

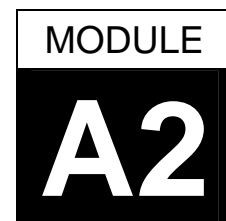
COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING



# PREST

Practitioner Research and  
Evaluation Skills Training in  
Open and Distance Learning

Planning research  
and evaluation



The PREST training resources aim to help open and distance learning practitioners develop and extend their research and evaluation skills. They can be used on a self-study basis or by training providers. The resources consist of two sets of materials: a six-module foundation course in research and evaluation skills and six handbooks in specific research areas of ODL. There is an accompanying user guide. A full list appears on the back cover.

The print-based materials are freely downloadable from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) website ([www.col.org/prest](http://www.col.org/prest)). Providers wishing to print and bind copies can apply for camera-ready copy which includes colour covers ([info@col.org](mailto:info@col.org)). They were developed by the International Research Foundation for Open Learning ([www.irfol.ac.uk](http://www.irfol.ac.uk)) on behalf of COL.

## The PREST core team

Charlotte Creed (Programme coordinator)  
Richard Freeman (Instructional designer, editor and author)  
Professor Bernadette Robinson (Academic editor and author)  
Alan Woodley (Academic editor and author)

## Additional members

Terry Allsop (Critical reviewer)  
Alicia Fentiman (Basic education adviser)  
Graham Hiles (Page layout)  
Helen Lentell (Commonwealth of Learning Training Programme Manager)  
Santosh Panda (External academic editor)  
Reehana Raza (Higher education adviser)

## Steering group

The PREST programme has been guided by a distinguished international steering group including: Peter Cookson, Raj Dhanarajan, Tony Dodds, Terry Evans, Olugbemiro Jegede, David Murphy, Evie Nonyongo, Santosh Panda and Hilary Perraton.

## Acknowledgements

We are particularly grateful to Hilary Perraton and Raj Dhanarajan who originally conceived of the PREST programme and have supported the project throughout. Among those to whom we are indebted for support, information and ideas are Honor Carter, Kate Crofts, John Daniel, Nick Gao, Jenny Glennie, Keith Harry, Colin Latchem, Lydia Meister, Roger Mills, Sanjaya Mishra, Ros Morpeth, Rod Tyrer, Paul West and Dave Wilson. In developing the materials, we have drawn inspiration from the lead provided by Roger Mitton in his handbook, Mitton, R. 1982 Practical research in distance education, Cambridge: International Extension College.

## Module A2: Planning research and evaluation

Author: Anna Robinson-Pant  
Critical reviewers: Richard Freeman, Santosh Panda and Bernadette Robinson.

Copyright: CreativeCommons, with Attribution, Share-Alike, 3.0

[\(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/\)](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)

ISBN 1-894975-17-0

## Permissions

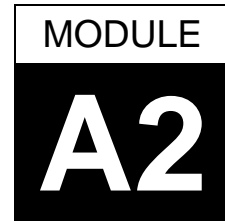
See the last page of the module.

# Contents

<b>Planning research and evaluation</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Module overview .....	1
Module objectives .....	1
Module organisation .....	1
The project .....	2
Resources .....	3
<b>Unit 1: Developing research questions</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Unit overview .....	5
Learning outcomes .....	5
Choosing a research focus .....	5
Generating research questions .....	7
Seeking funding for your research .....	12
Unit summary .....	15
References .....	15
Feedback to selected activities .....	15
<b>Unit 2: Writing a research proposal: working out the structure</b> .....	<b>19</b>
Unit overview .....	19
Learning outcomes .....	19
Looking at research proposals: what makes a good one? .....	19
Deciding on a structure .....	22
Writing a literature review .....	25
Unit summary .....	29
References .....	29
Feedback to selected activities .....	30
<b>Unit 3: Issues to consider when planning your research</b> .....	<b>33</b>
Unit overview .....	33
Learning outcomes .....	33
Why are some research projects better than others? .....	33
Planning your approach .....	39
Unit summary .....	41
References .....	42
Feedback to selected activities .....	42
<b>Unit 4: Developing your research proposal into a plan of action</b> .....	<b>47</b>
Unit overview .....	47
Learning outcomes .....	47
Working out your role in the research process .....	48
Looking at the ethical dimensions of your research .....	54
Looking ahead: working out your plan of action .....	56
Unit summary .....	59
Feedback to selected activities .....	60
<b>Unit 5: Writing your own research proposal</b> .....	<b>67</b>
Unit overview .....	67
Learning outcomes .....	67
Pulling it all together .....	67
Finishing the proposal .....	70
Module summary .....	75

Feedback to selected activities .....	75
<b>Permissions .....</b>	<b>79</b>

# Planning research and evaluation



## Module overview

In Module A1, you reflected on general problems or issues within your institution or programme, and began to consider how research might or might not help in some of these areas. In this module, you will narrow down these issues to a focused topic for your research and think about the practicalities of planning your research or evaluation project.

## Module objectives

When you have worked through this module, you should be able to:

- 1 Prepare a detailed research proposal and know how to adapt this to apply for funding, if appropriate.
- 2 Use the proposal as a basis for planning your research activities in detail.
- 3 Justify your chosen research approach and plan, taking into account issues around bias, validity and ethics.

## Module organisation

The module is structured into five units, as follows.

This introduction: (1 hr)

Unit 1: Developing research questions (4 hrs)

Unit 2: Writing a research proposal: working out the structure (5 hrs)

Unit 3: Issues to consider when planning your research (4 hrs)

Unit 4: Developing your research proposal into a plan of action (5 hrs)

Unit 5: Writing your own research proposal (3 hrs)

Your own study times may vary quite a bit from these, depending both on how you study and on the complexity of your research project.

Each unit is made up of the following components:

- an introductory paragraph or two that provide an overview of the unit, its focus and outcomes
- one or more activities for you to engage in, such as readings, analyse and tasks completed on the design of your research project
- a unit summary
- feedback on your responses to the activities.

## How to use the materials

The materials in this module are designed to be used in two ways:

### For self study

The module is self-contained. All the readings you will need are contained in the *Resources File* which accompanies this module. In addition, the general feedback provided in response to each activity is intended to keep you on track yet at the same time reinforce your own thinking and reflection.

### For workshops

The module can also be used in a workshop setting. Each of the activities could be done by small groups, and the feedback used as general guidance for both workshop leaders and participants. In a workshop setting, feedback can be more individualised, since participants have an opportunity to ask questions and receive direct answers, both of the workshop leader and their fellow participants.

## The project

Unlike some of the modules in this series, there is no separate project. The whole of the module supports you in developing your research proposal. The proposal is itself the project for the module.

## Resources

The following resources are used in this module:

Resource	Name when referred to in our text	Location
Gunawardena, G., et al. 2002 'Employment of university graduates in Sri Lanka: the demand-supply nexus.' <i>Annual Academic Sessions 2002: Abstracts</i> , Nugegoda: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Open University of Sri Lanka (extract pp 1-11)	<i>Gunawardena</i>	<i>Resources File</i>
Bell, J. 1999 <i>Doing your own research project</i> , Buckingham: The Open University Press (extract pp 93-95). Reproduced with the kind permission of the Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.	<i>Bell</i>	<i>Resources File</i>

These resources are included as an appendix at the end of the publication.





# Developing research questions



## Unit overview

This unit will enable you to explore different ways of generating research questions and to work out your focus, in the light of competing priorities such as funding, time constraints and institutional goals. You will begin by looking more closely at the area or problem that you wish to research, relating your own research objectives to those of others in your institution, funders and possible stakeholders. After determining your guiding research questions, you will go on to find out more about possible sources of finance for your study.

## Learning outcomes

When you have worked through this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 Develop appropriate research questions, both individually or collaboratively with your colleagues.
- 2 Identify whether your research questions fit with any specific funding agency priorities.
- 3 Narrow down your focus to a single guiding research question.
- 4 Analyse and compare different kinds of research questions, in relation to the kind of research approach that they suggest.

## Choosing a research focus

In A1 you looked at the reasons why you want to embark on a research project. Who owns and defines the project, as well as the audience of the research, are also key questions to consider now. You need to think about:

- Who is going to be involved in the choice of a research area?
- Why do I want to choose this particular research area?
- Does it fit into my institutional/organisational priorities and/or my own work?
- Who is going to support this project financially?
- How is the research going to be used later?

## Case Study



Depending on your context, you may or may not have had much say in what area to research or how the research will be used. For example, *Zobaida*, the NGO researcher whom you met in Module 1 and in the User Guide, is required to carry out a study as part of her normal duties.

*Zobaida* works with an international non-governmental organisation in Dhaka whose aim is to increase access to basic education for girls in Bangladesh in a culturally sensitive way. *Zobaida* has been asked by her project director to document the regions in Bangladesh where enrolment is lowest and to conduct interviews with out-of-school girls. She has been allocated a travel grant to visit these areas and to find out why so many girls have dropped out of school. She has been asked to put together a brief report on her findings and to make a presentation in front of donors in two months.

*Zobaida* has been told by her director, what to research, how the research is to be used and given a certain amount of resources to carry out the fieldwork. Although she has to conduct research to find out why so many girls drop out of school, she can decide about the kind of 'sub' research questions that she wants to use to structure her interviews. Depending on how she conceptualises the research problem, she could ask 'What are the barriers preventing girls from continuing in school?' or she might ask 'How does the environment of the school appear to those girls who have dropped out?', 'Do specific groups of girls seem more likely to drop out and why?' (e.g. certain age group, ethnic group). *Zobaida* knows that her research will be presented to donors and hopefully have an impact on their future policy in this area. She may for that reason decide to focus on the first question about the 'barriers' with a view to suggesting tangible solutions (e.g. timing of the school day could be more flexible).

---

## Generating research questions

Your next stage is to look at the kind of questions or issues that arise in relation to your chosen area, even if – like *Zobaida* – you have been told the general area or problem that you should research. If you are planning this research project as an individual, you might do this on your own. If your colleagues have been involved in choosing a research area, you could brainstorm possible research questions as a group. Whichever way you decide to work, you now need to generate as many questions as possible.

### Activity 1 15 mins



### Asking and developing questions as a group

This activity can be conducted with your colleagues, friends or students.

- 1 Give out two small slips of paper to each person. Ask them to write down a problem or issue that concerns them (in relation to your general research area, e.g. student dropout).
- 2 Now compare slips – throw away any that seem to say the same thing.
- 3 Put all the slips on the floor and rank them in order of importance to you as a group. You could do this by comparing two slips at a time and deciding which goes before which in order of priority. Alternatively, you could use large pieces of different coloured paper to sort the slips initially: red = most important, blue = second important, etc.
- 4 Write down which questions emerge as most important, any areas of dispute and the reasons why certain questions are considered unimportant.
- 5 Compare the group's responses to your own initial ideas of which questions were most important.

Which questions did the group produce that you had not previously thought of?

Do you agree with the way that they have prioritised the questions or would you have changed the order?

Why do you think there are any differences between the questions you come up with, and those of your colleagues?

---

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

## Learning more about visual methods of ranking

This next activity is based on a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) method called problem ranking. You may come across other similar terms (some with the same acronym, PRA) for this kind of participatory approach, such as 'participatory rural assessment', 'participatory appraisal', 'participatory learning and action' and 'participatory research activity'. There are many other PRA methods you could use too, such as:

**scoring** – instead of ranking the slips of paper, give all the group three counters or beans and ask them to cast their vote on the most important question or problem

**preference ranking** – comparing two questions at a time

## PRA

PRA was developed to help researchers listen to other people's views.

It allows everyone to participate by moving slips of paper around or casting votes, rather than one or two people dominating the discussion.

To find out more, look at the Institute of Development Studies Sussex website

<http://www.ids.ac.uk/go/research-teams/participation-team/projects-and-outputs/pr-and-pla-related-familiarisation-workshops/-2007/participation-research-pr-and-pla-workshops>).

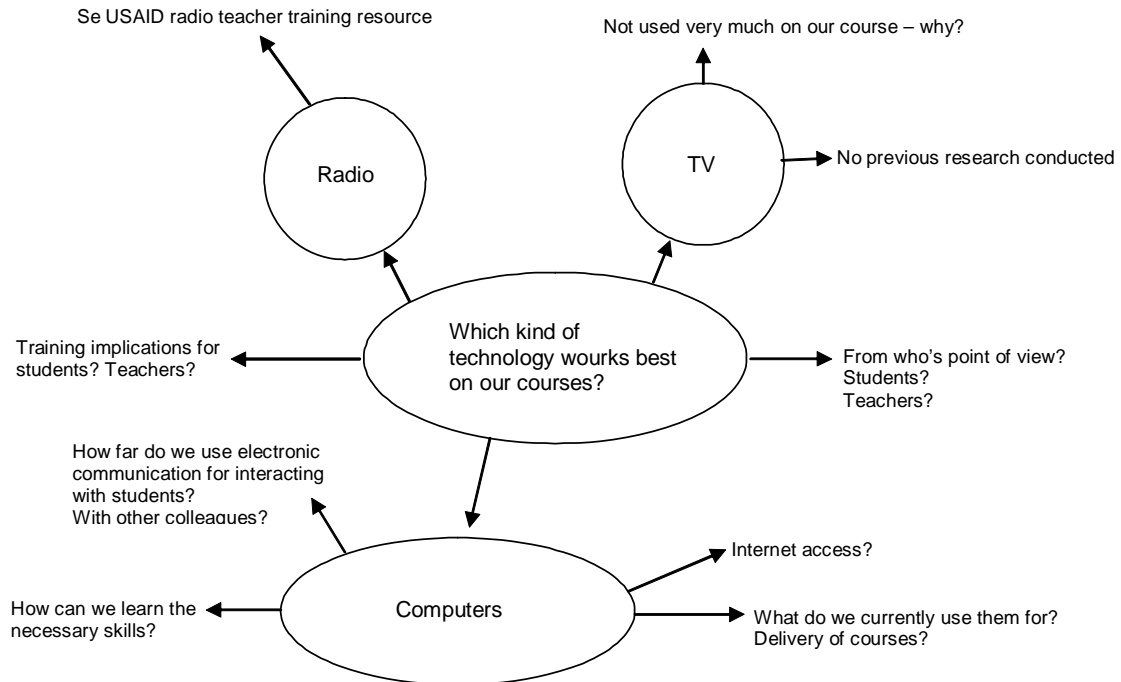


Figure 1 Mapping out your questions: an example of a planning map

## Activity 2 1 hour



### Asking and developing questions as an individual

Before you decide on your research question, this activity can help you to explore a variety of questions around your topic and begin to work out how they fit together. Refer to Figure 1 to help you.

