



The Open  
University

# FACILITATING & MAINTAINING RESEARCH ACCESS IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Personal Experiences and Reflections from the  
Professional and Digital Learning (PDL) Team

 [@CALRGatOU](https://twitter.com/CALRGatOU)

**CALRG**  
Computers and Learning Research Group



# Introduction – About PDL

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- The Professional and Digital Learning programme is reimagining professional and organisational learning in an era characterised by uncertainty and rapid change.
- We work with partners in diverse organisations - NGOs, multinationals, professional bodies and public organisations – to address contemporary challenges faced by society.
- The Professional and Digital Learning (PDL) group aims to convene academics whose research focuses on technology enhanced workplace learning, to encourage collaboration and to capitalise on the collective knowledge of the group to advance professional learning research.



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PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND REFLECTIONS OF PDL  
TEAM MEMBERS

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# Research Access in NGOs – Dr. Jude Fransman

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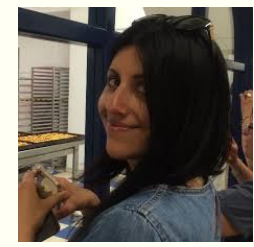
## Experiences / Challenges

- Effective collaboration is based on **long-term relationships** grounded in trust and shared vision/ways of working rather than short term funding opportunities.
- Should access be negotiated via **formal institutional channels or through individuals** ? Maybe a bit of both.
- Research Access relationships are more likely to succeed where the **partners** have some degree of **ownership** in the research.
- Negotiating the **reporting of sensitive/critical findings** is more tricky. Where there are multiple research sites, this can be aggregated/generalized to avoid finger-pointing

## Reflections / Strategies Employed

- **Organise agenda-setting/research-development** meetings with potential partners/collaborators outside of formally funded research activities.
- Ensure that participants have a **good prior understanding** of the nature of undertaken research.
- **‘Multimodal participatory journaling’** method to get access to in-depth day-to-day practices of NGO practitioners.
- **Offer incentive for participation** – e.g. : a tailored report focusing on the specific needs prioritized in the initial collaboration meetings. This caters to the ‘impact agenda’ of many funders.

# Research Access in Schools and Museums - Dr. Koula Charitonos



## Experience / Challenges

- **Schools** are among the most challenging settings to get access to: DBS process, increased skepticism stemming from concerns regarding use of technology (i.e. privacy, bullying).
- **Museums** more willing to support and provide access to academics. They are (almost) always in need of researchers to do evaluation of projects
- **Trust is a critical factor** - in any partnership work building trust entails an investment of time and energy.
- **Establish common understanding** / shared language - be explicit about the **‘What’**, **‘Why’**, and **‘How’** of your research.
- **Element of ownership** among stakeholders is essential for a **win-win situation**.

## Reflections / Strategies Employed

- **Academics agendas** - academics tend to serve their own agendas and work within funding cycles. What happens when we leave the setting?
- Transitions **between roles**: facilitator, participant, observer - important to be **open-minded** in the setting, **adapt** and **adjust**.
- **Look for ‘gatekeepers’**: personal networks, OU alliance with schools, academics previously involved with work in that school.
- **Plan in advance** - schools do their year planning in early summer, museums plan exhibitions over several years.
- Offer to **co-write papers**, **co-present**, co-design, invite them to come along to conferences, share findings with them.
- **“In the wild” is rewarding - context is everything**



# Research Access in Finance Sector – Vasudha Chaudhari



## Experience / Challenges

- Finance is a complex and dynamic sector with **stringent work ethics** and **privacy policies**. Hence, gaining entry into finance organisations required adherence to strict protocols.
- **Biggest Challenge** – Translating niche **practice problems into generalisable research questions**, and then rendering the **research findings into tacit outputs** customised to the financial institutions.

## Reflections / Strategies Employed

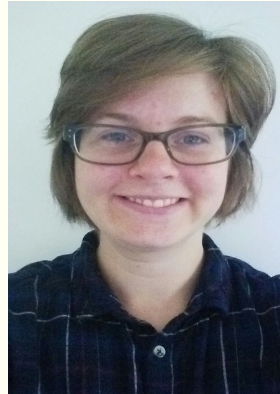
- **Fostering good rapport** with the organisational gatekeepers at the outset of research.
- **Clear Research Plan** outlining data collection methods, time commitment required from the professionals, and list of tangible outputs from the research.
- As time is of the essence in finance sector, **strong interpersonal** and **communication skills** are of utmost importance in order to maintain research access
- **LinkedIn** and **Twitter**: Building and Maintaining your digital research profile on social media.



# Personal Accounts of access challenges in different sectors

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Research in the Energy Sector –  
Victoria Murphy



[https://youtu.be/-\\_1PlNtzzgk](https://youtu.be/-_1PlNtzzgk)

 [@ehimevicky](https://twitter.com/ehimevicky)

Researching MOOC Educators –  
Tina Papathoma



<https://goo.gl/3WoxJK>

 [@aktinaki](https://twitter.com/aktinaki)

# Relevant skills for researchers – Prof Allison Littlejohn

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- Networking** - *Continually building links* with ‘gatekeepers’ from partner organisations.
- Listening** - *Align RQs with the needs* of the organisation or sector to maximise impact.
- Clarity** - *Communicate ‘bilingually’* the why, what, where and how of the data gathering.
- Persistence** - Gatekeepers’ priorities can change, so *prepare to be agile*.
- Planning** - *Prepare for the unknown* (Plan ‘B’). Companies can ‘drop’ research without warning.
- Rigour** - Focus on *one project with high impact outputs*, rather than a series of small studies.
- Outputs** - Self-assess your progress in terms of *outputs*, not activity.
- Originality** - Don’t tinker. Be bold. *Shake the field*.



## Assess your approach

Answer honestly. Score from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

1. Networking - I continually build links with partner organisations.
2. Listening - I align RQs with the needs of others.
3. Clarity - I communicate by publishing in different formats.
4. Persistence - I am prepared to be agile.
5. Planning/ Persistence - My research plan has a risk assessment and Plan B.
6. Rigour - I focus on one project with high impact outputs, rather than a series of small studies.
7. Outputs - I have regular high-quality outputs, such as peer-reviewed journal publications.
8. Originality - My research is original to an extent that it will shake the field.

Thank You!

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