

University of Leicester AHRC Doctoral Landscape Awards

Applicant Guidance
2025-2026

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These guidance notes are designed to help you make your application and lead you through the process so please do read them carefully.

Eligibility

Applications are eligible where the applicant is:

- a UK student with a Master's (or currently studying for a Master's)
- a UK student without a Master's but with equivalent professional experience (professionals working in the creative industries, for example who have professional or curatorial experience)
- an overseas student with a Master's (or currently studying for a Master's)
- an overseas student without a Master's but with equivalent professional experience (professionals working in the creative industries, for example who have professional or curatorial experience)
- not already a doctoral degree holder
- not already enrolled on a doctoral degree programme.

AHRC Subject Remit and ESRC Overlap

Applicants whose projects come close to the border between Arts and Humanities Research Council Funding and Economic and Social Research Council funding (particularly those in Sociology, Criminology, Law, Politics, Education, and Applied Linguistics) should check with their academic unit and with DLA leads that their project falls under the AHRC. Applicants are encouraged to carefully consult the [AHRC subject areas](#), as well as the [AHRC-ESRC Joint Statement](#).

Interdisciplinary and Practice Research

The Doctoral Landscape Awards support interdisciplinary and practice research, bearing in mind the AHRC subject areas. In these guidelines 'practice research' is used for consistency, however we recognise that a variety of other nomenclatures are preferred in specific disciplines including practice-led, practice-based and practice-as-research and that these alternative terms are equally valid. In all its forms, practice research is a process of investigation in order to gain new knowledge and original insights by a practitioner-researcher in which creative output can be produced or practice undertaken as an integral part of the research process and which is then disseminated in an appropriate form to the fields/communities who benefit from such knowledge. Indicative examples include research undertaken through artwork, exhibitions, compositions, performances, events, creative writing, design, textiles, film, or digital interactive media. In line with AHRC's guidelines and the University of Leicester's Senate Regulation 9, we expect this practice to be accompanied by some form of documentation of the research process, as well as some form of textual analysis or exposition to support its position and to demonstrate critical reflection.

The application process

Please ensure that you allow yourself enough time to complete your online funding application form by **20 January 2026 at noon UK time** for entry in October 2026. To aid with time zone conversion of the deadline, please check the [World clock converter](#).

Please note awards cannot be deferred. Please also note that following AHRC guidelines, we are only able to offer a maximum of 30% of DLA awards to international applicants.

There are three stages to the application process:

Step one: Identify a supervisor or supervisors

You will need to identify two supervisors. Do look through the [University's webpages](#) to identify departments, Schools, centres and/or institutes in your research area(s). Staff profiles will often feature a potential supervisor's current research interests, their previous and upcoming publications and activities, and a list of their previously supervised doctoral researchers and projects. This information can help you assess their suitability to support your research. Information about how to search for a potential supervisor will be provided in the Applicant Information Session (see below).

Once you have identified a potential supervisor, you should write them a brief email introducing yourself and enquire about discussing the ideas and focus of your prospective PhD research. During your discussions with the prospective supervisor(s), you should ask them specific questions about your project. Your potential supervisor(s) can help you refine your project for your application.

When considering applying for PhD study, it's important to think about the other academics in the university department, the PhD students that are already based there, available facilities and the research networks the department is host to or part of. This information can usually be found on a university department's website and will help you assess how a department will fit with your developing research interests. It may also be possible to reach out to current and past PhD students in the department, to ask about the research culture and perhaps get an idea of what it is like working with your proposed supervisor(s).

It is important to make early contact with potential supervisors and discuss your project and application with them. You will want to be contacting potential supervisors by late autumn, get your university application in by 8 December 2025, and then submit your DLA application by the January deadline.

Step two: Apply for a place to study

Before you can apply for funding, you will need to have applied for a place at the University of Leicester. It is not necessary for you to have received a formal offer in order to apply for funding, **but** your application to study at the University of Leicester must be in process with an Applicant ID number. The Applicant ID number is required for final submission of your funding application.

In short: you must apply to the University of Leicester BEFORE you submit your DLA funding application.

Step three: Apply for DLA funding

Once you have submitted your University of Leicester PhD application and you have received your Applicant ID, you may turn to submitting your DLA application.

