

Picturing Edinburgh: how do online distance learners view their University?

MSc in E-Learning: Dissertation research proposal

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8 April 2012

Word count: 2171

Abstract

With the current expansion of online distance learning provision within UK Higher Education there arises a need to consider how the distance learner views and relates to her institution. Using a flexible research design strategy, this study will employ a combination of narrative and visual methodologies to explore how online distance learners at The University of Edinburgh conceptualise their institution, whilst also offering insights into their attitudes towards the University. Data collection will take a qualitative approach with a view to identifying themes that will enable the University to gain a clearer understanding of the online distance learner.

Context and rationale

Prompted by opportunities for recruitment, and assisted by developments in the field of E-Learning, many UK Higher Education institutions are extending the range of online distance learning (ODL) courses they offer (White et al 2010). Reflecting this trend, in 2010 The University of Edinburgh launched the *Distance Education Initiative* (DEI) with the remit of substantially increasing the number and breadth of its postgraduate online courses. By 2012 the University had more than 1,100 ODL students comprising 96 nationalities¹.

With this growth in the number of online distance learners has come the need to understand what is distinct about the 'off campus' experience. A body of research exists on the distinct nature of online distance education, including how to support learning (see for instance Salmon 2002a), the nature of online digital spaces (see Bayne 2004), and issues of embodiment and presence (see Dreyfus 2009, Dall'Alba and Barnacle 2005). An opportunity exists to add to this discourse in a small way by exploring how online distance learners conceptualise and relate to their institution.

The study proposed here builds on existing experience of the Principal Investigator (PI) that includes an exploration of how distance learners view their learning space² as well as experiences of online distance learning³. The PI is currently contributing as a Research Associate to the *New Geographies of Learning* project⁴ - a study that is exploring notions of place and space and what it means to be a student who is at Edinburgh, but not in Edinburgh. The study proposed within this proposal is influenced by the successful (and relevant) methodological approach of the *New Geographies* project and will explore a number of emergent themes from that research.

The value of the research proposed here is that it will help to improve understanding of how distance learners conceptualise and relate to their institution, whilst offering attitudinal information on the 'student experience'. It is anticipated that the findings will be of value to the University as it expands its ODL provision. To this end the research proposed here has been informed by discussion with colleagues from the DEI.

Consistent with nature of online learning, a multimodal approach will be taken in data collection, analysis and dissemination. This will comprise a combination of semi-structured narrative interviews alongside the use of visual methodologies.

¹ Distance Education Initiative Wiki: <https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/DistanceEducationInitiative/DEI>
² EDC Space: Exploring the classroom without walls: <http://edcspace.weebly.com/>
³ Experiences of online distance learning: <http://odlexperiences.weebly.com/>
⁴ New Geographies of Learning: <http://edinspace.weebly.com/>

Methodology

The emphasis of the research question: '*Picturing Edinburgh: how do online distance learners view their University?*' reflects the aim of the study to explore how the University is conceptualised (how it is 'pictured'), alongside how students relate towards their institution (describing their 'views'). A flexible research strategy will be used that undertakes empirical work underpinned by a theoretical framework to provide a clearer understanding of the ODL experience.

The research question also reflects the nature of the data collection and analysis, which will comprise semi-structured narrative interviews (where participants describe how they view the University) with a visual approach (concerned with how they conceptualise or picture the institution). The proposed multimodal approach - with a combination of textual thematic and visual analysis - is apt considering the evolving nature of online learning (Kress 2005), where students learn and express ideas in a transliterate way (Thomson 2007). It is appropriate that the dissemination of findings is also multimodal in nature.

Narrative interviews

These will be in-depth, semi-structured, one-to-one interviews conducted in *Skype text*. A semi-structured approach is proposed in order to give participants space to 'tell their story' and the freedom to construct their own interpretation of events (Bruner 1999). Within this narrative approach, the emphasis will be upon 'long sections of talk' where participants will be encouraged to provide extended accounts of their learning experiences (Riesmann and Quinney, 2005: 374). Although this study will not set out to address a set of defined research questions, the structured element of the interview will see the PI use a checklist of themes to promote and direct discussion. These themes will be drawn from those emerging from the New Geographies project (an arrangement is in place to negotiate these with the research team upon publication of that work during Summer 2012). At this stage it is anticipated that themes will include 'campus envy', 'community and connectedness', 'prestige' and 'sentimentality'.

