Aim

The essay should provide a comprehensive review of the literature specifically focused in the area of research of the student. It should demonstrate an understanding of the field of research and a firm grasp of competing hypotheses in the area. It should place the student’s area of research in context and clarify why their research is important. It should provide an opportunity for the student to demonstrate ‘ownership of their project’. Students are advised that much of their literature review can be utilised in the introductory chapter to their confirmation review mini-thesis and their final thesis. In addition, students should gain experience of scientific writing, literature searching, use of a reference manager, contents page tools and figure construction.

Format

The review should be referenced appropriately in author date style using a reference manager such as Endnote. Text should be in 1.5 line spacing with a block font (e.g. Arial) of 12 point. The review should contain a minimum of 3 figures or tables, and where appropriate a summary figure for the review should be included. It should be organised into sections (with numbering) using appropriate headings and subheadings and a contents page should be included. Pages should be numbered consecutively. Marks will be deducted for failure to comply with these guidelines. The essay length is flexible, but as a guideline, the main body of the essay should be approximately 4000 words, and the entire essay should not exceed 30 pages of A4.

Marking scheme

The literature review is marked out of 100%. The pass mark is 65%. The assessor must consider, as a whole, if they consider the review to be of a standard appropriate for an individual undertaking an MD or PhD degree. If they do not, the mark should be below 65%. To give some idea of the standards that would be expected, a mark of 70% would be awarded to an essay that shows evidence of careful review of the literature, critical appraisal of most of the papers cited, is well organised and flows logically, complies with the formatting criteria and has only minor grammatical errors if any. A mark of 100% would be awarded to a literature review that could be submitted to a target journal without any further work. An essay that is incomplete and not a systematic review of the literature, which shows very little evidence of critical evaluation of the papers cited, is poorly structured, falls short of the formatting criteria and inconsistent use of grammar and spelling should be allocated a mark below 65%.