The University of Leicester is holding a virtual [Applicant Information Session and Application Writing Workshop on 3 December at 4pm UK time](#). We strongly recommend that you attend this workshop if possible, as it will contain useful practical advice. Please contact ahrcdla@le.ac.uk if you have any queries about this.

Completing the online DLA Application Form

To start your application please use the [DLA Application Form](#).

We advise that you develop your application offline and transfer it to the online form when you are satisfied. You can download a pdf copy of the DLA Application Form and work from that if you need to, before transferring your responses to the online form and submitting it. If you require the application in an alternative format, please contact ahrcdla@le.ac.uk.

You should aim to make the best case possible for your DLA application, proof-read before submission to avoid careless spelling or grammatical errors, and pay due attention to the word limits where applicable. If you have a disability which will make completing the application form difficult, please contact ahrcdle@le.ac.uk for advice. How you present your project proposal is crucial, so you should use clear and concise language, avoiding jargon. You should not assume that your audience will be specialists in your field, but rather familiar with the basic demands of your discipline and doctoral study.

Use of AI UKRI policy – applicant responsibilities

It is the responsibility of applicants to read and understand their responsibilities under [UKRI's AI policy](#).

Please follow the guidance below carefully. The form is the main document by which your application will be assessed, and if you omit any of the information requested, or provide information not appropriate to the question asked, or do not follow the guidance in other ways, it will affect the assessment of your application.

Application Section 1 – Eligibility Questions

The questions in this section confirm your eligibility to apply for a Doctoral Landscape Award.

Question 1: Please supply your full name with your application, ensuring this matches the name you have used in your University of Leicester application.

Question 2: Please supply an email address for correspondence, ensuring this matches the email address you have used in your University of Leicester application.

Question 3: This question asks you to choose your current status. If you have already commenced PhD study at the University of Leicester, you are not eligible for DLA funding.

International applicants will be eligible for tuition fees and a stipend to support living costs at the UKRI rate for UK applicants. UKRI (AHRC) funding will not cover international fees set by universities or other costs which are associated with entering the UK such as visas and health surcharge.

[UKCISA](#) provides information on tuition fees to help you assess your fee status. If you click on that link, you should find a guide to give you a clear idea of whether you have UK or International student status.

Question 4: Please select the PhD programme to which you have applied. Please ensure this matches the programme to which you have applied in your University of Leicester application.

Question 5: Please choose your mode of study. Full time students will be registered for a maximum of 3.5 years of study and receive 3.5 years of funding; part-time students will receive the same total amount of funding over a maximum of 7 years of registration. Please note that in both cases, you will be a campus-based student. Regulations under place of tenure set by [UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\)](#) recommend that you live within a reasonable distance of your institution so that you can meet necessary travel costs. This is to ensure that you are not isolated and get the full support, mentoring, training and access to the facilities you will need to complete your research successfully and to a high standard. The only exceptions to this are periods of absence that are an essential part of your study e.g.

fieldwork, study visits or conference attendance. These criteria mean that we are **unable to support distance learning PhDs**; furthermore, UKRI regulations are clear that international students funded by UKRI councils must be primarily resident in the UK for the duration of their study.

Question 6: Please confirm that you have submitted your University of Leicester application for a PhD place. You should not submit an application for a Doctoral Landscape Award until you have submitted your PhD application to the University of Leicester. However, you do not need to wait to receive a confirmed offer of a place to study in order to apply for the DLA – you just need to have an Applicant ID.

Question 7: Enter your University of Leicester Applicant ID here.

Question 8: As part of our commitment to an inclusive approach to applications, please confirm you HAVE NOT included details of your degree-awarding institution in your answers.

Question 9: Please confirm that you have checked that your research is eligible to be funded by the AHRC. You are encouraged to carefully consult the [AHRC subject areas](#), as well as the [AHRC-ESRC Joint Statement](#).

Application Section 2 – Project

This section asks you to provide information about your proposed PhD project.

Question 10: This should be a short title that describes the research to be undertaken and should be a single, indicative sentence. Try to avoid writing a question as your project's working title.

