

Frequently Asked Questions

AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Landscape Award Funding Opportunity

Version	Date of Publication	Comments
1	July 2024	Content based on questions as during a live webinar held on the 8 th of May 2025 and enquiries received in relation to this funding opportunity.

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Introduction

This document covers aspects of the funding opportunity but does not duplicate content from the funding opportunity. Please see [the full funding opportunity](#) and the FAQ's before you approach the ARHC for advice.

1. Eligibility

1.1 Who is eligible to apply for this funding opportunity?

Non higher education institutions (Non-HEI) in the UK with capacity to host doctoral students, including galleries, libraries, museums, archives, creative industries, and public/third sector organisations.

1.2 Can a non-HEI that has never held awards under the AHRC's Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) scheme apply?

Yes, non-HEIs do not need to have held awards under the AHRC CDP scheme to be eligible.

1.3 Does a small non-HEI have to partner with an HEI to apply?

No, it is not a requirement for a smaller non-HEI to partner with a Higher Education Institution (HEI) to apply. The lead organisation must be able to demonstrate that it meets the eligibility criteria set out in the scheme guidance, including having the appropriate infrastructure, experience, and capacity to support doctoral students effectively.

1.4 What constitutes a 'smaller, less experienced' non-HEI?

There is no fixed definition of what constitutes a 'smaller, less experienced' organisation. It is up to each organisation to assess and determine whether they have the appropriate capacity, resources, and experience to host a student.

If an organisation feels they may not be fully equipped to do so independently, they are encouraged to consider partnering with a more experienced organisation or joining a consortium. We would expect any such consideration to be clearly addressed in the application.

1.5 Can non-HEIs apply as a part of a consortium?

Yes, non-HEIs can apply as an individual organisation, as a consortium of non-HEI organisations, or with a university partner in specific circumstances.

1.6 Can a non-HEI be part of more than one consortium?

Yes, a non-HEI can be part of more than one consortium, but a single department may only be part of one consortium.

1.7 Is it possible to submit multiple bids (Sole and in partnership)?

Organisations may be involved in more than one proposal; however, there are important restrictions to be aware of.

- A single department may only be part of one consortium. In all cases, proposals must include a strong rationale for the partnership and the choice of partners involved.
- If a non-HEI organisation is included in multiple proposals, it is not permissible for a department that was part of an unsuccessful bid to access students from a successful bid involving the same organisation.

1.8 Can a consortium of multiple non-HEI organisations still partner with an HEI?

No, a consortium of non-HEIs would not need a university partner from the AHRC's perspective and would not be eligible to apply with a university partner. The option to partner with a HEI is only open to smaller non-HEIs, or those with less experience of supporting doctoral students.

1.9 Can HEI and HEI departments partner in more than one application?

Although we have not stated whether a Higher Education Institution can partner with more than one smaller/less experienced non-HEI, there would need to be a clear rationale for doing so and the HEI partner would need to demonstrate that it has the capacity to support more than one non-HEI organisation. The decision for partnering with a HEI needs to be taken by the non-HEI, according to their needs, as the non-HEI is the lead organisation on the application and on the award, if successful.

1.10 Are university museums and galleries eligible to apply?

Yes, university museums and galleries, or other HEI-managed organisations, are eligible to apply.

However, if successful, no more than 50% of the doctoral projects that are subsequently selected for nomination to the AHRC may be in collaboration with the parent HEI. This ensures a diversity of partnerships and supports the collaborative aims of the scheme.

1.11 Are private Higher Education providers considered non-HEI?

No, private Higher Education providers do not fall under the definition of a non-HEI for the purpose of this scheme.

1.12 Can a charity eligible for AHRC funding as an Independent Research Organisation (IRO) apply as a non-HEI?

Yes, public and third sector organisations including those eligible for AHRC funding as an IRO can apply as a non-HEI.

1.13 Can you apply as an arts organisation that offers Higher Education degrees but without degree awarding powers?

Yes, an arts organisation that offers higher education degrees but does not have its own degree awarding powers can apply. It is not a requirement of the scheme to hold degree awarding powers. However, the lead organisation must demonstrate that it meets the eligibility criteria and has the capacity to support doctoral students. Further details about the aims and requirements of the scheme can be found on the UKRI website: [Collaborative doctoral landscape award in the arts and humanities – UKRI](#).

