

Project Proposal Application

To be completed by the lead proposed supervisor,
with input from the non-HE Partner Organisation(s).



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

SECTION 1: PROJECT SUMMARY AND APPLICANT DETAILS			
Proposed Project Title:		Future Contemporaries: New directions for early career artist support	
Project Summary: <i>(Maximum 100 words)</i>		This CDA PhD partnership between Teesside University (TU) and New Contemporaries (NC) explores early career artist development programmes and their role in widening participation. The CDA comes at a timely moment: NC, the UK's largest graduate platform, is rethinking its model and programme. The NC annual exhibition is hosted at MIMA (2026) creating a dynamic context for this research. The project will generate new insights into early-career support, providing sector-wide application for inclusive practice in contemporary visual arts.	
Host University:		Teesside University	
Name of Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
1. New Contemporaries			
2.			
Contact(s) at Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
Name:		Kiera Blakey, Director	Email: kiera@newcontemporaries.org.uk
Name:		Ella Snell, Deputy Director	Email: ella@newcontemporaries.org.uk
Primary AHRC Subject Area: <i>Select one subject area from the list here. Please do <u>not</u> add or amend subjects, as there will not be a corresponding Subject Area Review Panel to assess your nomination.</i>		Fine Art: History, Theory and Practice	
Does the project include a Creative Practice component?		YES ☐	NO ☒
Do you consider the project to be interdisciplinary?		YES ☐	NO ☒
If you consider the project to be interdisciplinary, please state why: <i>(Maximum 100 words. Please note that your application will be assessed by the relevant primary AHRC subject area review panel. However, in this space you should indicate which other subject areas your proposal covers and how your methodology is genuinely interdisciplinary.)</i>			

SECTION 2: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

Please provide full details of the proposal and make your case for support below:

(Maximum 750 words)

There is an urgent need to understand the impact of artist development programmes and their ability to increase social mobility. Research is required to capture the fast-changing landscape and respond to the widening participation agenda and need for representative approaches impacted by the change of the HE art school sector and the increase of non-accredited learning models for artists.

In 2025, New Contemporaries (NC) celebrates 75 years as the foremost organisation dedicated to supporting early career artists in the UK. Central to NC's mission is an annual open call, artist development programme and touring exhibition. In 2026 NC are partnering with MIMA on their annual open call.

The collaborative PhD comes at a formative moment for NC and builds on the research environment and curatorial expertise at TU/MIMA. While many artist development programmes exist, there is a gap in measuring their long-term effectiveness and communicating this important work to policymakers and funders. NC is asking these questions in the context of future sustainability, with traditional funding routes in decline. The CDA, aided by TU expertise, offers an opportunity to work with NC and sector peers to develop research on the changing need of artist support and find new methods to evaluate this work.

NC is shifting its current model from a focus on exhibitions towards expanded artist development through residencies, workshops and mentorship, focusing on new national collaborative approaches. While this work is vital and is programmed in response to artist need it poses questions that the PhD candidate will analyse.

How might an organisation find ways to better tell the story of dispersed support? What is the effectiveness of development programmes and how might the sector find new collaborative and cross-sector approaches to artist support? What support do artists need and how has this need changed? How might we find new ways of measuring this important, but often less visible, work?

Research Context:

The CDA comes at a time when what artists need to build a career is changing rapidly. Historic markers for what constitute an artistic career have also shifted creating new challenges to organisations such as NC. The last 15 years has seen a surge in non-accredited courses and localised development support offered by organisations such as Wysing Art Centre, Spike Island, and NewBridge Projects. The sector is continuing to innovate and react to artist need in response to rises in tuition fees and cost of living. What is missing is a collaborative sector-wide approach to artist support.

What arts organisations struggle with is telling this story publicly, supported by substantial evidence. What might arts organisations learn from HE research environments experienced in measuring impact? How might this research create greater alignment and career progression for early-career artists post-graduation and how might this benefit the HE sector?

The PhD will lead to learning for NC and sector peers by exploring the effectiveness of current practices and suggest new models of engagement and artists development. Furthermore, the candidate will

devise strategies to amplify this sector work through creative forms of advocacy. There are myriad barriers to access for emerging artistic practice and tailoring support is vital.

New Contemporaries is at a formative moment with a new director and trustees rethinking its model and approach. With a small core team, the PhD candidate will increase research capacity at a crucial moment. In 2018 NC opened their programmes to graduates from non-accredited courses and in 2024 NC expanded its open call criteria to seven years post-graduation. In recent years, they have extended their development programme in partnership with organisations such as FORMA, British School at Rome and Hospitalfield and have ambitions to continue to grow this work.

