

GUIDANCE ON DEVELOPING A RESEARCH DEGREE PROPOSAL FOR APPLICATION TO CARDIFF SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

PhD, Professional Doctorate (DBA) & Taught Doctorate (DMan)

Introduction

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) specify that doctoral degrees are awarded for the creation and interpretation, construction and/or exposition of knowledge which extends the forefront of a discipline, usually through original research (QAA, 2014). Furthermore, the QAA expects holders of doctoral degrees to be able to conceptualise, design and implement projects for the generation of significant new knowledge and/or understanding. Therefore, individuals require both the ability to make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields and an innovative approach to tackling and solving problems. These QAA expectations determine how we, as a School, consider research degree proposals and their potential contribution.

Why do we ask for a Research Proposal?

There are a number of reasons why we want you to submit a research proposal as part of the doctoral degree application process. Firstly, you need to provide a rationale for us that demonstrates that your proposed research is worthwhile in that there are demonstrable benefits to be gained from undertaking the research, i.e. the need for the research. Secondly, you need to convince us that your proposed research is feasible and realistic in terms of achieving the demonstrable benefits in an ethical, legal, safe and timely fashion. Thirdly, your research proposal needs to sell your idea by effectively communicating the purpose of the research and persuading us about the value of the proposed research (Denscombe, 2012).

Although at the outset, you might find it difficult to identify what the value and contribution of your work might be, doctoral research must exhibit a significant contribution to the field and should be publishable in academic journals (Trowler, 2014); therefore, it is important that you are able to articulate the potential of your work to make a contribution. The requirement to make a contribution applies to all doctoral research, whether a PhD or a Professional Doctorate or a Taught Doctorate, as all need to demonstrate knowledge, expertise and intellectual rigour. If you are considering a PhD, the intention should be to create knowledge and expertise that will better inform and underpin new theory. If you are considering a Professional Doctorate, the intention should be to create knowledge and expertise that will better inform and underpin professional practice (Smith, 2009). If you are considering a Taught Doctorate (DMan), the intention should be to create knowledge and expertise that will better inform and underpin new management applications.

'The doctorate degree exists to create and extend knowledge through purposeful research' (Trafford and Leshem, 2008:35) – it is your responsibility to convince us of this through your research proposal.

What is a Research Proposal?

Punch (2016:2) suggests that research proposal should be viewed in the context of the 'four Ps':

- The research proposal is a **phase** of the overall research process – the phase which launches the project, and therefore a very important first phase.
- Developing a research proposal is a **process** of planning, designing and setting up the research, including placing it in context and connecting it to relevant literature.
- The finished proposal is a **product**, where the proposal is formally presented as a document.
- That document contains the proposed **plan** for the execution of the research.

In developing your research proposal you should have undertaken a considerable amount of pre-empirical research (Punch, 2016), that is to say, you will have done a lot of reading in relation to your research area in order to identify your research question and then to establish what data is required to answer that research question. This is an essential activity, as the work you do at this stage will have a significant influence on how your research proposal is developed.

A research proposal for a PhD should articulate the creation and interpretation of new knowledge through original research (Trafford and Lesham, 2008) on a particular topic that will therefore make a contribution to management theory. A research proposal for a Professional Doctorate should articulate the investigation of a professional practice issue and the generation of new knowledge and expertise which is integrated and applied within the professional practice setting (Smith, 2009) and therefore make a contribution to management practice. A research proposal for a Taught Doctorate (DMan) should articulate a systematic understanding of a substantial body of knowledge to design or develop new applications for a situation and therefore make a contribution to knowledge and expertise that will better inform and underpin new management applications or practice.



Your research proposal is critical to your application to study for a research degree at the Cardiff School of Management as it provides us with information upon which we will base an academic judgement about the quality of the research that you are proposing. In reviewing your application to study for a research degree within the Cardiff School of Management, we will be seeking evidence of your ability to:

- Produce new knowledge through original research or other advanced scholarship of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit publication. For a Professional Doctorate, this is also interpreted as a contribution to (or impact upon) professional practice. For a Taught Doctorate, this is also interpreted as the development of new management applications or practice.
- Appreciate the importance and relevance of theoretically-informed research, or in the case of a Professional Doctorate, relevant professional policy and practice, or in the case of a Taught

Doctorate, a systematic understanding and critical awareness of a substantial body of knowledge.

- Demonstrate a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice or management applications.
- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of research methodology, research design and appropriate utilisation.
- Apply sound judgement and ethical principles.
- Source, evaluate and appropriately reference information from a range of sources.

In addition, we will consider this evidence in relation to our supervisory capacity within the School.

Research Proposal: Requirements

Your research proposal should be 2,000 words long and include the following:

1. A working title
2. An introduction to the topic, stating clearly what you expect the project to accomplish.
3. Research question (*i.e. what is the issue/challenge/problem/research gap? What are you trying to find out?*). You should locate the problem within existing theoretical, professional and empirical research.
4. Research aim and objectives
5. A critical review of current and relevant literature that you have read, which supports your project aim and objectives and a discussion of the viability of your topic as being suitable for a research project (either as a PhD or Professional Doctorate or Taught Doctorate). You should provide a clear rationale/justification for the viability and significance of your proposed research, i.e. the contribution to the current body of knowledge or professional practice or management application.
6. A discussion of whatever research methods seem most appropriate for the achievement of your project objectives. You should evidence your engagement with relevant methodological and theoretical concepts and theories. You should specify and justify your proposed research methods in some detail and indicate their relationship to the research objectives stated in 4 (above). Regardless of whether you opt for qualitative or quantitative methods, you should include details of the design of the research, sampling strategy, sample size, access, ethical considerations and how you will analyse the data.
7. A project planning instrument, such as a Gantt chart, which outlines your research timetable.
8. A complete reference list which must conform to the Harvard System of Referencing.

Useful References:

Brett Davies, M. (2007) *Doing a successful research project using qualitative or quantitative methods*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Denscombe, M. (2012) *Research Proposals: A Practical Guide*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

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- Trafford, V. and Leshem, S (2008) *Stepping Stones to Achieving your Doctorate*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.
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