If successful, the organisation would be considered a non-HEI within the scheme. This means that all studentships must be developed in collaboration with a HEI that holds degree awarding powers. It would be the partner HEI that would hold the studentship funding. The scheme requires non-HEIs to work with a variety of HEIs to host their studentships, which means you are not permitted to use a single HEI to award the studentships. These HEIs will be responsible for registering and awarding the degree for doctoral students.

1.14 Is the focus only on cultural and collection type organisations or other types of organisations such as policy/legal research bodies?

Eligibility is not limited to cultural or collection-based organisations. Policy and legal research bodies may also apply, provided they meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the funding opportunity guidance.

Applicants must demonstrate that they undertake research within their organisation and can provide a high-quality doctoral training environment for doctoral students.

1.15 Can small/micro non-HEIs partner with HEIs for supervision?

Smaller or less experienced non-HEIs can apply in partnership with a Higher Education Institution (HEI); however, it is important to note that partnering solely for supervision purposes is not sufficient under this scheme.

- Application-level partnership: A non-HEI may partner with a HEI as part of their collaborative doctoral landscape application. In this context, the HEI provides additional assurance around the overall framework of student support, particularly where the non-HEI has limited experience in supporting doctoral students.
- Project-led collaboration: As with all collaborative doctoral awards, each studentship must involve co-supervision between the non-HEI and a HEI. This ensures that students benefit from a robust collaborative supervisory model, with clear contributions and responsibilities from both partners.

Partnering solely for supervision purposes, without a meaningful collaborative structure at both the application and project levels, would not meet the requirements of the scheme.

1.16 Can small/micro non-HEIs partner with larger non-HEI for the placement/ practical part of the call?

Smaller or less experienced non-HEIs can include other organisations, such as larger non-HEIs as project partners to provide placement opportunities and/or to co-supervise specific elements of doctoral projects, where capacity allows. This would be in addition to the period spent in the

non-HEI as part of the joint supervision of the student and their project. It is expected that the student will spend between 3 months and two years at the non-HEI partner organisation.

1.17 What counts as a 'department'? Would this be directorate or team level for organisations who have this kind of internal structure?

All organisations are structured differently so we are not prescriptive on what constitutes the equivalent of a department for a particular organisation. The key point is that, if the organisation is involved in more than one application, there must be a clear distinction between the parts of the organisation (and associated staff) involved in each one as they cannot be involved in both.

You would need to consider the possible positive and negative impacts of splitting your portfolio in this way. Please note, that if a department were part of an unsuccessful bid, it would not be eligible to host students if the wider non-HEI received an award.

2. Funding and Duration

2.1 What is the duration of the award?

The award supports four years of student intake starting in October 2027, with each studentship lasting four years.

2.2 What funding does the non-HEI receive as part of the award?

The non-HEI does not receive funding for these awards. Instead, they will receive a notional number of studentships.

2.3 What does 'notional' number of studentships mean?

Non-HEIs are unable to hold AHRC student funding, instead, the Collaborative doctoral landscape award holder will receive an allocation of studentship awards per year. Each year, they will go through a process of working with university partners to select the collaborative doctoral projects they wish to support to allocate these studentship awards.

AHRC is informed of the project choices and the funding for each doctoral studentship is paid directly to the academic partner involved. The non-HEI will then work with the university to recruit a student to the project.

2.4 How many studentships does AHRC intend to offer per year?

Up to 50 studentships per year for four years.

2.5 What is the minimum number of studentships an applicant can apply for per year?

Applicants can apply for a minimum of three studentships per year. However, for smaller, less experienced non-HEIs, the AHRC offers flexibility by reducing the minimum requirement to two studentships per year, provided a clear rationale is given.

2.6 What counts as 'exceptional circumstances' for allowing two studentships rather than the three minimum?

While we are not prescriptive about what constitutes 'exceptional circumstances,' applicants requesting to host only two students (rather than the standard three per year) must provide a clear and well-justified rationale.

This could include, for example, cases where a small or micro non-HEI has the relevant experience and expertise to lead a bid independently, without the need for a university partner, but does not have the capacity to support three studentships per year.

