Preparing for the Doctorate in Education (EdD)

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Section 1: Welcome

The Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology (CREET) at the Open University is one of the largest educational research units in the UK. Over the last few years our professional doctorate programme, the Doctorate in Education (EdD), has grown substantially and we aim to encourage more to join our three and a half year doctoral programme. Since we started in 1997, some 28 students a year have achieved doctorates and many are now using this research training to make significant contributions to educational development both here and abroad. It is noticeable that in recent years many more colleagues working in educational fields are choosing to tackle a doctorate through the EdD route, finding it quicker and more structured than a PhD route.

This pack is aimed at helping prospective EdD students to choose a research topic and then to write an effective proposal. Our four research clusters cover nine possible research areas and you will need to identify one or more of these areas where your research idea or topic might fit. It is important that you identify and address a topic or question that will benefit from an extended and in-depth study and generate practical conclusions. We are particularly looking for an EdD research proposal which will be relevant to your professional development or to the development of the organisation where you undertake it. We like to think that your research will help make a difference – to the field you work in and to your own development. Here’s hoping you will find this pack useful and will join us.

1.1 Introduction

These guidelines are intended to help you prepare your application for the EdD. As mentioned in the previous section, the EdD offers a highly structured programme of study towards a Doctorate. The programme is part-time and is usually completed within three and a half years. This is considerably less time when compared with conventional part-time PhD programmes offered at other universities. Your proposal to the Research School, therefore, needs to be particularly well planned, thought through and presented according to specified criteria. Bear in mind that every year we receive many more applications than are accepted. You are therefore strongly advised to read the guidelines carefully and follow recommended instructions so that your application will be successful. Time spent on well-written proposals pays off later on – in sharper approaches and much clearer strategies.

This pack consists of four main parts:

1. Locating your research. This section introduces the CREET research clusters, which should help you locate your proposed research idea within the Open University’s research programme, including examples of successful thesis summaries from each cluster, to indicate something of the range of work that is undertaken within the programme.

2. Criteria for our assessment and general introduction to the EdD programme: things you should know before completing the application process, including a timetable of key dates and useful contacts.

3. Advice on how to write and present your proposal, including how to summarise it and the criteria for assessment of proposals.

4. Some recommended reading and exemplars of EdD proposals.

1.2 General introduction to the EdD programme

The Open University EdD programme is designed to meet the needs of professionals in education and other related areas, such as nurse and social work education, who are
seeking to deepen their knowledge and understanding of contemporary educational issues. It is characterised by a professional orientation and a structured approach. It aims to develop skills in educational research and enquiry to carry out research that will contribute to professional knowledge and practice. Professional doctorate programmes are now well established in many higher education institutions across a wide range of academic disciplines. It is not surprising that many professionals regard this style of EdD programme as being a more appropriate vehicle for their further development than the traditional Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). A further point to note is that the Open University’s EdD programme is highly structured, which means that you are required to produce written material at regular intervals in the form of progress reports: you will write 12 progress reports leading up to a 50,000 word thesis. In addition, there is a residential weekend in years 1 and 3, a day school in year 2, and opportunities to participate in on-line seminars and present your work-in-progress to an academic audience.

Section 2: Locating your research within The Open University

The Ed programme is administered by The Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology (CREET). The EdD programme revolves around four broad clusters of research which members of the OU academic staff pursue. These are divided into nine ‘areas’. These are shown in the table below:

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<tr>
<th>CREET Research Cluster</th>
<th>EdD Programme Area</th>
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<tr>
<td>Childhood and Youth Studies</td>
<td>a. Inclusive education/ special educational needs</td>
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<td>b. Childhood and youth studies</td>
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<td>Educational Studies</td>
<td>c. Teacher development and professional learning</td>
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<td>d. Curriculum, equity and assessment</td>
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<td>h. Language learning and teaching</td>
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<td>Technology Enhanced Learning</td>
<td>j. Technology enhanced learning</td>
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This is important for you to note since your proposal should fall into one of the four clusters and, if at all possible, in one of the nine areas. You may not be sure about where your research ideas may be located. In this case we’ll assign you to an area that seems nearest to your topic area. The reason for locating your study in one of our clusters is because it is a way of including you in a community of practice. We have found that students who join such a group have the advantages of meeting researchers with a shared range of interests in research, conferences, research papers, topics and publications.

Your EdD research topic may be related to any of the areas listed in the clusters and areas below. However, the examples given should not be regarded as a prescriptive list: it is vital that your chosen topic is one that is interesting and significant for you. You may find that your research topic seems to straddle more than one aspect of study. This may be unavoidable. However, you should make every effort to identify the one area in which your proposed research questions are principally located. Indeed, many excellent research topics may be located in just one area, and you should avoid developing a topic that is so broad it seems to encompass most of the areas.
2.1 Childhood and Youth Studies Cluster

This research cluster draws on a range of approaches and research methodologies, including developmental psychology, childhood studies, sociology, anthropology, ethnography, cultural studies and cultural geography.

The cluster encompasses studies of children's and young people's experiences, representations, learning, development, inclusion and social participation. You might be interested in the institutions and social practices that shape learners' lives, and the cultural and personal constructions of childhood and youth that mediate these processes.

Research priorities in this cluster reflect the diversity of childhoods (for example, related to social, economic and cultural contexts) and the diversity of children's lived experiences (for example, related to age, gender, parenting/family experiences, abilities, disabilities, learning difficulties, and mental health). Research students and staff are engaged in international research and in studies with a strong policy or applied focus, e.g. early childhood care and education, and child labour.

In this cluster you are likely to already have good contacts with local schools or playgroups, maternity hospitals, further education colleges, or youth groups, etc. Research projects have included equipment for eye-tracking and video recording and analysis; these can be used to support data gathering in the cluster's observation suite and in other settings. A Children's Research Centre has been established by OU staff in this cluster, to support active research by children from across the UK and internationally. There are two broad areas in the Childhood and Youth Studies cluster: (a) inclusive education and (b) childhood and youth studies.

Area A  Inclusive education/special education/inclusive learning

The inclusive education area welcomes applications on, for example,

- developing an inclusive curriculum
- learning support and development
- parental participation and decision making
- learner perspectives and participation
- barriers to learning
- policies and systems.

The areas of study outlined below provide a framework to help you choose your research topic, and the examples provide a series of markers about possible content. You might find it useful to think about the detailed content and research methods that might lie behind each title.

Research approaches may fall broadly into the traditions of ethnography, action research, or case study – but we expect you to read widely and to choose the approach to match your research questions. It is likely that you will use research methods such as observation (ethnographic or systematic), interviewing and textual and documentary analysis. We welcome research projects on six kinds of topics:

1 Developing an inclusive curriculum

The focus may be on a curriculum subject, a cross-curricular theme or a specific pedagogical approach. Examples might be: exploring group work in science; the contribution of sign language to the whole school primary curriculum; responding to pupils’ diverse learning needs; inclusive learning in a vocational context.
2 Learning support and development

This is concerned with developing support for diverse learners. The focus might be on changing roles, teaching methods or organisation of provision. Examples might be: developing the work of learning support assistants; issues of practice and policy; educational psychology and inclusive practice; the SENCO and the inclusive learning manager: a comparison of roles.

3 Parent and carer participation and decision making

The area of concern here is the involvement of parents and carers in their children’s education, and the understanding that a parental/carer perspective and interest may differ from those of teachers and students. Examples might be: overcoming barriers to learning; comparing the views of parents/carers and teachers; going to appeal: parents/carers and the SEN process; the role of parent/carer governors in special and mainstream schools; the role of the voluntary sector.

4 Learner perspectives and participation

The emphasis here is on student perspectives on education and learning and the extent of student participation. Examples might be: student participation in mainstream and special schools; the role of student councils in inclusive schools; hearing diverse voices in further education; the role of learners in collecting data about their own learning.

5 Policies and systems

This covers policies concerned with difficulties in learning, disaffection or disability in education and their relationship to practice both at local and national level. Examples might include: school SEN policies and the SENCO role; funding arrangements for inclusive provision; changing perspectives in special education and inclusion; policy development on inclusive learning in further education.

Area B Child and youth studies

This area focuses on the social processes of development. It provides an opportunity for you to research the contribution of social relationships to the education of children and young people. It takes as its starting point child development in families, schools and society. The core theme is that child development is a social process, embedded in cultural contexts (family, day care, school, etc.), constructed in social relationships (between children and parents or other care givers, between siblings, with teachers and amongst peers, etc.), mediated by cultural tools that enhance possibilities for communication, thinking and personal expression (notably speech, literacy and numeracy) and shaped by cultural practices (styles of relationship, expectations of behaviour, etc.).

Your EdD research may be located in one of the areas below or may span two (or more):

- social development in the pre-school years
- the social processes of learning in family contexts
- the social processes of learning in schools
- peer social relations in the school years.

1 Social development in the pre-school years

Your research might concentrate on the processes by which children acquire social understanding through their relationships with parents, carers, siblings, peers, etc. These early relationships are central to children’s developing identities and social competence and influence their ability to transfer successfully from the family to the school setting. Your
research may be located in the family, the community or in some other educational provision for preschool aged children or span both types of settings. There might also be scope for examining the development of children who are not in school, who grow up in conflict zones, or for whom there is no ‘family setting’.

