

# British Library PhD Research Placements

## Application guidelines & FAQs

*For students, supervisors and HEIs*

### About the British Library

The British Library is the national library of the United Kingdom. It provides world class information services, supports traditional and digital scholarship in all its forms, and engages researchers and the public with its collections, online resources, events and exhibitions. These collections encompass all fields of knowledge, cover 3,500 years, and represent every age of civilisation – from the earliest written records to the digital collections of today.

We want to make this intellectual heritage accessible to everyone for research, inspiration and enjoyment. [Living Knowledge: The British Library 2015-2023](#) sets out our vision for future development

### British Library PhD research placements

Our PhD research placement scheme is designed to offer opportunities for current PhD students to apply and enhance research, communications and analytical skills and expertise outside of Higher Education as part of their wider research training and professional development. A PhD research placement at the British Library offers the chance to experience research in a different environment to that of a university, to engage with a range of different research users and audiences, to gain insights into different potential postdoctoral career paths, and to make a tangible contribution to the purposes and programmes of a national library and major cultural organisation.

We encourage all PhD students to consider a research placement with us. It is not necessary for the project to relate directly to the student's PhD or specific research interests. Rather, we see these placements as opportunities for professional development, 'hands on' training and research networking.

Placement students contribute to the Library in a variety of ways. This includes:

- activities to preserve and enhance the accessibility of our collections (encompassing both printed and digital custodianship)
- projects to enhance our collection management capacity and efficiency
- support for our expertise in large-scale data analytics and digital scholarship
- contributions to the Library's major exhibition programme, research engagement events and other activities that open up our collections to new audiences
- projects to create new research, teaching and learning resources
- policy research into areas where the Library has a professional leadership role, such as digital preservation, conservation or open access publishing
- involvement in a wide range of international projects and partnerships, including engagement with regions such as South Asia and the Middle East, whose cultures and histories are reflected most strongly in the Library's collections

PhD research placements are based 'behind the scenes' at the Library rather than in the Reading Rooms and are supervised by a member of British Library staff. They are placements rather than fixed-term jobs or internships, and as such the level and type of interaction with other staff will vary depending on the nature of the project and the student's own motivations and objectives during the placement. Typically, following an initial induction, placements will involve independent research and require the ability to work autonomously, supported by regular meetings with the British Library supervisor, to achieve an agreed set of objectives.

Research placement students are encouraged to take ownership of their projects. British Library supervisors will be happy to discuss ways to refine or adapt the project tasks and deliverables so that they align more closely with the student's own particular areas of research interest or expertise, or to help to facilitate particular development opportunities and professional experience. During their time at the Library, research placement students are encouraged to sign up to staff talks, tours and training workshops, subject to the approval of their placement supervisor. Where specific training is required to undertake the placement, this will be provided.

- [List of all British Library PhD research placements and their outcomes](#)
- [Case studies](#) on our website giving an insight into the experience of past PhD research placement students

### **Eligibility, funding and duration**

This scheme is open to all current PhD students, as long as they have the support of their PhD supervisor. International students are eligible if they have the right to study in the UK. We may consider applications from students who have already submitted their PhD thesis (but have not yet been awarded the degree) and, in exceptional cases, from recent Master's students about to embark on a PhD.

**NOTE:** The British Library PhD research placement scheme is intended to provide opportunities for PhD students to develop and apply their research skills outside of Higher Education. The projects made available through the scheme are developed and offered in the context of the wider UK postgraduate research training environment. In particular, UK research funders, HEIs, Doctoral Training Partnerships and other postgraduate and early-career training networks encourage PhD researchers to engage with research users and audiences outside the HE context during the period of the PhD research, and to consider a wide range of potential postdoctoral career paths.

A British Library PhD research placement is therefore a development opportunity to be undertaken as part of a PhD student's wider research training. Unlike for an internship or a fixed-term post, the British Library is unable to provide stipends or payment to PhD placement students. It is essential that applicants to the placement scheme obtain the support of their PhD supervisor in advance and that, as part of their process, they consult their HEI to ascertain what funding is available to support them.

The Library strongly recommends to HEIs that a PhD student given approval to undertake a placement is in receipt of a stipend – to a level at least equivalent to the RCUK national minimum doctoral stipend – for the duration of the placement.

After the interview stage, students who have been offered a placement and are not able to cover the costs through funding from their university or other sources may apply to the Library's **PhD Research Placement Travel Fund** to request help to cover day-to-day commuting expenses or one-off relocation travel costs – but please note that this Fund is limited and it the success of an application to it cannot be guaranteed. Travel and subsistence expenses incurred in undertaking project-related activities during the course of the placement will of course be reimbursed by the British Library.

All placements will be based at the site specified on the placement profile – either the Library's London site near St Pancras station or its site in Boston Spa, Yorkshire. Most placements can be done on a part-time basis, with some remote working also sometimes possible – see the individual project profiles on the British Library website for details.

Where possible, HEIs are requested to support those candidates selected for interview (see below) by reimbursing any associated travel expenses. It is also possible to arrange interviews via Skype or teleconferencing.

All PhD placements at the Library are for 3 months (or part-time equivalent) in order to ensure that the benefits to the student and to the Library outweigh the administrative and logistical effort involved.

There is usually some flexibility around the placement start date – see the project profiles for details. It is envisaged that the projects available under this Call for Applications will be completed sometime during the period May 2019 to April 2020.

