

Applicant Guidance Notes

AHRC Doctoral Landscape Awards

2026 Entry

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

Eligibility and Application Process

AHRC funds outstanding original research across the whole range of the arts and humanities. Its doctoral award funding is open to UK and International research students as detailed on the [UKRI website](#).

As an arts and humanities doctoral training partnership, we welcome applications for interdisciplinary and practice research. We encourage applications from people from all backgrounds and identities, to avoid perpetuating biases in arts and humanities research.

There are three potential forms of eligible preparation:

1. You might hold a Masters qualification at the time of application
2. You might be working towards a Masters qualification that you will have completed by the time your PhD begins (even though the result may not be known and the final examination board may not yet have taken place)
3. You might have professional and/or creative experience that is pertinent to your proposed research

Awards for UK residents cover UK tuition fees and provide a tax-free stipend at the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) rate. For 2025/6, this is £20,780 per annum. This rate will be adjusted in line with the rate set by UKRI each year.

According to UKRI, to be classified as a home student, candidates must meet one of the following criteria and the associated residency requirements:

- be a UK National
- have settled status
- have pre-settled status
- have indefinite leave to remain or enter
- be an Irish national (Irish nationals' eligibility is derived from the UK-Ireland Common Travel Area Agreement)

If a candidate does not meet the criteria above, they would be classed as an International Student.

International applicants are eligible to apply for the Doctoral Landscape Award. **One award will be available each year for the highest scoring international applicant.** This will cover a full tuition fee waiver and a stipend to support living costs at the standard UKRI rate for UK applicants. Please note that UKRI (AHRC) funding does not cover additional costs associated with entering or living in the UK, such as visa fees or the immigration health surcharge.

[UKCISA](#) provides information on tuition fees to help you assess your fee status. With the above

link, you should find a guide to give you a clear idea of whether you have UK or International student status.

UKRI regulations are clear that international students funded by UKRI councils must be primarily resident in the UK for the duration of their study. This means that we are unable to support distance learning PhD's under the Doctoral Landscape Awards.

Additional Eligibility Points

1. If you are already in receipt of a doctoral level qualification you are ineligible to apply.
2. If you are currently enrolled as a doctoral student, you are ineligible to apply.
3. If you are currently an employed member of academic staff at Birmingham City University, then you are ineligible to apply for funding from the Doctoral Landscape Awards. Staff at other universities are eligible to apply for a part-time studentship. However, the award would still be subject to the standard terms and conditions attached to a part-time studentship, for instance, with regard to hours worked, and the proposed PhD must be distinct from the work that the person is contracted to do at the institution. If these circumstances apply to you, please contact DLA@bcu.ac.uk for further guidance before beginning your application.
4. Employment: If you are currently employed full-time and intend to remain employed full-time whilst undertaking your PhD studies, you will be ineligible to apply for funding. You must make your employment position clear on the application form. Employment for part-time students should not exceed more than 20 hours in any week, and for full-time students should not exceed more than 6 hours in any week. International students must also check the limits on paid employment detailed in their visas.
5. If a Doctoral Landscape Award student takes up a salaried full-time position, AHRC funding will not continue (even for part-time study). If employment is for a fixed short-term appointment, it may be possible to take a leave of absence from AHRC-funded PhD study and suspend the studentship for the relevant period.
6. The Doctoral Landscape Award involves a collaboration of regional universities in the Midlands. You will be expected to participate in activities delivered across the Midlands. BCU will not be able to cover travel expenses across or from outside the Midlands to attend Hub events except in very exceptional circumstances. Regulations under place of tenure set by [UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\)](#) recommend that you live within a reasonable distance of your designated home institution so that you can meet necessary travel costs. This is to ensure that you are not isolated and get full support, mentoring, training and access to the facilities you will need to complete your research successfully and to a high standard. These criteria mean that we are **unable to support distance learning PhD's**; 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.

