Doctoral Landscape Awards Funding Application Form

Application Details

Please note that this DLA Funding Application must be completed fully, and submitted in addition to:

- Two References (using the Doctoral Landscape Award Reference Request Form only)
- Copies of Higher Education Qualifications (certificates and transcripts)
- International applicants must also provide a valid English language qualification

Please ensure that you have allowed yourself enough time to complete the Doctoral Landscape Award Application in full. **This Doctoral Landscape Award Application Form will need to be uploaded to a Birmingham City University online application form for your chosen research degree** and submitted alongside the other documents listed above.

You must submit your Birmingham City University online application form alongside all required supporting documentation before the deadline of 27th January 2026 (Noon, UK Time).

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

Please consult the Applicant Guidance Notes when completing this form.

Applicant Details

Full Name:	Applicant One
Email Address	Applicantone@gmail.com

Eligibility

Please check the following to confirm your eligibility for the Doctoral Landscape Awards

I am not currently enrolled as a doctoral student	☒
I am not already in receipt of a doctoral level qualification	☒

Fee Status

The AHRC Doctoral Landscape Awards are administered and awarded under the regulations set out in UKRI's terms and conditions surrounding recruitment. Due to funder restrictions, only one award each year can be offered to an international candidate.

Please see the DLA Applicant Guidance Notes for further information on determining Fee Status.

Please indicate whether you meet the criteria for Home/UK fee status or International/Overseas fee status
Home/UK Candidate

Employment Status

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.

Please indicate which mode of study you intend to adopt if you are successful with your funding application
Full-Time

If you intend to engage with part-time employment whilst undertaking a funding award, please specify an indicative number of hours of employment per week
None

That's Me! Studentship

A key focus of the Doctoral Landscape Awards is **equality, diversity and inclusion**. We are committed to attracting talented students from a wide range of backgrounds and providing the support they need to thrive throughout their PhD journey. **As part of this commitment, at least one of BCU's six studentships each year will be awarded to a UK/home fee status candidate from a Global Majority background.** This dedicated award continues the legacy of BCU's *That's Me!* project, which addresses barriers to postgraduate research study and promotes widening participation in doctoral research across the West Midlands. It will provide access to bespoke mentoring from senior Global Majority staff and professional development opportunities.

Please indicate if you would like to be considered for the That's Me! Studentship
Yes

Your Proposed Project

Please consult the Applicant Guidance Notes when completing this section of the form as it includes helpful information, tips, and prompts to support you.

Please provide a project title for your proposed research
Enhancing Immersion in Video Game Music Concerts Through Contemporary Classical and Experimental Arranging

Please confirm which overarching subject area your proposed research aligns with
Music and Performing Arts (Conservatoire)

Project Proposal (max. 500 words)

Please outline as relevant to the stage of your research at the time of applying, and with reference (e.g., Jones, 2017) to existing literature in the field:

- The context of your project (i.e., the research or practice background to the problem/challenge/research gap you will investigate).
- The research question(s) it will answer.
- The method(s) you will use to investigate your research question(s).
- 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).

Creative arrangements of contemporary media music, particularly from video games, are increasingly present in concert halls, with many professional orchestras now programming game music concerts (Böcker, 2021). Orchestras have incorporated creative arranging into both performance and education through projects such as *Project Remix* (CBSO, 2024), where secondary school students engage in orchestral performance through arranged media music repertoire. As audiences in concert halls change, orchestras are adapting (Gibbons, 2024). A 2025 study with 2000 individuals found that 88% of under-25s are interested in video games, with one in six discovering orchestral music through gaming (RPO, 2025). These developments indicate that creative arranging plays a growing role in audience development and participation.

