

# STARTING POINTS FOR RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

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# Starting Points for Research in Schools

## 1 Introduction

Carrying out research is one important way to help ensure that the continued improvement of the high quality of education in Scottish schools and other establishments is achieved. Good research gives us sound evidence on which to base educational decisions at classroom, school, local authority and national levels. School improvement based on research requires the development of a strong research community and ethos.

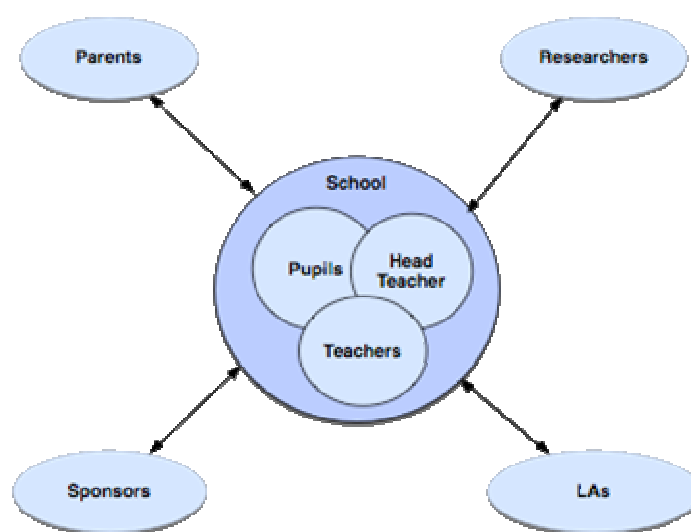


Figure 1: Research Community

The purpose of this booklet is essentially to encourage good practice in research in schools, so that the potential benefits of good research can be realised, both by the individual and organisation. It is also hoped that the content of the booklet may encourage those new to research to participate at an appropriate level as part of their professional and personal development

This booklet talks about key issues and responsibilities that need to be considered and also looks at some of the wider implications of being involved in research. In short, it provides some guiding principles for good practice for everyone involved in research in schools.

To begin with, it discusses the purpose of research, research types, research and teacher development, and school research communities. Later, it presents checklists (**'Starting Points'**) of specific issues for different groups to consider when planning a **more formal** research study, specifically: researchers, headteachers, teachers, pupils, parents, education authorities and funders.

The Research in Schools Working Group which produced this booklet hope you find it both interesting and helpful.

## 2.1 Why do we need to do research in schools?

Policy and practice in education should be informed by good research evidence. The best research should give us a better understanding of learning and teaching and at the same time help us to improve the quality of education for all children and young people. The involvement of individuals in research should also be seen as providing an excellent opportunity for personal learning and development.

There are many interesting developments taking place in Scottish education which might encourage more to take part in research activity in schools. As well as a general call for more evidence-informed policy and practice, local authorities, national bodies like Learning and Teaching Scotland, colleges, universities and, of course, schools themselves are increasingly involved in a wide range of specific initiatives which have a strong research dimension. The “Assessment is for Learning” Programme (SEED, 2002) and the Curriculum 3-18 review under “A Curriculum for Excellence” (SEED, 2004) are two good examples of this.

Research also has a major part to play in the continuing professional development of the practitioner, for example, in the Chartered Teacher programme. Finally, since schools are more and more being thought of as professional learning communities, schools might themselves wish to carry out research, which can contribute to the processes of school development as well as individuals’ personal and professional development. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Assessment is for Learning Programme which aims to promote a culture of reflection and learning within schools.

## 2.2 What kinds of research might take place in schools?

Educational research, which can take many forms, basically generates evidence that can be shared with others. It might seek to investigate the behaviour of pupils or the practice of teachers by systematic observation and the recording of events and social interactions. It might involve the analysis of data gathered by means of testing or other forms of assessment.

The methods used in educational research come mainly from the social sciences. Broadly, these methods can be described as ‘quantitative’ - administering of tests, questionnaires including the use of statistics for analysis of the data, or ‘qualitative’ - conducting interviews, focus groups, and analysis of documents. A review of relevant research evidence that already exists is often carried out before new research is undertaken.

Which methods are appropriate to use depend on the types of questions you wish to ask and the evidence that you require to answer your research questions. There is a wealth of good material available describing the different methods and when it is appropriate to use them. For example, the SCRE ‘Using Research’ Series has a number of very helpful and concise guides (<http://www.scre.ac.uk>).

Some examples of the different types of research that might take place in schools are outlined below:

- *Student/Pupil projects*  
An essential element of teachers’ initial teacher education is the understanding and competence in all stages of the research process. Most student teachers will be expected to carry out a professionally relevant research project during their programme of study, for example by systematically investigating some aspect of learning and teaching while they are involved in school placement. Increasingly, teachers are seeing the potential value of involving children and young people themselves as pupil researchers.

