AHRC COLLABORATIVE DOCTORAL PARTNERSHIP AWARDS AT THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

Frequently Asked Questions:

What are CDP Studentships?
The Arts and Humanities Research Council’s Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) scheme is intended to encourage and develop collaboration between UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and non-HEI organisations such as museums and galleries.

http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/funding/opportunities/current/collaborativedoctoralawards/

The AHRC’s Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) route is designed for non-HEI organisations with a strong track record in supporting and delivering PhD studentships. Under this route, specific organisations are allocated a cohort of AHRC-funded studentships, for which they can nominate individual doctoral projects and HEI partners.

What are CDP studentships at the V&A?
V&A CDP studentships are paid studentships that allow the V&A and an HEI to collaborate on a project that falls within the AHRC’s subject domain, and that can provide demonstrated benefits to both partners. Each project is carried out by a research student (or students) who are recruited by the partners, jointly supervised by members from both the V&A and HEI, and who will gain a doctoral qualification by the end of the studentship.

What is the role of the HEI?
They are responsible for administering the studentship in line with the AHRC’s terms and conditions, receiving funds from the AHRC for fees and to cover the student’s maintenance. Once the AHRC has checked and approved the nominated PhD studentship projects, these will be set up as Doctoral Training Grants to the HEI involved in each project, and will follow the same process for activating grants and funding students on other PhD awards (i.e. the funding award will be made directly to the collaborating HEI rather than to the V&A). The HEI partner for a CDP studentship can be anywhere in the UK.

The HEI supervisor is formally the lead supervisor for the studentship. They, and their Department, should demonstrably provide the right expertise and support for the topic. All CDP applications should have both a main HEI supervisor and a second HEI supervisor to ensure continuity of supervision in the event of staff changes during the PhD period.
What is the role of the V&A?
The V&A supervisor is formally the co-supervisor for the studentship. The CDP co-supervisor must be a member of V&A staff, and to that end all project proposals should be a joint effort between the proposed HEI supervisor and the proposed V&A co-supervisor. All CDP applications should have both a main V&A co-supervisor and a second V&A co-supervisor to ensure continuity of supervision in the event of staff changes during the PhD period.

How many CDP studentships does the V&A have?
The AHRC has awarded the V&A an allocation of three funded studentships to start each year.

How does the V&A decide what studentships to support?
Each year we hold an open competition designed to identify and select which funded studentship projects the Museum chooses to support, in accordance with AHRC guidelines.

Studentship proposals must be submitted by the HEI staff member who would act as the student’s main supervisor, and to have been co-developed with a V&A staff member, who would act as the student’s co-supervisor.

The studentship’s subject matter should be developed in close collaboration with the proposed V&A co-supervisor(s).

Proposals chosen for funding will be of high quality, appropriate for collaborative study at doctoral level, relevant to the V&A and in line with the strategic interests and objectives of both the Museum and wider cultural heritage sector. These are detailed below.

How long is a CDP studentship?
The AHRC provides 4 years of funding to allow for 3 years of research and writing, and up to a year for additional training or professional placement opportunities as required for the development of the student’s skills.

What does the CDP Award cover?
Each CDP studentship includes the HEI tuition fees and a student maintenance grant for up to 4 years (please note that the cost of Oxbridge College fees are not covered).

Who can be a CDP student?
Please note that a studentship can only be taken up by UK citizens and (at present) EU nationals who have been ordinarily resident in the UK for a minimum period of 3 years prior to the commencement of their studies. For UK and EU nationals who do not meet this requirement, the award will cover only tuition fees and the student will not be eligible for a maintenance grant. Applicants, or nominated students must meet the same eligibility criteria as any AHRC doctoral research student. See www.ahrc.ac.uk for more details.
Where will the student be based?
The student is expected to spend a significant amount of time researching with the V&A, and attending training and other Museum based activities. Depending on the student and their project, they may also be encouraged to spend some time as a volunteer with another department to gain additional work experience. We also provide additional financial support to our CDP students for travel and related research costs, up to £1000 per student over the course of the studentship.

Can a HEI propose more than one CDP working on a topic?
HEI partners can propose two or more studentships working on a larger project (which could involve different HEI and V&A departments or sets of supervisors), however please note that competition for our three studentships per year is likely to be strong.