2.7 Does the collaborative doctoral partnership award provide funding to cover non-HEI costs?

We do not provide funding for administration or non-HEI costs associated with setting up and delivering the training grant.

2.8 What kind of institutional funding is provided to support supervision etc?

We do not provide funding for administration costs or non-HEIs costs for this opportunity.

2.9 What level of support are the collaborative doctoral landscape award holding organisation expected to provide?

In-Kind support from collaborative doctoral landscape award holders is mandatory, such as supervision, access to facilities, and to support the students when they are working at the non-HEI and to engage with the cohort programme.

Additionally, the organisation is expected to make a financial contribution to the students recruited, recognising the higher costs which doctoral students may incur in undertaking a collaborative project, especially where the non-HEI and HEI are geographically distant.

2.10 Will non-HEIs have to provide cash matched funding?

No, there is no formal match funding requirement for non-HEIs or HEIs under this opportunity.

However, collaborative doctoral landscape award holders are expected to provide in-kind support and make a financial contribution to support the students they recruit.

While these contributions are not mandatory in terms of match funding, they are considered an important part of demonstrating commitment to the partnership and to the student experience.

2.11 What costs are covered by the studentships?

Studentships include funds to meet the UKRI minimum stipend and indicative fee levels, research costs in the form of a research training support grant (RTSG), and a stipend uplift to

reflect the collaborative nature of the award. The studentship funding is paid directly to the academic partner involved. London weighting is included, as applicable.

2.12 Does the 4 years of a funded PhD include the writing up year?

The four-year period is to enable students to undertake development opportunities and be supported up to thesis submission. This moves away from an unfunded 'writing up' year. This is in line with [UKRI's Training Grant Guidance](#): TGC 5 (Mode and duration of studentship): 'Councils expect doctoral projects to be designed and supervised in such a way that Students are able to submit their thesis within the funded period, as defined at the outset of the project'.

2.13 Who decides which HEIs are awarded the studentships?

In this funding model, it is the successful non-HEI organisation that receives the award, which includes a notional number of studentships. It is then the responsibility of the non-HEI to identify and collaborate with suitable Higher Education Institutions to deliver these studentships.

3. Supervision

3.1 What does 'less' or 'more' experienced mean in terms of PGR supervision?

We are not prescriptive on what defines 'less' or 'more' experienced and it is up to non-HEIs to determine their level of experience, based on the criteria and guidance provided.

Applicants must demonstrate that they have sufficient staff capacity and expertise to support the number of studentships requested. This includes outlining the supervisory experience of staff involved and how that experience will be used and supported.

Applicants are encouraged to show how their supervisory model will ensure high-quality support, continuity, and institutional commitment.

3.2 Can non-HEIs use associated staff/external members as supervisors?

Non-HEIs are expected to provide a primary supervisor who is an employee of the organisation. This ensures consistent, accountable support for the student and helps build supervisory capacity within the non-HEI.

However, we recognise the benefit of drawing on external expertise. Associated staff or external members can be included as co-supervisors, particularly where they bring valuable knowledge or experience that complements the supervisory team. This can be especially useful in interdisciplinary or practice-based projects.

Applicants should ensure that supervisory arrangements are robust, with clear lines of responsibility and support. Where external supervisors are involved, applications should explain how continuity, quality and institutional commitment will be maintained throughout the studentship.

3.3 Will non-HEIs involved in co-supervision (not leading a project) with an HEI be deemed 'less experienced' for this opportunity?

Not necessarily, if they have extensive experience of co-supervision and can make the case that they have sufficient staff capacity and capability to lead an award. Applicants may want to show how they will make the transition from partnering to leading on studentship projects and are confident that they can support the proposed number of studentships over the period.

3.4 What is the time commitment needed to co-supervise each PhD?

The time commitment needed to co-supervise a PhD will vary depending on the structure of the supervisory team, the nature of the project, the stage of the student's research and the amount of support they need. One useful route may be to reach out to current CDP Coordination Group via cdp@vam.ac.uk, who may be able to offer advice.

As a general guide, co-supervisors are expected to be meaningfully engaged in the student's development and research progress. Applicants should ensure that supervisory arrangements are realistic, clearly defined, and proportionate to the responsibilities of each supervisor.

