



*the*  
PRACTITIONER MASTERS  
PROGRAMME

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**THE  
PRACTITIONER MASTERS PROGRAMME  
FOR PROFESSIONALS  
A PROPOSED EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP**

***BY***

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## 1. KEY FIRST POINTS

**1.1 STUDENT CENTRED** The PMP is dedicated to supporting professional practitioners in the UK and across Continental Europe who wish to research themes, questions and issues they have identified as personally significant, and who are seeking Masters level research training, specialist updating, research guidance, academic supervision and a recognised and relevant higher degree.

**1.2 FLEXIBLE** The PMP has been created to respond effectively and efficiently to the expressed needs and interests of its participants. It possesses the flexibility not only to offer already approved/validated specialist pathways within it to potential recruits but also to create completely new subject modules and research components in direct response to the requests of individual professional groups, institutions and agencies.

## 2. PRACTITIONER RESEARCH EMPHASIS

**2.1 KEY DEFINITION** Basically, in the PMP practitioner research can be defined as research by professionals into their own practice and, if appropriate, into their profession's wider practice, with the twin aims of greater understanding and future improvement of practice. The PMP is close to Michael Bassey's definition of research (1999:38) as a 'systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry which aims to contribute towards the advancement of knowledge and wisdom.' 'Systematic' highlights the centrality of rational structures in research approaches, 'critical' emphasises the detailed analysis and balanced judgement necessary in assessing findings, and 'self-critical' notes the need for constant self-evaluation by the researcher.

**2.2 VALUES IN RESEARCH** PMP research is value-laden. The themes, issues and questions under investigation are those considered significant by the researcher, the methodologies and approaches guiding the investigation are those s/he has selected and justified, and the data gathered and criteria of assessment are those s/he deems important and appropriate. Everything has to be defended, and everything can be challenged. The PMP sees the identification and critique of values as central to the practitioner research it provides.

**2.3 THE ACTION RESEARCH ELEMENT** 'Action research' permeates the PMP, and its definition by Carr and Kemmis (1986) 'as a self-reflective, self critical and critical enquiry undertaken by professionals to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the wider contexts of practice' is particularly apt.

**2.4 BEYOND ACTION RESEARCH** But Carr and Kemmis do not cover it all. The 'practitioner research' within the PMP goes further, as it often engages with qualitative social research in its quest for data and resolutions, drawing on a variety of historical, cultural, ethical, political, social and economic perspectives, and utilising a range of observation, interview, case study, and questionnaire techniques.

**2.5 THE PMP'S ULTIMATE AIM** Practitioner research can be targeted at *problem-solving theory* and *critical theory*. Problem-solving may well motivate many participants on the PMP. They may take the prevailing aims, structure, hierarchy and processes within an institution as they find them, and seek to make them work more effectively by investigating and perhaps resolving a problem. It is this problem which becomes their research focus, and its evidence-based solution the most desirable, although not inevitable, outcome. Other PMP participants may be led on to critical theory. Here institutions, and relationships, are not considered inviolate, and the researcher moves towards understanding the deeper and wider processes of change which are taking place, or should take place. Whatever routes students ultimately take, the PMP has the continuing evidence-based enhancement of practice as its key objective.

**2.6 THE PRACTITIONER'S LEARNING SPIRAL** The word 'continuing' in the previous sentence is significant within the PMP which seeks to give participants a range of Masters level generic research skills which are readily transferable to new professional situations long after their 'studentship' is over. The PMP is predicated on the value of the continuing learning spirals which move deliberately from 'Doing to Knowing to better Doing to deeper Knowing' and using 'Theory to inform Practice and using future Practice to refine Theory to better inform Practice'. Critical reflection is at the heart of the PMP.

### 3. ADMISSION CRITERIA

**3.1 Background** Normally admission to Masters programmes includes the possession of a good Honours grade Bachelors degree or its equivalent. Some countries, and professions, do not recognise a Masters degree without an associated Bachelors degree. A small number of European Masters programmes admit students without Bachelor degrees or even their equivalent if their other skills, knowledge and experience are considered sufficient preparation. Nevertheless these students require the early stages of their Masters programmes to include a structured course of study skills and basic research approaches. Students possessing European HEI first degrees which do not include any research elements, would also benefit from early initiation into Masters research skills.

**3.2 Recommendations** In the light of (i) above, there is a need for (a) detailed admissions criteria and selected recruitment, and (b) an ECTS credit-rated initial research training course embracing study and basic research skills immediately following admission.

#### 3.3 Criteria for admission to the PMP

**(i) Academic Achievement:** normally the possession of (a) a first degree from a nationally recognised HEI, or (b) a certificate from a nationally recognised HEI which has first degree equivalence, or (c) a portfolio of courses and competencies which a nationally recognised accreditation agency confirms is completely or largely equivalent to the outcomes necessary for a first degree. In exceptional cases students without this evidence can be admitted at the programme coordinator's/director's discretion if their professional experiences and personal qualities merit. In such cases applicants might be required to attend

formal/informal interviews, and/or supply letters of reference, and/or undertake a written task.

**(ii) Professional Background:** possession of professional roles and responsibilities, and a working culture and environment, appropriate for undertaking practitioner and workplace centred Masters level research.

**(iii) Personal Qualities & Knowledge:** possession of detailed knowledge of the PMP's opportunities and demands, and a stated desire to understand and improve their practice and to complete assignments within reasonable deadlines

**(iv) Proficiency in English:** proven ability (through interview and submitted tasks) to understand spoken and written English, and to communicate orally and in writing in English to an acceptable standard – normally Level ? in EU criteria.

### 3.4 Pre-Admission PMP Taster Day

This is mandatory. The PMP 'taster' day comprises a detailed introduction to the PMP as a whole, with an emphasis on its professional/academic opportunities, research activities and assessment requirements. This day would help ensure prospective students understood the programme they were considering entering and, if handled skilfully, it would assist tutors in judging their suitability for admission. There would be opportunities for attendees to meet privately with PMP personnel.

## 4. KEY ELEMENTS OF THE PMP

**4.1 Balancing options and requirements** The PMP is (i) modular, (ii) process-based and (iii) outcome assessed. These key interwoven elements make it relevant and easily applicable to a wide range of subjects and professions.

Academic balance within the PMP is all-important. The greater the flexibility of the PMP for student, the greater the need for tutors to ensure its regulations and options are understood and implemented effectively and efficiently. The PMP's flexibility, therefore, accounts for the three mandatory 'moments' discussed in this proposal – the Pre-Admission Taster Day (see para 3), the initial Research Training component within the first module (see para 5) and the Dissertation/Masterpiece Preparation (see para 12).

