

**University of Cambridge Faculty of Education
Practitioner Professional Development**

Programme Specification

Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Research

1. Awarding Body	University of Cambridge
2. Teaching Institution	University of Cambridge
3. Accreditation Details	65 Masters Level credits
4. Name of Final Award	PCER
5. Programme Title	Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Research
6. UCAS Code	None
7. Benchmark Statement(s)	Education
8. Qualifications Framework Level	Level 7
9a. Date of Revision	April 2009
9b. Last Reviewed	September 2007

Aims of the Programme

The Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Research (PCER) provides teachers and others with the opportunity to gain a qualification based on a systematic and sustained investigation. Work submitted for the Postgraduate Certificate in Education Research (PCER) will focus on specific issues or practical problems arising out of professional concerns. The PCER provides continuing professional development and helps students prepare for potential career advancement. Students may set out to use the PCER to help address a particular issue, arising out of a review or appraisal, in their own professional development or, drawing upon team or institutional targets, in the development of their school, college or service. Students are encouraged to make these links and to create productive relationships between their own practice and proposed research. A PCER may be part of the route to a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Studies and ultimately to a Masters degree.

Structure of the PCER

Students undertaking a PCER will be allocated a supervisor from the Faculty of Education with expertise in the intended field. Work for the Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Research is based in systematic, sustained and reflective practitioner research, undertaken by the student over a significant period of time (usually two terms or a year). The enquiry may be largely empirical or it may be based substantially on reading, but it should entail both the application of ideas from literature as well as data gathering and analysis. A PCER involves systematic and sustained use of research methods. This may take a number of forms, including:

- negotiation of an individual investigation in which the student has designed, implemented and critically reflected upon a research project linked to their own practice or the practice of colleagues..
- participation in a substantial research project which has enabled the use of methods of enquiry, contribution to the analysis of data and reflection upon the findings and methodological issues;

- collaboration with colleagues in a shared research project which has enabled contributions to be made to research design and evaluation processes, as well as to the gathering and interpretation of data;

Students usually work individually though it is also possible to work collaboratively with one or two colleagues. Students are encouraged to consider the possibility of collaborative enquiry, although in the final report, it will be necessary for assessors to distinguish between work that has been done collaboratively and individual contributions. In deciding to pursue a collaborative approach therefore students are expected to anticipate:

- the roles that each of the participants will have in the proposed research;
- the aspects which will entail shared work;
- the aspects for which the student will have individual responsibility.

The PCER involves a substantial amount of sustained research or enquiry work (equivalent to at least 60 hours). While it is acknowledged that some of this time will overlap with professional duties, students will need to create space to accommodate the PCER in their professional and personal life. Students are therefore expected to consider:

- the time commitment they are able to make available to this work;
- any reduction in workload or responsibilities negotiated with colleagues or senior managers in order to enable the work to be undertaken.

A Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Research (PCER) should always be carefully planned, focused on a clear professional purpose and rigorous in terms of analysis and review.

Programme Outcomes

Knowledge and Understanding

Completing a PCER will lead to:

- the development of understanding of key concepts and issues within the fields studied;
- knowledge of those fields of study and familiarity with a range of relevant literature;
- a developing understanding and critical awareness of research methods and methodological issues.

Skills and other attributes

Work at the level of an PCER should develop *research and analytical skills* including:

- engagement in critical reflection both in relation to the substantive topic and the research methods used;
- application of theoretical perspectives to reflection on practice;
- critical engagement with relevant literature;
- ability to structure information so that it is intelligible to a reader who has no knowledge of the research work undertaken.

The PCER will involve the use of *skills in presentation* including:

- the use of clear and accurate English, which should also conform to the usual academic protocols;
- the use of an appropriate range of presentational devices, e.g. tables, figures and appendices;

- the ordering, sequencing and labeling of ideas made coherent by the provision of an explanatory commentary within the report.

Studying for the PCER may also entail the deployment of other *transferable skills*, for example:

- skills in planning and time management;
- written and verbal communication skills;
- skills in evaluating evidence of impact upon professional learning, and upon the student's own practice or the practice of colleagues.

It is expected that there will be evidence of *impact upon professional learning* and upon the practice of the individual or the practice of colleagues. Evidence of impact will be evaluated against the stated aims and intentions for the research. Evidence of impact may take a variety of forms, including evidence of:

- developments in pupils' and students' learning;
- changes in staff practices;

Recruitment and Admissions

The PCER can be taken as a free-standing qualification for participants wishing to engage in a discrete area of enquiry. The PCER can also be used as a route to the completion of an Advance Diploma in Educational Studies (ADES). In some circumstances, the PCER and the ADES may be used as an introduction to study for higher degrees.

Prospective students must make a coherent proposal in order to register for an PCER.

The proposal should make clear:

- the links between the proposed PCER and any existing development work, evaluation, enquiry or research project with which the student is involved;
- any negotiations undertaken with colleagues and/or managers about the proposed research and their roles in it as participants, facilitators, mentors or supporters.