From expanding their open call to building new partnerships, New Contemporaries is rethinking what it means to be an inclusive, accessible and sustainable at this moment of increased precarity for artists and organisations. The PhD, embedded across Teesside University and New Contemporaries, builds on this vital work. While the sector and artists have remained agile to funding challenges, there is little current research around the long-term impact or cross sector collaboration exploring early career artist support nationally.

Research Questions:

What are the new approaches to early-career artist support and how has this shifted in response to broader social and educational changes?

What new and transdisciplinary methods can we deploy to measure the impact and effectiveness of early career development and what is the learning for arts organisations, funders and HE?

How can creative methodologies inform widening participation agendas towards a more equitable approach to artist development?

Research Methodology:

The CDA will harness New Contemporaries' research assets – including a 75 year-old archive, extensive anonymised data drawn from 2,500+ applicants annually, staff expertise, artist alumni, and UK-wide partnerships – to explore new development approaches for organisations and artists. The candidate may have experience in the field of curating, museum studies, cultural geography, creative economy, artist development or cultural policy. The PhD will take a theory-led approach with research led in the initial phase by interviews and workshops with NC staff, sector peers, and artists to refine core research questions and approach. Further analysis will be developed by a critical mapping of the field and developing new evaluative techniques to measure impact.

Outputs from the PhD may include policy briefings with funders such as ACE, Henry Moore Foundation, policy makers and HE the sector. Toolkits could be developed for NC, artists and sector organisations. This will lead to better insight and targeted support for artists. The research will be of particular interest to NC, and peers: Artsquest, A-N, and Jerwood as well as funders Arts Council England, Paul Hamlyn, Henry Moore Foundation, as well as development organisations (in the region and further afield), universities and art

schools and grass-roots organisations. In terms of scholarly impact, the research will be of interest to researchers in cultural policy, curatorial studies and museology offering new methodologies and evaluative techniques that are artist-centred. Qualitative and quantitative evaluation including testimonies, longitudinal study and data analysis, could inform an advocacy document and policy briefing for funders.

Provide details of any resources and facilities, including equipment, fieldwork, training, etc., that will be required to complete the project successfully. NBC has limited Research Training Support Grant funding, which may affect the feasibility of high-cost projects. Please note where you might also secure additional funding, (e.g. partner organisations; department or school). Include estimated costs:

The PhD candidate will have access to a desk at NC's London offices and a laptop will be provided. They will be embedded in the research community at MIMA and TU, with full access to library, research, and technical support services. Core resources include access to NC's archive, anonymised application data, and extensive artist network, as well as relationships with NC alumni and public programming. The candidate will benefit from the expertise of staff across partner organisations, including curators, archivists, and educators. They will also benefit from participating in staff training opportunities at NC.

The Institute for Collective Place Leadership runs an annual summer school for all PhD candidates dedicated to research training and networking in June. Monthly seminars led by the PhD community are focused on sharing research with external speakers to share new approaches. This is supported by the Enrich programme ran through the Graduate School, this offers research fundamentals from grant and bid writing to methodology and academic delivery.

The candidate will also be able to audit any aspect of MA TU delivery including participation in Curating and Senior Leadership apprentice intensive weeks (further connecting them to sector peers) delivered with a national network of 50+ partner organisations. Internal and external training needs will be evaluated via the supervisory discussions.

Estimated costs include UK travel between partner sites and fieldwork-related transport (£600 year) are covered by the stipend. Public programming and workshop costs may be met by partner organisations, in consultation with the supervisory team and candidate. Additional funding support may be sought from TU's departmental research budget and external arts funding as required.

Outline the arrangements for communication between the non-HE partner organisation and the academic host institution in regard to project management and monitoring academic progress:

(Maximum 200 words)

A joint supervisory team—comprising academic staff from Teesside and senior staff from NC—will meet monthly to monitor progress, review milestones, and ensure alignment with both academic and objectives. These meetings will be documented and shared with all stakeholders.

The PhD researcher will be embedded across both institutions, with a clear schedule of time spent at NC and Teesside to support integrated learning and collaboration. Informal check-ins will supplement formal meetings, enabling responsive support and timely feedback. NC will provide mentorship and access to networks, while Teesside will oversee academic progression, training, and research integrity.

A shared digital workspace will facilitate ongoing communication, resource sharing, and progress tracking. Annual reviews will be conducted in line with university regulations, with NC contributing to evaluation and future planning.

What benefits will there be for the candidate and the non-HE partner organisation as a result of your collaboration?

