to laboratories or equipment. For an Investigation you also need very good Maths because you are collecting and analysing data. At The Henley College, usually only students who are doing Maths A-level or Further Maths are completing investigations.

If you are interested in a science or psychology topic it would be best to write it as a dissertation. You could always conduct a bit of primary research in the form of an online survey (which would be relevant for a social science topic, for example finding out attitudes towards something) or some simple experiments that you can do at home.

If you are now interested in completing an Extended Project you will first need to decide on the type of project (Dissertation, Artefact, Performance, Investigation). Next, you will have to choose your specific topic. Pick something you are really interested in (not something that sounds good or complicated). It could relate to your A-Level subjects you are going to study in September, it could be something to do with your future career or intended university course, but equally it could refer to a hobby or interest. Remember, you need to find your topic fascinating because will deal with it for a number of weeks (or even months), so if you are not fully behind in you will find working on your project not enjoyable.

Once you have settled on your topic, do some research: what have others written about it (or for Artefacts: what have others done). Note the details of your sources so that you can find them again. If it turns out, that there is no or very limited information about your topic, you might need to change what you are planning to do.
The Assessment

A few remarks about the assessment of your project. It is not only the final piece, i.e. the completed discussion or piece of art that is marked. You also gain credit for how you manage your time, your research, etc. The Extended Project is not just a final product but a process, and is marked as such.

A01: Manage (your project plan, time management, etc.) 9 marks
A02: Use Resources (how you conduct your research how detailed you are) 12 marks
A03: Develop and realise (the actual discussion you Write, or the thing you make) 24 marks
A04: Review (a self-critical look at your work) 9 marks

Total: 54 marks

Remember, the Extended Project is highly regarded by universities (especially Russell group) and many will reduce the entry requirements for those who have completed a project. Even those that do not explicitly credit the project will still take it into consideration when choosing between applicants. A student who has completed an Extended Project has demonstrated that they can work independently, can research and analyse, is self-critical and has time management skills and staying-power. All these are qualities universities value in their future students.