



AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) studentship with Historic Royal Palaces and the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (University of Leicester)

Equitable Heritage: Developing New Approaches to Creatively Embedded Access in Heritage Settings

Start date: 1 October 2026

Application Deadline: 12 midday (GMT), **Friday 22 May**

Interviews will take place online on **18 June 2026**.

We will be holding an **information webinar** about this PhD opportunity and an opportunity to hear from the supervisory team at Historic Royal Palaces and University of Leicester on **Wednesday 22 April** (10am-11am, UK time) if you would like to attend, please email research@hrp.org.uk and an invitation link will be sent to you.

In addition, the Collaborative Doctoral Partnership consortium will host an online webinar for prospective applicants on **13 April** 2026 at 11:00. These webinars will provide an overview of the CDP funding scheme (see below for details).

The Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) (University of Leicester) and Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) are pleased to announce the availability of a fully funded collaborative doctoral studentship from October 2026 under the AHRC's [Collaborative Doctoral Partnership Scheme](#).

This practice-centred project will explore approaches to, and the potential of, creatively embedded access at Kensington Palace, since it has an annual rotating exhibition programme where methods can be tested and approaches refined.

This project will be jointly supervised by Professor Richard Sandell and Professor Suzanne MacLeod, Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (University of Leicester), and Rhiannon Goddard and Caterina Berni, Historic Royal Palaces. The student will be expected

to spend time at both the University of Leicester and Historic Royal Palaces, as well as become part of the wider cohort of CDP funded students across the UK.

The studentship can be studied either full or part-time.

We encourage the widest range of potential students from different backgrounds and career stages to apply for this CDP studentship.

Students should have a Master's degree in a relevant subject or demonstrate relevant equivalent experience.

The studentship is open to both home and international applicants.

Project Overview

The project seeks to explore approaches to, and the potential of, creatively embedded access in a heritage setting, specifically Kensington Palace as it has an annual rotating exhibition programme where methods can be tested and approaches refined. Building on both HRP's leading-edge interpretive practice and RCMG's world-leading research around disability equity, the practice-centred PhD will:

- Review existing scholarship on creatively embedded access;
- Investigate innovative approaches to creatively embedded access within and beyond the heritage sector with a particular emphasis on disabled-led innovations;
- Build/utilise ethical methods that centre expertise rooted in disabled lived experience;
- Test/refine approaches using the temporary exhibition programme at Kensington Palace as a live testbed;
- Generate practical guidance to inform practice across HRP and the sector more widely.

Whilst there is considerable activity and knowledge around the specific requirements to enhance access to historic buildings and sites, exhibition-making and interpretation have received far less attention. The project takes shape as a growing number of cultural organisations are becoming aware of the ongoing negative impact of deeply entrenched ableist thinking and practice which sustains a heritage/museum/gallery sector where disabled visitors have experiences which are far from equitable (Museums Association 2025).

Creatively embedded approaches (CEA) to access are under-explored in the sector. CEA involves building attention to accessibility into the process of shaping interpretation and visitor experience for all audiences from the outset, not as an afterthought or something that is added on or switched on or off. Access is conceived as a creative tool that benefits all audiences (Eardley and Jones 2025) and can be seamlessly integrated into interpretation and

design processes in ways that disrupt hierarchies (for example, between disabled and non-disabled visitors' experiences) and act upon ableist assumptions and the ways in which disabled visitors experience discrimination and 'othering' in public spaces (Cachia 2013; RCMG 2022).

This collaboration brings together HRP's leading-edge interpretation and exhibition-making practice with RCMG's world-leading research into disability equity and ethics, and holds rich potential to support a PhD that can generate novel, realistic and practical solutions that clarify, extend and explore new thinking and practice and test these in real life settings with an established exhibition design team and interpretation specialists.

Research questions include:

- How can heritage sites and museums develop exhibitions and interpretation that offer genuinely accessible, equitable, seamless and inclusive experiences for all visitors?
- How might emerging anti-ableist thinking and practice, rooted in recognition of the rights of disabled people, be harnessed to drive inclusive transformation in interpretation at heritage sites?
- More particularly, how might 'creatively embedded access' – an approach to culture-making that resists bolt-on accommodations in favour of integrating access features to produce an equitable experience for all – open up new possibilities for HRP to advance and share leading-edge practice?

Research with Historic Royal Palaces

This research studentship is allocated to Historic Royal Palaces by the AHRC. The successful student will be expected to spend time carrying out research and gaining relevant experience with the partner at Kensington Palace as part of the studentship.