Question 11: A well-conceived project is the cornerstone of a successful application. Bear in mind that some of the assessors may not work precisely in your particular discipline, but that all of them will be able to assess whether a project is coherent and clearly explained and can be realised within the timeframe of your studies. As part of your proposal, make clear the contribution to knowledge and understanding that you hope to make and explain why the research is important. You will be addressing an audience with academic expertise in the arts and humanities, but not necessarily specialists in the precise area of the project: it is your responsibility to make sure the project is expressed clearly for that audience.

In describing your project in no more than 500 words, you will be expected to encompass a number of things. How you balance the weight and priority given to these different elements in the word count will depend on the nature of your project.

- The **context** of your project (i.e., the research or practice background to the problem/challenge/research gap you will investigate).

Please situate your project in relation to a research context. This means to explain why this research is needed and acknowledge previous work in the field (if any exists). Outline your project as relevant to the stage of your research at the time of applying, and with reference (e.g., Jones, 2017) to existing literature and practice in the field.

- The **research question(s)** it will answer.

What is the question animating your research's focus? What questions are motivating you to conduct and complete your research? Why must these questions be answered right now? Think about how your research may be staging an intervention in the research area(s) you are drawing on and what questions are raised by the 'gaps' in your field(s). Think, too, about what questions are raised by the intersection of your research and wider society? Browsing the University of Leicester's [doctoral research pages](#) will give you an idea of the kinds of questions and motivations animating currently funded projects. You might have a single research question, two or three questions, or an overall challenge with several underpinning objectives.

- The **method(s)** you will use to investigate your research question(s).

Describe your intended methods and try to be as specific as you can at this stage. We want you to outline *how* you will undertake the research. For example, what is your object of study and how will you gather data or generate insights about it? Is there a particular approach you will take with your creative practice? Will your research focus on a specific geographical location? Will you be undertaking fieldwork, archival research, qualitative interviews, theorisation or other methods? You should ensure you have a good grasp of the processes of those methodologies: for instance, oral history requires some thought around participant selection, both practical and ethical.

Please note the word count.

Question 12: Here you should explain how your proposed project may impact knowledge and understanding, whether within your own academic discipline, in relevant arts, humanities, cultural, creative and heritage sectors, or in broader societal or economic ways. You may also wish to reflect on how this might benefit your career. How might your research project might have impact? In other words, this is a place where you can articulate the "so what" of doing the research. Essentially, why does your research matter? This may necessarily be a short statement; in preparing it you might find it helpful to think about these questions. What changes will be made within your discipline(s) on account of your original research and

practical contributions? How will you work with organisations within and outside academia, education, research centres, conferences? Why are these organisations of particular interest to you? What forms of public engagement and dissemination best fit with your research? What are the practical uses of your project? How and why are these the best uses of your project? **Please note the word count.**

Question 13: List references for the primary and secondary material cited in your project proposal, covering written sources, exhibitions, performances, and other forms of practice, as relevant to your proposal. You must include enough information in your reference for the work cited to be identified by another person. However, in the interest of the word count, you may omit the publisher from the citations of books, and where an essay or article has multiple authors, you may use the lead author and abbreviate the others to 'et al.' **Please note the word count.**

Question 14: Please provide an indicative timeline and structure for your project, including year-by-year objectives and activities over the full duration of the award (to a maximum of 3.5 years for full-time students; 7 years part-time) This allows those assessing your application to understand its feasibility. **Please note the word count.**

Question 15: All research projects must comply with relevant research ethics and integrity guidelines so you should review your application against these requirements. Everyone is bound by the requirements of **academic honesty and integrity**; other projects may have more particular ethical implications. It is important to address ethical issues early in your research, and this is a good opportunity to start thinking about them. The most common issue in arts and humanities research is the collection of data, particularly, although not exclusively, about people still alive. If this applies to your project, how will you collect data, how will you ensure that your subjects have given their consent, and how you will you store the data you collect? You might also have issues around intellectual property, particularly if your project involves close collaboration with a partner. You should consult with your prospective supervisor on this. Depending on your research topic, you might not have any specific ethical concerns, but if you do, in this box you must outline:

Please review the [University of Leicester's research ethics and integrity guidelines](#), and outline:

- The specific ethical considerations of your project: these may be material (e.g. copyright and intellectual property, data storage) or methodological (data collection, engagement of research participants/stakeholders)
- How you will address ethical concerns you have identified (e.g., informed consent, anonymisation, appropriate training, identification of support services etc.)