- *Teacher/Practitioner research*  
This type of research is usually small-scale and specific to a particular context, e.g. the teacher's own classroom. It may be informal or more formal in nature. 'Action Research' seeks not so much to contribute to the knowledge base, but is designed to inform, and lead to changes in, practice, whilst assisting professional development. Classroom research can make a big difference at the class and school level and participation may encourage future, wider involvement in research. Many exciting opportunities to connect with other practitioners and researchers exist. Examples include the GTCS Teacher Researcher Programme (<http://www.gtcs.org.uk>) and the collaborative research networks of the Applied Educational Research Scheme (<http://www.aers.ac.uk>)
- *Case studies*  
A case study is a widely used small-scale, but in-depth investigation of an individual unit, an organisation, an institution e.g. a school. It may involve a wide range of different ways of gathering evidence, for example, via classroom observations, interviews or questionnaires. It allows a more intensive understanding of a complex issue or particular context. However, it may be difficult to use the results to generalise to other situations.
- *Evaluation Studies*  
An evaluation study collects information to assess the effectiveness and impact of an initiative or pilot programme. It often finds out 'what worked and for whom' and provides feedback both to the leaders of an initiative, and the funding body e.g. SEED, to assist in future decision and policy making. Examples include the evaluations of projects funded through the Future Learning and Teaching (FLaT) Programme (<http://www.flatprojects.org.uk>). The findings can also provide a source of advice for other schools who might be thinking of following a similar initiative. Pupils, teachers and/or parents may be involved in assessment, survey, reporting or administrative aspects of the study.
- *Large Scale International Studies*  
These studies are used to gather data about large numbers of pupils. They frequently involve several countries collaborating together to measure trends in performance over a number of years. For example, The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) compares the reading attainment of 9 and 10 year-old children in over 40 countries (<http://www.pirls.org>). Such studies usually involve testing being carried out in schools by an independent researcher along with teachers and pupils completing questionnaires. The findings from these studies can help the SEED and other bodies to plan policies to benefit all pupils in the future.

## 2.3 Are there ethical standards for research in schools?

Nowadays there is a clear expectation that everyone who carries out research - teachers, professional researchers or students should be aware of, and observe the relevant ethical guidelines. The Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA), like many similar research associations around the world has revised its guidelines in recent years to take account of key legislation such as the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Human Rights Act 1998, the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. These guidelines set out clear requirements in terms of the responsibilities of researchers towards all those who may participate in the research. For further details the SERA (2005) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research are available at [www.sera.ac.uk](http://www.sera.ac.uk).

The Government Social Research Unit has produced its own guidance for government social researchers and those commissioning social research. This guidance summarises five key ethical principles that all social researchers should uphold:

1. Sound application and conduct of social research methods and appropriate dissemination and utilisation of the findings
2. Participation based on valid informed consent
3. Enabling participation
4. Avoidance of personal and social harm
5. Non-disclosure of identity and personal information

(Source: [http://www.gsr.gov.uk/downloads/professional\\_guidance/ethical\\_assurance\\_for\\_GSR.pdf](http://www.gsr.gov.uk/downloads/professional_guidance/ethical_assurance_for_GSR.pdf))

These provide a useful starting point for considering ethical issues. It should be emphasised that ethical scrutiny is a continuous process from specification to dissemination and should not be treated as a one-off screening process to be undertaken at the outset.

Higher education institutions now require all research conducted by their staff, postgraduate research students and undergraduate students to be subject to ethical scrutiny before it is allowed to proceed. All research involving children requires the researchers to be covered by an enhanced Disclosure Scotland certificate.

The position of research in the public domain and the ability of researchers to withhold information is now explicitly outlined in The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 s27(2) which contains a specific exemption relating to the output from research. It states that:

(2) Information obtained in the course of, or derived from, a programme of research is exempt information if-

- (a) the programme is continuing with a view to a report of the research (whether or not including a statement of that information) being published by-
  - (i) a Scottish public authority; or
  - (ii) any other person; and
- (b) disclosure of the information before the date of publication would, or would be likely to, prejudice substantially-
  - (i) the programme;
  - (ii) the interests of any individual participating in the programme;
  - (iii) the interests of the authority which holds the information; or
  - (iv) the interests of the authority mentioned in sub-paragraph (i) of paragraph (a) (if it is a different authority from that which holds the information).

Note that the Freedom of Information Act 2000 has a somewhat different provision. s22 (1) of that act states that

**22.** - (1) Information is exempt information if-

- (a) the information is held by the public authority with a view to its publication, by the authority or any other person, at some future date (whether determined or not),

(b) the information was already held with a view to such publication at the time when the request for information was made, and

(c) it is reasonable in all the circumstances that the information should be withheld from disclosure until the date referred to in paragraph (a).

(2) The duty to confirm or deny does not arise if, or to the extent that, compliance with section 1(1)(a) would involve the disclosure of any information (whether or not already recorded) which falls within subsection (1).

There is no explicit reference to research in the UK act.