2 The social processes of learning in family contexts

Research in this area will focus on the way children acquire skills and understanding through interaction with an adult or another child in their own settings. The starting point will be situations in which learning is taking place, or is intended to take place. It can include learning in the family; in museums and galleries; and in lifelong learning contexts. You might focus on children of pre-school age or school age.

3 The social processes of learning in schools

The setting for this area of study, in contrast to the first two areas, is the school classroom. It covers research into the social processes of teaching and learning in classrooms. The focus may be on children working together, or on the contribution of teachers and other adults in classrooms, or learning outside the conventional classroom.

4 Peer social relations in the school or adolescent years

This focuses on how children’s social relationships and social understanding change as they progress through school or adolescence and how these influence their understanding of their own identity. The emphasis is on their social relationships with peers.

In each of these areas, numerous research questions are opened up for study, and your choice of a research topic will depend on your professional concerns, your context and your interests as well as your reading of the literature. For example, how useful are concepts like ‘scaffolding’, ‘contingency’ or ‘guided participation’ as analytic devices? How well do they apply in different contexts? Other questions may emerge from thinking about your own practical experiences and professional responsibilities. For example, you might be interested in how parents and carers adapt the way they support their children’s development depending on the children’s age and ability, or how different strategies modify children’s contributions in different situations. Alternatively, you might be interested in the strategies employed by a group of children as they work together to solve a problem or complete a task.

2.2 Educational Studies Cluster

United by a common interest in pedagogy, professionalism and policy, Open University researchers in this cluster employ different methodologies to produce qualitative or quantitative data. They explore teaching and learning in formal and informal contexts in homes, schools, higher education and work-based settings. The cluster is well known for its research into several inter-related educational themes, including pedagogy and the curriculum, teacher education, professional development, and leadership. In addition, the work of colleagues using qualitative methods and ethnographic approaches is widely cited. Cluster research is undertaken at a local, national and international level. It seeks to contribute to knowledge expansion and make an impact upon the unfolding educational agenda.

There are four ‘areas’ in the Educational Studies cluster. Your EdD research may be located in one of the areas below or may span two (or more):

(a) Teacher development and professional learning
(b) Curriculum, equity and assessment
(c) Developing lifelong learning
(d) Educational leadership and management.
**Area C: Teacher development and professional learning**

The following are some suggestions on teacher education and professional development which should provide you with an idea of what is possible or acceptable:

- teachers’ professional development
- mentor–mentee interaction
- assessment of teaching
- learning institutions (the ‘mentoring institution’)
- interpersonal skills and team understanding
- educational development and the change process
- interpreting and using evidence
- policy and practice in teacher education in a variety of cultures and contexts
- ICT-enhanced models of teacher education
- the development of teacher knowledge, including the impact of ICT on professional knowledge
- the policy contexts of teacher education and teacher workforce reform.

**Area D: Curriculum, equity and assessment**

In this area, it is likely that you will be researching issues related to one or more of these inter-related areas of study:

- learning and the curriculum
- assessment and the curriculum
- knowledge and skills and the curriculum
- pedagogy and practitioner identities
- identities and gender differentiation in education.

The context for your EdD research proposal may be a sector (e.g. early years practitioners and learners), a subject area or a particular group (e.g. primary teachers, learning support assistants, children with learning difficulties) and the focus may be on one or more of a number of factors. For example, factors affecting identity and performance may include age, class, race, gender and disability. What we mean by a ‘curriculum and assessment issue’ is something that gives insight into the ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ of teaching and learning.

Even when considering the area of ‘knowledge and skills and the curriculum’, for example, your concern should not just be about a particular domain such as literacy, but instead, about how understanding the nature of knowledge leads to particular curriculum choices – such as what or how to teach literacy for example. This will require consideration of what you and others understand about literacy and what it is to be literate, which in turn relates to the reasons for and ways of teaching literacy. Any answer to the question of what literacy should be taught will have elements that are particular to literacy and those that are general to all domains. Both types of elements – subject-specific and general – are of interest in this EdD.

In each area of study of learning, knowledge and assessment, there may be equity and diversity issues. Thus, there may be a concern for the achievement of boys and girls or with the fact that girls do not study science in equal numbers to boys. This area of study covers the role of education and schooling in shaping individual gender identities; the ways in which
particular aspects of educational institutions and educational practices reinforce or question gender identities; how people experience education differently and the implications of this for educational institutions and educational practices; and the ways in which educational experiences are also located in wider familial, cultural, social and political contexts.

**Area E: Developing lifelong learning**

This area is associated with the Policy, Professionalism, Leadership and Lifelong Learning Research Group, which investigates the interlinked areas of policy-making and implementation, leadership in formal and informal settings, the nature and importance of professionalism in relation to policy and practice, the nature of adult learning and learning in the workplace – lifelong learning.

There are three major areas associated with developing lifelong learning that are supported within this EdD line:

- perspectives on learning through the life course
- educational policies for lifelong learning
- informal and formal learning in the workplace, the community and in educational institutions.

These areas are broadly defined, and indeed, they may overlap with each other. They are intended to offer you broad guidance only, and may accommodate different shifts of emphasis that arise out of your own research interests, professional experiences and the context in which you work.

These three areas are concerned with young people (aged 13–19) and adults of different ages (but all post-compulsory education) who have a wide range of different experiences, expectations and learning needs. They also address issues in social and cultural environments in which learning or training occurs, including social exclusion and the removal of barriers to learning.

All three areas can be located in various cultural communities, in the UK or elsewhere, depending on the interest, expertise, knowledge and experience of the researcher. The three areas can also be located in different cultural communities, in the UK or elsewhere, depending on the interest, expertise, knowledge and experience of the researcher.

1 **Perspectives on learning through the lifecourse**

This theme addresses the ‘learning’ aspect of lifelong learning, which has received surprisingly little attention in discussions of how to promote more effective and inclusive approaches to learning. The theme will appeal particularly to those who are involved in supporting learners in the workplace, the classroom or the community.

2 **Educational policies and the area of work**

Here you may consider: the role of governments and agencies; policy strategies and responses, and the ‘machinery’ put into place for the implementation of policy – statutory, regulatory, advisory; the changing nature of work, whether in terms of job function, skills or hours of work; and how different kinds of employer organisations implement change. This strand also addresses issues in relation to vocational education and training. For example, the origin of policies on technical and vocational education and training and its subsequent impact on further education, or the nature of apprenticeships in a European context. It can accommodate both the knowledge dimensions of the changes – curricula, pedagogy and assessment – and also the institutions that provide organisational support, such as colleges, HE institutions and private training centres.
3 Informal and formal learning in the workplace, the community and in educational institutions

This area encompasses the various reforms to employment-related education and training that are currently being implemented. Again, it can accommodate both the knowledge dimensions of the changes – curricula, pedagogy and assessment – and also the institutions that provide the organisational support: schools, colleges, HE institutions, private training centres, and companies themselves. One of the central issues here is the degree to which public expectations in the establishment of vocational qualifications have been met by the experiences of individuals taking them. Of particular interest at the moment is research into vocational education and training – both policy and practice. Another area for potential research lies in the concept of ‘informal learning’ and its impact on the lives of adults, families, and their children.

Area F: Educational leadership and management

This area is concerned with exploring leadership and management issues in all sectors of education, including nursery settings, schools, further and higher education. Studies of leadership may also be located in nurse education, youth work or non-mainstream and informal settings, such as the voluntary sector. Research work in this area encompasses perspectives on senior and middle leadership roles and activities as well as more informal leader influences such as teacher leadership. There is increasing focus in this field on educational leadership as socially constructed and relational, enacted collaboratively by multiple leaders in interactions with colleagues. Following this line of thinking, you may wish to explore distributed leadership in the work of a particular team or subunit, or across a school or college.

We welcome EdD proposals in the following areas:

1. Leading student learning
2. Leading and managing people
3. Resource management
4. The leadership context
5. Strategic leadership and managing change.

Possible topics that might be explored in each of these areas are outlined below. Please note that these are examples only, we are always happy to provide advice on the feasibility of other ideas.

1 Leading student learning

Research studies in this area focus on the primary task of educational organisations: ensuring that student learning processes and outcomes are as successful as possible and continue to improve. You may choose to explore an aspect of leadership in the fields of the curriculum or pastoral care, for example: roles, responsibilities and structures, arrangements for monitoring, review and evaluation of policy and practice, or promoting and sustaining change, such as planning and implementing a new programme of study, approach to assessment, or strategy to improve student outcomes or subunit performance. There is substantial opportunity to draw on and critique concepts and frameworks developed in the extensive school/college improvement and effectiveness research literature. There is also scope for research studies on leading learner engagement or learning support, as well as exploring leadership issues around learner voice and participation in decision making.
2 Leading and managing people

Studies in this area are concerned with the processes involved in ensuring that staff of the organisation are able to deliver the most effective service to the students that can be achieved. Research topics are likely to be centred mainly, but not exclusively, on the internal leadership of educational organisations. Studies might focus, for example, on staffing policy, selection and recruitment policies, on roles and relationships between staff members/teams, or on appraisal and performance management. Leadership issues connected with staff and team development are also relevant here. It is an area that can engage with important questions of gender, ethnicity and wider equity and diversity issues. It is also likely to involve studies of organisational and professional cultures and sub-cultures. Important themes here are leadership development, leading and sustaining professional learning communities within and across organisational boundaries, and the role of leaders in fostering learning organisations.

