



Midlands4Cities

Doctoral Training Partnership

Birmingham Coventry Leicester Nottingham

Applicant Guidance Notes

AHRC Midlands4cities
Doctoral Training Partnership
Funding Applications

2021 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

From the academic year 2021/22 AHRC funding is open to UK and International research students as detailed on the [UKRI website](#).

You should either hold a Masters qualification at the time of application or be able to state that you will have completed one 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). You can also apply on the basis of having equivalent relevant professional experience in lieu of a Masters qualification.

Awards for UK residents cover UK tuition fees and provide a stipend at the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) rate.

International applicants will be eligible for tuition fees at the UK rate and a stipend to support living costs. UKRI (AHRC) funding will not cover international fees set by universities. Funding for this may be available from other sources but specific guidance on this is currently not available. Please watch out for updated information on the UKRI and Midlands4Cities websites.

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

Additional eligibility points

1. If you are already in receipt of a doctoral level qualification you are ineligible to apply for funding from the Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership.
2. If you are currently a member of academic staff at one of the M4C partner universities, and intend to remain in employment, then you are *ineligible* to apply for funding from the Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership. Academic staff who are employed in universities either full- or part-time in permanent or long-term fixed appointments are eligible to undertake PhDs as identified through the staff development procedures at their own institution. Please contact the M4C Site Directors of your university if you have any further questions.
3. If you have already commenced doctoral study you are *eligible* to apply for AHRC funding provided that, at the start of the AHRC award, you should not have completed more than 12 months full-time or 24 months part-time study.

4. You are only able to make an application for funding to M4C on two separate occasions. Applications submitted for a third time (i.e. in three successive years) will be *ineligible* and will not be considered.
5. 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. Only those students employed on a part-time basis whilst undertaking their doctoral studies will be eligible, in this case for a part-time award. 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.
6. If an M4C student takes up a salaried position at a university, Midlands4Cities and the AHRC will not continue funding (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 M4C PhD study and suspend the studentship for the relevant period.
7. As an M4C DTP student you will be expected to live within reasonable travel time of your designated home university to ensure that you are able to maintain regular contact with your department and supervisors. This is to ensure that you are not isolated and get the full support, mentoring, training and access to the facilities you will need to complete your research successfully and to a high standard. The only exceptions to this are periods of absence that are an essential part of your study e.g. fieldwork, study visits or conference attendance.
8. You are only allowed to submit ONE application to either of the Midlands4Cities doctoral route competitions. Students who apply for a Collaborative Doctoral Award are also eligible to apply to the Open Doctoral Award competition.

The application process

Please ensure that you allow yourself enough time to complete your online funding application form by the deadline – **13th January 2021 (noon)** for entry in September 2021. Awards cannot be deferred other than in exceptional circumstances.

Once you have chosen to apply for either the Open Doctoral Award or an advertised Collaborative Doctoral Award there are two stages to the application process.

Step one: Apply for a place to study at an M4C University

You will need to have applied for a place to study at one of the eight M4C universities before you can apply for funding. It is not necessary for you to have received a formal offer in order to *apply* for funding, **but** your application to study at a M4C university must be in process with an ID number which will be required for final submission of your funding application.

As such, apply to a university first *for a place* and then apply for *funding*.

To support both your application for a place to study and your funding application to Midlands4Cities it is essential that two references are submitted via the online M4C reference form by **13 January 2021 (noon)**. Please ensure that you read the [Reference Request](#) section carefully (page 10).

It is important to note that your referee is only required to complete the M4C reference forms. These will be used by the Admissions Office at your home university and in support of your M4C funding application.

Step two: Apply for M4C funding

Once your M4C University application form is in process (and you have received an applicant ID), you will be able to begin your M4C funding application. Applications for both doctoral routes, Open Doctoral Awards and Collaborative Doctoral Awards, should be completed on the M4C online application form.

For Open Doctoral Awards We recommend that you work with your prospective supervisors to discuss and refine your application for funding.

For Collaborative Doctoral Awards read the project description and contact the named lead academic supervisor to find out more information. The university at which the lead supervisor is based will become your home university.

Completing the online Application Form

To start your application please visit: <https://midlands4cities.smapply.io/>

We advise that you develop your proposal offline and transfer it to the online form when you are satisfied. You should aim to make the best case possible for your doctoral application, proof-read before submission to avoid careless spelling or grammatical errors and pay due attention to the word limits where applicable.

There are **four tasks** to complete the application process:

1. Eligibility questions
2. Application form
3. Equal opportunities form
4. Reference request

Eligibility questions

Before you can proceed with your application your eligibility for funding will be checked. Please ensure you have read the [Eligibility and Application Process](#) on page 2.

Application form

Section 1: Personal details

Please ensure that all your contact details are correct, as this is how we will undertake any communication with you.

