



Midlands4Cities

Doctoral Training Partnership

Birmingham Coventry Leicester Nottingham

# Applicant Guidance Notes

AHRC Midlands4cities Doctoral  
Training Partnership Funding  
Applications

2025 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 four potential forms of eligible preparation that M4C recognise:

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
4. You might have already commenced doctoral study. Students are eligible to apply for AHRC funding, provided that, they have not completed more than 21 months (full-time) or 42 months (part-time) of their PhD by the time the M4C award starts on 1<sup>st</sup> October.

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 and a stipend to support living costs at the UKRI rate for UK applicants. UKRI (AHRC) funding will not cover international fees set by universities or other costs which are associated with entering the UK such as visas and health surcharge. Please contact your home institution for further support provided for international applicants. Please see the links below:

[University of Birmingham](#)

[Birmingham City University](#)

[University of Warwick](#)

[Coventry University](#)

[De Montfort University](#)

[University of Leicester](#)

[Nottingham Trent University](#)

[University of Nottingham](#)

[UKCISA](#) provides information on tuition fees to help you assess your fee status. If you click on that link, you should find a guide to 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 M4C partner universities either full- or part-time in permanent or long- term fixed appointments (over 2 years) are eligible to undertake PhDs as identified through the staff development procedures at their own institution. 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 the M4C Site Directors of your university before beginning your application.
3. 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.
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 an M4C student takes up a salaried full-time position, 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.
6. Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership is a collaboration of universities in the Midlands. You will be expected to participate in mandatory and other relevant M4C activities delivered across the Midlands. M4C will not be able to cover travel expenses across or from outside the Midlands to attend M4C 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 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. 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.

You are only allowed to submit ONE application to each 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.

## Midlands Stuart Hall Foundation Studentship

For 2025, the Stuart Hall Foundation (SHF) Scholarship will support up to two studentships a year for Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnic candidates to undertake doctoral research in arts and humanities.

The Stuart Hall Foundation is particularly interested in helping to support black and brown students, activists and artists. These groups are underrepresented in UK higher education and cultural institutions.

You can find out more about SHF here: [www.stuarthallfoundation.org/about-us/](http://www.stuarthallfoundation.org/about-us/)

If you are eligible for this scholarship and wish to apply you will need to complete a short statement (up to 250 words) describing how your project fits with the Stuart Hall Foundation's purpose and criteria. You will be prompted to do this within the first section of the online application form under eligibility questions. Please note, only those with Home fee status are eligible to apply for M4C/SHF Fellowships.

## The application process

Please ensure that you allow yourself enough time to complete your online funding application form and have secured the submission of your references by the deadline **13 January 2025 (noon UK time)** for entry in October 2025. To aid with time zone conversion of the deadline, please see the below link:

[World clock converter](#)

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 three stages to the application process.

### **Step one: Identify a supervisor(s) and home university**

For **Collaborative Doctoral Awards (CDAs)**, read the project description and contact the lead academic supervisor to find out more information. You will also want to discuss with the lead supervisor how you would approach the project. The university at which the lead supervisor is based will become your Home University.

For **Open Doctoral Awards**, you'll need to identify a Home Institution and two or more supervisors (maximum three). You can have supervisors from one or more of the M4C partner universities. To identify a suitable lead supervisor and Home Institution, you can use the university websites. These will help you identify departments, schools, centres and/or institutes in 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 M4C application and may be able to provide examples of sample M4C applications where they have permission to do so.

When considering a prospective Home Institution, it's 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 usually be found on a university department's website 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 by late autumn, get your university application in before the New Year, and then apply to M4C by the January deadline.

## **Step two: 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**. Please be advised that international applicants will need to comply with the eligibility requirements of the home university for fee status, visa, and English language proficiency.

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 2025 (noon UK time)**. Before completing the Reference Request section of the application form, please ensure that you have read carefully both the M4C guidance ([here](#)) for regarding reference request and the instructions regarding references for your chosen home institution.