3 Leading and managing resources

EdD studies in this area will be concerned with aspects of the acquisition, deployment and evaluation of the use of financial and other resources. It might appear that it is the exclusive preserve of quantitative approaches to research, but this is not necessarily so. The processes of financial planning and decision making provide scope for qualitative research into how people act and respond to situations; alternatively, it could be an examination of the impact of resources on the operation of teams or groups in departments. The belief that research into financial management equals quantitative research rests on assumptions of rational management in rationally functioning organisations, which can be questioned through well-designed qualitative research. Projects in this area could be both internally and externally focused.

4 Leadership in context

This area is concerned with exploring the interrelationships between leadership and the context in which it takes place, both the external environment and the organisational setting. Studies of the external context could include topics exploring the impact of external policies and demands, such as increasing accountability, external evaluation and inspection, changes in educational policy, responses to the expectations of parents and other stakeholders, consumerism and marketisation pressures. This area of work could include all aspects of communication between the organisation and those outside it. Studies exploring the internal organisational context for leadership might involve work on culture structure and power, including consideration of notions of trust, professionalism, social capital and building capacity.

5 Strategic leadership and managing change

Strategic leadership is about establishing a shared view of and commitment to the future direction of the organisation and how to achieve it, linking internal priorities and external demands. It is not confined to senior levels of the organisation – you may choose to explore departmental or subunit strategy development. Topics here might include examining different models of strategic development and their application, such as rational, emergent, subjective or political approaches. Other areas for exploration here are stages and processes in strategic development, barriers to and facilitators of educational change, approaches to successful organisational innovation. An important aspect of strategic development for many organisations is partnership with other schools and agencies. You might choose to focus on collaborative work with another school, or multi-agency working, or school/college strategies to develop community partnerships and cohesion.

The five areas outlined above are conceived broadly, and you may find that your focus shifts from one area to another, or that it spans more than one of these areas. This is quite likely in the earlier stages of your research as you engage with the literature to deepen your understanding of the key themes. The important point is to choose a topic that:
• will benefit from an extended and in-depth study that can generate practical conclusions
• is relevant to your own professional development and that of the organisation(s) where you undertake your research
• strongly engages your interest, so that you can sustain your commitment and enthusiasm throughout the EdD research and writing up process.

2.3 Language and Literacies Cluster

This Cluster brings together researchers in the areas of (G) language and literacy as well as (H) language learning and teaching.

We are interested in any EdD project that investigates texts, discourses or practices in relation to child or adult language learning and teaching, whether in formal or informal contexts, and in any global location. We particularly welcome projects that employ a socio-cultural research approach (including linguistic methods of analysis) to investigate the contribution of spoken, written and computer-mediated dialogues to teaching and learning in home, school, HE and workplace settings.

Area G: Language and literacy

Language and literacy also covers areas overlapping with research in Language Learning and Teaching (see below).

We welcome EdD proposals related to language and literacy in any of the following contexts in any global location:

• education at school level
• adult and further education
• higher education
• educational, professional and workplace settings
• learning in everyday informal or community settings
• online learning.

We are keen to support the following kinds of research topics in the fields of language and literacy, and expect that EdD proposals may overlap a number of areas.

1 Talk and the processes of teaching and learning

This area can include the nature of talk in educational settings; socio-cultural approaches to analysing language and education; uses of English for education in multilingual contexts; supporting bilingual learners in multilingual contexts; issues in the assessment of oral language; gender and language in educational settings; accent and dialect.

2 Discourse and genre

Included might be discourse and identity in educational contexts; genres in different disciplinary areas; discourses underpinning teaching approaches and teaching materials; competing discourses in educational contexts; discourses about standard and non-standard language.

3 Nature and purposes of texts

This area touches on the analysis of texts, including oral texts, learning materials, texts produced by students, online and multimodal texts; issues in the production, circulation and interpretation of educational texts; assessment of student writing.
4 Language and literacy practices

Topics included might be the uses and meanings of spoken language and literacy in educational institutions, homes and communities, and the implications of these for students and teachers; the concept and purposes of adult literacies; contrasts between students’ language and literacy practices in and outside school; students’ multilingual language and literacy practices and their implications for education; online literacy practices and the use of mobile phones.

5 Multimodal communication

Topics included: the ways different semiotic modes – words, images, sound effects, moving images, colour – combine to create meanings in texts. The study of multimodality involves looking at these elements both separately and in combination, for instance in relation to a specific area of communication such as film, the internet and magazines.

6 Language and literacy policies

This includes issues connected with language and literacy policies at school, local, regional, national and international levels, or in further and higher education.

Area H: Language learning and teaching

We welcome EdD research proposals related to language learning and teaching in any context.

Researchers in our area apply a range of innovative methods to advance our knowledge of the learning and teaching of languages, both online and offline.

We are keen to support research related to the following broad topic areas:

1 Distance, blended and online language learning and teaching

An increasing number of institutions across educational sectors are turning to distance and blended forms of learning and teaching to increase participation, enhance access or for other reasons. What impact does this have on teachers or on learner motivation? How are the different components integrated in blended programmes? What kinds of ‘blend’ work best in different contexts? How do learners respond?

2 Language learning in multimodal online environments and e-literacies

Online media offer new tools for interaction between learners and between learners and teachers. These tools range from asynchronous applications such as email to real-time audiographic or video conferencing and social media. How do their affordances influence or shape learning? How should this be reflected in the training of teachers or in the design of tasks for online environments? What kind of strategies do learners and teachers develop in these environments?

3 Language learning strategies and individual learner variation

Research studies have produced conflicting results about the effectiveness of strategy development or ‘training’, and are often based on experimental programmes with full-time students in schools or universities. As yet there is no agreement on a variety of issues such as which strategies are most useful at which level, or whether strategy use increases or decreases with knowledge of the language or experience of language learning. What is the role of individual learner context and learning purpose, self-management and awareness?
4 Tandem learning

Tandem learning is an approach to language learning which draws on theories of learner autonomy and is based on cross-cultural collaborative partnerships, frequently online. It seems highly effective in helping learners to develop both second language proficiency and intercultural awareness. What kind of scaffolding provides the most effective support? What roles do positive and negative evidence play in second language acquisition? How is meaning negotiated in cross-linguistic encounters? What is the relationship between input and intake? How does such collaboration develop intercultural competence?

5 Language and intercultural competence

In an increasingly globalised world and in societies that are multi-cultural, the ability to communicate across cultures is increasingly important. Intercultural communication is not confined to one particular academic subject area but draws on a number of disciplines, among them language learning and teaching where a variety of different frameworks and models have been developed. Investigations of intercultural competence among language learners could focus on any particular group of language learners and on a variety of settings, aiming to answer questions about the acquisition and measurement of intercultural competence and how the various frameworks and theories of intercultural competence are put into practice by teachers, in textbooks or in other materials.

We are also able to offer supervision in research studies dealing with the application of learning theories to language learning; certain aspects of second language acquisition; learner autonomy, motivation and community or language teacher development. Your initial research proposal should address one or more issues related to these topics and will probably be related to your professional concerns. You should consider the particular characteristics of the learner group you hope to study, the target language(s) involved, the specific issue(s) that interest(s) you, the theoretical framework in which the study could be undertaken, and the most appropriate and practical research design.

2.4 Technology Enhanced Learning Cluster

Area J: Technology enhanced learning

This area expands on what has become commonly known as online, networked and e-learning. The concern with the digital networked environment is combined with an interest in new technologies and developments in education, as they happen, which combines our interest in technologies with experience of the new technologies at first hand. This area focuses on a variety of post-compulsory educational contexts, including lecturers, teachers, trainers, support staff, educational technologists, media specialists, learning systems managers, librarians, learning centre advisory staff, etc., from a range of knowledge domains such as education, health care, voluntary organisations and the public and private sector. Research topics in the technology enhanced learning include areas such as open educational resources, citizen science, participatory learning, accessibility of learning systems, learning design, technology enhanced assessment, game-based learning, learning analytics and understanding the changing experience of distance learning. The following sections can give you an idea about how to approach these research areas.

1 Design and delivery of online and distance education

This area covers the design and implementation of open and online distance learning. It builds on the experience that applicants have gained of a number of newer, innovative technologies, including wikis, blogs and social bookmarking. Research in this theme would concentrate on implications for learning design that arise from exploration of the students’ experience of these newer technologies. Possible research topics might include:

- the kinds of learner support appropriate in online and distance learning
the kinds of media a designer might choose to meet their objectives and how might this relate to their module design

creating and testing an application or some learning materials. The key to this work would be to inform the design and testing with strong theoretical and methodological underpinnings

exploring the implications for learning designs that arise from the deployment of particular new technologies, for example, wikis, blogs, social bookmarking and e-portfolios.

exploring the motivations and learning approaches of lifelong learners using open educational resources.

