

Northern Bridge Doctoral Training Partnership (NBDTP) & Northumbria-Sunderland Consortium in Art and Design (N-SC)

Joint Competition for AHRC Studentships through the National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) scheme

Guidance for Applicants and Staff

1. Introduction

As part of its Industrial Strategy, the government recently announced a National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) to support an additional 1000 PhD studentships to start on 1 October 2017. The Northern Bridge Doctoral Training Partnership (NBDTP) and Northumbria-Sunderland Consortium in Art and Design (N-SC) have secured 12 awards, funded by the AHRC, to support research in the two areas identified by AHRC as the focus of these awards: **Design** and **The Creative Sector**.

This document provides guidance for applicants and staff on the selection process and administrative arrangements for the joint NBDTP and N-SC NPIF doctoral studentships competition.

The competition's aim is to recruit and select doctoral students of the very highest calibre to study at Durham University, Newcastle University, Northumbria University, Queen's University Belfast and University of Sunderland. The competition is open to all applicants who meet the AHRC's eligibility criteria, and the award of studentships is based solely on the quality of applicants and their proposed research.

The studentship competition is designed to be open and transparent, with academic and professional services staff actively engaged in and supporting the application process. All assessment decisions are based on clear and agreed assessment criteria.

Applicants and staff are expected to follow the guidance, which is outlined in the following sections:

1. Introduction
 2. Key contacts
 3. Available awards
 4. Project eligibility
 5. Application routes for AHRC NPIF awards
 6. Applying to a PhD programme
 7. Completing the application form
 8. Submitting the application form
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 10. Evaluation of applications
 11. Competition outcome
 12. Competition timetable
- Appendix 1: Marking Scheme and Criteria
- Appendix 2: Template for Applicant's Email to Referees

The **NPIF Application Form and the Guidance for Applicants and Staff as well as the list of Research Fields (for 'Supervisor-led route' applicants)** may be found on the Northern Bridge Doctoral Training Partnership and the Northumbria-Sunderland Consortium in Art and Design websites:

www.northernbridge.ac.uk

<https://nuwebapps.northumbria.ac.uk/northumbria-sunderland-cdt/>

Briefings for potential applicants, academic staff and partners will be held at **Queen's University Belfast on Tuesday 6 June from 1700 to 1900** in GRS/01/014 (Training Room 8), on the first floor of The Graduate School, and at **Northumbria University on Monday 12 June from 1700 to 1900** in the Foyer of the School of Design, City Campus East (CCE) 2.

2. Key contacts

Inquiries about this competition should be directed to the relevant member of staff at the University concerned. See below for a list of their roles, names and email addresses:

Durham University

Lead academic contact: Jonathan Long j.j.long@dur.ac.uk

Administrative contact: Hazel Reynolds northernbridge.admin@dur.ac.uk

Newcastle University

Lead academic contact: Michael Rossington northernbridgedirector@ncl.ac.uk

Administrative contact: Sarah Rylance sarah.rylance@ncl.ac.uk

Northumbria University

Lead academic contact: Richard Terry richard.terry@northumbria.ac.uk

Administrative contact: Laura Hutchinson laura.hutchinson2@northumbria.ac.uk

Queen's University Belfast

Lead academic contact: Crawford Gribben northernbridge.director@qub.ac.uk

Administrative contact: Lynda Mahon northernbridge.admin@qub.ac.uk

University of Sunderland:

Lead academic contact: Beryl Graham beryl.graham@sunderland.ac.uk

Administrative contacts: Alison Perrett alison.perrett@sunderland.ac.uk and Lynne Fenwick lynne.fenwick@sunderland.ac.uk

3. Available awards

Our two consortia have been awarded 12 studentships. Each studentship will include Stipend, Tuition fees and Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) for a period of 3.5 years. In order to help facilitate the engagement with industrial partners, as required as part of the scheme, AHRC will also be providing an additional stipend of £550 per student per year.

Part-time applicants who apply cannot also work full time. Where necessary, before awards are made, NBDTP and N-SC will consult with the successful applicant and their proposed supervisors to ensure that they comply with AHRC's terms and conditions for award-holders.

For students classified as 'Home' students under AHRC rules, awards provide successful applicants with full tuition fees and a maintenance grant set at AHRC's national rate. Students classified as 'EU' under AHRC rules receive tuition fees only. Eligibility criteria are set out in the *Conditions of Research Council Training Grants* (January 2017), paras 37-46, and the *RCUK Training Grant Guide* (April 2017), paras 11-21. These documents are available here: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/grantstcs/>

AHRC-funded doctoral studentships to support Home/EU students are available in the subject areas listed below.

