Guidance Notes for preparing Research Degree Proposals

All applicants intending to apply to the School of Humanities at the University of Dundee for PhD research should prepare a research proposal to accompany their Research Degrees application through UKPASS.

Writing a convincing and well-argued research proposal is an essential part of being accepted for a research degree. It fulfils several purposes:

- It helps you to clarify your own ideas on what you want to do and what your priorities are.
- It enables members of the research area to which you have applied to decide whether or not they have the expertise to supervise you and to identify appropriate supervisors. It also enables us to discuss with you any changes that we may wish to suggest, so that we are able to supervise the research more appropriately.
- At an early stage it allows potential supervisors and other members of the department to ask questions about content, approach, values and methodology before you embark on the study proper and to determine any facilities required for the research.
- It allows potential issues to be identified at an early stage and to be resolved quickly, enabling progression with the research.

The following notes below should be used as guidance to help you to prepare your proposal. It is recommended that you use the items highlighted in bold as sub-headings when constructing your proposal.

**Title:** This should be a concise but clear indication of the intended area of research, indicating the field, scope and topic of the proposed study.

**Research Questions / Hypothesis:** What are the questions that you are asking or problems you are attempting to resolve and do they have sufficient quality and depth to merit this level of study? There may be an overarching question and a number of sub-questions or there may be a hypothesis that you set out to prove for example. Formulate the research questions, problems or issues that you wish to address clearly.

**Aims and objectives of the research:** What are the issues that you are aiming to explore and how do you intend to go about doing this? What are the practical phases, milestones and tasks that need to be accomplished to successfully complete the research?

**Research Context:** What is the background to your proposal? Have you provided enough background on yourself and the topic to show how the study fits with your past or present academic or professional experience, your concerns and interests or the relationship to the
research specialisms of the School of Humanities? What other work has been carried out in this field? Who are the key thinkers who influence opinion in this area? What are the current debates in this area? You should include both historical and contemporary examples as appropriate.

**Proposed research methods:** What approach / methodology will you adopt? Give an indication of the methods and/or theories that you feel will be appropriate to help you to undertake this research. Will it be practice based or a classic type of research approach? Will it include questionnaire, interviews, participant observation, archival and library research, studio work or team-based research for example?

**Significance:** Why is it important that these questions or issues are explored? How will the research contribute to new knowledge or to developing insights or how might they contribute to the advancement of knowledge and scholarship in this field? In other words, you have to state why you think your proposed research is important and how you might make an original contribution to knowledge. You may also wish to consider what impact your research may have for other people outside of Higher Education.

**Outcome:** Give an indication of how you envisage the final product of your research being presented. Might it take the form of a written thesis, a folio or exposition of creative work, or a combination of formats or outputs?

**Plan of Work:** Give an indication of the work sections/chapters/stages that you intend to carry out to address the research questions. If it is a practice-led, indicate the types of creative work that you intend to develop and their relevance to the research aims. Have you ascertained at this stage that the data sources, collections, organisations and individuals critical to your study will be accessible to you?

**Ethical Issues:** As with all research institutions, the University of Dundee has a rigorous Code of Practice governing research ethics. Please give an indication of any ethical issues that you may need to consider (for the University’s ethical approval code, procedures and clearance form, see: [http://www.dundee.ac.uk/main/research/ethics/](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/main/research/ethics/))

**Bibliography:** Include a concise bibliography of the key books/journals/websites etc. that are relevant to your study. Use citation or referencing systems such as the Harvard or Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) system, as appropriate to your subject area.

We recognise that the research title, questions, methods, process etc. are likely to evolve and develop during the course of the research, however, we need you to prepare this initial proposal to allow us to evaluate the suitability of your application. If the above categories are properly covered in your proposal, we will be able to provide you with a more helpful, accurate and quick response to your application.

The completed proposal should be approximately **1500 to 2000 words** in length, but a maximum of **4 sides of A4** (including short bibliography) and any referenced figures, illustrations or diagrams as appropriate. If applying for research also involving creative practice, please provide a sample portfolio of your recent work, in a suitably documented electronic format (viewable on both Mac & PC) to accompany the application. In this case it should also be clear from the written proposal how the practice will integrate with the ideas you hope to develop during the research. Please ensure any supporting material is adequately protected and clearly labelled with your name and address. Whilst every care will be taken with supporting items, the School of Humanities cannot accept responsibility for any loss or damage to this material.

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