2 Evaluation of online and distance education

This section focuses on the evaluation of online, distance and technology enhanced learning environments. Evaluation includes the evaluation of specific technologies for learning or larger-scale policy evaluation and evaluation of the student’s and tutor’s experience of these environments. Possible research topics might include:

- an evaluation of a particular application or technological tool such as blogging, podcasting or games
- an evaluation of a policy initiative, for example in a school, university or training organisation introducing new technologies
- taking a particular approach to evaluation, either related to technology, for example HCI, or related to use, for example in relation to accessibility
- measuring the effectiveness of distance learning
- investigating the influence of new developments in communication technology on public engagement in science
- exploring the effect of social and mobile technologies in enhancing museum learning.

3 Theoretical approaches to online and distance education

This would cover background theoretical approaches and assumptions that inform the design and practice of online and distance education. It relates most strongly to distance and flexible learning and socio-cultural and social practice theories of learning and change. Possible research topics would include:

- building on work on academic literacies and online learning, examining the ways digital resources are used to construct the experience of university study in the absence of physical buildings and face-to-face interaction. This would also link to studies examining:
- multi-modality in relation to online learning
- examining socio-cultural and social practice approaches to online learning
- exploring the development and use of theoretical paradigms such as computer supported collaborative learning (CSCL), activity theory or communities of practice in online and distance education.

4 Technologies for online and distance education

The area covered under this heading is the range of technologies that can be applied to online and distance education. These are stand-alone, independent activities and they can offer a number of benefits in supporting learning including flexibility, reuse and ease of updating. It is less clear how they impact on learners. Research could explore the students’ experience of these technologies including web 2.0 tools and mobile technologies, as well as wikis, blogs and social bookmarking. Possible research topics include:
• a study of e-learning innovators and innovations in an organisation, mobile devices, new communication channels
• an examination of the emergent study patterns that arise with the use of social networking sites
• the role of emergent technologies in the development of virtual communities
• developing profiles of mobile learners to inform educators or technologists
• an investigation of e-portfolio technologies and how they may provide links from the world of education with the world of work.
• an exploration of the effect of digital technologies on the way scientist engage with the wider public.
• investigations into game based learning.

5 Contexts for online and distance education

This theme covers the wider landscape in which online and distance education is developed. It covers the relationship between online and distance education and policy, either institutional or governmental policy or policy at the level of multinational and international agencies. This theme also relates to corporate online and distance education and the place of online and distance education in the knowledge-based economy. At a social level, this theme would encompass research into the nature of networked society and online and distance education. Possible research topics include:

• networked learning in a particular formal or informal learning context, for example in nurse education or the development of school leaders
• exploring the demands for an educated workforce in the knowledge-based economy and the ways in which new digital technologies can be applied to meet those demands
• the creation, distribution and exchange of learning and new technologies. You may wish to explore the use of open educational resources or you may wish to explore issues such as the re-use or storage in repositories of learning objects
• Self and co-regulation in a computer supported collaborative learning environment.

Examples of summaries of successful thesis proposals can be found in a separate document.

Section 3: Your proposal

3.1 Timetable for registration and useful contacts

It is important for you to know the timetable of application, that is, the deadline to which you have to adhere, and who to contact for further advice when developing your proposal. Your first contact for advice may be our email box: FELS-EdD@open.ac.uk. Following this you may be contacted by a member of the postgraduate team in CRET, Faculty of Education and Language Studies. If in doubt, they may put you in touch with one of the EdD’s academic coordinators who will be able to offer more specific advice. So do not hesitate to get in touch!

You also need to consider the time you have available to write your proposal and deadlines you have to bear in mind in the whole process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application period</th>
<th>August – November</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closing date for your proposal which should consist of 3,000 words, together</td>
<td>30th November</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with a summary of 300 words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consideration of proposals by EdD academics including allocation of potential supervisors</th>
<th>December-February</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal discussion by EdD team and proposals and feedback sent to Research School</td>
<td>March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notification to applicants from the Research School with feedback</td>
<td>April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start of EdD programme</td>
<td>May</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So the period between August and November is the time for you to develop your ideas and to consider the practicalities of committing yourself to intensive study and research over a period of up to four years.

In the period between December and March an academic coordinator from the EdD team may get in touch with you, seeking further clarification about your research proposal - though this does not happen very often. Once you have received a letter from the Research School sometime in April informing you that your proposal has been accepted, you will be directed to the formal registration process. By the start of the EdD programme towards the middle of May this process will be completed. Note that admission to the programme is also dependent on the availability of two suitable supervisors.

It is possible that your proposal will be rejected. The feedback you will receive will point to areas of weakness, and how you might improve the proposal, and you may well be encouraged to apply again the following year.

### 3.2 Developing your ideas

You may already have well developed and very specific ideas about the research you wish to undertake. It is possible that whatever you want to investigate links directly with any research you may have undertaken within your Masters degree. Alternatively, you may want to address research questions which have arisen out of your own professional context or independent of research you have undertaken previously. Some applicants are very sure about what it is they want to investigate; others are a little vaguer and need further advice and, above all, time to develop their ideas. You are asked to locate your proposed research within the academic areas of the EdD programme but it may not be so easy to decide which one of the nine seems most suitable. Your topic may overlap between two or even three areas. If in doubt, do indicate this with your proposal. There are two points to consider: first of all, your proposal will not be fixed in stone and will probably change quite a bit by the time you have reached the third year of the Doctoral Programme. A second point to note is that this is a professional doctorate in education which means that your research ideas need to have relevance for professional policy and practice. You may wish to carry out your research in an educational institution or other work area where learning takes place.

Developing and refining your research ideas is a long process. Developing a research proposal will require considerable thought and a process of redrafting before it is ready for submission. At the most elementary level any research plan involves considering the context, the people involved, your own role as both researcher and (sometimes) practitioner, how to set out the research questions, the kind of answers you might be looking for, and the means by which you anticipate the answers can be found. So you might need to:

- think about the professional context in which the research is to be located in terms of policy and practice
- who your respondents might be
your own role in the research process, and whether you are inside or outside the research itself

- the data you want to collect on the basis of questions you have asked
- how you want to collect the data
- problems you anticipate, and
- what kind of outcome you may expect.

In developing your EdD proposal you should consider the language used in what you both read and write; you need to be particularly careful not to accept without question 'labels' that may have been applied to some groups of learners. You should show that you understand that many aspects of education have been – and still are – located in an area where definitions are contested and where labels carry value judgements (eg 'special education'; 'training'; 'participation'). You may want to consider the competing discourses that surround many topics in your area and show where your study will sit, in terms of a range of different discourses.

You will need to consider theoretical perspectives which will underpin your questions. Furthermore, your research proposal should point to some kind of originality (unlike research at masters Level). There are various definitions of what is meant by that, none of them conclusive. It can, for example, mean finding some new knowledge not identified before, using a different methodology, building on something researched before, giving a new interpretation on something known before, or adding new evidence to established data. Whatever the outcomes of your study you will need to show that you have been critical of your sources and your own methods. The context in which your research will take place may also offer a range of possibilities. However, the outcome of your research should offer some aspects of new insights and hence be of relevance to those involved in your area of educational practice. Consider the broad contextual areas before you home in on the specifics. It is like painting a picture. It does not have to follow particular structure but in the end some kind of harmony is called for. Bear in mind that your proposed research should be broad enough and deep enough so that it can be sustained over a three year period and end at doctoral (not masters) degree level. You may find it difficult at first to develop your key research question. There are two things to consider: the wording of the questions is likely to change considerably in the course of your studies. Nevertheless, when writing the questions for your proposal try to be as precise and focussed as possible so that the reader understands what it is you are trying to achieve. This may involve drafting and redrafting the text several times. Bear in mind that the outcome of your research in the course of the coming years reflects the questions you have asked at the start of the doctorate programme.

The final step, when drafting your proposal, is to set realistic boundaries and time frames of what is possible to achieve within your own personal and professional environment. Some students set out to do far too much in the time available, where a study of the development of fewer learners, say, over a period of time can be more insightful.

### 3.3 Writing your proposal

The research proposal is the core of your application to the EdD programme and the nature and quality of the proposal are the most important determining factors for successful entry to the EdD. It should, therefore, exhibit a high level of critical analysis and demonstrate your understanding of the relationship between theory and practice in education. Your EdD proposal should be around **3000 words, together with a summary of 300**. Its purpose is to identify clearly your research question, put it in a theoretical framework (showing your present knowledge of the relevant literature), explain how you plan to carry out the work and show how you will analyse your data. You should also show how your proposed
study is linked to your professional work. In addition, as noted previously, your research needs to fit in with one of the research areas of the EdD programme.

The proposal should include:

- **A title** – this should be clear and succinct and preferably in no more than ten words. It is usually better to be clear and down to earth, rather than overly clever or cryptically poetic. For example, ‘An investigation into the factors that attract and retain young students at The Open University.’