Ethics review is required for all research that involves:

- Human participants, human tissue, material, remains or personal data
- Any other types of research that might not involve humans but still raises ethical issues or concerns. For example, the research or results of the research may pose a risk of damage to the environment, or cause political or social tensions or sensitivities or may impact on cultural heritage
- Animals or their tissue

If you have not identified any ethical issues with your project, please write "None" as a response. **Please note the word count.**

Question 16: Most projects will require primary research activities, such as visits to a particular archive or archives, or to museum or gallery collection, or the completion of data collection or a piece of fieldwork, or practice or performance. One of the measures of an excellent project and its management is your ability to think through which activities you will need to complete, when and how you will undertake them. We are not looking for numerical figures but the types of costs that are likely to be incurred. If your proposed project will require practice, fieldwork or study visits (beyond the use of the University of Leicester's facilities and routine dissemination and engagement, such as presenting at conferences), then you must complete this section. Please be aware that this application will serve as a reference point for additional funding. Activities identified here must be essential to the completion of your project. Their significance to the project must be evident to the assessors of your application. Activities not mentioned here but which are later identified as important to your research may not be funded.

For each activity, you should provide indicative information on:

- **Where** the activity will take place (will you have to travel, which museums, archives, libraries, sites will you visit, will you need to hire space)?
- **How** long will the activity last or how long will it take to accomplish the visit will be for (i.e., days, weeks)?
- **Why** is the activity necessary to your project (i.e., how will the visit support you to complete your research? e.g., enable data collection, stakeholder engagement, language practice etc)?
- **What type** of costs are likely to be incurred (e.g. travel and accommodation; participant costs; equipment hire)?
- **Contingency plans** in the event that visits cannot go ahead due to risk assessment outcomes.

Please note the word count.

Application Section 3: Preparedness

This section asks you to provide details about your academic and academic equivalent qualifications. These would be both your undergraduate degree and, if applicable, your postgraduate degree. The AHRC requires a good undergraduate degree award as a minimum, but we also recognise that professional qualifications and experience may provide the equivalent preparation to a Master's qualification. In order to support our inclusive approach to applications, please DO NOT include details of your degree-awarding institution in your answers.

Question 17: Your undergraduate degree is usually a first degree, resulting in a BA. If you are an international applicant, and do not know the equivalent British degree or classification, please check with the Admissions Office at pgrapply@le.ac.uk who should be able to provide the necessary equivalence.

Question 18: Should you hold or be studying for a post-graduate degree, this will normally be at Master's level. You may apply for DLA funding while you are studying for a Master's; if that is your situation, please add 'in progress' after the date when you expect to finish. If you are in this position, please be aware that completing your postgraduate degree will be a condition of your award.

Questions 19 and 20: If you do not hold a Master's degree nor are studying for one, but have equivalent professional experience, please provide full details of this experience in response to these questions. You do not need to complete both questions.

If you are an international applicant, please consult with the Admissions Office to establish the British equivalencies for your degree results. This will help the assessors understand your achievements correctly.

Question 21: In this question you should demonstrate your **preparedness**, what makes you the best person to undertake this research project and what you will bring to it. This is your opportunity to present yourself and your **particular abilities and skills**, so take time to think through how what you include is significant to how you will undertake your doctoral study. You should comment on your **knowledge and skills**, whether you have developed those through previous study in higher education (including specific modules if appropriate), through **other courses and training** (perhaps in a professional context) or **professional experience and creative practice** (for instance, employment, residencies, curations, internships, exhibiting, and performances). You might mention any **specialised training you have completed, both academic and professional**, such as languages, information technology and specific software packages used in your project, or equality, diversity and inclusion training. You should also note **academic and professional achievements**, such as

awards and prizes, scholarships, publications, and exhibitions. **Please note the word count.**

Question 22: Following on from the previous question about your preparedness, in this question you might also reflect on the skills you think **you will need but which you do not yet have:** for instance, advanced knowledge of a language, specific research methods, software training or project management skills. If this is the case, you might mention it as a training need here, to demonstrate that you understand the demands of your project and how you will address them. **Please note the word count.**