The collected interview data will be collated and coded using the *Dedoose* software package. It is intended that the coding process will help to identify relationships between different data (Gibbs 2007) and in particular different conceptualisations of the University. The subsequent analysis will involve thematic analysis that includes the use of visual maps to identify thematic networks, as well as inconsistencies or different viewpoints within and across interviews.

Visual approach

The second phase of data collection will invite students to submit a digital image. The online classroom has a significant visual dimension therefore in asking questions about how students view the University, it is appropriate that images should form a part on this research. As Robson points out (2011:370) the value of using visual data for the purpose of research is becoming increasingly appreciated. The practical mechanism for this phase of data collection will see students being encouraged to provide an image that in some way represents how they 'picture Edinburgh'. This phase of data collection will make use of a dedicated website created by the PI⁵. It will include a brief introduction to the exercise alongside a drop box for the submission of images. There is consistency here with the approach to the narrative interviews: rather than offering a structured set of prompts, participants will have the space to explore their own meaning-making through the choice of image content and format.

The analysis of images will use Rose's critical visual methodology (2007). Meaning will be determined from these user-generated images by considering the social context in which they were produced. Rose takes the position that these 'made meanings' or visual representations (p2) are valuable in helping us to understand how people behave and live their everyday lives. As such there is an alignment between this approach and that for the narrative interviews: in this case images, rather than text, will be used as a way of understanding how the online learner relates to his institution.

Writing up and dissemination

Although two distinct phases of data collection will be undertaken, it is anticipated that there will be significant overlap in the content of collected data. As such the findings will be written up in a holistic way that explores emerging themes. Consistent with the proposed data collection and analysis, the findings will be presented in a digital, multimodal way. Although the nature of submitted data will influence the format of the presented findings, it is will naturally see an integration of text and images, hosted on the project website.

Sample

The proposed size of the sample has been kept to a realistic level in order to provide enough time to achieve the depth required of a narrative research approach. Each phase of data collection will be promoted across the entire population of three ODL programmes, although it is anticipated that 12 interviews and around 30 images will provide sufficient data for meaningful analysis.

⁵ see the project website created by the PI for the New Geographies of Learning project: <http://edinspace.weebly.com/>

The decision to include 3 ODL programmes within the sample follows the guidance offered by DEI colleagues who highlighted the need to recruit participants from different 'types' of courses, citing varying student attitudes and 'make up'. Pending approval of this research proposal, DEI colleagues have agreed to assist in identifying appropriate programmes to be included in the sample and expect Programme Leaders to be enthusiastic in their support of the research. It is intended that the MSc in E-Learning will be one of the programmes - students from the E-Learning programmes formed the sample for the New Geographies project that has in turn shaped this study proposed in this document.

Even with an appropriate range of programmes included within the sample, there remains a challenge in identifying a suitable sample of participants. To this end, a purposive approach to sampling will be taken, focusing on the identification of a group of participants who will be able to satisfy the needs of the research question (Robson, 2011: 274). The exercise activity will be promoted amongst all students on the selected courses, however it is important that the sample does not focus solely on the most motivated individuals. The PI will monitor the collection of data to ensure the sample covers a range of different programmes, years of study and geographical locations.

Practical issues/delivery

Resources

Data collection will make use of *Skype* (for interviews) and a web-based drop box (for images). Data analysis will be undertaken using *Dedoose*, while dissemination will make use of *iMovie* and *Soundstudio*. The author has access to, and experience in, all of these resources. It is not anticipated that any financial resources will be required to support this project.

Timeline

Past experience has shown that ODL students are more likely to agree to participate in research activity during term time, although away from major assessment periods (typically the final fortnight of a twelve week term). This offers a relatively narrow window for the two stages of data collection therefore interviews have been scheduled to take place during October and November, while the visual exercise will take place during January and February. The Timeline also allows for a second 'data trawl' and for slippage.

