

The Henley MSc/DBA Programme

Notes on preparing your research outline

You will need to include a short outline of your proposed research with your application to join the MSc/ 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 a DBA programme seeks to achieve both rigour and relevance and a contribution to both theory and to practice.

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

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.

At the same time the research outline will not be a fully worked-out proposal. The purpose of the MSc stage in the DBA Programme is to help you to refine your ideas for research and to develop your competences to undertake that research. Accordingly the Research Proposal is the final output of the MSc programme. You will undertake a number of assessments throughout the MSc, 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.

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 as 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 worth doing. Accordingly you should indicate concisely why there is a need for the research both from 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 the research has 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 MSc, 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 would be your contribution.

7. Any other relevant information

Finally you should provide any other information you consider relevant to support your application relating to the research area.