4. Cohort development and student development opportunities.

4.1 What is the purpose of the Coordination Group?

The Coordination Group aims to facilitate a network to enhance the training and development opportunities available to students, share good practice among award holders, and build a community across the diverse organisations involved in the scheme.

4.2 Will the new independent coordination group replace the CDP4 group?

The Coordination Group will be a central component of the collaborative doctoral landscape awards. While the structure and leading of the coordination group may evolve, the group itself will continue to operate as a key part of the new awards along with responsibility for supporting any remaining CDP awards and studentships.

4.3 Are all successful non-HEIs and consortia expected to work together to support the cohort development programme?

Award holders are expected to work together to deliver a programme of cohort training and facilitate students' engagement with it.

4.4 Will AHRC provide additional funding to support student cohort development and the coordination groups activities?

Yes, AHRC will provide additional funding to support cohort development via a separate award to the coordination group. The coordination group award holder will also be a CDP or collaborative doctoral landscape award holder.

4.5 What commitments should non-HEI organisations make to support student development?

It is important that non-HEI organisation offer more than access to resources, collections or archives. AHRC will be looking for commitment to student development activities including placements and opportunities for students to be involved in the organisation on a wider scale.

4.6 How do Collaborative Doctoral Landscape award placements relate to the PhD?

Placements can be offered as part of the collaborative doctoral landscape studentships and, if offered, would form an integral part of the doctoral experience under the collaborative doctoral landscape award. They are designed to complement the doctoral research by providing students with meaningful development opportunities that enhance their research skills, professional experience, and career readiness.

5. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

5.1 Is an EDI action plan required for this opportunity?

Yes, applicants must ensure their EDI action plan demonstrates how they will embed the core principles of EDI at all levels and across all aspects of the collaborative doctoral landscape award.

5.2 What are your expectations in terms of EDI plans and are there any specific targets?

Applicants will need to include an EDI action plan within the collaborative doctoral landscape application. You need to ensure that your EDI action plan is clearly defined within your overall response for the positive culture and environment question.

Your plan must be evidence-based, that is include baseline data and be updated throughout the lifetime of the grant in line with data you regularly collect through relevant sector reports, including emerging impacts and needs.

EDI is one of the assessment criteria which will be considered by panel members when applications are assessed, therefore, AHRC expects these plans to be grounded in evidence, well-articulated, and addressing the needs of the community. AHRC has not set any specific targets, but applicants are expected to propose actions to reduce underrepresentation in the arts and humanities doctoral community.

You are encouraged to use the following headings in the EDI action plan but not limited to them. Please include any additional areas of EDI activity.

- increasing PhD access
- working practices
- supervision and supervisory teams
- wellbeing support
- monitoring and evaluation

5.3 What types of baseline data can be used as evidence?

A: Baseline data can be from sector reports rather than being specific to doctoral students and/or your organisation. You can also use data collected as part of a Collaborative Doctoral Partnership award (if applicable).

6. Assessment Process

6.1 How long is the assessment process and when will we receive the outcomes of our application?

Please see the opportunity on the UKRI funding finder. The funding opportunity closes for applications on 20th November 2025. AHRC hopes to announce the outcomes in May 2026. This is for students to start in October 2027.

6.2 Will you provide feedback to all applicants, successful and unsuccessful?

We will provide feedback with the outcome of your application.

6.3 Where are embedded images allowed and what sections?

You may demonstrate elements of your responses to the application questions in visual form if relevant. Further details are provided in the Funding Service.

7. Other categories of questions related to Collaborative Doctoral Landscape awards and other AHRC doctoral investments.

7.1 Can AHRC confirm that the CDA Landscape Awards scheme is replacing the CDP scheme?

Collaborative Doctoral Landscape awards follow the same model as the collaborative doctoral partnership scheme, with some minor changes to widen institutional participation.

7.2 Are there mechanisms for obtaining feedback on draft applications?

AHRC is unable to provide feedback on draft applications. Applicants are encouraged to carefully review the published guidance and FAQs, and to ensure their proposals align with the aims and requirements of the opportunity.