In many situations, you may find yourself initially planning your research alone – particularly if you have no face-to-face contact with colleagues or students. Even if you are planning your research together with your colleagues, you will find this activity useful for mapping out your individual perspective on issues that have arisen within the group.

- 1 Write down one word that describes your overall research area (e.g. 'technology'). Put this in a circle in the middle of your page.
- 2 Now reflect on your experience in this area and use arrows to indicate the various issues that emerge (e.g. comparing technology – radios are too expensive, no access to Internet). These might also include issues raised by your colleagues (see above).

- 3 Try to find out about any previous research done in this area (both locally and internationally, as reported in journals, websites etc). If you have access to the Internet, there are several websites containing summaries of completed educational research projects – see text box on Useful sources.

At this stage, you do not need to read the research in depth, just get an idea of the topics and questions that have already been researched.

What questions have already been asked in your area? Map them on your diagram.

- 4 Use your diagram to find out:
- Are there any gaps in this research area?
  - Is there any previous research that you can build on?
  - Which questions seem more/less important to you?
  - Which questions seem more/less important to your employer? Your organisation? Your government? Your students? Potential funding agencies?

## Useful sources

**id21** contains abstracts of evidence-based research which has been recently published (no more than two years old):

### website

<http://www.id21.org/>

**newsletter** write to: id21, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Falmer BN1 9RE, UK

### Eldis Education

e-mail bulletin on recent research on education:

subscribe: [eldis-education@lyris.ids.ac.uk](mailto:eldis-education@lyris.ids.ac.uk)

### search:

<http://www.eldis.org/education>

**journals:** *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* (IRRODL). A free online journal about research in the field  
<http://www.irrodl.org>

---

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

## One question or many?

You should now have collected many questions around your chosen area of research. The challenge is how to narrow these down. You want to identify a question that will guide your research journey, which is not so narrow that you immediately come to a dead end, yet not so wide and complex that you will never finish! Many researchers find this the most difficult task, since, the more you research, the more questions that arise!



## Research questions

- a) What problems do women teachers encounter when enrolling and participating in radio teacher training courses? (In a specific teacher training institution in India.)
- b) How do different media, such as print, radio and cassettes, compare in terms of costs per student and cost effectiveness? (A national government Open University programme.)
- c) What combination of different delivery methods is most effective in a range of African country contexts? (Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Zambia.)

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

---

## Finding a good research question or problem

You may spend a lot of time exploring and refining your research question, but you should not feel this is time wasted. This is an important first step as a researcher – to begin to understand your perspective on a problem, your assumptions and perhaps how you might see the problem as an outsider. These extracts from Kumar (1999) stress the importance of getting your research question or problem right:

*‘A research problem is like the foundation of a building. The type and design of the building is dependent upon the foundation. If the foundation is well-designed and strong, you can expect the building to be also. The research problem serves as the foundation of a research study: if it is well formulated, you can expect a good study to follow.’*

*‘You must have a clear idea with regard to what it is that you want to find out about and not what you think you must find.’*

*‘The formulation of a problem is like the ‘input’ into a study, and the ‘output’ – the quality of the contents of the research report... is entirely dependent upon it.’*

(Kumar, 1999, p. 36)

## Seeking funding for your research

If you are hoping to obtain funding to carry out your research, it is a good idea to think about possible sources at this stage. Many donor agencies have specific objectives or areas of interest – so there is no point presenting a proposal about higher education if they have already stated that their priority is around primary schooling. Even if they do not state their objectives, you can look at the type of research projects that they have funded in the past. So before you start preparing your research proposal, you will need to do some research of a different kind! You will need to find out who might be offering funding in your identified area of interest and how to apply for it.





**Table 1 Sources of funding**

Organisation	Functions
Department for International Development (DfID), 1 Palace Street, London, SW1E 5HE, UK <a href="http://www.dfid.gov.uk/">http://www.dfid.gov.uk/</a>	DfID have a new Research Funding Framework for 2005-7 (see <a href="http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/researchframework/r%20research-framework-2005.pdf">http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/researchframework/r%20research-framework-2005.pdf</a> ) and are calling for expressions of interest in conducting research. DfID funded research projects need to relate to DfID's stated priorities many of which are tied in with the Millennium Development Goals and aims described in their briefing papers which you can download from their website, e.g. Eliminating world poverty: making globalisation work for the poor (200). You could also contact the DfID office in your country to discuss the proposal informally first.
The Ford Foundation <a href="http://www.fordfound.org/">http://www.fordfound.org/</a>	You are advised to contact your regional Ford Foundation office with details of your proposed research (country office addresses are on the website).
Commonwealth of Learning, 1055 West Hastings Street, Suite 1200, Vancouver, BC, V6E 2E9, Canada Email: <a href="mailto:info@col.org">info@col.org</a> . Website: <a href="http://www.col.org">www.col.org</a> <a href="http://www.col.org/about/consulting/research.htm">http://www.col.org/about/consulting/research.htm</a>	Research funding in the area of distance learning.
SIDA, 105 25 Stockholm, Sweden <a href="http://www.sida.org/Sida/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=2263">http://www.sida.org/Sida/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=2263</a>	SIDA website has details of the Swedish Research Links which aims to stimulate collaboration between researchers in Sweden and researchers in Asia and the MENA-region, offering opportunities for submitting applications for funding research in areas of joint interest.
Embassies or international NGOs based in your country	You may find local donor agencies or foreign embassies have particular funds allocated for research in the country where they are based. Volunteer agencies, including VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) and Peace Corps also sometimes offer small grants from their headquarters in the countries where their volunteers work.

We will be looking more closely at how to prepare a funding application in Unit 5, but at this stage you need to have an idea of the direction that you might choose to go in.

In the next unit, you will be looking at how to develop your research question into a research proposal, as a tool to aid your planning and possibly as a basis for funding applications.

## Unit summary

In this unit, you have:

- learnt to develop research questions to guide your whole project. Many researchers consider their leading research question to be key to the success of their project – if it is too wide or vaguely constructed, you may find you lose your way
- learnt to evaluate whether you can explore a certain research question within your available resources. If you do not have the resources required, yet still want to develop that kind of enquiry, you can also look for sources of additional funding
- begun a preliminary investigation into funding agency priorities, to find out whether your question fits easily with their own stated areas of interest.

## References

Kumar, R. 1999 *Research methodology: a step-by-step guide for beginners*, London: Sage (extract p 36)

### Feedback to selected activities



### Feedback to Activity 1

Through working out questions as a group, rather than as an individual, you will have begun your research activity! You may have noticed different opinions within your group, perhaps because of different perceptions that people have of the same problem, according to their age, gender, occupation and status within the organisation. You may find that your perspective on the same issue is also quite different, perhaps because you are looking from the point of view of a researcher and also taking into account practical constraints, such as which problem would be easier to research.

Although in this activity you have been discussing ideas for research questions with friends or colleagues, you could apply this approach to facilitate discussions with stakeholders. As you will find in the module on reporting, understanding various stakeholders' viewpoints on the research question is also key to ensuring that your study will be used to improve policy and practice. Particularly when conducting evaluation studies, you will need to begin with a discussion of the stakeholders' objectives and questions that they would like the evaluator to address through the research. Using participatory and visual approaches to discuss and compare questions or priorities (as above) can enable the less vocal to have a say in meetings with more powerful stakeholders.

## Feedback to Activity 2

### Gaps

Your diagram should indicate which areas have been well researched and where the gaps may be. You could extend the diagram to show with arrows how a certain research area may have given rise to other areas of research.

### Building on previous research

You may find that your own research questions seem to emerge from research previously conducted – questions related to other research which don't seem to have been asked before.

### Questions which are important to you and others

You may find that you and your colleagues or students have quite different views on which questions are important. This is not surprising since you have different positions and roles within the institution and this shapes your priorities. What is important is to understand and begin to explore these different viewpoints and discuss which research questions might be of relevance to the people involved in the research.

---

## Feedback to Activity 3

### 1 The practical constraints

You might have taken into account your own skills and experience (e.g. if the project involved complex quantitative analysis as in b). You would also need to consider the time required, the scope of the project and whether external funding would be available.

### 2 Other points to consider

Your role, interests, contacts and position would also determine whether you could embark on a large scale research project such as c). Your organisation may have certain priorities (for example, to determine cost effectiveness as a key factor in decision making) which would mean that b) is a more obvious choice than a) or c). Thinking ahead to how the research will be used in your institution may imply that a) is more immediately relevant to organisational priorities, than c).

### 3 Your research question

The answer to this question would depend very much on your position and your organisation's objectives for carrying out research. For example, if you are working as a policy maker in a multilateral donor agency you may find c) appropriate, but it is

more likely that researchers based in national NGO or government institutions would choose to embark on a smaller scale project which can feed directly into improving their work, such as a) or b).

## Feedback to Activity 4

When you are looking for appropriate sources of funding, you will need to try to find the closest fit – in terms of how much money would be available and for what purpose, as well as the donor agency's stated priorities.

Although it can be tempting to alter your emphasis to fit the agency's objectives, you would not be advised to change direction completely in order to obtain funding.

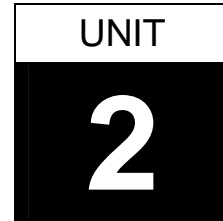
Remember that you will be carrying out this research over a number of months, and that you need to feel that your research question is important, useful and interesting to you and your colleagues.

Some researchers decide to write one kind of proposal to obtain funding and retain their interest in another kind of research – however, this could lead you into a difficult situation if you do not have the time to complete both projects satisfactorily.

---



# Writing a research proposal: working out the structure



## Unit overview

The purpose of this unit is to introduce you to the genre of the research proposal, rather than to explore the details of planning research (which will follow in Unit 3). You will begin by looking at the purpose of writing a research proposal and analysing the key elements of a research proposal. Through analysis of actual proposals, you will gain an understanding of different approaches to research proposal writing. At the end of this unit, you will have an idea of a possible structure for your own research proposal, and will have reviewed the relevant literature.

## Learning outcomes

When you have worked through this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 Analyse the structure of a research proposal and identify the elements that could be included in your own. (e.g. problem formulation and overall aims, literature review, justification of research approach, methods of data collection and analysis, reporting, time scale/schedule of activities, cost estimation, dissemination strategies)
- 2 Identify and review the relevant literature in an appropriate form for your proposal, including becoming familiar with academic referencing conventions.
- 3 Evaluate what makes a strong or weak research proposal.

## Looking at research proposals: what makes a good one?

Why write a research proposal?

*'It always helps to have one in case you don't know where you are going. Then later you will be more specific...'* (Frank)

*'It has to do with your personality – if you like to have guidelines for everyday life, planning your activities ahead of time.'* (Rose)

*'It acts as a guideline that helps others to understand what you are going to do or plan to do.'* (Monique)

*'In my country, you have to stick to the proposal once you have written one. In case you change, you have to answer their queries. Once you commit yourself on paper about a research proposal, you have to do it.'* (Rahina)

You don't have to write a research proposal before you start your research. However, many people find that it helps them plan their research in more detail and anticipate how things might work out in practice. Others do not have a choice – they have to write a detailed proposal if they are to seek funding or support from their employers. Or they may have to write a research proposal in order to get approval for the research from their institutional managers or committees. As you can see from the comments from the researchers quoted above, there are many arguments for and against writing a proposal.

## Reading



Some of the benefits of writing a proposal are that it:

- can help you to work out your ideas for research in detail and systematically, through developing clear research objectives, methods and questions
- can enable you to communicate your ideas about your proposed project clearly to your colleagues and research participants
- can get you into the habit of writing (as opposed to simply talking) about your research at an early stage, with the chance to learn more about how to communicate your ideas to a specific audience and experiment with different forms and structures
- can give you a structure to begin reviewing the relevant literature systematically and in a form which can also be used in your final report
- is useful as an indication of where you started from and you can look back at how your research evolved – your research journal helps in the same way
- is essential if you are to seek funding for your research project.