(Maximum 200 words)

The benefits are manifold, impacting the organisation and broader sector through key learning and advocacy. New Contemporaries is a small organisation (5 core members of staff) with a pre-eminent national role supporting early career artistic practice. NC works in partnership across the arts ecology to deliver its annual programme across England providing great access and potential insight for the candidate. The candidate will have access to this network, building capacity for research and public advocacy at a pivotal moment for NC and the sector.

The nature of early career artist support is reactive and short-term. There are very little longitudinal studies around the term impact of artist development programmes. The organisation have articulated a clear gap in the sector: a lack of storytelling around the impact of early career artist support and a clear challenge: the changing nature of what it means to build an artistic career. From quantitative data to qualitative testimonies and collaborative evaluative techniques; the CDA will offer a critical contribution to how organisations can help shape support for artists and tell that story in more vivid and compelling terms to funders.

The PhD candidate will build their skills in evaluation, archival research and sector advocacy with dedicated training opportunities at the university and NC. They will be networked nationally with sector peers via NC, MIMA and TU and have access to NC's rich alumni and institutional networks. There will be opportunity to feed into organisational visioning for NC and peers and cross-sector conversations (museums, galleries, artist development support) that will build opportunities for future collaboration.

State what financial (if any) or in-kind contribution the non-HE partner organisation will be making over the duration of the award:

*(Maximum 200 words. A financial contribution is **not** a requirement. However, the AHRC expect that **non-HE partners based overseas** will make a financial contribution to the costs of the student's return travel and accommodation when visiting.)*

NC will provide in-kind access to archives, staff expertise and time, training, networks and provide a desk at their office and laptop.

Any additional financial contribution may be committed as research takes shape in conversation with partnership organisation towards public programming and advocacy (workshops & symposia). In 2030, NC celebrates its 80-year anniversary, and the team are already working towards a programme to celebrate achievements and amplify advocacy for artist-support at a national level and it is hoped that the PhD may tie into that programme. The CDA candidate will contribute valuable research and feed into this public programming ensuring financial support and public outputs from the PhD.

Describe the nature of the collaborative arrangement and the activities the candidate will be undertaking with the non-HE partner organisation:

(Maximum 200 words)

The scope of the PhD research is shaped in discussion with the chosen applicant. The PhD will have appeal to curatorial and cultural policy researchers, and the supervision process will define an approach. Activities could include field work and interviews, archival research, and conference attendance.

The candidate will have regular access to NC Director, Deputy Director and team as needed and the candidate will have access to a desk at New Contemporaries office at Rich Mix, East London. This is a time of organisational change for New Contemporaries and the candidate will be a valuable member of the

extended team supporting via research and critical reflection. NC is networked nationally and there is an opportunity to harness these networks with sector peers and non-accredited grass roots initiatives. NC is already in conversation with these peers informally and the PhD will afford an opportunity to formalise these discussions and seek collaborative opportunities.

Outputs could include a resource and toolkits for NC, peers and funders. Public programmes such as talks, panel discussions and conferences will afford a platform for the research. Writing in peer-review and dedicated sector press (Museum Association, E-Flux, Contemporary Visual Arts Journal) will increase advocacy.

SECTION 3: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

Primary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Dr George Vasey, Senior Lecturer in Curating
School or Department:	School of Arts and Creative Industries
Email Address:	g.vasey@tees.ac.uk
Secondary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Dr Paul Alexander Stewart, Principal Lecturer
School or Department:	School of Arts and Creative Industries
Email Address:	p.stewart@tees.ac.uk
Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:	Kiera Blakey, Director
Organisation/Institution:	NC
Email Address:	kiera@newcontemporaries.org.uk
Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:	Dr Rebecca Prescott, Assistant Professor in Entrepreneurship
Organisation/Institution:	Northumbria University
Email Address:	Rebecca2.prescott@northumbria.ac.uk
Additional Internal or External Advisors or Academic Supervisors, if any:	
Name:	
Organisation/Institution:	
Email Address:	

Explain how the expertise of the supervisory team and external advisor(s) will allow them to support the proposed project and the selected candidate:

(Maximum 500 words)

Dr George Vasey is a Curator and has been a Trustee at NC since 2017 and Co-Chair since 2024, stepping down at the end of his third term in December 2025. Vasey is Senior Lecturer at Curating at Teesside University and has a 15+ year track record supporting emerging artistic practice for major institutions internationally bringing significant sector experience to the PhD supervision. He is committed to reducing barriers through accessible and inclusive approaches to curatorial support. He has led accredited and un-accredited learning programmes and advised organisations on best practice around artist development and open calls across the UK since 2010. Vasey and Blakey have worked closely for 2 years as Director and Chair. Vasey currently supervises one PhD

student, Becky Gee on 'New and Inclusive Strategies for Artist Engagement with Collections.'

