

Writing a Research Proposal for the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies

Applications to undertake doctoral research at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (IALS) must include a research proposal. The proposal document is intended to demonstrate both the quality and potential of the proposed research project.

Why is the proposal important?

The research proposal is the primary document used by assessors and potential supervisors to consider the originality of the proposed topic, the viability for doctoral research, and the 'fit' with a supervisor's expertise.

Requirements of a proposal

The proposal will be accompanied by an application form and other supporting document (see [here](#) for further details).

It is important that you doublecheck spelling and grammar before submitting your proposal.

There is no prescribed format for a proposal, but the following guidelines should be borne in mind:

- A research proposal should not exceed 10 A4 pages in length, with standard font size.
- The proposal should include a 'working title' (which can be changed as a thesis develops).
- A clear research question or hypothesis should be set out. This will be a concise statement of the problem/ topic of research. Many proposals are often too broad, so it is important to reflect on your research question/ hypothesis to ensure that your project is clearly focused.
- A draft outline structure should be included, for example setting out (briefly) what each chapter will cover. The applicant should take the opportunity to explain how the proposal fits with existing literature in the field, and what the original contribution of this proposed thesis will be.
- It is important that the proposal provides an indication of the key theoretical, policy or empirical debates in the field. You do need to demonstrate a familiarity with relevant academic literature and theories relating to your proposal.
- When discussing relevant literature, you should include full references. This can be done in footnotes (preferred) or alternatively a full bibliography at the end of the proposal.
- If your research is being driven by gaps in the existing literature, you should specify which of these gaps you propose to address.
- It is useful to ask yourself the following questions when preparing your proposal: What will my project do? So what? Who cares? Why is this important?
- An outline of the proposed methodology should be included. For example, do you propose to adopt doctrinal, comparative, theoretical, or socio-legal approaches? Explain why your

proposed methodology is appropriate to your proposed thesis. If you intend to conduct empirical research (eg research interviews), you should specify, *inter alia*, the number of interviews, the types of people that you hope to interview, and how you will get access to these people. It is important to demonstrate the feasibility of your proposed approach.

- The project should be achievable within 3-4 years. It can be useful to include a timeframe of intended milestones or progress during that timeframe.
- While your research proposal is judged mainly on content, it must also look professional: typed and written in good English. Attention will be paid to clarity of expression and the structure, coherence and flow of your proposal.
- Be aware that it is natural for ideas and plans to evolve and change over the course of a thesis.

Supervision

Details of our research expertise can be found [here](#).

If your application is approved, a supervisory team will be appointed. This will usually consist of two supervisors.

Due to the volume of enquiries and applications that we receive, it is not possible for IALS staff to individually engage with informal proposals prior to submission of applications.

If there is a particular potential supervisor that you have in mind, you should specify that in your proposal. Please note, though, that supervision by a particular person cannot be guaranteed.

Review process

When an application is received, it is first reviewed by the Applications team who check that the application is complete, that all supporting documentation has been supplied, etc. If an application is incomplete or if further documentation is required, the Applications team will make that clear to the applicant. An application will not proceed past this stage until it is complete.

Next, the complete application will be reviewed by the Director of Postgraduate Research (DPGR). The DPGR might ask other staff to also review the application, if it is beyond his/her expertise.

- Based on academic judgment, if the application is deemed not to be of a high standard or if IALS is deemed unable to offer supervision, the application will be rejected.
- If the application is deemed to be of a high standard and one that could potentially be supervised at IALS, the DPGR will then contact potential supervisors to gauge interest in supervising.
 - If a potential supervisor is identified, and is interested in supervising the proposed topic, an interview will then be arranged with the candidate. Depending on the interview, and further review of the proposal, an offer may be made to an applicant.