<u>Panel</u>	<u>Subject</u>
A	History (including Historical Geography)
A	Law and Legal Studies
A	Philosophy
A	Political Science and International Studies (Diplomacy and International Relations)
A	Theology, Divinity and Religion
B	Applied Arts: History, Theory, Practice
B	Architecture: Practice, History and Theory
B	Creative Writing
B	Design
B	Digital Arts: Practice, History and Theory
B	Drama and Theatre Studies
B	Ethnography and Anthropology
B	Film: Practice, History, Theory and Criticism
B	Fine Art: Practice, History and Theory
B	Music
B	Photography: Practice, History and Theory
C	Archaeology
C	Classics
C	Cultural Geography
C	Museum Studies
C	Policy, Arts Management and Creative Industries
D	English Language and Literature
D	French Studies
D	German Studies (including Dutch and Yiddish)
D	Hispanic, Portuguese and Latin American Studies
D	Interpreting and Translation
D	Italian Studies
D	Linguistics
D	Media and Communication Studies
D	Russian, Slavonic and Eastern European Studies

NBDTP and N-SC actively welcomes applications for interdisciplinary research projects.

Please note. PhD research in some of the above subject areas is also funded by the ESRC. Information on Subjects where the AHRC and the ESRC share interests and responsibilities is available in the AHRC's Research Funding Guide, Version 3.8 (December 2016), pp. 110-13. See: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/guides/research-funding-guide/>

4. Project eligibility

To be eligible for an AHRC NPIF award, the project must clearly fall within Design or the Creative Sector. These terms can be interpreted broadly, with the proviso that for the purposes of AHRC NPIF awards, the term 'Creative Sector' refers to the economic and commercial aspects of artistic and cultural creativity, but does not necessarily entail working exclusively in partnership with the private sector. **Please note, however, that applications for projects that do not engage with the commercial or economic aspects of cultural creativity cannot be considered under this scheme.** It is important that applicants can clearly demonstrate the eligibility of their project for the NPIF scheme.

Projects, whether applicant-led or supervisor-led, must include significant involvement of a partner. We recognise that different projects will involve different forms of partnership-working, and are flexible and open-minded about how such partnership-working is configured. Arrangements may include one or more of the following:

- a member of the partner organisation within the supervisory team;
- embeddedness of the student within an industrial/ business/ creative environment;
- contribution of the partner organisation to the student's training and development;
- access to resources and facilities at the partner organisation;
- a student placement with an industry partner.

5. Application routes

There are two routes through which an applicant may apply for an AHRC NPIF studentship in our consortia.

(1) **Supervisor-led route**

Across the five universities, 31 **Research Fields** within which academic supervisors and partners wish to recruit NPIF PhD students are advertised on the NBDTP and N-SC websites. In each case the title of the field, the name and email address of the main academic supervisor, the name of the partner organisation, and a brief description of the field is provided. Prospective applicants interested in developing a project in response to an advertised field must contact the main academic supervisor **as soon as possible**. It is up to the supervisor to decide whether, based upon the potential applicant's academic track record and relevant professional experience, they support an application. **Up to two applications per advertised research field may be developed by the main academic supervisor.** If supported, the applicant is **to complete Section A of the application form and email it to their supervisor by Monday 19 June at 5pm.**

(2) **Applicant-led route**

Applicants may develop their own project, as long as it fulfils the criteria for the award of an AHRC NPIF studentship. Potential applicants wishing to submit an application via the applicant-led route must first email an expression of interest to the lead academic contact at the University to which they wish to apply (for the lead academic contacts, see section 2 above). Potential applicants must do this **as soon as possible** after the competition has been advertised and by no later than **Wednesday 7 June at 5pm**. The EoI should include their name and email address, the name of the proposed supervisor, the name of the proposed partner organisation, a description (maximum 250 words) of the proposed project, a 100-word statement of how the project aligns with the AHRC NPIF scheme (see 'Project eligibility' above). The lead academic contact will reply as soon as possible indicating whether the EoI has been approved. If so, the applicant must then work with the proposed main academic supervisor and partner to **complete Section A of the application form and email it to their supervisor by Monday 19 June at 5pm.**

Please note that applicants may submit only one application to NBDTP/N-SC in this competition.