Proposals must demonstrate a capacity either:

- to design, implement, analyse, report and reflect upon an individually-designed research project or;
- to participate actively and reflectively in a research project undertaken collaboratively or led by others.

The proposal should include:

- reference to a capacity for and intentions in relation to systematic review of published material relevant to the project.

Applications for the Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Research (PCER) are made via the PPD office at the Faculty of Education (01223 -767725) or by following the procedure outlined on the Faculty's website:

<http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/ptpd/ppdapp.html>

Teaching and Learning Methods

PCER students work with a supervisor who will guide and support the decisions made about methodology. Supervision for the PCER does not, however, offer a course or systematic training in research methods. Students should therefore have some prior experience of, or training in, methods of educational research or enquiry and use research or enquiry methods with which they feel confident.

The PCER normally entitles candidates to six hours of supervision.

The Course Coordinator and PPD Manager are available to give advice and to support students. Administrative issues are dealt with by the PPD team Course Administrators.

Assessment

On completion of the research a report of between 10,000 and 12,000 words in length, should be submitted by the candidate.

Work for the PCER should include all of the following elements:

- a clear statement of professional purpose in undertaking the research;
- a critical review of the literature relating to the research;
- a rationale for the selection of research methods used and a reflective discussion about the practical application of those methods in the project;
- a presentation of the research findings including a reflective analysis of issues arising;
- ideas for further research or future development, including evidence of impact on professional learning.

Criteria for a pass

All PCER assignments are double marked by people other than the supervisor. PCER reports will be judged in relation to the following criteria. Comments from markers will indicate the strengths as well as limitations of the work and also provide guidance to assist candidates who might wish to progress onto a Masters degree.

The best PCER reports will provide evidence of all of the following:

- Impact upon professional development and practice
 - undertaking research that is focused on resolving issues and solving problems in relation to professional practice and/or policy-making in own work setting
 - providing evidence of impact of the research on the development of own professional learning and/or skills
 - discussing implications of research for the future development of professional practices and/or policy-making in own work setting
 - showing a commitment to ongoing professional development through practitioner research.
- Development of a research project
 - engaging in sustained practitioner research which is carefully planned and well-managed
 - making appropriate, accurate and creative use of research methods
 - evaluating and reflecting upon the methodological decisions taken

- critically analysing evidence collected and making sound judgements about the scope, significance and implications of findings
- Development of knowledge, skills and critical understanding
 - critically reflecting on a professional problem or concern
 - demonstrating a familiarity with a range of relevant literature relating to the substantive area of the research, including an understanding of key concepts, arguments and assumptions
 - developing a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights relating to the relevant academic discipline, field of study and/or professional practice.
 - developing a critical awareness of issues relating to research methods and methodologies.
- Structure and organisation
 - presenting a report which is logically structured and well organised
 - developing a coherent argument which addresses complex issues in a systematic and creative way
 - locating the writer biographically where appropriate.
- Presentation
 - communicating clearly and writing in a lucid and accurate manner
 - conforming to expected conventions of layout and presentation, including an accurate and full reference list
 - using a range of presentational devices appropriately (e.g. tables, bullet points, photographs, etc).

Feedback provided for PCER participants

Final comments provided by markers in relation to PCER submissions provide both summative and formative elements and indicate:

- the strengths of the work;
- areas in which future work could be improved;
- whether the work achieves a 'distinction', 'pass' or 'fail' against PCER assessment criteria.

Grading

PCERs may be assessed as distinction, pass or fail:

- Distinction

The report satisfies most of the assessment criteria clearly and unambiguously. Candidates who are awarded a 'distinction' are eligible to apply to join Year 2 of the Masters degree course (subject to successful interview). A distinction can only be awarded if the marker is confident that the report is of a sufficiently high standard to contribute towards the Year 1 assessments of the Masters degree.

- Pass

The report satisfies many of the assessment criteria, sufficiently well for the award of an PCER. There is evidence that work in relationship to some of the criteria could have been further developed. Candidates who are awarded a 'pass' may apply to join the Masters degree course, but they would be expected to complete both Years 1 and 2 (subject to successful interview).

- Fail

The report falls short of a pass standard in relationship to a substantial proportion of the assessment criteria.

Quality Assurance

The high quality of the PCER is supported by the following:

- The involvement of research active Faculty staff in supervising or overseeing the supervision of students;
- Double marking of the assignment;
- A formal evaluation of students' experience is conducted at the end of the year, and issues arising are considered within the Faculty of Education by the Practitioner Professional Development (PPD) Management Group, the Standing Committee for PPD and the Faculty Board with a view to enhancing the programme for the future.
- overview of courses and course outcomes by the PPD manager;
- Internal Examiners' moderation of assignments from a rotating representative sample of courses;
- External Examiner evidence, verbal and in written reports.