As Rahina pointed out above, there can also be drawbacks – depending on how your proposal is viewed by you, your employer and your colleagues. The drawbacks include:

- once approved, you may be expected to stick to what you said you would do in the proposal – even if your ideas or circumstances change



- just writing a proposal may push you into a more rigid, less open-ended research design than you intended, in your attempt to predict what you will be doing and what you anticipate finding out about
  - writing a good research proposal takes time – which could be spent on actually starting the research instead.
- 

As a trainee researcher, you will probably find that writing a research proposal is a good way to begin to narrow down your focus and plan your research in more detail. This involves not just planning the research activities and strategies, but looking ahead to how you want your research to be used and disseminated. However, you may well need to explain to your colleagues or employer that good research involves a process of continuous reflection and that your proposal should be regarded as the first step, not the blueprint for your research project. The exciting part of doing research is that you do not know exactly what you will find round the next corner!

## What does a research proposal look like?

*'It's an argument'*

*'A hierarchy of concepts'*

*'A recipe'*

(Punch, 2000 and Kumar, 1996)

Research proposals are as varied in form as research reports. However, as the definitions quoted above suggest, there are some common understandings around how a proposal should be structured and what should be included. You are putting forward an argument for doing your research in a certain way and usually the proposal moves from a general purpose to the specific methods you intend to use (the 'hierarchy of concepts'). Some people regard the proposal as a recipe, in that you are listing the elements needed in your research project – though with the understanding that the ingredients and methods may change over time. You need to start out by thinking about:

- What do I want to find out and how?
- Who is it for?
- What do I expect to happen?

**Activity 1** 2 hours



## Analysing the key elements in a research proposal

You will need to use the resource Gunawardena from your Resources File for this activity.

- 1 Read the resource Gunawardena, which was written by a researcher at the Open University of Sri Lanka.
- 2 List the main sections of this proposal and write the heading/theme of each section at the top of a separate blank piece of A4 paper.
- 3 Now cut each paper so that it represents the relative length of that section, as compared to other sections (e.g. if the introduction is shorter than the 'methodology', then you might have a quarter piece of paper for the introduction and a whole piece for methodology).
- 4 On each piece of paper, note what kind of information has been included in this section. If it has been presented as a table or bullet points, note this down too.
- 5 Place your sections in order on the floor or table and indicate in red where the writer has quoted any references. Does she/he use the literature in one section more than others? Is there a separate section for the literature review?
- 4 What other sections could be included? Is there anything you would have done differently?
- 5 Summarise the argument of the proposal in one sentence.

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

## Deciding on a structure

There are many different ways in which you could structure your proposal, and how you present your ideas depends very much on your topic and approach. You may also be expected to adopt a structure common by your organisation or the funding agency to whom you are applying (if this is the case).

**Activity 2** 30 mins



## Comparing research proposal structures

The structure of a research proposal both reflects and is influenced by the approach that you decide to adopt as a researcher.

- 1 Look at the three examples given below of how a research proposal could be structured. Each of these examples comes from a textbook on research design.
- 2 Compare these three examples and note what is different and what is similar between them.
- 3 Now look at the research proposal from Sri Lanka which you analysed earlier.
- 4 Which example do you feel most closely describes its structure?
- 5 Which elements are the same/different from this example?
- 6 How does the order of sections compare?
- 7 Thinking of your own intended research project, work out which sections you anticipate will be most relevant for you to include and which sections you may decide to exclude.
- 8 Write down the headings that you intend to use so you have an idea of the framework you will use.

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

### **Example A**

#### Introduction

- statement of the problem
- research questions/hypotheses
- theoretical perspective
- definition of terms
- delimitation and limitations of the study
- significance of the study

#### Review of the literature

#### Methods

- research design
- sample, population and subjects
- instruments and materials
- variables in the study
- data analysis

(Creswell, 1994)

## Example B

Title and title page

Abstract

Introduction

- area and topic
- background and context
- statement of purpose (or aims)

Research questions

- general
- specific

Conceptual framework, theory, hypotheses (if appropriate)

The literature

Methods

- design – strategy and framework
- sample
- data collection – instruments and procedures
- data analysis

Significance

Limitations and delimitations (if appropriate)

Consent, access and participants' protection

References

Appendices

(Punch, 2000, p. 67)

(Note: 'Delimitations' refers to defining the limits or the boundaries of the study, whereas 'limitations' means the limiting conditions or constraints that you anticipate.)

### **Example C**

A statement of the objectives of the study

A list of the hypotheses, if you are testing any.

The study design you are proposing to use.

The setting for your study.

The research instruments you are planning to use.

Information on sample size and sampling design.

Information on data processing procedures.

An outline of the proposed chapters for the report.

The study's problems and limitations.

A proposed time-frame.

(Kumar, 1996, p. 170)

## **Summary – presenting your proposals**

In this section, we have explored several different ways in which you might decide to present your research proposal. The research proposal structures discussed here brought out the following points:

- proposals can differ in the degree of detail provided about anticipated findings, sample size, research methods, according to the research approach adopted
- research proposals can differ in structure – some researchers choosing to integrate the literature they have read in every section, or perhaps to have a much longer section on 'research ethics' if this is a major concern. The structure will be influenced by your research topic, your approach and your own personality.

## **Writing a literature review**

### **Review or furniture sale catalogue?**

Haywood and Wragg (1982: 2) have described certain literature reviews as:

*'The furniture sale catalogue, in which everything merits a one-paragraph entry no matter how skilfully it has been conducted: Bloggs (1975) found this, Smith (1976) found that, Jones (1977) found the other, Bloggs, Smith and Jones (1978) found happiness in heaven.'*

A literature review is often considered to be an essential, but dull, part of the research process. If you see that your task is to wade through every published work on your topic to produce an extensive list of relevant references, you will probably end up with yet another 'furniture sale catalogue'. As the above quotation suggests, there is a real danger that in your attempt to be comprehensive and include everything you have read, you may end up with just a list of names and dates. But there may be no indication as to how these writers have influenced your work or how you see them in relation to each other. Writing a literature review which is readable and relevant to your research is an art in itself and a skill worth developing.

Learning to read critically and selectively is the first stage of constructing a literature review. You do not need to read every piece of literature on your chosen topic, but you need to gain a feel for the overall field and work out how your own research might fit in. You might also find it easier to intersperse the literature throughout your report or proposal, rather than to think of it as a separate section. This will enable you to make more direct links between key concepts and approaches in your own research, and how these have been developed in the literature.

### Activity 3 30 mins



## Constructing a literature review

You will need to use the resource Bell from your Resources File, for this activity.

Analysing how other researchers have written literature reviews can enable you to find ways of constructing rather than listing the works you have read.

Read the resource Bell from page 93 to 95 (starting at Consider the following introduction... ). This is an example of a literature review called 'Taking account of mature students', written by Alan Woodley, a researcher at the Open University in the United Kingdom.

- 1 How does the writer make links between the different works he quotes?
- 2 How far does the writer paraphrase the article/book and how far does he quote directly?
- 3 What would you say is the writer's position in relation to these books?

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

Of the many who have looked at the relationship between age and performance in universities, none has as yet produced a definite answer to the apparently simple question ‘Do mature students do better or worse than younger students?’....

## Where does your literature review fit into your proposal?

You can integrate your literature review into your proposal in many different ways. Rather than first presenting a picture of the whole field (as Woodley does), some researchers decide to reflect in more depth about particular theoretical works or previous research that has influenced their approach and ideas on their subject. Here is an example of this approach, from a research student looking at distance learning in Malaysia:

*‘Certainly the very first book that my supervisor gave me entitled: Points of viewing children thinking: a digital ethnographer’s journey by Segall (1997) helps to build my interest in qualitative research. I think Segall’s approach is very humanistic. She is able to build on rapport with students, with teachers and build trust and openness with her student informants. What I like about her is the space that Segall provides to the students. To an extent, the students themselves become producers and directors. Segall’s direct participation makes her part of the group. She has a binding relationship. In addition, the students are empowered by the space and room given to them that allow them to manoeuvre their thinking. Segall’s work and other research have strongly pointed to me that getting or building rapport with the actors in my research is the crucial most priority that I have to do during my fieldwork ...’*

(Dzakiria, nd)

You can see how this review is quite different from Woodley’s in showing the way that a certain book has shaped the researcher’s approach and views on his role. Their reviews are however similar in that they both point to a certain work or piece of research which they intend to build upon in their own investigation. Though written in different ways, both reviews are effective in relating the literature to the research enquiry, though it would be unusual to find a review like Dzakiria’s in a funding proposal, as opposed to an academic PhD proposal.

## Study Tips



### How to quote references

There are many different conventions for presenting references and your bibliography and you do not need to learn them all! (<http://essential.sci.uce.ac.uk/harvard/index.html>). The main thing is to be consistent in which way you decide to present your quotations, references and bibliography. Even in your research proposal, you should try to adopt one particular form and stick to it. If you are careful to look up and quote page numbers, dates and full titles at this early stage, you will save yourself a lot of time later. Though it may be tempting to take short-cuts and put in half-remembered quotes or references in your proposal, you may find you have to do the job all over again when you try to integrate sections from your proposal in your final report.

When you are quoting extracts from the literature, these should be indented and should be accompanied by the author's surname, date and the page number where you found the quotation. This will help any future reader of your report to retrace your steps and look at your 'evidence' for him/herself, e.g. 'Such open schooling is not a cheap option.' (Yates and Bradley, 2000: 207). The bibliography should list every work that you cite in the text. Where there are two or more works by the same author, list them as 2000a, 2000b etc. Entries in the bibliography should be typed in this order: author, initials, date, title, place of publication, publisher.

Yates, C. and Bradley, J. (eds.) 2000 Basic education at a distance, London: Routledge Falmer

Robinson, B. 1999 'Open and distance learning in the Gobi desert: non-formal education for nomadic women' *Distance Education* 20, 2: 181-204

There are several bibliographic computer packages which can help you do this task. With both Endnote and ProCite, you can keep an electronic record of what you have read by entering information in various fields. You can then choose how you want to present the references or bibliography and the program will do the formatting for you. This is particularly useful for compiling the bibliography or if you need to change the way in which references are presented. Many researchers also find these programs a convenient way of keeping notes on literature they have read, as an alternative to having, for example, a card reference system.



When quoting Internet sources, you will need to put the complete website reference (starting with <http://www.>), noting the date/time when you downloaded or consulted the article. It is worth bearing in mind that not all Internet references are reliable – and unlike articles that you consult in academic journals or books, will not necessarily have been through any quality control mechanisms.

---

## Summary: Writing a literature review

In this section, you have:

- learnt ways of identifying and reviewing literature relevant to your research topic
- been introduced to ways of organising and referring to other research or theoretical books that are relevant to your study.

You need to decide early on how you are going to keep notes on the literature and which conventions you will adopt for quotations and references.

## Unit summary

Within this unit, you:

- analysed the structure of a research proposal
- evaluated what makes a good or bad proposal
- began to make decisions about an appropriate structure for your own
- explored various sources for your research questions, including previous research, theoretical literature, and most importantly, observations from you and your colleagues
- began to look critically at which questions you would like and are able to use as the framework for your research.

In the next unit, you will consider issues around what makes a good piece of research – such as bias and ethical concerns. These issues are also key to ensuring you write a good research proposal.

## References

Bell, J. 1999 *Doing your own research project*, Buckingham: The Open University Press (extract pp 93-95)

Cresswell, J. 1994 *Research design: qualitative and quantitative approaches*, London: Sage

Dzakira, H. nd *Draft PhD proposal*, Norwich: Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE), University of East Anglia

Gunawardena, G., et al. 2002 'Employment of university graduates in Sri Lanka: the demand-supply nexus.' *Annual Academic Sessions 2002: Abstracts*, Nugegoda: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Open University of Sri Lanka (extract pp 20-32)

Haywood, P. and Wragg, E 1982 'Evaluating the literature' *Rediguide 2*, Nottingham: School of Education, University of Nottingham. Quoted in J. Bell 1999 *Doing your own research project*, Buckingham: The Open University Press (extract pp 92)

Kumar, R. 1996 *Research methodology: a step-by-step guide for beginners*, London: Sage

Punch, K. 2000 *Developing effective research proposals*, London: Sage

Yates, C. and Bradley, J. (eds.) 2000 *Basic education at a distance*, London: Routledge Falmer

## Feedback to selected activities



### Feedback to Activity 1

You will have noticed that there are some very short sections in this proposal (such as gender considerations, environmental considerations, etc), as well as more extensive sections on the relevant literature and background to the study. The following points are worth noting in relation to your own proposal:

#### 1 Structure

This proposal moves from the general to the more specific, outlining the background to the research, the literature, and moving to more specific research objectives and questions.

#### 2 Content

The proposal outlines the whole research process, from formulation of the research problem, to fieldwork, to dissemination of findings.

#### 3 Treatment of literature review

The 'review of pertinent literature' forms a separate section in this proposal and there are few references elsewhere. Other writers sometimes choose to integrate the literature throughout their proposal.

#### 4 Your proposed additions or changes

The short sections could be combined as a general section around ‘constraints’ or ‘underlying assumptions’.

#### 5 Terminology

This researcher makes a distinction between ‘methodology’ and ‘methods’, where ‘methodology’ is at the higher level of a research framework or approach, and ‘methods’ relate to the tools used to collect data. Sometimes you will find these two terms being used more loosely or even interchangeably in research proposals.

#### 6 Organisational issues

This researcher uses a numbered list for his research questions and dissemination methods. This is particularly useful if you want to break down your research questions into smaller units of analysis.

