Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership Scoring Criteria

Eligibility

Applications are eligible where the applicant is:

- A UK student with a Masters (or currently studying for a Masters)
- An international student with a Masters (or currently studying for a Masters)
- A UK or an international student without a Masters but with equivalent professional experience (professionals working in the creative industries, for example who have professional or curatorial experience)
- A UK or an international student in their first year (or part-time equivalent) of doctoral research, who wish to apply for funding to complete their PhDs. (Please see guidance notes for earliest eligible start dates.)
- Applicants whose projects come close to the border between Arts and Humanities Research Council Funding and Economic and Social Research Council funding (particularly those in Geography, Law, Politics, Development and Linguistics) should check with their academic unit and with Site Directors that their project falls under the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council).

Practice research

Midlands4Cities supports practice research. In these guidelines 'practice research' is used for consistency; however, M4C (Midlands4Cities) recognises that a variety of other nomenclatures are preferred in specific disciplines including practice-led, practice-based and practice-as-research and that these alternative terms are equally valid. In all its forms, practice research is a process of investigation in order to gain new knowledge and original insights by a practitioner-researcher in which creative output can be produced or practice undertaken as an integral part of the research process and which is then disseminated in an appropriate form to the fields/ communities who benefit from such knowledge. Indicative examples include research undertaken through artwork, exhibitions, compositions, performances, events, creative writing, design, textiles, film, or digital interactive media. In line with the AHRC's guidelines, M4C expects this practice to be accompanied by some form of documentation of the research process, as well as some form of textual analysis or exposition to support its position and to demonstrate critical reflection.

The Criteria for a Midlands4Cities application.

All applications for Midlands4Cities funding are subject to the same criteria for scoring. These are based on four 'P's: Project, Person, Preparedness and Place. Scores are awarded on the evidence of the application form, where the applicant puts forward their case, on the references, where referees are invited to comment on Person and Preparedness with reference to doctoral study, and on the Institutional Support Form and Interview Record, where the applicant's home institution addresses all four criteria, with additional information on Project and Place.

M4C does not assign percentage weightings to these categories; rather, applications are assessed holistically using the 'four Ps' as guidance for markers of excellence. In many places the 'four Ps' overlap, e.g., person with preparedness, project with preparedness and place. An excellent application, nonetheless, will address all four areas well and carefully. The criteria below should be used by:

1. Applicants: to ensure that they provide the necessary information for shortlisting and scoring.
2. Academic units and institutions: to support applicants in completing their applications, and to shortlist the very best applications to go forward to the panel assessments.
3. Subject Area Panellists: to ensure consistency in assessment and scoring.

Project

A well-thought-through project is essential to a successful application. It should address the following questions: is the project focused? Is it feasible to complete it within the funding period? Are the research questions clear to a non-specialist as well as to a disciplinary expert? Will the research methodology address the research questions? Is the project clearly informed by current thinking in the field, both in its questions and in its methodology?

What makes the project stand out? Does it bring a new methodology or perspective to an old question? Does it address a new question? Is it clear what difference the project will make? How will it affect current understanding? Is it building on previous work or is it challenging assumptions? Why is it timely and important? Are there references to help contextualise the topic?

An understanding of the research process and the final output is also important and is addressed in the timeline for study. Crucial questions here include: Can the project be completed within the timeframe of the award? What stages of work will have to be completed and in what order to address the questions?

In short, what is this project going to address and why is it important that it should be addressed?

Person

Under this heading comes the applicant's achievements, aptitudes and experience to date, both academic and professional: in what ways are they able to demonstrate that they are equipped to undertake the project they have outlined? Appropriate academic evidence includes degree results, both at undergraduate and taught post-graduate, or progress and predicted success at MA level, usually in fields relevant to the field of doctoral study: what classification did the applicant attain in their degrees? Have they previous experience of research projects, and if so, what were their grades for these? Appropriate professional or practitioner evidence includes significant and relevant experience, progress in the field and predicted success in professional or practice roles. What examples of success can the applicant provide?

Referees will be asked to comment on the applicant's achievements to date and their preparedness to undertake doctoral study. These comments will also be considered in the scoring.

The key question for this section is: why is the applicant the best person to undertake this project?

Preparedness

While the previous section is concerned with the applicant's achievements so far, in this section, the applicant must demonstrate their preparation to undertake their project. This falls into two parts. Firstly, what previous specialist experience, training or knowledge does the applicant bring to the project? What are the direct links between their academic qualifications and particular areas of study, between their professional experience and practice and their research questions, materials and methodologies? Can they demonstrate specific expertise and knowledge on which they can build their research project? Secondly, what further skills, knowledge, training and experience will they need to complete the project? These might include specific skills, e.g., languages, digital skills, creative techniques, interpretative skills, in which case you should indicate how they intend to acquire them.

Under this heading you should also outline any intended essential research activities, including fieldwork and practice. Why are these essential to your project? What will they involve? Will there be any ethical issues? If circumstances do not allow them to take place, are there alternatives that will allow the completion of the project?

