

AHRC 'Crafting Care for a Healthy Place, Planet and People'

Doctoral Focal College

Application Guidance for 2026 Entry

Please read this guidance document in full before completing an Expression of Interest.

Introduction

This document is intended for those who wish to apply for Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding from the 'Crafting Care for a Healthy Place, Planet and People' Doctoral Focal College to undertake a PhD at the University of Lancashire, University of Liverpool, or Royal Northern College of Music. The guidance below sets out eligibility for awards, expectations of funding, and the application process.

Financial basis of the awards

A 'Crafting Care' PhD Studentship consists of:

- Payment of academic fees, at the standard UKRI Home rate (£5,006 in 2025/26, exact rate for 2026/27 subject to confirmation from UKRI).
- Maintenance Stipend (£20,780 in 2025/26, exact rate for 2026/27 subject to confirmation from UKRI)
- Access to a Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) for reimbursement of research related expenses including - but not limited to - conference attendance and training courses.

Nine studentships are available for October 2026 Entry. The standard length of our studentships will be three and a half years, for full-time study. A longer period of funding may be awarded where a student requires additional advanced training, is working with a non-HEI Partner on a Collaborative Doctoral Award, or when a student completes a placement during their studies. Students opting to study part-time will receive a pro rata maintenance grant of the equivalent of a full-time award.

Students will receive additional Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) to support reasonable adjustments where appropriate. To ensure reasonable adjustments are in place ahead of studentships commencing, students who are awarded funding are encouraged to commence

the process of seeking DSA ahead of their start date. More details will be provided in funding offer letters when successful.

Residential Eligibility

Studentships are open to both Home and International (including EU and EEA) candidates.

Please note that the studentships will only fund tuition fees up to the Home rate. This is £5,006 in 2025/26 (exact rate for 2026/27 subject to confirmation from UKRI). International tuition fees are usually substantially higher than this sum.

Please also be aware that a maximum of 30% of our studentships can be awarded to international students each year i.e. two studentships will be available for international students in 2026.

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

If a candidate does not meet the criteria, they will be classed as an international student.

This will not apply to Irish nationals living in the UK whose right to study and to access benefits and services are preserved on a reciprocal basis under the Common Travel Area arrangement. Such applicants will be classified as Home students.

You must refer to the UKRI Terms and Conditions for Training Grants for full details

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

Academic Eligibility

Candidates applying for a PhD will usually have undertaken both an undergraduate and a master's course. Typically, candidates will have undertaken these courses at a recognised UK Higher Education Institution (HEI), although applications with qualifications from outside the UK are welcome. It will be necessary to ascertain whether such qualifications equate to a UK

honours degree, and at what level. Assessments of qualifications attained outside the UK are based on the British Council's NARIC guide. For non-UK qualification transcripts not in English, an official translation must be provided with the application form.

Project Areas for 2026 Recruitment

The 'Crafting Care' Doctoral Focal College sought input from across its constituent universities and non-university partners to identify four key Project Areas, around which recruitment for the 2026 cohort of students will be based. Every prospective student who applies to the college must be proposing a research project that fits within one of the following four Project Areas:

1. Catalysing Care through Creative Arts/Practices

This theme invites expressions of interest that engage with the capacity of arts and creative practices to catalyse, at individual and structural/systemic levels, new experience and innovative thinking in relation to health and wellbeing, by: transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries; fostering community and meaningful relational connection; representing and redressing social injustices and health inequalities; giving voice and expression to the lived experience of marginalised or under-represented groups.

Projects might include, but are not limited to, how arts-based initiatives or approaches can: create networks of care beyond social service models which sustain wellbeing across human and more than human worlds; empower migrant and refugee groups to communicate health needs and access resources; constitute a form of activism by illuminating and intervening in care injustices (such as gendered violence, disability, abortion); narrate (verbal and non-verbal) experiences of place (of people living with dementia or other groups whose perceptions of the environment are rarely considered in planning) to help shape landscapes of care.

