**Guidance on Writing a DBA Research Proposal**

A crucial part of the DBA application is the research proposal. It is one of the key criteria that the University of Salford uses to differentiate between different applicants and to make decisions on whether to make offers of acceptance onto the doctoral programme. This page provides guidance on how to write a research proposal, with a few suggestions on what to include and what to avoid.

**What is a DBA proposal?**
A DBA proposal is an outline of your proposed research that is designed to:
- Formulate and define a clear, interesting research question; this may take the form of a hypothesis to be tested, or an open-ended enquiry related to your work base.
- Establish the relevance and value of the proposed research question in the context of current academic thinking, highlighting its originality and significance and its application to your professional practice/organisation
- Outline a clear and practical methodology which enables you to answer the research question, and to describe and evaluate any data or source material you will draw upon
- Suggest what you hope to discover at the end of your research and what impact it may have to your professional practice/organisation
- Provide a provisional timeline of your research

**How long does it need to be?**
Most research proposals are between 1500 and 2000 words long.

**What's a research proposal for?**
Your proposal gives a relatively brief overview of what you would like to study. You will demonstrate how and why you have chosen to do this particular research, so that the University or School can see whether it is a viable project.

**What do I need to include?**
A research proposal will include the following (note that this is a general guide and that you may have been given more specific instructions by your supervisor):

• **A working title:** this might not be the finalised title of your project, but must show that you have thought about what you are hoping to achieve. Make sure any key words appear in the working title.

• **A general overview:** a brief section about the subject area you are looking at, and how it fits into which discipline(s). This will be most important in DBA research proposals where you are applying for funding, as you will need to show how your topic fits into the disciplines funded by the body.

• **A review of relevant literature:** this isn't an enormous literature review, but you need to show that you are aware of the important issues, themes and debates in the relevant literature. You must refer to key texts and briefly show that you understand how they are relevant to your research area. You are therefore summarising what has been done before on this topic. Remember that a DBA is original research exploring work-based problems, so for DBA proposals you will also need to show that what you'll be studying hasn't been done before.

• **Key research questions:** the aims and objectives of the research. What are the questions you'll be looking to answer? What are you hoping to find out? If undertaking original research, your hypothesis can be explained in this section. Be careful not to include an unachievable number of goals or be over-ambitious. Ambition is good but you must be able to actually carry out the things you have described.

• **Methodology:** how are you planning to do this research? What methods will you use? Are you looking for qualitative or quantitative data, or both? Will you be carrying out laboratory experiments or questionnaires? What options are open to you or what different methods could you use, and why have you chosen the ones you have? Where are you likely to access data from?

• **Expected results:** obviously you can't say what the results will be, because you haven't done the research yet. You can, however, explain what kinds of results you hope to achieve, such as a greater understanding of the way something works, a new method of doing something and so on. Think about how your research will affect or impact the subject area and your professional practice.

• **Timescale:** include a timescale, showing that you understand the need to plan your research carefully and have thought about how long the different tasks might take you. It doesn't need to be very detailed and it may of course change later, but it's essential that you show you've thought about whether your project is achievable in the time available. The Use of Gantt chart is a good way of demonstrating how your time will be allocated.

• **References:** include a list of the key texts you've referred to, in the format required by your School (in most cases at the University of Salford, this will be the Harvard referencing system).

**Some things to bear in mind**
• Don't choose something too broad: your research must be achievable. Your project might feel like it's going to last a long time, especially if it is a DBA, but be aware of how long different aspects of your research might take. You won't be able to answer every question about the topic, or look into every single aspect of a subject.

• Don't choose something vague: your proposal needs to be as defined as possible, as a proposal which is too vague will look like you haven't thought it through.

• Is there enough University expertise? Make sure there's somebody available to supervise your research. Don't propose to study a topic if there isn't a suitable supervisor within the School/University!

• Make sure you find it interesting: be sure to choose something you are interested in and passionate about and has relevance to your professional practice. You'll spend an awful lot of time studying it, so you must be committed to the topic.