



AHRC 'Crafting Care for People, Place and Planet'

Doctoral Focal College

Application Guidance for 2027 Entry

Please read this guidance document in full before completing an Expression of Interest.

Introduction

This document is intended for those who wish to apply for Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding from the 'Crafting Care for People, Place and Planet' Doctoral Focal College to undertake a PhD at the University of Lancashire, University of Liverpool, or Royal Northern College of Music. The guidance below sets out eligibility for awards, expectations of funding, and the application process.

Financial basis of the awards

A 'Crafting Care' PhD Studentship consists of:

- Payment of academic fees, at the standard UKRI Home rate (£5,238 in 2026/27, exact rate for 2027/28 subject to confirmation from UKRI).
- Maintenance Stipend (£21,805 in 2026/27, exact rate for 2027/28 subject to confirmation from UKRI).
- Access to a Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) for reimbursement of research related expenses including - but not limited to - conference attendance and training courses.

Nine studentships are available for October 2027 Entry. The standard length of our studentships will be three and a half years, for full-time study. A longer period of funding may be awarded where a student requires additional advanced training, is working with a non-HEI Partner on a Collaborative Doctoral Award, or when a student completes a placement during their studies. Students opting to study part-time will receive a pro rata maintenance grant of the equivalent of a full-time award.

Students will receive additional Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) to support reasonable adjustments where appropriate. To ensure reasonable adjustments are in place ahead of studentships commencing, students who are awarded funding are encouraged to commence the process of seeking DSA ahead of their start date. More details will be provided in funding offer letters when successful.

Residential Eligibility

Studentships are open to both Home and International (including EU and EEA) candidates.

Please note that the studentships will only fund tuition fees up to the Home rate. This is £5,238 in 2026/27 (exact rate for 2027/28 subject to confirmation from UKRI). International tuition fees are usually substantially higher than this sum. All three universities have committed to waiving increased tuition fees for international 'Crafting Care' students, so international students recruited to these studentships will not be expected to pay any additional tuition fees themselves.

Please also be aware that a maximum of 30% of our studentships can be awarded to international students each year i.e. two studentships will be available for international students in 2027.

To be classed as a home student, candidates must meet the following criteria:

- Be a UK National (meeting residency requirements), or
- Have settled status, or
- Have pre-settled status (meeting residency requirements), or
- Have indefinite leave to remain or enter

If a candidate does not meet the criteria, they will be classed as an international student.

This will not apply to Irish nationals living in the UK whose right to study and to access benefits and services are preserved on a reciprocal basis under the Common Travel Area arrangement. Such applicants will be classified as Home students.

You must refer to the UKRI Terms and Conditions for Training Grants for full details

<https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/grant-terms-and-conditions/>

Academic Eligibility

Candidates applying for a PhD will usually have undertaken both an undergraduate and a master's course though the college's emphasis on Preparedness for Postgraduate Research reflects the commitment to recognising also non-traditional pathways to PhD study and expertise by experience. Typically, candidates will have undertaken undergraduate and master's courses at a recognised UK Higher Education Institution (HEI), although applications with qualifications from outside the UK are welcome. It will be necessary to ascertain whether such qualifications equate to a UK honours degree, and at what level. Assessments of qualifications attained outside the UK are based on the British Council's NARIC guide. For non-UK qualification transcripts not in English, an official translation must be provided with the application form.

The AHRC 'Crafting Care' Doctoral Focal College is unable to accept applications from current students who have already commenced PhD programmes – only prospective PhD students may apply.

'Crafting Care' Interdisciplinary Themes

Every prospective student who applies to the college must be proposing a research project that fits within one of the following four Interdisciplinary Themes:

- **Care as Craft**

We are looking for expressions of interest concerned with cultural and community traditions of care practices in relation to human and more-than-human health. We welcome proposals which interrogate how histories of healthcare offer a perspective on the ideological hierarchies, systems and institutions that shape our conceptual and affective responses to care, and/or which engage closely with archives and collections (physical and/or digital), concepts, aesthetics, and methods that are central to crafting and curating healthcare care in the past. Curation is itself a form of care (see 'Curating the Future'), implying both careful protection and selection (of artefacts, events, data, ideas, methodologies) pertaining to (health)care related histories, or ecosystems (biomedical, indigenous, traditional), or ethics, for example. We welcome projects that explore how we can curate, as well as communicate, (health)care more carefully and effectively, as well as projects that, for example, foreground activism as a more agentic form of care relating to human or environmental health.