Information provided by the applicant in this section will be corroborated by the support statement provided by the home institution, particularly in regard to the provision of necessary training and the viability of the research activities.

The key questions for this section are: what skills, knowledge, and expertise does the applicant already have, and what further skills and expertise will the applicant need to undertake their project?

Place

This section addresses how the proposed project will benefit from the **research expertise of the chosen supervisory team and the home institution.** The applicant should reflect on why they have chosen their home institution and their lead supervisor, and what they think their supervisory team will offer them in academic and/or practice expertise. In addition, does the applicant know of any research groups in their home institution that will support and develop their work? Are they aware of any **areas of expertise** in any of the **other M4C institutions** that they would like to draw on, or are there **M4C partners** they would like to work with?

Applicants will provide **outline answers** to these questions; **institutional support statements** will provide more detail on the appropriateness of the supervisory team, and potential supervisory collaboration across M4C; any relevant opportunities to collaborate

with non-university partners for the benefit the applicant and project; and the potential to work with individuals and groups beyond higher education, such as artists, activists, community groups.

The key question for this section is: why is this the best place to undertake this project?

Collaborative Doctoral Awards (CDA)

CDA applications the project title and research questions already set an outstanding application will outline how these will be addressed and communicated in both a professional and an academic context. Successful CDA applicants will identify the skills they can apply to the research question in both an academic and professional context.

Scoring

Note for individual institutions sifting M4C applicants <u>before</u> submitting to Subject Area Panels

Institutions are not required to score applicants as part of their own sifting process, and Institutional Support Forms (ISF) should not present a 'score' on any part of the form. However, academic-unit committees should be aware of the scoring rubric used by M4C panels. **Those committees** must only shortlist those applications they consider to be the very best of the applications they consider, those which meet at the very least the majority of the criteria of a 6. This is a highly competitive scheme and there are c. 87 open awards and 23 collaborative doctoral awards available in total, across 8 institutions. However, they should neither score nor rank shortlisted applications on the Institutional Support Form. Shortlisted applications are returned to M4C for distribution to the scoring panels.

Note for Subject Area Panel members

Academics who have agreed to act as an M4C Subject Area Panel member will be required to score candidates. Panel Guidance, outlining the responsibilities of panels and instructions about how panels will operate, is circulated as part of the panel documentation, and should be read in conjunction with these scoring guidelines. See table of scoring definitions below.

Score	Definition
6	**Outstanding Application and top priority for an award** A research proposal that is outstanding across the following: conceptualization of questions, aims and objectives; scholarly, creative, or professional contextualization; research design and methodology; potential for innovation and influence in academic and/or non-academic contexts; clarity of structure and expression. The articulation of the project indicates appropriate command of the field at this level. The intended contribution of the project to research, scholarship and/or practice in the disciplinary area/s may be additive or transformative but in all cases is clearly and persuasively indicated. The candidate's potential to undertake research at doctoral level based on their previous academic/employment/practitioner record is evidenced in the application as of extremely high quality. Evidence may lie in outstanding academic results achieved or predicted, in outstanding professional or creative outputs/achievements realised or in secure progress, or in a combination of these. Outstanding quality of achievements may be demonstrated by uniformly excellent results or outputs or by a clear trajectory of success in subjects or areas leading directly towards the proposed research. The profile assembled by the applicant and supporting information of their suitability and motivation to undertake the proposed research may take diverse and non-traditional forms. In all cases, it is coherent, convincing, and shows substantive relevant activity of exceptional quality and purpose. The prospective supervisors have appropriate expertise and research experience that is relevant to the doctoral project; the capacity of the supervisory team to guide the project to successful and timely completion is demonstrated through their track record of doctoral supervision and/or the support of the academic unit. The training and resources in the DTP (Doctoral Training Programme) as outlined in the application will meet the applicant's needs for the proposed study. The proposal demonstrates that the expertise, resources, and research culture of the proposed HEI(s) offers excellent support to enable the successful completion of the project. Information from referees may confirm and complement the applicant's and institution's own accounts of the quality of the application with regard to the person and preparedness of the applicant.