2. Communicating and Curating Care

We are looking for expressions of interest that engage with the institutions, collections, concepts, aesthetics and methods that are central to communicating the past, present and future of care. Curation is itself, etymologically, a form of care: implying both careful

protection and selection (of, for example, artefacts, events, data and methodologies). We welcome projects that explore how we can curate and communicate care more carefully and effectively. These proposals might, for example, enquire how the emergent discourses around decolonisation, or the environmental humanities, or crip theory, change the way that we approach particular archives, databases, and collections. Alternatively, they might explore practices of curation (e.g. historic and emergent forms of anthologisation, exhibitions and taxonomy) and in doing so ask how we can draw out hidden histories of health and medicine from the past or imagine possible environmental futures.

Likewise, we are interested in ideas of how we can (re)design the systems and institutions that shape our conceptual and affective responses to care. How might we redesign aspects of pedagogy to ensure inclusive practices of care within education, and how do we educate about care (of people, place or planet) across different periods and contexts? How can students of the history of health, educators, gallerists and archivists design their services in response to people with different needs and lived experiences, or different political moments/movements?

3. Nourishing Care

We are looking for expressions of interest that engage with novel concepts, methods and practices of nourishing care and which explore the complex interplay between physical sustenance, cultural traditions, and ecological systems in our metabolic engagement with the world. We welcome projects which situate nourishment and nutrition at the intersection of biology, ethics, culture and environment to generate transformative insights in relation to the better care of people, place and planet.

Projects might include, but are not limited to: exploration of how nutritional care practices of ancient or contemporary cultures and communities help to craft, for example, individual and societal resilience, cultural identity, environmental sustainability and health equity; investigation of how existing knowledge or evidence (for example, historical, zooarchaeological and bioarchaeological) can be integrated with (for example) state-of-the-art nutritional and biological knowledge, and/or activist and lived experience, to build understanding around long-term nourishment strategies for population health; new conceptual, creative and methodological approaches to ingestion and digestion, which might

address problems of food insecurity and poverty, or ecological sustainability, and/or which might attend to local or individual biopsychosocial malnutrition, or celebrations and co-creation of nutritional or nourishing care.

4. Spaces and Places for Care

This theme invites expressions of interest that engage with the capacity of spaces and places (where space is given meaning through history, cultural memory, and connections to cultural or personal identity) to foster health and wellbeing of both people and planet.

We are interested in ideas that utilise an interdisciplinary approach to explore how we can shape spaces and places for care, redressing social injustices and reducing health inequalities, working with communities and protecting the planet. We anticipate that projects may explore the capacity of heritage landscapes (like canals, waterways, and forests), and their associated traditions, to foster attachment to place, cultural identity, and wellbeing; how arts and creative practices may ‘unlock’ some of the health and wellbeing benefits of natural or semi-natural places and spaces; how arts, creativity and leisure participation can support emotional well-being and a sense of self, particularly for marginalised or under-represented groups, including those experiencing life-changing conditions or injuries; and how nurturing a culture of trees, woods, waterways, coast and other habitats can improve social, physical and mental health and well-being and imagine environmental futures that protect planetary health.

Equal Opportunities Monitoring

Please ensure you complete and submit an EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES MONITORING FORM with your application. This will not be made available to those reviewing your funding application but will be used to survey equality and diversity of applicants and our funded students.

Application Process

The studentship application process consists of two phases:

1. Expression of Interest Phase

Candidates are invited to submit an Expression of Interest form by the 1st December 2025. On the Expression of Interest form candidates are asked to outline their preliminary ideas for a

PhD project and detail their 'Preparedness for Postgraduate Research'. Based on this information, the AHRC 'Crafting Care' Academic Management Committee will shortlist up to 15 candidates who will be invited to progress to the next phase.

2. Research Proposal Phase

Candidates who are shortlisted at the Expression of Interest phase will be contacted in early January and invited to submit a full Research Proposal by the 1st April 2026. In addition to the full Research Proposal itself, candidates will be asked to reflect on ethical considerations, additional funding needs, and – if applying for a Collaborative Doctoral Award – the plans with the non-HEI Partner. Shortlisted candidates should also submit an admissions application to their chosen university at this stage:

- [Royal Northern College of Music](#), Deadline 15th January 2026
- [University of Lancashire](#), Deadline 16th March 2026
- [University of Liverpool](#), Deadline 16th March 2026

Collaborative Doctoral Award

When reviewing the Expressions of Interest from prospective candidates, the AHRC 'Crafting Care' Academic Management Committee will consider which proposed projects may benefit most from collaboration and co-supervision by a non-university (or 'non-HEI') Partner. Up to three of the candidates shortlisted to progress to the full Research Proposal stage will be paired with one of the college's ten non-HEI Partners to develop a Collaborative Doctoral Award proposal. PhD candidates working with a non-HEI Partner on a formal Collaborative Doctoral Award will receive a longer period of studentship and a small stipend uplift.