That's Me! Studentship

In line with BCU's commitment to widening participation and promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in postgraduate research, the ***That's Me!* Studentship** is designed to encourage applications from domiciled candidates from underrepresented backgrounds, particularly those from Global Majority communities. According to [Campbell Stevens \(2020\)](#), Global Majority "refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and or have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities'".

Each year, **at least one of BCU's six AHRC Doctoral Landscape Awards** will be reserved for UK/Home Students eligible for the *That's Me!* Studentship. Applicants will be invited to indicate on their application whether they wish to be considered for this studentship.

The Studentship will provide bespoke career mentoring and professional development from senior leadership.

Successful candidates must meet the published award criteria and be eligible for UK/home fee status.

The Application Process

Please ensure that you allow yourself enough time to complete all elements of your online application form and have secured the submission of your references by the hard deadline of **27th January 2026 (noon UK time)** for entry in October 2026.

Incomplete applications, or applications received after this deadline will not be considered under any circumstances.

Awards cannot be deferred other than in exceptional circumstances.

Step One: Identify a Supervisor(s)

You'll need to identify two or more supervisors (maximum three) for your doctoral study. Your lead supervisor, the Director of Studies, **must be from BCU**. However, you can choose to have supervisors from one or more of the Hub's partner universities:

University of Nottingham (Hub Lead)
Coventry University
DeMontfort University
University of Birmingham
University of Leicester
University of Warwick

To identify a suitable lead supervisor, you can use BCU's [Pure Portal](#). This will help you identify departments, schools, centres and/or institutes and potential supervisors relevant to your research area(s). Staff profiles on websites 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.

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 Doctoral Landscape Award application.

It is also 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 be found [here](#) 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. You will want to have begun contacting potential supervisors before submitting your Expression of Interest form and before submitting the final application.

Step Two: Submit an Expression of Interest

Once you've identified your supervisors and you have a sense of your PhD project, you will need to complete the online Expression of Interest form (found [here](#)) ideally before the **17 November 2026 (noon UK time)**. This is a soft deadline. It is supportive process intended to get you sketching out your PhD proposal, identifying and communicating with relevant supervisors and articulating why your project is an ideal fit with BCU's research culture and the wider Hub. We will also record that you have submitted an Expression of Interest and share this with the relevant Department/School to review.

BCU also offers an **Application Writing Workshop**, which provides advice on the application process, discussions around what makes a successful application and a chance for you to ask questions. We strongly recommend that you participate in this workshop if possible. **This year's workshop will take place online from 10am – 2pm on Saturday 8th November.**

You are still welcome to proceed to full application stage and apply for the Doctoral Landscape Awards at BCU even if you do not submit an Expression of Interest. The Expression of Interest is not mandatory but encouraged.

Step Three: Complete your Online Application

The application process has several stages, all of which must be completed for your application to be considered. Incomplete applications, or applications submitted after the published deadline, will not be considered under any circumstances.

To support your application, it is essential that two references (at least one academic) are provided at the time of submission. Please ensure that you have read carefully the guidance for references later in this guidance document.

Overview and Checklist for the Formal Online Application Process	
Begin the BCU Online Application Form for your chosen Research Degree	☐
Download the Reference Request Form from the Doctoral Landscape Awards Page . Send this to your two Referees and ask they return this to you in enough time before the deadline to apply (27th January 2026), as you will need to upload the references to your BCU Online Application Form Portal before submission.	☐
Complete the Doctoral Landscape Award Application Form and upload this to your BCU Online Application Form Portal prior to submission	☐
Upload your two completed references to your BCU Online Application Form Portal	☐
Upload copies of your Higher Education Certificate and Transcripts (and evidence of English Language proficiency if required) to your BCU Online Application Form Portal	☐
Submit your Completed BCU Online Application Form, with all required attachments	☐

Completing the Online Application

To apply for the Doctoral Landscape Awards, you will need to complete both the BCU Online Application Form and complete a separate Doctoral Landscape Award funding application.

