# Guidelines for Writing a Research Proposal for your PhD Application

All applicants to the PhD programme in The School of Biochemistry & Immunology at Trinity College Dublin must submit a research proposal using the template below, as part of the application process. This proposal serves a number of functions:

* It is used by academic assessors to determine whether the applicant has identified a clear focus for their PhD.
* It should provide the assessors with confidence that the applicant has the necessary background understanding and competence to undertake the research.

Your research proposal represents your thinking at this stage in the research process. It is not a binding commitment to a specific research question, and it is not at all unusual for PhD candidates to find that the thesis they ultimately submit, has developed in a quite different direction to that outlined in their research proposal.

**Before you start it is essential that you have discussed and agreed the research proposal with your proposed supervisor.**

In **writing your research proposal** remember:

* Be clear and concise in your writing. The proposal should not normally exceed 1,000 words.
* Your proposal will be read by a number of assessors, and some may not have expertise specific to your topic. Write the proposal in a way that makes it easy for a non-expert reader to understand.
* Check for grammatical and typographical errors. These can distract the reader and detract from the essence of your proposal.

**Key elements** in a research proposal:

Any research proposal should address the following questions:

* What is the question want to investigate?
* Why is that question important?
* How are you going to explore/investigate it?

These questions are usually addressed through the following core sections:

**Background** **(~200 words)**

This section should give a clear, concise description of your research aims and objectives and a summary of the background literature. You are expected to briefly summarize what is already known in the literature about the question you propose to address and to highlight important gaps in knowledge.

**Proposed Approach (max 600 words)**

This section is where you explain *how* you intend answering the question you have outlined above and demonstrate your understanding of the research process. Important considerations here are the kinds of techniques you intend using in your research. You may already have a clear vision of the sequence of steps that will form your research plan but that is not always the case. Research methods evolve as questions become clearer and more focused. What you are setting out is your plan at this point – a plan that is likely to go through many different iterations before it is implemented.

**Anticipated outcomes (~200 words)**

While it is almost impossible to predict what the final outputs of your PhD will be at this stage of the process, it is important that you showcase your understanding of the potential that exists for the research programme you are proposing. In this section consider what findings you might make, how these will advance the field, research community, society as a whole. Consider also your goals for disseminating these findings i.e. aspirations to publish, attend conferences etc.

# Proposal template

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Applicant Name: | Applicant ID (if known): |
| School applying to: | Supervisor: |
|  |  |
| Research Title: | |
|  | |
| Background to the proposed research question: (~200 words) | |
|  | |
| Planned approach to addressing this research question (max 600 words) | |
|  | |
| Anticipated outcomes (~200 words) | |
|  | |
| Relevant literature cited: | |
|  | |