The Henley DBA Programme

Notes on preparing your research outline

You will need to include an outline of your proposed research with your application to join the Doctor of Business Administration Programme. The purpose of these notes is to give you some guidance as you prepare your outline.

The nature of doctoral research in business and management

Research undertaken as part of the Henley DBA programme seeks to achieve both rigour and relevance and a contribution to both theory and practice.

The proposed area of research needs to be grounded in the relevant business and management literature and needs to make a contribution to that literature: for example by closing a gap in the literature or by extending an existing theory to new areas.

In addition, research undertaken for a DBA must be relevant to practising managers and to organisations. This means that the topic researched should be grounded in a problem faced by managers and organisations and that the results of the research should make a contribution to improving existing practice.

DBA research may fall within a specific subject area within business or management, such as finance, marketing or leadership, for example, but often research topics in business and management may often incorporate elements from multiple disciplines.

The research outline and the research proposal

The purpose of the research outline is twofold. Firstly, it will enable Henley Business School to assess whether your proposed area of research will be suitable for study for a DBA. Secondly it will enable Henley to be sure that it could provide appropriate supervisory support to help you to complete your research.

The DBA Programme is designed to help you to refine your ideas for research and to develop your competences to undertake that research. You will undertake a number of assessments, such as a literature review, a critique of a research methodology, data analysis assignments and a pilot study, to help you to develop the Research Proposal. Accordingly, the full Research Proposal will be developed within the DBA programme, and the research outline at the application stage is not expected to be a fully worked-out proposal.

Format for the research outline

The research outline will be a written document of between 4 and 6 pages (A4), and 1200-1800 words in length, and should be written in an appropriate academic style.
It should address the following key areas:

1. **The research area and research question:**
   This section should identify what you want to research in terms of the research question, or questions, you will address. Where appropriate you may be able to state the hypotheses that you will seek to test, but not all topics are amenable to the statement of hypotheses. You should seek to be as clear and specific as possible in stating your research problem or question.

2. **Significant prior research**
   You are not expected to have completed a full literature review but you should mention major research and important theoretical contributions, themes or issues in the area. You should also reference key authors who have informed your current thinking or who have contributed to the understanding of the topic.

3. **The importance of the research for theory and practice**
   This section addresses the question of whether the research is worthwhile. Accordingly, you should indicate concisely why there is a need for the research - both the literature and from the perspective of organisations.

4. **Your interest in the topic**
   Any research undertaken at doctoral level will present a challenge and it is important that you have a deep and enduring interest in the focus of the research. In addition, a DBA programme seeks to develop the individual researcher as well as an understanding of the topic. Accordingly, this section should briefly outline your motivation and interest in undertaking research in the area selected.

5. **Possible research approach or research methodology**
   This section relates to how the researcher proposes to approach the research. Although it is recognised that a detailed understanding of research methodology will be developed during the DBA, it is important to provide an indication of the intended methodology. For example, will a qualitative or quantitative methodology be appropriate, and will data be obtained using questionnaires, interviews, simulations, or existing data for example?

6. **The contribution you wish to make**
   In addition to showing that the research is important for theory and practice, doctoral research should make a contribution to that theory and practice. In terms of theory, this could be developing a new model to understand the relationships between variables, or developing our understanding of a new phenomenon for example. With regard to practice, the contribution could be to improve processes in organisations or to develop techniques to help managers. If possible, it would be helpful for you to outline what you think your contribution would be.

7. **Any other relevant information**
   Finally, you should provide any other information you consider relevant to support your application relating to the research area.
Important tips to ensure you present your Research Outline most effectively

- A potential and focused level of detail is expected throughout the research outline by moving between the broad academic and/or industry review and the DBA candidate’s added value in theory and practice, i.e. the research outcome is where the DBA candidate states in details the value s/he brings to different stakeholders in theory and practice.

- A section or sub-section (under one of the 7-key areas) on the Accordance of your research outline with one or more of the “Research Topics” at Henley Business School, will help the DBA academic committee to allocate the right available supervisor and/or set co/joint-supervision if necessary. Please see the below link to our available research topics:

  https://www.henley.ac.uk/study/phd-dba/doctor-of-business-administration-dba#research-topics

- Using key references in the literature review section, e.g. authoritative sources: academic books and papers, industry and consultancy reports, government white papers, etc., adds a core value and shows the gap in theory and practice. As mentioned above, the selected references need to balance between providing a broad review for the industry or the field of specialisation of the suggested research topic, on the other hand, they need to provide a level of detail to inform a focused research outline.

- Whilst it is helpful to breakdown a research topic into paragraphs or bullet-points to cover different related aspects, it is also important to give examples to demonstrate the argument in practice, which also helps the DBA candidate to reflect on her/his experience and specialised knowledge. Those examples might be models, systems, case studies, data sources, etc., which the DBA candidate thinks are relevant to the research scope.

- Using charts and tables or other graphical material (with reference in the text) makes complex arguments clear and presents the ideas effectively. The DBA candidate can use and reference in her/his research outline high resolution material from references in the literature review section or other sources.

- Please set all titles, text, etc. in the same style throughout the research outline.

- You may find this additional guidance helpful from the Graduate School website:

  https://www.reading.ac.uk/graduateschool/how-to-apply/gs-how-to-apply-pgr.aspx