

## M4C DTP Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) Marketing Template

<b>Project Title</b>				
Inclusive dance and the understudy: new frontiers				
<b>LEAD INSTITUTION</b>				
Name of HEI institution	Coventry University			
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>PARTNER ORGANISATION</b>				
Name of organisation	Candoco Dance Company			
Website URL	<a href="http://candoco.co.uk/">http://candoco.co.uk/</a>			
<b>THE RESEARCH PROJECT</b>				
<i>(Max 750 words)</i>				
<p>This PhD project seeks to interrogate the [role of the] understudy in inclusive dance. The ‘understudy’ is generally taken to mean a dancer who will learn the choreography of another dancer, but only perform in that role for an audience if for some reason the first dancer is unable to do so. This practice is often employed by well-funded dance and theatre companies such the Royal Ballet and Rambert. In smaller contemporary dance companies, an understudy is only brought in once/if a dancer is injured involving a different process framed by a sense of urgency/emergency.</p> <p>Despite the importance of the role, there seems to be remarkably little academic literature exploring its parameters, most notably the political, social and economic environment that will profoundly shape its nature and status. Journalistic articles discuss the impact on the understudy (second-choice); how to approach the role (work more not less; don’t be a prima donna); the impact on the understudy (I am not good enough); the response of the audience to the appearance of the understudy (a flurry of complaints); while others argue ‘True appreciation of the role of an understudy requires proper respect for the time-honoured tradition that the show is bigger than any one performer.’</p> <p>While there is little exploration of the understudy role generally, there appears to be none addressing the question: <b>what does it mean to understudy in inclusive dance?</b></p> <p>Why now?</p> <p>Candoco’s success has brought new opportunities for the company, including appearances on Strictly Come Dancing and an upcoming family show at the Royal Opera House.</p> <p>With these come risks of injury and illness necessitating Candoco to contemplate how an understudy might be included in its programming. This is not new, but integrating double casts and understudies into a devising process is. This is a development of the creative process when ‘re-imagining’ a seminal work, such as Trisha Brown’s ‘Set and Re-Set’, or teaching movement and ways of learning to dancers with different bodies. This lies at the heart of inclusive practice; a person centred process based on principles rather than ‘steps’; a need to interrogate the essence of a movement or choreographic intention, to enable the realisation of dance on different bodies and people; dancers as artists and creative collaborators rather than neutral canvasses on which to place the choreographic voice and repertory.</p> <p>Candoco explores these questions in an informal way; this CDA will develop and formalise this process that is live and urgent for Candoco. It will confront a range of normative frameworks including traditional structures within dance that may require ‘replication’, and those creating problems for</p>				

access and different bodies. It will lay the groundwork for a deeper appreciation of the role of the understudy, furthering our understanding of equality and diversity in the cultural sector.

#### Research questions

- What is the political, economic and social framework within which understudying takes place from the perspective of: the dancer; the audience; the choreographer; the company?
- What are the particular challenges faced within inclusive dance from the perspective of the choreographer; the dancer; the company?
- How can one understand and put into practice the choreographic principles that would drive the realisation or queering of the role of understudy in inclusive dance?
- How might a deeper understanding of the role and practice of the understudy contribute to the equality and diversity agenda in dance, and more broadly within the cultural sector?

#### Methodologies

1. Literature review in relation to current scholarship surrounding 'the understudy' – to include journalistic resources
2. Qualitative interviews with (a) choreographers; (b) dancers; (c) dance companies with a view to developing an understanding of the context in which understudy's are appointed and work
3. Practice research exploring the experience of what it means to 'understudy' from an insider perspective, creating an 'understudy study' that investigates through devising process and performance how different bodies/performers 'replicate', 'recreate' or uncover new insights to 'othering' and 'otherness' in performance practice.
4. Intervention developed in consultation with the student as the research progresses. It could include a live or filmed work or an open workshop sharing the research and research questions.

#### Timetable

- 1 – M4C activities; CU basic modules; literature review; methodology and ideas for practice research; plan qualitative interviews; thesis plan.
- 2 – qualitative data programme, detailed thesis plan and writing schedule; development of practice research and intervention; conference contribution; M4C activities
- 3 – data analysis; development of practice research and intervention; delivery of workshop and conference presentation. M4C activities.
- 4 – Honing practice research and intervention; thesis full draft; delivery of practice research and intervention; thesis submission.



**HOW TO FIND OUT MORE**

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