Proposals might explore practices of curation (e.g. historic and emergent forms of anthologisation, exhibitions, and taxonomy). Alternatively, proposals might consider how current discourses around fourth wave feminism, decolonisation, environmental humanities, or crip theory, change approaches to particular historical archives, databases, and collections. How do we educate about care of people, place or planet across different periods and contexts? How might students and educators of the history of health, including gallerists and archivists, redesign aspects of pedagogy to ensure inclusive practices of careful curation which respond to people with different needs and lived experiences, or to different political moments/movements?

- **Ecologies of Care**

This interdisciplinary theme invites proposals that use place-led approaches to explore the health-environment nexus, from impacts of ecosystem change on chronic/infectious disease to effects of arts/nature-led community groups on human and more-than-human health. We are looking for proposals that engage with the capacity of spaces and places (where space is given meaning through history, cultural memory and connections to cultural or personal identity) to foster human and planetary health. We welcome interdisciplinary approaches to shaping spaces and places for care, redressing social injustices and reducing health inequalities, working with communities and protecting the wellbeing of both people and planet.

Proposed projects may include, but are not limited to: how heritage landscapes and environments (canals, waterways, forests, parks and coastlines) and their associated histories, traditions and cultural practices foster attachment to place, cultural identity, connection and wellbeing; how arts, creative and cultural practices help people (particularly marginalised or under-represented groups) access health and wellbeing benefits of nature, heritage and other environments; how creative and cultural engagement fosters connection, participation and social inclusion, strengthening relationships between people and places, and contributing to healthier, more resilient communities and environments; how caring for trees, woodland, waterways, coastlines and other habitats can improve physical and mental health, strengthen communities and encourage environmental stewardship of planetary health; how heritage, culture and creativity can help communities respond to climate and ecological crises, by exploring the past impacts of heat, flooding and extreme weather, and imagining more sustainable and resilient environmental futures.

- **Creativity and Care**

This theme invites expressions of interest that engage with the capacity of arts and creative practices to catalyse, at individual and structural/systemic levels, new experience and innovative thinking in relation to health and wellbeing by: transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries; fostering community and meaningful relational connections; representing and redressing social injustices and health inequalities; giving voice and expression to the lived experience of marginalised or under-represented groups; capturing aspects of health and care experience which official reporting methods overlook or neglect. We welcome projects that explore how arts-based approaches can both interrogate and shape understandings of care practices, environments and experiences, as well as stimulate creative research methods and approaches which contribute to a more diverse, and more widely disseminated, knowledge base in respect of health and care.

Projects might include, but are not limited to, how arts-based initiatives or approaches can: create networks of care beyond social service models which sustain wellbeing across human and more than human worlds; empower marginalised groups to communicate health needs and access resources; constitute a form of activism by illuminating and intervening in care injustices; narrate (verbal and non-verbal) experiences of place for groups whose perception of the environment are rarely considered to help shape landscapes of care; prioritise artistic (affective/subjective) modes of attention to experiences, environments and practices of health and care as alternatives to objectifying or clinical procedures; privilege the complexities and diversities of personal experience over standardised medical or scientific accounting.

- **Curating the Future**

This theme is interested in practices of “curating” (etymologically “taking-care-of”) the “future” in the broadest sense. We welcome proposals that respond to emergent social, environmental, and health challenges across different scales, from the local to the global. Projects might focus on the imagination of possible futures: how, for example, writers, artists, policymakers, or particular communities articulate adaptive strategies in relation to phenomena such as climate change, ecocide, AI, ageing populations, novel pathogens. What sorts of conflicts, ecologies, social phenomena, or care practices could manifest in these futures? What sort of technologies, political formations or narratives might catalyse change? We are also interested in histories of the future, in what might be learned from failed or alternate visions of futurity that have emerged at different points in time: whether they take the form of utopian dreams or apocalyptic visions.