### **How to apply**

Applicants should refer to the placement profile detailing the placement opportunity for which they wish to apply, before completing the **Application Form**.

Applications should be accompanied by a **Curriculum Vitae (max. 2 sides of A4)** outlining the applicant's higher education, achievements and professional experience to date.

Applicants may apply for up to two of the placement opportunities listed on the British Library website for this call. Separate applications should be submitted for each placement.

Applications and accompanying CVs should be submitted by e-mail to [Research.Development@bl.uk](mailto:Research.Development@bl.uk)

The application deadline is 5pm on **18 February 2019**.

### **Assessment criteria and selection process**

Applicants will be assessed in a two-stage process. Written applications will be assessed according to the following criteria:

1. Motivation and aims
2. Writing style
3. Understanding of the British Library and the institutional context of the placement
4. Knowledge and transferrable skills

Applicants successful at this stage will be invited to interview at the British Library in March and April 2019.

Following the interview process, the applicants selected for each placement opportunity will be notified and a start date agreed. All appointments will be subject to the Library's security clearance, the process for which usually takes up to six weeks. It is therefore anticipated that placements will be scheduled to begin anytime from early May 2019 onwards.

Any enquires about British Library PhD placements should be directed to [Research.Development@bl.uk](mailto:Research.Development@bl.uk)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***Why is the British Library offering PhD research placements?***

The PhD research placement scheme was set up in 2016 in response to the wider move among the UK postgraduate training community to encourage postgraduate research students to develop a broad skillset over the course of their PhDs and to consider a range of postdoctoral career paths. UK research funders, HEIs, Doctoral Training Partnerships and other postgraduate and early-career training networks are increasingly looking to large national organisations like the British Library to provide training and professional development opportunities that speak to this agenda. The British Library's PhD research placement scheme was created in order to manage this demand and to make the Library's opportunities accessible to the broadest possible range of PhD students.

Research is central to much of the work that goes on 'behind the scenes' across different areas of the Library. It therefore offers an ideal environment for PhD students to develop and apply their skills in new contexts and to gain an insight into a range of career paths outside Higher Education. Likewise, the Library benefits from the skills and expertise of students who undertake research placements with us.

### ***How does a PhD research placement differ from an internship at the British Library?***

PhD research placements at the British Library centre on a specific pre-defined task or project. However, these areas of work are typically broad in scope and offer ample opportunities for students to narrow down the topic and pursue projects and activities in line with their own interests and ambitions. PhD research placements are less structured than internships, and students are expected to be proactive and use their own initiative to benefit fully from the experience. Essential project-related training will be provided, yet is likely to be more informal and ad hoc than that what could be expected from a structured internship or training scheme.

There is currently no regular internships scheme at the British Library, yet occasional opportunities are available and will always be advertised on our careers website (<http://www.bl.uk/careers/>). Unlike internships, which are typically open to a broad range of applicants, PhD research placements are only open to PhD students. The placement tasks and objectives are defined by the Library specifically with the postgraduate and early-career research training and professional development context outlined above in mind. The placements offered by the Library are designed to complement the academic training received by PhD students at their HEIs.

### ***What is the difference between a PhD research placement at the British Library and independent research/fieldwork?***

Many PhD research placement students will already be familiar with the British Library through its Reading Rooms, cultural events or other services (though this is by no means a prerequisite for applying). During the research placement, students gain staff-level access 'behind the scenes' and work closely with British Library members of staff, benefitting from their expertise, and – in some cases – from access to collections that are not yet available to the general public. All placement students have access to a desk space and workstation within the staff areas of the Library, as well as being provided with an IT account and access to staff facilities and training events.

While a PhD research placement project may in some cases align closely with the student's own PhD topic, this is by no means essential. The placement student should not spend the placement conducting research for their thesis or other personal projects. Rather the research placement is intended as a 'break' from regular PhD research, for the purpose of acquiring new professional skills and experiences, under the guidance of a BL member of staff. Subject to consultation and approval by the BL supervisor, students may

use the material encountered as part of the placement project for their personal research, but such work would need to be undertaken outside the core working hours of the placement and not interfere with it.

**NOTE:** Students undertaking a placement full time will not normally be able to continue working on their PhD thesis during this period and it should therefore be considered a 'break' from their regular studies. While placements can take place any time during the PhD, it is essential that students discuss the timing with their supervisor and ensure that it will not conflict with plans for successful progression and submission of the thesis.

***What funding is available to support me during the placement?***

Unlike internships, PhD research placements are not funded by the British Library. As outlined above, the scheme was set up in response to growing demand by HEIs and research funders for external organisations to offer training and career development opportunities for their students. Financial support for the duration of the placement is therefore commonly provided by the student's HEI or research funder. Students are expected to ascertain prior to application what funding would be available to support them during the research placement.

Self-funded PhD students are eligible to apply, but must confirm that they have sufficient funds available to support them for the duration of the research placement.

The British Library has a limited **PhD Research Placement Travel Fund**, which students who have been offered a placement can apply to in order to help cover day-to-day commuting expenses or one-off relocation travel costs, where these are not covered by their research funder or HEI. However, please note that the success of an application to the fund cannot be guaranteed and that the funding would not be able to cover rent or other living costs. All successful applicants will automatically receive further information about the Travel Fund after the interview stage.

Expenses that are directly related to the placement project (i.e. travel to attend conferences or stakeholder meetings or organising events at the British Library) will be covered by the Library, provided this has been approved in advance by the placement supervisor.