- **A summary of no more than 300 words** – this might be the last thing you do as it represents an overview of the main body of your proposal.

- **A brief explanation of the educational issues that frame your proposed research topic, and why you are interested in the topic and the setting in which it will be conducted.** You should, if at all possible, state which one of the EdD Areas (see Section 2) you consider to be the best ‘fit’ for your proposed research.

- **Specific research questions.** These are the questions you are trying to address. Although your questions may be modified over time your initial questions should be clear and specific, enabling you to be clear about data collection and evaluation.

- **A description of the theoretical framework for your research, identifying the important concepts that will underpin your work and how your proposed study relates to research done by others.** You will need to identify some of the key literature relevant to the proposed field of study and show awareness of the most important current literature. You may draw on your own previous work, if appropriate.

- **An explanation and justification of the methods you plan to use in the research, both for producing data, and for its analysis.** In this section you should draw on literature about research methodology and show that you have considered issues of validity and reliability if these are relevant. You should outline your general approach, for example sociolinguistic analysis, ethnography, action research, grounded theory. If you are going to use a combination of approaches then explain how they will complement each other and, most importantly, how they relate to the particular data that you wish to produce given your theoretical framework. Then explain the specific methods you plan to use for data production and data analysis, with as much detail as possible. You should find our appendix of references useful here.

- **An identification of the ethical issues involved in your research and an explanation of how you will address these.** The British Educational Research Association provides advice on research ethics on their website. These are accessible: [http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/Ethical%20Guidelines](http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/Ethical%20Guidelines). You will need to link particular ethical issues to your own work (eg what safeguards will you use to make sure that your subjects can speak openly to you?). You should remember that ethics applies to the whole of a research project and not just to the completion of an intial checklist.

- **The potential applications of your research to educational policy and practice.** What value might it have to other people in your field or area? Why might your research help us to understand more about the area you are working in?

- **Your professional role and expertise, and how you will draw on your professional knowledge and the opportunities in your context when carrying out your research study.** Perhaps, too, reflect on what the research might mean to you and why you are moved to answer this research question at this particular time in your professional career.

- **A timetable** – you should provide a provisional outline timetable for the work to be covered for each of the three years of EdD study. This is to show that you have made a realistic estimate of the overall workload involved, and have identified a realistic schedule that fits with the scale and nature of the research activities you are planning. This timetable can later be amended but it must be manageable in terms of the structure of
the programme. For example, in Year 1 you will need to undertake a literature review and a pilot study and in Years 2 and 3 cover the major research and thesis writing.

- The references used in your proposal. Citing these properly will help you later on. Your references should be relevant and helpful rather than numerous. What you choose to cite will give us an idea of the scope of your reading in preparation for the proposal.

3.4 Writing a Summary

The purpose of a summary is to give the reader an overview of the full proposal you are submitting. So this section will be brief. There are several points to note: the summary should contain all the key points of your proposal, yet be brief, concise, comprehensive, self-explanatory and readable. It should not contain unnecessary words or phrases. It should be written in the future tense since you are explaining what it is you intend to do.

The summary should explain the following: who you are, the educational setting in which you work, the policy context of your proposed research; why you want to undertake this research, what it is you want to investigate, the questions you are asking; the theoretical/conceptual framework you see as relevant in terms of your chosen literature and methodology; the research instruments you think most appropriate and why; who you envisage your respondents will be; access and practical issues you are anticipating; the most likely outcome you expect and relevance of potential findings to professional practice. Most of us when writing a summary start with a much longer text and then prune and cut several times until we have reached the appropriate word count, which is a maximum of 300 words. To help you we have provided some examples of summaries from successfully completed theses for the EdD. Yours will be about what you intend to do, rather than what you have done, so will be a little different – but notice how succinct they are.

3.5 What is meant by ‘doctorate level’?

This is a crucial question. Your proposal may not yet have reached this level: it may take you three years. Nevertheless, you may find it helpful to know what you are aiming for. You will have completed a masters degree before joining this programme, so you will have a clearer sense about the academic level you had to achieve previously. A ‘doctorate’, not surprisingly, is much harder to achieve. The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications states the following.

Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication
- a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice
- the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems
- a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

(QAA, 2008, pp. 23–4)

No distinction is made between a PhD and a Doctorate in Education. This means that both the PhD and the EdD have to achieve the same academic level.
Section 4: What happens after you have submitted your proposal and summary

4.1 Criteria for assessment of your proposal

Your research proposal will be assessed against the following criteria. The proposal should:

- fit in with CREET clusters and an EdD academic area of research
- demonstrate that you can design a coherent and well thought-out research proposal
- relate systematically and clearly to relevant material in the area of study and research methods
- demonstrate the appropriateness of the research methods and methods of data analysis chosen to answer the questions posed
- be of professional and practical educational relevance
- show how your research draws on your own professional expertise and context
- show that the research is feasible within the time and other constraints
- demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively in written English.

In addition, the proposal needs to be of a sufficiently high standard to suggest that you will be able to reach doctorate level within the time available. We will aim to provide you with written feedback on your application. This feedback is designed to help you think about your research in advance of your first meeting with your supervisors (if you are successful), or what areas need to be enhanced (if you are unsuccessful).

4.2 Looking ahead

Once you have submitted your proposal there will be quite a gap in time before you receive a letter from the Research School informing you that your proposal has been either accepted or rejected. Whatever the outcome, this period will be a good time for further reading, thinking and developing your research ideas. You may want to start a literature research to find out what kind of related research is already in the public domain. Whatever work you will be doing in this period will be of value for your forthcoming research.

The letter of acceptance will give you extensive feedback from the EdD team about the strengths and weaknesses of your proposal, together with advice on how to prepare for the next step. You should take note of the points given and take these into account when you prepare your first Progress Report which will be due early in June, before you attend the first residential weekend.

Should your proposal not have been accepted then the reasons for this will be explained. This may be because your proposal falls outside the academic support areas of the EdD programme, or it may be that a number of points raised in your proposal need strengthening. In any case you will be encouraged to submit a revised proposal in due course.
Section 5: Useful resources and exemplars

5.1 Useful Resources

There are a numerous of books available which focus on research methodologies and methods. Having completed a masters module on research methods you will have worked with quite a few and know of others. In addition:

Academic Publications by CREET members are held in ORO. Open Research Online is the Open University’s repository of research publications and other research outputs. It is an Open Access resource that can be searched and browsed freely by members of the public. You will find it helpful when preparing your proposal to look under the appropriate CREET clusters and EdD Areas for suitable publications.

OPERA (Open Educational Research ASSETS) brings together resources that have been designed to support educational research at masters level. These resources are free for you to use and you may find them useful in developing your research proposal [http://www.open.edu/openlearnworks/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=51427](http://www.open.edu/openlearnworks/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=51427)

These resources include Educational Open Access Publications. Open access journals and publications provide a way for those who are not necessarily students or staff of a university to access educational research information. This information can be used to inform applications to doctoral programmes, research projects or to keep abreast of developments in an area of interest after, or outside of, graduating.

There are some useful Open University online resources you can draw on, particularly the section ‘Preparing a research proposal’ [http://www.open.edu/openlearnworks/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=51427](http://www.open.edu/openlearnworks/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=51427). These are all open access so anyone can use it/refer to it. So you can refer to all of it or any bits that seem suitable for your purpose.

There also numerous research methods books that you may have used in the past and may find them helpful with your planning.


Then there are area specific books which may also help you writing your proposal.

Area F (Educational Leadership and Management)


**Area G (Language and Literacy)**


**Area H (Language Learning and Teaching)**


5.2 Exemplars of two proposals

We offer these two examples of project proposals so that you can see how others have addressed the task. They are offered as exemplars only and have been amended for clarity.

5.2.1 Example project 1

Project title
An investigation into the factors that attract and retain young students at The Open University.

Summary
As a staff member I noticed the rising number of young people choosing to take a degree with the Open University instead of a ‘traditional university’. The research will investigate why students aged 18–24 come to the Open University and the factors that influence their decision. It will also examine their learning experience and the key factors that lead to successful study. The research population will be new Open University students with no previous higher education qualification, studying one of four introductory level modules. Data will be compared by module and from students aged 18–20 (Group 1) and 21–24 (Group 2). An online survey will be sent to students, hoping to reach 200 responses. I aim to have up to 40 students participating in semi-structured email interviews. I expect the findings to indicate that students’ decisions about higher education study are likely to be influenced by family members and friends. I hope to find their main reasons for studying and what attracted them to this form of study. I expect to find that students’ study experience is positive but that they might find the lack of personal contact with tutors and peers a challenge. I also intend to identify students’ experiences on progress and their coping strategies for managing the conflicting demands of work, study and family. I am keen to see if there is any difference between the experiences of students in the two groups. My interviews will be undertaken following strict ethical processes and based on a grounded theory approach. I anticipate that obtaining a sample of students who will continue to study successfully will be challenging; particularly given that I might not be able to interview them once they have completed.

