When applying, you should prepare a Research Proposal that is between 3,000 and 4,000 words in total, excluding timetable and bibliography (items 7 and 8 below). Your proposal should clearly indicate the area of research and should demonstrate your ability to develop and execute a 3 year\(^1\) or 5 year\(^2\) programme of independent research. Your Research Proposal may contain the following elements. This structure is intended as a guide only, and should be adapted to the requirements of your proposed research where necessary.

It does not matter if you are not completely sure about certain aspects of your proposal at this stage, but the department will be looking for evidence that you already know the broad field of research, have read an appropriate amount of relevant literature\(^4\), and can make a convincing case for the topic you are proposing, as well as having considered the appropriate methodology to investigate this topic.

1. **Working Title (suggested word count: 15 words)**
   Your title should summarise the main idea of the proposal simply. You may want to use a title and a subtitle, separated by a colon.

2. **Context**
   Explain the academic context from which your research emerges. **This should involve a critical review of the existing literature*/s*. The important thing to establish here is the extent to which your proposed thesis research makes a contribution; i.e., adds something conceptual, methodological and/or empirical which is not already offered in this literature*/s*. This section should therefore introduce the issues that will be addressed by your research questions, and explain the importance of the research to others. In other words, it should establish the rationale for your proposed thesis, and should therefore proceed smoothly into section 3 below.

3. **Research Questions or Aims**
   Provide a statement of your research question/aim, ideally in the form of a central over-arching question/aims and two or three sub-questions/aims. Your research questions/aims can appear in any form, and *certainly do not need to be expressed in the form of testable hypotheses*. Do ensure however that they are sufficiently narrow – one of the reasons why many PhD applications are not successful is because the terrain outlined in the relevant proposal is simply too broad for a doctoral project. Please also remember that the PhD thesis is first and foremost an academic endeavour, not a consultancy or applied research project.

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\(^1\) For full-time applicants  
\(^2\) For part-time applicants
4. **Empirical Methods**

This section should outline the empirical work you plan to undertake, if relevant. You should identify the method or methods you propose to use, and justify these choices (i.e., explain why this method is being used in preference to others). Further you should indicate how and why you will achieve empirical access, if this is a pertinent issue.

4a. **Theoretical projects**

For those applicants who wish to undertake theoretical research where neither primary nor secondary data will be used, the methods section above should be replaced with a section which explains exactly how the relevant theory will be examined in order to answer the research questions.

5. **Reflections**

Here you should include reflections on potential practical and empirical obstacles, conceptual/theoretical problems and difficulties, ethics, your own perspective on the issues at hand - and how these issues may impact on your studies. One of the things the department looks for in a potential PhD student is an awareness of some of the challenges they will face in progressing their proposed thesis project and of the extent to which these represent unavoidable limitations.

6. **Conclusion**

This should be a very brief wrap-up of your proposed thesis project, which summarizes its key contributions and how you intend to realize them.

7. **Proposed research timetable**

A brief outline of the timetable for completion of the thesis, remembering that activities can run concurrently.

8. **Bibliography**

A list of sources relevant to the research project.