## 2.4 Teachers' involvement in research

In any school (research community), it is clear that teachers have a key role to play in influencing potential school improvement by involvement in (practice-based, action) research. It is also clear, however, that many teachers will have little, or long lapsed, experience of formal research and would require some encouragement and appropriate support to become involved with research. It is therefore important to recognise that involvement in (often small scale) more informal, as well as formal, research has a role to play in the continuing professional development of the practitioner. Ideally all teachers will be research informed **and**, in time, with appropriate phased development, research active.

Informal Research Activities	Reading in preparation for research
	Investigation of new resources
	Try out new teaching strategy / method
Formal Research Opportunities (funded research)	GTCS Teacher Researcher Programme ( <a href="http://www.gtcs.org.uk">http://www.gtcs.org.uk</a> )
	Applied Educational Research Scheme ( <a href="http://www.aers.ac.uk">http://www.aers.ac.uk</a> )
	Learning & Teaching Scotland ( <a href="http://www.ltscotland.org.uk">http://www.ltscotland.org.uk</a> )

There are many specific professional reasons why teachers may become involved in research, including :

- The creation of new understandings about teaching and learning and about learning environments
- The development and critique of practice and curriculum
- The improvement of practice in teaching and learning
- The creation of new knowledge for the profession
- Collaboration / sharing

Eraut (1977) defined teacher development as :

*'The natural process of professional growth in which a teacher gradually acquires confidence, gains new perspectives, increases in knowledge, discovers new methods, takes on new roles'.*

Clearly research delivers in many of these areas. The nature of action research blends with effective continuing professional development (CPD) and classroom and school-based action research is recognised as a major means of professional growth for teachers (Cameron-Jones 1983).

Research may also have an important role to play in a teacher's career development ladder as defined by the current Standards (and Professional Recognition) continuum in Scotland (see Figure 2).

