

Clinical Psychology at University of Edinburgh

PhD and MScR proposal guide

**Purpose**

The proposal provides the School and potential research supervisors with a clear indication of the topic in which the applicant is interested, and also give an indication of the student’s ability to identify and develop an interesting research question. Most potential supervisors will consider research proposals as preliminary indicators of the applicant’s area of interest and will not necessarily assume that the proposal defines exactly the research that the student will undertake. The proposal does not need to give details of all studies that will form the PhD; however, the applicant should demonstrate that he/she has considered how further studies could develop from the proposed work, i.e. there is scope for further study.

**Word length**

We recommend that the proposal is between 2000 and 3000 words.

**Structure**

The proposal should be structured using the following headers and content.

1. *Summary of the proposed project (around 250 words recommended).*

This should give a summary of the project that indicates the objectives, the methods and contribution of the project.

1. *Background and rationale (around 1500 words recommended).*

The proposal should next outline the subject for research both in terms of theoretical issues and relevant empirical applications. This section provides a justification to the project based on theory and previous literature. The applicant should also demonstrate familiarity with the major lines of argument which have been developed in the area and demonstrate an understanding of the ideas and findings of key researchers working on the topic. This background section should:

* Outline the general background to the research.
* Indicate what educational or theoretical basis will be used to establish and evaluate the research.
* Identify the specific problem your research seeks to answer.
* Offer research questions and hypotheses that you have identified.

1. *Methods and plan of analysis (around 1000 words recommended).*

This section should indicate the methods used within the study, including the sample, recruitment, procedure, design and method of analysis. If your proposed research involves empirical work, you should provide an indication of the form and location of that empirical work and where and how you might collect relevant data. You should also give consideration to the feasibility of collecting the data. An estimate of sample size and power should be provided. Ensure that the research question and methods match. The method section should:

* Indicate the methodological strategy or philosophy you intend to follow.
* Identify and define the major constructs (variables) in your study/studies.
* Identify any pilot work you expect to require or have completed.
* Identify the main features of your sample.
* Describe the sampling strategy.
* Indicate how measures/data relate to variables.
* Indicate any problems of access to data.

1. *Statement of contribution to research and practice (250 words recommended).*

This section should summarise the potential impact of the proposed research. Although no indication of the research findings can be presented, it is beneficial to demonstrate how you envisage your research to contribute to debates and discussions within the area, make a contribution to the existing work and extend understanding.

1. *References*

Finally, you should provide references for the research proposal.