

Suggested PhD proposal outline

This is suggested structure for your PhD proposal for your application to the University of Bedfordshire's Hosted PhD program with MEU.

This NOT a form to fill out, it is a guide for you for the structure of your proposal. You will be expected to submit the proposal on a separate document, with your name and intended Research Institute that you are applying to.

As suggested outline, it has the standard headings of a typical PhD proposal. However you proposed field of study and research focus may necessitate different/additional headings. In all cases, your proposal should not be more than 4,000 (excluding references and work plan). Your research proposal should align with the provisional milestones of the PhD program timeline which is provided at the end of this document. As part of your proposal, you should map your own specific PhD research plan to this program timeline.

The proposal will be reviewed by members of academic staff from UoB, as first step in reviewing your application. Assessors wish to gain a clear understanding of your proposed research topic and existing knowledge. The panel /UoB consider the suitability of the project in relation to supervisory expertise and capacity within the Research Institute you are applying to. If your proposal meets the essential proposal screening criteria, you will be invited to an interview to present and discuss your research. This proposal interview is not a commitment to being offered a place, it is part of the application review process. If you are accepted and enrolled, it will be important to recognise that your research questions and methods may change when you begin your research.

Plagiarism and Generative AI

You must ensure that the application constitutes your own original work. Make sure that you acknowledge the authors of ALL publications you use to write your proposal. Failure to do so will be considered as plagiarism. Do not copy word for word what an author has said. You may think that the original author has presented the information using the best possible words in the best format. However, it is best to analyse the information presented and re-write it in your own words. If you absolutely have to quote an author ad verbatim, then make sure that you use quotation marks and italics to indicate it.

It is not appropriate to misrepresent AI generated content as your own work. Copying information from elsewhere or asking someone else to write your proposal, including the use of AI apps such as Chat GPT, could be considered fraud. Be aware that if you use AI tools (such as ChatGPT or others) to generate your submission and submit this as if it were your own work, this will be regarded as academic misconduct and treated as such leading to your disqualification from the application process.

Note that PhD proposals are not fully binding. As your work progresses, your ideas will mature resulting in your research taking a slightly different form from that which you envisaged at the start. Nonetheless, you will be committed to the area, in broad terms, that you identify in your proposal.

Suggested Structure

1. Working Title This should be as precise as possible - broad subject areas are too large for the scope of a PhD
2. Abstract This is a short summary of the proposal. It should state the research problem, its context, and its significance.
3. Introduction and background Brief introduction to the project, showing what original research you are proposing. You need to present how your research will fit within the research field of your proposal.
4. Research Questions You should identify the research questions which you will be seeking to answer and explain why they are significant. What is the rationale of your proposed study, and what will be its original contribution to knowledge? Provide a statement of your research question/aim, ideally in the form of a central over-arching question/aim 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 research degree 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 research degree thesis is first and foremost an academic endeavour, not a consultancy or applied research project.
5. Research problem and research gap Explain the academic context from which your research emerges. This applies both to theoretical and empirical research. The important thing to establish here is the extent to which your proposed thesis research makes a contribution - i.e., adds something theoretical, 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 research problem and research gap your thesis intends to address.
6. Theoretical /Conceptual framework

Explain the academic context from which your research emerges. This applies both to theoretical and empirical research. The important thing to establish here is the extent to which your proposed thesis research makes a contribution - i.e., adds something theoretical, conceptual, methodological and/or empirical which is not already offered in this literature(s).

5. Literature Review

You should refer to the key articles and books in the proposed area of research, showing on the one hand how they will support your research, but also demonstrating that there is a need for your research.

6. Methodology and research design

What is your methodology?

- Is there a broad approach, such as qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods that informs the way the research is to be designed?
- Are there other discipline-related approaches to designing and implementing your intended project?
- How will you use existing theories/approaches to inform your methodology?
- This can include philosophical influences that underpin your methods.
- Why is this design appropriate for addressing your research questions/ hypotheses?

Intended research design

How will the project be designed to achieve the best findings?

Who or what are the sample/target group or organization? What is your sampling strategy?

What data is needed to adequately meet the aims of the research?

How will data be collected or generated?

How do you intend to analyze the data? How will this approach help you to address your research aims and questions?

7. Timescale

You should sketch what you hope to achieve in each year of your research - three years for a full-time PhD or six years for a part-time/distance learning PhD.

See the UoB PhD program timeline to map your research project to. The UoB PhD program is 3 years, and 3 months maximum. As you consider your research project, think of the feasibility of your proposed research and the time of the program.