### Feedback to Activity 2

This activity shows how difficult it is to prescribe one model for proposal writing. Each of the three examples reveals assumptions about the nature of research, as well as about the level of detail that a research proposal should contain.

Examples A and B outline similar sections for the proposal, though they differ in how these sections fit together. Example A includes ‘limitations and delimitations’ and ‘significance of the study’ under the introduction, whereas Example B considers these at the end of the proposal. By having only three main sections broken into subsections, Example A is perhaps the clearest structure to follow.

Example C differs in that the writer seems to have differing assumptions around his/her research approach. The use of terms such as ‘research hypotheses’ rather than ‘research questions’ and ‘data processing’ rather than ‘data analysis’ suggests that this structure is intended for a quantitative research design. The idea that the proposal should contain ‘an outline of the proposed chapters for the report’ points to a less open-ended kind of research, than for example, an ethnographic study. The level of detail provided also seems greater in this proposal (e.g. including a time frame).

The Sri Lankan proposal you analysed earlier seems closest to Example B in the sections proposed (e.g. a separate literature review) and the order of these. However, none of these three examples include a section on dissemination of findings (suggesting that they are around academic research proposals, rather than more applied educational research).

When working out the structure for your own proposal, you need to take into account how your chosen research approach will determine what you can predict in advance.

---

### Feedback to Activity 3

This is a useful review as you can see how the writer related what he has read directly to his research question, ‘Do mature students do better or worse than younger students?’

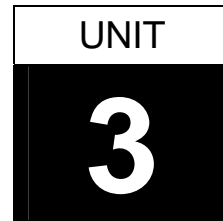
The writer links the different works through grouping them in terms of who had made similar findings. When he is reading these works, he has noted who agrees with whom and which writers were working on similar issues.

He does not quote directly from the books but he paraphrases the key finding from several (e.g. Sanders, 1961) when it is important to his argument. Sometimes, he simply lists the works which support his particular point – as in the opening paragraph.

The writer clearly shows whether he agrees or disagrees with certain findings, through his critique of the methods they employed or assumptions they take. For example, he discussed ‘the problem with these two studies’. His review does not state, ‘I agree with this and I disagree with that ...’ but he points to limitations within some studies and suggests how he will build on previous research (e.g. Walker’s work in the last paragraph). He gives more detail about Walker’s study for this reason.

---

# Issues to consider when planning your research



## Unit overview

You are adopting a new role as a researcher and this unit introduces some of the issues that may arise in relation to you as a researcher and your chosen research approach. Whilst issues such as validity, relevance, reliability, bias, sample and causality will be discussed in more depth later, you need to start thinking about these concepts when you are planning and designing your research. The aim of this unit is to encourage you to develop a research approach from your research question and to look critically at the inherent advantages and drawbacks of your chosen research approach.

## Learning outcomes

When you have worked through this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 Understand how the concept of 'bias' relates to your own proposed research project.
- 2 Compare different kinds of research approaches and analyse the pros and cons of each.
- 3 Develop concrete ideas for a research approach around your research questions.

## Why are some research projects better than others?

### Bias

Bias occurs when you inadvertently steer the findings of your project in a particular direction as in these three examples:

- only listening to and reporting what the boys said in the lesson, and ignoring the girls' comments because you can't hear them so well

- interviewing people whom you can meet in the office, but not bothering to interview staff who work from home or outside office hours
- presenting a picture that confirms your previously held ideas about why people drop out from courses.

One of the hardest things to do as a researcher is to recognise your own bias – whether this is around your attitudes (perhaps that you relate more easily to a certain group of people) or perhaps your position as an ‘insider’ within the situation you are researching. But this is the first step towards designing a project which will be considered to be ‘good’ research. Attitudes towards researcher bias have changed greatly over the years and it is now generally accepted that you cannot or should not aspire to conduct completely neutral or value-free social research.

These changing ideas about bias have greatly affected how we carry out research. For example, in the School of Education where I work, we have a classroom with a one-way mirror on the wall, which was built this way so that researchers could observe children interacting without the children being aware of their presence. I imagine when this room was built, researchers believed that they should minimise the effect of their presence and create a setting where the children would behave as ‘naturally’ as possible. Today, researchers in my department would dispute how ‘natural’ this setting was, pointing out that even to bring children to play in a university department was an unnatural act – like a clinical experiment. They would also feel uneasy about the ethical implications of a researcher observing someone who did not know or consent to being researched. We now feel that we can learn more by going to do research in a school, where we observe children interacting with each other and their teachers – and importantly, they observe and interact with us too as researchers. Rather than aiming to reduce our impact on the classroom or educational setting, we may actually intend to initiate change, for example, through action research.

All this is about our changing notions of bias and validity. We now accept that every researcher will have a bias and that it is impossible to eliminate all bias in a research project. The challenge is to recognise and reflect on your bias throughout the project and to set up situations where you are able to compare your own findings with other people’s views (including your research participants). You may come across the term **reflexivity** being used to describe the way that a researcher reflects upon and writes about her/his own position in the research project and how this has affected his/her research methods and findings.

**Activity 1** 30 mins**Where do you stand? Analysing your position in the research**

You already have an idea of your research project and the situation in which you will be carrying out your research. Even if you have not started your project, you can imagine what kind of bias you may introduce. Some people may talk about this as the preconceived notions that they bring with them. But you can also see bias in more positive terms, as the closeness that you have with certain groups of people or settings (perhaps as an insider).

In this activity, you need to think more closely about your research project and the role that you will play as researcher.

Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

- 1 Write down all the words that you would use to describe your identity (as a researcher or professional and more generally, such as ethnicity, gender, age). Assume that you are describing yourself to someone who has not met you. Note down any words that you imagine other people might use to describe you.
- 2 Write down all the groups of people or individuals with whom you intend to conduct research. Note any words that you would use to describe these people. What differences and similarities can you see between yourself and these other groups of people (your research participants)?
- 3 Try to visualise the situation where you will be doing your fieldwork. What kind of relationship do you envisage having with your research participants? Is this different from your usual relationship or interactions?
- 4 Note down any other factors that might influence how you carry out your research.
- 5 In which ways and why do you think your research might be biased:
  - towards certain groups of people (who will you focus on and why?)
  - towards certain kinds of interactions (will you be talking to people informally, formally, or not talking at all and why?)
  - towards certain research methods (which methods do you prefer and why?)
  - other kinds of bias?

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

## Does sample size matter?

When you are deciding who to interview or where to go to conduct your research, one of your first decisions will be around sample size. Should I interview one teacher or five? Six students or 600? Should I base my observation in one school or three? The issue about how large or small a sample size should be is partly around bias: your role as a researcher will be quite different if you are only interviewing one teacher and can get to know that person in such depth. Some people may feel that you can minimise bias as you can present the situation more fully from your respondent's point of view. Others may feel that your study is more biased as you have only focused on one point of view and not had the opportunity to compare other teachers' views. In any case, the implications that you draw from your findings around one teacher would be quite different from those of a large scale survey: you would be wise not to generalise statistically and suggest that this one teacher is representative of all teachers. It is not simply a question of sample size, but the criteria that you use for sampling your population and what you intend to find out about them that help determine the extent of possible bias. You may also find that practical considerations influence your sample size too (e.g. such as how many colleagues have time to meet up with you out of working hours).

### Activity 2 20 mins



## What can we learn from small and large samples?

In this activity you will learn to make decisions about sample size in the light of the research approach that you have decided to adopt.

Read the description of the research project below and imagine that you are deciding on the sample size.

- 1 Which groups of people would you include in your sample and how would you choose them?
- 2 How many respondents would you aim to cover in the study and what factors would influence your decision on this?
- 3 What kind of research approach would you use and why?

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*



## Reading



### **The concept of credit rating and its applications: a case of divergence of definitions and interpretations among academics of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies**

Credit has become a universal measure used to ascertain the volume of work undertaken by students following university courses and study programs. The concept is gaining ground because of its inherent advantages with respect to measurement of relative worth of courses and study programs for the purposes of accreditation, credit transfers and allocation of funds to academic institutions. In the context of the Open University of Sri Lanka the concept has been in vogue for the past two decades and an academic worth of a credit is defined by the university as equivalent to 450 hours of work by a student. In a nutshell this would mean that the student needs to spend more than two hours of work per day consistently through the year to complete a two-credit program successfully. The concept assumes that there can be variations in volume of real work, difficulty rating and the degree of learning and teaching with respect to different levels of programs. For instance, the volume of work for postgraduate students would be definitely greater than for an undergraduate student.

Although this concept has been in operation in this university for the past twenty years there appears to be confusion among students and staff alike with respect to its definitions which gives rise to different interpretations and viewpoints. This could be a very serious issue particularly when programme coordinators and course coordinators are not unanimous about definitions and interpretations. This study therefore attempts to ascertain the level of awareness among a sample of course coordinators/programme coordinators as to whether they have correctly understood the concept and are in a position to explain to a lay person its meaning and implications.

(Vidanapathirana, and Morais, 2002, pp 36-39)

### **How do we make decisions about sample size?**

Decisions about sample size are closely related to our intended research approach: an in-depth ethnographic study would normally (depending on resources) be limited to a smaller sample size than a large national survey. In the following activity, you will need to analyse the ways in which our methodological stance influences decisions about sample size.

**Activity 3** 15 mins**Comparing two research projects**

Different research approaches may answer the same research question in very different ways. For example, Garland's (1993) use of an ethnographic approach revealed different reasons for dropout from those elicited by questionnaires.

Read the description below of this research project from Allama Iqbal Open University in Islamabad, Pakistan. Compare this project with the previous project from Sri Lanka, in terms of:

- 1 Sample size – which do you think will cover a larger population and why?
- 2 Research approach – what kind of research methods do you think will be employed in the Pakistan project and why? What kind of evidence will be collected?
- 3 Pilot study on dropouts in the Allama Iqbal Open University

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

**Reading****Dropout study**

The study proposes to explore the causes of dropouts in the distance system of education provided to people in the country drawn from a 'no bar on age' group, multi level education, occupation or profession. The study will examine various aspects of student clientele, the course characteristics and the system itself which manages distance education. The study will also examine each factor involved in the process to suggest remedial ways and means for improvement. The study is aimed at identifying the nature and the extent of dropouts and the number of variables involved which are responsible for such a waste.

NoorKhan et al. 1993

**Summary – your approach and sample**

In the above activities, you have begun to reflect on issues around your role as a researcher, as well as the way that you select your research sample. How you select your sample and how you position yourself within the research may bring into question issues around how valid or representative your data is. The concepts of validity and reliability will be looked at in more depth in later modules. However, even at the early stage of planning your research, you need to predict possible criticisms of your research design – such as the idea that you are biased in your sample or your methods.

## Planning your approach

In later modules, we will be looking in greater detail at the implications of adopting certain research approaches and the kind of research tools you may choose to use. However, at this stage of preparing your proposal, you can begin to explore different ways of designing your research around your research question(s) and decide which you think would be most appropriate. You may find it useful to look back at *Module 1* which introduced several approaches to research, including action research and different kinds of evaluation, and research tools such as surveys, interviews, documentary analysis and focus group discussions.

### Small is beautiful or bigger is best?

In Unit 1, you developed several questions, which could be the basis for your research investigation. You may have ended up with a single guiding research question and perhaps a hierarchy of questions relating to each other. Now is the time to begin to think how you would put these questions into operation and plan your research strategy around them.

#### Activity 4 1 hr



### Working out which way to go next

This activity is intended to lead you on from your research questions to think more deeply about how you intend to go about your research and to compare two possible courses of action.

- 1 Go back to your research questions and write down your main or guiding question.
- 2 Think of two completely different ways of investigating this question – the most obvious contrast might be a large scale survey or an in-depth case study. But you might think of other contrasting approaches that are appropriate to your topic. Call these two alternative approaches Plan A and Plan B and write these headings on two separate sheets of paper. For each approach (A and B), note down:
  - Who will you be researching?
  - How many people/groups do you aim to cover?
  - Where will you be conducting the research?
  - Over what time period?
  - How will you be conducting the research?
  - What tools might you use?

- How do you see your role?
- Will you be the sole researcher (or who else might be involved?)
- What kind of data do you expect to collect and analyse?
- How does this relate to your research question?
- How will this data be used later?
- What kind of bias can you predict within your research study?

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

---

## Thinking through your options

### Who?

Say your question is around 'Why do women dropout of open university courses more frequently than men?', you might decide to do a survey of all male and female students in an open university, using a pre-coded questionnaire with reasons why they decided to enrol and the factors affecting their decision to stay on or leave the course. Alternatively, you might decide to do a case study of three women students, as compared to three male students – interviewing them in depth about their impressions of the course and observing the way they integrate their studies with everyday life.

### How?

Both of these approaches would answer the question in a different way. With the first alternative (survey), you could collect statistical evidence as to the most likely reason why most women drop out and compare male and female student attitudes to studying. With the in-depth study, you would not be able to generalise about how the majority of dropouts feel about the institution/ course, but you could gain insights into the different ways that women and men experience their courses, including their learning styles and how their home life interacts, and gain a more holistic picture of why women dropout.

### Why?

Other differences in approach might be around who carries out the research and why. Within participatory and action research approaches, you as researcher may be researching your own practice with a view to improving it, or in the above example, you could involve students in researching their own experiences as learners and with their peers. The outcomes of this latter approach might be very different from the survey that aims to analyse student dropout rates and would be useful to differing groups of people (e.g. students or teachers, rather than those working at policy

level). However, participatory approaches are often more time-intensive than conventional research approaches, because of the time required to build up collaborative relationships.