**4.2 The modular element** Modules provide students, tutors, university awarding bodies, marketing personnel, finance officers, accreditation agencies, external examiners and employers with generally recognised, easily identifiable, working programme elements.

Seen as PMP building bricks, modules can be easily modified and replaced, and as a range of separate or interlocking options they can provide students with a significant degree of easily administered choice (see below).

Seen as credit-carrying entities, each module must contain sufficiently clear demands in terms of subject and/or research training content, individual study and research requirements, and assessed study and research outcomes to secure 30 UK CATS and 15 ECTS credits, and more in the case of the first module with its mandatory initial research training component (see para 8).

**4.3 The process based element** PMP students will work towards a formally assessed demonstration of key Masters level abilities, attributes and skills in their individual assignments and dissertation. These are itemised in Appendix 2.

**4.4 The assessed outcome element** All work submitted through the PMP is assessed at Masters level. The PMP assessments are linked solely to each module's formal outcomes – the assessed assignments and the assessed dissertation. The assessment criteria are the key Masters level abilities, attributes and skill itemised in Appendix 3.

## **5. FIRST MODULE: ADDITIONAL SKILLS AND RESEARCH TRAINING COMPONENT.**

**5.1 Additional Component** The first module will be longer than the second, third and fourth modules inasmuch as it will include an additional initial study skills advice/training component, and an introductory examination of PMP research methodologies and methods, with additional student reading, and non-assessed tasks. This component will extend the first module contact time by a total of two days (12 hours), although in due course aspects of this training could be undertaken electronically.

**5.2 Mandatory** Experience dictates that this component is an essential pre-requisite for all students. It is an integral part of the PMP to ensure its content and approaches link coherently with students' subsequent selected schemes of study.

For the great majority of students the additional element would be mandatory. **There may be a minority of applicants with research degrees or other relevant research experience who could be granted exemption to this component through APL procedures.**

The content and approaches will vary according to the main PMP 'Pathway' adopted in agreement with particular professional groups – see next paragraph.

## **6. SUBSEQUENT PMP PATHWAYS OPTIONS**

At this point, with the students possessing sound knowledge of the aims, methodologies, opportunities and requirements of the PMP it is anticipated they will be in a position to select the study/research patterns best suited to their needs and interests.

Masters students' needs are diverse, and the PMP offers a range of study options:

- (a) Some primarily desire a ‘taught’ programme introducing new research, ideas, projects, and concepts linked to the furtherance of their professional knowledge, experience, skills and careers.

**THEREFORE** the PMP will possess the option of specially compiled modules with these ‘taught’ components. A ‘taught’ M level module embraces far more sophisticated teaching and learning approaches than direct transmission.

- (b) Some primarily seek opportunities to undertake individual research projects analysing, *inter alia*, generally accepted practice, newly introduced practice, and/or possible future practice under expert guidance and supervision using generally well-regarded methodologies and methods for such research.

**THEREFORE** the PMP will possess modules whose central purpose is to provide students with skilled supervision and the necessary additional research guidance to undertake and fulfil their chosen research themes/questions. These are termed Independent Research Modules (IRM)

- (c) Some prefer a mix of both approaches as their evolving ideas and interests dictate.

**THEREFORE** The PMP will use its modular structure, and variety of modules as described below, to allow students as much flexibility as possible to switch between modular options (a) and (b).

## IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL NOTES

- (i) **ACTIVE PARTICIPATION:** The PMP assumes that students will be actively involved in subject, professional and research discourse with tutors as they plan and progress through the programme. Their assessed outcomes will be centred on the satisfactory acquisition and utilisation of the Masters level abilities, attributes and skills.
- (ii) **SPECIFIC PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION:** The PMP may offer some overseas students who are seeking Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and/or further recognised professional qualifications the opportunity to undertake specific research assignments likely to assist in this formal recognition by local and national authorities and professional bodies.

## 7. MODULES

### 7.1 Definition and Criteria

A module is a ‘piece’ of academic study whose criteria of compilation include:

- (i) sufficient hours of contact, private study and research, and non-assessed and assessed outcomes to meet HEI requirements for M level awards and recognition for 15 ECTS credits.

- (ii) an appropriate balance within the PMP of relevant subject content and/or research training and/or assignment supervision at Masters level.

## **7.2 Types**

### **Taught Modules**

These contain (a) subject content, (b) research training and (c) assignment supervision elements. They can be compiled to suit any professions/professional groups.

### **Independent Research Modules (IRM)**

These contain (a) research training and (b) assignment supervision elements. The IRM is in an all-purpose standard format suitable for all eventualities.

## **7.3 Format and Delivery**

All modules can be delivered:

- (i) at any time during the year,
- (ii) at any venue approved by the institute and its partner university,
- (iii) over varying periods of time up to a year,
- (iv) with a variety of teaching and learning approaches as appropriate.

## **7.4 Assessed Outcomes**

No modules have any pre-determined assessed tasks.

The theme, methodology, methods and structure of assessed research/study tasks are negotiated individually between each student and the module tutor(s).

Central to these negotiations are

- (i) the PMP process-based criteria for assessment,
- (ii) ethical considerations,
- (iii) the opportunities and constraints of word-limits,
- (iv) accessible resources and the student's scope for relevant research,
- (v) any personal or professional deadlines for completion,
- (vi) any time-scale imposed by the degree-awarding HEI partner of the Institute
- (vii)

## **7.5 The sequence of modules students may follow**

Students may undertake any type of modules in any order, subject only to the availability of modules and specialist tutors serving particular PMP venues.

## 8 ECTS CREDIT ACCUMULATION

The PMP aims to secure a minimum of 120 ECTS credits. Necessarily this demanding target impacts upon the required hours of study and assessed outcomes. Equally important is the PMP's avowed aim of providing students with substantial and varied research training and experiences, and giving them the opportunity to disseminate their findings in a professional/scholarly format.

The PMP, therefore, comprises:-

- Stage One: The Pre-Admission 'Taster' Day and Admissions Processes
- Stage Two: The Research, Study & Design Component of the First Module (10 ECTS)
- Stage Three: Four Modules chosen from those on offer locally (60 ECTS)
- Stage Four: Dissertation/Masterpiece Preparatory Course and Task (see para 12) (10 ECTS)
- Stage Five: Dissertation/Masterpiece (see para 13) (40 ECTS)

## 9 THE LINKED MODULE OPTIONS

### 9.1 Conceptually Linking Modules

At Stage Three students may opt to:-

- (a) study four discrete and unconnected modules,
- (b) propose research projects which conceptually link two modules. Normally these would be (a) a Taught Module followed by an Independent Research Module or (b) two Independent Research Modules. The two module assignments would normally be submitted at the end of the second module as Part One and Part Two of a linked study. The assignments would demonstrate the clear connection between the two.
- (c) propose conceptually linking three or four modules, probably using a combination of Taught and Independent Research Modules, so that, for example, the results of their research projects were presented for assessment much as though they were four chapters of a book. Other forms of submission are discussed below.

