

Writing a research proposal for MIE

Before you communicate with a potential supervisor about your research plans, or make a formal application to study for a PhD with the Manchester Institute of Education (MIE), you should write a research proposal. Well written draft proposals are very important in demonstrating your potential to study for a PhD to a potential supervisor, and in assessment of your PhD application to MIE. So it warrants plenty of your time and energy to ensure it is well developed. Below is an outline of what we expect to see in a well written proposal.

Your research proposal should:

- demonstrate evidence of intellectual purpose and originality;
- show that you are capable of communicating your ideas clearly, concisely and coherently;
- show you can use published literature to support your ideas and arguments;
- define the topic you are interested in and show good awareness of the research context.

Your proposal should be 2,000-3,000 words long. It should present the background to, and key debates in, your research field, and include enough detail on your proposed research methodology to demonstrate your potential as a research student. PhD applicants are expected to possess a good working knowledge of research methodology.

Structuring your research proposal

The following guide describes the characteristics of a well-developed PhD proposal.

- **Title:** Create a clear working title for your research project.
- **Introduction:** Discuss the background to your topic, defining key terms. Present the research problem you have identified and why it is important. Describe the specific aspect(s) of this problem that you intend to investigate and why.
- **Literature Review:** Review relevant literature and theories relating to your proposed research area, ensuring your discussion is supported with references to literature. You should show that you clearly understand the main arguments, ideas and findings of key researchers in this field. Here you should demonstrate your knowledge of current debates on your topic. Overall, the review should showcase your familiarity with the subject area, and your ability to communicate clearly and concisely.
- **Aims and RQs:** Summarise the central aim(s) of your proposed research and state the research questions (RQs) that will guide it. Each research question should be specific and clearly relate to your aim(s).
- **Methodology:** Outline the research methods you will use and justify your choice of approach. Explain how you expect to conduct your research – what data gathering instruments will you use? How will you identify participants? How will you access participants (will you need to gain permissions from any relevant organisations for this)? What equipment will your research need (if any)? How do you propose to analyse the data you collect from this research?
- **Timeframe:** Indicate your project strategy and timetable. What are the main project stages? What would the annual completion expectations be? What are the perceived challenges to completion, and how might these be overcome?
- **Contribution to knowledge:** Explain why your proposed project is important. How will your research make an original contribution to the field?
- **Bibliography:** Provide an initial bibliography on your topic and methods, and underline the references referred to in your proposal.

Refining your proposal

When you submit your research proposal for application purposes, you will **not** be committing yourself to the precise detail or methodology you have outlined. Once we accept you onto a PhD programme, you will be expected to refine your original proposal following additional engagement with literature, research training, and discussions with your supervisory team.