Whilst audiences are evolving, the artistic approaches to arranging remain very traditional. Game music is originally composed in response to players' interaction with the game (Gibbons, 2018), a dimension that is absent from the conventional concert setting. Yet, game concert series, such as *Distant Worlds* (Distant Worlds, 2025), largely replicate standard concert formats rather than reimagining arrangements to reflect player immersion. Although existing literature has examined the "concertisation" of game music from musicological perspectives (Greenfield-Casas, 2022), there is limited research focusing on creative arranging as an artistic compositional practice to enhance immersion in game music concerts. Thus, this practice-based doctoral research addresses that gap by framing the arranging process at its centre of enquiry and asking:

How can creative game music arrangements incorporate more contemporary classical and experimental music techniques to enhance audience immersion in the concert hall?

It is further guided by the following sub-question:

- **How can the arranger's direct engagement with the video game—its narrative, gameplay and sonic identity—further inform arranging decisions that enhance concert immersion?**

This research will be conducted in collaboration with the Birmingham Game Music Ensemble, a 30-piece orchestra specialised in performing game music arrangements I founded during my MMus, with regular concert performances at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (BGME, 2025). The methodology combines qualitative research with creative practice, including anonymised questionnaires with audiences attending BGME's concerts and semi-structured interviews with university-level arrangers working with the ensemble. The practice-based component involves the creation of a portfolio of my original creative arrangements. Rehearsals, recordings and performances will serve as key sites of observation.

The final artefact will comprise a portfolio of 90–120 minutes of my original creative arrangements accompanied by a commentary reflecting on creative arranging as an artistic practice extending beyond traditional music composition. This will be supported by the analysis and reflection of participants' data and my artistic experience. This research contributes original knowledge by acknowledging creative game music arranging as an emerging and independent artistic medium within contemporary concert culture. Beyond academia, it supports professional and artistic development for arrangers, fosters cross-disciplinary collaboration and informs music practices seeking to engage and immerse new audiences. Leading this project in an ethically safe, non-commercial academic context provides a platform for risk-averse ensembles to explore more innovative and immersive approaches in game music arrangements, cultivating stronger audience engagement and experience.

Project Reference List (max. 200 words)

Please provide references for all primary and secondary material cited in your project proposal. These references may include full details of exhibitions, performances, and other examples of practice. You should ONLY include references for material you have discussed in the project proposal. Your references should provide enough information to locate the item.

BGME (2025) *Birmingham Game Music Ensemble: FACTIONS*. The Bradshaw Hall, Birmingham, 20 November.

BGME (2025) *Birmingham Game Music Ensemble: FACTIONS*. The Recital Hall, Birmingham, 9 April.

Böcker, T. (2021) Producing Game Music Concerts, in M. Fritsch and T. Summers (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Video Game Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 424–432.

CBSO (2024) *Project Remix: From the Small Screen*. Symphony Hall, Birmingham, 25 February.

Distant Worlds (2025) *Celebrating FINAL FANTASY XIV and XVI*. Eventim Apollo Theatre, London, 29 March.

Gibbons, W. (2018). *Unlimited Replays*. Oxford University Press.

Gibbons, W. J. and Grimshaw, M. (2024). *The Oxford Handbook of Video Game Music and Sound*. Oxford University Press.

Greenfield-Casas, S. (2022) *Re:Replay: On the Classical Arrangement and Concertization of Video Game Music*. Ph.D. Thesis. Northwestern University. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/87706148/Re_Replay_On_the_Classical_Arrangement_and_Concertization_of_Video_Game_Music?source=swp_share [Accessed 21 January 2026].

RPO (2025) *The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra brings the video game world to life at London's Royal Albert Hall.* [press release] 23 May. Available at: https://www.rpo.co.uk/news-and-press/95-press/997-the-royal-philharmonic-orchestra-brings-the-video-game-world-to-life-at-londons-royal-albert-hall [Accessed 21 January 2026].

An Indicative Structure/Timeline (max. 200 words)

We are looking to see that you understand the feasibility of your research and have the potential to project manage your PhD. Please provide an indicative structure/timeline for your project across the duration of the award you are applying for.

This research will be conducted over 3.5 years in collaboration with the Birmingham Game Music Ensemble, with a minimum of ten public concerts delivered across the project.

