

# INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

## Doctoral School

### Research Proposal Guidelines

This advice is intended to help you to formulate a research proposal for a research degree in education or in one of the related areas in which the Institute has expertise to supervise your research. Your proposal should provide evidence of your ability to plan and organise independent research. We are looking for:

- a clear and reasonably well defined area of interest;
- evidence that you are familiar with literature in your field of interest;
- a specific focus or problem/set of related questions within the field which you intend to pursue or a proposition which you wish to argue.

If accepted for a research degree, you will not necessarily be expected to follow the proposal exactly, since it is an inevitable part of the research process that ideas change and develop. During the course of your studies you will have an opportunity to explore your ideas in much greater depth; you will be introduced to a range of research techniques and your proposal will be refined through discussions with your supervisor, other researchers and fellow students.

#### Layout for proposal

We would expect the proposal to be about four (A4 size) pages of single-spaced text and would like you to set out your proposal under the following headings.

##### TITLE

This may be indicative at this stage or simply describe the area of interest, but it is very helpful for use in considering potential supervisors.

In addition, please provide a brief overview of your research question and an outline of the main objectives of your research, providing details of three key aspects. This will help in identifying a suitable supervisor.

##### LITERATURE REVIEW

We would like you to provide a brief introduction which indicates your knowledge of the relevant literature. Normally this would be in the form of a very brief literature review, or at least an indication of the literature on which you intend to draw and how your research question might make a useful contribution to the area of study.

##### RESEARCH QUESTION

You should provide a clear idea of the central focus or questions which the research is designed to examine. This may take various forms depending on the kind of research envisaged. It may involve a series of assertions which you intend to argue

in favour of or to challenge, or a set of empirical hypotheses which you will seek to test out, or an area which you may wish to explore. This should build on the literature review and include a rationale for why you think the work you wish to undertake is of importance.

## RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

A preliminary outline of the proposed method of enquiry. Once again, this will vary depending on the kind of research envisaged – it may be historical, empirical, theoretical etc. You should mention the techniques you propose to employ (eg interviews or case case studies) and procedures for collecting data and any potential difficulties that might be faced.

If the research is to have an empirical element, then we would expect some indication of the kind of data that you plan to collect and the possible methods of collecting it, although your thinking in this area may be at a preliminary stage.

If there is no empirical element, then you could expand on how you propose to develop your own perspective on the issues, explain how you have reached this view, and/or how it relates to the existing literature.

## REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Your proposal must be fully referenced with a bibliography and should include a statement that the proposal is your own unaided work. Advice on referencing is attached.

You should also include a brief timetable indicating the phases of your study and the amount of time you intend to spend on each (eg data collection, drafting, writing up).

## After Submission

When you have submitted your application and proposal, the Doctoral School will liaise with the appropriate academic department(s) to identify a potential supervisor with expertise in your proposed area of research. You will hear from the Doctoral School as soon as a decision has been reached on your application.

If you have already had a discussion with a member of academic staff, please indicate this by completing the appropriate section on the front of the application form. We can then pass this information to the department(s) considering your application.

## Suggested Referencing Style

If you use direct quotations you should indent them left and right, and use single spacing between lines. The page number(s) of the quotation should be given at the end of the quotation or after the date of the reference, e.g. (Smith, 1976, p.15) if it comes after a quotation, or Smith (1976, p.15) if the reference just precedes the quotation. Your own comments on the quotation should follow.

In the body of the text references are noted by the author's surname, followed by the date of publication in brackets, e.g. Smith (1976). The '*et al*' convention can be used when the number of authors is greater than two; this is the Latin for 'and others'. Other Latin words used here include 'ibid' (the same) and 'op cit' (quoted above), which save you continually repeating the name. The following format for referencing books, chapters and journal articles is an example:

Books:

Lawton, D. (1992). *Education and Politics for the 1990s: Conflict or Consensus?* London: Falmer Press.

Chapter in edited book:

Lambert, D.M. (1992). 'Towards a geography of social concern', in M.Naish (ed.) *Geography and Education*, London: Kogan Page.

Journal articles:

Bernstein, B.B. (2001). 'Symbolic control: issues of empirical description of agencies and agents'. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 4 (1), 68-78.

If secondary references are used, it should be clear to the reader that the secondary reference has not been read. In this case where the work of one author is cited in another author's work, it is necessary to refer to the secondary source and provide both authors' names. For example:

Short (cited in Brown, 2000, p. 51) reported...

or

(Short, cited in Brown, 2000, p. 51)

In this example, only Brown is included in the references list. The bibliographic details for Short do not need to be included in the text or in the reference list.

Internet based materials

For internet based materials, your references should state the URL and the date when you last accessed the particular site or document. For example:

DOWLING, P.C. (2000). *A Manifesto for Design and the Charismatic Intellectual*. [Online]. Presented at Education for Social Democracies: changing forms and sites. Institute of Education, University of London. 3rd–5th July 2000. Available at: [www.ioe.ac.uk/ccs/dowling/c2000](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/ccs/dowling/c2000). Last accessed 18th July 2000.

For advice on the use of APA style to cite internet sources see

<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/cite6.html>.

For advice on Harvard style, and a link to specific advice on internet resources, see

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/library/libdocs/hsl-dvc1.pdf> .

November 2008