

## **Developing a research proposal**

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# Workshop: Developing a research proposal

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# Types of research proposal

- 1. Commissioned (or contract) research
  - aka 'reactive' research
  - research or evaluation
- 2. Regulated funding (Research Council or charity funded research, EU funding)
  - aka 'proactive' research
- Overlapping principles
- Some features of difference

# Commissioned or contract research

- main funders are government departments, agencies
- HE sector bodies; some charities, pressure groups or voluntary sector bodies
- public competition for the work
- they issue *Expressions of Interest* and/or *Invitations to Tender ...* some use *Framework Agreements*
- can be research or evaluation work
- almost always about POLICY rather than pedagogy or practice
- sometimes known as 'applied research' as it is applicable to identified policy problems

# Research or evaluation?

- Research is usually more open ended enquiry in response to a perceived problem, e.g.
  - 'Research into the causes of the BAME attainment gap in HE'
- An evaluation in the same field might be (e.g.):
  - 'Evaluation of the XXX CPD programme to counter unconscious racial bias in assessment'

# Research or evaluation?

- Methods may be similar - but an evaluation tender will usually steer you towards which to use
- time scales may be similar (i.e. report within 9 months)
- funding for the work may be similar
- Range and scope likely to be far more open ended in a research project
  - evaluation is (usually) of a bounded programme or set of questions
  - sometimes steered away from adjacent areas

# Commissioners in WP/ HE outreach field

- Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (structural and market side of sector)
- HEFCE (operational side of sector)
- OFFA/SPA/UCAS
- UUK/HEA
- Mission Groups
- Sutton Trust/EEF
- The Edge Foundation
- The Bridge Group
- etc etc

# Process

- Commissioners will decide an issue needs research / evaluation
- Issue the ITT
- 2-3 week turnaround
- How do you decide whether to go for it?



# The research/evaluation commissioning context

- Knowing the field - government agendas, types of evidence they will be looking for
- Knowing how research is commissioned
- Knowing the funder and the policy context
- To bid or not to bid - a cost-benefit analysis
- Centre for Education and Inclusion Research at SHU <http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ceir/>

# Looking out for tenders

Organisation	How often	Website
Contracts Finder	Daily	<a href="https://sid4gov.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sid4gov">https://sid4gov.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sid4gov</a> sign in then click this separate link (which isn't in Sid4gov) <a href="https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Home/Dashboard">https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Home/Dashboard</a>
Tenders Direct (subscription)	Daily and on website	<a href="https://www.tendersdirect.co.uk/">https://www.tendersdirect.co.uk/</a>
OPPEX now on pay wall	tbc	<a href="https://oppex.com/">https://oppex.com/</a>
Sell2Wales	Daily	<a href="https://www.sell2wales.gov.wales">https://www.sell2wales.gov.wales</a>
The Chest North West (LAs)	As tenders are posted	<a href="https://procontract.due-north.com/Login">https://procontract.due-north.com/Login</a>
nepo (North East LAs)	As tenders are posted	<a href="https://www.qtegov.com/procontract/supplier.nsf/frm_home?openform">https://www.qtegov.com/procontract/supplier.nsf/frm_home?openform</a>
YORtender (Yorkshire LAs)	As tenders are posted	<a href="https://www.yortender.co.uk">https://www.yortender.co.uk</a>
Public contracts scotland	Weekly	<a href="http://www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk/">http://www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk/</a>
Proactis (National College / Bristol City Council / Caerphilly /Newham and others)	As tenders are posted	<a href="https://supplierlive.proactisp2p.com/Account/Login">https://supplierlive.proactisp2p.com/Account/Login</a>
E Tenders (Republic of Ireland Research Projects)	Daily	<a href="http://www.etenders.gov.ie/">http://www.etenders.gov.ie/</a>
Funding Central NCVO (Cabinet Office)	Weekly	<a href="http://www.fundingcentral.org.uk/default.aspx">http://www.fundingcentral.org.uk/default.aspx</a>
HEFCE (bids via UKSBS - see list tab below)	When tenders are posted	<a href="https://in-tendhost.co.uk/hefce/">https://in-tendhost.co.uk/hefce/</a>
Higher Education Academy		<a href="https://in-tendhost.co.uk/neupc/asp/Home.#sthash.69nmWjNI.dpuf">https://in-tendhost.co.uk/neupc/asp/Home.#sthash.69nmWjNI.dpuf</a>
JRF Monthly Newsletter	Monthly	<a href="http://www.jrf.org.uk/">http://www.jrf.org.uk/</a>
Research Research, Research Fortnight	Fortnightly	<a href="http://www.researchresearch.com/">http://www.researchresearch.com/</a>
Funding News		
Research Research, Research Fortnight	Fortnightly	<a href="http://www.researchresearch.com/">http://www.researchresearch.com/</a>
Research News		
NIHR (NHS)	Occasional	<a href="http://www.nihr.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx">http://www.nihr.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx</a>

