

Collaborating with Midlands4Cities:

10 questions about partner-university engagement

The Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership (M4C) is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and brings together eight leading universities across the Midlands. It is a major catalyst for arts and humanities postgraduate research in the region, and delivers benefits to students, academic institutions, and a wide range of partners in the cultural, creative, and heritage sectors.

1. What types of partner organisation does M4C work with?

M4C collaborates with cultural, creative, civic, charitable and commercial organisations, big and small. Some of our partners are large national organisations like the British Film Institute, Royal Shakespeare Company and Historic England and others are based in the Midlands region - in our four cities and beyond. M4C is committed to working with partners that connect to the cultural life and communities of the Midlands and to fostering skills development within the region. M4C welcomes collaboration with partner organisations of different scales that represent diversity in and of the region.

2. What types of collaboration are possible?

For M4C, collaboration is based on a commitment that any partnership should address *mutually beneficial* needs and concerns. There are three main types of collaboration: i) **placements** that allow doctoral students to work with a partner organisation for 1-6 months on a specific project brief; ii) **Collaborative Doctoral Awards (CDA)** that are PhDs co-designed and co-supervised between academics and a partner organisation, the research topic supporting the work of the partner; iii) **skills training** that helps support employability and cultivates sector-based skills.

3. What are the benefits to a partner organisation?

Organisational benefits: M4C enables partners to draw on high calibre doctoral researchers across the Midlands in ways that connect to particular organisational needs, resources, capacity building, skills gaps, and in such ways that can advance new knowledge and practices for the partner. In turn, a

placement allows doctoral students to gain first-hand experience of work outside the university environment and develop valuable skills that enhance their employability prospects. M4C supports over 400 doctoral students (you can view and search our [student profiles](#)), as well as post-doctoral 'Creative Economy Engagement Fellows.'

Practical benefits: M4C offers multiple types of collaboration and can broker engagement with 8 universities - individually and at once. This brokering overcomes the problem of not knowing who to speak to in developing partnership work, and can deliver greater agility for partners in responding to immediate needs, ideas and funding calls. M4C provides a vehicle for building and maintaining relationships between universities/partners over sustained periods.

4. What are the financial costs?

For placements and CDAs, the cost to partner organisations would usually be in-kind, for example providing a manager who would oversee the student's work and offering inductions and in-house training. The students will be paid their full stipend rate by M4C for the duration of their placement or CDA (although larger organisations may provide a financial contribution in the latter case). Some partners cost value in-kind depending on the grade of employee (e.g. senior manager, curator, records assistant), and according to tangible and intangible costs relating to time.

5. What are the potential time requirements?

We realise that time has its own cost. The most sustained commitment of time would be the role of non-university supervisor on a Collaborative Doctoral Award, which lasts 4 years. Some partners estimate that this role involves 10-15 days per annum. Others suggest a commitment of 4-5% of the time of someone working full time, although less time if the student is part-time. Some staff at our partners have assumed the role of 'special advisers' for certain projects where time and input is more flexible.

6. How do partners take placements and projects forward?

M4C has a dedicated Partner, Placements and Relationship Manager who can provide guidance about the type and duration of a placement (research or employability), the process of developing a 'project brief' and the timescale

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needed to set up a placement with a student (this can take up to 3 months, although placements can be developed and undertaken at any time during the year so are more responsive to immediate organisational needs). Our partners have developed placements along different models, from 'research advocacy' and 'embedded researcher' to briefs which address a specific business or organisational need (e.g. support for an event, exhibition etc). Please contact us with any questions: placements@midlands4cities.ac.uk

7. How do partners develop a Collaborative Doctoral Award?

M4C is committed to funding a minimum of 40 CDAs between 2019 and 2023. Partners should liaise with academics, or the institutional research and partnership manager (see below), at one of our eight universities to explore viable project ideas. Each university will develop and co-design two CDAs per year for consideration, co-producing a proposal outlining the research project, arrangements for supervision, and how it will contribute towards the priorities and objectives of the partner organisation. Proposals must be submitted by universities in June, meaning planning should take place in advance of this date. Those selected by M4C will be advertised in October. Applicants will be interviewed and confirmed in the following February-April, and the project will begin in October, twelve months after being advertised. Partners therefore need to account for lead times.

8. What are the expectations of a non-university supervisor in a Collaborative Doctoral Award?

As well as train future colleagues for partner organisations and generate new research, CDAs can provide development opportunities for existing staff in taking on the role of supervisor, mentor and guide. While the university supervisor will be responsible for ensuring the student completes the thesis (including reporting), the non-university supervisor is responsible for ensuring the student has access to the partner organisation, 'line manages' the student when at the partner and ensures the studentship fulfils the partner's needs and expectations. There is no expectation that a non-university supervisor has a PhD, or necessarily reads the PhD. However, they will be an active part of the supervisory team.

9. How can I become an M4C partner and get involved?

Partnership with M4C can be what you want it to be. There is no contract you need to sign! Getting involved with M4C can range from listing your organisation on the [Partners](#) page of our website - making yourself visible to students, future applicants and current academics - to participating in training events, or representing the view of partners on [M4C's Partner Advisory Group \(PAG\)](#). This group is part of M4C's management structure, and is configured to represent different cultural sectors and national/regional/city organisations.

10. What do the acronyms mean?

AHRC Arts and Humanities Research Council
UKRI UK Research and Innovation
M4C Midlands4Cities
DTP Doctoral Training Partnership
CDA Collaborative Doctoral Award

Institutional contacts for CDA development:

University of Birmingham: Liese Perrin (Research Support Partner) and Sheena Robertson (Head of Research Operations)

Birmingham City University: Jude Pearson (Assistant Director, Partnerships)

University of Warwick: James Green (Research Strategy and Development Manager)

Coventry University: Dr Marta Vizcaya Echano (Collaborative Partnership Manager)

University of Leicester: Clare Hudson (Head of Research and Enterprise Partnerships)

De Montfort University: Dr. Meera Warrior (Head of Policy and Governance/Doctoral Student Services) and Rachel Granger (Site Director for M4C DTP)

Nottingham Trent University: Lucy Phillips (Strategic Partnership Manager)

University of Nottingham: Sally Bowden (Head of Research and Knowledge Exchange)

CONTACT M4C:

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