

## ***"What makes a good research proposal?"***

The quality of your academic research proposal is of fundamental importance to your application. This is your opportunity to impress us that the research you propose is of importance and of interest from an academic viewpoint (ie capable of providing new insights and knowledge into an area or areas of human activity) - the organisational benefits alone are insufficient justification as a PhD needs to yield 'a contribution to knowledge'. It is important to note that many very interesting, useful and worthwhile projects deemed acceptable as dissertation topics on an MBA course (for instance) may not satisfy the requirement for 'new knowledge' expected from a PhD thesis. So, the emphasis needs to be upon WHAT insights this academic research will be able to provide WITHIN the context of what is already known within academic disciplines it is drawing upon.

For example, a research project could focus upon "the barriers to innovation facing manufacturing companies in South Yorkshire" and this would produce insights and learning resulting in practical benefits. However for this to be an acceptable research proposal for a PhD there would need to be academic justification that highlighted the **existing research** into innovation, perceptions of barriers, the manufacturing context that would draw upon socio-economic history, social psychology, theories on learning and enterprise and how **this research** will inform what is known (and add to) theories and frameworks and knowledge in the fields of social psychology, learning, enterprise and so on..... **Consequently, the focus is primarily on academic learning.**

Therefore ask yourself the following questions about the research proposal and see how you can improve upon the...

### Research Question

- what is the academic question ?
- what academic reading has been done that justifies this research question ?
- what can be achieved in terms of new insights and understanding ?

### Research Feasibility

- how feasible is this research project ?
- what access do I have to research sites and people I will want to interview ?
- will the questions I have be appropriate and acceptable for them to answer ?

### Research Approach

- what is my research approach ?
- is it academically justifiable and practically possible ?
- what academic reading has been done to determine and justify this approach ?

Remember, it is the demonstration of an academic approach to the research proposal that is most critical, so include references to academic literature to substantiate your argument as to how and why this research is justified from an academic viewpoint. A research proposal without academic references included is unlikely to be passed on to academics for their comments as it does not signify an appropriate approach to doing research at this level.



**Sheffield  
Hallam University**

**SHARPENS YOUR THINKING**