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 Two
Email Address	Applicanttwo@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
6

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
No

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
Capture, Care, Coexistence: Human-Nonhuman Relationships in the Pokémon Franchise

Please confirm which overarching subject area your proposed research aligns with
Media and Cultural Studies

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).

This project examines how the Pokémon videogame series has represented and reshaped understandings of human-nonhuman relationships across its nearly thirty-year lifespan, from *Pokémon Red and Blue* (1996) to recent releases such as *Pokémon Legends: Z-A* (2025). While Pokémon exists as a broader cultural franchise, this research focuses specifically on its videogames and mobile applications as the primary sites where players engage directly with Pokémon as relational, affective, and ethical others through play. Across this period, the series has shifted from mechanics centred on capture, ownership, and mastery towards designs that increasingly emphasise care, cooperation, and shared environments, making it a uniquely sustained case study of evolving human-nonhuman relations in mainstream games.

Existing scholarship on Pokémon has largely approached the series through consumer culture (Allison, 2006), globalisation (Tobin, 2004), or health and environmental impact, often with a particular focus on Pokémon GO (Bainbridge, 2014; Balmford et al., 2002). While these studies acknowledge the franchise's cultural significance, they rarely offer sustained analysis of how game mechanics themselves structure relationships between humans and nonhumans over time. By contrast, work in game studies, animal studies, and environmental humanities has increasingly foregrounded nonhuman agency, relational play, and ethical engagement in games (Chang, 2019; Bianchi, 2017; Tyler, 2022), building on existing foundational work in the sphere (Haraway, 2008, 2016). This project

brings these approaches together through a theoretical framework that treats human-nonhuman relations as co-constituted through systems of play, rather than as representations alone.

The project is guided by posthuman and relational theory, particularly concepts of nonhuman agency, care, and relational ontology, which enable analysis of how games configure ethical relationships through rules, mechanics, and player action. Pokémon's long-running design history provides an ideal site for examining how these relational frameworks are operationalised within commercial game systems. I look to address two central research questions:
1. How have Pokémon's core game mechanics-particularly those relating to capture, training, bonding, and care-shifted from 1996 to the present, and how do these mechanics structure particular forms of human-nonhuman relationships through play?
2. What new theoretical insights into human-nonhuman relations can be generated by examining Pokémon as a long-running videogame series, and how might these insights reshape existing understandings of ethical play and multispecies coexistence in digital games?

Methodologically, the project employs qualitative game analysis, combining close playing and close analysis of selected titles with comparative analysis of mechanics, rule systems, interface design, and narrative framing. Rather than analysing the entire series exhaustively, the study focuses on a strategically selected corpus of games that mark key moments in the series' shifting approach to capture, care, and coexistence, including early generation titles, transitional entries, and recent games that foreground shared environments and relational ethics. This approach enables detailed, systematic analysis while maintaining feasibility.

The project contributes original knowledge to game studies and posthuman humanities by offering sustained, longitudinal analysis of Pokémon games as relational systems of play. Beyond academia, its findings are relevant to game designers and critics interested in ethical mechanics, nonhuman representation, and care-based play, and to wider cultural debates about how digital systems shape understandings of coexistence with nonhuman agents.

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.

Allison, A. (2006). *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*. University of California Press.
Bainbridge, J. (2013). 'It is a Pokémon world': The Pokémon franchise and the environment. *International Journal of*

Cultural Studies, *17*(4), 399-414. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877913501240
Balmford, A., Clegg, L., Coulson, T., & Taylor, J. (2002). Why conservationists should heed Pokémon. *Science (New York, N.Y.)*, *295*(5564), 2367. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.295.5564.2367b
Bianchi, M. (2017). Inklings and Tentacled Things: Grasping at Kinship through Video Games. Ecozon (a): European Journal of Literature, Culture, and Environment, 8 (2), 136-150. https://doi.org/10.37536/ECOZONA.2017.8.2.1354
Chang, A (2019). *Playing Nature: Ecology in Video Games*. University of Minnesota Press. Tyler, T. (2022). *Game: Animals, Video Games, and Humanity*. University of Minnesota Press.
Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene*. Duke University Press.
Haraway, D. (2008). *When Species Meet*. University of Minnesota Press.
Pokémon Red and Blue [videogame] (1996). Nintendo.
Pokémon Legends: Z-A [videogame] (2025). Nintendo.
Tobin, J. (Ed.) (2004). *Pikachu's global adventure: The rise and fall of Pokémon*. Duke University Press.

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.

Year 1: Refine research design and corpus (selected Pokemon games and key apps), and complete a focused literature review in game studies, posthuman and animal studies, and human-nonhuman relations. Complete PGCert in Research Practice. Develop the project's qualitative methodology (close reading/playing and analysis) and produce thesis plan plus draft methodology chapter.

Year 2: Beginning of core analysis and chapter drafting, comparative mapping of mechanics across the series relating to capture, training, bonding, and care, and writing of main analytical chapters. Apply to present work so far at conferences such as Interactive Games, BDiGRA. Submit an article for publication.

Year 3: Complete remaining analysis and chapter drafting and write an integrative discussion/synthesis chapter articulating the project's contribution. Complete introduction and conclusion, and submit thesis by the end of Year 3. Continue applying to present at conferences, and submit another article for publication.

Months 37-42: Viva preparation and completion, final corrections, and further dissemination of findings through presentation and publication. Apply to DiGRA as first international conference.

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.)

The project does not involve human participants or sensitive personal data. As such, the primary procedural ethical considerations concern responsible use of copyrighted materials and appropriate citation of games and assets. Since Pokémon is an intellectual property owned by Nintendo, Game Freak, and the Pokémon Company, all screenshots, transcripts, and other game materials will be used for research purposes under fair dealing provisions for criticism and review. I will ensure all copyrighted material is clearly attributed.