# Bidding checklist (1)

- How close is it to established areas of expertise (methods and/or substantive area)?
- Do we have the capacity to undertake it?
- Do we have the expertise/experience etc required according to the client scoring scheme?
- What are the potential spinoffs (business, academic, partnership, developing an area of work; junior researchers)?
- How great is the likely competition, and who?
- What is the time frame for bidding? Estimate time to write bid - is it doable?

# Bidding checklist (2)

- What is the budget - can we judge if it is doable by considering: timeframe; complexity
- Possible partners: do we need them; who should lead?
- Is there capacity to write the bid - lead; RA support; admin support?
- Is there capacity to do the work in the centre, faculty, university, beyond university?
- Who is going to do what?/when?
- Have we got administrative capacity?

# Structuring the proposal

- Understanding the environment
- Who we are - track record in similar work for similar clients - the sales pitch
- Our approach - aims and objectives, research questions
  - Methodology and methods
  - Analysis
  - Timelines
  - Costing
  - Staffing (mini-CVs)
  - Risk assessment and QA/Data Protection

# Scoring mechanism (HEFCE)

Question subject	Maximum marks
Price	15%
Understanding the environment	15%
Staff and delivery of project	15%
Project plan and timescales	25%
Method	30%

# Thorny issues

## Costing

- do you know the budget?
- daily rates
- is it VAT-able

Contractual - get the ITT terms/conditions looked at by 'legal'