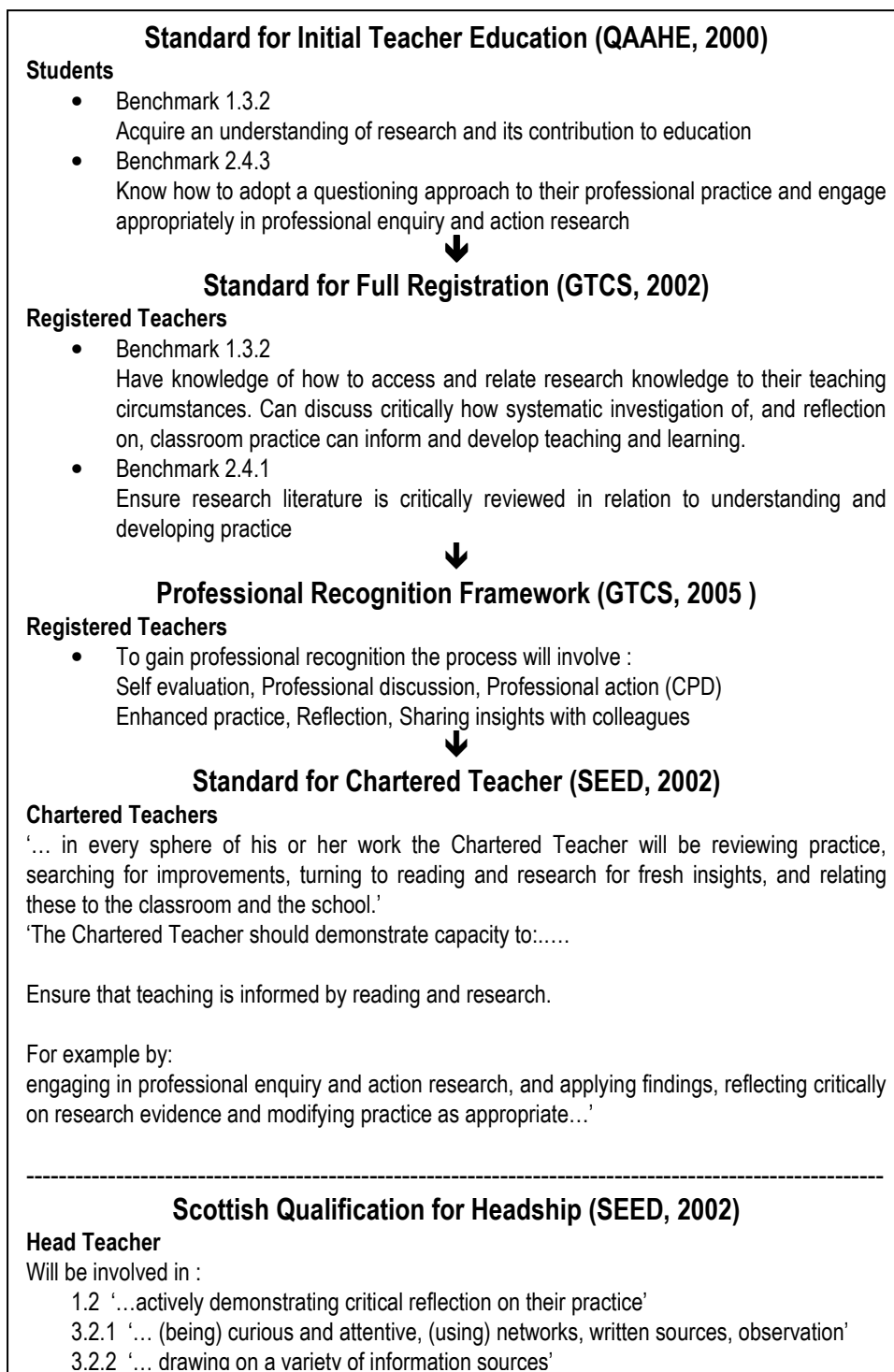


Figure 2: Linking Research to the Career Stage Standards

All new teachers should be able to research aspects of their practice to encourage improvements. For probationers (and indeed all fully registered teachers), research links to aspects of all of the main categories of the Standard for Full Registration:

- **Professional Knowledge and Understanding** (e.g. knowledge of new curricular developments)
- **Professional Skills and Abilities** (e.g. planning, communication)
- **Professional Values and Personal Commitment** (e.g. self-evaluation, partnerships)

In some local authorities, probationers undertake a small-scale research project as part of their Induction year (Dumfries and Galloway Council, 2005). Other local authorities such as North Ayrshire (see Figure 3) and West Lothian provide guidance on research methodology for teachers undertaking research.

### **North Ayrshire – an example of a managed approach to research**

North Ayrshire have a co-ordinator for research projects carried out within North Ayrshire Council Educational Services. Researchers who contact schools or the council will be referred through the Corporate Director (Educational Services) to the co-ordinator. At this point, a clearly defined set of procedures are initiated. The researcher is requested to provide:

- An outline proposal of the research, including details of the supervisor/mentor and the purpose of the research
- Copies of the materials to be used in the research
- Proof of a Disclosure Scotland check
- Copies of letters to head teachers, participants and parents
- A list of the schools that will be invited to participate.

Once the requested material is sent to the authority and checked, a formal decision will be made regarding permission for the research and notified to the researcher in writing. At the same time, the relevant head teachers will be contacted by the research co-ordinator to inform them of the researcher's likely approach. The research co-ordinator also provides the researcher with guidance and templates for the production of consent forms and letters. The authority requires to approve such letters before they are sent out.

Finally the researcher is required to send a copy of their final report to the participating schools and to the research co-ordinator who monitors progress through the logging of all research on a database.

Figure 3: North Ayrshire Research Guidance

For those teachers seeking Professional Recognition or Chartered Teacher (<http://www.gtcs.org.uk>) or Scottish Qualification for Headship status (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2002/11/15816>) research is an important CPD activity generating evidence of reflective practices.

The key message here is that teacher engagement with research at any level enables the development of a toolkit of skills which may be applied / extended at various stages of their career as part of on-going and worthwhile professional development which may align with aspects of the continuum defined in Figure 2.



## 2.5 Developing a Research Community

To enable research to have a maximum impact in schools (and potentially beyond) in terms of fostering improvement, the development of a research community is essential. The section below highlights some pointers for schools wanting to address the challenges of effectively developing, fostering and maintaining a research culture and community.

### Initial Planning Points

- promote a culture of self-evaluation through the use of 'How Good is Our School?' (HMle)
- promote research as part of the school self evaluation framework
- encourage staff to participate in collaborative discussion related to strengths and development needs
- stimulate a culture of evaluation through the collection of evidence

### Action Points for Developing a School Research Culture

- appoint a school 'Research Champion' to provide information, support and encouragement to a school research culture and make links with external 'Research Champions' e.g. a member of the senior management team, or the extended management team with a responsibility for school improvement
- establish a support group to work with a school champion and to monitor all research activities
- produce a publicity leaflet broadcasting commitment to research and provide a briefing session for parents related to research and evaluation culture
- provide a research notice board in staff rooms
- provide research publications in staff rooms
- produce and make available a 'toolkit' of documentation to lead staff through the research process including ethical guidelines
- build specific discussion of issues of concern into CPD activities and thereby identify those which may merit further investigation
- be alive to outside support for in-school research e.g. through the GTCS Teacher Research Programme
- make connections with networks of researchers working in areas of shared interest, e.g. by joining the collaborative research networks of the Applied Educational Research Scheme ([www.aers.ac.uk](http://www.aers.ac.uk)) or by linking up with local and national initiatives which involve research and development, such as "Assessment is for Learning" and "A Curriculum for Excellence"
- be prepared to use CPD resources to encourage staff members to attend relevant research conferences
- Make connections with schools in other countries to draw on a wider and more diverse range of experiences and examples.