Focus of the research
As part of my MA, I investigated the factors affecting the participation and retention of first-year university students. Most studies about higher education (HE) participation and retention focus on young applicants to full time study but there is little information about the motivations of young students participating in part time distance learning modules. Over the last ten years, the proportion of 18–20 year olds studying at the Open University has risen from 3.6% to 5%. This led me to question what motivates this particular group of students to choose the OU and what influences their decision to complete or withdraw from the module. Are their experiences and motivations substantially different from students at full time institutions?

A strong feature of recent research in higher education has been the concept of barriers to participation. Reay et al. (2001) claim that social class and race inequalities persist despite Government efforts to widen access while Hodgson and Spours attribute the ‘lack of participation of young people from working class backgrounds’ to ‘a marketized and class-based approach to higher education during the 1990s.’ (Hayton and Paczuska, 2002, p. ix). A recent survey found that cost and fear of debt are now the major deterrents for people who apply to but do not enter higher education (Futuretrack, IER, 2009) – findings which have implications for the funding of student financial support and the planned review of student fees.
Gorard et al. (2006) point out that the concept of barriers is an attractive one to policy makers as it implies that action can be taken to remove the barriers and solve the problem of non participation; although, as Field notes, learners are now ‘largely responsible for directing their learning themselves’ (Dohmen, quoted in Field, 2000, p. 256). Moreover, McGivney et al. state that ‘reluctance to engage in education may have more to do with attitudes, perceptions and expectations than with any practical barriers.’ (McGivney et al., 1993, p. 21).

Gorard et al. develop this idea, stating that ‘the key social determinants predicting lifelong participation in learning’ are long term and ‘involve time, place, gender, family and initial schooling.’ (Gorard et al., 2006, p. 5). Such findings, they claim, ‘emphasise the importance of reviewing evidence on participation through the “lifecourse” of each individual, and compromises the analytic utility of the “barriers” metaphor.’ (Gorard et al., 2006, p. 5). Similarly, Fuller et al. reject the notion of ‘readily identifiable barriers’ and claim instead that ‘patterns of participation and non participation in HE are strongly embedded in and explained by people’s interwoven social, historical and biographical circumstances and experience.’ (Fuller et al., 2008, p. 6).

In investigating student motivations for participation in higher education, Connor concludes that the main motivations for recent entrants to HE were ‘their interest in studying a particular subject and their desire to acquire a higher qualification for a specific job or career.’ (Connor, 2001, p. 211). These findings will be compared to those of OU students in the proposed study.

Access to clear, detailed and accurate information is seen as important for students faced with HE choices, particularly when Moogan et al. report that 72% of the main sample were ‘afraid of making the wrong decision’. (Moogan et al., 1999, p. 222). The research study will investigate whether OU students have the same perception of risk in choosing to take an open entry module and whether this relates to their study aim in committing to a qualification or a single module. Both studies highlight the importance of teachers and parents/carers in the decision making process and the influence of family and friends will also be examined as part of the proposed study.

Cook and Leckey (1999) highlight the problems some students face in the transition from school to university, stating that ‘many entrants to higher education will not have been adequately prepared for the types of learning and studying they will encounter’ (Cook and Leckey, 1999, p. 169). They investigate student study methods, preferred learning styles and student expectations of university life compared to their actual experience and conclude that students find it difficult to adapt to being autonomous learners and will need additional learning support in their first year. (See also Fazey and Fazey, 2001). This may or may not be a problem that is exacerbated for part time distance learners but it will be investigated as part of the research study.

Many studies on the issue of student retention have been published in the UK in recent years but ‘little consensus exists in the literature (…) regarding which combination of elements is paramount’ (Bennett, 2003, p. 128). The research on retention has largely focussed on three areas: student characteristics, institutional characteristics, and experiential factors. Harrison claims, for example, that student withdrawal is linked to ‘poor preparation, poor or passive decision-making and difficulties with socialisation or adapting to the student lifestyle.’ (Harrison, 2006, p. 388) while Thomas (2002) believes that it is universities that have a responsibility to foster an environment which supports students and consequently aids retention. One of the few conclusions shared by the majority of the studies is that students are most in danger of withdrawing in the first year of study (Yorke, 2000; Rickinson and Rutherford, 1995) and ‘the reasons for student drop out are complex and multidimensional’ (Bennett, 2003, p. 128).

Recognising this, Assiter and Gibbs take a different approach in their study. Rather than investigating reasons for student withdrawal, they focus instead on the ‘the experience and
biography of those experiencing problems’ (Assiter and Gibbs, 2007, p. 82). They conclude that issues like debt, illness, wrong choice of module or lack of social support networks may all be factors in student withdrawal but ‘it is the way that these factors interact in a complex fashion with the student’s biography (..) and their identity that matters’ (Assiter and Gibbs, 2007, p. 90). In this, they adopt a similar approach to Fuller et al. (2008) and Johnston and Heath (2007) and it is one I also plan to use in the proposed study.

**Research questions**

Why do young students choose to study at the Open University?

- What are the key factors that influenced their decision?
- Were these mainly external factors (e.g. Government policy on student fees, open entry policy) or internal (e.g. personal motivation)?
- What role did their ‘networks of intimacy’ have in the decision making process?
- To what extent did their decision to come to the OU relate to their personal and educational biography to date?
- What is their main study aim in coming to the OU? (Qualification? One-off module?)
- What factors influence whether or not a young student completes their OU module?
- Did the experience of studying at the OU match their expectations?
- Did they experience any problems with their studies? If so, how did they tackle these?
- What were their main sources of support when they were studying?
- What factors influenced their decision to complete or not complete their module?
- What are their plans for education/employment after the end of their module?
- Are there differences in the motivations and retention of students studying Arts modules compared to Science modules?

**Research strategy**

Since the main focus of the research is student motivation, I intend to undertake a qualitative study of 20 students across the life of their module. This will be supplemented by quantitative information from existing OU surveys/databases and a questionnaire.

The model for the qualitative study is the interpretivist approach used by Fuller et al. (2008) and Assiter and Gibbs (2007) which seeks to explore people’s behaviour, attitudes and experiences, although as Denscombe points out, it is important that the data collected should be ‘structured as little as possible by the researcher’s own prior assumptions’. (E891 Study Guide, p. 84)

**Year 1** will focus on the literature review and a pilot study in one OU region with 4–6 registered students in the target age group (undergraduate 18–20yr) who are new to higher education and are studying a 60 credit point Level 1 module in the Arts or Science Faculty – either AA100 (The Arts Past and Present) or S104 (Exploring Science).

Part 1 of the pilot study will be individual semi-structured interviews prior to module start. (By interviewing the students before module start, I hope to avoid the dangers of post hoc rationalisation (Assiter and Gibbs, 2007). The interviews would focus on the students’ motivations in choosing the Open University, their decision-making process and influences on their choice from among their ‘networks of intimacy’ (Heath and Cleaver, 2003). Open comments and quantitative information from the Modules Survey, Withdrawal Survey and CIRCE will be used to help structure the questions. The use of a semi-structured interview allows the inclusion of specific questions arising from the research focus and provides a
clearer framework for analysing the data afterwards. It also gives the students the opportunity to talk more freely about their own personal and educational history.

Interviews will be audio recorded and supplemented by field notes to document non-verbal communication. The notes and recordings will be analysed, sub-divided into categories and arranged thematically for potential inclusion in the questionnaire.

Part 2 of the pilot study will be a questionnaire in December to all students from the target group in two OU regions who are studying either AA100 or S104. This will focus on students’ personal and educational histories, covering independent variables such as academic qualifications, school experience and support networks. The results of the questionnaire will be compared to student performance, assessed through Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA) scores. This will give an indication of how well students from different backgrounds perform on OU modules.

In January, follow-up interviews will take place with the 4–6 students interviewed in September/October to discuss their learning experiences to date. Responses will be analysed, categorised and compared to the original interviews to identify themes for follow up in Year 2/3.

Year 2 will study 20 students for the whole length of their module from two contrasting (demographically) OU regions. It could be argued that the self-selected sample group might be biased in favour of more motivated students so the results of the questionnaire sent to all students studying AA100 and S104 will act as a form of ‘control’ group.

Semi-structured interviews will take place in September/October 2011 with follow up interviews in March and after the end of the module in July/August (or earlier for any students who withdraw). Students will also have access to a designated mailbox or Facebook area for posting comments related to the study.

In December, questionnaires will go out to all students in the target group in the ten English OU regions. These will be analysed between January and May and compared later with the results of the OU Modules Survey published in December 2012. The inclusion of all students studying AA100 and S104 in the questionnaire will enable me to analyse the data by module, age, socio-economic grouping, gender and ethnicity and make comparisons with the main research group. I will also be able to identify students with 2+ 'A' levels who would more closely parallel school leavers entering traditional higher education institutions and compare their responses to those in the studies from the literature review. During August, I will analyse the results of any withdrawal surveys returned by those in the larger study group.

Year 3 will involve detailed data analysis from the questionnaire, interviews, survey information and CIRCE. I would use an ANOVA test to assess the significance of the effect of students' backgrounds (assessed by the questionnaire) and performance (assessed by TMA scores) on their satisfaction with the module (assessed by the Modules Survey). A separate analysis will be undertaken for students who withdraw from the module to assess whether there is a significant difference in the profiles of students who complete and those who withdraw.