Some "Curating the Future" projects might engage with the future of curation itself. We welcome proposals on how decolonial, ecocritical, crip, or queer theory, changes approaches to archives, data, or collections: particularly those associated with the institutions in the Crafting Care network such as University of Liverpool's world-leading Science Fiction collection or National Museum Liverpool's rich resources in natural history. How might neighbourhoods, online platforms, national parks, or city centres re-curate themselves for the challenges of climate change? How might museums and galleries draw out hidden histories of health and medicine to imagine more inclusive futures?

Permeating across this theme is a question of curating more just, pleasurable, equitable, and liveable futures in the face of shifting local and global challenges.

Equal Opportunities Monitoring

Please ensure you complete and submit an EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES MONITORING FORM with your application. This will not be made available to those reviewing your funding application but will be used to survey equality and diversity of applicants and our funded students.

Application Process

Please note that the 'Crafting Care' Doctoral Focal College strongly discourages the use of Generative AI in the development of PhD proposals, in keeping with our ethos of care for the environment, for the originality and creativity of thinking, and for the future integrity of research.

The studentship application process consists of two phases:

1. Expression of Interest Phase

Candidates are invited to submit an Expression of Interest form by the 1st December 2026. On the Expression of Interest form candidates are asked to outline their preliminary ideas for a PhD project and detail their 'Preparedness for Postgraduate Research'. Based on this information, the AHRC 'Crafting Care' Academic Management Committee will shortlist up to 20 candidates who will be invited to progress to the next phase.

2. Research Proposal Phase

Candidates who are shortlisted at the Expression of Interest phase will be contacted in early January and invited to submit a full Research Proposal by the 1st April 2027. In addition to the full Research Proposal itself, candidates will be asked to reflect on ethical considerations, additional funding needs, and – if invited to apply for a [Collaborative Doctoral Award](#) – the plans with the non-HEI Partner.

Shortlisted candidates should also submit an admissions application to their chosen university at this stage:

- [Royal Northern College of Music](#), Deadline 13th January 2027
- [University of Lancashire](#), Deadline 15th March 2027
- [University of Liverpool](#), Deadline 15th March 2027

Collaborative Doctoral Awards

The AHRC ‘Crafting Care’ Doctoral Focal College incorporates ten non-university (or ‘non-HEI’) Partners in the work of the college. Each year, up to two ‘Crafting Care’ studentships will take the form of Collaborative Doctoral Awards, where the PhD project is formally co-supervised by an expert from one of our non-HEI Partners.

Candidates may want to indicate in their Expression of Interest abstract if they think their project would particularly benefit from co-supervision by a non-HEI Partner. When reviewing the Expressions of Interest from prospective candidates, the AHRC ‘Crafting Care’ Academic Management Committee will consider which proposed projects may benefit most from collaboration with a non-HEI Partner. Up to three of the candidates shortlisted to progress to the full Research Proposal stage will be formally paired with one of the college’s non-HEI Partners to develop a Collaborative Doctoral Award proposal. If successful in securing funding, PhD candidates in receipt of a Collaborative Doctoral Award will receive a longer period of studentship (four years) and a small stipend uplift (an extra £600 per annum).

The AHRC ‘Crafting Care’ Doctoral Focal College’s non-HEI Partners are:

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| • Alder Hey Children’s Hospital | • Mersey Care NHS Trust |
| • Canal and River Trust | • National Museums Liverpool |
| • DaDa | • Royal Liverpool Philharmonic |
| • Liverpool Biennial | • The Mersey Forest |
| • Liverpool Heart and Chest Hospital | • Wirral Council Public Health |

More information about our non-HEI Partners can be found here: <https://ahrc-crafting-care.ac.uk/home/our-partners/>

If a candidate is not formally invited to submit a Collaborative Doctoral Award proposal, they may still wish to approach one of the non-HEI Partners to collaborate informally on aspects of their project. The 'Crafting Care' Doctoral Focal College encourages students to initiate more informal collaborations of this kind during their PhD study to enrich their project and enhance its impact beyond academia. Please note that informal support from a non-HEI partner does not affect a proposal's chance of success in the competition and will not result in any additional time or funding. Candidates should not submit a Letter of Support from the non-HEI Partner in these cases.

