

# TECHNE AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award

Invitation for PhD applications

<b>Project title</b>	'Observing uncertainty: ambiguity in conservation documentation and its implications for the care of collections'
<b>Location</b>	London
<b>Eligibility</b>	Home and International Fee Status (International applicants will be asked to pay the balance between the home fee award and the international fee charged by their home institution). Full Time and Part Time (50% FTE and above) applications will be considered.
<b>Funding amount</b>	Tuition fees and annual maintenance equivalent to £17285.00
<b>Duration</b>	3 years full-time/6 years part time
<b>Requirements</b>	Undergraduate and postgraduate qualification in conservation or conservation science or information science, skills in computing, condition surveys, book and paper conservation or equivalent experience.
<b>Programme start</b>	October 2021
<b>Application deadline</b>	9am, 1 March 2021
<b>Interviews</b>	Week beginning 8 March 2021, please note that interviews will be held online via Microsoft Teams.
<b>TECHNE submission</b>	19 March 2021

## About the Doctoral Award

**The University of the Arts London (UAL)** and **The National Archives** are pleased to offer an **AHRC TECHNE Collaborative Doctorate Award (CDA)** which aims to explore uncertainty in conservation documentation records and how it affects decision-making in collection care.

We invite applications from those with an interest in the archives and cultural heritage sector who would like to undertake PhD study. This project will examine how documented uncertainty can be understood, and propose methods of processing historical documentation records containing uncertainty indicators. This will be primarily based on the conservation documentation records of The National Archives. As this is a collaborative award, the successful candidate will be expected to spend time at both the University of the Arts London and The National Archives.

Ligatus has been leading research in conservation documentation since 2003 building on the success of projects such as the condition survey of the manuscripts and printed books of the Library of the St. Catherine Monastery in Sinai, Egypt, the Language of Bindings thesaurus, the digitisation and survey of the archive of the artist John Latham and more recently the Linked Conservation Data project. UAL has a leading and coordinating role in collaborative work by a large community of experts in the fields of bookbinding history, conservation documentation, information and computer science. UAL's research is assessed as being 83% World Leading and International in the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014) for Art & Design, History, Practice, Theory; is ranked a top 5 research

university in its broader peer group in the UK and first in the Power ranking for Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory category.

The National Archives is the official archive and publisher for the UK Government, and for England and Wales; its mission is to collect and preserve the record of Government, to use expertise and knowledge to connect people with history through our collections (spanning 1000 years and both physical and digital formats), and to lead, partner and support archives at home and worldwide. Alongside underpinning research for millions of people through access to our records, as an Independent Research Organisation, TNA has a strong commitment to innovative and sector-leading research in the understanding of physical and digital archival collections and practice. The Collection Care Department (CCD) is a hub for student training and continuing professional development, and an incubator for challenge-led research, where conservators and heritage scientists work collectively to co-create projects and address topics relevant to book, paper, photograph, and textile conservation. The teams are involved in developing innovative research and evidence-based policy on the preservation, conservation, access, and documentation of iconic items as well as large scale archival collections and their related datasets.

It is important to us that our organisation is more diverse, so we encourage applications from people of all backgrounds and identities. We're especially keen to hear from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic candidates who are currently under-represented.

For further questions please contact Dr Athanasios Velios: [a.velios@arts.ac.uk](mailto:a.velios@arts.ac.uk)

Relevant links:

- Read [UAL's student diversity policy](#)
- Read [The National Archives Equality and diversity policy \(PDF 1.8MB\)](#)
- Further details and application, visit our [PhD and MPhil degrees page](#)
- Online reference: [ligatus.org.uk/node/810](http://ligatus.org.uk/node/810)

Ligatus, University of the Arts London and The National Archives

The University of the Arts London (UAL) and The National Archives (TNA) have established a formal partnership since 2018. The partnership focuses on the mutual interest of the two institutions in conservation documentation and the epistemology of conservation. It was formalised through the activities of the AHRC Linked Conservation Data project. The two institutions also have long-standing relationships as staff members of TNA have been trained in Camberwell College of Arts (one of the constituent colleges of UAL) and have also been teaching in the same college.

The Studentship Vision

Documentation carried out during conservation research, condition assessment, treatment and analysis forms a critical record of collection items in memory organisations. This includes records of observations made either through naked eye or with analytical equipment. Conservators and curators decide on the care of heritage collections based on these observations; however, in many cases these observations are not clear. When the properties of an object are not apparent to the naked eye or measurable through analyses (e.g. the internal structure of a book), conservators use reason and previous knowledge to deduct understandings of objects. This semi-empirical evidence is also recorded.

The level of uncertainty introduced by such observations is often denoted with qualification statements (e.g. “possibly”) and the frequent “?” in records. With the increasing drive to make conservation documentation records digital, searchable, and networked, knowledge management and reasoning systems based on ontological models (e.g. CIDOC-CRM) are being explored; however, uncertainty in documentation presents a yet-unaddressed challenge for these models. Datasets containing inconsistent, informal and unrecognised uncertainty indicators cannot be summarised or computed by current documentation tools. Consequently, these records are either excluded from computation or they require human interpretation. This project will examine how documented uncertainty can be understood, and propose methods of processing historical documentation records containing uncertainty indicators. This project will explore these ideas by:

- Identifying types of uncertainty by examining existing TNA conservation records
- Reviewing existing ways of recording uncertainty and proposing new ones
- Mapping reasoning processes based on uncertainty records
- Articulating through knowledge management tools the potentially new knowledge that uncertainty records can provide
- Applying these to case studies from the TNA Collection Care Department (CCD)

### Questions to Consider in Your Applications

- What is the nature of uncertainty in observations records?
- How does uncertainty impact a) our understanding of objects and b) decision making in conservation and collection management with particular emphasis on TNA’s Collection Care Department (CCD)

### Proposed Supervisors

- Dr Athanasios Velios, Reader in Documentation, Ligatus, UAL
- Sonja Schwoell, Head of Conservation Treatment and Development, The National Archives

### Application Process

Applicants for this TECHNE CDA studentship should first read the project description and expected qualifications and experience in this document. In selecting applicants, the panel will be looking for proposals that directly address the themes and questions outlined.

All applications for this TECHNE CDA award must be received by UAL no later than **9am, 1 March 2021**.

Applications should include the below:

- Completed UAL online PhD Application submitted to Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Colleges via: <https://www.arts.ac.uk/research/phd-and-mphil-degrees>

Applicants should follow the Guidance on How to Write a Research Proposal available in that page and link their proposal to the themes and concerns outlined in this document.

- CV to be uploaded to the online application system
- Statement of up to one side of A4 demonstrating what they will bring to the project, how it fits with their previous experience and interests and how they will shape it, to be uploaded to the online application system.

UAL and TNA have received preliminary approval for this studentship but this will be confirmed following the recruitment of a student. The application is done in 2-stages:

### **Stage 1**

Applications will be selected for interview considered by a panel convened at UAL and the selected applicant will be offered a place at UAL. Interviews to be held on the week beginning **8 March 2021**.

The offer will include full supervision, mentoring and support from both UAL and TNA for the duration of studies.

### **Stage 2**

The selected application will be submitted to the TECHNE Selection Panel where it will be considered for TECHNE funding. The criteria for selection at this stage are in line with the standard TECHNE selection processes.

- Successful Applicant will be confirmed **April / May 2021**
- Student Enrols with UAL **Monday, 27 September 2021**