## Sub-contractual relationships

- who does what
- differential costs

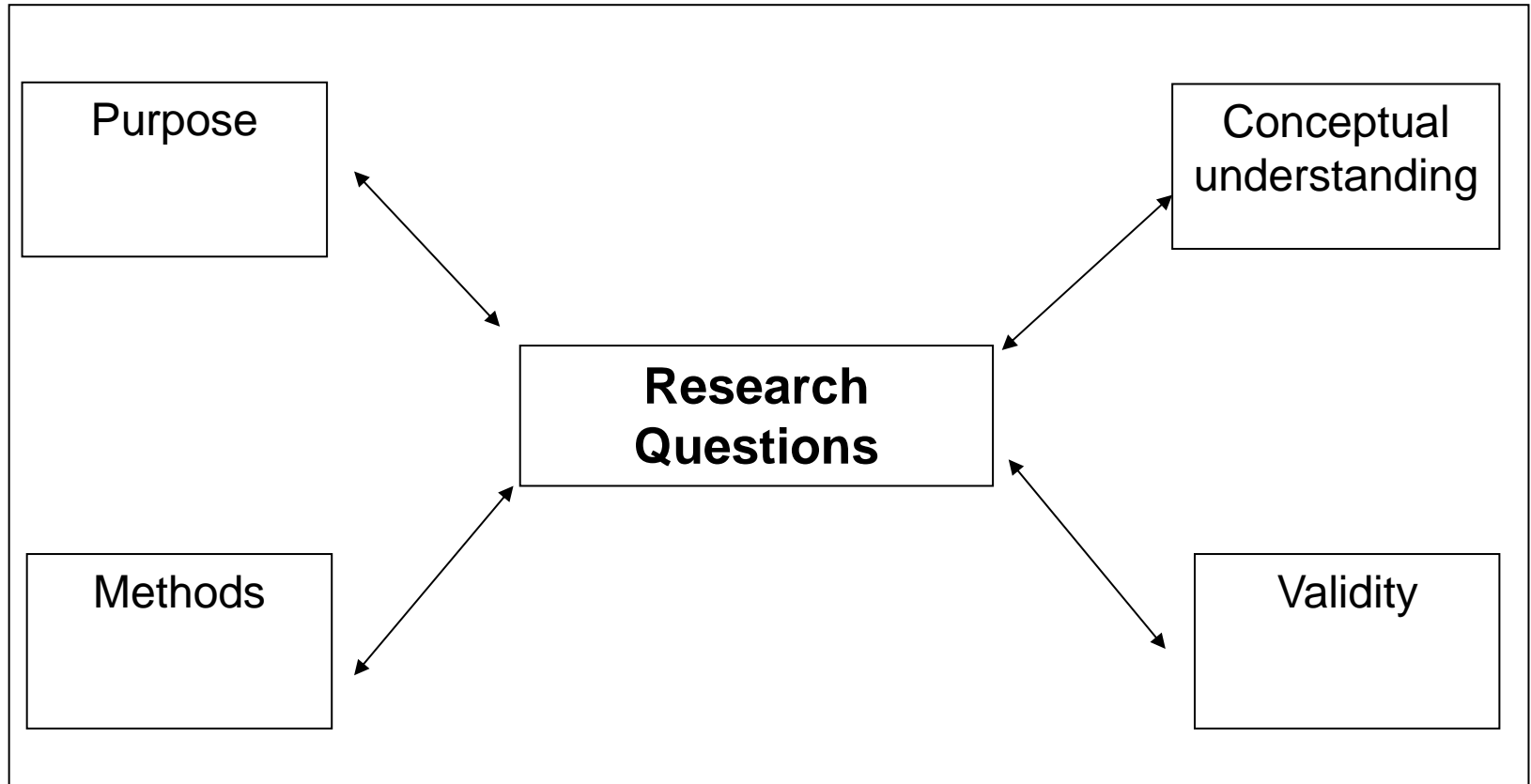
## Funder requirements

- liaison requirements
- reporting schedules
- dissemination
- Time - they always expect more than they will pay for

# Methods and approach



# Aims, objectives and methods: the primacy of research questions



Source: Maxwell (1996: 3-4)

# Methods..?

- Research questions - who aimed at?
  - nature of subjects - recipients; practitioners; stakeholders; end-users
- sample/cohort size and nature
- variables anticipated
- complexity of data required: in-depth (qual) or yes-no (survey) statistical trial (RCT, quasi-experimental)
- validity and robustness = usefulness
- nature of funder: purpose, audience
- what do **we** want to get out of it?

# Proactive research proposals

- Research councils <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/>
- <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/funding/research/>
- European Commission [http://cordis.europa.eu/home\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/home_en.html)
- Large charitable bodies e.g. Leverhulme Trust  
<http://tinyurl.com/hyuq2uj>
- Sutton Trust <http://www.suttontrust.com/>
- Big Lottery Fund <http://tinyurl.com/hhggky6>
- Size of budget - variable (some small grants available e.g. SRHE £10k; big calls can have budgets of £5m)
- Research support office e.g. RIO at SHU
- What's different - time and budget
- Multiple partners - different ways of working

# What else is different?

- **You** identify the issue, drawing on literature and theoretical underpinning of your choice
- Open calls - plenty of scope
- Multidisciplinarity and criticality encouraged
- Length of time you can take (to develop proposal and to carry out the research)
- Range of approaches and methodologies

# What else is different?

- Freedom to shift direction within the budget
- Full Economic Costing
- More possibilities for publications
- Prestige in career and REF impact terms
- ... **but** hugely bureaucratic and time consuming (especially EC funding streams)
- Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S)
- <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/je-s-electronic-applications/>

# Structure for a Research Council proposal

- Case for support
  - project objectives
  - project summary
  - academic beneficiaries
  - ethical information
  - impact summary (i.e. who on)
  - staff duties (and CVs)
- Pathways to impact (i.e. how it will impact research/policy community)

# References

- Dahlberg, L. and McCaig, C. (eds) (2010) *Practical Research and Evaluation: A Start-to-Finish Guide for Practitioners*, SAGE Publications Ltd;
- Maxwell, J. (1996) *Qualitative Research design: an interactive approach*, Thousand Oaks, London & Delhi: Sage Publications.