**9.2 Negotiating Linked Modules** Such linked arrangements would be part of a carefully negotiated agreement between students and PMP tutors. The criteria would include, *inter alia*, the availability of specialist tutors, the scope, demands and coherence of the overall scheme of study and research, time management and estimated submission deadlines, the availability of resources, including those in the workplace, and ethical considerations.

**9.3 Assessing Linked Modules** For academic assessment purposes, and the calculation of ECTS credits, each modular part of a major submission linking two or more modules would need clear

identification as each part would be assessed as an individual assignment. This division would form part of the agreement between student and tutor.

## 10. MODULE ASSIGNMENT EMPHASES

**10.1 Module skills** Many skills contribute to effective research and its analysis. The PMP lists these in paragraph 19.2 below. They are the all-important core ‘processes’ governing the Masters standard of the PMP. They guide students’ studies and research, and therefore must reveal themselves clearly in the assessed outcomes – the assignments.

**10.2 Selection of skills** The PMP affords students the opportunity to select those M level skills/methods they consider best for their chosen research project, and recording and analysing in its assessed assignment, in detailed discussion with tutors. The PMP provides a number of examples of how various skills and attributes contribute to various research questions and themes to assist in these discussions (see below), but individual final agreements may well lie outside these examples.

The eventual submission is assessed against the agreed criteria.

## 11. MODULE ASSIGNMENT FORMAT

To a significant extent the format in which students may submit their work for assessment is negotiable between them and their tutors, subject to the PMP’s condition that expert markers, external examiners and all those formally inspecting the PMP must find the assessment criteria easily accessible and capable of demonstration within the selected format. This key condition will be to the fore in all format negotiations between students and tutors.

The format options are:-

**11.1 Essay** This is a piece of extended writing between 4,000 and 5,000 words in length, with chapters, sub-headings, tables, diagrams, illustrations, references and appendices as considered appropriate by the student.

Extended pieces of writing can take a number of forms. The Case Study and the relatively new Narrative formats are negotiable options.

**11.2 Portfolios** Portfolios can take several forms, but for the PMP normally includes (i) an accumulative part descriptive/part reflective diary with (ii) periodic additional critical reflections on key actions/decisions/ readings/problems etc, (iii) a final 2,000 word long critically reflective commentary and assessment of the complete project/experiment/development/period of change etc, interspersed with (iv) clear documentary evidence of the key actions/decisions/readings/problems etc as points of reference.

Structured portfolios, possibly in triptych format, are a potentially sound instrument through which practitioner researchers can (i) keep on-going diaries and records of

activities/events/changes/discussions and (ii) their immediate thoughts/responses/attitudes/decisions etc and (iii) later more measured critical reflections and conclusions. (See full description in Appendix 4)

**11.3 Event** This is a conceptually linked combination of assessed activities, normally including (i) a performance/event/ exhibition/ lesson etc viewed, possibly live but possibly electronically, by a marker/assessor, (ii) an oral presentation by the student and live interview with the marker/assessor critically reflecting on the performance/event/exhibition/lesson etc, and (iii) an overall critically reflective commentary about 1,500 to 2,000 words long on the assessed activity from start to finish.

**11.4 Event and Peer participation** This is similar to 11.3 above but with the active involvement of a group of the student's peers in the live interview as questioners and commentators on the assessed activity and oral presentation. The peer group would have attended/viewed the initial assessed activity. They would give an agreed view on the quality of the event, presentation and interview responses.

#### **ADDITIONAL NOTE**

It must be re-emphasised that whichever assessment format is agreed between student and tutor, the key requisite is the capacity of that format to demonstrate the student's fulfilment of the PMP's assessment criteria (see Appendix 3).

Students will declare which option they will follow. The tutor will offer clear advice if requested, but the final decision lies with the student.

## **12. DISSERTATION/MASTERPIECE PREPARATION MODULE**

When students have completed the RS&DM and the four taught and/or independent research modules successfully they may apply to undertake the dissertation/masterpiece preparation stage. This provides specific training and planning tasks for undertaking the major research for the dissertation/masterpiece. When completed successfully, students proceed with the dissertation/masterpiece itself.

The Preparation Module includes discussions and agreement about whether the Dissertation or Masterpiece route is most suited to the student's interests and theme.

This stage can involve EITHER

- (i) the research, preparation and submission of an extended piece of writing between 15,000 and 20,000 words long on a specific theme. This is the PMP Dissertation.

OR

- (ii) the research, preparation and submission of one or more major professional event/activity/ programme of lessons/performance/exhibition, followed by an oral interview and written reflective commentary of 5,000-7,000 words. This is the PMP Masterpiece.

The Preparation Module is mandatory.

Its content is generic but tailored to individual needs, and includes the research methodologies and methods, data collection and analysis instruments, recent research and professional literature, timescales and deadlines, and ethics protocols necessary for the satisfactory completion of the Dissertation or Masterpiece.

If several students are at this stage, group seminars as well as individual face-to-face or electronic tutorials will be organised. Students will meet and work with their prospective supervisors during the course of this module.

The student is expected to use the module to, **first**, formulate his/her initial Dissertation or Masterpiece proposal, **second**, create a research schedule (key research stages, estimated deadlines, required resources – as known at this early but important planning stage) and **third**, compile a concise portfolio of evidence, statements and arguments identifying and justifying his/her selected research methodologies and methods, data collection and analysis instruments, research and subject reading, study timescales and deadlines, and personal and professional ethics protocols.

There are no time limits attached to the Preparation Modules, although ten to twelve weeks would be the average expectation.

The completed Preparation Module Tasks (in three parts as itemised above) is presented to the prospective tutor for assessment in line with HEI procedures, and the Tasks and this initial assessment are presented to the HEIs Assessment Panel for scrutiny and possible ECTS credits.