Question 23: For this optional question, you may want to make the panel aware of circumstances or other experience, **specifically** where the circumstances have negatively affected your academic results, and where you have not received mitigation. There is no requirement to disclose such circumstances if you do not wish to, or you do not think that you have any to disclose. **Please note the word count.**

If there is something you would like the panel to know, please present it as concisely as possible, with a rough date where appropriate. For instance, "2021, diagnosis of dyslexia during final year of study. Mitigation as the result of diagnosis improved but degree average predominantly calculated on previous grades". You should **ONLY** supply information here which has impacted your studies or professional achievements. **Please note the word count.**

Application Section 4: Place

This section asks you to explain why the University of Leicester is the best place for you to undertake this project.

Questions 24 and 25 ask you to provide the names of two supervisors and their academic unit or Schools.

Question 26: For this question you should explain the academic reasons why the University of Leicester is the best place for you to undertake doctoral study. There are four main areas you might want to discuss. Firstly, and most importantly, you might want to explain why your lead supervisor is **the best person to support you** in your project. Secondly, you should look at the other **networks** available. For instance, does the University of Leicester have a particular **research strength in your disciplinary area**, which means you would be able to participate in broader research discussions and groups? Or are there **resources and methodological expertise**, which might underpin specialist training that you know you will need? Or are there particular **facilities** that you would use? These might include an archive, or performance, or practice space. And finally, you might also think about Leicester offers to post-graduate researchers more generally: what training and support will you benefit from

and seek out? Finally, you should consider how your project fits in with the thematic priorities of Leicester's College of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities. These are:

- *Heritage: Past, present, future*
- *Culture & Digital Futures: Media, contemporary creativity, & AI*
- *Healthy Planet, People, and Places: Global mobilities, environmental futures, social wellbeing*
- *Social Justice and Rights: Hyperdiversity, equity, and inclusion*
- *Security, Crime & Prevention: Victims, perpetrators, responses to crime*

Please note the word count.

Application Section 5: Other Information

Question 27 asks you to confirm whether you have applied for an AHRC award at any other Doctoral Training Programme (DTP) or institution, to begin studies in 2026. If you have, please specify the institution in **Question 28**. Your responses to these questions do not form part of the assessment of your application and will not be used in the shortlisting and if applicable the awarding process.

What happens next

Once you have completed the form, don't forget to submit your application! Once the deadline has passed, all applications will be anonymized, before being processed and reviewed by the University of Leicester DLA Management Board to confirm their eligibility. The DLA Management Board comprises two DLA co-Leads, the College Dean of Research, the College Dean of Postgraduate Research, the Head of the Doctoral College, and at least one EDI representative. All eligible applications will then be sent to the appropriate academic unit.

Each academic unit will form a fixed Subject Area Specialist Panel (SASP) normally comprising the School's Director of Postgraduate Research, the School's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Lead (or nominated deputy), and one further academic in the same or related discipline to review applications. Applications will be reviewed using the three criteria of **Project**, **Preparedness**, and **Place**. Since this is a highly competitive scheme, only those applications scoring a minimum average of 5 across the combined criteria will be put forward for shortlisting. Please see below for details of these criteria.

Part of the shortlisting process is an interview. The interview panel will comprise the SASP and in addition to this fixed panel, for each interview, the named supervisor will also attend. Interviews will take place between **5 February and 19 February 2026**. You will receive a week's notice ahead of any interview, and you will also receive the interview questions in advance.

After interviews the anonymised applications of shortlisted applicants will be returned to the DLA Management Board with two additional forms: the first, a report on the interview, to ensure consistent practice across all interviews; and the second, an institutional support form, on which the School will confirm its support for the application, both person and project, and confirm the supervisory team. Only applications which are scored at the very top of the scale (5 and 6) will be shortlisted. Applicants who are not shortlisted will be informed at this stage in early March 2026.

The DLA Scholarship Selection Panel (DLASSP) will comprise the DLA Management Board, and a DLA Lead external to the University. THE DLASSP read all shortlisted applications and additional forms, and make final selections and allocations. Successful applicants will be contacted in late March. There may be a reserve list; if you are on the reserve list, you will also be informed.