The Doctoral Landscape Awards funding application form will need to be uploaded to your BCU online application portal before you submit your BCU application form. We will explain the process in further depth below.

You should aim to make the best case possible for your doctoral application, proof-read before submission to avoid 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 the Doctoral Landscape Team at DLA@bcu.ac.uk as early as possible.

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.

International applicants will need to comply with the eligibility requirements for visa, and English language proficiency. Please see [here for more detailed information](#).

If you are an international applicant, and do not know the equivalent British degree or classification for your undergraduate or postgraduate qualification(s), please contact dla@bcu.ac.uk

The use of generative AI is forbidden. For further information on AI use, [please familiarise yourself with UKRI's policy](#).

Please follow the guidance below carefully. This 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.

Part One of the Online Application Process

Part one of the process is to start your online application to apply to Birmingham City University for a place on one of our Research Degrees. Please visit the relevant Research Degree landing page, found here: [Course Search Results | Birmingham City University](#).

From here, you can select the relevant Research Degree page for your subject. Please note, the Doctoral Landscape Awards are only open to research projects that are covered under the subject area remit of the AHRC. Therefore, we would expect that you will apply for one of the following Research Degree Programmes:

- Art and Design
- English

- Law
- Media and Cultural Studies
- Music and Performing Arts

Once you have identified the relevant Research Degree Programme for you and your proposed subject area, you can follow the 'apply online' button to begin your online application.

You will be able to start and save the application and log back into the applicant portal later to resume and submit your application.

You will need to ensure that you complete all required sections of the BCU online application form. However, please follow the remaining steps in this guidance document before submitting your BCU online application, as specific supporting documents are required as part of the Doctoral Landscape Award Application Process.

We will not be able to consider applications for the Doctoral Landscape Awards which do not include the following supporting documentation:

- The Doctoral Landscape Award Funding Application
- Two References
- Copies of Higher Education Qualifications (Certificates and Transcripts)
- International applicants must also provide a valid English language qualification

The above must all be attached to your BCU online application form before you submit.

Please continue to review the following sections of the guidance document which provides information for the supporting documents required.

Please note, all requirements must be completed prior to submission. We will only consider your application as complete if it is submitted with all the above documentation.

Your online BCU application must be submitted before the deadline of 27th January 2026 (Noon UK Time) to be considered.

Applications submitted after the deadline or are submitted incomplete will not be eligible.

Part Two of the Online Application Process

Part Two of the application process will be to complete the Doctoral Landscape Award Funding Application Form.

[Download The Doctoral Landscape Award Funding Application Form from this webpage.](#)

Please contact the Doctoral Landscape Team at DLA@bcu.ac.uk as early as possible for support if required.

The Doctoral Landscape Award Funding Application Form **must** be completed and uploaded to your BCU online application portal prior to submitting your application. We cannot accept any Doctoral Landscape Award Funding Applications which are submitted after the published deadline (**27th January 2026, Noon UK Time**).

The guidance detailed below is intended to support you through each of the sections found on the Doctoral Landscape Award Funding Application.

Applicant Details

Fee Status

Please confirm your fee status, indicating if you are eligible for UK/home fees or international fees. [UKCISA](#) provides information on tuition fees to help you assess your fee status if you are uncertain.

Employment Status:

You need to select your intended mode of study:

- Full-Time Study
- Part-Time Study

AHRC eligibility criteria stipulates that candidates cannot take up a full-time funding award and continue in full-time employment.

If studying full-time, employment should not exceed six hours in any week or (for international students) the maximum as laid down in your visa. If studying part-time, employment should not exceed 20 hours in any week.

If you intend to study part-time, you need to give an indicative number of employment hours per week on the application form.

Project

Project Title:

Please give your research project a title. This should be a short title that describes the research to be undertaken and should be a single sentence. Try to avoid writing a question as a working title. It might be helpful to think of this as how you would describe your research to a friend or family member.