### 13. DISSERTATION/MASTERPIECE

The student has a supervisor allocated formally by the HEI throughout his/her studies. The supervisor has expertise in Masters level research, in the subject of the dissertation or masterpiece and in the format of the intended dissertation or masterpiece. The supervisor's role and responsibility includes:

- (i) establishing an agreed pattern and modes of regular contact with the student
- (ii) ensuring the student understands the requirements of this stage of the PMP
- (iii) ensuring the student identifies and can access an appropriate range of literary and other resources
- (iv) seeking the advice of other subject specialists if required
- (v) agreeing with the student appropriate lines of enquiry and project management, and estimated deadlines for key stages
- (vi) ensuring the student compiles an appropriate ethics protocol
- (vii) undertaking critically constructive analysis of aspects of the dissertation/masterpiece as it is compiled/undertaken
- (viii) becoming a formal assessor of the completed dissertation/masterpiece

The dissertation and masterpiece must fulfil all the PMP's M level assessment criteria, but it is in the nature of the PMP that research projects will fulfil each of the criteria to a greater or lesser extent as

their subjects and approaches dictate. Supervisors must ensure students understand not only the opportunities afforded them by the PMP's flexibility but also the requirement that they identify clearly in the dissertation and masterpiece formats how they have fulfilled each of the criteria to a satisfactory level.

For students' opting for the Masterpiece, the academic/conceptual relationship between the component parts – all of which can contain Masters level qualities – is particularly significant.

It is important to emphasise, however, that while it is the responsibility of supervisors to draw students' attention to PMP requirements – such as ethics protocols and assessment criteria – it is the students' personal responsibility to actually fulfil those requirements.

## 14. STUDENT SUPPORT

Regular and easily accessible student support is central to the PMP. This ensures students receive intensive research training not only at the outset through the mandatory module but also in each module and at the dissertation/masterpiece stage. For part-time students close contact with tutors is important not only to ensure the workplace centred research consistently meets PMP requirements but also that significant changes within the workplace, new research findings and possible changes in research approach and direction are identified and discussed. The idea of tutor-student debate as part of students' personal and professional growth throughout the PMP, and their acquisition of new transferable skills, is important.

There are several means through which this consistency of contact can be achieved:-

**14.1 Face-to-face meetings.** Students will meet regularly in cohort groups based upon module themes and/or geographical centres. Time will be allocated within these cohort meetings to individual as well as group tutorials.

**14.2 Electronic contact:** Students will have access to tutors through agreed arrangements via e-mail, Skype and telephone.

**14.3 Inter-active Website:** A dedicated website will have the facility for on-line discussions on module and research themes.

**14.4 Programme Guidelines:** Hard and electronic PMP guidelines, detailed research advice and in due course students' assignments in full or summary.

**14.5 PMP Handbook:** The partner HEI will publish in hard and electronic form an official PMP Handbook, which will afford students access information to its library.

## 15. APPENDIX: SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- 15.1 Appendix 1: Diagram of the stages and routes through the PMP
- 15.2 Appendix 2: Masters level skills, attributes and assessment criteria within the PMP
- 15.3 Appendix 3: Masters level research methods
- 15.4 Appendix 4: The Triptych Portfolio

**APPENDIX 1.**

**STAGES THROUGH THE PMP**

<b>Stage*</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Academic Award</b>	<b>ECT points</b>
1:	Taster Day	None	0
2:	Selection & Formal Admission	None	0
3: **	Taught or Independent Research Module	Certificate of Advanced Study	15 + 10***
4:	Taught or Independent Research Module	Post-Graduate Certificate	15
5:	Taught or Independent Research Module		15
6:	Taught or Independent Research Module	Post-Graduate Diploma	15
7:	Dissertation/Masterpiece Preparation Module	None	10
8:	Dissertation/ Masterpiece	Master of Arts (MA)	40

\* All stages are compulsory

\*\* Stages 3-6 include conceptually linking module assignments - 'double assignments' addressing a single research question/title

\*\*\* Module 3 has a significant extended initial research training component which carries 10 ECT points.

**APPENDIX 2: MASTERS LEVEL SKILLS & ATTRIBUTES WITHIN THE PMP**

The PMP takes the Masters Level 7 criteria from The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland created by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency as its primary programme and outcomes guide.

This framework is highly regarded and widely recognised. The QAA Masters Level 7 criteria for (a) personally demonstrated outcomes, (b) enhanced professional capabilities, and (c) the acquisition of vocationally-centred transferable skills and attributes, are particularly appropriate for this practitioner-centred degree

The complete Framework can be found at <http://www.qaa.uk/academicinfrastructure> and the relevant sections state:

*Masters degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:*

- (i) a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice*
- (ii) a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship*
- (iii) originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline*
- (iv) conceptual understanding that enables the student (a) to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline, and (b) to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.*

*Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:*

- (i) deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences*
- (ii) demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level*
- (iii) continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.*

*And holders will have the qualities and transferable skills for employment requiring:*

- (i) the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility*
- (ii) decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations*

*(iii) the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.*

The PMP has used these criteria to inform the final assessment of each assignment, dissertation and masterpiece. The PMP's assessment criteria are as follows. It should be noted that they are (a) applicable to students from a wide range of professions, and (b) compiled to be initial guidelines for students as well as final assessment criteria for markers.

PMP students should demonstrate through their assessed outcomes the abilities to:

- (i) identify, set up and use a variety of learning strategies (within and outside PMP contact time and within and beyond the workplace)
- (ii) identify, interpret, conceptualise and evaluate critically relevant literature, data, objects, artefacts and images and to relate them to practice as appropriate
- (iii) synthesise ideas and research findings, and contextualise them in relation to their own evolving practice
- (iv) formulate and test new ideas from a variety of approaches, justify the foundation of those ideas and (in practical work) implement them
- (v) test ideas, including the application of models as appropriate, using a variety of research designs, methodologies, measurements and techniques of analysis
- (vi) present ideas and research findings in a well-structured, easily accessible, and convincingly argued or projected way, such as written papers, oral presentations and practical work
- (vii) plan, execute and report a significant piece of research possessing some element of originality
- (viii) exercise independent judgement and critical self-awareness, using them to reflect upon their own practice and, where appropriate, that of others
- (ix) understand and demonstrate ethical, legal, social and civic responsibility as a researcher and member of a profession/discipline/association
- (x) understand and respect interdisciplinary and diverse cultural perspectives, and the roles and expertise of others
- (xi) realise their creativity, where relevant, through an appropriate balance between the application of rigorous and informed theory, inspiration, and discovery through experience, all organised through critical self-evaluation executed with a high level of technical skill and application of appropriate intellect, materials and technology.