Candidates may want to indicate in their Expression of Interest abstract if they think their project would particularly benefit from co-supervision by a non-HEI Partner. The AHRC 'Crafting Care' Doctoral Focal College's non-HEI Partners are:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Alder Hey Children's Hospital | • Liverpool Biennial |
| • Canal and River Trust | • Liverpool Heart and Chest Hospital |
| • Dada | • Mersey Care NHS Trust |

- National Museums Liverpool
- Royal Liverpool Philharmonic
- The Mersey Forest
- Wirral Council Public Health

Expression of Interest Form Guidance

1. Candidate Details

Please complete in full. You will need to be contactable between December 2025 and September 2026, so please provide an email address on which you can be contacted throughout this period.

2. PhD Project Proposal

Please provide an indicative title for your PhD Project and indicate which of the four 2026 Project Areas your proposed PhD Project aligns with. A preliminary abstract should be provided, in 300 words or less, which outlines your idea for a PhD research project and explains why your proposed project aligns with the 2026 Project Area you have specified.

3. Previous Qualifications

Please enter your relevant academic qualifications.

4. Preparedness for Postgraduate Research (PPR)

In answering this question, please refer explicitly to each of the five PPR criteria listed below. Appendix 1 at the end of this document outlines how each of these criteria will be assessed.

1. Why you want to pursue postgraduate research and what is your **motivation** for pursuing your chosen research topic?
2. Instances where you have demonstrated **problem-solving skills**, initiative, and perseverance in the face of challenges or obstacles, however big or small, making the most of available resources and opportunities (even when these might have been limited). Where relevant, you can also provide context to academic grades achieved. Challenges or obstacles might relate to various personal circumstances or experiences, including but not limited to, those relating to changing circumstances, ill health, socio-economic background, being the first in your family to attend university, returning to education after a long break, or managing caregiving or other competing responsibilities.

Please ensure that any challenges discussed are directly relevant to your preparedness for postgraduate research.

3. Examples of how you have **completed a project** (or achieved something), set goals, adapted when necessary, and managed your time effectively. You can include any accomplishments (personal, professional, or academic) that you take pride in and explain how you achieved these.
4. Your **personal development**, including (a) how you have gone about acquiring relevant skills that have prepared you for undertaking postgraduate research, (b) the identification of any current skill gaps and how you plan to address these, and (c) how receiving AHRC funding will enable your development in line with your future research and career goals.
5. Instances where you have successfully **worked collaboratively with others**, possibly providing support to others or seeking support for yourself when needed.

Be explicit about how any skills developed during these experiences have prepared you for undertaking postgraduate research, for your proposed research project, and for future engagement within the postgraduate community.

5. Supervisory Team

If you already have a primary supervisor or supervisory team in mind, please provide details below. This should be discussed with the proposed supervisor(s) before they are named here. It is not a requirement to have a supervisor at this stage, and – if shortlisted to proceed to the Research Proposal phase – assistance can be given in finding the best supervisory team for your project.

6. Acknowledgement

Please sign and date the application form. Electronic signatures are sufficient.

7. Supporting Documents

Please ensure you include a completed Equal Opportunities monitoring form. No further documentation is required at this stage, and any additional documents that are supplied will not be considered during the application process.

Research Proposal Form Guidance

You should only complete this form if you have been invited to do so after successfully completing the above Expression of Interest phase. Candidates will be notified of the outcome of their Expression of Interest in early January 2026.

1. Candidate Details

Please complete in full. You will need to be contactable between April and September 2026, so please provide an email address on which you can be contacted throughout this period.

2. PhD Project Proposal

Please provide the title for your PhD Project and indicate which of the four 2026 Project Areas your proposed PhD Project aligns with. A full proposal outlining the details of your project should be provided in 1500 words or less. Proposals that exceed the word limit may be disqualified. Referencing/bibliography should be included within this word limit. Please reflect on any ethical issues which might arise from your research.