Project Proposal [max. 500 words]:

A well-conceived project is the cornerstone of a successful application. The AHRC is looking for innovative, exciting and original research projects, and we welcome applications for interdisciplinary and practice research as well as distinctive contributions to a discipline.

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 several 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 M4C website and looking at the Researcher Profiles listed there 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 field work, 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.

- The **impact(s)** your project could make in terms of an original contribution to knowledge in the field(s), and beyond academia (e.g., in professional and creative practice, industry, etc).

Please state how you see that your research project might have impact, in other words the “so what” of doing the research, why does your research matter? Whilst this will 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 in and out of 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?

Project references [max 250 words]

Please provide references for all primary and secondary resources cited in your project proposal. These may include exhibitions, performances, artworks, as appropriate. This will help assessors locate your project in current work. You must include enough information in your reference for the work cited to be located by another person. However, 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.’

Indicative structure and time-line [max. 200 words]

You should outline the planned progression of the research and/or practice over the 3.5 years (FT) or 7 years (PT) of the project to submission, suggesting the main focus of your activity in specific periods and any milestones, e.g. phases of fieldwork, practice or research visits, partner collaborations, completion of chapter drafts, and engagement with training. We are looking to see that you understand the feasibility of your research and have the potential to project manage your PhD.

Ethics [max 200 words]:

All research projects must comply with relevant research ethics and integrity guidelines. [Please review your project proposal against BCU’s 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. Depending on your research topic, you might not have any specific ethical concerns, but if you do, in this box you must 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.)

However, please note, you should not simply repeat or cut and paste what you find in BCU's guidance but be as specific as possible to your proposal.

Off-site Practice/ Fieldwork/Study Visits [max 200 words]:

Most projects 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 BCU's facilities and routine dissemination and engagement, such as presenting at conferences), then you must complete this section. Please be aware, 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 (e.g., restrictions due to COVID-19).

Preparedness

Qualifications:

In this section, you are asked to provide details about your academic qualifications, both your undergraduate degree and, if applicable, your postgraduate degree. The AHRC requires a good

undergraduate degree award as a minimum; we also recognise that professional qualifications and experience may provide the equivalent preparation to a Masters qualification. To support our inclusive approach to applications, please DO NOT include details of your degree-awarding institution in your answers. Your undergraduate degree is usually a first degree, resulting in a BA.

Should you hold or be studying for a post-graduate degree, this will normally be at Masters level. You may apply for AHRC funding while you are studying for a Masters; if that is your situation, please put 'pending' under 'classification', and the date when you expect to finish under completion. If you are in this position, please be aware that completing your postgraduate degree will be a condition of any award.

If you do not hold a Masters' degree nor are studying for one, but have equivalent professional experience, please provide full details of this experience in the next question.

If you qualify as a home fees student but have an international qualification, or are an international applicant and do not know the equivalent British degree or classification, please contact Research.Admissions@bcu.ac.uk and DLA@bcu.ac.uk for further guidance and support on the necessary equivalence.

Describe how you are ready to undertake your proposed doctoral research project based on your previous study and experience? [max. 500 words]:

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, exhibitions.

It is also important to remember that while not all those looking at your application will be expert in precisely your area, they will be experienced in assessing your fit for the project you have described. 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, or experience with a particular software package. 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.

If you wish to be considered for the That's Me Studentship, you may also use this space to reflect briefly on any aspects of your background, experience, or route into doctoral study that you feel are relevant. This could include how the additional mentoring and professional development offered through the studentship might support your growth as a researcher. This is entirely optional and will not affect how your application is scored.

In order to support our inclusive approach to applications, please do not include web addresses or refer the panelists who will be assessing your application to external information sites in this section. All the necessary information should be contained within the word count.

Anything else you would like to bring to the attention of the panel? [max. 150 words]:

In this section if you wish, you may mention any circumstances or other experience that you would like to bring to the attention of the panel, **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. If you do not wish to disclose, please make sure that your referees and the interviewing panel are aware of your wish.

