

IHS PhD Programme

Research proposal template

This research proposal template must be used for your project proposal.

Please make sure that your proposal fits with one of the research clusters of IHS. The research proposal is meant to communicate your ideas in a clear, coherent fashion. Please highlight the novelty of the ideas, and how your research would make scientific contribution(s).

A research proposal should be between 5-8 pages. The PhD research proposal must include the following items, in this order:

1. Abstract

The abstract should provide a short summary of your proposed research. It should state the motive for the research, the objectives, the expected outcomes and the scientific significance of those outcomes.

- Tip: Write the abstract once you are done with the other items.
- Tip: Test your abstract with a lay person. If (s)he can understand what you are trying to tell, the abstract is perfect.

2. Problem Statement

The problem statement is a short description of the locus of your research. You will need to outline the theoretical and / or methodological issues. If you wish, you may also add a practical component, although this will not be regarded as the core of PhD research. It is important that you state the scientific relevance of the proposed research: what scientific insight will you add?

- Tip: Do a quick scan of the scientific literature to get a better understanding of current debates. Some journals publish systematic literature reviews that could be useful for you.
- Tip: Do not pile too many ideas into one proposal

3. Research Objectives and Research Questions

State the research objectives and research questions. A research object is usually structured as follows: “to [research activity] in order to [analytical activity] in [target group, sample].” Research questions commonly center on explaining something, such as “under what conditions does “y” occur” or “what causes y”, where “y” stands for the dependent variable. Please make sure that your question reflects the scientific state of the art.

- Tip: Formulating a good research question is hard so you may want to take some time for this.
- Tip: Do not stack too many objectives and questions, to keep things manageable.

4. Theoretical Framework

Provide a short overview of the theoretical state of art that applies to your research. Please include a conceptual framework; i.e. a schematic overview of the main concepts and causal model.

- Tip: A mind map may serve as a good starting point for structuring and relating your concepts
- Tip: Start your causal model with what you consider the core, and work from there.

5. Research Methodology

Provide an overview of your proposed research methodology. State the method you intend to use and explain why you think that this method suits the research objectives and questions. Please note that a technique is not a method (e.g. interviewing is a technique, regression analysis is a method).

- Tip: Spend some time reading into research methodology as this is a complex matter.
- Tip: You can propose a method if you think it is fitting without having much working experience with the method. Our Graduate School provides courses to cover you. However, make you sure that your proposal remains realistic.

6. Planning

Please provide a tentative planning overview. We understand that this is difficult to estimate but it is useful for yourself to assess how realistic your proposed project is. If your proposal is too broad and not feasible within 3 to 4 years, it is unlikely that you will manage to finish it one day. Please note that the regular IHS PhD trajectory lasts 4 years.

- Tip: Make a Gantt-chart, using each of the steps described in the proposal
- Tip: Field work (collecting data) tends to require a considerable amount of time. Not only does it involve much work, you are also dependent on circumstances outside of your control (e.g. willingness of people to participate). Plan some buffer time for this.

7. Link to the IHS specialization:

In this section you should indicate which IHS research cluster would fit the content of your PhD research the most. We understand that some topics may not fit perfectly. Please choose the cluster closest to your research if that is the case.

Review

Your proposal will be reviewed by two members of our academic staff. You will be accepted into the PhD school if your proposal meets the criteria. Occasionally, there may be a request for a revision, followed by another review. However, we kindly ask you to perfect your proposal as resubmissions are only done in exceptional cases.