**Anticipated problems**

- There is a lower than average response rate from younger students to institutional surveys and the potential small sample size may have an impact on the validity of the finding.

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1Nation regions are excluded from the study because there are a number of differences in student support arrangements, including financial support, which may impact on the validity of the findings.
• Young students may be reluctant to participate in a study lasting almost a year. I may need to reduce the amount of contact time with the interview group.

• Some students may not want to meet before module start, particularly if it requires additional expense in travelling for a face-to-face meeting.

• Face-to-face interviews may be difficult to arrange, particularly if students live a long way from the regional centre. Interviews after tutorials may be possible. Phone interviews would be an alternative.

• There is a pilot project taking place with AA100 students in the East Midlands region, as part of the Student Support Review, where students will be receiving enhanced learning support. I will need to exclude these students from the main study as their experiences are likely to be substantially different from AA100 students in other regions and this would have an impact on the validity of the findings.

• I will need to be aware of other retention activities being undertaken within Student Services as this may impact on the behaviour of students in the research study.

• The total number of students aged 18–20 is still relatively small and it may be difficult to recruit sufficient volunteers for the research, particularly if the study is restricted to two modules.

**Ethical issues**

As the research involves the collection of information from students, I will need to:

• apply to the Student Research Project Panel at the OU for authorisation to contact students

• apply for authorisation from the Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee

• inform the OU Data Protection Officer about the research and comply with data protection guidance

• establish a research ethics protocol, e.g. how to gain informed consent, how the data will be collected and stored, how to debrief participants

• use pseudonyms to protect the identity of the students and anonymise the data

• obtain agreement from the participants to record and use their personal details for the purposes of the research and sign an Agreement to Participate form

• obtain agreement from the tutors and director of any OU regional centres I visit

• obtain permission to reproduce sensitive IET data for an external audience

• decide how to respond to any negative comments from students about OU staff.

**Application to educational policy and practice**

This is an area of research that relates to the widening access agenda, the changes to the funding of higher education in the UK in 1998 and the growing interest from the UK Government in student retention (National Audit Office, 2002; HEFCE, 2003; DfES, 2003). It is an important topic because it concerns ‘differential access to education, wastage of potential, social justice and value for money for taxpayers’ (Harrison, 2006, p. 377).

The research is important for a number of reasons. First, there is very little research into what motivates young students to study part-time, distance-learning modules or the factors that affect their retention. The outcomes of the study could have significance to the growing number of higher education institutions offering modules by distance learning and the nature of the support they offer to their students. A better understanding of the factors affecting student motivation in the 18–20 age group will enable the University to attract and retain
more young (and mainly non-ELQ)\textsuperscript{2} students, fulfilling its mission of widening access and improving its financial security through increased government funding and fee income. The conclusions of the study could inform the future focus of student support, particularly in the context of the Student Support Review that is currently taking place at the Open University.

**Development of professional knowledge**

My teaching experience in secondary schools and my posts in student recruitment and retention at the OU should provide a useful background for this research study. Through my work in Student Services, I also have good working relationships with the OU regional directors and would have their support for carrying out research interviews within their regions.

My current post in the Arts Faculty led me to nominate AA100 as one of the modules in my research study. What I learn from my research may enable me to influence module design and student support policy in Arts Faculty and may have a positive impact on student completion and retention rates.

**Timetable**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Revise proposal. Apply to SRPP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May–July</td>
<td>Literature review, Residential weekend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Analyse CIRCE information, Modules Survey 2009 and Withdrawal Survey, Prepare interview questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Initiate pilot study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews with pilot group, Analyse information from interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Construct questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Send out questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Analyse results of questionnaire. Compare with TMA scores, Email contact with 4–6 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Final analysis of interviews and questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March–April</td>
<td>Write up results and Stage 1 report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May–June</td>
<td>Review interview questions and questionnaire, Amend timetable for Year 2/3</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Longitudinal study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Identify 20 students for research study, Set up face to face/phone interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Attend day school in early October, Interviews with research group, Agree contact dates with research group, Set up mailbox/Facebook area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Analyse information from interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Questionnaire to all AA100 and S104 students from English OU regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January–June</td>
<td>Analyse results of questionnaire</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{2}Non-ELQ students are students who do not have an equivalent or lower (ELQ) qualification to the qualification they want to register for.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Mid-module interviews with sample group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April–June</td>
<td>Analyse mid module interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July/August</td>
<td>Face-to-face/telephone interviews with completers and withdrawers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Analyse withdrawal surveys of those in main target group who withdrew from module</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Year 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September/October</td>
<td>Check completion and progression data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November–January</td>
<td>Analysis of data Construct list of possible indicators for successful/unsuccesful completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Attend residential weekend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March–July</td>
<td>Write up research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August to October</td>
<td>Revisions and preparation for viva</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2981 words)

**References**


5.2.2 Example project 2

Project title
The significance of cultural and social capital in university choice.

Summary
Research on the way that sixth-form students utilise cultural and social capital when applying to university has suggested that students make differential choices on the basis of social class. Research has also highlighted the significance of intra-class differences amongst middle-class students. It suggests the extent to which family, school, peers, and the media may influence and impact on choices. This research will examine the extent to which students from similar socio-economic backgrounds, and in particular ‘working-class’ students, make choices. This process is examined in terms of the university and course choices made and associated social advantage and prestige. I intend to use an interpretive paradigm using qualitative methods and a conceptual framework derived from Bourdieu. Focus groups and semi-structured interviews will be used to investigate research questions and a grounded approach to data analysis will be utilised. I expect the findings to show that access to cultural and social capital is limited to familial influence. Students may well be influenced by their parents, carers and siblings in differential ways. I also hope to show to what extent the college environment has an impact on student decisions. I aim to show that when making choices young people are influenced by general locality; whether to ‘stay local’ or ‘move away’ but that these concepts in turn are influenced by both geographical and sketchy views of universities - triggering concerns perhaps about ‘fitting-in’ and resulting in limitations on choice, in relation particularly to prestigious HEIs.

Focus of the research
Rationale: My research concerns the extent to which sixth-form students from different socio-economic backgrounds utilise cultural and social capital to inform the process of applying to university through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. I wish to examine this process in terms of the university and module choices made and the social advantage and prestige that can be linked to the offer of a place.
Notions of different kinds of capital and the impact on educational outcomes stem from the work of Bourdieu (1998; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1998), who addresses the tripartite relationship between economic, social and cultural capital. Much has been written to establish that those who lack economic capital are disadvantaged in terms of educational achievement (Halsey, Heath and Ridge, 1980; Douglas, 1964). However, I wish to examine the often less tangible notions of cultural and social capital to examine the extent to which these influence choice. This derives from a concern, identified through supporting students, that many students are not making the most of opportunities available to them, although often they have the economic capacity to do so.

My interest in this area links to my professional practice and issues raised during E845 Supporting lifelong learning and E891 Educational enquiry, and links to a desire to enable people to participate in education to reduce social exclusion (E845, Study Guide). In Britain lifelong learning is prioritised as a means to widening participation in post compulsory education and training. Whilst limited in terms of implementation, Field (2002, p. 204) suggests that policies and practices have developed to reform initial education. This initial education is the focus of my research.

Whilst studying E845 I examined the extent to which adult students on Access programmes access social capital to empower them to gain maximum benefit from educational provision. I wish to apply similar concepts to sixth form students to assess the benefit gained from social capital, cultural capital and subsequent impact on choice.

Putnam (1995) suggests that social capital can be structural in that opportunities and networks within a community can be significant, hence ‘social capital refers to … social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination, and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1995, p. 67), and can be encouraged through community collaboration. Putnam suggests social capital is being eroded through a decline in civic engagement and participation – and in turn educational activities decline. Schuller and Field (2002) suggest that high social capital results in high academic achievement. Mayo suggests that social capital is crucial as a means of reducing or removing social exclusion. Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1998) suggest that social capital is centred on resources within the family and this can affect both educational achievement and employment. Coleman relates this to human capital (Coleman, 1988, p. 101) that is productive for employers. In addition, Lin (1988) demonstrates a link between social capital and occupational mobility. Coleman further links social capital to community trust and obligation.

Social capital, it seems, has the capacity to empower individuals through civic engagement (Putnam, 1995) or resources within the family (Coleman, 1988; Bourdieu, 1998) although it can empower people in an unequal way. This remains one of the key questions in assessing the benefits of social capital as a means to empowerment and the reduction of social exclusion. Recent studies concerning the use of social capital by adult students (Preston, 2003; Jackson, 2006), examined during E891, highlighted the extent to which social capital can be both beneficial and exclusionary. Both studies identified social class as a significant criteria and identified different patterns of the development of social capital in relation to this. They demonstrated links to both empowerment and unfair advantage and could not separate social capital from cultural capital. Social capital can be beneficial and may encourage particular outcomes in terms of university choice, although such support might be variable and can be exclusionary.