Kiera Blakey has been Director of NC since 2023 and has led the organisation through significant change. Blakey has worked across the public sector in museums and public cultural commissioning. She was previously Head of Programme at Nottingham Contemporary and Curator at Camden Art Centre and Art on the Underground. Previous to NC she was Curator at Institute of Contemporary Arts working closely with the Director to reimagine a new vision for the organisation. She has a 15+ experience supporting emerging artist practice. Throughout her career she has prioritised widening access to contemporary art and improving the conditions in which artists can work. She is committed to multidisciplinary practice, supporting experimentation and building spaces for dialogue that foster artistic and public engagement.

Dr Paul Alexander Stewart (Principal Lecturer: Research and Knowledge Exchange) will contribute research and curatorial practice expertise to the supervision, with a special focus on curatorial strategy, social engagement and digital communication. He leads and co-developed the UK's first MA Curating (Level 7 Curator Degree Apprentice) programme in 2022, is Series Editor for *Oncurating.org* and Editor for *Engage Journal*, an international journal of Visual Art Engagement and Participation. His publications include *Art, Critical Pedagogy and Capitalism* (Routledge 2021) and his monograph on *Educational Aesthetics* is forthcoming with Bloomsbury. He has supervised one PhD student to completion to date with a further 3 PhD students due to submit in the coming year. He is currently co-lead for AHRC Green Corridor – a thrive initiative and the project was awarded £3m in 2025. He has three PhD completions.

Dr Rebecca Prescott passion for research focuses on the relationship between place and (specifically creative) practice. Thanks to 10 years' experience working across sectors as a practitioner, lecturer, researcher and consultant, she has a sustained, deep and extensive grounding in questions of creative practice and its relationship to wider issues of entrepreneurship, identity, inclusion and design. A core element of her research focuses on the reinvention of artistic practice as an entrepreneurial undertaking, identifying the fundamental features of artist-led organisational development and the processes that both promote, and constrain, innovation and creativity. As part of this, she examines the use of culture and the creative industries in the transformation of urban structures.

SECTION 4: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Please provide details about the research environment the selected candidate will be joining and its suitability:
(Maximum 500 words)

As a member of the PhD community in the School of Arts and Creative Industries (incorporating MIMA) at Teesside University the CDA will benefit from a programme of monthly PGR workshops, dedicated workspace, accessing peer feedback through group crits, a yearly summer school run by the Institute of Collective Place Leadership, tailored cohort training sessions and guest speaker presentations.

A member of the wider SACI research community, they will have access to professional and research

networks including CHEAD, Plus Tate and the British Art Network as well as gaining insights into partnership working with regional and national organisations such as the Combined Tees Valley Authority, National Trust, Tate and the Science Museum. They will benefit from membership of an interdisciplinary research community across the arts, humanities and social sciences at Teesside, the Institute for Collective Place Leadership, dedicated to facilitating the University’s People and Place strategic theme. The Institute undertakes place-based research to support regional growth, development and regeneration through a collaborative approach that brings together policymakers, communities, businesses and academics. It brings researchers together to drive forward action-orientated research around the following key themes: Innovative and Imaginative Places; Empowered and Inclusive Places; Sustainable and Resilient Places.

The Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA) is an exceptional institution for postgraduate research, offering a wealth of resources. It is home to the 2,350-work collection, which spans a variety of contemporary art forms and offers unique research opportunities. MIMA’s collection strengths are in modern British studio ceramics, drawing, craft and new materials jewellery. MIMA also features an open access collection store, funded by the AHRC, allowing direct engagement with artworks and enhancing research flexibility. The Research Study Centre provides dedicated spaces for academic collaboration, with a focus on interdisciplinary approaches and critical engagement.

MIMA is a leading voice in socially-engaged museological practice and is home to a UK leading MA in Curating. Prof Sarah Perks has a long track record supporting early career artists. Research Fellow Dr. Claire Louise Staunton similarly has 20 years-experience in commissioning and artist support. MIMA’s curatorial team, Elinor Morgan and Helen Welford, are closely aligned to early career artist support in the Tees Valley and could provide valuable insight.

Building expertise in the region, alongside the connections and informed knowledge of Rebecca Prescott we can also look to Dr. Julie Crawshaw (Northumbria University) and Dr. Emma Coffield (Newcastle University) who have researched and written on early career artist support and would bring much to a supervisory team.

Through New Contemporaries they will have a dedicated workspace and access to their archive (housed at Tate) their systems and processes, alumni network, wider partnerships and consistent meetings and a member of the team.