Year 1 – Training and Foundations

- Completion of PGCert in Research Practice.
- Literature review and refinement of research methodologies.
- Attendance at networking events through *CreaTech Frontiers* and Birmingham City University's Games Academy.
- Design and ethical approval of audience questionnaires and interview consent forms.
- Planning and delivery of Concerts 1–2.
- Arrangement of approximately 20 minutes of music.
- Initial data collection, analysis, and reflective writing.
- Completion of Progression Assessment Panel.

Year 2 – Portfolio Development

- Attendance at industry conferences (e.g. Ludo and Game Sound Con).
- Planning and delivery of Concerts 3–6.
- Arrangement of 40–50 minutes of music.
- Ongoing data collection, analysis, and reflective writing.

Year 3 – Portfolio Completion

- Definition of portfolio and commentary presentation format.
- Planning and delivery of Concerts 7–10.
- Arrangement of a further 40–50 minutes of music.
- Final analysis and reflective writing.

Final 6 Months – Submission

- Completion of commentary and final review of scores and data.
- Project submission and presentation.

Ethics (max. 200 words)

All research projects must comply with relevant research ethics and integrity guidelines. You must address ethical issues early in your research. Please review BCU's 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); and
- How you will address ethical concerns you have identified (e.g., informed consent, anonymisation, appropriate training, identification of support services etc.)

This research involves the collection of data from participants and the arrangement of copyrighted works. Therefore, ethical considerations include informed consent, data management and copyright compliance.

The music being arranged is not in the public domain; however, the UK Intellectual Property Office provides exceptions to copyright legislation for non-commercial research conducted within educational institutions. These apply where original creators are appropriately acknowledged and no commercial outputs are produced. Original creators will also be contacted to obtain further permission.

Data will be collected through anonymised, voluntary questionnaires distributed to audience members after concerts and through interviews with arrangers. Arrangers will receive a detailed participant information sheet in advance and will provide informed consent prior to voluntary participation. Arrangers will have the right to withdraw from the study, access their data and request amendments up to one month after data collection.

All research documentation will be submitted for approval to the University Ethics Committee prior to data collection. Research data and artefacts will be stored using the University's approved storage systems, in compliance with GDPR and institutional data protection policies. Access to raw data will be restricted to the researcher, supervisors, and examiners. All raw data will be destroyed upon research completion.

Off-Site Practice/Fieldwork/Study Visits (max. 200 words)

Complete this section if your proposed project will require you to undertake fieldwork, study visits or practice (beyond routine dissemination and engagement events). We are not looking for numerical figures but the types of costs that are likely to be incurred. For each activity, please provide indicative details about:

- Where the activity will take place (i.e., country, institute, archive, centre etc)
- How long the activity will take (i.e., days, weeks)
- Why the activity is required (i.e., how will the activity support you to complete your research? e.g., enable data collection, stakeholder engagement, language practice, test theoretical argument etc.)
- What types of costs are likely to be incurred (travel, accommodation, room hire, training costs)
- Contingency plans in the event that activity cannot go ahead due to risk assessment outcomes (e.g., restrictions due to COVID-19).

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 will be scrutinised.

Ludomusicology Research Events
Location: UK (hosted annually at different UK universities)
Duration: 3 days per year

Purpose:
Ludo is an inter-university research conference dedicated to research into game music, offering opportunities for researchers to present work in the field. Presenting at this conference will directly inform the refinement of my research questions, methodologies and arguments, strengthening the final doctoral submission, whilst contributing to the development of my academic presentation skills. This event is central to the development of game music research links in the UK.

Indicative Costs:
Domestic travel, accommodation and access costs.

Contingency:
If full attendance is not possible, attendance will be reduced to one day and/or participation will take place online when possible.

Game Sound Con
Location: USA – Burbank Convention Center, California
Duration: 2 days per year

Purpose:
Game Sound Con is a yearly international conference bringing together researchers and industry professionals working in game music. Attendance is central to the contextualisation of my research within the international game music ecosystem while establishing international links and collaborations.