Can a proposal be for a particular student?
Yes. It is possible to name a particular student who would be offered the studentship if the application is successful. As there is generally considerable competition for studentships at the V&A such a proposal would need to show not only that the named person is capable of carrying out PhD level research, but that they are a strong candidate for the particular project in mind. Please consult the further guidance for potential nominated students at the end of this document.

What kind of project is the V&A looking for?
We welcome applications for CDP studentships on any topic provided that the proposed project is of high quality, is appropriate for collaborative study at doctoral level, and is relevant to both AHRC subject areas (https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/research/subjectcoverage/ahrc-disciplines/) and V&A’s collections and priorities.

However, we are particularly keen to encourage applications on the following:

- Photography
- Fashion and textiles
- Nineteenth Century collections
- Digital objects and collections
- Histories of collecting, including contested and ‘difficult histories’
- Digital humanities
- Embodied learning
- Museums and community engagement

We see considerable benefits in encouraging connections between students working on similar subjects at different CDP-holding institutions. The following overarching themes cover areas known to be of interest to many CDP-holding institutions. Whilst it is not obligatory for your proposed project to be explicitly connected with any of the themes below, we encourage you to consider potential connections:
• Photography as Art, Photography as Practice
What can the collections of museums, galleries, libraries, archives and heritage organisations tell us about the uses of photography?

• Collecting, Connections and Creating: 1600-1800
Many institutions hold significant collections from the early modern period. What can we learn from considering these different collections together? How have collections led to the reorganisation and creation of new knowledge?

• Materiality in a Digital Age
What opportunities arise for museums, galleries, libraries, archives and heritage organisations from digital technologies and social media?

• Linking the Arts, Sciences and Technology
What is the role of museums, galleries, libraries, archives and heritage organisations in investigating and representing the relations between the arts and the sciences? What is the role of science in art galleries, and the arts in science and technology museums?

• Museums, Galleries and Public Culture
What has been the influence of museums, galleries, libraries, archives and heritage organisations on the public culture, and how may they most effectively wield this influence? Reciprocally, how has the public culture affected the policies and practices of such organisations?

• End of Empire
How has the end of global empires affected the collections of museums, galleries, Libraries, archives and heritage organisations, and how can imperial-era collections be sympathetically and effectively deployed in our multicultural age?

I am from an HEI and would like to propose a project. How should I do this?
In the first instance, HEI colleagues are invited to submit an initial Expression of Interest (EoI).

If this EoI is suitable then you will be asked to submit a formal proposal.

Our key assessment criteria are:
• The academic quality of the proposed project
• The extent to which the proposed project supports the V&A’s own research
• The extent to which the proposed project engages with the needs and priorities of the wider cultural sector.

For more information about this year’s process and deadlines see https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/collaborative-doctoral-partnerships
What happens after a HEI submits a formal project proposal?
An assessment panel, consisting of V&A staff, HEI and other heritage organisation representatives meets after Christmas to consider all the eligible proposals. Panel members will not take part in the review of any proposals where a conflict of interest could be construed. Some proposals may be recommended subject to suggested improvements or conditions by the panel. We will provide feedback on proposals.
If your proposal is successful, the V&A will formally nominate the project to the AHRC. The HEI supervisor will then need to submit a CDP “application” form via JeS to allow the AHRC to undertake basic eligibility checks and to set up awards. Once this is completed the studentship can be advertised, and the HEI will then administer it in line with standard AHRC CDA studentships.

How will applications be assessed?
The Panel will assess, mark and rank each eligible application using the following primary criteria:

1) The academic strength of the proposal
   • Is there a PhD in this topic?
   • Will the research lead to an original and substantial contribution to the knowledge of the subject matter?
   • Are there clear and answerable research questions?
   • How practical will it be for the student to complete the research and answer these questions in the time period and with the specialist support and resources the V&A and partner HEI have available?
   • Is there scope for the student to develop their own emphasis with the overall proposal?
   • What will be the benefits to the student of doing a doctorate in conjunction with the V&A rather than in an HEI alone?

2) How well the proposal supports the V&A’s key aims and priorities
   • How does this CDA support the V&A’s research aims and priorities and current initiatives?
   • Is this CDA part of an existing or planned Museum research project, exhibition or new gallery redevelopment? If so, how will it support or extend that project?
   • Is the proposal part of a partnership with other museums, libraries or similar institutions?

