



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

ESALA - Research Proposals & Portfolios

When applying for a research degree in ESALA all applicants are required to submit a research proposal outlining the nature of the work they intend to undertake towards their degree.

As the research degree is an independently directed and intensive piece of research, the outcome of which is an MPhil/PhD thesis or MSc by Research dissertation, your initial research proposal is important. It is this that enables us to judge the scope and quality of your proposed research, as well as locate appropriate supervision.

A research proposal is a document that typically sets out the aims, questions, and methodologies of the intended research (see suggested format below for further detail). Postgraduate research inevitably changes over the course of a candidature, so a good proposal tends to chart plausible and suggestive directions for research rather than fixed issues. The formulation of a proposal will help us to discuss your research interests, how to structure them, and whether Edinburgh is the best place for you to pursue them.

It is important to explore the research interests that are represented within our subject area and detailed in the Research and Staff Profiles. Members of academic staff are happy to discuss your proposal. Please feel free to e-mail a member of academic staff if you have some affinity with an area of their work, or believe they would be suitable to supervise your project.

Suggested format of the research proposal

Please organise your proposal under the following headings and follow the suggested word lengths.

Abstract: summarize the aim, rationale and hypotheses of your proposed research. (200 words).

Outline: give a statement explaining what your proposed research topic is and a rationale for undertaking the research, i.e., why it is important or relevant? (400 words).

Intellectual Context: outline existing theoretical debates and/or empirical context for your proposed research; show how your proposed research relates to this body of knowledge. (400 words).

Main Research Questions: what specific issues or questions will your proposed research examine? (200 words).

Methodology: what method, or methods, will you use to address your research questions? (200 words). If your research is text based, discuss the documentary/theoretical/archival methods you will use to analyze your source materials. If you plan to undertake empirical work, outline some of the fieldwork techniques you might use. If you plan to work with non-textual media (drawings, models, video, photography), outline the techniques and exemplars that will guide your work.

Ethical Issues: note any ethical issues arising from your research (ethics can be interpreted in a broad sense as well as, for example, matters of consent and confidentiality).

Timetable: provide a timetable for your research. If you intend to do fieldwork overseas, or archival work, identify what this will entail and how it fits into the timetable.

Audience and/or User Community: if relevant, indicate how you expect your research to be useful, and to whom.

- [Further information from Student Recruitment and Admissions](#)

Portfolios

PhD Architecture by Design also requires the submission of a portfolio of recent work.

- For these programmes, the portfolio is the most important part of the application and these notes are intended to offer some guidance in preparing one.
- Members of the admissions panel are looking for highly motivated applicants with the skills and attributes that will enable them make the most of the programme. They want to form an understanding of how you, as an applicant, might benefit from and contribute to the programme. The portfolio is one the best devices we have to help form that judgment. It allows us to build up a picture of your capacities to draw, make things, think creatively, manipulate form, organize information, and handle ideas. Therefore it is important to consider carefully how you assemble your portfolio.

Format

- Portfolios should be presented digitally as PDF documents. The pages should be set up at A4 size, organised in 'landscape' format. Make sure the portfolio is saved as a single PDF file (i.e. not as lots of separately saved pages). On the first page of the portfolio incorporate your name and UUN, and on the pages immediately following include a brief CV and your personal statement. Present your design work in an intelligent and understandable way. Give the titles of projects, and annotate drawings etc. as required. Organise your work so that the admissions panel can see and appreciate your development.

Focus

- The focus of the portfolio should be on your best and most recent work. It should include representative examples of work undertaken as part of a formal programme of study, any work carried out while in practice, and self-initiated projects undertaken outside formal studies. As much as possible include a variety of work:
- **KIND:** architectural design, speculative projects, art, built, research;
- **SCALE:** furniture, buildings, urban design, regional studies;
- **MEDIA:** freehand drawings, technical drawings, computer drawings, models, sculptures, live performances, paintings, installations, video.
- It is important that your portfolio contains your best work. But do not limit this to presentation images alone. Include sketches, studies and working drawings. If possible, include examples from your design sketchbooks and notebooks.
- Not all undergraduate courses in architecture, art and design require students to keep sketchbooks or notebooks, so you may not have such material to hand. However, notes and sketches play an important part in design thinking and are important for demonstrating your capacity to investigate and explore in the medium of design.
- It is also important to present your most recent work. But, if you have had a longer period in practice or have a diverse educational, professional background, you should include work that would best show the wider scope and development of your career.
- Make sure that drawings, photographs, etc., appear at a high enough resolution to be clearly legible. However, avoid files that are so big that the PDF no longer runs quickly and smoothly.

Applicants are advised to contact the ECA Postgraduate Office ecaresearchdegrees@ed.ac.uk if they have any queries relating to research degrees prior to application.