What is a research proposal?

The main purpose of a research proposal is to specify the following:

- Why the research problem warrants investigation;
- That the proposed methodology is appropriate and feasible within the timeframe;
- That the results make an original contribution to the research field and indicate areas for further research.

The research proposal provides an outline of the premise of what you are proposing to research. However, it is subject to adaptation as the research proceeds. It serves as a starting point for development and discussion with the assistance of your research supervisor.

Typically, the research proposal will include:

- Aims and objectives
- Statement of hypothesis or research ‘problem’
- Literature review of previous research in the area and justification for further research
- Proposed methodology
- Expected results and contribution to body of knowledge
- Requirements for equipment, materials, field trips, and funding (if applicable)
- Approximate time by which each stage will be completed

The length of the research proposal for the Laidlaw Programme is not restricted, but it should be concise, as long as required to explain your proposal in sufficient detail for the application stage and in simple terms which can be understood by a non-expert.

Aims and objectives

State the purpose of this piece of research. Then provide a detailed list of objectives, for example:

- Statement of hypothesis or research question (what is the question you’re trying to answer)
- Description of literature review
You should identify the context of your research and which key existing academic texts and researchers you will be developing from, and your rationale for doing so. Therefore you should identify which sources you are going to consult in which fields / areas and the rationale for doing so. You should demonstrate why the investigation and examination of selected research studies will contribute to your research.

Methodology

Why, Who, What, How and Where
The Methodology section can vary in length and content, depending upon the research topic and approach to investigation. This section should include a detailed explanation of the sample population, procedures, timelines, objectives, research limitations, type of data collection, ethical considerations, and method of analysis.

Why: restate research problem or hypothesis
Before describing the methodology it is a good idea to re-state the research problem before describing how this is to be researched.

Who: sample population
Define and describe the sample population and associated demographics (who are you investigating and where are they from?), Is there likely to be any bias or difficulties from the point of view of gender, age, race, sexuality, religious beliefs, political affiliation, educational level, etc. You must demonstrate that a sufficient number of subjects have been investigated so that there is a solid basis for your findings and claims.

Where: research environment
Will the research take place within a specified location, institution, range of institutions, or work-related environment.

What and How:
You should include a statement of whether the methodology is qualitative or quantitative or a combination, and why this method was suitable for research. Include a detailed explanation of data collection methods such as surveys, interviews, questionnaires, focus groups and case studies. You must demonstrate that you have analysed the advantages and limitations of your method of data collection.

Resources
Outline / describe the resources you will require to complete your research in terms of materials, equipment, costs.

Timeframe
Identify the timeframe for each stage of your research.