Criteria for Assessing a Doctoral Landscape Award application

All applications for Doctoral Landscape Award funding are subject to the same criteria for scoring. These are based on three 'P's: **Project, Preparedness, and Place**. Scores are awarded on the evidence of the application form, where the applicant puts forward their case; on the references collected in the University of Leicester PhD application, where referees are invited to comment on the applicant's preparedness for doctoral study; and on the Institutional Support Form and Interview Record, which address all three criteria, with additional information on Project and Place.

Each of the three criteria will be scored on a **scale of 1–6**, with 6 being the highest. The overall score for an application will be calculated as the **average of these three scores**, giving a final result out of six. This ensures that no single criterion disproportionately determines the outcome and allows applicants to demonstrate excellence across a range of areas.

Project

A well-thought-through project is essential to a successful application. It should address the following questions: is the project focused? Is it feasible to complete it within the funding period? Are the research questions clear to a non-specialist as well as to a disciplinary expert? Will the research methodology address the research questions? Is the project clearly informed by current thinking in the field, both in its questions and in its methodology?

What makes the project stand out? Does it bring a new methodology or perspective to an old question? Does it address a new question? Is it clear what difference the project will make? How will it affect current understanding? Is it building on previous work or is it challenging assumptions? Why is it timely and important? Are there references to help contextualise the topic?

An understanding of the research process and the final output is also important, and is addressed in the timeline for study. Crucial questions here include: Can the project be completed within the timeframe of the award? What stages of work will have to be completed and in what order to address the questions?

In short, **what is this project going to address, and why is it important that it should be addressed?**

Preparedness

This section considers the applicant's overall readiness to undertake doctoral research, bringing together evidence of prior academic achievement, professional or creative experience, skills, and motivation. Applicants should demonstrate how their previous studies, research experience, or practice have equipped them with the knowledge and capabilities needed to complete their proposed project. Academic preparation, including degree classification and performance in research projects, should be presented as part of this overall picture, alongside professional experience, creative outputs, or other relevant achievements that have prepared the applicant to work at doctoral level.

Applicants should also indicate what further skills, knowledge, or training they will need in order to carry out the project successfully, and how they intend to acquire them. These might include, for example, language training, digital methods, technical or creative techniques, or specific methodological competencies. Evidence of commitment, independence, and the capacity to contribute new knowledge to their field should also be made clear.

Preparedness is understood holistically, valuing both academic and non-traditional routes into research. Academic results are considered as one element of readiness rather than the sole determinant of potential. Information provided by the applicant will be corroborated by the institutional support statement, particularly with respect to the provision of necessary training and the viability of the proposed research activities.

The key question for this section is: **how is this applicant prepared — through experience, skills, and motivation — to undertake this project, and how will they develop further during the PhD?**

Place

This section addresses how the proposed project will benefit from the research expertise of the chosen supervisory team and the home institution. The applicant should reflect on why they have chosen their home institution and their lead supervisor, and what they think their supervisory team will offer them in academic and/or practice expertise. In addition, does the applicant know of any research groups in their home institution that will support and develop their work? Are they aware of any areas of expertise in any of the other partner institutions that they would like to draw on, or are there partners they would like to work with? Does the applicant articulate how the project fits into the thematic priorities of the College of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities?

- Heritage: Past, present, future
- Culture & Digital Futures: Media, contemporary creativity, & AI
- Healthy Planet, People, and Places: Global mobilities, environmental futures, social wellbeing
- Social Justice and Rights: Hyperdiversity, equity, and inclusion
- Security, Crime & Prevention: Victims, perpetrators, responses to crime

Applicants will provide outline answers to these questions; institutional support statements will provide more detail on the appropriateness of the supervisory team, and potential supervisory collaboration across the network; any relevant opportunities to collaborate with non-university partners for the benefit the applicant and project; and the potential to work with individuals and groups beyond higher education, such as artists, activists, community groups.

The key question for this section is: **why is this the best place to undertake this project?**

Scoring

Each application is scored against the three criteria — **Project, Preparedness, and Place** — on a scale of 1 to 6. Each criterion is given an individual score, and the overall result is the average of the three scores, producing a final score out of six. This approach ensures that no single criterion disproportionately determines the outcome and allows applicants to demonstrate excellence across a range of areas.

