

Developing a research proposal

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Published version

MCCAIG, Colin (2016). Developing a research proposal. In: Widening Participation Conference : 'HE: Transforming lives through life-wide learning', Milton Keynes, April 27-28th. (Unpublished)

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

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

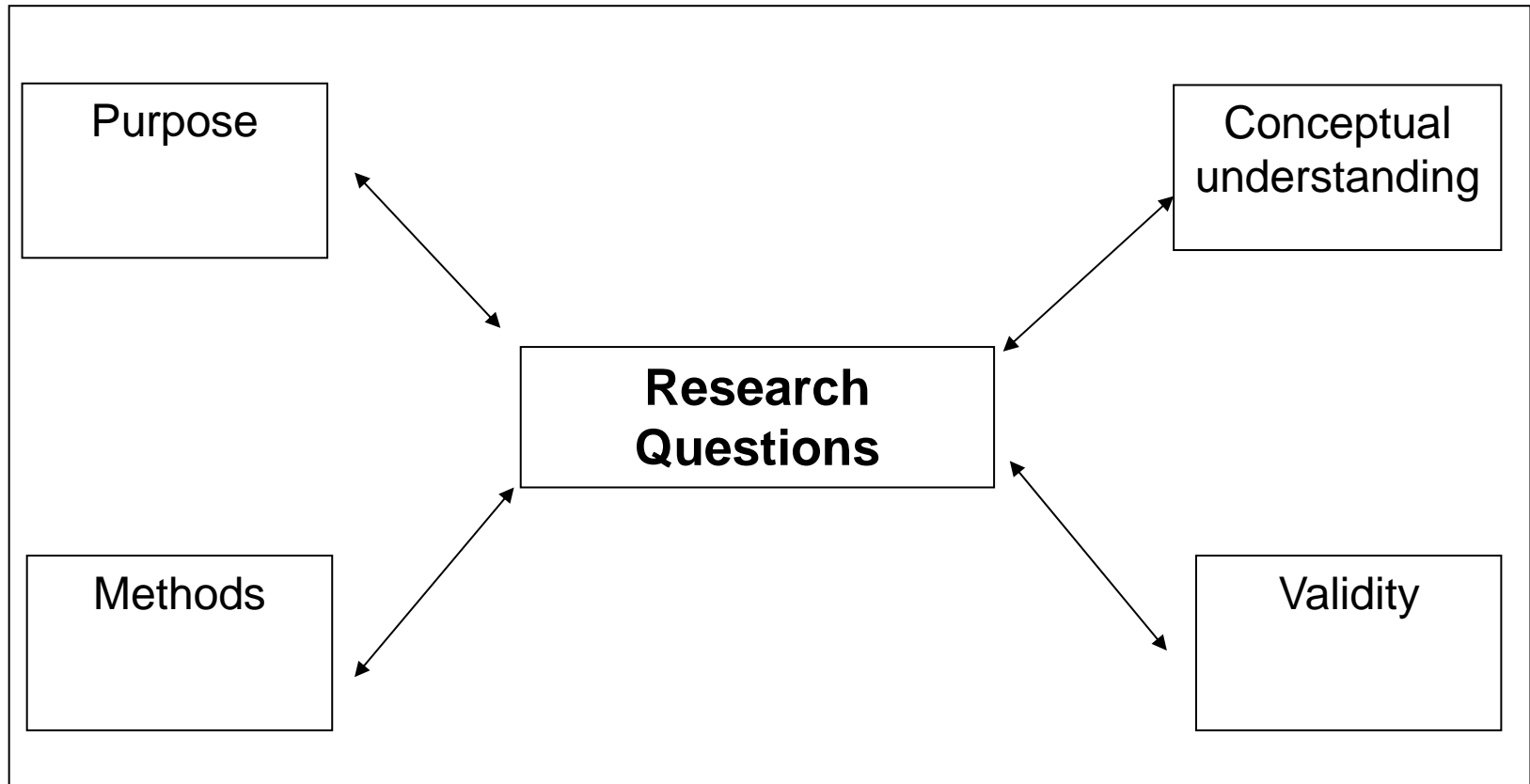
- who does what
- differential costs

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

- 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.