

Oxford-Wessex Collaborative Doctoral Landscape Award EDI Action Plan

The Gardens Libraries and Museums of the University of Oxford (hereafter: GLAM) and Wessex Museums are committed to encouraging applicants from all backgrounds to apply for Collaborative Doctoral Landscape Award (CDLA) studentships. In partnership with the UK-wide CDLA Consortium we wish to address the under-representation in doctoral research and the arts/heritage/cultural sector of people with experience of structural inequities including:

- UK students from Asian, Black, and mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds that are under-represented in relevant UK doctoral and cultural-sector pathways;
- Students who are disabled;
- Students from low to medium socio-economic backgrounds.

We will work closely with other CDLA partners to share EDI best practice and resources. Collaborative doctoral studentships already attract people from different backgrounds into postgraduate research compared to other studentships (JD Hill & A Meek, 2019) and we want to build on this.

Data. Due to resource and GDPR restrictions we have very limited existing data about EDI for Collaborative Doctoral Students. Furthermore, AHRC itself has identified that there is limited evidence reported in the academic literature focused on doctoral training provision within the arts and humanities (CRAC / Vitae 2023). We have therefore highlighted sector-wide issues using existing data from across postgraduate research, humanities, and the cultural and heritage sectors. One key point in our action plan will be to set GDPR-approved provisions in place to collect these data from current and future students.

Ethnicity. The Oxford-Wessex CDLP is committed to positive action to help address the disproportionately low participation of UK students from Asian, Black, and mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds progressing into doctoral research within the arts and humanities (CRAC / Vitae 2023). Research suggests that this low participation is caused by systemic disadvantage linked to ethnicity (Arday 2020; Leading Routes 2019). There is also evidence of significant under-representation of professionals from UK Asian, Black, and mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds within the cultural and heritage sectors (15% of cultural/heritage sector workers compared to 18% of whole working age population, ACE 2025); within postgraduate research (8% of arts & humanities doctoral researchers compared to 15% in all disciplines, CRAC / Vitae 2023); and with Oxford's GLAM (9% compared to 19% in wider university, University of Oxford 2025).

Disability and mental health. An ACE report in 2025 stated that, 'There is still work to be done to improve the representation of disabled people in the cultural and heritage sector' as 9% identified as disabled in ACE's 2022/23 data compared to 22% of the whole working age population (ACE 2025). In GLAM, 11.2% of staff declared a disability in 2024 compared to 6.8% of overall staff (University of Oxford 2025). In addition, data show that disability is under-represented in HE overall but has been steadily increasing, and in 2023-24, 20.7% of students had a reported disability, compared with 8.2% in 2010-11 (Office for Students 2025). Our most recent data on the CDP 2025 intake indicates that 23.5% of CDP students declared a disability and/or neurodivergence (Boateng 2025). The proportion of students who disclosed a mental health condition to their university has increased rapidly from under 1% in 2010/11 to 5.8% in 2022/23 (Lewis & Stiebahl 2025). A study found that more than a third of doctoral researchers (35.8%) had considered ending and/or taking a break from their studies due to poor mental health (Hazell 2021). Taken together, these data suggest that students with disabilities, neurodivergence, or mental health conditions may require additional support at recruitment/application and interview stage, and once in post, which we will address with the UK-wide CDLA Consortium.

Age, gender, caring responsibilities. In 2023 to 2024, for all UKRI research councils, most students were in the 29-or-less age category; the proportion ranged from 93% of students at STFC to 50% of students at AHRC, suggesting that arts and humanities doctoral students skew slightly older (UKRI 2025). The latest CDP data shows that 60.8% of students are aged 25-34, 72.9% of CDP students identified as female, with 21.2% identifying as male (Boateng 2025). 15% of applicants report having caring responsibilities, which intersects significantly with disability, social class background, and age (ibid.). It is worth also noting that 90% of students surveyed by the National Union of Students (NUS) for its September 2022 'Cost of Living' report said the rising cost of living had negatively impacted their mental health. Students said they were worried about 'being able to eat, feed their family, and pay bills, with concerns about cost-of-living pressures greater among older students, postgraduates, and those who work or have caring responsibilities' (NUS 2022). We know this means that as a Consortium we need to ensure parity of access to training and networking activities for those who work part-time, who have caring responsibilities, or who might have problems travelling to events. We have capitalized on the technologies which have become familiar during the pandemic to enable us to provide remote training and networking opportunities to our students.