When asking for a reference, you need to be able to tell your potential referee whether their reference will only be used for M4C or whether your referee may be asked to provide an additional reference for your university application. If you have any queries, please consult your Site Directors using the institutional email address on the [Midlands4cities Contacts Page](#).

### **Step three: 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.

M4C also offer online and city-based **Application Writing Workshops** which are advertised on the M4C website. These workshops provide advice on the application process, discussion of examples of previous successful applications and a chance for you to ask questions. We strongly recommend that you participate in a workshop if possible.

## Completing the online Application Form

To start your application please visit: [The Midlands4Cities Application Portal](#)

We advise that you develop your proposal offline and transfer it to the online form when you are satisfied. You can download a pdf version of part two of the form.

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. If you have a disability which will make completing the application form difficult, please contact your home university for support. 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.

### **Use of AI UKRI policy – applicant responsibilities**

[artificial-intelligence-in-application-and-assessment-policy/use-of-generative-artificial-intelligence-in-application-preparation-and-assessment/](#)

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 Form

Part One of the Application form collects data for two reasons: firstly, to enable M4C to process your application, and secondly to allow M4C to measure its success in attracting candidates with a wide range of backgrounds and experience, and to ensure that it provides appropriate support for those candidates. **The information in this part of the application form is not part of the assessment process.** The Equality and Diversity data is separated from the application before assessment, then it is aggregated and held anonymously. It is not shared with anyone prior to the making of awards. It is reported as aggregated data to M4C's Management Committee and to M4C's funders, the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

The questions asked are derived from [Advance HE](#) and are designed to give the fullest picture possible of applicants and award winners.

## Part two of the online Application Form

### Project

#### [Your Award and Mode of Study](#)

First of all you need to select the award you are applying for and insert the date on which your doctoral study will begin or, if you have already started, the date on which you began. The types of award are:

- Full-time Open Doctoral Competition
- Part-time Open Doctoral Competition
- Full-time Collaborative Doctoral Award
- Part-time Collaborative Doctoral Award

All applications, whether to the Open or CDA competition, are assessed by the same scoring criteria which can be found here:

[M4C Scoring Criteria](#)

#### [Your Proposed Project- CDAs](#)

If you are applying for a **Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA)**, please note that 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.

**Project Title:**



Please use the exact advertised CDA project title here. This can be found on the website.

### **Project Proposal [max. 500 words]**

For CDA applications you should explain how you will develop your research in the overall context of the advertised project with reference (e.g., Jones, 2017) to existing literature and practice in the field. Make clear the specific question(s), method(s) and critical approaches you intend to apply. Outline how you envisage the collaboration with the partner organisation. Please outline how your individual approach to the project will contribute to knowledge in the field and have potential for social and cultural impact. Use no more than 500 words.

### **Project references [max 250 words]**

Please provide references for all primary and secondary resources mentioned 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/timeline**

Outline an indicative structure/timeline for your project, including how you envisage collaboration with the partner organisation. You should outline the planned progression of the research and/or practice over the 4 years (FT) or 8 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, the development of your collaboration with your partner organisation, 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.

## [Your Proposed Project- Open Competition](#)

### **Project Title:**

If you are applying to the **Open Competition** with your own project, 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. M4C 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 a number of 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 mentioned 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. Every M4C institution has an ethics policy and provides guidance appropriate to each discipline, and you **must** comply with this. Please review your project proposal against your proposed home institution'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 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.)

Please note, however, that you should not simply repeat or cut and paste what you find in your institution's guidance, but be as specific as possible to your proposal.

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

Most projects will 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 your home university'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).

## **Person and 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; M4C also recognises that professional qualifications and experience may provide the equivalent preparation to a Masters qualification. In order 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. If you are an international applicant, and do not know the equivalent British degree or classification, please check with the admissions office in your Home Institution, who should be able to provide the necessary equivalence.