TIMING	ACTIVITY
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiate with DEI colleagues over programmes to be included within sample alongside MSc in E-Learning. • Negotiate with Programme Leaders to identify best way of recruiting participants. • Negotiate digital format for dissemination with Supervisor.
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit interview participants and prepare interview schedule. • Commence narrative interviews in Skype.
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to interview participants.
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review submitted interview data to identify any gaps in the sample. Where necessary, work with Programme Leaders to identify suitable individuals to be invited to participate. Undertake further data trawl as required. • Undertake literature review.
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit participants in visual data exercise as negotiated with programme leaders. • Monitor submission of visual data.
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor submission of visual data and address any gaps in the sample, potentially working with Programme Leaders to identify participants. Undertake further data trawl as required. • Begin to archive, organise and code data.
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to archive, organise and code data.
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of interview and visual data. • Allowance for slippage.
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of interview and visual data.
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commence write up of findings. • Allowance for slippage.
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to write up findings.
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit work with 'fresh eyes' - making corrections and revisions as required. • Submit dissertation.

Anticipating potential risks

The PI's experience of similar research activity (combined with the fact that the proposed research strategy is influenced by existing, successful work) reduces the potential for problems. Nevertheless, a risk analysis is useful in anticipating challenges that might arise during the project. First, the high proportion of ODL students who undertake study alongside full-time employment could make participation unattractive. Furthermore, discussion with DEI colleagues has suggested that the willingness of

students to participate in a research exercise could vary between different programmes. It has been suggested for instance that students on professional courses have a pragmatic inclination towards ignoring activities that do not directly contribute towards teaching and assessment. It will be necessary therefore to monitor the make up of the sample. Where gaps in the data are identified, Programme Leaders will be approached in order to identify appropriate candidates to be invited to participate. Each of these activities is included within the Timeline.

Another potential risk lies in whether potential participants might be discouraged from coming forward if they are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the suggested approach to data collection (e.g. Skype). This will be addressed by suggesting (within introductory information) that an alternative approach can be explored where necessary. Continuing with the notion of technology as a potential barrier, it could be the case that some potential participants may feel they lack the technical skills to create a digital image for the visual exercise. This will be addressed by making it clear from the outset that the visual exercise is not concerned with technical or artistic proficiency, and that participants should feel free to submit a basic (or existing) image as desired.

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Appendix 1. Participation information and consent form

Participant information and consent form

'Picturing Edinburgh: How do online distance learners view their University?'

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this research study. The information and questions presented here aim to ensure that participants are fully aware of the nature of the project they have committed to. If you have any questions about this information presented here, please feel free to contact me at james.lamb@ed.ac.uk.

Project Summary

This study sets out to explore how online distance learners at The University of Edinburgh view their institution. The study aims to explore how distance learners conceptualise or 'picture' the University. As well as demonstrating the type of meaning that the distance learner attaches to her institution, it is anticipated that the findings will provide attitudinal information that will be of value to the University. The design of this research strategy has been informed by discussions between the Principal Investigator and colleagues from the University's Distance Education Initiative, who are supportive of the work.

A flexible research strategy has been proposed that combines the collection of empirical data underpinned by a conceptual grounding. The focus will be upon producing qualitative data through a combination of narrative and visual methodologies. There will be two phases of data collection:

1. In-depth interviews will be conducted in Skype text (an alternative arrangement can be made if required). This will be a narrative interview where the participant will be encouraged to 'tell their story' and undertake their own meaning making. The role of the interviewer will be to occasionally guide conversation.
2. Participants will be invited to submit a digital image that in some way represents the University. The format and content of the image is left up to the participant. The image will be submitted using a drop box on the dedicated project website.

The collected data will be analysed thematically and by using visual methodologies. The findings will be written and disseminated on the project website. It is anticipated that the findings will help to provide the University with a clearer understanding of how online distance learners view their institution.

(continues over)

Declaring your consent to participate in this study

I have read through the information above and understand the purpose of this study.

I understand that I am free to ask questions and to withdraw my consent for involvement at any time.

I understand that my name will not appear in any published document relating to this study.

I am willing to participate in a narrative interview for this project.

I am willing to submit an image that in some way represents how I see the University.

I am willing for anonymised extracts from my interview, as well as my submitted image, to be used as part of the study.

I understand that although collected data will be fully anonymised, it may appear in published form, including on the project website.

Participant's name:

Date:

Participant's signature (can be submitted digitally):

Appendix 2. Ethics application form

University of Edinburgh

MORAY HOUSE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

Application Form

This form should be used for all research carried out under the auspices of Moray House School of Education. A four-tier system of ethical approval has been developed, administered by the Ethics Sub-committee and the Research Support Office. The levels within the system are explained below. Please tick the appropriate box to indicate which level applies to your research.

