

Professional Development Opportunity for lecturers

Education for Soil Health: Online Training Module on Community-Engaged Research and Learning (CERL) – Frequently Asked Questions

Are you interested in exploring innovative ways to engage your students and to connect your teaching with real-world impact for local soil health challenges?

You're invited to engage with the LOESS project team through our international **fully online self-study module**, designed for lecturers who want to integrate Education for Soil Health and Community-Engaged Research and Learning (CERL) into their teaching.

What is CERL and what is the aim of the module?

CERL is a form of experiential learning and involves university students gaining academic credit for working with community partners on collaboratively designed real-life projects. The goal is mutual benefit – enhancing student learning whilst carrying out a project or piece of research which benefits the community.

In this module, we support you to explore the benefits of embedding CERL in your own higher education teaching practice as a way to transform and reimagine the learning experience. This aligns with wider European policy goals of tackling societal challenges and seeing learners as creative and critical thinkers and active and responsible citizens equipped for lifelong learning.

Soil health is essential to a sustainable future. A focus on soil health education (across all disciplines) can bring this topic to life for your students and make it engaging, relevant, accessible and practical.

How will I learn?

This module is designed as a **flexible, self-paced online resource**, requiring approximately 22 learning hours in total.

All materials have been revised to enable lecturers to:

- Work through content at their own pace
- Complete reflection and design tasks in their own time
- Revisit materials as needed
- Adapt learning to suit their teaching context and schedule



The module is structured around four core thematic units. Through guided readings, short video inputs, structured reflection tasks and practical design activities, you will:

- Discover the principles, benefits and challenges of CERL
- Learn how to collaborate with community partners ethically and effectively
- Explore innovative tools including a crowd-mapping platform and Augmented Reality app developed in the LOESS soil health education project
- Design a CERL-based project to implement in one of your own courses.

The resource includes suggested reflection prompts, practical worksheets and planning templates to support the development of your own CERL initiative

What will the module involve and when will it take place?

The module involves:

- 22 total learning hours
 - Approximately 16 hours of guided self-directed learning
 - Approximately 6 hours of structured reflection and project design work

There are no fixed dates or live attendance requirements. You may begin and complete the module at a time that suits you.

Optional peer discussion or local support may be available through your local LOESS partner, but participation in these is not required in order to complete the module.

What will I gain from the module?

The learning outcomes for this module are that, by the end, you will be able to;

- Evaluate relevant sources on Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL), and particularly on embedding CERL methodology into the higher education curriculum;
- Identify and evaluate pedagogies, methods and opportunities for integrating soil (health) education and awareness into CERL projects;
- Design and plan the implementation of a CERL project within a module or course that fosters meaningful and respectful stakeholder engagement, aligns with student learning outcomes, and integrates opportunities for learner reflection;
- Apply common principles of science communication and ethical consideration when working collaboratively with community members;
- Demonstrate the ability to critically reflect on the learning content and your professional experiences and to further integrate feedback.



I have more questions

You can consult the LOESS CERL Module Proforma for detailed guidance on methodology and structure, or contact your local LOESS partner for further information about support available in your region.

How do I access the module?

The online self-study module is available via the LOESS platform.

Further information

What is community engaged research and learning and can I see some examples of it in practice?

Community Engaged Research and Learning is an approach which involves university students working with community partners on collaboratively designed real-life projects. The goal of CERL projects is mutual benefit – enhancing student learning whilst carrying out a project or piece of research which benefits the community. Collaboration and co-creation are critical defining principles, reflection is an underpinning concept, and the role of the lecturer is vital to the whole process since they supervise, support, and (as much as possible) quality-assure the end outputs.

Two examples of CERL soil health projects are;

- Horticulture students collaborating with a local school and local community group to create a 'Wizard of Oz' themed community and school garden.
- Sustainable Development Masters students collaborating with a landscape heritage organisation to make a case for government funding to maintain mountain walking pathways that are eroding.

What are the benefits of a CERL approach?

CERL offers a powerful way to enrich soil health education through hands-on impactful projects grounded in real-world issues. Educators report that CERL enhances student engagement and deepens learning, as students work collaboratively with civil society partners to apply theoretical knowledge in meaningful contexts.

For educators themselves, CERL provides opportunities for professional growth, fresh insights, and a sense of doing meaningful work. It also opens up access to physical research sites and authentic learning environments, which are especially valuable for teaching complex topics like soil health.

Furthermore, CERL aligns with broader institutional priorities by supporting teaching, research, and civic engagement—all in a cost-effective way that maximizes existing resources.



I am not a soil expert but I am interested in the topic of soil health, can I join the module without deep soil knowledge?

If you have a passion to integrate CERL topics on soil health into your teaching, we want to hear from you.

Can you recommend any further reading to help me decide?

The [LOESS CERL Module Proforma](#) offers an Essential Resources Listing which includes articles, guides and videos – see p.19. In addition, tables 1 and 3 in [LOESS Deliverable 3.1](#) show how a wide range of disciplines, including arts and humanities, can become involved.