Research Proposal Guidelines for PhD Studies in Social Science
University of Aberdeen

Those who wish to apply for PhD studies will need to include a research proposal of no more than 1200 words (not including references). Such research proposals need to convince the reader that the applicant is prepared for the challenge of independent doctoral research resulting in the production of new knowledge; equally important we will also use the proposal as a means of ensuring that we have appropriate academic staff who are able to provide adequate supervision for the topic and using the methods that are proposed by the student.

The research proposal should have a ***clear title*** which describes the topic of the PhD effectively.

It should include:

Introduction: This should introduce the research proposal, but also convince the reader that that the topic and approach presented here is interesting and worthwhile.

Literature Review: The point of the literature review is to demonstrate your grasp of the literature relevant to your topic, and to situate your research question as something that will contribute to that literature. You should clearly identify what theoretical perspectives and resources inform your research.

Research Question/Hypothesis: Be clear and concise about what it is that you hope to learn and how it will contribute to the literature. It will need to be answerable by means of the methods outlined below.

Methods: This section will outline how you will answer your research question. It should identify what instruments you intend to use, who your population of interest is, and how you intend to sample and recruit them. It should also give clear indication of how you intend to analyse your data so gathered.

Ethics: You should identify any risks to the researcher or participants, and how you will minimise these risks.

Timeline: The proposal should identify a timeline of 36 months, and how the different tasks will be scheduled within that time-frame.

References: only those that are referred to in the proposal.

For further guidance, see Keith Punch *Developing Effective Research Proposals* (London: Sage, 2006), or Zina O'Leary *The Essential Guide to Doing your Research Project* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010)