3. Supervisory Team

Please state who your prospective supervisors are. This should have been discussed with the prospective supervisors prior to application. List your primary supervisor first. The supervisory fit of your prospective supervision team will be taken into consideration when the application is assessed. All students are expected to have at least two academic supervisors.

4. Potential Additional Costs

Please clearly indicate whether you intend to do fieldwork (overseas or within the UK) during your doctoral programme. Please indicate the destination and the duration of fieldwork if known at this stage. Only students who specify potential fieldwork in their original application will be eligible to apply for additional fieldwork funding during their studentship.

Please also discuss with your supervisor and indicate whether your project is likely to require additional funding (£1000 or more) for the purchase of specialist equipment, specific software or access to datasets, without which the project could not be completed.

Your answers to these questions will not influence the panel's decisions about studentship allocation but will allow the college to ensure appropriate funding is available to support the project if successful.

5. Collaboration with a non-HEI Partner

Only complete this section if your proposed PhD project involves working with a non-HEI Partner as a Collaborative Doctoral Award. Before completing this section, you must have discussed the collaboration with your supervisor and the proposed non-HEI Partner. A letter of support from the partner, which briefly outlines the nature of the collaboration should be included. Contributions from a collaborating partner can be in cash or in kind.

Speculative collaborations should not be included here. It is acknowledged that some proposed research projects may involve collaboration with a non-HEI Partner in a less formal arrangement than a defined Collaborative Doctoral Award. In these cases, applicants should detail the involvement of the non-HEI Partner in the PhD Project Proposal section of this form.

6. Acknowledgement

Please sign and date the application form. Electronic signatures are sufficient.

7. Supporting Documents

You should provide two references, along with your research proposal form, and copies of your academic transcripts. These may be the same references you submitted for your university admissions application, but do not have to be. Please see Appendix 1 for referee guidance – it is advised that potential referees are sent a copy of this when approached for a reference.

If you have completed Q5, indicating that your project will be delivered in collaboration with a non-HEI Partner as a Collaborative Doctoral Award, please include a letter of support from the non-HEI Partner.

Supporting documents should be in Word or PDF format – please do not send image files. No further documentation (e.g. CV, personal statements, extended research proposals) is required, and any additional documents that are supplied will not be considered during the application process.

APPENDIX 1: Guidance Note for Referees

Please highlight this guidance note to your referees when you request a reference.

The Research Proposal must be supported by two references from people able to comment on the candidate's 'Preparedness for Postgraduate Research'.

Potential supervisors can act as referee but should not be used for both references. Where applicants have recently completed a master's qualification, it would be expected that academic referees are utilised. Where applicants have been away from Higher Education for some time, references from employers (or similar) can be included. In both cases, referees should be those who can comment on the candidate's 'Preparedness for Postgraduate Research' according to the criteria below:

Preparedness for Postgraduate Research – to what extent does the application demonstrate:	
1. Motivation for Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enthusiasm and a strong motivation for research?• Enthusiasm and a strong motivation for their specific research topic?• A desire to make a positive difference in the world, which they have explicitly linked to their own postgraduate research?
2. Problem Solving, Perseverance and Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perseverance and a problem-solving approach in the face of challenges or setbacks?• Resourcefulness and initiative in terms of making efficient or even creative use of (potentially limited) resources?• The seeking out, identification and utilisation of support and advice available to them?• Awareness of explicit links between experiences/skills developed in this area and postgraduate research?
3. Project and Time Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An ability to set goals, intermediate milestones, and prioritisation of activities?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity to manage their own time effectively, to complete projects or tasks, and to adapt plans if necessary? • A commitment to seeing plans through, recognising risks, and building contingencies? • Awareness of explicit links between experiences/skills developed in this area and postgraduate research?
4. Personal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflection and awareness of personal abilities, including recognising the transferable nature of skills, their own current boundaries, and where further development is needed? • Seeking and effectively utilising feedback? • Development of a strategy to address additional needs in terms of knowledge, skills, and expertise? • Commitment to continued learning and development? • Awareness of explicit links between experiences/skills developed in this area and postgraduate research?
5. Working with Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of working with others effectively? Perhaps including existing links to communities, they intend to research? • A commitment to being mindful of their personal actions and their influence on others, while seeking to show respect for individual differences? • Awareness of explicit links between experiences/skills developed in this area and postgraduate research? • An intention to actively engage with opportunities offered during the PhD, including giving back to the community, should their application be successful?