



## Research Proposal Guidelines

Prior to making an application or completing a draft of your research proposal, we recommend that you assess whether QUB Law has expertise in your chosen research field. You can find details on potential supervisors and their area of interest [here](#).

If you cannot find a potential supervisor, you may wish to contact the School's PhD Enquiries team via email at [pglawenquiries@qub.ac.uk](mailto:pglawenquiries@qub.ac.uk). There is no guarantee that the team will be able to find a potential supervisor if you cannot (we have wide-ranging but not infinite areas of expertise within the School of Law), but they will certainly be able to offer an informed opinion.

Having found a potential supervisor, you should make initial contact with this individual via email. The email should include:

- a 500-word statement of your research question and its significance
- a brief, but precise, reference to your academic qualifications and, where relevant to the proposed PhD, your work experience. In particular, do you have prior qualifications in law, at what level, with what final grade, and have you completed a long essay/dissertation and, if so, what grade did you achieve?

If you are then encouraged to proceed to a full 1,500 word research proposal, here is our guidance on what assessors will expect to see when they review your proposal.

1. A title that is both concise and descriptive.
2. Clear answers to the following crucial questions:
  1. **What** - What is the research question that will be answered in the PhD? If required, you may include an overall research question and a series of sub-questions. Ensure that your research question is stated at, or near, the start of the proposal. Ensure, too, that it is stated in a clear way; assessors should not have to search for your research question, or make their own determination because your proposal failed to do so. Be aware that it takes time to craft a quality research question; expect to spend time thinking about the question, and then set aside additional time to write it up in a clear, concise and precise manner.
  2. **Why** - Why should this research question be addressed? In particular, by addressing this research question, will you augment scholarship in the area? This goes towards the question of whether the PhD will make an original contribution to scholarship in the relevant field. Consider, too, the significance of the question at the heart of your proposed PhD. It is not sufficient to claim that a proposed PhD is original because it has never been studied before; it could be the case that it has not been studied because it has not been deemed significant, ie, worthy of study. The proposal should not feature a literature review. However, the assessors will expect to see reference to the literature, both to demonstrate your knowledge of the current state of research in the field in which you hope to study, and to support your claim that there is currently a gap in the literature which your PhD will fill. Your task, in other words, is to establish the research context. In doing so, if you fail to demonstrate familiarity with key sources in your proposed field,

including how your proposed PhD relates to these, it is likely to raise doubts as to the quality of your proposal and also your aptitude for a PhD.

3. **How** -

1. What methodology and method(s) will be adopted to address the question?
2. What is the proposed timetable for the research? One of the questions the assessors will ask at this point is: does the proposed PhD seem to be viable? Viable within the time available? Within the funds available? Using the methods proposed?

4. **General** - The quality of the presentation should be high; sloppiness will count against the proposal. Do not exceed the maximum word count of 1,500 words, including references but excluding bibliography.