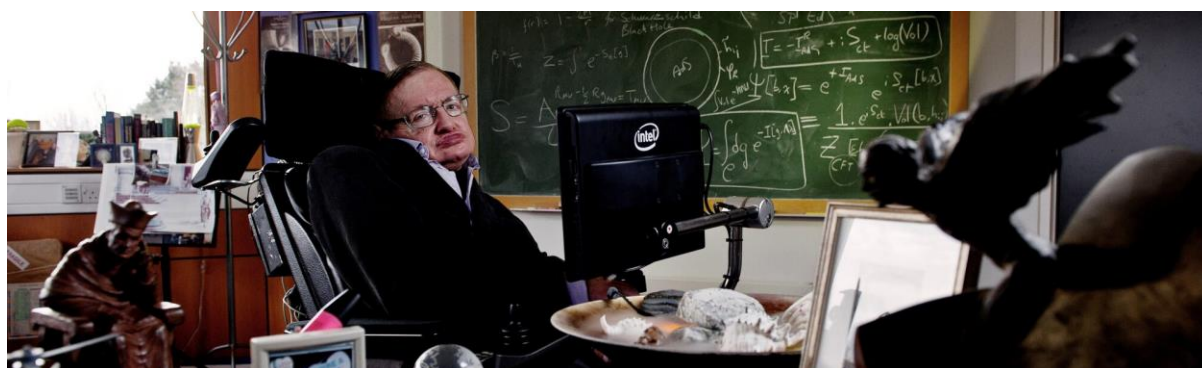


AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) studentship –  
**Disability-oriented research for the Stephen Hawking Collection  
and its public offerings** with the Science Museum and the University  
of Leicester



Professor Stephen Hawking in his office at the University of Cambridge, 2011. Image: Sarah Lee

**Start date:** 1st October 2025

**Online Information and Q&A sessions:** 12<sup>th</sup> May 2025 (12-1pm) / 30<sup>th</sup> May 2025 (10-11am). To reserve your place, please email [rcmg@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:rcmg@leicester.ac.uk)

**Application Deadline: Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2025** (midday GMT)

All applicants will be notified by 25<sup>th</sup> June 2025.

**Interviews with shortlisted candidates will take place on Friday 11 July 2025** and will take place in person in London at the Science Museum. (Alternative online arrangements will be made if shortlisted candidates are unable to attend in person).

### **About this CDP**

The Science Museum and the University of Leicester are pleased to announce the availability of a fully funded Collaborative doctoral studentship from October 2025 under the AHRC's [Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships \(CDP\) scheme](#)

A collection of over a thousand items from the late physicist Stephen Hawking will be put on display at the Science Museum in London in 2028. The Science Museum Group (SMG) and the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG), University of Leicester, will support a student with expertise in disability, ethics, interpretation and museum studies to carry out research that can inform and enrich the way we talk about Hawking's life and relationship to disability in our exhibitions, research and public engagement.

This project will be jointly supervised by Juan-Andres Leon and Selina Hurley (Science Museum) and Professors Suzanne MacLeod and Richard Sandell (University of Leicester) and the student will be expected to spend time at both the University and the Museum, as well as becoming part of the wider cohort of CDP-funded students across the UK.

We encourage the widest range of potential students to study for this CDP studentship and are committed to welcoming students from different backgrounds to apply. Given the focus of this PhD, we particularly welcome applications from students with lived experience of disability as they are currently underrepresented at this level in this area.

- Students should have a Master's Degree in a relevant subject or be able to demonstrate equivalent experience in a professional setting.
- The studentship is open to both home and international applicants.
- The studentship can be studied either full-time (4 years) or part-time (7 years).
- We encourage applications from a diverse range of people, from different backgrounds and career stages.
- The approach to the research presents the student with an option for a practice-centred PhD where - rather than submitting an 80,000-word thesis - the student will be able to decide whether they submit a shorter, 60,000-word thesis and a portfolio. This alternative approach will award the student with the same qualification (PhD in Museum Studies).

## **Project Overview**

In 2021 the Science Museum Group (SMG) acquired over a thousand items from the late physicist Stephen Hawking, and he is quickly becoming a major presence in the Museum. The collection was made available online, a book for

general audiences was published, and a flagship building is now named after him. A full reconstruction of Hawking's office will open in London in 2028, and there will be ongoing research and interpretive work based on this collection. The collection holds huge potential to engage visitors in conversations around disability but also raises significant ethical challenges and sensitivities in relation to the way ideas of disability and care are interpreted through the collection. The acquisition has brought to the fore the need for dedicated, long-term research to support this work at SMG. This CDP addresses the urgency to ensure, that over the coming years, the way we talk about Hawking draws on and contributes to leading-edge scholarship and debate in this field.

