



Guidelines for research plan when applying to the doctoral programme

The person applying to be admitted to the doctoral programme in law shall submit a research plan for their intended thesis project. The purpose of this research plan is 1) to show the relevance and importance of the intended project for legal science, 2) to show the applicants familiarity with the field the project covers, and 3) to indicate the feasibility of completing the project within the given timeframe of the doctoral studies – which includes an awareness of the methodological challenges and potential delimitations the project may entail.

General points of departure

- A general point of departure for the scope of the project should be that it can be completed through four years of full-time studies and result in a doctoral thesis of 200–400 pages.
- The research plan should not exceed 3000–4000 words including footnotes and bibliography and should be written in either Swedish or English.
- The structure of the research plan and its headings may vary, but to facilitate an evaluation of the research plan the aspects described below should be included.

Background and specific aim of the project

To show the relevance and importance of the project for the field of legal science, the research plan should start with a short background to the problem area or legal context subject to study within the intended project. This should then be further clarified and concretised in an overarching aim for the project, which may then be divided into more specific research questions. The aim of the project may change during the project within the confines of the more overarching context of the study but should be so concrete in the research plan as to allow for an assessment of the academic potential of the project.

A viable research project tends to aim for something beyond restating existing sources of law or previous research (i.e. a doctoral thesis is something different than a textbook or a legal summary). The research plan should therefore clarify the project's intended contributions in terms of new knowledge or insights. Such an independent contribution may consist of e.g. systematisation and analysis of existing law; critical analysis of the ability of applicable law within the area to live up to formal or substantive legal values; construction of theory or the application of theoretical perspectives on the law; interpretation and synthesis of case law; analysis of legal developments and their driving forces; analysis of conflicting objectives, balancing of interests, legal economic effects, issues of legal certainty or rule of law, etc.

In addition to the above-mentioned background and aim, the research plan should also include a more in-depth description of the research questions the project aims to answer and their relevance to the overarching aim of the project.



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Methodology and theory

The research plan should include a description of the methods used in the project to answer the research questions and why these methods have been chosen. The description should aim to be as concrete as possible taking into account that the project is in an early planning stage. It should include a description of any potential problems or risks the methods may imply and how these are to be handled within the project.

In this context, the materials used in the study should be discussed in relation to the chosen methods.

If theoretical frameworks or perspectives are used, these should be described and justified in the research plan.

Existing research

A doctoral thesis project, like other research, are intended to provide new knowledge. The research plan should therefore show that the applicant is familiar with existing research and explain how the proposed project will build upon and/or be distinguished from previous research within the area. The novelty of the project can be shown by e.g. illustrating gaps or weaknesses in the existing research; the need for new perspectives or theoretical approaches; or by showing significant changes in either the law or the surrounding society that necessitates new research in a previously explored area. The description of previous research should be stringent and focused on analysing differences in relation to the proposed project.

Matters of form

As mentioned above, the research plan should not exceed 3000–3500 words including footnotes and bibliography and should be written in either Swedish or English. It should include citations to sources used and a bibliography. The format of citations and bibliography should be consistent and provide sufficient information to identify and locate cited sources.