

# PhD Research Proposal Guidelines

We are delighted to consider applications for PhD research at the School of Management, University of Bristol. Your research proposal should indicate to us that you have the ability to undertake original, high quality academic research. We want you to provide us with evidence that you will be able to undertake research that will make a contribution to an existing body of knowledge and that can be completed within the required timescale. We therefore expect to see evidence in your proposal that you have researched your ideas, are familiar with, and can critically assess, the pertinent literature, and have considered a methodology to answer your research questions that is appropriate and feasible.

We refer to your research proposal to help us decide whether you would be a suitable candidate to study at PhD level. We therefore assess your proposal on its quality, originality, and coherence. It also helps us to decide if your research interests match those of academics in the School of Management and whether or not they would be able to provide suitably qualified and interested supervision for your proposed research.

Please note: At Bristol we supervise an incredibly wide range of PhDs, including, theoretical, empirical, historical, comparative or policy-focused work. We have many expert supervisors; however, we do not generally have the expertise to supervise PhD proposals that are exclusively in a jurisdiction outside UK, EU or international comparative studies. You do not have to identify supervisors at the application stage. However, you do need to explain how your research will fit within the specialist research areas of academics at the School of Management, and non-academic interested parties such as policy makers, management practitioners and the public.

## Proposal guidelines

A PhD research proposal should be 1,000 words in length. A good PhD proposal will explain clearly (1) what the research aims to achieve and what it is about; (2) why the research is important and in what way it is original or new, and (3) how the research is to be conducted (methodology).

In order to help you with your application, the following headings might be a helpful guide to writing your research proposal:

**Title.** A short, indicative title is best.

**Abstract.** This is a succinct summary of your research proposal that will present a condensed outline, enabling the reader to get a very quick overview of your proposed project, lines of inquiry and possible outcomes. An abstract is often written last, after you have written the proposal and are able to summarise it effectively.

### Background to your proposed research

Provide a short introduction to your area of interest with a succinct, selective and critical review of the relevant literature. What management question(s) do you intend to investigate? (This may be quite imprecise at the application stage); what might be some of the key literatures that might inform the issues (again, indicative at the application stage); and, as precisely as you can, what is the question you are trying to answer?

Demonstrate that you understand the theoretical underpinnings and main debates and issues in your research area and how your proposed research will make an original and necessary contribution to this. You need to be convincing that your proposed research will fill a gap in existing

knowledge and the importance of filling this gap. This might include a description of the question/debate/phenomenon of interest, and the context(s) and situation in which you think the research will take place; an explanation of why the topic is of interest to you; and an outline of the reasons why the topic should be of interest to research and/ or practice (the 'so what?' question).

**Methodology.** Outline how you plan to conduct the research and the data sources that you will use. How do you think you might go about answering the question? Give some indication why you think this is the best methodology for your proposed study. If you are planning to do empirical work, do please give some indication of what your methods might be (quantitative (surveys, statistics etc); qualitative (interviews, ethnography etc). You need to be convincing about the appropriateness and feasibility of the approaches you are suggesting, and reflective about problems you might encounter (including ethical and data protection issues) in collecting and analysing your data.

**Expected outcomes and impact.** How do you think the research might add to existing knowledge; what might it enable organisations or interested parties to do differently? Increasingly in academia PhD students are being asked to consider how their research might contribute to both academic impact and/or economic and societal impact. This is well explained on the [ESRC website](#) if you would like to find out more.

**Timetable.** What is your initial estimation of the timetable of the PhD thesis? When will each of the key stages start and finish (refining proposal; literature review; developing research methods; fieldwork; analysis; writing the draft; final submission)? There are likely to be overlaps between the stages.

**Why Bristol?** Why –specifically - do you want to study for your PhD at Bristol? Explain how your research will fit within the specialist research areas of academics at the School of Management, and non-academic interested parties such as policy makers, management practitioners and the public. Also think about broader collaborations and partnerships (academic and non-academic) that will support your research and bring benefits to both yourself and others. How would you fit into our research themes and research culture (please see the '*10 reasons to study for a PhD at Bristol*' section on the website for more information).

**Reference list** Provide a properly referenced list of the sources you have mentioned in your research proposal. Do make sure that you cite what you see as the key readings in the field. This does not have to be comprehensive, but you are illustrating the range of sources you might use in your research.