The definitions of scores are as follows:

Score	Definition
6	Outstanding Application and top priority for an award A research proposal that is outstanding across the following: conceptualisation of questions, aims and objectives; scholarly, creative, or professional contextualisation; research design and methodology; potential for innovation and influence in academic and/or non-academic contexts; and clarity of structure and expression. The articulation of the project indicates appropriate command of the field at this level. The intended contribution of the project to research,

	scholarship and/or practice may be additive or transformative but is in all cases clearly and persuasively stated. The candidate's preparedness to undertake research at doctoral level is demonstrated at an exceptionally high level. Evidence may lie in outstanding academic results achieved or predicted, outstanding professional or creative outputs or achievements, a convincing trajectory of relevant skills and experience, or a combination of these. Preparedness may be demonstrated through traditional or non-traditional routes into research, but in all cases is coherent, compelling, and supported by substantive evidence of relevant activity, motivation, and purpose. The proposed supervisory team is exceptionally well-matched to the project. Their expertise and research experience are highly relevant and their track record demonstrates capacity to guide the project to successful and timely completion. The research environment, training provision, and resources offered by the institution are clearly of the highest quality and will enable the project to succeed.
5	Excellent Application and strong contender for an award A research proposal that is excellent across almost all of the following: conceptualisation of questions, aims and objectives; scholarly, creative, or professional contextualisation; research design and methodology; potential for innovation and influence; and clarity of structure and expression. The articulation of the project demonstrates secure command of the field at this level. The intended contribution to research, scholarship, or practice is clearly indicated and likely to be significant, though not consistently at the level required for a 6. The candidate's preparedness to undertake doctoral research is of a high quality. Academic results achieved or predicted, professional or creative outputs, and skills development demonstrate strong potential to succeed, with a credible plan for acquiring any further training required. The applicant's profile is coherent and convincing, showing clear purpose and relevant experience, though not with the exceptional quality or consistency of a 6. The supervisory team and environment are well-suited to the project. There is clear evidence of appropriate expertise, relevant resources, and a supportive research culture that will provide a strong basis for completion of the project, though not all elements are as compelling as would be expected for the highest rating.

The remaining categories are included as a guide to help Unit of Assessment committees that undertake the initial review of applicants to decide which applications merit a score of 5 or 6 and so should be sent forward for consideration to the Awarding Committee.

4	Good application but requiring further development A research proposal that demonstrates good standards in some but not all of the following: conceptualisation of questions, aims and objectives; scholarly, creative, or professional contextualisation; research design and methodology; and clarity of structure and expression. Command of the field may be uneven or underdeveloped, and the project may require some refinement before it is fully convincing. The applicant's preparedness shows evidence of relevant academic, professional, or creative achievements but these may be uneven or incomplete. There may be gaps in skills or knowledge, or limited clarity in the plan for development. While there is potential to succeed, doubts may be raised about the applicant's readiness to undertake the project at the outset of the award. The proposed supervisory team and research environment are broadly suitable, but there may be some concerns about the fit or capacity to provide the training and resources needed for successful completion.
3	Satisfactory application but not recommended for an award In the competitive context, the research proposal does not demonstrate sufficient originality, coherence, or rigour to be recommended for funding. The project may be vague in its aims, weakly contextualised, or lacking a robust methodology. The applicant's preparedness does not demonstrate consistent strength. Academic results may be modest or incomplete, relevant professional or creative experience may be limited, and plans for acquiring further skills may be unclear or unrealistic. The overall profile does not convincingly demonstrate readiness for doctoral study. The fit between the project and supervisory environment may be partial or weak, and provision of resources or training may not appear adequate to support successful completion.

2	Poor application and not recommended for an award. The application contains insufficient evidence and justification for support. There are noticeable gaps or flaws in one or more of the criteria of project, preparedness, or place. The viability of the research project or the applicant's capacity to complete it successfully is seriously in doubt. Referees may express substantive reservations about the applicant's suitability for doctoral research or about the feasibility of the proposed project.
1	Application not recommended for an award because of acute shortcomings The application demonstrates serious weaknesses in one or more of the categories of project, preparedness, or place, such that the panel cannot recommend funding. Evidence that the academic unit(s) or DTP could support successful and timely completion of the project may be absent or severely limited.
U	Application ungraded because it does not fall within the scope of the scheme.