## Looking at the practical constraints

When you are deciding on the path that you intend to take, you need to take into account all these factors, particularly:

- What resources do you have at your disposal? There is no point deciding to do a large-scale district survey with a ten person team, if you have no budget or free time.
- Which approach do you feel most comfortable with – both ideologically and in terms of your existing skills? If you decide to do complex statistical analysis, you will need access to the resources to develop these skills if you do not already have them. Qualitative approaches may seem appropriate but often require more thought about how the data will be used – particularly if your colleagues or policy makers are more familiar with quantitative approaches and value tables of statistics above in-depth ethnographic analysis!
- What is the overall purpose of your research and how do you intend the findings to be used? You need to take into account how your research is intended to be used. For example, if you conduct an in-depth analysis of a specific course, are you in a position to implement or suggest any changes?
- What kind of role will you adopt within the research and how does this affect bias within your study? For example, you may decide to do a large scale study rather than a case study of your own institution because of concerns about your bias as an insider and the need to triangulate your perceptions. Your contrasting plans may have differing ethical implications too (e.g. that you can protect the identity of informants in a large scale survey but less so in a case study of one institution). We will be looking at this in the next unit.

## Unit summary

In this unit, you have begun to develop your research idea into a proposed study through comparing the different research approaches. Within the research proposals you have analysed and the two contrasting plans for your own research, you have identified issues around:

- bias (within your methods and your own role)
- sample group size and composition
- research approach

- practical constraints

All of these issues will be explored in detail in later modules but at the moment, you need to be aware in general terms of how these concerns can shape your proposal and influence your research design.

## References

Garland, M. 1993 'Ethnography penetrates the "I didn't have time" rationale to elucidate higher order reasons for distance education withdrawal' *Research in Distance Education* 5, 2:6-10

Noorkhan, M., et al. 1993 'Study of non-completers in Allama Iqbal Open University', in M. Chaudry and W. Siddiqi (eds.) *An annotated bibliography on research publications* Islamabad: Research and Evaluation Centres, Allama Iqbal Open University

Vidanapathirana, U. and Morais, S. 2002 'The concept of credit rating and its applications: a case of divergence of definitions and interpretations among academics of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies' *Annual Academic Sessions 2002: Abstracts*, Nugegoda: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Open University of Sri Lanka, (extract pp 36-39)

### Feedback to selected activities



## Feedback to Activity 1

### 1 Distance

You may have noted differences according to ethnicity, age, socio-economic class, gender, language, politics, religion or beliefs of many kinds. All these axes of difference may affect the way that people interact with each other and how your research participants will view you as researcher. You will need to reflect on ways to minimise certain differences which could affect the quality of your data (e.g. speaking the language in which participants feel most comfortable). If you are a man interviewing women, how might this affect your methods or findings? (or a woman interviewing men ...)

### 2 Assumed stereotypes

You will have noted any starting assumptions that you have about your research participants. This may include preconceived ideas about their status, roles, personality or behaviour. Like your research journal, noting these initial impressions is important for you to assess how your opinions change throughout the research process. You may be amazed later at how wrong (or right) your first impressions of people were!

### 3 Desired relationship

Researchers carry out interviews in a variety of ways, ranging from formal structured interviews to conversations which do not seem to be research. It is useful to reflect beforehand on the kind of relationship that you would like to establish with participants (a ‘fly on the wall’?) and how this differs from your existing relationship (if you have one). If you usually interact with these students as a teacher in a strongly hierarchical structure, how will you be regarded if you try to engage in casual conversation?

### 4 Personal methodological preferences

Your choice of research methods is influenced by your research topic or approach, but also by factors around your personality (perhaps you prefer doing questionnaire analysis to chatting informally with people?) or your existing skills.

### 5 Sampling and methodological bias

You may have noted bias around the time of day when you meet participants (perhaps it is always at lunchtime?) and the place where you interact. You can explore ways of changing your patterns of interaction, perhaps by setting up interviews outside the office or interviewing/observing at a variety of times.

## Feedback to Activity 2

Your first decision may have been around whether to include students as well as staff in this study. Since the introduction suggests that students are also confused about the concept of credit, it seems reasonable to include students too. However, the last sentence indicates that the proposal writers intended that their sample would consist only of course coordinators and programme coordinators only. When deciding on your sample size, you would need to take into account:

- 1 How many programme co-ordinators and course co-ordinators are there in total? If the faculty is relatively small, you may decide to include everyone – however this will depend on their availability as well as your resources. In this example, the researchers chose to sample 30 course co-ordinators and 15 programme co-ordinators (but we do not know what proportion this was of the total number of staff).
- 2 How many of these people would be considered to be a representative sample. You could decide to sample your population according to differences such as gender, age, ethnicity, length of service, subject area, postgraduate or undergraduate level, seniority etc. All these factors could influence how your respondents view the issue of credit and your sample should try to include a representative cross-section of the department.

- 3 How many people could you cover within your allocated time/resources? If you decide on a large sample size, this may have an influence on your research methods. You cannot hope to interview a hundred people in depth if you only have a few hours a week at your disposal. It would be better to decide what kind of information you want to find out and through which methods, then make decisions about who and how many people you intend to sample.

This study aimed to find out how academic staff interpreted the concept of credit, so a qualitative approach would seem appropriate to explore their differing viewpoints and practices. The researchers in this case chose to use a questionnaire but they might also have chosen to conduct interviews. Generally, a survey approach is associated with a large sample size and qualitative approaches lend themselves to smaller samples. Tools such as the questionnaire could be used within a qualitative or quantitative approach but the format and kinds of questions asked might be quite different. In this case, I imagine that the questionnaire might include in-depth and open-ended questions intended to encourage course coordinators to look critically at the concept of credit.

---

### Feedback to Activity 3

Compared with the earlier example from Sri Lanka, you may have noted that this proposed study is much larger in scope. The researchers describe it as a survey in two districts of Pakistan (Rawalpindi and Islamabad).

#### Sample size

This study appears to cover a larger population since it will examine all the dropouts in two districts. Since the project aims to look at the management system itself, this also suggests that the focus will be wider than simply the students who have dropped out. Unlike the example from Sri Lanka which focused in more depth on the course coordinators, this study aims to go beyond the immediate student group to research the groups involved in delivering and managing the distance education courses.

#### The research approach

Though described as a 'survey' (which suggests collecting statistical data on dropouts and enrolment), the study appears to include more in-depth examination about the factors associated with dropout, such as the course characteristics. This could imply a mixed-methods approach, combining a large scale survey with a smaller in-depth study of specific courses and learners.



Comparing these two studies, it is worth noting the resource implications of both. The relatively small scale study of course coordinators would be easier to manage and carry out than this larger survey involving familiarity with a wide range of methods and covering a larger and more diverse population.

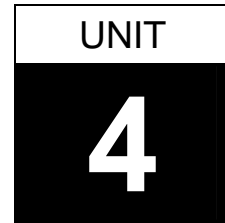
---

## Feedback to Activity 4

You should now have a sketch of two possible ways forward, both based around your research question. Plan A and Plan B may be contrasting in terms of size, research methods or the role that you as researcher intend to adopt.



# Developing your research proposal into a plan of action



## Unit overview

This unit focuses on the practicalities of planning and carrying out your research, including reflection on your role as researcher and how to ensure that ethical concerns are addressed. Through analysis of two contrasting research projects, you will gain an understanding of the different roles and relationships you could adopt as researcher. This is also related to the issues around the differences between evaluation and research, raised in *Module A1*. This unit also involves writing a detailed timetable for your research project and anticipating possible constraints. By the end of the unit, you will have a good idea how to structure your field research and the key issues that you need to take into account when planning your work.

## Learning outcomes

When you have worked through this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 Define your own intended role in the research, in relation to your chosen approach.
- 2 Distinguish between different kinds of data that are to be collected and analysed during the project.
- 3 Identify constraints around access and any ethical concerns, demonstrating how these will be addressed within the proposal.
- 4 Outline a timetable for the research, with costings, where relevant, and locations for each activity.

## Working out your role in the research process

As we saw in Unit 3, there are many different ways in which you can approach your research question. Decisions around which research approach to adopt have implications not just for the kind of data you collect or tools that you use, but for the role that you will play within the research process. In this section, we will look at the kind of relationship you hope to establish with other people involved in your research and how this can influence the direction your research takes.

You may or may not choose to adopt an action research approach. However, looking at the differences between conventional and participatory approaches can enable us to look critically at how we would like to place ourselves (and colleagues) within the research.

### Participant or object?

You may have noticed that researchers use a variety of terms to describe people taking part in interviews or other research activities – whereas some reports may refer to the ‘objects’ of research, other researchers refer to ‘research participants’ or ‘partners in research’. All these terms can give us an insight into the intended relationship between the researcher and those who are being researched. Within educational research, action research is an increasingly popular approach.

You may or may not choose to adopt an action research approach. However, looking at the differences between conventional and participatory approaches can enable us to look critically at how we would like to place ourselves (and colleagues) within the research.

### Action research

‘A form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in order to improve... their own social or educational practices’

(Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988: 5).

### Activity 1 30 mins



### Comparing the researchers’ roles

Deciding what kind of role you will adopt as researcher is not easy. The following activity introduces you to some key issues around your role and relationship with research participants, through comparison of two contrasting research projects.

- 1 Read the two accounts of research projects below (Two contrasting roles) and then fill in the table.

## Reading



### Two contrasting roles

‘The New Educational Reforms were introduced to primary grades in all schools in Sri Lanka in 1999. One of the major objectives of the Reforms was to enable all pupils to gain mastery in Essential Learning Competencies at the end of Grade 2, that is Key Stage 1. The National Education Research and Evaluation Centre of the University of Colombo undertook the first macro level study of a representative sample of 200 schools, which was supplemented by a survey of 10% of all primary schools (997 schools) to examine the effectiveness of the implementation of the Reforms from several perspectives...Assessment of 15 selected competencies of 872 students by researchers and assessment of 2443 students by teachers were analysed for this component...It was found that there was a discrepancy in the assessment by teachers and researchers while the only variable significantly related to mastery in competencies was school type. The study indicates a need to provide specific guidance to teachers in assessing competencies as well as in maintaining assessment records.’ (Gunawardena, G. 2002. p.19)

‘SCF (UK) and a group of children will be researching awareness about HIV/AIDS amongst children and young people in eastern Nepal, both in refugee camps there and in the adjacent communities. They will be planning their own awareness-raising programme, which will take place in a regional workshop and they will together be the main resource people. The children will also bring edited films of their work and the process they used; they will be trained to use a camcorder to record what goes on but the rushes will be professionally edited...’

(Save the Children Fund researcher quoted in Johnson, V. et al. 1998, “Stepping Forward”, p 307)

	Sri Lanka Study	Nepal Study
What does the researcher do?		
Who are the research participants and what are they expected to do within the research study?		
Who plans the project and decides the research direction?		
Who carries out the analysis and how?		
What are the outcomes of the project?		
What skills are required within the project?		

- 2 Comparing these two studies, which do you think would be most difficult to carry out successfully and why?
- 3 What constraints would you envisage around the role of the researcher in each case?

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

### Adopting the evaluator’s role

You may have decided or, like *Zobaida*, more commonly been asked by your institution or a funding agency to carry out an evaluation of a particular educational intervention, such as a course or the introduction of a new computer program. Evaluation is often linked to resources (whether financial or personnel) so your colleagues may be more concerned about your findings than with other kinds of research! You may hear the term **stakeholders** used in place of research participants in the context of an evaluation, suggesting that many people will take an interest in the outcome of your research investigation. This section looks at the role of a researcher within an evaluation and suggests ways in which this might affect your voice within the research proposal.



## Reading



### Evaluators and evaluation: some reflections

Evaluation has been, and continues to be, largely concerned with what governments and their agencies do with our money for our supposed benefit. Who gets what and at whose expense? We are talking about winners and losers in the arena of social action and we are not just talking about money, or even what money buys. In a pluralist democracy, we have to add values and beliefs to the mix. In such circumstances, judgements of worth are inherently problematic and unlikely to be consensual. Whose judgement is to count, whose process of judgement formation is to be informed, whose questions get answered?' CARE, 1994, p.3)

'Their task is to construct a body of evidence to support judgements, made by others, of the merits of existing practices and the policies from which they derive. Their focus is almost invariably highly specific – a training course for detectives or a mother tongue teaching programme for linguistic minorities. They are usually commissioned by those who also have responsibility for the programmes under scrutiny and the power to shape their future, and this puts a premium on the fairness, as well as the accuracy they bring to their representations. .. As a general rule (frequently breached), evaluators should not seek answers to questions nobody is asking...' (ibid.)

---

### Implications for your own research

Whether or not you decide to adopt the role of evaluator within your own research study, you will need to address many of the issues raised in the last activity. In your proposal, you will need to think about who gets the knowledge and who is disadvantaged by the knowledge going in a certain direction, perhaps in relation to your colleagues or students involved in the research.



