



Guidance for PhD Proposals HAPP: *Working Draft*

Applicants for a PhD must submit a research proposal. This can be up to a maximum of 1,500 words (including referencing, but not including the bibliography of cited works).

We strongly suggest that you make contact with a potential PhD supervisor within the school to discuss the research project as you develop the proposal.

Strong PhD proposals take considerable time to prepare, and they must clearly demonstrate what the project is, why it is important, how it will be achieved, and how it fits with the research expertise of the school's staff.

A strong research proposal will include:

- 1) **A title** that gives a clear sense of the area of research and the contribution to knowledge being made.
- 2) **Introduction and Aims and Objectives.** You should briefly introduce the reader to your proposal by indicating specifically what you want to research and what you expect to be able to achieve in the course of your PhD. What contribution to knowledge will you make? Why is this important?
- 3) **Research question or questions that the project will address.** It is sometimes helpful to pose one overarching question, and some smaller questions that will form part of how you expect to build your answer to the overarching question. In some cases it is helpful to specify a problem or an issue that you want to engage rather than specifying a series of questions – but in such cases it is important to be explicit about what findings or argument you wish to develop.
- 4) **A discussion of how your research project will make an original contribution to knowledge.** This should provide a sense of the following:
 - a. *Why is it important to address your research questions?* Give a sense of why the research is important. For instance, if you are claiming that you will fill a gap in existing research, why is it important that this gap be filled?
 - b. *How does your research project build upon existing academic research and how does it further develop that literature or fill a gap?* This may take the form of a formal literature review, if you wish, but this should be a critical analysis of the literature rather than a long description of what it covers. If you do not include a literature review section it is still important to demonstrate your grasp of the relevant literature by referring to it to support your points.
- 5) **Methods and Plans.** Provide an outline of the research methods to be used in the research project. This should be fairly detailed. For instance, if using archives – which ones? If conducting interviews – what types of interviewees would be seeking out? If using ethnographic methods, which ones? If your research will involve travel for fieldwork, where will you go? If working theoretically, what concepts and thinkers will you engage? In all cases you should specify how you will gather information, how you will gain access to the information, and how you will analyse that information in order to address your research questions. The key thing that reviewers will look for here is a sense of the process of the research project and how it will be sufficient to address the research questions.
You should to include a timetable for different tasks, indicating what you will do in each year of your proposed PhD.

You are not required to organise your proposal under these headings, but you should clearly demonstrate how your project engages each of these things.