Each assignment must therefore demonstrate, in an easily accessible, carefully explained, structured format, all of the following features:-

- (i) a viable and relevant research question/project
- (ii) the professional and/or personal context(s) from which the research question/project arises

- (iii) the setting of research goals, planning and ordering of activities to complete the project within available resources
- (iv) the accessing and management of relevant information
- (v) the understanding and development of relevant concepts
- (vi) the design, justification and implementation of appropriate methodologies and detailed methods
- (vii) the synthesis and analysis of data from an appropriate variety of sources
- (viii) balanced conclusions and recommendations for further action/research/developments, especially in the light of (i) and (ii)
- (ix) a critical analysis of one's own research

**APPENDIX 3: RESEARCH METHODS & SKILLS**

1. The PMP expects students to be aware of the research methodologies, and methods, which exist, and to select and justify their choices for research within the PMP. They will be aware through initial module presentations and discussions that practitioner-research within the auspices of the PMP lends itself to particular methodologies, and methods, but not necessarily to a single methodology, or method..
2. PMP assignments, and dissertations and masterpiece commentaries, will require a high level of critical reflection, analysis, argument, and reasoned defence of decisions and approaches. This Appendix outlines a number of key elements that will necessarily appear to a greater or lesser extent in all submitted work. The PMP expects students to understand, and fulfil, the 'package' of skills and criteria associated with these key elements. These key elements and their 'packages' are:
3. Contexts Research should be clearly located within ideas, perspectives and theories drawn from relevant historical, cultural and critical contexts. Within these broader contexts it show how the research question/project arises from and potentially contributes to professional practice. Students should show critical awareness of their own attitudes/beliefs/values/skills relevant to the practice under consideration, and ensure these appropriately inform, and are informed by, their research reflections/arguments/conclusions.
4. Critical Reflection on Knowledge: Students should have mastered the skills of critical reflection. They should demonstrate familiarity with key relevant bodies of knowledge – books, journals, archives, museums, galleries etc. If appropriate, they should show awareness of changes in knowledge and interpretations in recent years and/or over more historic time. They should be selective in their choice of major sources, and justify the selection in terms of relevancy and an appropriate range of opinions centred upon their own research question/project.
5. Critical Reflection on Practice: Students should possess an understanding of reflective practice, and show evidence of their personal engagement in the contributory processes. This includes defining and analysing the area of practice under consideration in relation to an appropriate range of contexts, and considering the motives, causes and influences on the practice and their present and future implications.
6. Collecting and Analysing Data: Students should clarify through references to theoretical backgrounds and/or the issue being investigated the purpose for which the data are being used. They should identify and justify the selected methods of creating, recording, analysing and presenting data. This would include discussion on the contexts in which data is produced. The students should examine the spectrum of research methods in human sciences – basically the perennial question whether 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' refer to distinct and separate paradigms or complementary ones to be 'mixed and matched' as appropriate – and justify their own stance. They should also identify whether the data is being used to test an existing proposition/theory/ hypothesis (the 'deductive' approach) or to create, however tentatively, a new one (the 'inductive' or 'grounded theory' approach). Methods of data collection will include Interviews, Questionnaires, Observations, and Narratives – and all of these come in a variety of forms from which the one(s) most appropriate for particular research projects must be carefully selected.

7. Argument: Students should be both analytical and critical in building their arguments, and the conclusion must be clear even if sometimes tenuous and/or complex., Statements should be reasoned, accumulative and scrupulously supported by evidence, and contrary views should be noted, respected and challenged. The students' own views and positions are essential, but always supported by evidence from wider reading and/or personal practice. No key argument can be hurried; detailed construction of a major argument is essential.
  
8. Ethics Protocol: PMP research will almost always involve the compilation of an ethics protocol governing its processes and procedures. The protocol will be informed by the ethical requirements of the awarding HEI, professional institutions and wider bodies associated with the research, relevant national legislation, and the views/beliefs of the researchers themselves and the associations/communities/fellowships of which they are members. Students must demonstrate the relevance/implications/opportunities/limitations of the ethics protocol they have compiled on their research and findings.

## **APPENDIX 4: THE TRIPTYCH PORTFOLIO**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The Triptych Portfolio is predicated on the clear presentation and analysis of a research project at each stage from start to finish – that is from initial thoughts to final evaluation. Its format gives students the opportunity to immediately record activities and events in the form of a RESEARCH DIARY, and later to enter more measured CRITICAL REFLECTIONS on these activities and events, and finally to compile an overall ANALYSIS & EVALUATION of the completed project’s aims, processes and outcomes.

1.2 The Portfolio, therefore, has three distinct sections – Research Diary, Critical Reflections, Analysis & Evaluation. Each section is linked to the other two in several ways. These links include the dates of entries, textual references, on-going critical reflections and accumulative arguments.

1.3 The presentation format of the Portfolio for final assessment must be based on these links. For example, pages could be divided into three sections – either vertically or horizontally – thereby allowing the reader (i) to follow activities and events as they progressed, (ii) to understand the researcher’s accumulating reflections on them, and (iii) to assess his/her final analysis, judgement and recommendations with ease. Alternatively, each section could have a page to itself which is connected to the other two sections in a clear and easily accessible form.

1.4 All three sections must abide by the PMP and awarding HEI’s Ethics Protocol.

1.5 The three parallel sections are:

RESEARCH DIARY

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

ANALYSIS & EVALUATION

The entries in the on-going Research Diary inform the regular Critical Reflections and both of these inform the later Analysis & Evaluation. The cross-referencing system through which each section informs the other sections is determined by the student, but one example could be clear coding, underlining and numbering in various colours.

### **2. RESEARCH DIARY SECTION**

2.1 Entries should record all things relevant to the research projects - immediate events, activities, meetings, discussions, decisions, outcomes, problems and opportunities - as they occur or soon afterwards. Entries can be bullet-points, notes or narrative but however they are compiled they should be easily accessible to a new reader. Entries should be dated, and cross-referenced later to Critical Reflections and Analysis & Evaluation.

2.2 Entries should also ‘signpost’ through the text, or sub-headings, or numbering, such things as lines of development, problems receiving attention, sequence of related events, growth of teams or groups, and changes in direction.

2.3 This section can include documentary and other evidence of key meetings, interviews, lessons, reports, surveys, tests, observation schedules, and extracts from related literature directly informing the project. This evidence should only include relevant extracts where information is included in lengthy documents, and full references should be given. The evidence can be included in the relevant part of the section itself or in a clearly marked and signposted appendix.

### 3. CRITICAL REFLECTIONS SECTION

3.1 This section should be written as extended text with accurate sentence construction and punctuation. It should contain critical reflections on the on-going research project as described in the research diary, and the reflections should be regular and not-too-distant from the events prompting them – maybe later in the same day or few days later, possibly at the next week-end. However, much about the timing and extent of entries will depend upon the pace of development and the nature of events.