### Action Points for Maintaining a School Research Culture

- disseminate research information through a notice board or newsletter
- provide active support to small scale action research projects by individuals, 'buddies' or teams
- publicise and celebrate the outcomes of small scale in-school projects by pupils and by teachers
- keep all participants informed of outcomes from research
- ensure that, where possible, outcomes of research impact upon school policy and practice

- communicate the purposes and outcomes of all in-school research activities to participants
- encourage staff participation in staff development activities/seminars related to research
- encourage pupils to participate in research related to pupil specific issues
- provide staff training on aspects of research analysis

**Things to avoid:**

- taking on too many research projects at one time
- failing to communicate outcomes of research in every case whether negative or positive

### **3 Starting Points: things to think about for everyone involved in formal research**

Good research takes into account the many different people who could be involved, whether as researchers, 'research participants' (e.g. people asked for their views in a survey, an interview or a focus group), funders, sponsors, and others with particular roles, like parents, teachers and headteachers. In the remainder of this booklet you'll find '**Starting Points**' to help with planning formal schools research addressed specifically to the following groups:

- A researcher or teacher, planning a formal school(s)-based project
- A headteacher, asked to give permission for research to take place in school
- A teacher and other members of school staff, asked to participate in a research project
- A pupil or student, asked to participate in a research project
- A parent, who is involved in research – where either the parent or her/his child is asked to participate in a research project
- An Local Authority, asked to support a particular research project
- A funder or sponsor of a particular research project

These **Starting Points** can't hope to cover every problem or situation in any research project and not all points identified in this booklet will be appropriate in all situations. Ultimately, each member of the research community has the right and the responsibility to make their own decisions about the nature of their involvement in research activity. These notes of guidance are designed to assist that decision-making process, but not to offer a definitive 'blueprint' for undertaking research in schools.

## Starting Points for Research in Schools

### 1. A researcher or teacher, planning a formal school(s)-based project

Most of us would probably think about 'researchers' as working in universities, for government agencies or in private research companies, but more and more teachers are actively investigating their own practice and that of others using formal research methods. Some children and young people (in small numbers at the moment) are starting to become involved as researchers too, in schools and other settings. The starting points below should help researchers – whoever they are – to think through some of the issues about conducting a research project. This includes teachers undertaking a formal investigation as part of CPD.

#### **Make sure the research is seen as relevant and worthwhile**

- Could the outcomes of the research have an influence on future policy at a national or local level?
- Could the outcomes of the research have an influence on practice at a national or local level?
- Will the research be relevant to the research participants' own situations?
- Will schools recognise how the outcomes might benefit pupils or teachers in the future?
- Will schools recognise how they can make a meaningful contribution?

#### **Make it clear why you're proposing the research, and what you intend to do**

- Do you have a fully developed project proposal?
- Do you have an easily read summary of the proposal?
- Do you have a clear specification of your expectations of the research participants (who, when, how much time, where, specific resources etc)?
- Have you taken account of the fact that some of the identified sample may not wish to take part?
- Have you identified the sponsors of the report and the intended audience for the outcomes?

#### **Consider your responsibilities towards the school where you'll be carrying out the research**

- Have you negotiated a timetable and confirmed all aspects of the agreement in writing?
- Have you sought permission from the Local Authority to approach schools?
- Have you identified a strategy for discussing the purposes and methodology with all involved, including parents and pupils?
- Are you aware of the consequences of your requests on the timetable of the school?
- Will you require specific assistance from school staff to undertake the research, and if so, have you costed possible staff cover arrangements for teachers?

#### **Consider any ethical issues that might be relevant to your project**

- Have you identified all ethical considerations including anonymity, confidentiality and obtaining informed consent?
- Has the proposal been monitored by an ethical committee prior to agreement to proceed?
- Have you made explicit all ethical issues to staff, pupils and parents involved?
- Have you made sure that all researchers have been Disclosure Scotland checked and documentation is provided to support this? This can be a time consuming process so ensure enough time is allowed. See <http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk> for full details.

**Consider how you will be communicating about the research to all those involved throughout the life of the project**

- Do you have information leaflets for all those involved using appropriate terminology and user-friendly language with the possibility of providing information in others' languages or formats ?
- Do you have procedures in place to give participants updates on the research and provide initial findings?
- Is there a way for research participants or others interested in the research to find out more as the study progresses e.g. a project website or freephone number?
- Have you identified a strategy for discussion of specific school outcomes before inclusion in any final report?
- Have you plans to communicate findings to research participants in advance?

**Plan and conduct an effective dissemination strategy so that others can find out about what has been learned**

- Do you have a strategy for informing participants before final dissemination?
- Have you protected the participants' anonymity?
- Have you identified the specific audiences for outcomes?
- Have you considered how findings will be disseminated and identified a timescale for reporting findings?

## Starting Points for Research in Schools

### 2. A headteacher, who is asked to give permission for research to take place in school

Headteachers are often asked to give permission for research to take place in their schools. Research can benefit the individual teacher in the classroom, teaching across the school, the school community, and schools nationally and internationally. Headteachers might also be interested to look at section 2.5 which discusses building a research culture in schools. Headteachers in Local Authority schools may also find it useful to consult with their local Educational Psychology Service, as educational psychologists are trained in research methodology and in the application of research techniques.

