

Working with the V&A as a PhD Researcher: An Overview

Academic Year 2026-2027



PhDs at the V&A

What is a PhD?

To gain a PhD candidates are required to:

- Acquire and understand a substantial body of knowledge at the forefront of their discipline or area of professional practice.
- Conceptualise, design and implement a project to generate new knowledge or understanding.
- Create or interpret new knowledge through original research or through other advanced scholarship of a quality that extends the forefront of their discipline. Work produced for a doctorate would often merit publication.
- Build a thorough understanding of techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

The V&A does not hold doctoral award holding powers. **All PhDs conducted in partnership with the V&A are awarded by a partner university.**

Collaborative PhDs at the V&A

Collaborative PhDs are funded studentships that are **jointly supervised** by staff at a university and at the V&A. These PhDs offer distinctive opportunities for collections-based and applied research across the arts and humanities, in partnership with the cultural and heritage sector.

The V&A's collaborative PhDs are specifically intended to **support the work and research** that we do as an organisation. Collaborative PhDs are one of the ways in which the V&A delivers its mission to champion design and creativity in all its forms, for everyone.

They provide an exceptional opportunity for PhD researchers to acquire new skills within a research-led, professional environment. For staff, co-supervision of doctoral studentships enables development of professional skills, a chance to further share expertise, and to support research into hitherto **understudied areas of the V&A's collections and processes.**

What are the ways in which the V&A supports PhD researchers?

- Providing access to our collections for PhD researchers (e.g. Archives, NAL, Print Room, Collections across family of sites).
- Responding to email queries from PhD researchers.
- Offering professional and skills development opportunities through the annual V&A PhD Placement Scheme.
- Acting as a co-supervisor of a PhD project.
- Co-designing and co-developing collaborative PhD projects with external academics through schemes including: Collaborative Doctoral Landscape Awards, Doctoral Landscape Awards, Doctoral Focal Awards and university-specific scholarships.

PhDs at the V&A – Creating a PhD Project

I am a prospective PhD researcher with my own topic and research proposal, can the V&A act as a partner?

PhD researchers who have developed their own research proposal can explore the potential of the V&A acting as a partner for a funding application via a UK university (e.g. Doctoral Focal Awards or Doctoral Landscape Awards). However, V&A ability to support an application will be based upon strategic alignment and staff capacity.

I am a prospective PhD researcher and would like to apply for a Collaborative Doctoral Landscape Award, can I propose my own project?

No. Projects are designed by V&A members of staff and academics from a partner UK university. Projects are available for application via partner university application portals in the spring of each application round. Full details of projects will be circulated through V&A websites and comms channels.

PhDs at the V&A – Accessing V&A Research Resources

I am a PhD researcher and I require access to V&A collections to complete a section of my PhD, how do I do this?

The V&A's collections are world-leading in their depth and breadth and are extensively consulted by PhD researchers in the course of their projects. Please consult the following pages for guidance on working with V&A Collections:

- [V&A Archive · V&A](#) – requires minimum 2-weeks notice to book appointment. Slots available Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday (10:00 – 16:30).
- [Study rooms · V&A](#) – this page provides guidance on using the V&A East Storehouse Study Centre, the Prints and Drawings study room and Ceramics Study rooms at V&A South Kensington, and the National Art Library.
- [Order an Object · V&A](#) – is the new system for booking slots to view objects for research purposes. Please note that lead in times for an appointment **may be up to six weeks**.

PhDs at the V&A – Accessing V&A Research Resources

- [National Art Library · V&A](#) cares for and develops the UK's largest library collection on art, design and performance. It offers a range of services for researchers, including a [Virtual Reading Room](#).
- The [Archive of Art and Design](#) collects, conserves and makes available for research the archives of individuals, associations and companies involved in any stage of the art and design process. It has a range of detailed research guides that provide further detail on specific areas of the V&A's holdings.
- [Theatre and Performance Archives](#) (including the David Bowie Archive) are the national collection of performing arts documenting current practice and the history of all areas of performing arts in the UK, including drama, dance, opera, circus, puppetry, comedy, musical theatre, costume, set design, pantomime, popular music and more.
- The V&A's [Provenance Research Hub](#) provides guidance for researchers exploring the collecting histories of V&A holdings.

