

21st Century British Comics

Reference: 2017-3-COO

Supervisor	Ian Cooke, Head of Contemporary British Publications
Department, Location	Contemporary British Collections, St Pancras . The placement may benefit from the student spending some days at the Library's Boston Spa site, in Yorkshire, but this is not a requirement.
Start date/timeframe	Anytime during 2017, though an August 2017 start date would be difficult due to other commitments of the supervisor.
Duration	3 months (or part-time equivalent – see below) <i>For a part-time placement, the number of days per week the student would spend on site at the Library could be agreed with the supervisor in advance</i>
Remote-working	Some elements of remote working would be feasible for this placement, if needed – to be agreed with the supervisor in advance.

Context for placement

The Library's Contemporary British Publications team is responsible for the curation of 21st-century UK publishing across print and digital formats. Our collections range from artists books and independent press to the major mainstream publishers and the UK web archive. We have particular interests in the role of place in published communication, politics in everyday life, and contemporary literary and artistic expression.

The Library held a major exhibition on comics in 2014, 'Comics Unmasked: Art and Anarchy in the UK'. We'd like to extend this work to ensure that our collecting of comics in the 21st century builds on our past strengths. We'd like a PhD student to join us to help understand the current landscape of comics publishing in the UK: writers and artists; publishers, distributors, fairs, shops; and formats and technologies. What is most important about UK comics in the 21st century, and how are UK comics influencing, and influenced by, the rest of the world? The work on technologies will feed into work being carried out at the Library which examines our capacity to collect work in new and emerging digital formats.

Expected tasks and outcomes

The student will work closely with colleagues across the Contemporary British Publications team, including the Curators for Contemporary British Publications and Web Archivists. There will be opportunities also to contact curators in similar positions at other Legal Deposit Libraries.

Activities will include: research on the Library's existing collections and collection strengths in UK comics; research on current writers, artists, publishers and distribution channels; and on the tools and technologies used in digital publishing of comics.

Outputs will include: a written report and/or presentation on contemporary comics publishing and distribution within the UK, identifying areas or activities for the Library to develop collections; a written report and/or presentation on tools and technologies for digital publishing – to inform work of the Library's Emerging Formats task group; a web archive special collection on comics; blog posts and other public communication.

There is opportunity for this placement to work across a variety of themes, and the student will need to select certain areas and outputs to focus on. This will be discussed and agreed with the student as part of the selection and induction process.

Training and experience expected to be gained by student through the placement

This placement offers an opportunity for a student to understand the role of research in policy development at a large cultural institution. It will provide insight into UK publishing and distribution, and the role of, and challenges faced by, National Libraries in the 21st century. The student will be expected to communicate their research to a professional audience (librarians working in national and university libraries) and also to a wider public.

The student will be supported by colleagues in Contemporary British Publications, but will be expected to own both the selection of areas in which to focus their research and the methodologies used in the research. The student will be asked to reflect on these choices at the end of the placement. The requirement from the British Library is that this research covers both print and digital formats.

During the placement, the student will have access to all appropriate staff training and public events offered

by the Library. This may include, for example, events in the Library's 'Digital Scholarship' and '21st Century Curators' staff training programmes, and events organised at the Library by the Alan Turing Institute.

The student will be hosted within the Contemporary British Publications team, Contemporary British Collections, and will be invited to all team meetings, usually held monthly, throughout the placement. This will give greater insight into the work of the team, and how this project relates to this work. Subject to availability of funds, the student may be supported in attendance at external events in the UK relevant to the project, during the placement. The placement may also benefit from the student spending some days spent at the Library's Boston Spa site, in Yorkshire (although this is not a requirement) – the costs of any travel between its sites would be covered by the Library.

Required knowledge and skills

This placement will be most suitable for a student whose research is in a field related either to publishing generally or comics particularly. Some prior knowledge of UK comics, including current publishers, writers and artists, will be useful to the student. An enthusiasm for digital publishing is important, but specific technical skills are not required.