Indicative Costs:
International travel, accommodation, registration and access costs.
Contingency:
The conference operates in a hybrid format, allowing full online participation if travel is not possible.

Preparedness

If applicable, please provide details about your higher education qualifications.

In order to support our inclusive approach to applications, please DO NOT include details of your degree-awarding institution in your answers.

Please indicate if your qualification was awarded in the UK or internationally. If internationally, please indicate the UK equivalency of the qualification and its classification. If you are unsure of the UK equivalencies of your qualifications, please contact the Research Admissions Team and Doctoral Landscape Awards Team at Birmingham City University on: Research.Admissions@bcu.ac.uk and DLA@bcu.ac.uk.

Undergraduate Degree

Subject	Music Composition
Degree	BMus (Hons)
Classification	First Class
Completion Date	01/07/2024
Awarding Country	UK

Postgraduate Degree (Master's or Equivalent International Qualification)

If you are not studying for/do not hold a Master's Degree, but have equivalent professional experience, please proceed to the next questions and provide details there.

If you are currently studying for a Master's Degree, 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.

Subject	Music Composition
Degree	MMus Composition
Classification	Pending
Completion Date	01/07/2026
Awarding Country	UK

Previous Study and Experience (max. 500 words)

Describe how you are ready to undertake your proposed doctoral research project based on your previous study and experience. You might comment on:

- **Knowledge and skills** developed through previous study (e.g., undergraduate/postgraduate studies (including specific modules), certifications, training etc.) and/or **professional and creative practice** (e.g., employment, research assistantships, consultancy, residencies, performances, curations, internships etc.).

- **Specialised training** (e.g., languages, ICT, methods, EDI etc.).

- **Academic and professional achievements** (e.g., awards, scholarships, publications etc.).

If appropriate, you should also identify any training you might need to undertake or skills you might need to gain in order to complete your project. These may include:

- **Language** proficiency
- **Research methods** in data collection, such as interviewing, archive use, and associated ethical
- practice
- **Data management and processing,** particularly where specific software is required
- **Project management,** including practice and curation

10

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.

I hold a BMus in Composition and I am in my final year of my MMus in Composition. Throughout my studies, I have consistently demonstrated excellence in my academic and practical endeavours, whilst taking steps to prepare me for a PhD.

During my studies, I achieved diverse awards and recognition for my compositional practice. In 2024, I received the prestigious Countess of Munster Musical Trust Postgraduate Composition Award and scholarship and I was also awarded the Musicians' Company Silver Medal, the UK's oldest music award for excellence in Conservatoire studies. As a composer, I have collaborated with diverse ensembles, including the CBSO, *Quatuor Bozzini* and Rough for Opera. Whilst I have not finished my MMus, in my first year, I achieved an average mark of 80/100 across my modules, which involved the research into contemporary music practices, creating informed work and commenting on my own artistic practice. These experiences were vital to support the contextualisation of my research area.

Video games have been part of my life since I was five years old, and I became a musician because of it. I am proud that during my MMus, I created Birmingham Game Music Ensemble: a 30-piece orchestra specialised in performing game music arrangements, for which I regularly arrange music, helping me gain experience in large-scale project management and production, alongside effective large-team coordination. With the ensemble, I have directed teams of over 50 contributors, documented projects to a professional level and delivered high-profile concerts in Birmingham. Venues' post-concert surveys demonstrated that on average 25% of our attendees are first-time visitors, evidencing effective audience development. Most recently, I incorporated structured data collection during each concert through anonymised and voluntary feedback forms, enabling assessment of audience engagement, with 60/170 individuals completing the questionnaire at our latest concert. These experiences have developed my skills in data collection and evaluation, which will aid the success of my research. Furthermore, my strong compositional and arranging background and my lived experiences with games and their music make me the ideal candidate to lead this research.