If there is something you would like the panel to know, please present it as concisely as possible, with a rough date. 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.

Place

Proposed Home Institution:

Your Home Institution is the one to which you have applied. For your application form, this will be Birmingham City University. Your Lead Supervisor also needs to be based at Birmingham City University.

Proposed Supervisory Team:

One of the opportunities The Doctoral Landscape Awards offers is the option to have a cross-institutional supervisory team, where you can draw on expertise from two or three Hub member institutions to support your project. This might be particularly valuable where your project is inter- or cross-disciplinary, or where you would benefit from very particular expertise. This is an **option** not a requirement. However, you might find it useful to discuss this with your prospective lead supervisor and to look across the consortium for other academic staff in your area.

Your supervisory team should include at least two people: your lead supervisor will also need to be based at Birmingham City University, but your second supervisor(s) may be based at any of the Hub member institutions, and you might also have a supervisor from a partner organisation, depending on the needs of your project.

Describe how your selected institution(s) provide a suitable environment for both the progress of your project and your academic/professional development [max 300 words]:

It is important that you have actively chosen your institution, because the right fit between institution and project makes a huge difference to the project's success. In this question, you're asked to explain the academic reasons why you've chosen your Home Institution.

There are three main areas you might want to discuss. Firstly, 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 your home institution have a particular **research strength in your disciplinary area**, which means you would be able to participate in broader research discussions and groups? Or is there methodological **expertise and resources**, 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 what does your institution offers to post-graduate researchers more generally: is there **good training provision and support**? Will there be opportunities to gain career experience, including teaching or placements?

Consider how you might both support and benefit from the East and West Midlands Doctoral Hub [max 150 words]

You may wish to comment on how you could engage with:

- Partner organisations.
- Training opportunities.

The East and West Midlands Doctoral Training Hub provides a doctoral training programme and we encourage and expect our students to engage with our provision and with each other to make the most of the opportunities available. You may wish to discuss these opportunities with your potential supervisor.

Many students apply for **additional funding** in order to undertake research activities, including practice, archive and gallery visits, and presentation of their research at conferences. Some work in **collaboration** with other Hub students to organise conferences, specific training, and support networks.

Students also organise the annual **Research Festival** and some will become part of the Hub **Forums**. How might you get the most out of Hub membership?

Further Guidance

We would strongly recommend that you work with your proposed lead supervisor on completing the Doctoral Landscape Awards Funding Application form. They should be able to provide you with feedback and support on drafts of your application, so long as you give them sufficient advance notice to do so. Please be advised that academic staff may not be able to support working on Doctoral Landscape Awards Funding Application Form at short notice, and immediately before the deadline.

We would strongly advise that significant time is given to the crafting of the Doctoral Landscape Awards Funding Application form as applying for doctoral funding is a very competitive process.

Once the Doctoral Landscape Awards Funding Application Form has been complete, please upload this to your BCU online application portal.

The Doctoral Landscape Award Funding Application Form **must** be completed and uploaded to your BCU online application portal prior to submitting your application. We cannot accept any Doctoral Landscape Award Funding Applications which are submitted after the published deadline (**27th January 2026, Noon UK Time**).

Part Three of the Online Application Process: References

The final requirement for your application will be providing your supporting references. You will need to upload two references when your application is submitted on the BCU Online Application Portal.

Your referees will need to complete the DLA Reference Request Form found [here](#). **We cannot accept references which do not use this specific form.**

It is your responsibility as the applicant to send the DLA reference request form to your two chosen referees. It is also your responsibility as the applicant to ensure that your two referees complete and return the DLA reference request form back to you, so that you can upload it to your BCU Online Application Portal before the application deadline.

You must upload the two references to your BCU Online Application Portal before you submit the application by the deadline of **27th January 2026 (Noon UK Time)**. Due to the nature of the recruitment timeframe, we cannot accept references submitted after the application deadline.