Expression of Interest Form Guidance

1. Candidate Details

Please complete in full. You will need to be contactable between December 2026 and September 2027, so please provide an email address on which you can be contacted throughout this period.

2. PhD Project Proposal

Please provide an indicative title for your PhD Project and indicate which of the four Interdisciplinary Themes your proposed PhD Project aligns with. A preliminary abstract should be provided, in 300 words or less, which outlines your idea for a PhD research project and explains why your proposed project aligns with the Interdisciplinary Theme you have specified.

We are looking for abstracts which:

- are demonstrably responsive to the interdisciplinary opportunities the themes invite (conceptually, methodologically or in terms of overall orientation/approach)
- are bold, exploratory, exciting, innovative, while appropriately specific in terms of the scope and nature of the proposed project
- demonstrate an explicit fit to the selected theme

3. Previous Qualifications

Please enter your relevant academic qualifications.

4. Preparedness for Postgraduate Research (PPR)

In answering this question, please refer explicitly to each of the five PPR criteria listed below. Appendix 1 at the end of this document outlines how each of these criteria will be assessed.

1. Why you want to pursue postgraduate research and what is your **motivation** for pursuing your chosen research topic?
2. Instances where you have demonstrated **problem-solving skills**, initiative, and perseverance in the face of challenges or obstacles, however big or small, making the most of available resources and opportunities (even when these might have been limited). Where relevant, you can also provide context to academic grades achieved. Challenges or obstacles might relate to various personal circumstances or experiences, including but not limited to, those relating to changing circumstances, ill health, socio-economic background, being the first in your family to attend university, returning to education after a long break, or managing caregiving or other competing responsibilities. Please ensure that any challenges discussed are directly relevant to your preparedness for postgraduate research.
3. Examples of how you have **completed a project** (or achieved something), set goals, adapted when necessary, and managed your time effectively. You can include any accomplishments (personal, professional, or academic) that you take pride in and explain how you achieved these.
4. Your **personal development**, including (a) how you have gone about acquiring relevant skills that have prepared you for undertaking postgraduate research, (b) the identification of any current skill gaps and how you plan to address these, and (c) how receiving AHRC funding will enable your development in line with your future research and career goals.
5. Instances where you have successfully **worked collaboratively with others**, possibly providing support to others or seeking support for yourself when needed.

Be explicit about how any skills developed during these experiences have prepared you for undertaking postgraduate research, for your proposed research project, and for future engagement within the postgraduate community.

5. Supervisory Team

If you already have a primary supervisor or supervisory team in mind, please provide details. This should be discussed with the proposed supervisor(s) before they are named here. It is not a requirement to have a supervisor at this stage, and – if shortlisted to proceed to the Research Proposal phase – assistance can be given in finding the best supervisory team for your project.

6. Acknowledgement

Please sign and date the application form. Electronic signatures are sufficient.

7. Supporting Documents

Please ensure you include a completed Equal Opportunities monitoring form. No further documentation is required at this stage, and any additional documents that are supplied will not be considered during the application process.

Research Proposal Form Guidance

You should only complete this form if you have been invited to do so after successfully completing the above Expression of Interest phase. Candidates will be notified of the outcome of their Expression of Interest in early January 2027.

1. Candidate Details

Please complete in full. You will need to be contactable between April and September 2027, so please provide an email address on which you can be contacted throughout this period.

2. PhD Project Proposal

Please provide the title for your PhD Project and indicate which of the four Interdisciplinary Themes your proposed PhD Project aligns with. A full proposal outlining the details of your project should be provided in 1500 words or less. Proposals that exceed the word limit may be disqualified. Referencing/bibliography should be included within this word limit. Please reflect on any ethical issues which might arise from your research.

3. Supervisory Team

Please state who your prospective supervisors are. This should have been discussed with the prospective supervisors prior to application. List your primary supervisor first. The supervisory fit

of your prospective supervision team will be taken into consideration when the application is assessed. All students are expected to have at least two academic supervisors.

4. Potential Additional Costs

Please clearly indicate whether you intend to do fieldwork (overseas or within the UK) during your doctoral programme. Please indicate the destination and the duration of fieldwork if known at this stage. Only students who specify potential fieldwork in their original application will be eligible to apply for additional fieldwork funding during their studentship.