3.2 In this section the researcher should comment upon activities and events as their results, connections, trends, developments, growth and implications become apparent. In some instances these features will be apparent quickly, in some instances not until considerably later. This is one reason why ‘signposting’ where the evidence is in the diary is important. Some comments are almost certainly needed on the degree and nature of changes in attitudes, practices, ideas, relationships, motivation, pressures, pace and standards, and some analysis of the evidence and reasons for these changes. Some thoughts on future planning and expectations in the light of the critical reflection would be essential too.

3.3 This section is expected to contain some evidence-based analysis and argument at Masters level.

3.4 ‘Critical’ should not be viewed as synonymous with either ‘criticism’ or ‘celebration’, although both could play a part. Critical reflection is concerned with a careful evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and problems, advantages and disadvantages, success and failure, relevance and irrelevance of aspects of the project that are under scrutiny at that time. Critical reflection should be based upon clear and stated or referenced evidence, either qualitative or quantitative or both, as appropriate. It should always keep firmly in mind the aims, processes and intended outcomes of the project. The internal contexts of the project should be remembered – such as the hierarchies, teams, premises, budgets, expectations and targets - and so should the external contexts – the possible political, economic, educational, social and legal pressures.

3.5 If the critical reflection leads to serious thoughts of changes in methods, approaches, direction and outcomes, and perhaps even to these changes taking place, they should be stated and justified in this section as an essential part of the project – and the assessed assignment.

3.6 This section can include supportive references to, and quotations from, the researcher’s wider reading around the project theme. It can also contain ‘signposts’ showing where the section helps to fulfil the PMP’s Masters level criteria.

### 4. ANALYSIS & EVALUATION SECTION

4.1 Although the previous section may contain some signposted evidence of Masers level reflection, this final section must be dominated by Masters level analysis and evaluation.

4.2 This section is written as a piece of extend text, with clear sub-headings as considered appropriate by the researcher. Referencing is essential.

4.3 Most of this section will be written towards or at the end of the project as it analyses and evaluates the complete enterprise from inception to completion. The exception is the initial context setting which should be initially drafted at the outset as it identifies important factors which have possibly driven, possibly encouraged, and possibly circumscribed the project. No research

project can ignore the institutional, cultural, social, political and economic contexts likely to affect its implementation and outcomes.

4.4 It is here that analytical evidence of two necessary literature searches should be recorded – the first on what well-regarded writers have said about the area covered by the project, and the second on research approaches applicable to the project itself. In what ways and to what extent have these wider spheres of reading contributed to the research project?

4.5 Key aspects of wider reading on these themes should not be forgotten throughout this section as most project approaches, findings and conclusions will benefit from comparison with, and measuring against, other relevant research. For example, was a particular text on observation schedules as relevant on final reflection as you originally thought it would be? Or, did your findings on team dynamics within your institution confirm or challenge the views of a particularly well-regarded author you had consulted initially? These are just examples; your project will reveal its own questions.

4.6 This section can be seen as an accumulative analysis leading to a concluding evaluation. With the diary entries and regular critical reflections as signposted supporting evidence, the analysis can proceed in two main ways. The first is chronological, the second is thematic.

4.7 Chronological: This route examines the project step by step analysing how and why decisions, developments, activities and events occurred, and assesses their contribution to the growth and, hopefully, the success of the project. In the light of this analysis the section ends with a balanced overview of the research approaches and project outcomes.

4.8 Thematic: This route examines the project through each of its key components. These would include, for example, research methodologies, methods, understanding of contexts, influence of wider reading, project action planning, key moments of difficulty and opportunity, outcomes achieved in terms of success criteria, project monitoring, evaluation and review. The chronological route would cover all these points but through several returns to each point as it occurred chronologically rather than through a single major sub-heading.

**APPENDIX 5: THE ROLE OF THE PRACTITIONER MASTERS PROGRAMME TUTOR**

The Practitioner Masters Programme (PMP) has been created by academic personnel within the Institute for Action Research in Switzerland. It is accredited for the award of a Masters degree by the university which is the Institute's partners in its delivery and assessment. There are specific regulations governing the PMP readily available to all students, especially regarding the academic standards and criteria required for the successful submission of the four module assignments and the final dissertation. This paper concentrates upon the role of the PMP tutor. It assumes its readers have access to programme details, and the Student Handbook, and therefore does not discuss them in detail.

Nowadays, Student Handbooks are very informative. They contain the regulations governing the passage of students from applying for admission to gaining certificates and degrees, and also include a great deal of information on what students can expect to do on the programme, and how to go about doing it. And usually every now and again a person entitled the 'tutor' or 'supervisor' appears in the Handbooks. Usually, though, there is no Handbook section describing the role and responsibilities of these mysterious people, but clearly they are important beings. Their brief appearances on various pages of the Handbook lead students to see that 'tutors' lead Masters modules as subject specialists, they provide support for module assignments, they turn themselves into formal markers, and they also turn themselves into 'supervisors' of the final dissertations.

Tutors are, indeed, important but the reasons are more complex than they appear at first sight. With justification, it can be said that the success of the PMP with its research components and array of high level assessment tasks rests to a large extent in their hands. This statement is not meant to take anything away from the energy, commitment, intelligence and achievements of students. It does, though, signal the subject of this paper which is the depth and breadth of the on-going contact between tutors and students which not only 'fleshes out' the PMP's written rules and requirements but also interprets the programme's opportunities in the students' best interests.

Once a student enters the PMP, s/he embarks on a programme in which s/he selects the research assignments, and approaches, for each module, and in due course the final dissertation. These are personal decisions, and as such they lie at the heart of the PMP, and account for its professional significance. It is vitally important, however, that the student understands the range of research methodologies and methods linked to the PMP, and can apply this newly acquired knowledge with confidence and profit. What does it mean, for example, for research to be 'valid', 'authentic' and 'reliable'? How are 'methodologies' different to 'methods'? What is 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' research, and are they mutually exclusive or richly complementary? What are 'action research' and 'practitioner research', and are they synonymous, or different, or complementary? Why do different books say different things about research, and value some methodologies more than others? What do all the technical terms, such as 'criticality' and 'reflexivity', mean? What exactly is 'critical reflection' – a term mentioned so frequently in Student Handbooks that it must be, and is, highly significant.

It is all so confusing! Or is it? Tutors know all about practitioner research, and also how to support others who have come to value it as a key professional attribute.