Details of Award

CDP doctoral training grants fund full-time studentships for 4 years or part-time equivalent up to a maximum of 7 years. The award pays tuition fees up to the value of the full-time home fee. Research Councils UK Indicative Fee Level for 2026/2027 is £5,238.

Please note that international applicants will be required to fund the difference between the UK and International fee. International students will be required to reside in the UK until completion of the PhD.

The award pays an annual stipend for all students, both home and international students. This stipend is tax free, and is the equivalent of an annual salary, enabling the student to pay

living costs. The UKRI National Minimum Doctoral Stipend for 2026/7 is £21,805 plus, an allowance of £1000/year. There is also a CDP maintenance payment of £600/year.

Further details can be found on the [UKRI website](#).

The student is eligible to receive an additional travel and related expenses grant during the course of the project courtesy of Historic Royal Palaces worth up to £850 per year for 4 years.

The successful candidate will be encouraged to participate in professional development events and activities organised for all Collaborative Doctoral Partnership students who are registered with different universities and studying with cultural and heritage organisations across the UK. These activities are organised by a coordination team based at the V&A and are designed to provide CDP researchers with the knowledge, networks and skills to thrive in their future careers.

Eligibility

- This studentship is open to both Home and International applicants.
- 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
- Further guidance can be found here based on revisions to Training Grant Terms and Conditions for projects starting in October 2026 - [Policy statement: review of the training grant conditions – UKRI](#)
- International students are eligible to receive the full award for maintenance as are home students.
- We want to encourage the widest range of potential students to apply for a CDP studentship and are committed to welcoming students from different backgrounds. We particularly welcome applications from students with lived experience of disability and students from minority ethnic backgrounds as they are currently underrepresented at this level in this area.
- Applicants should ideally have or expect to receive a relevant Masters-level qualification in a relevant subject for example, Museum Studies, Disability Studies, Heritage Studies or be able to demonstrate equivalent experience in a professional

setting. You should have a good knowledge of the field of Museum Studies; however, we recognise that knowledge acquired in other fields can serve as a strong foundation for PhD study of museums, galleries and heritage.

- Applicants must be able to demonstrate an interest in the museum sector and potential and enthusiasm for developing experience and skills cognisant with a potential future career in the cultural, heritage, galleries, museums, and archive sectors.
- As a collaborative award, students will be expected to spend time at both the University and Historic Royal Palaces.

NB. All applicants must meet UKRI terms and conditions for funding. See:

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

Project details and how to apply

Candidates should submit an online University of Leicester PhD application using the “Apply Here” button at the link below. Please label all your application documents as ‘AHRC CDP HRP’ and add this label to the digital application form where it asks about funding.

<https://le.ac.uk/study/research-degrees/research-subjects/museum-studies#tablist1-panel2>

Applicants should attach:

- A statement of purpose: write up to 750 words explaining how your academic and/or professional experience has prepared you to fulfil the terms of this project (250 words) and your personal and/or academic motivation for pursuing this Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (500 words)
- A research proposal outlining the independent research that you anticipate undertaking in relation to this project – avoid repeating the formal project description but rather identify and extrapolate those aspects that you find particularly interesting. Please include: a summary of your proposed research focus, a review of relevant literature, your proposed methodology, an outline of any anticipated ethical issues; a short bibliography (max 1,500 words)
- Two references (at least one needs to be an academic reference), from individuals who are familiar with your recent work in relevant fields. **Please ensure that you submit your references with your application.**
- Your degree certificate and university transcripts
- IELTS scores (International English Language Testing System) if applicable. Full info here: <https://le.ac.uk/study/research-degrees/entry-reqs/eng-lang-reqs/ielts-65>

We ask all applicants to complete a voluntary EDI monitoring form [here](#). All responses are anonymous.

All CDP projects are part of a nationwide programme called the Collaborative Doctoral Partnership consortium. The CDP consortium will host an online webinar for prospective applicants on **13 April** 2026 at 11:00. These webinars will provide an overview of the CDP funding scheme.

To sign up for a webinar, please email cdp@vam.ac.uk with the subject line "Prospective Applicant Webinar" from the email address you would like to join the online meeting from. Sign up will close on 10 April 2026 at 17:00.

Please note, the webinars will not focus on individual projects.

Applicants can expect reasonable adjustments throughout the process. If you require any assistance through the application, or interview process (if you are shortlisted), please contact Richard Sandell at rps6@leicester.ac.uk.

This fully-funded PhD project also forms part of the anniversary celebrations that mark 60 years of global impact of Museum Studies at Leicester. During this time, the University of Leicester has acquired a global reputation for leading-edge thinking and experimental practice in Museum Studies.