Please Ensure:

- Your referees are aware that they need to complete a reference request. You must send the DLA reference request form to them to complete. Please make them aware of the deadlines by which you need this completed and returned to you, in order for you to upload it to your BCU online application form and submit this before the deadline.
- Contact details for the referee must be included on the form, to allow for independent verification if required.
- An academic referee must include their academic email address (not personal).
- If possible, a professional reference includes a professional email address (such as having the institution/company/charity name or identifier in the email address).
- Your referees understand they are expected to include answers to all questions on the form.
- The specific DLA Reference Request Form is used. We cannot accept references which do not use this form.

Completing the reference form should not be an onerous process, but it is essential that you select referees who have the detailed knowledge required to appraise your recent intellectual, creative and/or professional development as well as your preparedness for the PhD project. **We expect at least one academic reference.**

In references, panels will be looking for evidence of at least some of the following: a good knowledge base of your chosen field (this can be academic or it can be experiential); ability to complete an extended project or piece of work; relevant skills, such as language knowledge; potential to produce innovative and substantive contribution to discipline. This list is not exhaustive – you may have other qualities that your referee wishes to highlight – but it is essential that your references support your potential as a research student.

Top Tips

- Discuss your project with your potential referee. Please ensure that your referee understands that you are applying to highly competitive funding scheme and not just for a place to study.
- Establish timeframes: are they able to provide the reference to enable you to submit your application by the deadline?
- Share the reference request form with your referee as early as possible so they know what is expected of them.
- **Only** ask a potential supervisor to be your referee if that person has **already taught you** (ideally at Masters rather than undergraduate levels), knows your academic record, and can comment on the proposed PhD research.
- If a potential supervisor has **not** taught you before and can only comment on the PhD research proposal that you have shared with them, they should **not** be a referee.
- Applicants who have not been in education for a period of time may choose to select a referee who is, for example, an employer, or a collaborator, in the creative industries. In this case, you should ensure that referees are aware that they will need to comment on you as a person and professional.

What Happens Next

Once all the tasks in your application are complete, you have uploaded all of the required documentation to apply for the Doctoral Landscape Awards (including the references), **you must submit your application on the BCU online application portal**: it won't be submitted automatically.

Applications will then be processed by our Research Admissions Team and the Doctoral Landscape Awards Team. The Teams will review the applications to ensure that it was both submitted before the deadline, and it includes all the required information and additional documentation (including two references).

Any applications which are incomplete or submitted after the deadline will not be considered. Candidates will be notified as soon as possible if their application falls into either of these categories and is not being considered any further.

Eligible applications are reviewed by an academic panel, who will shortlist candidates in their academic unit, using the 3 Ps (project, preparedness and place). Part of the shortlisting process is an interview, with a panel normally comprising the unit's head of graduate studies (or equivalent), the supervisor and one further academic not involved in the project, but in the same or a related discipline. Only applications which are scored at the very top of the scale (so 5 and 6) will be shortlisted. Applicants who are not shortlisted will be informed by The Doctoral Landscape Awards Team at this stage.

For those shortlisted, the final application – applicant form, references, interview report form, and support form – will be submitted to the awarding committee panel for blind scoring. Panelists score according to the criteria, as applied to the 3 Ps (project, preparedness and place) and return their score to committee. Panelists will have the opportunity to raise queries about applications and the process during the scoring period.

Once the scores have been returned, the scores are aggregated, and the highest scoring applications are identified. These applications are recommended to the Awarding Committee which takes place in April.

The Awarding Committee is chaired by BCU's Doctoral Landscape Award Institutional Lead and the Doctoral Research College Manager, the Doctoral Landscape Award Project Lead, an external Doctoral Landscape Award Project Lead from the Regional Hub, and a diverse range of academics from different career levels. At this point awards are made, arising from the panel scoring, and a reserve list is drawn up. All applicants will be informed of the committee's outcome in early May.