Tutors have a variety of roles and responsibilities. They are academics with subject specialisms, research knowledge and programme expertise, and all three features are called upon in the PMP. Nevertheless, tutors recognise that students on the PMP are often experts in their own professional fields, and indeed may well know more than they do about particular areas. They appreciate, too, that PMP students are volunteers – no-one has forced them to apply – and that they are keen to reflect critically on their own professional practice, even if the processes through which they will achieve this high level of reflection are only hazily understood at the outset, or not understood at all! Quite reasonably, tutors will assume that their students are willing to read widely from books, journals and websites they recommend, and from books, journals and websites students themselves have selected. And they expect their reading to embrace research methodologies and methods as well as up-to-date professional subject material. However, tutors remember they were students once. They appreciate students have natural anxieties about the bureaucratic and academic demands of the programme upon which they are embarking, and the research and writing methods they should employ to attain satisfactory grades.

There is another crucial factor. To a significant extent the PMP is all about student autonomy and the responsibilities that go with that autonomy. Tutors value student autonomy highly, and have no wish to impose their own ideas on students about their research and assignments. In the end it is the students' Master degree, not the tutors, but conversely students are unlikely to gain the degree without tutors. The PMP is significantly different to most other Masters programmes in the freedom of choice and flexibility of study patterns it offers its students, and tutors bear this in mind at all times. On one hand tutors must allow students to make their minds up about the research questions they wish to pursue as module assignments, and to select the most appropriate methodologies and methods, while on the other hand tutors must be reassured that students have all the necessary subject knowledge, research skills, resources and time to carry out their research and produce an assignment of satisfactory length and content. Getting an appropriately balanced relationship right is a skilled art, but it is the key to success within the PMP.

Some responsibilities of tutors are clear-cut. At the start of a module they must ensure students have received copies of all the necessary documents for the programme – the Student Handbook in particular, and relevant letters of acceptance. Tutors must be sure students understand the subject specific content of the module, the intended teaching approaches, the required reading, the times and dates of meetings, the deadlines for assignment submission, and the arrangements for tutorial support. In some cases the dates and times of future group meetings are discussed and agreed at the first meeting, but sometimes they are laid down, and notified in the initial publicity very much earlier because of the tutors' own busy schedules. The style and format of module meetings will be discussed, so that students know what is expected of them regarding their active participation in group activities and debates, including their individual presentation of ideas and arguments linked to module themes and their research assignments. Quite early in the module tutors will also remind students of the need for accurate referencing and grammar in assignments, and the modes of assessment applicable to the module. Tutors will always do their best to remind students of key programme points, and to answer questions fully. However it has to be said that formally speaking it is the students' responsibility to master the intricacies of the PMP regarding its administrative and academic requirements. The basic working rule – the bottom line, perhaps – is that once tutors have raised and highlighted these operational points in a group session, or to an individual student, their formal responsibilities in these technical matters have been fulfilled.

There are what the PMP calls 'Taught Modules' and there are 'Independent Research Modules' – usually abbreviated to IRMs. As their name implies, Taught Modules have a significant subject-centred components compiled and led by tutors, as well as an element of relevant research training and consistent support for the research project and report (the assessed assignment) which must be linked to the theme of the subject of the module. A Taught Module necessarily has a number of meetings attended by the whole group of students who have applied to undertake it. These meetings include presentations and other activities centred on the specific professional subject of the module and also elements of research training and support for research projects and individual assignments. Parts of these meetings will be set aside for individual tutorials with students, but tutors will also arrange to stay in contact with each student at other times through e-mail, Skype, telephone, letter, or face-to-face meetings as convenient and as agreed. Tutors will often encourage students on Taught Modules to arrange communication between themselves outside the module meetings to talk about their projects, share resources, discuss ideas and problems, visit each other's workplace, and be each other's constructively critical friends. Experience has confirmed the great value students place on this type of personal and professional contact with each other as well as with the tutors.

In Taught Modules tutors organise the activities in the sessions where they meet the students as a group. These activities can include tutor presentations on specific themes, student led discussions, group workshops on specific tasks, and research training. In the days or weeks between meetings tutors can give students required reading or workplace tasks to undertake which will be discussed at a later date. As the weeks progress time can be devoted to sharing and discussing reports on individual research projects and assignments. Although this paragraph may give the impression tutors dominate the proceedings, this is usually far from the case. Sometimes tutors will wish to give a subject specific presentation or engage in an element of research training, but many sessions are planned by students and tutors agreeing agendas and schedules best suited to the needs of the students themselves. The key principle is that tutors and students are working together towards a common end – professional development, personal satisfaction, and a good higher degree! Quite rightly, tutors expect PMP students to participate actively in group activities and discussions. Sharing knowledge and experiences, especially newly acquired knowledge and experience, should be enjoyably stimulating, and so should facing challenges and differing perspectives, especially if we find we are shifting perspectives ourselves.

'Independent Research Modules' are both similar and different to 'Taught Modules'. They are different inasmuch as there is no subject-centred element, and students usually embark on them with clear ideas on their research projects from the outset. They are similar in the training and support given to students for their projects and critically reflective assignment writing but, unlike Taught Modules, IRM research projects can range beyond any module theme. Sometimes IRM students work entirely independently of other students, meeting with their tutors individually as agreed, but increasingly tutors try to bring groups of IRM students together for mutual support and discussion.

The choice of type of module – Taught or Independent Research - undertaken lies entirely with students, although tutors will give advice if asked – and this could be especially important when students may be planning a series of research projects or reaching the end of one module and are unsure about the best next step.

In the PMP every student determines his/her research assignment for every module, and tutors try to ensure that every group meeting on a taught module will play a part in supporting students in, first, deciding upon a viable research project, second, planning it carefully and realistically, third, carrying it out effectively, and fourth, writing it up in a critically reflective assignment. There is no formally laid-down pattern to this process. The PMP requires students to submit their assignment by the deadline linked to the module they are undertaking. This is timed to allow about six weeks for assignments to be marked by programme tutors and scrutinised by the university's external examiners and then submitted to the all-important university Examination Board. Module tutors will work with students with the appropriate deadline firmly in mind, and they will ensure students are fully aware of that deadline!

Most students wish to finish their research and assignments well before the deadline, and certainly most tutors will heartily encourage this. It has to be acknowledged that some students are far better than others at working to deadlines, and for all the advice some students are given they are still badly shaken by the speed with which the last few weeks of their allotted assignment time seem to pass them by. Time management is a wonderful thing, and neglected at one's peril. A tutor can, and will, strongly recommend the advantages of advance planning, and will sometimes go as far as agreeing a detailed strategy with a student, but in the end it is the student who must honour that agreement.

There are a number of ways in which tutors fulfil their supporting role for research projects and assignment compilation. There are no formal guidelines. Fundamentally both the student and the tutor must share responsibility for agreeing and abiding by their mutual understanding of each other's responsibilities.

