

## **POSTGRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH**

### Guidance on preparing a proposal

Work for the Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Research (PCER) should always be based in systematic and sustained investigation. Your proposal should therefore demonstrate your capacity either:

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

Work submitted for the PCER should focus on a specific issue or practical problem arising out of professional concerns. Your proposal should therefore set out:

- the issue, concern or problem you mean to explore;
- the precise focus of your enquiry;
- any research questions you are already drafting (although you may use the initial stages of your PCER to further develop and refine these questions).

While your PCER should entail sustained research and enquiry leading to a substantial report of 10-12,000 words, you should beware of planning too ambitious a project. Successful projects will be highly focused with carefully defined limits in terms of research boundaries and timescales. Your proposal should therefore set out:

- the scope of your enquiry;
- a projected timeline for your research, including time for interpretation, analysis and writing up.

Although you may work alone on a topic of particular concern to you, work towards a PCER will normally be greatly enhanced if you can secure the active support of colleagues and senior managers for your project. You may, for example, already be working with colleagues on a problem, a development target, an evaluation or a formal research project. You may be able to secure the support of a colleague or senior manager as a critical friend or mentor. You may set out to use the PCER to help you to address a particular issue, arising out of review or appraisal, in your own professional development or, drawing upon team or institutional targets, in the development of your school, college or service. We would encourage you to make these links and to create productive relationships between your practice and your proposed research. Your proposal should therefore make clear:

- the links between your proposed PCER and any existing development work, evaluation, enquiry or research project with which you are involved;
- any negotiations you have undertaken with your colleagues and/or managers about your proposed research and their roles in it as participants, facilitators, mentors or supporters (you can attach letters of support to your proposal along with copies of extracts from other relevant documentation).

You may work individually towards your PCER or work collaboratively with one or two colleagues. We would encourage you to consider the possibility of collaborative enquiry, although, in your final report, it will be important for assessors to distinguish between work that has been done collaboratively and individual contributions. If you decide to pursue a collaborative approach, your proposal(s) should therefore anticipate:

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

The PCER is meant to involve you in a substantial amount of sustained research or enquiry work (equivalent to at least 60 hours). While we acknowledge that some of this time will overlap with your regular professional duties (indeed, we would encourage you to ensure that this is the case), you will need to create space to accommodate the PCER in your professional and personal life. Your proposal should therefore show

- the time commitment you are able to make to this work;
- any non-contact time or cover available to help you to carry out and complete your research;
- any reduction in workload or responsibilities you have negotiated with colleagues or senior managers in order to enable you to undertake this work (you can attach supporting documentation to your proposal).

The PCER should involve you in systematic research or enquiry and your final report should contain a brief justification for the approach taken and a reflective and evaluative account of the methods you used. You will be able to refine your decisions about methods in discussion with your supervisor but you should have given some thought to this in advance. Your proposal should therefore specify:

- the approach you intend to take your research and the methods you intend to use.

As a PCER student, you will work with a supervisor who will guide and support the decisions you make about methodology. The PCER does NOT, however, offer a course or systematic training in research methods. Your proposal should therefore clarify;

- your prior experience of, or training in, methods of educational research or enquiry;
- the research or enquiry methods you feel confident about using;
- the areas in which you feel you will need some support or guidance.

In your PCER, you will be expected to take account of the ethical issues arising from research or enquiry work that entails the participation or involvement of others, for example, colleagues, other professionals, parents, pupils or students. Guidance on the ethical dimension will be provided through supervision but your proposals should give:

- a preliminary review of any ethical dilemmas you can anticipate.

A PCER report should contain evidence of the development of your knowledge and understanding of key concepts and issues within the fields you have studied, usually demonstrated partly through your familiarity with a range of relevant literature. Your proposal should therefore include:

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

Your PCER should focus on impact, upon your own professional learning and upon your own practice or the practice of colleagues, and on the implications of your work for future practice, making recommendations for action arising from your analysis. Your proposal should therefore describe:

- the impact that you intend your work to have;
- any reporting, dissemination or development processes that you can foresee.