I am currently taking a MMus Research Project module, which involves a practice-based investigation of performers' autonomy within contemporary chamber music groups. Through this module, I became familiar with the language used in research practice and gained experience in engaging participants, ethical awareness, time management and refining methodologies; thus, making me more prepared to pursue doctoral-level research.

Any Other Information (max. 150 words)

Is there any other information you would like to bring to the panel's attention? For instance, you might wish to note extenuating circumstances, such as illness, which have affected your previous performance.

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"

N.A.

Place

Proposed Supervisory Team

Please provide details of your potential supervision team. Include here the names of your potential supervisors and their universities in each case (minimum of 2 and no more than 3 academic supervisors).

Potential Lead Supervisor Details:

Name	Professor Joe Cutler
University	Birmingham City University
Academic Unit	Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

Potential Second Supervisor Details:

Name	Professor Michael Wolters
University	Birmingham City University
Academic Unit	Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

Potential Third Supervisor (optional):

Name	Dr Benjamin Tassie
University	Birmingham City University
Academic Unit	Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

Place of Study (max. 300 words)

Describe how BCU and any other selected institution(s) provide a suitable environment for both the progress of your project and your academic/professional development. Please comment on:

- The fit and expertise of your proposed **supervisory team.**
- Institutional **expertise and networks** (e.g., research centres/institutes/groups, partnerships, collaborations etc)
- **Training and development** opportunities (e.g., available courses, teaching, leadership roles).

The Royal Birmingham Conservatoire provides the ideal environment for the successful delivery of this project and the wider development of my compositional and arranging practice, as well as opportunities to lead department projects and teaching opportunities, in association with Birmingham Game Music Ensemble.

The Conservatoire offers a diverse composition department and research environment, with national and international links to ensembles and arts organisations, including its close collaboration with the CBSO, whose regular game music programming directly aligns with my research, allowing for my work to be developed and disseminated whilst establishing a relevant professional and educational relationship. With my game music orchestra hosting its concert series at the Conservatoire, I have a wide network of musicians who can engage in my research, allowing for my continuing professional development, whilst fostering performance, arranging, composition and recording opportunities across multiple departments and collaborations with Birmingham City University's Games Academy.

Professors Michael Wolters and Joe Cutler's extensive experience supervising over 40 composition-based research projects is central to the success of my research. As Head of Experimental Performance and Media Music at the Conservatoire, Wolters' expertise in both fields is relevant to the arranging component, informing innovative concert-hall media music arranging practices. As the Head of Composition for over 20 years, Cutler's research specialisation in contemporary music composition will guide the contextualisation of my artistic practice, acknowledging creative arranging as an extension beyond contemporary classical composition. Dr Benjamin Tassie's awareness of audiences in contemporary classical music culture through his 100s of radio programmes on *Resonance FM* and his artistic direction in *Classical Remix,* which reimagined classical music for new audiences, will provide important insight in thearea of creative arranging beyond game music and perspectives on the evolving nature of audiences in concert culture, which are essential to contextualise the impact of my research.

13

The East and West Midlands Hub

Consider how you might both support and benefit from the **East and West Midlands Hub**

You may wish to discuss these opportunities with your potential supervisor.

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

- Networking opportunities
- Professional development opportunities

(max. 150 words)

Interaction with the East and West Midlands Hub will help my research reach beyond the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and Birmingham City University, cultivating my professional development by positioning my artistic practice within a wider regional and national context.

Networking opportunities at the Hub, such as *CreaTech Frontiers*, a programme dedicated to the development of creative media technologies in the West Midlands, will allow collaborations with researchers and practitioners from partner institutions in the area of creative digital media, providing a new platform for my research to be disseminated.

I will contribute to the Hub through the active delivery of professional development opportunities with my game music orchestra, in the areas of performance and arranging, with archival audio-visual documentation being supplied to participants. By holding concerts at partner institutions, the orchestra gains experience performing beyond the Conservatoire, whilst fostering new audiences and driving significant attention to Hub partners.