3) How well the proposal engages with the needs and priorities of the wider cultural sector
   • How does this CDA connect with challenges and opportunities relating to the wider cultural sector?
   • Is the proposal part of a partnership with other museums, libraries or similar institutions?

Secondary considerations will include:
   • The suitability and track record of the proposed supervisors
   • The project’s fit with the workload and other commitments of the proposed supervisors
   • The suitability and track record of the named student (if applicable)
What else do I, as a prospective CDP HEI Supervisor, need to know?
The most successful CDP proposals often develop from already established relationships between academics and museum-based staff, and/or ongoing dialogues between them concerning new research.

Museum-based research usually has a different focus and approach than PhD research taking place in universities. It often (although not always) relates directly to our collections (see http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections). Its methodology usually involves the in-depth material analysis of museum objects, which will form a central body of evidence - along with other types of documentation - for the CDP student. Some of the research questions are raised by the objects and gaps in our knowledge about them. The focus for all CDP studentships is the production of the thesis (or equivalent), and additional outcomes may also be appropriate. The results of the CDP research should contribute directly to our interpretation of the V&A's collections and the information we present to our audiences. Both supervisors will need to consider the type of student who would be suited to the project. Past experience indicates that while many MA students have the academic skills necessary, far fewer have the 'object reading and analysis' skills that working with collections requires. A successful CDP proposal needs to meet these requirements as well as relate to relevant academic research interests.

If you are not familiar with the V&A’s collections and programmes, we encourage you to look at recent publications and exhibitions relevant to your subject.

Please find the curators, conservators and other museum professionals working with collections or on topics relevant to your field and contact them well in advance of the CDP proposal deadline. If you do not personally know the relevant individual, informal preliminary contact can establish areas of mutual interest and relevant research.

I would like to study for a PhD. Is a CDP PhD right for me?
Collaborative PhD students work across two locations, with two sets of supervisors, in two different organisations. This enables students to gain valuable first-hand experience in different environment and enhances their employment-related skills and training. However, you should also be prepared to overcome potential challenges specifically related to the nature of collaborative PhDs. This includes working effectively with supervisors who – depending on the institutions involved – may also be geographically distant.

A collaborative PhD with the V&A also usually involves in-depth research on some aspect of our collections. In such cases, students are expected to read and analyse objects as they would other forms of historical evidence, such as documents and visual images. If you are approaching a V&A curator as a prospective co-supervisor, you should therefore define the specific collections you wish to study and how you will incorporate the perspective of material culture with the academic research you intend to do.
Where do I find out about applying for a V&A CDP studentship?
Our CDP studentships are advertised on http://www.ahrc-cdp.org/category/available-studentships/ from spring each year.

I am interested in being a nominated student, how do I locate and secure the agreement of the right supervisors?
To be named on a CDP application, you must secure both the active support of the proposed HEI supervisor and the proposed V&A co-supervisor. You must have met and discussed the project with them, and have gained their agreement to co-supervise the project. Be well prepared for these discussions – your proposed supervisors will want to see clear evidence of your progress so far and your PhD plans.

As early as possible, you should contact the university department you are interested in to check that they have an appropriately qualified supervisor in the area you wish to study. If a HEI supervisor agrees to develop a CDP application with you as a nominated student, you should together approach your intended V&A co-supervisor for further discussion.

Please note that the V&A will only accept a CDP application that names a nominated student if it has the formal endorsement of both the proposed HEI and V&A supervisors.

Further guidance for proposals with nominated students
The AHRC recommends that in order to allow equal of opportunity, and to ensure that the best applicants are attracted, the selection of CDP students should be made through open competition.

It is recognised, however, that some projects will have originated with a particular student and where that student has the appropriate ability, and meets the eligibility criteria, it would be unfair and inappropriate for the project to be advertised. There may also be instances where a very particular knowledge or skill-set is required which means a project is developed with a student in mind. In such cases, nomination of a student without competition can be justified.

Each application with a nominated student will be rigorously judged on its own merits. In addition to the usual CDP criteria, our Assessment Panel’s decision will consider the information and evidence provided about your ability, aptitude, commitment and preparedness for postgraduate study, and the quality of work you will produce.

Useful links
See https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/collaborative-doctoral-partnerships
http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/funding/opportunities/current/collaborativedoctoralawards/
https://www.ahrc-cdp.org/