

Guidelines for PhD Proposals Accompanying Applications

1. Preparing to Write: Investigating Staff Profiles

Before writing a draft proposal to accompany your application it is essential that you spend time looking at the profiles of staff in the School of Education. These can be found on our website at this URL: <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/education/people>. Proposals that are not targeted at an area in which we have expertise, or proposals that are too vague for a potential supervisor to be identified, frequently do not even get to the stage of being reviewed. We wish to be sure that you will benefit from the very best research supervision available. In order to ensure this you need to invest significant time in thinking about and constructing a carefully drafted proposal that fits into the research environment of the School of Education.

The draft proposal should not exceed 10 sides of A4 paper. Indicative content of the proposal is as follows:

2. Working Title

Give your research a short title that adequately describes the research to be undertaken. This should be a single sentence. Try to avoid writing a question as a working title.

3. Overview and Originality

Provide an overview of the area in which you intend to work, and outline the specific issues that you wish to investigate. State why you are particularly interested in this area of research, and indicate what you believe your research will contribute to the field.

4. Key Research Questions

Set out your key research questions that you will attempt to answer by conducting the research outlined in section 3.

5. Literature Review

Conduct a brief critical literature review of the area in which you wish to work. We will wish to see that you are familiar with the key texts in the field and can place your intended work within a theoretical framework. You may wish to show that the precise research you wish to undertake will build on what we already know, or you may wish to show that your research addresses a particular gap in the research literature. Whatever approach you take, it is essential that you place your intended research within the context of the existing literature and can see how and why your own work will contribute something original.

6. Suggested Methodology and Sources of Data

While we recognise that your methodology will evolve during the course of your research, we wish to see an indicative methodological approach in the draft proposal. This should indicate the kinds of data that would help you answer your research questions, and how you might go about collecting and analysing this data. The more specific you can be in this section, the better a reviewer will be able to evaluate the likelihood that your research will be successful.

7. References

Provide a list of references that matches the citations in your draft proposal.

9. Things to Avoid

- Do not send proposals on topics that we are unable to supervise.
- Do not send proposals that are too broad or lack focus. We wish to see that you have a clear idea of what can be achieved in three years (full-time) or five to six years (part-time) of doctoral research. This requires clarity of thought and a clear focus on key research questions and a methodology that is logistically achievable.
- Do not use vague language or provide general descriptions. This is particularly important in the methodology section. Phrases like “I will use appropriate qualitative methodologies” are not informative.
- Do not hide any weaknesses in your current knowledge base or skills. If you know that as part of the process of doing a doctorate you will need to engage in a personal development plan to acquire new skills, and can identify these, we treat such awareness very positively.

Further Help and Advice

You may wish to consult the many proposal writing guidelines freely available on the Internet. A selection of these documents is available from these sources:

<http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/gradschool/prospective/apply/social-science-research-proposals>

<http://www.findaphd.com/student/study/study-33.asp>

<http://researchproposalguide.com/>