7.3 Are there thematic priorities AHRC is more likely to fund?

There are no specific thematic priorities under this opportunity.

7.4 How is world-class expertise defined in this context, and what indicators are used to demonstrate it?

Applicants should evidence the quality of their research environment, which would include both expertise and infrastructure that will be available to support doctoral students. Applicants should demonstrate a strong commitment to postgraduate research and the capacity to deliver high-quality doctoral training. This may include relevant experience, alignment with organisational research strategies, and clear plans for managing the award effectively. It will be for the panel to assess whether the case has been made.

7.5 What is the typical size of the consortium/partnerships applying for funding?

There is no set or typical size for consortia applying, the scheme is designed to be flexible, and partnerships can vary significantly depending on the organisations involved and the structure of the proposed programme.

You can find a list of organisations funded under previous Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships (CDPs) on the AHRC website. These examples illustrate the range and scale of partnerships that have been supported in the past.

7.6 Could a staff member with a research master's become a doctoral student?

Yes, a staff member who holds a research master's degree can apply to become a doctoral student under the collaborative landscape award scheme. However, they must follow the same application and selection process as any other prospective student and meet all relevant eligibility and academic requirements.

7.7 Will AHRC run any matchmaking for small/micro-organisations to find partnerships with existing or experienced CDP holders?

AHRC will not be running a formal matchmaking process for this funding opportunity. However, we encourage smaller or less experienced organisations to proactively explore potential partnerships. One useful route may be to reach out to current CDP Coordination Group via cdp@vam.ac.uk, who may be able to offer advice or signpost opportunities for collaboration.

7.8 How do CDPs relate to the landscape awards? Will both continue to exist?

The collaborative doctoral landscape awards are part of a broader shift in how UKRI supports doctoral training. In May 2022, UKRI announced its transition to collective talent funding, which led to the launch of the UKRI Doctoral Investment Framework in November 2023.

From 2024, all UKRI doctoral support has been framed around two types of awards:

- Doctoral Landscape Awards, which provide a broad, stable base of funding to support strategic, discovery-led doctoral training.
- Doctoral Focal Awards, which respond to specific, time-limited strategic priorities.

The collaborative doctoral landscape awards align with this new framework and reflect UKRI's collective approach across Research Councils.

AHRC will be supporting both Collaborative Doctoral Landscape Awards and Doctoral Landscape Awards. These are independent of each other, though engagement between awards is welcomed. Further information related to AHRC Landscape awards can be found on the UKRI website using the following link: [AHRC confirms first doctoral landscape awards – UKRI](#)

7.9 Can AHRC confirm that CDAs will still be possible within the new HEI-led doctoral landscape scheme?

Yes, collaborative doctoral awards (CDA) remain a key feature of AHRC's doctoral training offer, they can be supported through the doctoral landscape awards and the doctoral focal awards.

The collaborative doctoral landscape awards are specifically designed to support collaborative doctoral training.

7.10 Does AHRC monitor the number and outcomes of current CDAs within HEI-led DTCs?

AHRC does not support HEI-led DTCs. If this is a reference to the Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTP2), we do not systematically monitor collaborative awards that the DTP training grants support.

7.11 Is there an expectation for collaborative doctoral landscape award students to engage with the regional hubs?

There is no expectation for the collaborative doctoral landscape award students to engage with the Landscape award regional hubs. However, we welcome engagement across AHRC-funded awards and training grants where appropriate, as this can help extend development opportunities and build connections among students and research organisations.

7.12 Which type of TFS account should I use to submit an application?

We recommend that the lead applicant submits the application through an institutional TFS account. Using an institutional account ensures appropriate oversight, access for colleagues, and alignment with UKRI's submission requirements.

If your organisation does not yet have an institutional TFS account, we advise setting one up as early as possible to avoid delays. Please refer to the [opportunity](#) for full details.

7.13 Is there an AHRC contact Email?

For questions related to this specific funding opportunity please contact Skills@ahrc.ukri.org.

7.14 Will the Q&A from the webinar be available to attendees afterwards?

The recording will be uploaded to [the UKRI for Researchers YouTube channel](#). Therefore, any questions that were answered within the Q&A part of the webinar can be reviewed in the [recordings](#) and are available both to attendees and the wider community.