While the project does not involve human participants, it engages with ethical questions of care, capture, and agency in games. These will be addressed critically and reflexively, avoiding anthropocentric assumptions and remaining attentive to how analytical framing may reproduce or challenge normative understandings of nonhuman life and value.

All research data, notes, and files will be stored securely on encrypted, password-protected devices in line with BCU's data management policies. Ethics and integrity training will be completed as required, and I will seek guidance from my supervisory team and BCU's ethics committee should any unforeseen issues arise during the project.

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.

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	English and Philosophy
Degree	Master of Arts with Honours (undergraduate)
Classification	First Class
Date Awarded	20/06/2024
Awarding Country	Scotland

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	Games and Arts
Degree	Master of Science by Research
Classification	Pending graduation in July 2026 following successful *viva voce* in December 2025
Date Awarded	10/07/2026
Awarding Country	Scotland

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

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.

My academic and professional background has equipped me with the skills and discipline to complete this doctoral project within the funded period. I hold a First-Class Honours undergraduate degree in English and Philosophy, followed by a MSc by Research in Games and Arts, which have provided sustained training in humanities-based game analysis, independent research design, and long-form academic writing.

Across my undergraduate and postgraduate research, I have developed expertise in qualitative textual and ludic analysis, including close reading, close playing, comparative analysis of game mechanics, and theoretically informed cultural critique, drawing on established methods in game studies (e.g. Fernández-Vara). My undergraduate dissertation examined *Pokémon Emerald* through the lenses of environmental humanities and political theory, while my postgraduate thesis on *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* developed a 30,000-word original argument combining posthumanism, game studies, and affect theory. Together, these projects demonstrate my ability to work with complex theoretical frameworks and to analyse games as cultural and ethical systems, directly informing the methodological approach of this proposed doctoral project.

Alongside formal academic training, I bring extensive longstanding familiarity with the Pokemon series, including experience across multiple generations, platforms, and gameplay styles through the twenty-five years I have been a fan of the series. This practical knowledge of the franchise's scale and diversity strengthens my capacity to identify analytically significant shifts in mechanics and design, particularly relating to my chosen themes of capture, care, and coexistence.

My research output to date includes one peer-reviewed first-author publication, with my Masters thesis awaiting publication through Abertay following corrections, alongside five conference presentations, three of these being external at both games and media conferences (Interactive Games conference, investigate.games), and AdvanceHE conferences discussing student representation. These reflect my active engagement with both the games field and the higher education field more generally, and my capacity to disseminate research to varying audiences. I have also been an invited panellist at the University of Dundee to discuss my games research and my postgraduate journey so far, again demonstrating my developing academic profile.

I have also received multiple academic awards recognising both scholarly excellence and contribution to wider academic communities. These include Dundee's Wimberley Award, the highest student honour awarded by the university, the Richard Smith Memorial Prize for the best dissertation in Philosophy, and the Sandy Kingston Memorial Award for outstanding contribution to the students' union. These awards reflect the quality of both my academic and personal output and dedication.

My academic background, existing research output, and the recognition I have received demonstrate that I am well prepared to undertake doctoral study and contribute actively to the academic community at BCU.

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"

Click or tap here to enter text.

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	Poppy Wilde
University	Birmingham City University
Academic Unit	Media and Cultural Studies

Potential Second Supervisor Details:

Name	Nick Webber
University	Birmingham City University
Academic Unit	Media and Cultural Studies

Potential Third Supervisor (optional):

Name	Click or tap here to enter text.
University	Click or tap here to enter text.
Academic Unit	Click or tap here to enter text.

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).

BCU provides a strong environment for the development of my project and for my academic and professional growth as a games researcher. My proposed supervisory team of Dr Poppy Wilde and Prof Nick Webber offers a complementary combination of expertise ideally suited to this research. Dr Wilde's work on posthumanism, human-nonhuman relations, and animals in games directly aligns with my focus on human-nonhuman care and relationality in games. Prof Webber's expertise in historical games would be highly relevant to analysis of a genre that the Pokémon franchise has recently traversed into, and his research on the relationship between cultural policy and games complements my interest in the intersection between games and cultural and environmental consciousness. BCU's wider research culture further strengthens this. The Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research hosts an active Game Cultures research structure, bringing together a network of researchers at various stages of their careers, and from various institutions including the Universities of Birmingham and Warwick, enabling access to a broader regional research network. BCU also holds a crucial position in both UK and international games studies, hosting major events in the field such as the History of Games Conference 2024, Video Games Cultures Conference 2024, and BDiGRA 2025.

BCU also offers excellent training and development opportunities, especially within the games studies field, such as the conferences mentioned previously, which I would hope to attend and/or present at. Additionally, as Dr Wilde has been appointed as PGR Studio Coordinator, working under her supervision would allow my involvement in the community and professional events she organises, not only within games but within the School of Arts at a wider level.

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)

Being part of the East and West Midlands Hub would allow me to develop my project within a wider regional research community working across similar themes and topics in different interdisciplinary ways. Access to Hub-wide training and cohort events would support my development as a researcher, through workshops, seminars, and research forums that bring together scholars from each of the partner institutions.

The Hub would also enable me to build sustained peer and scholarly networks outwith BCU, including working with researchers such as Dr Bettina Bódi and Dr Regina Seiwald whose research in gaming and digital humanities complement mine, and Dr Matt Hayler whose research in posthumanism, philosophy, and animal studies complements my academic background.

I would also like to contribute to the Hub through presenting my work, and at later stages of my doctoral journey, using my past academic organisational experience to lead and convene events of my own.