Socio-economic status (SES). Although socio-economic status is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, we are aware that those from disadvantaged backgrounds are under-represented at postgraduate level (Mateos-González & Wakeling 2022). Department for Education analysis shows large differences in postgraduate progression by SES quintile (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2020). National statistics show lower representation from the lowest Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile across UK nations.

Care experience. Those who have spent time in state care as children, and are therefore 'care-experienced', are known to have lower life chances than the general population (Baker et al 2022). Perhaps surprisingly, however, care-experienced graduates who successfully access and complete an undergraduate degree are significantly more likely to progress to postgraduate study than non-care-experienced graduates (ibid.) However, as highlighted by Baker (2024), 'Although the statistical insights into care-experienced graduates' taught postgraduate progression is undoubtedly promising, their lived experiences show how the sudden loss of support upon graduating from the undergraduate level leads to economic hardship and perpetuates housing and financial instability. These constraints were insurmountable for many, particularly in the context of not having safety nets in the form of a family home, having past experiences of instability during their time in the care system, and of course, graduating into a post-Covid economy and cost of living crisis'.

More targeted support at application and transition stages for CDLA applicants from lower SES backgrounds, and for care-experienced graduates and strong widening participation strategies among HEI partners, remain priorities.

Intersectional needs. We will consider intersectional needs (Crenshaw, 1989) across all categories acknowledging the known and hidden interconnections across protected characteristics, other identity markers and modes and status of study. For instance, the compounded wellbeing challenges for ethnic minority doctoral researchers (NUS, 2011) and the broader structural inequalities within the public health landscape (Race Equality Foundation, 2019) demonstrate the importance of developing flexible support structures which can achieve better mental health outcomes. The other intersections at play within the doctoral research landscape include student status (i.e., full or part-time), nationality, physical disabilities and mental health challenges, isolated researchers, those with caring responsibilities, and first-generation university students, those with financial concerns or work-life balance challenges.

Strategic actions to increase equality, diversity and inclusion.

The actions below use the objectives set out in the Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) Consortium: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2025-2027) (Boateng 2025), and outline how GLAM-Wessex CDLP will address them.

Aim	Actions	Measures of Success
Communication to a diverse group of potential applicants about the CDLA opportunities and application processes	Oxford-Wessex CDLP webpages (hosted on GLAM's website) will use diverse imagery, be clearly written and accessible. Clear information on financial support available, studentships offered and how to apply. Student stories from diverse voices, explaining their route into the CDP, their experiences and destination.	Y1+ changes to GLAM's website, information and processes Y2+ introduction of events for prospective candidates
Select studentship projects that may attract different applicants	Encourage diversity in choice of co-supervisors and proactively encourage topics that may attract a wider range of applicants Panel for selecting studentship projects aware of these issues and chaired to avoid potential bias against applicants or topics.	Y1+ monitoring the diversity of co-supervisors and topics. Y1+ changes to project selection panel processes and to applications forms
Ensure equality of opportunity for supervisors and projects	Oxford-Wessex CDLP will proactively engage a broad range of UK HEIs, including institutions currently under-represented in Collaborative Doctoral Partnership provision, and seek to build relationships with institutions serving diverse and widening-participation student populations. Local post-92 universities actively targeted at launch. Pre-application webinar held and widely advertised to encourage applications from a wider group of HEIs	Y1+ List of actively emailed institutions; Y1+ records kept of HEIs that apply and that receive awards Y1+ attendance records for webinar monitored for HEI diversity