All applications should be submitted well in advance of a required date of approval, particularly in the case of Level 3. Applications will normally be processed within 2-4 weeks, but this cannot be guaranteed.

Level 0: If your research project is completely desk-based, i.e. does not involve participants you are not obliged to apply for ethical approval. However, you may find it useful to do so to ensure that you are conforming to confidentiality guidelines.

Level 1: applies to 'straightforward' non-intervention, observational research (e.g. analysis of archived data, classroom observation, use of standardised questionnaires).

Level 2: covers novel procedures or the use of atypical participant groups – usually projects in which ethical issues might require more detailed consideration but were unlikely to prove problematic.

Level 3: applies to research which is potentially problematic in that it may incorporate an inherent physical or emotional risk to participants.

Colleagues are reminded that all researchers working directly with children and other groups as listed in 4.3 in the application form should ensure they have prior Disclosure Scotland clearance (formerly Scottish Criminal Record Office). This is a confidential process and forms are available from Susan McNeill Susan.McNeill@ed.ac.uk Tel: 2429330. Members of staff who have **current** clearance through GTC membership are already covered.

Applicants must indicate their commitment to following the ethical guidelines appropriate to their research (e.g. BERA, BSA, BPS, BASES).

Name...*James Lamb* Department ...*Moray House School of Education*

Ethical guidelines followed BERA

Has your Head of Department/Supervisor approved this application **Yes**

You may find it helpful to copy and paste this symbol
beside the relevant box when answering: ✓

SECTION 1: PROJECT DETAILS

1.1 Title of Project:

“Picturing Edinburgh: how do online distance learners view their University?”

1.2 Proposed start date: *September 2012*

1.3 Duration of the project: *12 months*

1.4 List the following details of the Principal Investigator, and any Co-Investigator(s)

Principal Investigator	
Name: James Lamb	
Title: Mr	
Department: Lothians Equal Access Programme for School	
Address: 7 Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh, EH8 9LW	
Tel: 0131 650 4676	Email: james.lamb@ed.ac.uk

Co- Investigator	
Name: Sian Bayne	
Title: Dr	
Department: Education, Community and Society	
Address: Paterson’s Land, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, EH8 8AQ	
Tel: 0131 651 6337	Email: sian.bayne@ed.ac.uk

Co-Investigator	
Name:	
Title:	
Department:	
Address:	
Tel:	Email:

1.5 If funding is necessary to proceed with the study, has it been secured?

YES

NO *No funding required*

If YES, give details of the agency/agencies supporting the project. If a funding submission is planned, give details of the agency/agencies to which a funding application(s) has been made.

1.6 Does the project require the approval of any other institution and/or ethics committee?

YES

NO

If YES, give details and indicate the status of the application at each other institution or ethics committee (i.e. submitted, approved, deferred, rejected).

SECTION 2: DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

Please attach a brief description (no more than 500 words) of your proposal. This should include, as appropriate, the aims and objectives of the study, the research question and/or hypothesis to be investigated, details of the sample, and data collection methods.

“Picturing Edinburgh: how do online distance learners view their University?”

This study sets out to explore how online distance learners at The University of Edinburgh view their University. The study aims to explore how distance learners conceptualise or ‘picture’ the University. As well as demonstrating the type of meaning that the distance learner attaches to her institution (and past experience indicates that this will vary between different students), it is anticipated that the findings will provide attitudinal information that will be of value to the University. The design of this research strategy has been informed by discussions between the Principal Investigator and colleagues from the University’s Distance Education Initiative who are supportive of the work.

The study builds on previous relevant work that the Principal Investigator has undertaken within the University, and in particular is modelled on the approach that has successfully been taken with the current New Geographies of Learning Project within the Department of Education, Community and Society. With the approval of the Principal Investigator of the New Geographies project, this study will explore themes emerging from the ongoing research.

A flexible research strategy has been proposed that combines the collection of empirical data underpinned by a conceptual grounding. The focus will be upon producing qualitative data through a combination of narrative and visual methodologies.

There will be two phases of data collection. Around 12 participants from three online distance learning programmes will participate in an in-depth interview conducted in Skype text. The second phase will see the entire cohort from each of the three programmes being invited to submit a digital image that represents how they view the University. These images will be submitted using a drop box on the dedicated project website. It is anticipated that around 30 images will be submitted. The nature of the sample will be carefully monitored and, where appropriate, assistance will be sought from Programme Leaders in ensuring that a representative group of participants has been recruited.