#### **Make sure the research is relevant and worthwhile**

- Is the research commissioned by or organised through a nationally recognised reputable body?
- Will participation in the research activities stimulate interest amongst identified staff?
- Will pupils recognise the significance of the research when it is explained to them?
- Do you understand why your school has been invited to participate?
- Will the school be able to justify participation in the research?
- Will the research fit in with the school's other priorities and timetable?
- Will the research interfere too much with timetabled activities?
- How does the researcher consider that the outcomes will influence policy or practice, locally, nationally or internationally?
- How does the proposed research link to other research already undertaken?

#### **Find out why the researchers are proposing the research, and what they intend to do**

- Have you been provided with as much information about the research as you require e.g. who is funding it, aims, methods, timescales?
- Have you clarified what would be required of staff, pupils and parents asked to participate in the research?
- Have you clarified with the researcher the time frame for the research?
- Have you clarified the resources that will be required and who is expected to provide them?

#### **Ask how the researchers are going to take into account any ethical issues that might be relevant to this project**

- Has the research been approved by an appropriate ethics monitoring committee e.g. a university committee?
- Are you satisfied that all ethical considerations including anonymity, confidentiality and obtaining informed consent have been addressed?
- Do the researchers have documentation prepared for permission to be sought from parents and pupils?
- Are you satisfied that all researchers have been Disclosure Scotland checked and documentation is provided to support this?
- Have any concerns been expressed by any sections of the school community, and if so, have these been discussed and responded to by the school senior management team?

**Make sure you are happy with how information about the research will be communicated to all those involved throughout the life of the project**

- Is the Local Authority aware of the research, and if appropriate, have they given permission for your school to be contacted?
- Do the researchers have information leaflets for all those involved using appropriate terminology and user-friendly language?
- Are you satisfied that research participants or others interested in the research will be able to find out more as the study progresses e.g. through a project website?
- Will participants in your school receive feedback before publication?
- Will your school receive feedback before publication of research findings and have an opportunity to discuss specific school outcomes?

**Make sure an effective dissemination strategy is in place so that you and others can find out about what the researchers have learned**

- Are you aware of the proposed publication date, how and where the findings will be published?
- Will the school and Local Authority be given a pre-publication copy of the findings?

## Starting Points for Research in Schools

### 3. A teacher and other members of school staff, asked to participate in a research project (or where their pupils are asked to participate)

As research becomes a more common activity in schools – both external research and projects conducted ‘in-house’ – teachers and other school staff are more likely to be asked to participate in research. That could mean, for example, filling out a survey questionnaire, being interviewed on a one-to-one basis, or taking part in a focus group. Alternatively, teachers or other staff may be asked to help in some way if their pupils are to be research participants themselves. Staff in Local Authority schools may also find it useful to consult with an educational psychologist from their local Educational Psychology Service for advice on carrying out or participating in research.

#### **Make sure the research is relevant and worthwhile**

- Does the research involve learning activities or work processes that are relevant to your own work?
- Do the research activities stimulate your own interest?
- How does the researcher consider that the outcomes will influence policy or practice, locally, nationally or internationally?
- Do you feel that your participation will enhance teaching and learning or your own professional development?
- Will pupils recognise the significance of the research when it is explained to them?

#### **Find out why the researchers are proposing the research and what they intend to do**

- Have you been provided with as much information about the research as you require e.g. who is funding it, aims, methods, timescales?
- Do you know exactly what is expected of you and/ or your pupils?
- Are you quite clear about how much time will be required by you and/or your pupils to be part of the research?
- Do you have any responsibilities with regard to briefing of pupils or parents?
- If required, is there supply cover to enable you to be involved in the research?
- Do you understand why you and/or your pupils have been chosen to participate?

#### **Ask how the researchers are going to take into account any ethical issues that might be relevant to this project**

- Have any ethical issues e.g. anonymity, confidentiality been discussed fully with you, the pupils who are to participate and, if appropriate, their parents?
- Have you had the opportunity to discuss any ethical issues, which may trouble you, with the researcher or school management?
- Is it clear that any teacher or pupil has a right to withdraw from the research at any time?
- If appropriate, do the researchers have documentation prepared for permission to be sought from parents and pupils?

#### **Make sure you are happy with how relevant information about the research will be communicated to all those involved throughout the life of the project**

- Do the researchers have information leaflets for all those involved using appropriate terminology and user-friendly language?
- Has appropriate briefing been provided for parents and pupils?

- Are you satisfied that research participants or others interested in the research will be able to find out more as the study progresses e.g. through a project website?
- Will you and your school receive feedback before publication of research findings and have an opportunity to discuss specific school outcomes?

**Make sure an effective dissemination strategy is in place so that you and others, including your pupils, can find out about what the researchers have learned**

- Will details of the findings be shared with participants before publication?
- Have you protected the participants' anonymity?
- Are you aware of the proposed publication date, how and where the findings will be published?
- Will the school and Local Authority be given a pre-publication copy of the findings?
- What scope is there for implementing any recommended changes arising from research findings?