Should you hold or be studying for a post-graduate degree, this will normally be at Masters level. You may apply for M4C 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 your 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 are an international applicant**, please consult with the Admissions Office in your Home Institution to establish the British equivalencies for your degree results. This will help the assessors understand your achievements correctly.

**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.

**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 both open competition and CDA applicants, your lead academic supervisor will be based at this institution.

### **Proposed supervisory team:**

One of the opportunities M4C offers is the option to have a cross-institutional supervisory team, where you can draw on expertise from two or three 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.

For CDA applicants, your supervisory team is set out in the project brief: it will comprise of a lead academic supervisor from your home institution, a second academic supervisor, and a supervisor from the partner organisation. For open competition applicants, your supervisory team should include at least two people: your lead supervisor will also be at your Home Institution, but your second supervisor(s) may be based at any of the M4C institutions, and you might also have a supervisor from a partner organisation, depending on the needs of your project.

### **Describe how your selected M4C 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 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?

Please review the M4C webpages: <https://www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/> Consider how you might both support and benefit from the Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership. [max 150 words].

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

- **M4C development funding beyond your stipend.**
- **Partner organisations.**
- **Placement and training opportunities.**

Midlands4Cities 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.

You can see the kinds of opportunities available on the Midlands4Cities website here

<https://www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/news-events/> and here

<https://www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/our-offer/>. 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 M4C students to organise conferences, specific training, and support networks. Others undertake **placements** to gain research and work experience in **partner organisations**: our list of current M4C partners can be found here; <https://www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/partners/>. Students also organise the annual **Research Festival** and some will become part of the M4C **Student Advisory Forum**. How might you get the most out of M4C membership?

## References

To support your application to Midlands4Cities it is essential that two references are received by M4C via the online M4C reference form by the deadline of **13 January 2025 (noon UK time)**. To aid with time zone conversion of the deadline, please see the below link:

[World clock converter](#)

Please be aware that although a reference request to your referee has been sent, **your referees must still 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.

**In most cases, 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. If you are in any doubt, please check with your proposed home institution ([www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/contact](http://www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/contact))

When you have completed this section of the online application form, 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.

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](mailto: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](mailto: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 answers to each of the questions on the form.
- Your referees understand that they should not provide additional personal information not included in the parts of the application form used by assessing panellists, i.e. your name, your gender (they should use gender neutral pronouns), and your awarding institutions.

## Time frame

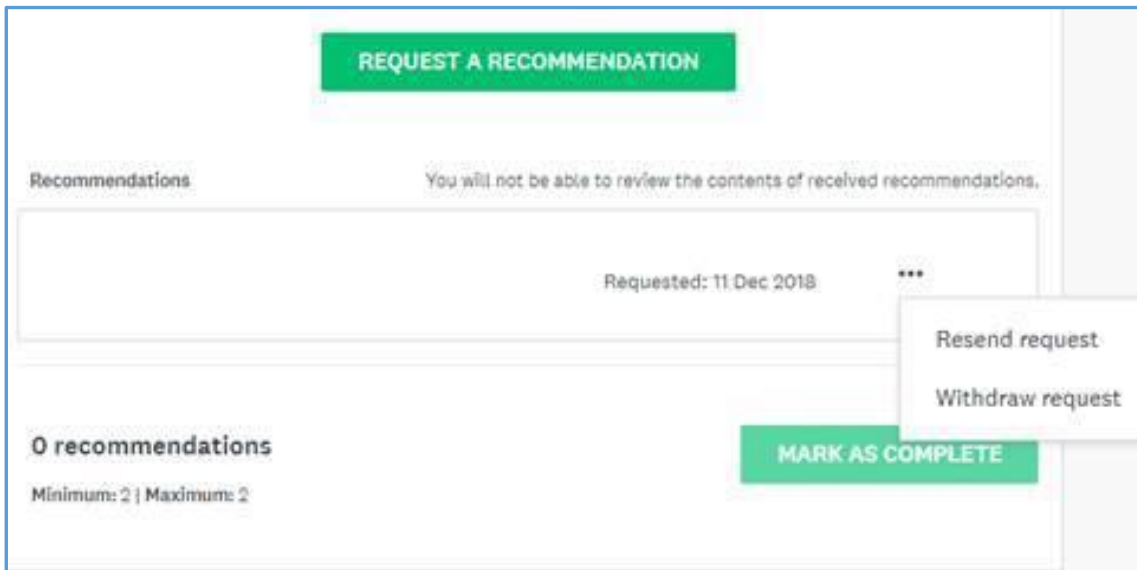
We recommend that you complete the M4C reference request section as early as possible but **no later than 1<sup>st</sup> December**. Do not leave it until the Christmas break when many colleagues are unavailable. **Please allow enough time for your referees to complete their reference or for changes to be made.**