6. Applying to a PhD programme

Applications for funding through the AHRC NPIF scheme may be made **concurrently** with, or **subsequent** to, an application to study for a PhD at one of the five participating universities. **Please discuss the procedure for applying for a place on a PhD programme with the relevant administrative contact at the University concerned (see section 2 above). If the University's application portal requires you to enter a code indicating the funding you are also applying for, please use 'AH17b'.**

Applicants who have **not yet applied** for a PhD place may apply ***to only one*** of the five universities in the NBDTP and N-SC. If their application is successful this will be their host institution and will hold their registration.

Students who have already **been accepted** onto the PhD programme at one of the five participating universities but who have **not yet commenced doctoral study** may apply for NPIF funding, provided that their project meets the project eligibility criteria set out in section 4, above.

Applicants who are **already registered** on a programme of doctoral study at one of the five participating universities may apply, provided that the project eligibility criteria set out in section 4, above. Please note that to be eligible for an NPIF studentship, candidates must have completed no more than 18 months full-time or 36 months part-time study on the award start-date.

7. Completing the application form

Section A

This section of the application form must be completed by the applicant in consultation with the main academic supervisor. It includes the **Research Proposal**.

Summary of proposal and fit to scheme (Section 6.0)

The NPIF scheme has specific Project Eligibility Criteria (see Section 4, above). In this part of the form, you need to demonstrate that your proposed research project fits the scheme. You need to do this even if you are applying through the supervisor-led route.

Project proposal (Section 6.1)

****IMPORTANT****

In line with the AHRC's definition of research, ***In order for your project to be eligible for funding under the NPIF, it must*** articulate 1) a set of research questions, issues or problems; 2) the research context (i.e. the current state of research within the subject area or discipline, and the significance of the project in relation to that context); and 3) the methods to be used in order to answer the research questions.

"The AHRC's definition of research is as follows: research activities should primarily be concerned with research processes, rather than outputs. This definition is built around three key features and your proposal must fully address all of these in order to be considered eligible for support:

1: It must define a series of research questions, issues or problems that will be addressed in the course of the research. It must also define its aims and objectives in terms of seeking to enhance knowledge and understanding relating to the questions, issues or problems to be addressed.

2: It must specify a research context for the questions, issues or problems to be addressed. You must specify why it is important that these particular questions, issues or problems should be addressed; what

other research is being or has been conducted in this area; and what particular contribution this project will make to the advancement of creativity, insights, knowledge and understanding in this area.

3: It must specify the research methods for addressing and answering the research questions, issues or problems. You must state how, in the course of the research project, you will seek to answer the questions, address the issues or solve the problems. You should also explain the rationale for your chosen research methods and why you think they provide the most appropriate means by which to address the research questions, issues or problems.

Our primary concern is to ensure that the research we fund addresses clearly-articulated research questions, issues or problems, set in a clear context of other research in that area, and using appropriate research methods and/or approaches.”

Source:

<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/funding/research/researchfundingguide/introduction/definitionofresearch/>

Partnerships and your suitability for an NPIF award (Section 6.2, 6.3)

Please indicate how the partnership will work in ways that will support the project, and note any prior experience you have of collaborative working. We understand that partnership arrangements are subject to change as a project progresses, but require, at this stage, evidence that proper consideration has been given to the practicalities of partnership working.

Applicants for the practice-based areas listed below may supply a URL in Section 7 to a portfolio of outputs. Please use the portfolio to demonstrate the technical and professional competencies that will allow you to complete the research outlined in Section 6.

- Applied Arts Practice
- Architecture Practice
- Creative Writing
- Curatorial Practice
- Design Practice
- Digital Arts Practice
- Drama & Theatre Practice
- Film Practice
- Fine Art Practice (including painting, sculpture and printmaking)
- Music composition and performance
- Photography Practice

Section B

This section of the application form on supervision, training & development and research environment is to be completed by the Department / School and endorsed by the partner organisation.

Please note that joint supervision by academic staff from more than one institution from NBDTP and N-SC is strongly encouraged. Where a successful applicant is supported by a supervisory team that crosses institutional boundaries and includes a partner representative, the main and second supervisors should be at the host university, with the third supervisor from the partner organisation and a fourth supervisor at one of the other universities.

8. Submitting the application form

A member of staff in the School/Department (*not the applicant*) should email a PDF of the completed application form by attachment to hass.npif@ncl.ac.uk by **5:00pm on Friday 30 June 2017**. The subject line of the email should give the name of the university and the surname of the applicant in the form 'SUNDERLAND_SMITH'. The School/Department should also attach PDFs of the following 6 documents to the same e-mail:

Attachment 1	PhD programme application form
Attachment 2	Applicant CV (no more than 2 sides of A4)
Attachments 3 & 4	Two references for Applicant
Attachment 5	Transcripts of previous qualifications
Attachment 6	Letter or email from partner organisation confirming that they support this application and have seen Sections 9 and 10 and are committed to providing the support outlined therein.