Ensure equality of opportunity for studentship candidates	Require HEI partners to follow best UKRI practices for EDI recruitment and support, and to share with us information on EDI characteristics data and understand that EDI is a priority for us as CDLA holder. All studentship adverts to outline options for part time study and equivalent (non-Masters) experience as routes into the CDLA.	Y1+ all studentship adverts outline flexible study options Y1 trial accessing anonymised EDI data from HEI partners re. applicant EDI characteristics
Student selection on merit / excellence and regardless of mode of study or background	Student recruitment panel to include representatives from both HEI and GLAM / Wessex Museums and where possible also the CDLA-director to ensure best practice. GLAM and Wessex Museums panel members required to complete EDI/unconscious bias training. We will require HEIs to follow same practice before participation in student recruitment.	Y+ monitor membership of short-listing and interview panel, and their training
Increase number of awards to candidates from under represented groups via Positive Action.	Positive action will be enabled for people with under-represented characteristics: specifically for UK applicants from Asian, Black, and mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds that are under-represented in relevant UK doctoral and cultural-sector pathways; and applicants who are disabled. And support given to HEI partners new to using positive action.	Y1 update positive action memorandum of justification Y2-Y3 monitor progress of positive action measures
Promote an inclusive research & training and working environment	Provision or monitoring of supervisor and student training on best practice in inclusive research, bullying and harassment, and responsible bystander training. Supervisor training on these is standard within GLAM. We can also provide it for students if not available in their HEI. Continue to provide a mix of in-person and online events to ensure that all students can access our training regardless of their ability to travel.	Y1 – Y4 require confirmation from supervisors that training has been completed before student start date. Monitor student and supervisor training as part of annual student reporting

Implement equitable finance procedures for student access to the cultural partner contribution (up to £2k p.a.)	Student expenses that are eligible for the cultural partner contribution will be paid directly by the cultural institutions (up to £2,000 per student per year) with no need for students to pay upfront and reclaim. Where needed beyond the UKRI contribution, the expenses allowance will be considered allowable for contributing to childcare / care costs associated with students attendance at studentship-related training and professional development.	Y1-Y4 ensure that Oxford-Wessex institutions that apply for studentships are aware of this requirement and commit to enabling it
Support mental health and wellbeing of students	Advise on the AHRC/UKRI regulations for DSA, sick leave and parental leave and help students claim it where needed. Close liaison with HEIs and Consortium on pastoral care issues, best practice, support and sharing with the Consortium via the EDI forum.	Y1-Y4 ensure the regulations are flagged at Oxford-Wessex inductions
Management of awards	Oxford-Wessex CDLA will continue to take an active role in the UK- wide Consortium to collaborate on areas of joint interest including student welfare, EDI, and inclusive practice.	Y1- Y4 Student welfare, EDI, and inclusive practice are standing agenda items for the Oxford-Wessex CDLP.

Strategy for Monitoring the delivery of this action plan. We will monitor progress on this EDI plan at the Oxford-Wessex CDLP panel meetings, and feed information into the UK-wide CDLA Consortium annual monitoring exercises to help identify any further actions needed. We will discuss challenges and successes across the Consortium. Within the Oxford-Wessex CDLP, with only 3 new students per year the numbers of students from the backgrounds that we wish to encourage may be small. However, by working together we can monitor progress across the UK-wide Consortium.

Possible challenges or barriers and how you will address them. One of the anticipated barriers is access to EDI data from student recruitment exercises which is currently collected and held by the HEI and AHRC. Without access to these data we will be limited in the amount or rigour of monitoring and we will rely primarily on ensuring EDI principles are upheld during the recruitment process. Staff resource for delivering new activity may also be a possible challenge, but we will ensure that senior management within GLAM is aware of the additional resources that may be required in supporting CDP students and actioning our EDI strategy.

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