8. Ethics

Do you foresee any ethical issues with your research?

For a PhD research proposal, the ethics section should demonstrate a thorough understanding of the moral principles guiding your study and outline the practical steps you will take to protect the rights and welfare of all involved. It should address how you will minimize potential harms and maximize benefits, obtain proper approvals, and maintain the integrity of your research. Ethical approval will be needed for any research involving human participants. The University of Bedfordshire requires an Ethics review submission and approval before conducting your research. An ethics approval form that details the ethical issues that you foresee, and how you will address them will be part of the research milestones within the program, usually in year 2. In your research proposal, you will need to consider and present the ethical issues that are specific to your research proposal and how you intend to address them.

9. Bibliography

This should be a short list of the key articles and books mentioned in your proposal. Quality is more important than quantity - demonstrating engagement with the literatures both subject-specific and methodological as appropriate.

Full time PhD Plan

This plan incorporates the key milestones of the research based PhD program of the University of Bedfordshire (whether hosted with UKDEGREESMEU or in the UK as they are identical).

It is however indicative – in providing a generic timeline for the 3 year PhD. Noting that the program timeline is set at completion at maximum of 3 years and 3 months.

It is expected that the students, with support from their supervisors, will plan for specific activities across the whole program, including training and researcher development workshops and activities, including presenting, attending in relevant for a, workshops, seminars and /or conferences, as well as publications.

Months	Activities	Output
1-2	Enrolment, induction, first meeting with supervisory team, plan for year 1 (including preparation for PP1), training needs analysis	Research plan established, initial literature review, supervision plan, training needs identified
3-4	Continue literature review, prepare initial data collection plan if applicable, start ethics review process	Literature review ongoing, ethics approval application drafted as needed
5-6	Finish literature review, prepare PP1 draft, seek progression point for PP1 completion	Draft PP1 prepared, plan for progression point submission
6-7	Submit PP1 into System, conduct PP1 review meeting, seek PP1 outcome (progression point)	PP1 submission, approval or feedback for amendments
8	Complete PP1 revisions if required, formal PP1 review outcome, prepare for PP1 viva	PP1 approved, draft for viva readiness
9	Conduct PP1 viva, determine outcome, work on amendments or proceed to next phase	Viva passed or amendments assigned, successful milestone
10-11	Address PP1 amendments, submit into system, prepare ethics approval application for early data collection if applicable	PP1 amendments completed, ethics approval submitted if early data collection planned
12-13	Ethics review approval obtained, commence primary data collection, develop research data management plan	No data collection without Ethics Panel Approval. Data collection underway, research data management plan in place
14-16	Continue data collection, conduct preliminary data analysis, refine methodology	Data collection ongoing, early analysis begins
17-18	Develop and submit draft PP2, seek supervisory feedback, perform revisions	Draft PP2 ready, feedback incorporated
19	Submit PP2 into System	Reviewed for compliance and viva date and panel confirmed
20	PP2 viva	Viva conducted, outcome of PP2 achieved
21-28	Complete data collection, finalize data analysis, start drafting thesis chapters	Data collection finished, thesis chapters drafting initiated
29 - 31	Complete thesis chapters – formulate knowledge contribution	A coherent research story comes together, chapters cross referenced, bibliography checked
32 - 33	Complete final thesis draft, submission preparations for thesis submission to supervisors	Thesis draft finalized and submitted for supervisory feedback
34	Supervisory review and feedback	Thesis amended accordingly
35	Prepare for thesis submission to RGS	Final thesis checks and ready for formal submission (Month 36)
36	Thesis Submission to RGS	Official submission of thesis – with all accompanying documents

Months	Activities	Output
37-38	Preparation for viva, final checks, scheduling viva	Ready for viva, schedule preparations
39	Viva and outcome (tends to be held at around 3 months after the submission)	Conduct viva, decision on completion

Summary of Key Milestones & Outcomes:

- First year for full research project development – 10,000 word research proposal
- **Progression Points:**
- **PP1:** Achieved around months 8 after successful completion of initial phases.
- **Ethics Approval & Outcome:**

Submitted around months 10-11, approved by months 12-13, enabling data collection.
- **Research Data Management Plan:**

Developed at months 12-13, aligned with data collection start.
- **PP2:** Achieved around months 19
- **Thesis Submission:**

Due at month 36, after final revisions and supervisor approval.
- **Viva & Final Outcome:**

Viva scheduled and conducted at months 37-39, with the outcome finalized in month 39.