

Brighton Doctoral College

A proposal should include the following:

1. Indicative title of the topic area

This should accurately reflect what it is that you want to study and the central issues that you are going to address.

2. Context / rationale / why is this study important? (300 – 500 words)

Introduce the general area of study and identify the theoretical context within which your research will be developed by discussing the discipline(s) and or field/s of study relevant to your research. This means outlining the key theoretical area(s) you will draw upon to enable you to find out what it is that you want to know (e.g. underpinned from the social sciences; arts and humanities; life, health and physical sciences). In addition, you will need to contextualise your research in terms of the literature of your subject area. What we are looking for here is an indication that you understand and have done some research into the wider theoretical context.

Developing the context is just one part of this section; you are building a case / rationale for the study area. Why is this study important, which theoretical areas support this? Can you identify any gaps in current understanding that help you build the case for this research study?

In this section you could outline the main aim of the study (also see section 4).

3. Literature review (approximately 700 – 900 words)

Here you are demonstrating that you are aware of what has been and what is currently being written about your topic (i.e. the academic literature, Government documents, media coverage). We are looking for you to make links between a body of literature and your proposed area of study and in doing so attempt to identify any gaps in knowledge. A PhD thesis arises from original research leading to new knowledge or a significant contribution to existing knowledge. If, at this stage, you have some thoughts on how your research is likely to contribute to knowledge then include details in your proposal. This section should include citations which are compiled into a reference list at the end of the document (see point 7).

4. The research questions or hypotheses (approximately 200 words)

Having told us what you want to study and why, and then illustrated these ideas with reference to a body of literature, the next task is to distil your ideas into a tentative set of research questions, hypotheses, aims and objectives (as the underpinning discipline requires) that are manageable and achievable within a normal PhD timeframe (see 6 below).

5. Research approach/ methodologies / methods (approximately 400 words)

There will be many research approaches open to you. In your proposal, suggest the methodological approach that you might take and make a reasoned case as to why the research questions you have

posed are best addressed by this approach. You might also suggest what methods you would use to carry out the research or generate data that can help you address your research questions.

If your research is anchored in creative or artistic practice you should include suitable samples of your work, along with a clear statement of how the creative production will lead or support the enquiry, for example through the process of making, testing, and reflecting upon practice

5.1 Ethical considerations: Have you identified any ethical issues that relate to your project? Areas you may wish to reflect on include voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity,

5.2 Contribution to knowledge Although you are not in a position to present research findings, it is often beneficial to conclude the research proposal by indicating the contribution you envisage that your research will make to the literature in your particular subject area, or by indicating the potential practical or policy implications of your research. This means providing an indication of the extent to which you feel your research will make an original contribution, suggesting how it may fill gaps in existing research, and showing how it may extend understanding of particular topics.

6. Timescale/research planning (approximately 200 words)

A full time PhD should take three years to complete, although you may require more time to acquire the relevant skills prior to commencing your research, or where there is a significant collaboration dimension to the research project. Part time study will take longer (up to five - six years). Within this timeframe, you will need to demonstrate your awareness of time management and planning (e.g. length of time for primary research/ fieldwork).

7. Reference List (at least 10 – 20 references)

Please include a reference list of all the sources that you referred to in the text using a recognised referencing style appropriate to your discipline (e.g. Harvard or Vancouver for Sciences).

There are a number of books widely available that may help in preparing your research proposal (as well as in completing your research degree). Here are a few to point you in the right direction:

Bell, J (2010, 5th edn) *Doing your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researchers in Education & Social Science*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baxter, L, Hughes, C and Tight, M (2007, 3rd edn) *How to Research*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Philips, E and Pugh, D (2005, 4th edn) *How to get a PhD: A Handbook for Students and their Supervisors*, Maidenhead: Open University Press

Typical Weaknesses: Applications are often delayed or rejected because of the following problems:

1) The project cannot be supervised at Brighton. Make sure that the specialist area you wish to study is covered by a member(s) of staff. You can do this by checking individual staff profiles on our [PGR programme index](#) or [research website](#).

You might also contact academic staff prior to making a formal application to get an indication of how well your proposed research topic aligns with our research interests and expertise. We also recommend an approach to a potential lead supervisor who may be able to support you in your application.

2) The project is not focused. Your research proposal should be as specific and as focused as possible. Although your project may alter significantly as you progress, we cannot accept students who have only a vague idea of a research field. A passion to explore is not sufficient in itself. The onus is on you to state the question(s) which underpin your proposed research. Your ability to frame your research in this way demonstrates your potential to think like a researcher.

3) The project is unlikely to be completed. PhDs are typically 3-4 years full time and around 5-6 years part-time. Projects cannot be accepted which are unlikely to be completed on this timescale, whether because of student competence, resource issues or the extent of the topic.

4) (For projects involving creative practice) The practice is not framed within a research project. Your proposal should clearly describe a research project. Creative or artistic practice, however original it may be, does not qualify as research in itself. Creative practice through which research is to be undertaken must be justified.

For more help and advice for all stages of your application, you may wish to visit:
<https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/doctorate/>