

Practice Research at the British Library

Reference: 2019-21-PER

Supervisor	Dr James Perkins (Research and Postgraduate Development Manager) Dr Diana Siclovan (Research Information and Communications Officer)
Department, Location	Research Development Team – St Pancras, London
Start date/timeframe	Any time from May 2019
Duration	3 months (or part-time equivalent). For a part-time placement, the student would be required to spend a minimum of 2 days/week on site at the Library.
Remote-working	An element of remote working would be possible for this placement and this can be agreed with the candidate.
Context for placement	
<p>The British Library's Research Development team supports and manages collaborative research activity across the Library, including in its capacity as an Independent Research Organisation (IRO). This involves supporting British Library staff to apply for research grants, developing collaborations with HEIs and other partners, managing the Library's involvement in the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) scheme and other postdoctoral training, and promoting the Library's research to the public. On behalf of the Library, the team also contributes to wider discussions about UK research policy and strategy.</p> <p>The goal of the placement will be to identify how the Research Development team can better support, engage with and promote the potential of 'practice research' at the Library across our various Living Knowledge programmes and purposes.</p> <p>Practice-based, practice-led and action research are well-established across different professional sectors and academic disciplines, but have only recently begun to be more consciously applied in the cultural/heritage sector. We are interested in understanding more about the nature and rationale behind one or several of these approaches and exploring different frameworks and methodologies. Together with the student we would like to think about how these approaches may be applied in the British Library research context and what the organisational and wider benefits would be.</p>	
Expected tasks and outcomes	
<p>Depending on the successful candidate's own research background and interests, and how these relate to the organisational context of the British Library, the project could focus on practice-led, practice-based or action research (or a combination of these). This will be discussed as part of the interview process and finalised at the start of the placement, as will the exact scope of the project. For example the student might choose to specifically focus on exploring ideas for the CDP programme or look at opportunities for practice research in other contexts and areas of the Library's activity.</p> <p>After an initial induction to the Library and the work of the Research Development team, the student will be asked to undertake research into the topic in order to produce a short briefing paper or presentation for the Research Development team, also drawing on their own experiences if relevant. This would summarise different practice research concepts/approaches, indicate the disciplines or subject areas in which these types of research are most common, and outline the key points for the Library to consider. It is envisaged that this stage of the project would rely primarily on desk research, although this could be complemented by face-to-face or telephone/skype interviews with external contacts, if necessary. The results of this research would be discussed with the placement supervisors, other team members and key internal stakeholders and would help to inform the next stages of the placement.</p> <p>Following this initial reflection, the student will in consultation with the supervisors develop a strategy for conducting wider research and discussions across the Library. This will involve spending time based in other departments to develop an understanding of their work and to be able to identify their research needs and start developing ideas for possible future projects in those areas. The principal points of contact at the Library for this stage of the project will be informed by the suggestions of the Research Development team and the student's own earlier desk research. However, as far as possible, there will be scope for the resulting report or case studies to reflect the student's own research background or interests.</p> <p>Based on their experience of conducting research and speaking to colleagues across the Library, the student will be asked to write a report for the Research Development team. This could also take the form of a</p>	

number of 'case studies' that identify the interests, needs and priorities of certain teams/groups in the Library.

Towards the end of the placement, they will be asked to deliver a staff talk/training session to equip staff with an understanding of the relevant methodologies and the skills needed to undertake such research, as well as any specific challenges or opportunities that this type of research brings.

Drawing on the Research Development team's contacts and networks, another potential placement outcome could be a talk or workshop for colleagues at other IROs and/or other external audiences, potentially enabling the student to compare approaches to practice research across different organisational contexts.

The student will be able to share their findings through [BL blog](#) posts throughout the placement and could, if interested, also write up their placement experience as a paper for submission to a relevant academic journal.

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

This placement offers a unique opportunity to gain an insight into the structures and everyday operations of the UK's national library and a major cultural organisation. The student will be based in the Research Development team, a small but dynamic team that works across the Library. In addition, they may be able to spend extended periods of time based in other areas and thus benefit from learning about a wide range of Library initiatives.

At the beginning of the placement, the student will receive a comprehensive introduction to the structures, activities and strategic priorities of the British Library, and the initiatives the Research Development team takes to support research across the organisation. Throughout the placement, they will be fully imbedded within the team and will be able to attend weekly team meetings, shadow the work of various team members and take part in other team activities. They will thus develop an in-depth understanding of research management in an Independent Research Organisation, including grant development, running a Collaborative Doctoral Programme, developing staff training and research engagement initiatives. Through the placement project, they will be able to actively shape strategy and help develop new initiatives in this area.

The placement will offer ample opportunities to develop communication, presentation and interpersonal skills, as the placement will require the student to work with a range of Library staff from diverse backgrounds. To be effective, the student will need to tailor their communication style to the needs of different audiences. By developing and delivering a staff workshop, the student will also get a chance to demonstrate and enhance their teaching/training skills.

For the duration of the placement, the student will have staff-level access to the British Library collection and resources, including a regular internal programme of lectures, training courses (e.g. Digital Scholarship courses; 21st century curatorship lecture series) and reading groups (e.g. on curatorial practice), and they will be encouraged to take full advantage of what is on offer.

Required knowledge and skills

We are looking for someone who is undertaking an action research or practice-led/practice-based PhD (in any discipline) and is familiar with the theoretical framework and relevant methodologies, and is willing to think critically about how these can be developed and applied in the context of a national library/cultural organisation.

Ideally, the successful candidate would have a demonstrable interest in the cultural sector and/or museums/libraries/archives.

This is a training and development opportunity open to current PhD students only. It is not intended to lead to a permanent post at the Library. Please note that the Library is unable to provide a stipend for PhD research placements. Applicants must obtain the support of their PhD supervisor in advance and, as part of their process, consult their HEI to ascertain what funding is available to support them.

Application deadline: 5pm on Monday, **18 February 2019**. Information on how to apply is available on our website: <https://www.bl.uk/news/2019/january/phd-research-placements-2019>