Section 2: Your doctoral route and mode of study

Please select your doctoral route, Open Doctoral Award or Collaborative Doctoral Award.

If you have already started your PhD, please include the date on which your studies commenced and whether you have been studying part-time or full-time.

Section 3: Your supervision team

Please remember that you will be working with a team of at least two academic supervisors and that they can be academic members of staff at different universities.

Although you apply to a single home university, your supervisory team can be made up of academics from other universities across Midlands4Cities when this provides the best fit of expertise for your project.

Please provide details of your proposed supervisory team minimum of 2 and no more than 3 academic supervisors with whom you have communicated in developing your research proposal. Please provide the name of the Academic Unit in which you intend to study (e.g. department, school or subject area).

If you anticipate any links to M4C partners in terms of training or co-supervision please include this information here. Note this is for information only and will not influence any final decision about your funding application.

Section 4: Your career in higher education to date

Please provide details of the institutions you have attended (or are attending), and the courses you have taken at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. You should enter one undergraduate and one Masters level degree, but there is also space to add other qualifications at the same level or other relevant qualifications.

If your qualification was completed outside the UK, please tell us the name of your qualification in the original language (e.g. Maîtrise, and not the English equivalent). If you studied in or outside the UK, please confirm that your Masters degree is 180 credits even if not all of those credits were at Masters level (e.g. a language or professional module may not have been at Masters level) and list the modules that you have taken along with their credit weighting if known.

Section 5: Professional experience

AHRC eligibility criteria stipulate that applicants cannot take up a full-time award and continue in full-time employment. Please see point five in the [Additional Eligibility Points](#).

Please provide information about any employment, work or professional experience that is **relevant to your proposed programme of study**. This is of particular importance if your programme is practice-led, if your Masters qualification was completed sometime ago, or if you have had no Masters level training but you have substantial professional experience relevant to the subject of your proposed research. You should use this space to give details of professional experience that you wish the assessors to consider.

Section 6: Project proposal

Applicants to the Open Doctoral Competition should provide details of your proposed project. Applicants to the Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) competition should provide details of how you propose to engage with the CDA project in pursuing and developing its research goals (see below).

The **project proposal** plays a key part in the assessment of your application. That is why we recommend that you discuss the content of this section in good time with your proposed supervisors. The assessors are looking for evidence of high-quality research and strong potential for postgraduate study. You need to present your case clearly and concisely.

It is important to organise the information you provide about your proposed research project carefully.

There are four components to this section:

The project title for your proposed programme of research

An outline of your proposed project and your preparation for study and previous experience (maximum 400 words).

An explanation of the context of the research, its aims and objectives, its potential application and impact. If you have already begun your doctoral study, please remember to refer to the research you have undertaken to date so it is clear what has already been completed (maximum 400 words).

Identify any ethical and intellectual property issues associated with the project and how these will be addressed or have been addressed if you are a current PhD student (maximum 400 words).

When planning your proposal, you may find it helpful to consider the following areas:

Intellectual purpose and originality: Make sure you provide a synopsis of your proposed research project. In describing your project, address the key **research questions, research context** (i.e. the debates or secondary literature your project engages with) and **research methodology** (how you plan to go about your research). How you present your project proposal is crucial, so you should use clear and concise language, avoiding jargon. Bear in mind that some of the assessors may not work precisely in your particular specialism 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 particular contribution to knowledge and understanding that you hope to make and explain why the research is important. Outline the potential application of your project within the research field and, where relevant, the potential of your research for social and cultural impact.

Your reasons for undertaking this project: What is the purpose of the research? How does it develop your intellectual trajectory (i.e. how does it relate to what you have studied)? Where there is an overlap between your Masters dissertation (if you completed one) and your doctoral study, you should demonstrate how the project extends previous work and state clearly the added value of continuing to pursue research in this area. If it is an entirely new direction for you, make sure that assessors can see that you have sufficient experience to conduct research in this area. Explain why the Academic Unit(s) and the supervisory team are a strong fit to your project.

Preparation and previous experience: you should provide a brief indication of any previous experience or preparation that is relevant to your proposed doctoral study. For example, you may wish to highlight key areas of your Masters study or professional experience. Where applicable, you should also include training and preparation additional to formal undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications that is relevant to your proposed study (e.g. if you have additional degrees, qualifications or relevant skills that you have not included elsewhere on the form). If you are aware of

additional training - for example foreign language skills or IT training - that you will require in order to complete your PhD study, please include it in this section. The fact that you require further training will not be regarded by the assessors as a sign of weakness in your application. Where appropriate to your project, state where sources and materials necessary for the research are located and how these will be accessed.