The collected interview data will be thematically analysed while the images will be read using Rose’s visual methodologies. The findings will be

combined and written up and disseminated using the dedicated project website.

SECTION 3: POTENTIAL RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS

- 3.1 Could the research induce any psychological stress or discomfort in the participants? YES NO

If YES, state the nature of the risk and what measures will be taken to deal with such problems.

- 3.2 Does the research require any physically invasive or potentially physically harmful procedures? YES NO

If YES, give details and outline procedures to be put in place to deal with potential problems.

- 3.3 Does the research involve the investigation of any illegal behaviours? YES NO

If YES, give details.

- 3.4 Is it possible that this research will lead to the disclosure of information about child abuse or neglect? YES NO

If YES, indicate the likelihood of such disclosure and your proposed response to this. If there is a real risk of such disclosure triggering an obligation to make a report to Police, Social Work or other authorities, a warning to this effect must be included in the Information and Consent documents.

- 3.5 Is there any purpose to which the research findings could be put that could adversely affect participants? YES NO

If YES, describe the potential risk for participants of this use of the data. Outline any steps that will be taken to protect participants.

- 3.6 Could this research adversely affect participants in any other way? YES NO

If YES, give details and outline procedures to be put in place to deal with such problems.

- 3.7 Could this research adversely affect members of particular groups of people? YES NO

If YES, describe these possible adverse effects and the protection to be put in place against them.

3.8 Is this research expected to benefit the participants, directly or indirectly?

YES NO

If YES, give details.

It is anticipated that the findings will provide the University with a clearer understanding of the ways in which online distance learners conceptualise the institution. It is also expected that attitudinal information will emerge that will be of value. The findings will be shared with colleagues from the Distance Education Initiative who could in turn disseminate relevant information amongst Programme Leaders. An improved understanding of how distance learners view their institution could help to improve the experience of participants and fellow distance learners.

3.9 Will the true purpose of the research be concealed from the participants?

YES NO

If YES, explain what information will be concealed and why. Will participants be debriefed at the conclusion of the study? If not, why not?

3.10 At any stage in this research could researchers' safety be compromised or could the research induce emotional distress in the researchers?

YES NO

If YES, to either or both, give details and outline procedures to be out in place to deal with potential problems.

SECTION 4: PARTICIPANTS

4.1 How many participants is it hoped to include in the research? Around 40

4.2 What criteria will be used in deciding on the inclusion and exclusion of participants in the study?

Students will be drawn from 3 online distance learning programmes, including the MSc in E-Learning, including a spread across year of study and geography.

4.3 Are any of the participants likely to:

be under 16 years of age? YES NO
children in the care of a Local Authority? YES NO

known to have special educational needs	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
physically or mentally ill?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
vulnerable in other ways	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
members of a racial or ethnic minority?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
unlikely to be proficient in English?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
in a client or professional relationship with the researchers?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
in a student-teacher relationship with the researchers?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
in any other dependent relationship with the researchers?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
have difficulty in reading and/or comprehending any printed material distributed as part of the study?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

If YES to any of the above, explain and describe the measures that will be used to protect and/or inform participants.

The nature of online distance learning means that there is a higher than normal possibility that the sample will include individuals experiencing physical or mental illness. Similarly, online courses have a diverse geographical and therefore cultural mix. The nature of the proposed research does not prevent the participation of students with physical or mental illness, or present barriers to those from ethnic minorities. Furthermore, all participants will be enrolled postgraduates at The University of Edinburgh and it is therefore anticipated that they will be capable of participating in research to the extent that they desire.

4.4 How will the sample be recruited?

All students from 3 selected programmes will be invited to participate although it is anticipated that approximately 40 students will be involved in the project. The specifics of recruitment will be negotiated with Programme Leaders upon approval of this proposal, however it is intended that students will be sent an e-mail that directs them to a dedicated website outlining the nature of the research.

4.5 Will participants receive any financial or other material benefits because of participation?

YES NO

If YES, what benefits will be offered to participants and why?

Before completing Sections 5 & 6 please refer to the University Data Protection Policy to ensure that the relevant conditions relating to the processing of personal data under Schedule 2 and Schedule 3 are satisfied. Details are Available at:

SECTION 5: CONFIDENTIALITY AND HANDLING OF DATA

- 5.1 Will the research require the collection of personal information from e.g. universities, schools, employers, or other agencies about individuals without their direct consent?