This CDP provides a unique opportunity to undertake deep research into both SMG collections and museum practice and to directly inform development of content for a collection in which disability is deeply intertwined with the contemporary history of science, technology and medicine. The Hawking collection is one of the most complete material manifestations of the life of a scientist with advancing care needs, three decades of it also as a public figure. Our CDP researcher will have a privileged, independent position to inquire, interpret and deploy the richness of this collection, as part of the project, and to inform further content production.

Most of the Hawking objects, from the mundane to the cosmological, have unexpected connections to disability. These objects of Hawking's everyday life hold enormous potential to explore with audiences changing attitudes towards disability and to confront harmful ableist assumptions that permeate all areas of public life. His disability was central to his identity and shaped the lives of those around him including his relatives, colleagues and friends who assisted in his care. While Stephen tended to avoid discussing disability in public engagements, cultivating a veneer of lightness, family members and others closest to him draw attention to the significance of disability in all of their everyday lives. It is crucial, therefore, to recognise the ethical challenges, as well as opportunities, that surround working on Hawking's life and the need for a model of engaging with this element of Hawking's experience that is ethical and productive.

### **Aims and objectives**

With all this in mind, this research aims to build a detailed understanding of the ethical complexities and nuances involved in interpreting disability in the context of the SMG and in relation to the Stephen Hawking Collection. The research will:-

- Draw across wide-ranging literatures (e.g. Museum Studies, Disability Studies, Ethics and Interpretation) to build detailed underpinning knowledge and understanding of key issues and debates;
- Undertake a review of leading-edge practice in the representation and interpretation of disability, drawing on international examples;
- Work across the Hawking Collection and engage with key individuals close to Hawking to draw out key themes and opportunities for interpretation;
- Explore the ethics of interpretation of these key themes and opportunities;
- Work with and refine an evolving Framework for Ethical Interpretation of Disability in relation to Science and Technology collections.

**Research questions include:**

- What are the interpretive and ethical possibilities and challenges of publicly presenting and engaging audiences around the Hawking Collection?
- How might the Science Museum ethically integrate themes of disability and care (as an essential and everyday feature of human existence) into the Hawking project?
- What potential does the Hawking collection and display project hold for communicating with audiences how science and technology (as all culture), relate to disability?
- How might a deeper understanding of, and engagement with, the ethical possibilities and challenges surrounding the Hawking collection – as they relate to disability - inform the Museum's choice of stories, ideas and language; public programming, exhibition design; visitor experience; and external communications.

**Research with the Science Museum (London)**

This research studentship is one allocated to the Science Museum and Archives Consortium by the AHRC. The successful student will be expected to spend time carrying out research and gaining relevant experience with the partner in the Science Museum (London) with periodic visits to its collections management site, the National Collections Centre (Swindon) 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 UKRI rate for PhD degrees. The Research Councils UK Indicative Fee Level for 2024/2025 is £5,006\*. The University of Leicester will waive any difference between this fee and the UK home fee. If an international candidate is successful, they will be required to pay the difference between the UKRI fee and the University of Leicester's published international fee and 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 Minimum Doctoral Stipend for 2025/2026 is £20,780\*. There is also a CDP Maintenance Allowance of £600 per year, added directly to the stipend.

As the Science Museum is London-based, the student will receive the CDP London Partner Organisation Allowance (an additional £1000 per year added directly to the stipend) in recognition of additional travel costs. The Science Museum will also provide a Research Allowance of up to £1000 per year (or PTE) to support research expenses. The student will be eligible for a Research Support Training Grant, managed by the University, of up to £3000 over the course of the studentship.

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

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 or Irish 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 2025 - [Policy statement: review of the training grant conditions – UKRI](#)
- We encourage the widest range of potential students to study for this CDP studentship and are committed to welcoming students from different backgrounds to apply. Given the focus of this PhD, we particularly welcome applications from students with lived experience of disability as they are currently underrepresented at this level in this area.
- Applicants must hold a UK undergraduate (Bachelors) degree with at least first class or upper second class honours or an equivalent qualification from a recognised overseas institution AND a first class or 2:1 equivalent at Masters degree and/or relevant work experience.
- Candidates should have a good understanding of the ethical issues related to disability, rights and care that pertain to this research as well as awareness of key issues in museums and the wider cultural sector; however applications are welcome from students from a range of academic backgrounds relevant to the research questions at the heart of this studentship. This might include, for example, museum studies, disability studies, sociology, public history, art history, science and technology studies.
- Applicants must be able to demonstrate an interest in the subject of the PhD and potential and enthusiasm for developing skills more widely in the cultural sector.
- As a collaborative award, students will be expected to spend time at both the University and the Science Museum (London)

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**

For more information and how to apply see <https://le.ac.uk/study/research-degrees/research-subjects/museum-studies>

We encourage all applicants to attend one of the two information/Q&A sessions on either 12<sup>th</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup> May where you will have an opportunity to hear from the supervisory team and ask any questions you might have.

To submit questions about the project please contact: [rcmg@le.ac.uk](mailto:rcmg@le.ac.uk)

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

**RCMG, University of Leicester 2 April 2025.**