What follows is a typical sequence of consultations and decisions regarding a new research project and assignment, whether for a Taught Module or IRM. However both students and tutors are within their rights to seek different arrangements, although the ultimate decision makers are the tutors. Tutors on most Taught Modules, and tutors on all IRMs, expect students to come to decisions about their intended module research assignments sooner rather than later in the module. 'Sooner rather than later' sounds rather vague, and once again there are no rules or guidelines about when assignments should begin, but tutors know only too well that the weeks and months fly by and getting initial ideas formulated is possibly the hardest part of the exercise!

Early on in modules tutors will want to discuss the themes of individual research projects and the working titles of assignments. This is not to impose any theme or title on students – far from it – but to ensure students' ideas are realistic in terms of the time they are will take to complete the chosen project, the criteria of the assignment mode they have selected, the resources they will need, the ethical factors they must consider, the maximum word length they are allowed. In short, can the targeted work be completed in about six months and written up with a significant chance of success within 5,000 words? Experience has shown that many students need to hone down their initial ideas, however admirable they might be, in order to arrive at a clearly targeted viable research project within these parameters. Usually using questioning techniques, tutors will work sensitively with students to arrive at a themes and a title that meet students' wishes and are likely to meet IMP requirements too.

At the outset tutors will ensure students identify all the ethical issues touching upon their project, and compile a detailed 'protocol' to guarantee that their research activities and written assignment are ethically sound. Ethical considerations include the avoidance of misrepresentation of other people's ideas, attitudes and opinions, the preservation of the anonymity of institutions and colleagues where required, and the need for openness and honesty with people who are involved with the research, especially as subjects. No-one should be forced to assist a student's research project, or to express opinions about other colleagues' skills, views or performance. Other factors to bear in mind are the legal requirements of the country in which the students are working and conducting their research, the codes of conduct governing particular professions and institutions, and the principles and practices linked to professional associations of which students might be members. Ethics is a complex field, and a changing one too, and tutors will do their best to support students in this important area but the ultimate responsibility for acting ethically lies with students themselves. Students have to understand that there may well be ethical limits on the areas than can investigate and questions they can ask within and beyond their workplace.

The PMP offers students several different types of assignment from which to select the one most suited to the research they have in mind for a module. Tutors will advise students on the best mode for a particular research project, although they will probably expect students to have good ideas themselves first! Some students will have good ideas about two, three or even all four module projects and assignments at the outset of their studies, and in these instances students are well-advised to discuss their intended 'package' as early as possible with a tutor so that particular themes and titles can be matched appropriately with particular modes.

Tutors are, of course, interested in how students will carry out their research. Early tutorials, sometimes in groups, sometimes individually, will concentrate upon the methodologies and methods best suited to each project. Once again, tutors will expect students to have given serious thought to these questions, and tutorials often take the form of tutor questioning, giving recommended reading, pinpointing omissions, and suggesting alternatives. At the back of tutors' minds on these occasions are the 'deep' criteria and the 'mode specific' criteria governing the selected mode. Tutors will want to see them at the front of students' minds throughout tutorials – and the research itself. Tutors will want to be reassured that students are not missing out any of these criteria in their initial planning, and their on-going thinking. Tutors will expect students to be constantly self-critically, reflecting on what they are planning and what they are doing as the research gets under way. Are things going to plan? If not, why not? What changes are needed? What improvements can I make? Am I reading the right books, journals and websites? Does my interview or questionnaire ask the right questions in the right way? Have I missed a factor that might influence my conclusions? Tutors see themselves as supportive and constructively critical friends, and as sympathetic yet frequently challenging mentors. Their experience means they know how a research project, and the written assignment arising out of it, will – and indeed must – satisfy all the assessment criteria.

Tutors will advise students on the reading they should undertake as part of their research. This will include source material on the research theme and research methodologies and methods, although tutors will naturally expect students to have given their wider reading considerable thought beforehand. Students, though, may well know material not known to tutors. Tutors will remind students of the virtues of keeping full textual references, accurate note-taking, staying tight to the

research theme, and critically reflecting on the evidence, conclusions and biases they encounter. They will also question students on the methodologies and methods they are selecting for their research to emphasise the importance of their fitness for the intended purpose. Once again tutors are unlikely to tell students what to choose; they are more likely to channel and intensify students' thinking through adroit questioning.

When the time nears for the dissertation, tutors will be particularly demanding in both their invitations and challenges to students. By then students have undertaken four module assignments and should be well-acquainted with Masters research approaches, styles of presentation, and standards of argument. However they will receive extra training in the skills needed for a longer piece of practical and academic research. Each student, though, will need to identify a research project linked to their professional practice which will enable them to meet the dissertation criteria, and tutors are crucial to this process. Despite the students experiences so far, the discussions with tutors, in groups and individually, are vital in sharpening perspectives, targeting research approaches, establishing timescales, satisfying ethics protocols, identifying initial reading, and, most important of all, determining the clearest possible aims. Is the project capable of fulfilling all the academic demands, and can it be completed in less than a year? Such discussions take nothing away from what the student wishes to achieve, but they will make sure that the project is satisfactorily – and satisfyingly - 'do-able' as well as personally valuable. Fundamentally, as all tutors know and all students learn, a dissertation project must be efficient in design and effective in operation. It is an exciting moment on the PMP.

A tutor might support different students in different ways. Sometimes this is because a student wishes to undertake a particularly sensitive or difficult schedule of research, and the tutor agrees that the project is eminently worthwhile but requires closer monitoring than others. Sometimes, though, a student has not undertaken a serious study for many years but is keen to pursue a high level of practitioner research and a tutor may decide that he or she needs closer support than others for the first module or two. Students are also reminded by tutors that they can be contacted at particular times electronically if they have further questions to ask, and some students take up this offer more often than others. There are no set rules on tutor-student contact, except the ones that will be laid down by the tutor, and these will be to ensure s/he has some private life and time for other programmes! Certainly, though, no tutor will want any student to sit at home worrying at great length about any issues, and students are advised to take careful note about the availability of their tutors, and the arrangements for accessing them outside face-to-face contact time.

PMP tutors safely assume their students are enthusiasts, keen to use all aspects of the PMP to critically reflect on their practice and learn more about their profession. Tutors are primarily 'enablers', ensuring students stay within the broad parameters of the PMP and use all its opportunities to best advantage. They ask questions and offer challenges when and where appropriate, and throughout the student's time on the programme they offer encouragement and support.

Tutors try to use their time wisely, and students should use their tutors wisely too.