## Information for what and for whom?

Decisions around the purpose of your research influence not only your intended relationship with participants, but also the way in which you collect and analyse data. As we saw in the Nepal example above, you may act as a facilitator with other people collecting and analysing the data, or you might see yourself working as an individual, with sole responsibility for carrying out research activities and presenting findings. Whichever role you adopt, you will need to decide how and when you can begin to share your findings, and perhaps set up mechanisms for dissemination. We tend to assume that dissemination takes place at the end of the project, but, particularly within action research and evaluation, you may discover that your research investigation is richer if you share insights as you go along. Within your research proposal and timetable, you can include ideas for dissemination, such as meetings or workshops and informal focus group discussions. *Module A6* will look in more detail at ways of communicating your research findings to key audiences and stakeholders.

### Activity 3 30 mins



## Collecting and analysing your data: where, when and how?

This activity will be useful when you come to construct a timetable of research tasks later in this unit. You need to start planning, not just how to collect information but how and when to analyse it and when to start writing about your findings.

Use a separate sheet of paper for this activity.

Think about the likely sources of data in your project. This may include:

- secondary data, such as policy documents from the Internet or your institution or existing databases on student enrolments etc.
- primary data, such as information you yourself get from people through interviews, questionnaires, observation and diaries.

- 1 List all the sources of data and research activities that you might be using.
- 2 For each item on your list, note how data will be recorded and analysed.
- 3 Note how and when the findings from each activity will be shared – and with whom.
- 4 What problems/constraints might arise around sharing any of the information you collect?

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

## Looking at the ethical dimensions of your research

Ethical concerns are important to consider in relation to every aspect of your research. It is not just a matter of thinking about how you obtain access to information or how you persuade people to take part in your interviews, but also about reflecting on the purpose of your research, how you will use the findings and above all, your power as researcher!

### What kind of issues might arise?

Engaging in research means that you need to think critically about your relationship with those you are researching and work out ways of ensuring that your research does not cause them harm. This is more complex than it sounds, because you often cannot predict the implications of what you are researching at the time.

#### Activity 4 40 mins



### Ethical dilemmas: thinking about ways around them

This activity will encourage you to think through the ethical implications of carrying out research in a variety of contexts and decide how you might deal with some of these issues.

- 1 Read the four quotations below and
  - a) decide what, if any, ethical dilemmas the researcher faces.
  - b) list any strategies you think might help overcome the problem(s).
- 2 Which situation do you think is the most difficult to deal with?

Here are some dilemmas faced by researchers in a range of countries and settings:

*'I am doing a case study of a small school in Iran. Everyone is keen to take part in my research, because I know them well as colleagues. I did promise that whatever they said to me would be kept anonymous. However, now that I have done some interviews, I don't know how I will manage to keep my promise. If I report any of these interviews even under a false name, everyone will guess who said it because they know each other so well. And some of the teachers were very critical of the headmaster so they might get into real trouble...'* (Abdul)

*'I work in an open university in Pakistan and want to find out more about how teachers feel about the changing role of technology in their courses. I have asked the Principal for permission to carry out the interviews and he has agreed, telling the teachers that they should all take part in the study. I am concerned that because of the 'top-down' nature of our college, that teachers would be scared to say 'no' even if they didn't want to take part in interviews.'* (Farhana)

*'I am carrying out focus group discussions with young girls in an open school in Bihar. I want to find out why they come to this school and how their parents feel about it. I want to use a tape recorder because the transcription will be more accurate than my own notes. But if I tell them I am recording the conversation, they may be shy to speak. They probably haven't spoken into a tape before. I am thinking of hiding the tape recorder behind a curtain and telling them only after I have finished the interview.'* (Anita)

*'I have lots of photographs of the students who took part in my research which would help bring my report to life. I don't think they would mind having their photos published. In fact, in this part of Tanzania, they rarely have their photos taken and they were very keen for me to take the photos in the first place.'* (Paolo)

Read the quotations and decide what (if any) ethical dilemmas the researcher faces.

- 3 For each example, what strategies could you think of to help overcome the problem?

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

## Identifying ethical concerns in your own research: how can you deal with them?

You don't want to end up like Abdul, thinking about the ethical dimensions after you have embarked on the research activities. At the stage of planning and writing your research proposal, you need to think carefully about the problems that could arise through carrying out the research in a particular way. Certain approaches, such as life history approach, raise more obvious ethical dilemmas. You would need to collaborate very closely with the one individual about how you constructed their story for the public domain.

### Activity 5 20 mins



## Looking at your own research: how can you minimise the side effects?

Considering the ethical dimensions of your research is about trying to minimise the unintended side effects of your study. Like an untested medicine, your research could cause harm as well as good, and you need to try and anticipate in advance what this might be.

For each of the following points, note down any ethical dilemmas that might arise in relation to your research and how you could deal with these. Note these on a separate piece of paper.

- 1 Access to respondents and the research site. (Who will you have to negotiate this with? Will you need written consent? Who else will need to have a say in whether and how you conduct the research?)
- 2 Are you working with particularly vulnerable groups of people (e.g. children)? Should you negotiate with their guardians as well and how do you protect them?
- 3 Are there particular problems around your methodology – or should you change it (as in Abdul’s case above) to protect informants’ identity?
- 4 How and to whom will you report sensitive findings? What will you do if you discover information that may be harmful to individuals?
- 5 How is your research to be used? How will you disseminate findings? Could there be ethical concerns around these ways?
- 6 Any other ethical concerns?

---

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

## Looking ahead: working out your plan of action

Before you started to plan your research, you will already have had some idea about how much time you would spend on it, what resources you have at your disposal (money and people) and where you could conduct the field activities. Now is the time to work out a more definite plan of what you will be doing, when and where. This plan will take into account all the issues you have discussed earlier in this module about ethics, methodology and, perhaps, likely sources of sponsorship.

### Preparing a timetable for your research

Like the research proposal as a whole, your timetable needs to be seen as quite different from a college or school timetable. It is a planning tool which can be adapted as you go along, rather than a document that dictates your movements.

#### **Activity 6** 1 hr



### **Writing your own timetable**

Now it is time to plan your research activities more precisely. In this activity, you will work out the logistics of carrying out your research project through constructing a detailed timetable.

- 1 Draw up a timetable for your research project, starting at the proposal stage and finishing with the dissemination of the final report or findings. Remember to leave enough time for setting up the research. It will take time to negotiate access and set up interviews with your research participants.

Your timetable should start at the proposal stage and end at the dissemination of the final report or findings. Look at the example below and prepare a timetable for your research study, including details of all the activities that you will be carrying out.

For each stage of the process in your timetable, note:

- location of the activity
- who will be involved
- any costs implied (e.g. if you need to prepare a budget for your employer or a sponsor).

Constructing the timetable may seem a straightforward task, but you will need to think carefully about particular issues that have implications for timing and location.

Here is an example of a timetable drawn up for a research project looking at the impact of gender training within NGOs. You can use it to help you to prepare a timetable for your research study, including details of all the activities that you will be carrying out.

Dates	Activity	People involved
March	Phase 1: Development of research methodology for whole project, initial contacts with NGOs involved.	Researcher, NGO contacts
April/May	Literature review and theoretical analysis. Interviews with NGOs and donor agencies for overview on literacy programmes	Researcher, NGO staff being interviewed, four donor agencies
June/July	Phase 2: Collection and analysis of gender training materials and curricula. Interviews and observation of gender training courses at two NGOs	Researcher, research assistant, gender trainers and trainees at two NGOs
August/September	Interviews with trainees continued, observation and interviews with ongoing courses.	Researcher, research assistant, gender trainers and trainees
October	Data analysis and report writing	Researcher and research assistant
November	Draft report to stakeholders for their feedback	Researcher, research assistant, various stakeholders
December	Finalise main report and compile guidelines	Researcher, research assistant, gender trainers
January	Dissemination workshop for NGOs and donor agencies. Publication of report.	Researcher, research assistant, donor agency staff, NGO staff, gender course trainees, secretary for support re workshop.

- 2 Now fill in more details of how you will go about the work and to make sure your timing is accurate.
- 3 Note down your answers to the following points and amend your timetable if necessary:
  - **Access and entry:** How will you gain access to interviewees, to institutions? What barriers might you encounter? If you are already working in a fieldwork situation, do any changes need to be made for you to work as a researcher? What kind of secondary information can you gain access to and when will you collect it?
  - **Language:** Which language will you use to carry out interviews or fill in questionnaires? Will this disadvantage any group of participants? Which language will you use to report on findings? Do you need an interpreter/ translator for documents or interviews?

- **Timing and location:** Work out the logistics of where you will be and when. How long do you need to spend at each site or with each informant? If you can't physically meet research participants, how long will it take to get in contact/communicate by letter, e-mail etc.
- **Analysis of data:** Have you thought how you will analyse the data and when (as you go along or at the end?). Will you be analysing the data yourself? Do you need to gain new skills or familiarity with a computer program for this (such as SPSS)? Have you allowed time to learn these skills? Do you have access to such software?

---

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

## Unit summary

You have now:

- reflected on your intended role in the research
- worked out the approach that you would like to take
- identified the kind of data to be collected
- identified any ethical concerns
- prepared a timetable.

In the next unit, you will be able to put all these sections together as a research proposal to be presented to your colleagues and employer, or used as the basis for obtaining funding from a donor agency.

This unit has pointed to the importance of planning your research rigorously from the start and incorporating discussion of any possible constraints in your research proposal. You won't then end up regretting that you didn't ask a teacher's permission to tape record her class, or wondering why you have collected 1,000 survey forms that you don't know how to go about analysing!

In the next unit, you will be able to put all these sections together as a research proposal to be presented to your colleagues and employer, or used as the basis for obtaining funding from a donor agency.

## References

CARE. 1994 *Coming to terms with research*, Norwich: Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia (extract p 3)

Gunawardena, G. 2002 'Essential learning competencies of pupils in key stage 1 at primary school level' *Annual Academic Sessions 2002: Abstracts*, Nugegoda: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Open University of Sri Lanka, (extract pp 17-19)

Johnson, V., Gordon, G. and Pridmore, P. 1998 *Stepping forward: children and young people's participation in the development process*, London: Intermediate Technology (extract p 307)

Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. 1988 *The action research planner*, Victoria: Deakin University Press (extract p 5)

MacDonald, B. 1994 'Evaluation in the social services' in *CARE Coming to terms with research*, Norwich: Centre for Applied Research, University of East Anglia.

## Feedback to selected activities



### Feedback to Activity 1

#### 1 Contrasting the two approaches

These two accounts belong to contrasting research paradigms and entail very different roles for the researcher and research teams.

The Sri Lanka example is a more conventional approach to educational research, in that the researcher determined in advance the nature of the problem and the specific questions to be explored. The relationship between the research team (presumably from the University) and the schools appears to be hierarchical in that the researchers direct the teachers to carry out assessments, and the children are viewed as objects of the research. There is no indication that the teachers or children have had the opportunity to feed into the research design, though the teachers play an essential role in data collection. The analysis was carried out by the researcher and required specialist statistical skills. The outcome of the research was a report indicating areas of concern around assessment of students' competencies and the need for teachers to receive specific support in this area.

The Nepal example draws on an approach to educational research known as participatory or action research. The aim of the project is to initiate change through raising children's awareness of HIV/AIDS, and the researcher is a facilitator of educational activities with the children, as well as planning the research. Although the actual research area (HIV/AIDS and children) has been determined in advance (presumably also linked to funding and donor priorities in this case), the researcher sees the children as part of the research team. This means that the research activities need to be accessible to the child researchers and readily disseminated to other groups of children – hence the use of video. In conventional approaches, the adult researcher would be holding and controlling the video, whereas here it is



intended that the children will film their peers. The direct outcome of the project will be a workshop organised by the children who were involved in the research.

## 2 Comparing the roles

Comparing the roles of the researcher in each case, you could suggest that the Nepal project might be more difficult to carry out because the researcher needs to keep a low profile and hand over some of the control to the children. This entails the risk of losing the original focus – though that could prove to be more exciting as the children could take the researcher in a direction that she/he had not predicted. The researcher requires a range of skills, from experience in facilitating workshops with children to co-ordinating video production. The Sri Lanka study is more fixed in its aims and direction and the researcher carries responsibility for managing the collection and analysis of data and writing the report. There may however be great logistical difficulties in managing a large team of researchers and co-ordinating with teachers over a wider geographical area.

You may have filled the table in as follows:

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Sri Lanka study</b>	<b>Nepal study</b>
What does the researcher do?	Directs teachers to carry out assessments, analyses data and writes report	Facilitates educational activities with children
Who are the research participants and what are they expected to do within the research study?	Children are to be assessed by teachers	Children, who collect data through video, analyse it and disseminate it to other children
Who plans the project and decides the research direction?	Research team	Researcher with child team
Who carries out the analysis and how?	Researcher	Children and researcher through discussion of video data
What are the outcomes of the project?	Research report	Video and workshops
What skills are required within the project?	Knowledge of statistical tools, designing assessment forms, staff management skills	Video training skills, facilitation skills

### 3 Constraints

These two roles are very different and which you decide to adopt will depend on your personality, your beliefs and your existing skills. Constraints on the Sri Lanka study might include shortage of trained research assistants, lack of time, difficulty in communication with teachers and possible lack of commitment to the study. In the Nepal case, selection of suitable child facilitators and building up a more equal relationship with them would be key to the success. It might also be difficult for the researcher to 'let go' when the project appears to be going in a direction which they might not agree with.

---

## Feedback to Activity 2

The writer presents two contrasting perspectives on evaluation in these extracts; the conventional role of the evaluator, as someone sponsored to carry out the wishes of a government, and the more subversive role of an evaluator who challenges the dominant values and voices.

