

University of Cambridge: Programme Specifications

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this programme specification. Programme specifications are produced and then reviewed annually by the relevant faculty or department and revised where necessary. However, we reserve the right to withdraw, update or amend this programme specification at any time without notice.

Further information about specifications and an archive of programme specifications for all awards of the University is available online at: www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/camdata/archive.html

POSTGRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

1	Awarding body	University of Cambridge
2	Teaching institution	Faculty of Education
3	Accreditation details	65 Masters Level credits
4	Name of final award	PCER
5	Programme title	Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Research
6	JACS code(s)	X300
7	Relevant QAA benchmark statement(s)	Education
8	Qualifications framework level	7 (Masters)
9	Date specification was produced/ last revised	April 2011
10	Date specification was last reviewed	April 2011

Aims of the Programme

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

Structure of the PCER

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

- negotiation of an individual investigation in which the student has designed, implemented and critically reflected upon enquiry into to their own practice or the practice of colleagues.
- participation in a substantial research project which has enabled the student to develop their use of methods of enquiry, to contribute to the analysis of data and reflect upon the findings and methodological issues;
- collaboration with colleagues in a shared research project which has enabled contributions to be made to research design and evaluation processes, as well as to the gathering and interpretation of data;
- the identification of an issue within their workplace and/or other institutions, the systematic and rigorous analysis of this issue and the development of policy and/or practice in relation to this issue.

Students may work individually or collaboratively with colleagues although in the final report, it will be necessary for assessors to distinguish between work that has been done collaboratively and individual contributions. In deciding to pursue a collaborative approach therefore students are expected to anticipate:

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

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

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

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

Programme Outcomes

The PCER requires sustained commitment to an enquiry or development project resulting in a substantial assignment. There is therefore the expectation that this will have a significant impact on the development of the student's:

- knowledge and understanding;
- research and analytical skills;
- the skills of systematic enquiry and/or leading development;
- skills of presentation;
- transferable skills.

Details of what might constitute these outcomes are given in the generic criteria for PPD awards below.

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

- developments in pupils' and students' learning;
- developments in professional learning of the student and of colleagues;
- changes in staff practices;
- development of policy.

Recruitment and Admissions

The PCER can be taken as a free-standing qualification for participants wishing to engage in a discrete area of enquiry. The PCER can also be used as a route to the completion of a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Studies (PDES) and to the Faculty Master's and EdD programme.

Prospective students must make a coherent proposal in order to register for a PCER. The proposal should:

- make clear the links between the proposed PCER and any existing development work, evaluation, enquiry or research project with which the student is involved;
- make clear any negotiations undertaken with colleagues and/or managers about the proposed research and their roles in it as participants, facilitators, mentors or supporters.
- demonstrate a capacity to design, implement, analyse, report and reflect upon an individually-designed research project or; to participate actively and reflectively in a research project undertaken collaboratively or led by others.
- demonstrate intentions in relation to the systematic review of published material relevant to the project.

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

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

Teaching and Learning Methods

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

The PCER entitles candidates to six hours of supervision which involves:

- guidance about the nature of the assignment, the standard expected, the planning of the study, literature and sources and appropriate enquiry methods or techniques;
- monitoring and advising on handing-in dates;
- making formative comment (written or oral) on work prior to the handing-in-date, including broad indications of its quality and suggestions for improvement.

Students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning and development and to take the initiative in asking for a supervision – especially if problems or difficulties are encountered. Students should consult the PPD Course Manager or the PPD Administrator if particular difficulties arise concerning supervision arrangements

Assessment guidance for the PCER

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

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

Assessment criteria

In addition to adherence to the guidance given above, all PPD assignments are assessed against the following generic criteria:

Knowledge and understanding including

- the development of understanding of key concepts and issues within the fields studied;
- knowledge of those fields of study and familiarity with a range of relevant literature;
- knowledge, understanding and critical awareness of methodological issues related to professional enquiry and/or development.

Research and analytical skills including:

- critical reflection and analysis (as shown in the account of learning based on the courses attended by the participant and/or in the accounts of systematic enquiry);
- comment upon and evaluation of reading that has been carried out;
- the ability to link the analysis and interpretation of data with theoretical perspectives;
- the structuring of information so that it is intelligible to a reader who has no knowledge of the research work undertaken.

Systematic enquiry. This may take a number of forms, including:

- empirical work which is planned and sufficiently rigorous for the purpose;
- literature-based enquiry for a clear professional purpose;
- development work soundly based on relevant literature and/or rigorous enquiry;
- rigorous professional self-review and self-analysis.

Any enquiry is likely to entail the application of ideas from the literature as well as data gathering and analysis.

Skills in presentation including:

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

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

Transferable skills, for example:

- skills in planning and time management;
- written and verbal communication skills;
- skills in evaluating evidence of impact upon individual professional learning, and upon individual practice or the practice of colleagues

Assessment procedures

On completion of the enquiry and/or development work a report of between 10,000 and 12,000 words in length, should be submitted by the candidate to the PPD office.

All PCER assignments are double marked by people other than the supervisor. Comments from markers provide both summative and formative comments indicating the strengths as well as limitations of the work. They also provide guidance to assist candidates who might wish to progress onto a Masters degree.

PCERs may be assessed as distinction, pass or fail:

- **Distinction**
The report satisfies most of the assessment criteria clearly and unambiguously.
- **Pass**
The report satisfies many of the assessment criteria, sufficiently well for the award of an PCER. There is evidence that work in relationship to some of the criteria could have been further developed.
- **Fail**
The report falls short of a pass standard in relationship to a substantial proportion of the assessment criteria.

Candidates who are awarded a pass or distinction are eligible to apply to join Year 2 of the Cambridge part-time Masters degree course (subject to successful interview). A pass can only be awarded if the marker is confident that the report is of a sufficiently high standard that it is equivalent to work produced for Year 1 of the Masters degree.

Quality Assurance

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

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

- External Examiner evidence, verbal and in written reports.