## Starting Points for Research in Schools

### 4. A pupil or student, asked to participate in a research project

Young people asked to participate in research have a right to be as fully informed as possible. This should include giving them the opportunity to speak to the researchers in advance of participating in the research. Here are some questions that pupils could ask researchers about the research they are planning to undertake. School staff should take the opportunity to prepare, but not influence, the pupils in advance of them talking to the researchers, and the statements below could contribute a crib sheet to assist the discussion.

#### **Ask them why they are doing the research**

- What was it that gave you the idea to carry out this research?
- Has someone asked you to do this research or is it your own idea?
- What do you think the findings from this research will tell you?
- How will the findings be used?
- What things do you think might change as a result of this research?
- Will the findings from the research be of benefit to me or other pupils now or in the future?

#### **Ask them how they're going to do it**

- What will I be asked to do?
- Why have I been chosen to participate?
- When will the research take place and how long it is likely to take?
- If this is a long research project, will ongoing information about the project be provided to me?

#### **Ask what will happen with the information you provide**

- Do I have to take part in the research and can I change my mind even if at first I said 'yes'?
- Will my parents/carers also be asked to give permission for me to take part?
- Will anyone else be able to see what I say to you or write on the questionnaire?
- If I find any of the questions upsetting is there anyone I can talk to about it?
- Will I be identified in the research, or will I be anonymous?

#### **Ask how the researchers will tell you and other pupils in your school about what they find out**

- Will we get a chance to see the findings before they are published?
- Where and how will the findings be published?
- When do you expect to publish the findings?
- Will we get an opportunity to discuss the findings and what they mean?

## Starting Points for Research in Schools

### 5. A parent, who is involved in research in that role, or where her/his child is asked to participate in a research project

Parents are a vital part of any school community and are being increasingly involved in research, whether as participants in their own right, or where their child is asked to take part in research. Because of the inevitable distance from school that exists for some parents– those who work full-time, for instance, or those who live long distances from school – there will be particular challenges making sure parents are fully involved in decision making about research activity. Here are some questions which parents could ask researchers about the research they are planning to undertake.

#### Ask the researchers why they are doing the research

- What was it that gave you the idea to carry out this research?
- Has someone asked you to do this research or is it your own idea?
- What do you think the findings from this research will tell you?
- What things do you think might change as a result of this research?
- Will the findings from the research be of benefit to my child or to other pupils now or in the future?

#### Ask the researchers how they will undertake the research

- What will my child or I be asked to do?
- Why has my child/have I been chosen to participate?
- When will the research take place and how long it is likely to take?
- How much time out of school work will it take?
- If this is a long research project, will ongoing information about the project be provided to me and/or my child?

#### Ask the researchers what will happen with the information you or your child provide

- Does my child/do I have to take part in the research and can I change my mind even if at first I said 'yes'?
- Will I be asked to give permission for my child to take part in the research?
- Will anyone else be able to see what my child or I say to you or write on the questionnaire?
- If my child or I find any of the questions upsetting is there anyone we can talk to about it?
- Will my child be identified by name in the research, or will s/he be anonymous?

#### Ask how the researchers will tell about what they find out

- Will we get a chance to see the findings before they are published?
- Where and how will the findings be published?
- When do you expect to publish the findings?
- Will we get an opportunity to discuss the findings and what they mean?

#### Other issues parents may want to consider

- Have you had the opportunity to discuss any ethical issues, which may trouble you, with the researcher or school management?

## Starting Points for Research in Schools

### 6. A Local Authority asked to support a particular research project

Local Authorities can play a key role in making it easier for researchers to get access to schools to conduct their research. They also are very important in making sure research findings are communicated effectively across the local area. Many authorities channel this through one person, which, in some cases, is the principal educational psychologist. However, authorities can sometimes feel overwhelmed by the quantity of research that is being proposed at any one time and this can make it difficult to decide which projects deserve support. Local Authorities may find it useful to consult with their principal educational psychologist, for advice on matters relating to research either at school or Authority level. For these reasons, we have provided some Starting Points for Local Authorities to consult, before making a decision about supporting research:

#### **Make sure the research is relevant and worthwhile**

- Is the research commissioned by or organised through a nationally recognised reputable body?
- Has the proposer provided all the appropriate documentation to support the request to contact schools?
- How does the researcher consider that the outcomes will influence policy or practice, either locally or nationally?
- How does the proposed research link to other research already undertaken?
- Will the research be relevant to the research participants' own situations?
- Will the research focus on part of the normal activities of the research participants?
- Will participation in the research activities stimulate interest amongst identified staff?
- Will pupils recognise the significance of the research when it is explained to them?
- Will the schools be able to justify participation in the research?

#### **Be clear about why the researchers are proposing the research, and what they intend to do**

- Have you been provided with as much information about the research as you require e.g. who is funding it, aims, methods, timescales?
- Are you clear what would be required of staff, pupils and parents asked to participate in the research?
- Are you clear about the resources that will be required and who is expected to provide them?
- Do you understand why schools in your authority have been invited to participate?