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

The M4C reference form is short and consists of four questions:

1. Are you the current or prospective PhD Supervisor?
2. In what capacity do you know the candidate?
3. How long have you known the candidate?
4. Is the candidate equipped to complete the project?

Your referee will be asked to give a Likert rating for question 4 and provide an explanation for the rating.

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. 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 questions with your referee in advance 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.
- If you are already undertaking a PhD (whether full- or part-time) and are applying for funding for the remaining period (21 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 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 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.
- For further support on choosing and corresponding with your referees, we recommend you speak to your prospective supervisor and/or the Site Director at the institution you are applying to.
- You will be notified automatically when your referees have submitted their references. When you have received both notifications, please go back into your application and mark the reference section as complete. **Until you do this, you will not be able to submit your application.**
- Should you need to change one of your referees because of illness or any other reason, please use the reference page **first to withdraw** the request (this confirms with your referee that you have withdrawn them), then **delete the original request**, and **then add a request** to your new referee. You have to delete the original request in order to be able to add another.

## What happens next

Once all the tasks in your application are complete, including the references, **you must submit your application**: it won't be submitted automatically. Once you have submitted your application, it is then sent to your home institution and department for shortlisting.

CDA applications are reviewed by the academic supervisor, the Site Directors at both city institutions and the partner supervisor, and a shortlist is drawn up. Shortlisted applicants will be interviewed by a panel of the academic supervisor, the partner supervisor and one site director from each M4C university in the city. After the interview applicants are scored according to the [Midlands4Cities AHRC Scoring Criteria](#), and these scores, and the recommendation for award, are reported to the Student Award Panel.

Open competition applications are reviewed by an academic panel, who will shortlist candidates in their academic unit, using the 4 Ps (person, 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. The applications of shortlisted applicants will be returned to M4C with two additional forms: one, a report on the interview, to ensure consistent practice across all interviews, and the second, an institutional support form, on which the unit will confirm its support for the application, both person and project, and confirm the supervisory team. 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 their home university at this stage.

The final application – applicant form, references, interview report form, and institutional support form – will be allocated to the appropriate subject-specialist panel for scoring. There are four specialist panels: A1 (History, Cultural and Museum Studies), A2 (Philosophy, Law, Theology, Archaeology), B (Music, Dance, Drama, Fine Art, and Design) and C (Languages and Literatures); the Institutional Support Form will indicate the most appropriate panel for each shortlisted application. The panel comprise two disciplinary experts from each institution together with one site director from each institution: so a total of 24 people. Panellists score according to the AHRC criteria, as applied to the 4 Ps (person, project, preparedness and place) and return their score to M4C. Panellists will have the opportunity to raise queries about applications and process during the scoring period.

Once the scores have been returned through Subject Area Panels, the scores are aggregated, and the highest scoring applications are identified. These applications are recommended to the Student Selection Panel which will be at the end of March.

The Student Selection Panel comprises the M4C Director, the Site Directors from each institution, and the M4C's External Assessor. At this point awards are made, arising from the panel scoring in both Open and CDA competitions, and a reserve list is drawn up. Applicants will be informed of the outcome of the Student Selection Panel in early May.