In assessing 'cultural capital’ I wish to examine the information and knowledge that circulates within and around families which might enable students to gain advantage in education and positively influence university choice. This follows Bourdieu’s (1998) formulation of cultural capital, but broadens the concept, as Vryonides (2007) suggests, by looking at ‘students, their cultural practices, skills, attitudes, knowledge in relation to their schooling experience or outcomes, or by looking at parents/carers’ education, cultural practices and skills and ability to engage successfully in processes and institutions influencing children’s education'
(Vryonides, 2007, p. 869). Through utilising cultural capital one can see a link to social advantage, and this relates to the 'cultural resources' that students bring to making choices (Collier and Morgan, 2007). The development of cultural capital can be linked to the family and correlations to social class have been established (Dumais, 2002). Cultural capital is passed from one generation to another and through this process individuals gain social advantage (Swartz, 1997). Wildhagen (2009) suggests cultural capital is also 'institutionalized and ... is used to maintain group advantage' (Wildhagen, 2009, p. 175). This echoes Bourdieu, and in developing this it is proposed that cultural capital is further employed to gain academic reward. Such reward has been linked to improved academic performance in a range of research (DiMaggio, 1982; Dumais, 2002), but also impacts on 'whether students make certain educational transitions' (Wildhagen, 2009, p. 175), such as the transition to university.

**Research questions**

1. To what extent do students have access to social and cultural capital?
   - (a) Which social networks, aspects of the community and familial associations do students have access to?
   - (b) What kinds of knowledge impact on student aspirations?
   - (c) How are students exposed to this knowledge?

2. How do students employ social and cultural capital when choosing where and what to study?
   - (a) How do social networks, aspects of the community and familial associations impact on university and module choice?
   - (b) Are these inclusive/exclusive?
   - (c) What kinds of knowledge impact on university and module choice?
   - (d) Which factors directly link to high status/prestigious choices?
   - (e) What cultural practices/resources promote particular choices.

3. To what extent do college practices and policies support informed choices when undertaking UCAS applications?
   - (a) What knowledge circulating throughout the college assists students with choice?
   - (b) Do students have equal access to this knowledge?
   - (c) What networks and resources support student choices?
   - (d) Do students have equal access to these networks and resources?
   - (e) Does the college reinforce existing hierarchies?

**Research strategy**

I intend to utilise semi-structured interviews and will focus on a target population based on my own college. In theoretical terms two significant problems arise: the choice of methodology and the operationalisation of research concepts.

In considering operationalisation, I note that many studies (Wells, 2008; Croninger and Lee, 2001; Perna, 2000) point to the close relationship between social and cultural capital and the difficulty of operationalising individually. I do not wish to narrow concepts in an over prescriptive way, as a key part of the research will involve participants contributing to an overview of how different kinds of capital are utilised. In accepting a broad definition of social capital I accept that it may be both familial (Coleman, 1988; Bourdieu, 1998) and based on
community networks (Putnam, 1995). Portes (1998) indicates that social capital has been linked to educational attainment, school retention and subsequent employment (Portes, 1998, p. 9), whilst Wong (1998) utilises a notion of social capital external to the family and linked to other social networks (Wong, 1998, p.5). Gewirtz et al. (1995) are interested in linking the use of social capital to school choice and to the family. In this sense social capital represents the extent to which families have the opportunity to utilise information concerning factors related to schools and teachers. This links to cultural capital through examining the way knowledge within a family is used to facilitate educational advantage. In terms of cultural capital Bourdieu's definition is relatively narrow (Sullivan, 2001), but the concept has been utilised in research in a number of ways. Vryonides (2007) suggests that cultural capital can encompass the behaviour of 'students, their cultural practices, skills, attitudes, knowledge in relation to schooling experience or outcomes, or by looking at parents' education, cultural practices and skills and ability to engage successfully in processes and institutions influencing children's education' (Vryonides, 2007, p. 869). In examining cultural capital and advantage Vryonides identifies a number of quantitative studies that try and establish various correlations, but notes that they do not 'reach to conclusive results' (Vryonides, 2007, p. 869). In contrast, qualitative research such as Gewirtz et al. (1995) identify the use that parents made of cultural capital in relation to educational choices and the ways that parents gained social advantage through social capital.

Through revealing the interconnections between different kinds of capital and the way that parents use non-economic capital, qualitative methodologies give a rich insight into the dynamics of social and cultural capital that might not be revealed through quantitative methodology. Where Vryonides (2007) found little to link cultural capital to educational advantage through the use of quantitative methods, further examination using interviews revealed a great deal more that linked to social advantage. This relates to my aims where I wish to examine the students' perspectives in relation to university choice, rather than examining statistical correlations. Ball (2003) discovered that middle class families utilised different kinds of capital in a complex way to gain an educational advantage for their children. It is difficult to differentiate between the ways that they use different kinds of capital and hence examining both together seems to make operational sense. Ball also deployed qualitative methods that seem particularly suitable for examining a range of complex factors and give 'insight' into familial choices, outcomes and educational practices.

My approach is a broadly interpretivist, although critical, perspective that seeks to examine the outlook of the students being investigated. This is to gain a broader understanding of their motivations and the meanings and reality of their behaviour (E891 Study Guide). I have chosen a qualitative methodology in the form of semi-structured interviews; these should enable me to gain 'access to people's knowledge about both the contexts in which they act and the other people involved in them' (E891 Study Guide). It also relates to practical concerns relating to operationalisation.

I am seeking to utilise a method that will both enable me to standardise themes under discussion, but will also allow me the opportunity to probe issues further to add to the depth of responses (Research Methods in Education, p. 184) thereby increasing validity. Through the use of open-ended questions, and with the scope to encourage students to elaborate on answers, this will also allow for 'unanticipated responses' (Cohen et al., 2008, p. 357). Nevertheless, through standardised themes I will be able to make some comparisons, although this is not my primary objective. The target population will be based on my own college, with a sampling frame drawn from 16–19 year old sixth-form students undertaking Level Three qualifications. It will be difficult to utilise large numbers of participants, which will hamper generalisations, but I wish to achieve a degree of representativeness to address my research questions. Consequently I will ensure that a degree of stratified sampling is employed to obtain an equal gender distribution and a range of students from local council wards that represent the socio-economic diversity within the college. Once such sub-groups have been established I will utilise random sampling, whilst also employing a reserve list to
allow for problems caused by those who are not willing to participate (Bell, 2005, p. 146). I anticipate undertaking approximately thirty interviews.

Data analysis will utilise ‘theme analysis’ (E891 Study Guide, p. 125) to reveal the significant features of the way respondents used non-economic capital and arrived at their module choices. Themes will be grouped around non-economic capital and will be organised in relation to each research question to ‘preserve coherence’ (Cohen et al., 2008, p. 468). Through utilising a methodology that allows for unanticipated responses, I am aware that different themes and subsequent theoretical considerations may well emerge suggesting a ‘grounded theory’ approach. Themes will be summarised and interpretations of data illustrated by reference to examples (Research Methods in Education, p. 218).

Ethical issues
I will seek permission from the college principal prior to undertaking research and keep him informed regarding progress. I will maintain confidentiality and anonymity in relation to college and students, who will not be named. I will also use a consent form and emphasise voluntary participation. It will be emphasised that respondents can leave the research at any point, and if desired their responses will not be used in the research findings. If responses are used, respondents will be able to see transcripts. This information will also be provided, in the form of documents sent beforehand. I will need to be aware that I may need to terminate an interview if the respondent seems uncomfortable.

Application to educational policy and practice
Social and cultural capital can have a positive or negative interpretation and form a useful conceptual basis for investigating the extent to which students use the local community and educational providers, as well as assessing the advantages than can be gained through the family. If educational providers are to reach their goals they need to understand which types of knowledge and networks support students from more marginalised or disadvantaged groups. It would be ironic if widening participation initiatives simply reinforced the benefits of powerful groups. Findings ought to influence the way that students are supported, in terms of the college and the wider community of Hampshire colleges; the findings could influence arrangements for student support and targeting of extra resources and minimise boundaries between the community and the college.

Own professional context and development of professional knowledge
My interest in this area emerges from experience of working in an open entry co-educational sixth form college (see Appendix). Previously I undertook a role that enabled me to examine the extent to which adult students on Access programmes access social capital to empower them to gain maximum benefit from educational provision and contributed to my assignments for E845. In my current post part of my role involves advising sixth form students with UCAS applications both as tutor and as a pastoral adviser (senior tutor) where I am also responsible for managing UCAS applications for a team of tutors. I have been able to observe the choices that students make and this initially informs the research area under consideration. If sixth form students who make an informed choice have a specific use of non-economic capital it may be appropriate to assess if similar types of capital can be further facilitated through the college. It may also suggest which aspects of the community are beneficial to students and again may have implications for the college.

Timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Plan strategy for literature review</td>
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<tr>
<td>June–May (the following year)</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June–August</td>
<td>Pilot interview schedule and assess applicability</td>
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<tr>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Period</td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September–October</td>
<td>Plan methodology – operationalise concepts, preliminary planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November–March</td>
<td>Conduct interviews (ongoing transcripts, initial data analysis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April–October</td>
<td>Data analysis (identify themes, analyse, evaluate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November–February</td>
<td>Re-visit literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March–October</td>
<td>Write-up research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**References**