#### **Ask how the researchers are going to take into account any ethical issues that might be relevant to this project**

- Has the research been approved by an appropriate ethics monitoring committee e.g. a university committee?
- Are you satisfied that all ethical considerations including anonymity, confidentiality and obtaining informed consent have been addressed?
- Are there strategies outlined to ensure that all ethical issues will be highlighted with schools and research participants?
- Are all those involved covered by Disclosure Scotland certification?

**Make sure you are happy with how relevant information about the research will be communicated to all those involved throughout the life of the project**

- Do the researchers have information leaflets for all those involved using appropriate terminology and user-friendly language?
- Are you satisfied that research participants or others interested in the research will be able to find out more as the study progresses e.g. through a project website?
- Will local authorities and schools receive feedback before publication of research findings and have an opportunity to discuss specific school outcomes?

**Make sure an effective dissemination strategy is in place so that the Authority and others, including schools and pupils, can find out about what the researchers have learned.**

- Have researchers agreed to give specific feedback to schools, pupils and parents?
- Are you aware of the proposed publication date, how and where the findings will be published?
- Will schools and local authorities be given a pre-publication copy of the findings?

**Other issues an authority may wish to consider**

- Does a database of research activities exist within the Authority?
- Is the spread of research activities monitored and consideration given to research overload for a particular school or class?
- Does the authority have a scheme to support small scale research activities as part of continuous professional development?
- Do research methods and outcomes appear in the Authority's staff development programme?
- Does the authority promote research and the results of research as a contributor to developments?
- Does the authority have a systematic process for evaluating research proposals before granting researchers permission to contact schools?
- In situations of uncertainty regarding whether to support a particular research project, has the senior management team of the Authority been consulted?

## Starting Points for Research in Schools

### 7. A funder or sponsor of a particular research project

A wide range of bodies can act as funders of research in schools. These include national government agencies, local authorities and charities. In many cases research can be jointly funded by a number of co-funders. Funders inevitably receive more requests for funding than they can support so it is important that funding decisions are made in line with the aims and strategies of the funding bodies and are based on objective criteria. Co-funders in particular must ensure that they share the same understanding of the research project. Some key issues for funders are presented below.

#### **Make sure the research is relevant and worthwhile**

- How is the research intended to have an influence on future policy and practice, either locally or nationally?
- Will the research be relevant to the research participants' own situations?
- Will the research look at part of the normal activities of the research participants?
- Will schools recognise how the outcomes might benefit pupils or teachers in the future?
- Will schools recognise how they can make a meaningful contribution?
- Will pupils recognise the significance of the research when it is explained to them?
- Will the school be able to justify participation in the research?
- How does the proposed research link to other existing research?

#### **Be clear about what the research is proposing to do and what it hopes to find out**

- Is the project budget sufficient to ensure that the research will meet its objectives, keep to time and be of high quality?
- Is there a fully developed project proposal with a clear specification of aims, methods, analysis plans, etc?
- Has thought been given to expectations of the research participants (who, when, how much time, where etc)?
- Has a clear timetable for the research activities been set out?
- Has access to any organisations or data been negotiated in advance?
- Have the resources that will be required and who is expected to provide them been agreed in advance?
- Has thought been given to how existing data could be utilised to reduce the burden on research participants?

#### **Make sure ethical issues that might be relevant to this project are taken into account**

- If appropriate, have the costs of supply cover been included in the project budget to enable teachers to participate in the research?
- Have you identified all ethical considerations with researchers e.g. anonymity, confidentiality and obtaining informed consent?
- Has the proposal been monitored by an ethical committee prior to agreement to proceed?
- How will ethical issues be discussed with all research participants, schools and authorities?
- Have you ensured that all researchers have been Disclosure Scotland checked and documentation is provided to support this?
- Has consideration been given to equalities and accessibility issues and appropriate actions planned?

**Make sure that relevant information about the research is communicated to all those involved**

- Will information leaflets be provided for all those involved using appropriate terminology and user-friendly language?
- Are there procedures in place to give participants updates on the research and provide initial findings?
- Is there a way for research participants or others interested in the research to find out more as the study progresses e.g. a project website or freephone number?
- Is there a strategy for discussion of specific school outcomes before inclusion in any final report?
- Are there plans to communicate findings to research participants in advance?

**Make sure an effective dissemination strategy is in place so that what the researchers have learned can be widely shared**

- Have researchers agreed to give specific feedback to schools, pupils, parents and education authorities?
- Has the scope of the report been agreed within the researcher's contract?
- Is it clear who the customers for the report findings are?
- Are you clear about the publications which may be used to disseminate findings?
- Do you have a strategy for informing participants before final dissemination?
- Have you identified the specific audiences for outcomes?
- Have you considered how findings will be disseminated and identified a timescale for reporting findings?

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