### 1 The purpose of evaluation

The writer sees the purpose of evaluation as being largely determined by governments and agencies that have funded the programmes being evaluated. Within this approach, the purpose of evaluation is to develop accountability through assessing value for money. The writer does however suggest that the evaluator could also change the agenda, 'seek answers to questions nobody is asking...', and look at wider issues around change or whose values dominate.

### Task 2 The task of the researcher/evaluator

The task of the evaluator from the government's point of view is to collect evidence about how given interventions measure up to stated objectives. However, the writer suggests that the evaluator should also seek the views of those not in positions of power, who may be asking different questions about the intervention.

### Task 3 Who has control over the evaluation?

The government or sponsor appears to have complete control over the evaluation, as they determine the questions to be asked and the objectives to be measured. The role of the evaluator could either be to collect evidence that supports or contradicts these objectives, or (more controversially) to provide information to and seek views of other stakeholders who are normally not consulted.

## Task 4 The problems associated with evaluation

This account shows clearly the problems associated with evaluation around control and power. Who has the power to speak and to determine the scope of the evaluation? Who has the power to decide what is published?

---

## Feedback to Activity 3

### 1 Listing

This activity will be useful when you come to construct a timetable of activities later in this unit. You need to start planning, not just how to collect information but how and when to analyse and start writing about your findings. You may have included a range of activities and sources of data, from statistical surveys to ethnographic observation or focus group discussions.

### 2 Recording and analysing

How you record and analyse each item will depend on your approach, your own skills and how you intend to use the information. For example, if you want the research to feed directly into a workshop (as in the Nepal example above), you might choose to record results visually through photographs or video. If you are concerned to protect the identity of informants or you are in a situation where technology such as a video camera or tape recorder is novel and would prove a distraction, you might prefer to use written notes.

### 3 Sharing

For each of the activities you have listed, you could choose to share the findings almost immediately – or later on in the project. Many researchers now collaborate with participants when writing up transcripts or life histories, and, less frequently, when presenting their analysis of raw data. The benefit of sharing your views early on is that the participants can begin to shape the research and may have a perspective that changes your initial analysis.

### 4 Constraints

The disadvantage of sharing findings during the research process is that you may slow down the process with endless debate and deliberation! This is particularly so if your informants are in positions of power and are concerned about their public image. If you are putting forward your own views and analysis of a situation (as compared to the participants'), you may be pushed into taking judgements at too early a stage of the process.

---

## Feedback to Activity 4

### 1 Abdul

1(a) Abdul is doing research in a small school where people will be identifiable as individuals, even if he changes their names and tries to report their words anonymously. Abdul should not have promised confidentiality without thinking through how he was going to ensure this.

(b) Abdul could however tackle this problem in several ways:

- negotiate in advance with each individual about what he is going to report from their interview and how it is to be presented. This is a lengthy process as it will require more discussion and meetings with each respondent, and the willingness to change his analysis if they feel it is not accurate. In this case, people may then be happy to be identified by name
- write fictionalised ‘vignettes’ based on the true facts. This might involve taking several quotations from different people and inventing a character who typifies a certain position or viewpoint
- change his methodology completely, for example, to include other schools within the study (as a multi-site case study) so that there is a larger sample of teachers and they are not so clearly identifiable.

### 2 Farhana

a) Farhana points to a problem around access, which is common to many researchers working in hierarchical institutions. She has to fulfil the bureaucratic requirement of obtaining the Principal's permission to interview teachers. However, she also recognises the difficulties that teachers would face if they did not want to participate.

b) In order to overcome this, Farhana could negotiate with each teacher individually about whether or not they choose to participate, and allow them the opportunity to read whatever she is going to quote in the report. If they feel uneasy about her using their interview data, she should be willing to withdraw it from the study.

### 3 Anita

a) Anita is suggesting using ‘covert’ methods of research, which are difficult to justify on ethical grounds in this case. Occasionally, researchers working with drug dealers or with groups who would never agree to participate in interviews have resorted to this method (hidden cameras, tape recorders etc), but it does not seem justified in Anita's case.

- b) A way of overcoming the girls' shyness would be to let them play around with the tape recorder first and hear their voices and it might be necessary to spend longer on the discussion simply to overcome their unease with the technology. However, a simpler solution might be to note down their discussion with a pen and paper if this seems less intrusive. If Anita had hidden the tape recorder, at the very least she should inform the children afterwards and ask if they mind her using the data. They may find it difficult to say no (like Farhana's teachers) due to Anita's more powerful position as adult and researcher.

#### 4 Paolo

- a) Paolo has taken photographs with people's oral permission. The problem with using these in a report is that even if he uses them carefully, he cannot be sure where his research will end up. Nowadays, many research reports are published in some form on the Internet and then any photographs become accessible to anyone who chooses to use them.
- b) One solution is to blank out people's faces or use pictures where individuals are not recognisable. In many contexts, it would be considered good practice to ask for written permission perhaps on a consent form, but in rural Tanzania, requesting a signature on a form may raise much suspicion! Paolo mentions that people are keen to have their photographs taken – in this situation, it might be appropriate to give people their own copy of the photograph as well as taking it away for your report.

#### 5 Which situation do you think is the most difficult to deal with?

I would consider Abdul's situation the most difficult to deal with at this stage.

---

### Feedback to Activity 5

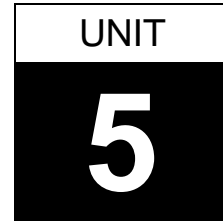
The above concerns cover every stage of the research process: ethics is not something you can add in before or afterwards, but a way of thinking about your research. Concerns around how you disseminate your research may influence how you decide to collect and analyse data in the first place – by adopting a more participatory approach for example. It is also important to recognise that, as a researcher, you also have rights, and there should be a point at which you can stress that you are entitled to your own interpretation too. You may choose to develop written forms of consent or a contract between you and the research participants.

---

## Feedback to Activity 6

There are so many factors that will affect your timetable that you will never predict them all. However, you have begun to reflect on how decisions around issues such as language and analysis will affect the timing of your research activities. If you decide to use one language for collecting data (e.g. Hindi) and another for reporting (e.g. English), you will need to make decisions about whether to translate all your raw data into English or to work from transcriptions in Hindi. You need to take into account how much time you have available, as well as concerns around methodological rigour.

# Writing your own research proposal



## Unit overview

The purpose of this unit is for you to bring together all the activities carried out in the earlier units of this module and to prepare your own detailed research proposal. You have already written a substantial part of your proposal (e.g. the research questions, ethical considerations and timetable). This unit will enable you to fill in any gaps and, if appropriate, to present your proposal in a form suitable for funding applications. You are encouraged to think beyond your data collection to consider how your research will be used and disseminated (though this will be followed up in more detail in *Module A6*). At the end of this unit, you are introduced to an approach required by many funders, the project logical framework and given more specific advice for making funding applications.

## Learning outcomes

When you have worked through this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 Prepare a research proposal to guide your research activities, and to apply for funding, if required.
- 2 Critically analyse your research proposal and identify any gaps.
- 3 Prioritise activities within your research proposal.

## Pulling it all together

You have already written at least two thirds of your research proposal, but you now need to think about the order in which you present information and any sections to be added or expanded. You have so far been writing largely for yourself, so you also need to consider what you would need to add if presenting this, for example, to someone who does not know your research context.

## Finding a coherent structure

You can think of your research proposal as a story that you are writing about the research you intend to carry out. You need to find a way of talking about your proposed research which is convincing to the reader and presents your argument through a clear and coherent structure. As we discussed in Unit 2, there are many different ways of presenting and structuring your research proposal. It is up to you to find a structure which can clearly convey your topic and your research approach. This is, of course, quite different from applying for funding, where you will often find you have to adapt your approach to someone else's structure.

## Analysing what you have done so far

### Activity 1 1 hr



### Are there any gaps?

For this activity, you need to look through the work you completed in the previous units in this module.

- 1 Bring together all the sections relevant to your research proposal within one file (if you are using a computer) under the following headings:
  - purpose or rationale
  - research question(s)
  - research approach
  - methods or techniques
  - literature review/ previous research in this area
  - research activities
  - timetable
  - budget
  - ethical concerns
  - researcher's role
  - constraints
  - outcomes
  - dissemination.
- 2 You may find that you have other headings as well – and that you do not have information under all of these headings.



- 3 Now review your headings and put them in an appropriate order. You might refer back to the research proposal models A, B and C in Unit 2 for examples of structures that other researchers have used. Remember that you can experiment with the structure and form, perhaps bringing relevant literature into all the sections, rather than presenting a separate literature review section.
- 4 Once you have a suitable order, make a note of:
  - Which sections need to be expanded or are not yet written
  - Which sections would not make sense without further explanation or re-writing for an outsider
  - Whether your ‘voice’ is consistent throughout. At the simplest level, you need to decide if you use the first person (‘I’) or the third person (‘the researcher’).
- 5 Expand any sections that need further explanation. For example, background information on your institution which would enable an outsider to understand why you have adopted a certain approach.

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

## Outcomes and dissemination

One aspect that we have not so far discussed in detail is how you intend your research to benefit others and the mechanisms for sharing your findings. At this stage, this is probably the least of your worries! However, if you are applying for funding from an external donor agency, this section will need to be well developed. Funders are usually concerned that the research projects they support should have a wide impact on the research community. Aside from the funding concerns, it is well worth thinking in advance how you intend to disseminate your findings, since this may also influence whom you include in your study and the kind of data or materials you collect along the way.

### Activity 2 40 mins



## Looking ahead to the end of the process

The outcomes of your research will be closely related to the purpose and aims of your research. This activity will enable you to anticipate how your research findings may be used and how you will go about disseminating them.

- 1 Look back at your purpose and rationale, and note down from your research proposal:
  - the general outcomes that you anticipate from this research

- any specific outcomes that you anticipate (e.g. a manual, teachers trained)
  - any factors which would make a difference to these objectives being achieved
  - the groups of people/individuals which you hope to benefit from the research
  - any groups of people whom you would like to read or hear about your research findings (e.g. policy makers)
  - any people who would find your research of interest or relevance, but are not immediately affected by it.
- 2 Now you need to consider how you will communicate with the groups mentioned above. This may be through written, oral or electronic means and need not be at the end of the research, but perhaps at different stages. Write down:
- the different ways will you use for sharing the findings of your research
  - the stage at which you will begin to disseminate your findings.

---

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

## Finishing the proposal

You should by now have an almost completed research proposal. You can now go through and write the sections more fully (for example, the section on dissemination which is in note form). However, if the purpose of writing the proposal is to apply for funding, you may prefer to wait until you have completed the next activity and have collected any documents from donors to whom you will apply.

## Making a funding application

Before you start revising your proposal in order to apply for funding, you need to make a decision about which donor or sponsoring agency might be most interested in your work. In some cases, this decision may be based on agencies who are already involved in the work of your institution or with whom you have had previous contact.

**Activity 3** several hours**Another kind of research!**

This activity suggests a strategy that you can use to obtain funding. Since it involves quite a bit of research of likely donors, it is likely to take you several hours.

You will not usually be successful in obtaining external funding for a research project until you have done some preliminary research into who is funding what and why. A colleague of mine describes this as learning ‘the mother tongue’ of the funding agency to whom you wish to apply. For this reason, you cannot simply send out the same application or proposal to a range of donor agencies.

Look back at Unit 1, where you worked out your research objectives and did a brief survey of research already completed.

- 1 List the funding agencies that may be interested in your research and not the reasons why.
- 2 Look at any information you have about these agencies, particularly their websites, and find out details of their objectives, projects that they have funded in the past, and how much they generally give.
- 3 Choose the agency that looks most appropriate for your project and the level of funding that you require. Obtain application forms, either by post or from the Internet, and compare these with your existing proposal. If possible, read copies of proposals that have already been funded by the agency. Sometimes these are available on their website.
- 4 Which sections of the form can be adapted from your proposal and which need to be written?

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

**Adapting your proposal to different formats**

If you are applying for funding, you may find you need to adjust your proposal to fit their headings or conventions of presenting research ideas. In this section you are introduced to a common planning tool, the project logical framework, in order to apply it within a research funding context.

## Logical frameworks

Increasingly, agencies are requiring applicants to summarise their proposal within a certain framework, adopted within the agency as a whole to guide their project work. The ‘logical framework’ (often referred to as ‘log frame’) is a commonly used tool and if you are not familiar with this form, can look intimidating!

Although people often find log frames time consuming and sometimes even intimidating to complete, they are a useful planning tool. In general, log frames summarise in a standard format:

- what a programme aims to achieve
- how the goals will be achieved
- what is needed to ensure success (including assumptions as well as inputs)
- proposed ways of measuring progress
- potential problems that might be faced.

## Log frames – where to find out more

<http://www.bond.org.uk/pubs/ipw.htm>. Download the Beginners Guide to Logical Framework Analysis.

BOND is a UK-based network of voluntary organisations, working in the international development field. This means that these guidelines are written for people living in the UK who are involved in development work internationally. The guide does, however, include some useful tables that provide definitions of all the log frame terms as well as guidelines on how to make use of a log frame for planning.