Please also discuss with your supervisor and indicate whether your project is likely to require additional funding (£1000 or more) for the purchase of specialist equipment, specific software or access to datasets, without which the project could not be completed.

Your answers to these questions will not influence the panel's decisions about studentship allocation but will allow the college to ensure appropriate funding is available to support the project if successful.

5. Collaboration with a non-HEI Partner

Only complete this section if your proposed PhD project involves working with a non-HEI Partner and you have been invited to apply for a [Collaborative Doctoral Award](#). Before completing this section, you must have agreed the collaboration with your supervisor and the proposed non-HEI Partner. A Letter of Support from the partner, which briefly outlines the nature of the collaboration should be included. Contributions from a collaborating partner can be in cash or in kind.

Speculative collaborations should not be included here.

If a candidate has not been formally invited to submit a Collaborative Doctoral Award proposal, they may still wish to approach one of the non-HEI Partners to collaborate informally on aspects of their project. However, this should not be detailed in this section and there is no need to submit a Letter of Support from the non-HEI Partner. In these cases, applicants should detail the proposed informal involvement of the non-HEI Partner in the PhD Project Proposal section of this form.

6. Acknowledgement

Please sign and date the application form. Electronic signatures are sufficient.

7. Supporting Documents

You should provide two references, along with your research proposal form, and copies of your academic transcripts. These may be the same references you submitted for your university admissions application, but do not have to be. Please see Appendix 1 for referee guidance – it is advised that potential referees are sent a copy of this when approached for a reference.

If you have completed Q5, indicating that your project will be delivered in collaboration with a non-HEI Partner as a Collaborative Doctoral Award, please include a Letter of Support from the non-HEI Partner.

Supporting documents should be in Word or PDF format – please do not send image files. No further documentation (e.g. CV, personal statements, extended research proposals) is required, and any additional documents that are supplied will not be considered during the application process.

APPENDIX 1: Guidance Note for Referees

Please highlight this guidance note to your referees when you request a reference.

The Research Proposal must be supported by two references from people able to comment on the candidate's 'Preparedness for Postgraduate Research'.

Potential supervisors can act as referee but should not be used for both references. Where applicants have recently completed a master's qualification, it would be expected that academic referees are utilised. Where applicants have been away from Higher Education for some time, references from employers (or similar) can be included. In both cases, referees should be those who can comment on the candidate's 'Preparedness for Postgraduate Research' according to the criteria below:

Preparedness for Postgraduate Research – to what extent does the application demonstrate:	
1. Motivation for Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enthusiasm and a strong motivation for research?• Enthusiasm and a strong motivation for their specific research topic?• A desire to make a positive difference in the world, which they have explicitly linked to their own postgraduate research?
2. Problem Solving, Perseverance and Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perseverance and a problem-solving approach in the face of challenges or setbacks?• Resourcefulness and initiative in terms of making efficient or even creative use of (potentially limited) resources?• The seeking out, identification and utilisation of support and advice available to them?• Awareness of explicit links between experiences/skills developed in this area and postgraduate research?
3. Project and Time Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An ability to set goals, intermediate milestones, and prioritisation of activities?• Capacity to manage their own time effectively, to complete projects or tasks, and to adapt plans if necessary?• A commitment to seeing plans through, recognising risks, and building contingencies?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of explicit links between experiences/skills developed in this area and postgraduate research?
4. Personal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflection and awareness of personal abilities, including recognising the transferable nature of skills, their own current boundaries, and where further development is needed? • Seeking and effectively utilising feedback? • Development of a strategy to address additional needs in terms of knowledge, skills, and expertise? • Commitment to continued learning and development? • Awareness of explicit links between experiences/skills developed in this area and postgraduate research?
5. Working with Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of working with others effectively? Perhaps including existing links to communities, they intend to research? • A commitment to being mindful of their personal actions and their influence on others, while seeking to show respect for individual differences? • Awareness of explicit links between experiences/skills developed in this area and postgraduate research? • An intention to actively engage with opportunities offered during the PhD, including giving back to the community, should their application be successful?