YES NO

If YES, state what information will be sought and why written consent for access to this information will not be obtained from the participants themselves.

- 5.2 Will any part of the research involving participants be audio/film/video taped or recorded using any other electronic medium?

YES NO

If YES, what medium is to be used and how will the recordings be used?

Interviews will be conducted in Skype text, with transcripts saved for the purpose of coding and analysis. Participants will also be asked to submit a digital image.

- 5.3 Who will have access to the raw data?

The Principal Investigator and Co-Investigator.

- 5.4 How will the confidentiality of data, including the identity of participants, be ensured?

Permission to use extracts from the data will be sought from participants within the consent form. Participants will also be made aware that extracts used in reporting will be fully anonymised.

- 5.5 Specify where the datafiles/audio/video tapes, etc. will be retained after the study, how long they will be retained and how they will eventually be disposed of.

All interview data will be electronically stored in password protected folders. It is not anticipated that any data will be printed out, however where this is the case it will be stored in a locked filing cabinet within the Principal Investigator's office for a period of seven years after the completion of the research, before being shredded.

- 5.6 How do you intend for the results of the research to be used?

Project findings will be written up and presented as a dedicated website. The results will be shared with colleagues from the University's Distance Education Initiative who have helped to inform the shape of the research proposal. Where findings are seen to be of value, it is anticipated that they will be shared with Programme Leaders from the University's online distance learning programmes.

5.7 Will feedback of findings be given to participants. YES NO

If YES, how and when will this feedback be provided?

All participants will be invited to visit the findings on the website.

SECTION 6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT

6.1 Will written consent be obtained from participants? YES NO

If YES, attach a copy of the information sheet and consent forms (covering project details, confidentiality, freedom to withdraw at any stage of the project).

Attached as appendix 1 within Research Proposal

If NO, explain why not.

Administrative consent may be deemed sufficient:

- a) for studies where the data collection involves aggregated (not individual) statistical information and where the collection of data presents:
 - (i) no invasion of privacy;
 - (ii) no potential social or emotional risks:
- b) for studies which focus on the development and evaluation of curriculum materials, resources, guidelines, test items, or programme evaluations rather than the study, observation, and evaluation of individuals.

6.2 Will administrative consent (eg. from a headteacher) be obtained in lieu of participants' consent? YES NO

If YES, explain why individual consent is not considered necessary.

6.3 In the case of minors participating in the research on an individual basis, will the consent or assent of parents be obtained? YES NO

If YES, explain how this consent or assent will be obtained.

If NO, give reasons.

6.4 Will the consent or assent (at least verbal) of minors participating in the research on an individual basis be obtained?

YES NO

If YES, explain how this consent or assent will be obtained.

If NO, give reasons.

6.5 In the case of participants whose first language is not English, will arrangements be made to ensure informed consent?

YES NO

If YES, what arrangements will be made?

If NO, give reasons.

All participants will be enrolled postgraduates at the University and therefore, where English is not the first language, will have be required to demonstrate appropriate proficiency. Additional arrangements are therefore unnecessary.

6.6 In the case of participants with special educational needs will arrangements be made to ensure informed consent?

YES NO

If YES, what arrangements will be made?

If NO, give reasons.

It is not anticipated that the sample will include participants with significant special education needs.

SECTION 7: CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The University has a draft 'Policy on the Conflict of Interest' (copies available from the Research Support Office). Regarding research the draft states that a conflict of interest would arise in cases where an employee of the University might be

“ compromising research objectivity or independence in return for financial or non-financial benefit for him/herself or for a relative or friend.”

The draft policy also states that the responsibility for avoiding a conflict of interest, in the first instance, lies with the individual, but that potential conflicts of interest should always be disclosed, normally to the line manager or Head of Department. Failure to disclose a conflict of interest or to cease involvement until the conflict has been resolved may result in disciplinary action and in serious cases could result in dismissal.

7.1 Does your research involve a conflict of interest as outlined above YES NO

If YES, give details.

N.B. Have you included copies of participants' information sheet(s) and consent sheet(s) if appropriate?

Please take time to check through your application to ensure that you have answered all relevant questions.

Electronically completed forms should be submitted to Sandra.Orr@ed.ac.uk Research Support Office, Old Moray House, School of Education