For further information about BOND see [www.bond.org.uk](http://www.bond.org.uk) or contact at [bond@bond.ac.uk](mailto:bond@bond.ac.uk)

### Activity 4 20 mins



## Completing a project logical framework

Read the example of a project logical framework below (Figure 2). This was written for a research funding application for a project investigating how school council meetings run in primary schools (in the UK) could draw on visual means of communicating (as well as the more literacy-based forms of running meetings that adults use, such as minutes and agenda). Note down:

- 1 What is the difference between the ‘goal’ and the ‘purpose’?
- 2 Which part of your proposal would be similar to ‘measurable indicators’ and ‘means of verification’?
- 3 What kinds of ‘means of verification’ can you find in this example?
- 4 What kinds of ‘means of verification’ can you find in your own proposal?

5 In which section can you find the ‘important assumptions’ in your own proposal?

*The feedback to this activity is at the end of the unit →*

*Figure 2 An example of a project logical framework*

Narrative summary	Measurable indicator	Means of verification	Important assumptions
Goal			
To empower children by enabling them to have greater influence and control over their own learning, thereby contributing to more effective teaching and learning in primary schools.	Children participate more fully in decision making, around their own learning and their learning environment, initially in the context of school councils.	Decisions are made by the children in areas which are of concern to them.	That participation is a fundamental principle in a democratic society and should be extended to children. That children are empowered when they are able to make decisions in areas of concern to them. That children learn more effectively when they have greater control over their own learning, participating more fully in decisions around their learning.

Purpose	Measurable indicator	Means of verification	Important assumptions
To enhance children’s level of participation in decision making through building on visual ways of communicating.	Changes in the ways children participate in decision making within the school council and classrooms.	Observation of the school council meetings and classroom discussions. Interviews & focus group discussion with teachers and children.	That the school council in each of the three schools provides a forum for developing participation.
To extend the range of communicative practices in which teachers and children in the project schools engage.	Changes in children’s and teachers’ practice regarding the range of communicative practices they engage in within the classroom and beyond.	As above.	That visual ways of communicating will contribute to greater participation.
To raise awareness amongst teachers in other schools as to visual ways of communicating.	Changes in content and level of discussion around children’s communicative practice, participation and decision making.	Workshop and conference with teachers.	That the teachers are not at present using predominantly visual methods of communicating.

Outputs	Measurable indicator	Means of verification	Important assumptions
Greater participation in decision making, initially in the school council.	Changes in the proportion & composition of children actively participating in discussions and changes in the nature of the discussions (level of decision making) in the school councils and classrooms.	Observation, interviews and focus group discussions. Workshop and conference with teachers.	That teachers and children agree to take part in the research study. That greater participation in the school council can lead to children's greater participation in decision making around their own learning and their learning environment, in other areas of the school and community
Contribution to teachers' professional development through supporting their understanding of the potential of visual, and other, ways of communicating with children.	Willingness on the part of other teachers to engage in action research around this area in their own classrooms, informed by knowledge gained from this research project.	Response to guidelines developed in collaboration with participating teachers for other school councils.	That teachers welcome children's greater participation in decision making in the school council and school as a whole.
Identification of ways of applying the visual means of communicating introduced in school councils to other learning contexts.	Introduction of similar visual practices in other areas of the school and community.	Observations of extended application of the practices researched.	That teachers will continue to develop their practice around this area. The researchers will collaborate with the teachers' in identifying new directions within the research.

Activities	Measurable indicator	Means of verification	Important assumptions
Research into school councils in the three Norfolk primary schools.	Research fieldwork in three schools.		
Introduction of PRA/visual ways of communicating within the school councils.			
Evaluation and development of the research with teachers in the schools.		Progress reports Meetings and workshop with teachers in partner schools.	As above.
Analysis and presentation of findings through workshop with participating teachers and writing final report.	Workshop.		
Dissemination conference.	Conference and articles for disseminating findings. Final report.		

## Last steps

You are now at the stage of finishing your proposal. If you are intending to send the proposal to a funding agency, you may need to revise it in collaboration with your employer and colleagues to ensure they are happy with the direction you intend to take (and the resources you will be offering from the institution's side). Even if you are not using your proposal as the basis for a funding application, it is very useful to circulate it amongst your friends and colleagues for feedback. This will also be another way of introducing them to your ideas for a research project and encouraging them to contribute their ideas to the research process. If you are preparing a proposal for funding, you may find the tips below useful – and good luck!

## Module summary

You have now completed your research proposal and are ready to embark on the research project. Through the activities in this module, you have become familiar with many of the issues that you will encounter later in your field research, such as ethical concerns and your role as researcher. Though these will be dealt with in more detail in later modules, you have already begun to consider how these issues may affect the way you design your research. You have also begun to write and reflect on your research through constructing a research proposal and learning skills of analysis, communication and presentation. This is just the start of a process which you will continue throughout your research project: writing up does not just happen at the end!

### Feedback to selected activities



### Feedback to Activity 1

It is tempting to consider the research proposal as a formula where you have to simply fill in the blanks! However, a research proposal can be shaped by you and your research topic – just like a research report.

You need to decide which sections should carry more weight than others. For example, if you are researching a sensitive topic (e.g. young people's views of counselling interventions), you may decide to have a lengthier section on research ethics.

You may find it easier to write your proposal in the first person, rather than referring to yourself as 'the researcher'. This is now acceptable and preferable in many institutions, but you need to take into account how reports and proposals are presented within your own organisation. If your colleagues and employer are more used to formal depersonalised proposals or reports, you may need to indicate why you are adopting a different style from the norm.

If you feel that your proposal could be considered as a blueprint for the research and that you will be limited by it, you may also want to suggest ways in which certain aspects of the research may change once you have started.

Whether your audience is your employer, your sponsor or your colleagues, thinking about them is essential at this stage. As well as explaining things in more detail (for example, why you are interested in a certain topic or aspect), you can begin to anticipate what your specific audience may 'read into' your proposal and ensure that they share your perspective on the research. Good research depends on good communication, even at the proposal stage.

---

## Feedback to Activity 2

It helps to try to make your outcomes as specific as possible, particularly in a funding application. Sponsors are unlikely to be interested in vague declarations of furthering knowledge in a certain area. They are more likely to prefer definite outcomes such as a manual which shares ideas on methods of evaluation, or a dissemination workshop with colleagues who participated in your research. You do not need to state exactly what you will be disseminating at this stage but you can suggest the ways in which you will share information and with whom. As you will be exploring in the final module, there are many ways of further disseminating information, particularly through the websites of relevant organisations or your own website, if you have one. Though many researchers prefer to disseminate findings only at the end of their research project, this depends on your approach – action research would involve sharing findings and perceptions as the project evolves.

---

## Feedback to Activity 3

Each funding agency has its own priorities and you need to find out what these are before applying. These are usually stated in their objectives or mission statement or themes.

There is no point choosing an agency to apply to if they only fund research in the health sector and you are looking at the applications of ICT in distance education. Some agencies have a geographical bias towards working in one particular area of the world. You also need to take into account the kind of research approach generally supported – for example, an agency may prefer large statistical surveys to in-depth case study. You would be advised not to change your own chosen approach, but to look for a funder who is likely to be sympathetic to where you are coming from.



It is likely that much of your research proposal can be used to complete the application form. Some donor agencies do not have an application form, but specify the sections they would expect to see within a proposal. The sections which you are likely to have to expand on might include:

- **Outcomes and how to monitor or measure them.** Donors are concerned about accountability and want to be sure that they can measure value for money in tangible terms.
  - **Budget.** If you are applying for funding, you need to be specific about how much you want in relation to each research activity. If you are organising a workshop, don't give a lump sum, but break it down into the various elements (such as refreshments, transport, room hire, etc).
  - **Objectives.** You may need to explain in more detail how your stated objectives and rationale relates to the overall priorities of the funding agency. This might include looking at how your research could be useful within the agency's overall work.
- 

## Feedback to Activity 4

Don't feel that the project logical framework is a completely different task from what you have already written in the proposal. It is simply a more compressed way of presenting some of the information.

### 1 What is the difference between the 'goal' and the 'purpose'?

The goal is a more general and perhaps higher level aim than the 'purpose' in this context. When you wrote your research questions, you may have moved from the general to the more specific. The distinction between 'goal' and 'purpose' is similar here.

### 2 Which part of your proposal would be similar to 'measurable indicators' and 'means of verification'?

You may have discussed the measurable indicators and means of verification in your section on outcomes and how these will be measured. Some projects do not lend themselves easily to measurable indicators (i.e. principles which you can use to measure whether your objectives have been achieved), especially if you are adopting an ethnographic approach.

3 and 4 What kinds of ‘means of verification’ can you find in this example? What kinds of ‘means of verification’ can you find in your own proposal?

‘Means of verification’ refers to the concrete evidence that you can present to as a measure of your project’s success. This can be collected through focus group discussions, materials, interviews, observation.

5 In which section can you find the ‘important assumptions’ in your own proposal?

The important assumptions can probably be found in the rationale and constraints section of your proposal. As well as the limitations or constraints on your research project working out as you intended (e.g. that colleagues do not have time to participate fully), you can include wider assumptions that you yourself make about the nature of your topic and the research process. This might include your ideological stance, as in this example – ‘that participation is a fundamental principle in a democratic society and should be extended to children’.

---

## Permissions

The publishers, editors and authors of this handbook are very grateful to the following copyright holders and authors for permission to include extracts from their work. We are particularly indebted to those publishers and individuals who supported the project by waiving copyright fees. We have made every effort to track down copyright holders. If you consider we have used material which is your copyright without acknowledgement, please accept our apologies and let COL know so the correction can be put into the next edition.

The Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex and the Department for International Development for permission to use the links [www.ids.ac.uk/ids](http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids), [www.id21.org](http://www.id21.org), [www.eldis.org](http://www.eldis.org) and [eldis-education@lyris.ids.ac.uk](mailto:eldis-education@lyris.ids.ac.uk)

Professor Terry Anderson and Paul Smith of the The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning for permission to use the link <http://www.irrodl.org>

Various quotes reprinted by permission of Sage Publications Ltd from Kumar, R. *Research methodologies: a step-by-step guide for beginners*, (© Kumar, 1999)

Department for International Development (DfID) for permission to use the link <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/>

The Ford Foundation for permission to use the link <http://www.fordfound.org>

The Commonwealth of Learning for permission to use the links [info@col.org](mailto:info@col.org) and [www.col.org](http://www.col.org)

SIDA for permission to use the link <http://www.sida.org/Sida/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=2263>

Various quotes reprinted by permission of Sage Publications Ltd from Punch, K. *Developing effective research proposals*, (© Punch, 2000)

Professor Chandra Gunawardena and the Open University of Sri Lanka for permission to reproduce Gunawardena, G., et al. 2002 'Employment of university graduates in Sri Lanka: the demand-supply nexus', *Annual Academic Sessions 2002: Abstracts*, Nugegoda: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Open University of Sri Lanka (extract pp 20-32)

A quote from p 13 of Cresswell, J. *Research design; qualitative and quantitative approaches*, (© Cresswell, 1994). Reprinted by permission of Sage Publications Ltd.

The School of Education, University of Nottingham for permission to use a quote from p 2 of Haywood, P. And Wragg, E. 1982 'Evaluating the literature' *Rediguide 2*, Nottingham: School of Education, University of Nottingham.

The Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Publishing Company to use as a reading pp 93-95 from Bell, J. 1999 *Doing our research project*, Buckingham: Open University

Dr Hicham Dzakiria for permission to use an extract from Dzakiria, H. nd. *Draft PhD proposal*, Norwich: Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE), University of East Anglia.

Routledge Falmer for permission to use a quote from Yates, C. And Bradley, J (eds.) 2000 *Basic education at a distance*, London: Routledge Falmer

The Essential Team of the University of Central England in Birmingham for permission to use the link <http://essential.sci.uce.ac.uk/>

Professor Chandra Gunawardena of the The Open University of Sri Lanka for permission to quote from pp 36-39 of Vidanapathirana, U. and Morais, S. 2002 'The concept of credit rating and its applications: a case of divergence of definitions and interpretations among academic of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies', *Annual Academic Sessions 2002: Abstracts* Nugegoda: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Open University of Sri Lanka

Professor Masooda Chaudhry if the Allama Iqbal Open University for permission to quote from Noorkhan, M., et al. 1993 'Study of non-completers in Allama Iqbal Open University', in M. Chaudry and W. Siddiqi (eds.) *An annotated bibliography on research publications* Islamabad: Research and Evaluation Centres, Allama Iqbal Open University

Deakin University Press for permission to quote from p 5 of Kemmis, S. and McTaggart, R. 1988. *The action research planner*, Victoria: Deakin University Press

Professor Chandra Gunawardena of the The Open University of Sri Lanka for permission to quote from p 19 of Gunawardena, G., et al. 2002 'Employment of university graduates in Sri Lanka: the demand-supply nexus.' *Annual Academic Sessions 2002: Abstracts*, Nugegoda: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Open University of Sri Lanka

ITDG Publishing for permission to use a quote from p 307 in Johnson, V., Gordon, G, and Pridmore, P. 1998 *Stepping forward: children and young people's participation in the development process*. London: Intermediate Technology

Professor Barry MacDonald for permission to quote from MacDonald, B. 1994 'Evaluation in the social sciences' in CARE. 1994 *Coming to terms with research*, Centre for Applied Research, University of East Anglia, UK. pp 1-7

Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia for permission to quote from pg 3 of CARE. 1994 *Coming to terms with research*, Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia, p 3

BOND organisation for permission to use the link <http://www.bond.org.uk/pubs/ipw.htm> and the report *Beginners Guide to Logical Framework Analysis*.