	Excellent Application and strong contender for an award
5	A research proposal that is excellent across almost all of the following: conceptualization of questions, aims and objectives; scholarly, creative, or professional contextualization; research design and methodology; potential for innovation and influence in academic and/or non-academic contexts; clarity of structure and expression. The articulation of the project suggests appropriate command of the field at this level. The intended contribution of the project to research, scholarship and/or practice in the disciplinary area/s may be additive or transformative but in all cases is indicated well. The proposal may have some key strengths, innovative ideas and/or outstanding elements but not achieve the consistently high quality to warrant a 6 rating. The candidate's potential to undertake research at doctoral level based on their previous academic/employment/practitioner record is evidenced in the application as of high quality. Evidence may lie in excellent academic results achieved or predicted, in excellent professional or creative outputs/achievements realised or in secure progress, or in a combination of these. Excellent quality of achievements may be demonstrated by uniformly strong results or outputs or by a clear trajectory of success in subjects or areas leading directly towards the proposed research. The profile assembled by the applicant and supporting information of their suitability and motivation to undertake the proposed research may take diverse and non-traditional forms. In all cases, it is generally coherent, convincing, and shows substantive relevant activity of excellent quality and purpose. The prospective supervisors have appropriate expertise and research experience that is relevant to the doctoral project; the capacity of the supervisory team to guide the project to successful and timely completion is demonstrated through their track record of doctoral supervision and/or the support of the academic unit. The training and resources in the DTP as outlined in the application will meet the applicant's needs for the proposed study. The proposal demonstrates that the expertise, resources, and research culture of the proposed HEI(s) offers reliable support to enable the successful completion of the project. Information from referees may confirm and complement the applicant's and institution's own accounts of the quality of the application with regard to the person and preparedness of the applicant.

The remaining categories are included as a guide to help academic-unit committees that undertake the initial sifting of applicants within institutions to decide which applications merit a score of 5 or 6 and so should be sent forward for consideration at M4C Subject Area Panels.

| 4 | **Good application but does not meet all criteria at a high enough level to be considered for an award.**

A research proposal that demonstrates high standards in some but not consistently all of the following: conceptualization of questions, aims and objectives; scholarly, creative, or professional contextualization; research design and methodology; potential for innovation and influence in academic and/or non-academic contexts; clarity of structure and expression. Command of the field at this level may be insecure. The research merits support but the proposal requires further development in order to be convincing.

The candidate's potential to undertake research at doctoral level based on their previous academic/employment/practitioner record is evidenced in the application as of good but not consistent quality. Doubts may be raised by elements of academic results achieved or predicted, professional or creative outputs/achievements realised or in progress, or a combination of these. The quality of achievements may be demonstrated by uniformly good results or outputs or by a discernible trajectory of success in subjects or areas related to the proposed research. The profile assembled by the applicant and supporting information of their suitability and motivation to undertake the proposed research has strong features but is not entirely coherent or convincing.

The prospective supervisors may not have expertise and research experience entirely appropriate and relevant to the doctoral project and applicant; the capacity of the supervisory team to guide the project to successful and timely completion may not be securely demonstrated through their track record of doctoral supervision and/or the support of the academic unit. The applicant's training and resources needs may not be securely met by provision available in the DTP or in the unit(s) or HEI(s) to which the applicant has applied and successful completion of the project may be in doubt.

Specific and reasonable data or detail from referees may cast doubt upon the applicant's and institution's own accounts of the quality of the application. Brief, generic, or understated support from referees should not in itself be interpreted as indicating a score of 4 unless corroborated by other insecure elements of the application. |

3	**Satisfactory application but not recommended for an award** In the competitive context, the research proposal is not considered of sufficient rigour, originality, coherence, or academic potential to be recommended for funding. The candidate's potential to undertake research at doctoral level based on their previous academic/employment/practitioner record is not evidenced in the application as of consistent and appropriate quality. Doubts may be raised by elements of academic results achieved or predicted, professional or creative outputs/achievements realised or in progress, or a combination of these. The profile assembled by the applicant and supporting information of their suitability and motivation to undertake the proposed research has some good features but is not convincing. The prospective supervisors may not have expertise and research experience appropriate and relevant to the doctoral project and applicant; the capacity of the supervisory team to guide the project to successful and timely completion may not be securely demonstrated through their track record of doctoral supervision and/or the support of the academic unit. The applicant's training and resources needs may not be appropriately met by provision available in the DTP or in the unit(s) or HEI(s) to which the applicant has applied; successful completion of the project is in doubt. Specific and reasonable data or detail from referees may cast doubt upon the quality of the application. Criticisms or reservations expressed by a referee or referees should not in isolation be interpreted as indicating a score of 3 unless corroborated by other flawed elements of the application.
2	**Poor application and not recommended for an award.** The application contains insufficient evidence and justification for support. There are noticeable gaps or flaws in relation to one or more of the categories of project, person, preparedness, or place. Evidence that the applicant would be well supported to successful and timely completion of the proposed project by the academic unit(s) or DTP is limited. Referees may express substantive reservations about the applicant's suitability for doctoral research in the proposed area or research community.
1	Application not recommended for an award because of acute shortcomings in one or more of the categories of project, person, preparedness, or place. Evidence of the capacity of the academic unit(s) or DTP to support the applicant to successful and timely completion of the proposed project may be absent or severely limited.
U	Application ungraded because it does not fall within the scope of the scheme.

Overlap of AHRC and ESRC Subject remit

Further information published by UKRI is here:

https://www.ukri.org/publications/research-overlapping-social-sciences-and-arts-and-humanities-joint-ahrc-and-esrc-statement/

Joint AHRC, ESRC statement document