

AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) studentship with National Museums Northern Ireland

The Ulster Museum: Northern Ireland's Culture Lab

The School of Heritage and Culture Studies, University of Leicester, in partnership with National Museums Northern Ireland (NI), invites applications from suitably qualified applicants for a [Collaborative Doctoral Partnership \(CDP\)](#) studentship, funded (fees and living allowance) by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), to conduct research leading to a PhD on the theme: *The Ulster Museum: Northern Ireland Culture Lab*

Start date: 1 October 2026.

Application Deadline: 20 April 2026 at 5pm (UK Time)

Applications received after this date cannot be considered. Candidates will be notified of the outcome of their application by the end of day on the 28 April 2026.

Interviews will take place on **6 May 2026**. All interviews will be **online**.

This project will be jointly supervised by lead supervisors Prof Suzanne MacLeod (University of Leicester) and Hannah Crowdy (Head of Curatorial, National Museums NI) and second supervisors William Blair (Director of Collections, National Museums NI) and Prof Richard Sandell (University of Leicester). The student will be expected to spend time at both University of Leicester and National Museums NI HQ & Ulster Museum (Northern Ireland), and be part of a wider cohort of CDP funded students across the UK.

The studentship can be studied either full time (4 years) or part time (7 years).

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. We particularly welcome applications from minority ethnic backgrounds 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 for a Master's degree. You should have a good knowledge of the field of Museum Studies; however, we recognise that knowledge acquired in other fields – from palaeontology to Modern Languages – can serve as a strong foundation for PhD study of museums, galleries and heritage.

The studentship is open to both home and international applicants.

Project overview

This research explores the history and development of the Ulster Museum as a national, multi-disciplinary museum for Northern Ireland. From its origins in the collections of learned societies, to its service as Belfast's city museum, to its recognition as a national institution through the Museum Act (Northern Ireland) 1961, it has been pioneering and reflective of and responsive to wider political and social change in Northern Ireland. It serves as a civic place, a national museum and an international player, transcending definitions through its collections and strategic positioning. Operating in a post-conflict, divided society, where the concept of 'the nation' remains contested, it is a rare shared space for difficult conversations, broadening perspectives and inclusive engagement.

Drawing upon extensive institutional records and qualitative research with former and current staff and stakeholders, the project asks why and how the Ulster Museum developed as it did and what its contribution has been to place-making and identity. As a national institution it has often been negatively stereotyped as an arm of the state and a conservative establishment, yet this is far from the reality. This research examines these preconceptions and recovers a more nuanced, complex institutional history.

Looking forwards as well as backwards, the research will inform the direction of live redevelopment plans for the Museum in the medium and long term, realising the ambitions in the Ulster Museums Masterplan (2020) and aligning with the policy direction in Northern Ireland's Programme for Government (2024-2027).

The key research questions of the project are as follows:

1. How has the Ulster Museum responded to the political and social context of Northern Ireland in its development?
2. How have the specific contexts of Northern Ireland and the Ulster Museum shaped distinct and particular curatorial practices?

Engaging with scholarship, archival sources and key stakeholders, the PhD will:

- Generate a highly contextualised institutional history;
- Assess the Ulster Museum's unique contribution to the field of museology as a result of this contextual understanding;
- Inform implementation of the Ulster Museum Masterplan (2020);
- Evidence the valuable role the Ulster Museum plays in society in Northern Ireland.

Application procedure

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 NMNI' 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>

For the application process, candidates should prepare:

- a research proposal: write up to 2000 words outlining from an academic perspective 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
- 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 current academic/professional CV
- two references (at least one needs to be an academic reference), which should normally be by academics (or other professionals) 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>

Research with National Museums NI

This research studentship is one allocated to the University of Leicester by the AHRC to support the work of National Museums NI. Given the site-specific nature of the PhD, the successful student will be expected to spend a significant proportion of their time carrying out research and gaining relevant experience at National Museums NI 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. **Research Councils UK Indicative Fee Level for 2026-27 is £5,238.** Please note that international applicants will be required to fund the difference between the UK and International fee.

The award pays full maintenance for all students both home and international students. The UKRI National Minimum **Doctoral Stipend for 2026-27 is £21,805**, plus a CDP maintenance payment of £600/year.

The student is eligible to receive an additional travel and related expenses grant during the course of the project courtesy of National Museums NI worth up to £2,000 per year for 4 years (pro-rated for part-time students).

The successful candidate will be eligible to participate in events organised for all Collaborative Doctoral Partnership students who are registered with different universities and studying with cultural and heritage organisations across the UK.

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 2026

- International students are eligible to receive the full award for maintenance as are home students.

A successful international student will be required to pay the difference between what the AHRC provide to the university for tuition and the charge made by the university for tuition fees for international students studying for a doctoral degree. The full annual international tuition fee for 2026-27 at University of Leicester is £18,000 for full time international students, and £14,950 (for up to 4 years) for part time international students.
- 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. We encourage applicants from all backgrounds to apply, even if you are not certain that you meet every criterion. We are keen to hear from individuals with varied expertise who can bring unique perspectives to the studentships. Experiences beyond academia, including other experience in a professional setting are also highly valued, this includes diverse lived experiences and those with an understanding of diverse research practices, outputs, impacts and engagement practice.
- Applicants may come from diverse disciplines, including museum studies, history or politics, for example. It is expected that the successful applicant will be able to clearly explain the relationship between their existing training/experience and the topic of

this CDP, and to indicate how their present research interests relate to the proposed project.

- Applicants must be able to demonstrate an interest in the [GLAM sector](#) and potential and enthusiasm for developing skills more widely in related areas.
- As a collaborative award, students will be expected to spend time at both the University and National Museums NI.

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/>

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.

Further information

If you have questions about the project funding and practicalities, please contact cdp@nationalmuseumsni.org

If you would like to ask any questions in relation to your research proposal or statement of purpose please email the main supervisory team jointly:

- Suzanne MacLeod – sm100@le.ac.uk
- Hannah Crowdy – hannah.crowdy@nationalmuseumsni.org