Types of Collaborative PhDs

Types of Collaborative PhDs – Collaborative Doctoral Landscape Awards

PhD researchers are jointly supervised by V&A staff and an academic based at a UK university. The project is **co-designed and co-developed** between the supervisors, responding to **strategic research needs** within the V&A.

The decision as to which project to support is made by the V&A.

The V&A has been awarded 14 studentships across four cohort years (2027 – 2030).

The V&A will select five projects to commence on 1 October 2027.

Projects will be advertised for applications in Spring 2027.

Types of Collaborative PhDs – Collaborative Doctoral Awards via Doctoral Focal Awards

Collaborative Doctoral Awards are funded PhDs offered through the AHRC's new Doctoral Focal Awards (DFA) scheme, which supports PhD projects across a range of different consortia.

The V&A will act as a project partner for the King's College London led consortium, [ADAPT-AI](#).

Each DFA has a slightly different set of criteria for the design, development and selection of CDA projects. However, the project needs to have benefit for the V&A. Selection of projects is **made the university consortia**.

Project submission and selection deadlines vary according to the timelines outlined by each DFA.

Types of Collaborative PhDs – Collaborative Doctoral Awards via Doctoral Landscape Awards

The AHRC has stated their desire for the 50 UK universities who have been awarded funding via the Doctoral Landscape Awards scheme (3 PhD projects per university per year) to also consider offering Collaborative Doctoral Awards within this scheme.

The process and timelines are unique to each university, as is the decision-making process.

Selection of projects is made by the host university.

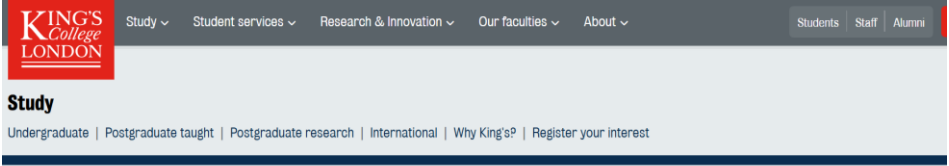
Few universities have made clear what their approach will be. One exception is the University of Brighton, where they aim to fund 1 Collaborative PhD per year. Their [funding webpage](#) is clear and informative. **Project submission and selection deadlines vary according to the timelines outlined by each Landscape Award holder.**

Types of Collaborative PhDs – other consortia/funding opportunities.

In addition to funding provided for PhD research through AHRC, some Universities support PhD research through their own funding schemes. These university scholarships usually match the minimum stipend provided by AHRC. **Selection of projects is made by the university.**

Examples of this type of scheme include:

- African Creativity Beyond Borders (KCL)



The screenshot shows the King's College London website. The header includes the college's logo and navigation links: Study, Student services, Research & Innovation, Our faculties, and About. Below the header, there's a 'Study' section with links for Undergraduate, Postgraduate taught, Postgraduate research, International, Why King's?, and Register your interest. The main content area is titled 'African Creativity Beyond Borders'. It lists subject areas (Politics & Economics, International Affairs & Development, Arts, culture and media, History and classics, Policy and society), funding type (Tuition fee, Stipend, Research Training & Support Grant), academic year (2026/27), study level (Postgraduate research), study mode (Full time), and application closing date (13 February 2026). A note at the bottom states: '4 fully funded PhD scholarships, starting in October 2026, specifically encouraging applications from candidates who identify as Black / Mixed Black and/or have diasporic or heritage roots in Africa.'

KING'S College LONDON

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African Creativity Beyond Borders

Subject areas: Politics & Economics. International Affairs & Development. Arts, culture and media. History and classics. Policy and society.

Funding type: Tuition fee. Stipend. Research Training & Support Grant.

Academic year: 2026/27

Study level: Postgraduate research

Study mode: Full time.

Application closing date: 13 February 2026

4 fully funded PhD scholarships, starting in October 2026, specifically encouraging applications from candidates who identify as Black / Mixed Black and/or have diasporic or heritage roots in Africa.

Project submission and selection deadlines vary according to the timelines outlined by each university.

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