Applicants for Collaborative Doctoral Awards (CDA)

While CDA projects have been co-designed in broad terms between an academic and partner organisation, it is important for applicants to address the specific way they intend to engage with the research aims of the project. In this case you should explain how you will develop your research in the overall context of the project and make clear the questions, methods and critical approaches you intend to apply. You should make clear how your research and background (i.e. academic, professional, practice-based, etc.) will help you to address the goals of the collaborative project and the contribution to knowledge and understanding that you hope to make with/within this. As with Open Competition applications, please outline the potential application of your project within the wider research field and the potential of your research for social and cultural impact.

In explaining your reasons for wanting to undertake the proposed project, you should identify the value to you of the proposed CDA and explain your fit to it. How in particular does the collaborative nature of the project benefit your study? How will your doctoral study potentially relate to your career aims? How would your own preparation and previous experience contribute to the successful delivery of the proposed project?

Section 7: Fieldwork and study visits

If you need to carry out study visits or fieldwork trips during the period of your award, you must state your planned destination(s), the expected duration and purpose of each visit, and indicate how they are integral to your research.

Section 8: Extended funding

M4C is committed to ensuring that funding supports projects of scale and ambition, offers the specialist training that may be required, and provides time for wider development opportunities.

The baseline duration for Open Doctoral Awards is 3.5 years (42 months full-time or 84 months part-time). This baseline has been established to include the time for students to undertake placements and engagement opportunities as part of their doctoral experience. It is expected that the research project will be designed in such a way that students are able to submit their thesis within the funded period *as defined at the outset of the project*.

An award can be extended up to a maximum of 6 months full-time or 12 months part-time. Requests for extended funding can be made where there is a rationale for complex or extended training, skills acquisition, extended archival visits, fieldwork or extended placement needs. For example:

- the research cannot be undertaken in full without the acquisition of specific language skills.
- the research cannot be undertaken in full without learning specific new, high-level methodological skills, for example, complex quantitative skills.
- the research cannot be undertaken in full without the development of very significant and demanding new discipline-specific skills, for example, palaeographical, papyrological or epigraphical skills, or where a high degree of collaboration with other disciplines necessitates a significant period of additional time to develop the requisite knowledge of other areas.
- the research cannot be undertaken in full without fieldwork being undertaken which presents significant challenges, for example, of a methodological or practical nature.
- The research would benefit from an extended placement opportunity that has already been identified.

This is not an exhaustive list but if you need to carry out any of the above or similar during the period of your award, you **must** make a case for the need and explain how it is integral to your research.

You should include details of the training or skills development required and the planned destinations and purpose of visits for fieldwork or placements. You should indicate the length of additional time you will require.

As the period of funding for **Collaborative Doctoral Awards (CDA)** is set at **4 years**, an extension to award is not applicable in this instance.

Section 9: Applicant ID

As part of the application process for a place to study at your home university you will be issued with an applicant ID. You will need this before you can submit your M4C funding application. If you have already started your PhD, please use your institutional ID number.

Section 10: Source of enquiry

To assist with future marketing and recruitment we would appreciate your feedback on how you found out about Midlands4Cities studentships.

Equal opportunities

Applicants to Midlands4Cities are considered solely on the basis of their academic experience, merits, abilities and potential, regardless of gender, ethnic or racial origin, age (subject to university regulations on minimum age), disability, religion, sexual orientation or any other irrelevant distinction.

The data will not be used in the assessment of your application but is a requirement of the application process.

Reference request

To support your application to Midlands4Cities it is essential that two references are received by your chosen referee via the online M4C reference form by the deadline of **13 January 2021 (noon UK time)**. Please be aware that although your reference request has been sent, your referees must **submit** their references via our online form before your funding application can be submitted. Late references will not be accepted, and your application will be ruled as ineligible.

Your referee is only required to complete the M4C reference forms. These will be used by the Admissions Office at your home university and in support of your M4C funding application. They do **not** need to write two separate references.

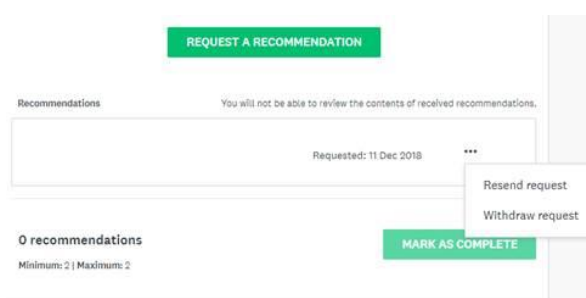
When you have completed this section, your referee will be sent an automated request to complete the M4C reference form. It is essential that you provide a current and accurate email address for your referees in your application.

Time frame

We recommend that you complete the M4C reference request section by December 2020 at the very latest. **Please allow enough time for your referees to complete their reference.**

To resend the reference request or change your referee:

1. Revisit the 'Request a Reference' section in the applicant portal.
2. Click the three dots and selecting 'Resend Request'



Selecting a referee

It is essential that you select referees who have the detailed knowledge required to appraise your recent intellectual development and preparedness for the programme of study you will be undertaking.

