



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

SEARCHING FOR FUNDING?

Use our database to find your eligible sources of funding:

www.birmingham.ac.uk/pgfunding

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

Join us on campus for an Open Day or speak to us online:

www.birmingham.ac.uk/pgvisit

PG TIPS

A large, faint, light blue lightbulb icon with rays emanating from it, positioned in the background on the right side of the page.

PhD advice

WHERE DO YOU START!?

Your guide to the PhD
process at Birmingham.



THE PhD PROCESS

- ✓ Choose which research degree: PhD, MA/MSc by Research, or MRes
- ✓ Consider the research area and themes
- ✓ Begin your supervisor search
- ✓ Consult with a potential supervisor or department
- ✓ Write your research proposal
- ✓ Make a formal application



WHAT IS A RESEARCH PROPOSAL?

A research proposal is a concise and coherent summary of your proposed research.

It is a key part of your application, on which potential supervisors will decide if your research is something they can support.



FINDING A SUPERVISOR

As you are still developing your research topic we recommend that you first contact a member of our staff with appropriate expertise to discuss your proposed research.

If there is a good fit between your proposed research and our research strengths, a supervisor may be able to give you advice on a draft of your research proposal before you formally apply.



WHAT SHOULD YOU INCLUDE?

- ✓ Research topic
- ✓ Review of the literature
- ✓ Research objectives
- ✓ Research strategy
- ✓ Anticipated results
- ✓ Schedule and budget
- ✓ References and bibliography

WHAT SHOULD THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL BE?

The research proposal is an important document that you submit as part of the application process, so it is essential that you put sufficient time and energy into preparing, as well as drafting, it.

REMEMBER THE 6 Ps

PROJECT

Why is your project worth investing in?

PERSON

Why are you the best person to deliver the project?

PLACE

Why is the University of Birmingham the best place to undertake your research?

PREPARATION

How have you prepared for the project? What other training will you undertake in order to deliver the project?

PASSION

Does your passion for your subject and for conducting original research come through in the application?

PRECISION

You want the reader to get a very clear idea of what you are planning to do, why it is worthwhile, and how you plan to achieve your goals.

Three years and 50,000–80,000 words for a full-time PhD can get used up alarmingly quickly: your project must be achievable!

WHAT SHOULD YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL DEMONSTRATE?

ORIGINALITY

What is the 'gap' in knowledge that you wish to fill?

CONTEXT

Situate your own research within a body of existing work.

IMPACT

The benefits to wider society.

CRITICAL THINKING

Identify issues and problems within the status quo.

SUITABLE SUPERVISION

Research the department and show that your project fits with the research interests of a supervisor, and/or the wider department and University.

OWNERSHIP

Demonstrate your ability to take ownership of an independent research project and make a positive first impression of yourself as a potential research leader.

FEASIBILITY

Show that the scope, timescale and resources are realistic. Reflect on the key questions that you are seeking to answer to ensure that your project is not too broad to be achievable.

TRAINING NEEDS

What further training will you need? How will you undertake this?

INTEREST

Demonstrate an interest in and passion for your research area, through specific examples.

WHY YOU?

Why are you the right person to undertake this research? How has your background prepared you for it?

TWO KEY CONCEPTS THAT YOU NEED TO EXPRESS: ORIGINALITY AND IMPACT.

Find out how to demonstrate these concepts:

www.birmingham.ac.uk/proposalwriting

AN EXAMPLE LAYOUT

1. A WORKING TITLE

A clear indication of the intent of your project and the central issue that you will address.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Write a short overview of your research: the key issue(s) that you wish to investigate, and why these are important. Why have you applied to the department? You can refer to the research areas and priorities of a particular research grouping or supervisor.

4. METHODOLOGY AND RESOURCES

This section should identify the information or data that you will need in order to address the central issue of your research, how you are going to access the material and the possible research methods or techniques that you will use. You should also include some reflection on potential problems that you may face in the research process (eg, access to primary material or interview subjects).

3. GROUND YOUR RESEARCH IN EXISTING LITERATURE

Yours is an original piece of research, so you should demonstrate that your proposed topic, or your perspective on it, has not been studied before. Discuss major debates and issues in the field and show your familiarity with some of the main works addressing your proposed research issue.

Make reference to the most important texts related to the research, demonstrate your understanding of the issues and identify existing gaps (both theoretical and practical) that your research intends to address.

5. TIMESCALE

Provide a realistic time plan for completing your research degree study, either in three years if you are studying full time or six years if part time.

6. REFERENCES

Some departments may request an indicative list of references and sources. List the main published literature that you intend to use to guide your research (with reference to the theoretical framework and the substance of the research), and any available data sources you may use.

OUR RESEARCH MATTERS

and our postgraduate researchers are integral to our achievements.

Be a part of our diverse and supportive community.

www.birmingham.ac.uk/pgr

MAKE SURE YOU'VE COVERED THE FOLLOWING...

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH?

WHY DO IT?

WHY INVEST?

SIGNIFICANCE

YOUR AIMS

HAVE YOU SHOWN YOUR PASSION?

CONTEXT IN THE FIELD

METHODOLOGY

IS THERE FIELDWORK?

RESOURCES REQUIRED

IMPACT

TIMELINE

REFERENCES

THE 3 Cs

CLEAR

- Is it clearly articulated?
- Is the research problem, question or hypothesis made clear?
- Is it clear what the impact will be?
- Be as specific as you can as often as you can!

CONCISE

- Is it succinct and focused (ie, doesn't ramble)?
- Does it use short sentences and paragraphs that convey your ideas in a concise way?

COHERENT

- Does it flow and link together well?
- Does it tell a clear narrative of what you want to do, why, and how?