Make sure that your referees have all the information they require (e.g. a copy of your project proposal, and all your marks from both undergraduate and Masters if you have them). Referees will need to write in detail about your previous high performance, with evidence.

When selecting your referees, ask a potential supervisor **only** if that person has taught you already (ideally at Masters rather than undergraduate levels), knows your academic record, and can comment on the proposed PhD research. If that is the case, a potential supervisor can (and should) act as a referee. If a potential supervisor has **not** taught you before and can only comment on the PhD research proposal that you have shared with them, that potential supervisor should **not** be a referee.

If you are already undertaking a PhD (whether full- or part-time) and are applying for funding for the remaining period (30 months minimum of full-time funding or the part-time equivalent), you should ensure that at least **one of your referees is a current supervisor of your PhD** and can therefore comment in detail on the quality and the quantity of the work you have completed to date.

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 partner in the creative industries. In this case, you should ensure that referees are aware that they will need to comment in detail on the research proposal as well as you as a person and professional.

Please ensure:

- your referees are aware that they have been nominated to complete a reference request and **confirm that they have received the automated reference request**. (In some instances, the request may have been delivered to the junk or spam folder. It is advisable to add noreply@mail.smapply.net to your safe senders list).
- When using a university email address, please use the referee's full email address, e.g. Joe.bloggs@institution.ac.uk and **not their username**.
- referees should not register with the M4C applicant portal to submit a reference. **Please ask them to await the automated reference request.**
- your referees understand that they will be expected to include detailed answers to each of the questions on the form, in relation to your proposed research and your academic background and qualifications.

Submit

Once you have completed the four tasks and your references are received, you are ready to submit your completed application, click 'Review & Submit'.

Assessment Criteria

Evidence of the quality of the applicant: this will be based on the case made by the student in support of their application, and evidence provided by the referees and Academic Unit about the student's performance at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and in terms of any relevant professional experience. It is important to note that performance does not refer only to final degree results but also to any marks received to date. These should be made available to assessors via referees or the Institutional Support and Authorisation form where appropriate. Assessors are seeking evidence of the applicant's ability to articulate a research project, a coherent and well thought-out plan for doctoral study and for timely completion, and an awareness of the place of their research within the current field.

Evidence that the applicant is suitably prepared for their proposed study and future career: this will be based on the applicant's description of how previous experience (academic and professional) has prepared them for postgraduate study, and the applicant's description of how the programme of study will contribute to long-term career aims. Assessors consider the full application in all its parts, to include supporting evidence provided by referees and by the Academic Unit in the Institutional Support and Authorisation Form, including the interview with the applicant. They seek evidence of the applicant's ability to complete high quality programme of study, and to complete it to time.

Evidence of the quality and feasibility of the proposed study: this will be based on the applicant's account including their rationale for pursuing the proposed programme of study. Assessors will also consider the supporting information provided by the Academic Unit about the programme of study and how it relates to the student's current and long-term goals.

Evidence of the quality and appropriateness of Academic Unit's support and resource: this will be based on the Academic Unit's account of the preparation and training that will be provided to meet the student's needs, in terms of their doctoral study and future career. The assessors will consider information about the resources and support that will enable the student to complete a high-quality thesis as available in the Academic Unit and within the Midlands4Cities research environment. Assessors are seeking evidence that there is appropriate research expertise within an Academic Unit in a single university or in more than one university, and that the supervisory team *represents the best support and fit to the student available within the*

Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership. They need evidence that each supervisor’s expertise is relevant to the proposed study. Assessors will also need to be assured that appropriate procedures and processes have been put in place in relation to research ethics, health and safety and academic misconduct.

Key Dates

<p>13 January 2021 noon</p>	<p>Deadline for M4C DTP funding applications</p> <p>You should have already applied (pending acceptance) for a PhD before submitting your M4C DTP funding application.</p> <p>Your full and complete funding application should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M4C online application form • 2 M4C online references received by your chosen referees.
<p>January 2021</p>	<p>Application shortlisting and interviews by academic units.</p> <p>Interviews arrangements will be arranged by your selected home university so please liaise directly with them on this. Please see M4C contacts page.</p> <p>Applicants who have not been shortlisted will be notified.</p>
<p>February 2021</p>	<p>M4C selection and grading process starts.</p> <p>This will be dependent on your acceptance for a PhD at your chosen M4C university.</p>
<p>Early March 2021</p>	<p>M4C Selection Panels and committees take place to assess and make decisions on your funding application.</p>
<p>Week commencing 29 March 2021</p>	<p>You will be notified of the outcome of your application.</p>
<p>19 May 2021</p>	<p>M4C Welcome event for 2021 cohort.</p>