Applications received after the deadline will NOT be considered.

9. References

Two references are required. Once applicants have been given approval by a supervisor to complete the application form, they must contact two referees immediately using the template email provided in Appendix B below. References should be sent to the main academic supervisor by Monday 19 June at 5pm. The supervisor should ensure that they are submitted with the rest of the application material (see Section 8, above).

10. Evaluation of applications

Eligible applications to the NPIF studentships competition will be reviewed by a specially convened NPIF Studentship Committee consisting of one representative from each of the five participating universities and two senior members of academic staff with experience of partner collaboration who are external to the consortia. The marking scheme and criteria for assessment are set out in Appendix I of this Guidance. The NPIF Studentship Committee will meet on **Monday 10 July** to confirm the final rankings from which the awards will be made, and to identify a list of reserves.

11. Competition outcome

The NBDTP and N-SC will inform all applicants of the outcome of their applications via the university to which they applied on **Tuesday 11 July**. Departments/Schools and supervisors will be informed of outcomes at the same time. In cases where successful applicants choose not to accept an offer of a studentship, the next highest-ranked applicant on the reserve list will be contacted and made an offer of an award.

11. Competition timetable

Wednesday 31 May	Competition launched on consortia websites
<p><i>Potential applicants via 'Supervisor-led route' to e-mail relevant main academic supervisor named in Research Fields PDF on consortia websites;</i></p> <p><i>Potential applicants via 'Applicant-led route' to e-mail relevant lead academic contact listed in Section 2 above.</i></p>	
Tuesday 6 June, 5-7pm	Briefing at Queen's University Belfast (venue: GRS/01/014, i.e. Training Room 8, first floor of The Graduate School)
Wednesday 7 June, 5pm	Deadline for applicant-led route applicants to submit an expression of interest to lead academic contact at relevant university
Monday 12 June, 5-7pm	Briefing at Northumbria University (venue: the Foyer of the School of Design, City Campus East (CCE) 2)
Monday 19 June, 5:00pm	Deadline for applicants to have completed Section A of the application form and submitted it to main academic supervisor
Friday 30 June, 5:00pm	Deadline for Schools/Departments to have checked Section A, completed Section B, and submitted application forms with requisite attachments
Monday 10 July	Studentship Committee meeting
Tuesday 11 July	Notification of outcome to all applicants
Tuesday 25 July	Deadline for acceptances of studentship offers
Monday 2 October	Awardholders begin their PhD programmes.

Appendix 1

NPIF Marking Scheme and Assessment Criteria

The criteria to be used to evaluate applications are indicated below. The Studentship Committee will be aware of, and sympathetic to, the fact that applicants will come from a diverse range of backgrounds, including experience in professional and creative practice.

The Committee will be asked to grade and comment on three aspects of the application: The Applicant, the Research Proposal, and the Supervision, Training & Development and Research Environment sections. The marks for all sections are out of 12, giving an aggregate score out of 36.

1. The Applicant

In assessing the suitability of the applicant for an NBDTP/N-SC doctoral award, the Studentship Committee will consider the following:

Competition for NPIF studentships is expected to be intense, and we require evidence of academic excellence and evidence that the student has the research skills necessary to undertake the project. This generally means a first-class or good upper-second undergraduate degree, and performance at or close to distinction standard in a masters degree. Applicants with lower qualifications and/or without a masters degree may be considered if they can demonstrate that relevant professional practice or work experience has equipped them with equivalent academic and research skills. We also require a strong case for the applicant's aptitude for collaboration or partnership working.

Marking Scheme for the Applicant

Grade	Descriptor
12	An outstanding applicant: full evidence is provided of exceptional past academic achievement and potential to undertake original independent research, and excellent preparedness for doctoral study. Outstanding aptitude for / experience of collaboration or partnership working. To be funded as a matter of utmost priority.
11	
10	A very strong candidate: excellence is fully evidenced in terms of academic achievement and potential, and a very high level of preparedness for doctoral study. Excellent aptitude for/ experience of collaboration or partnership working. To be funded as a matter of priority, though does not merit the highest priority rating.
9	
8	A strong applicant, with evidence of very good past academic performance and potential, and a high level of preparedness for doctoral study. Good aptitude for/ experience of collaboration or partnership working. Deserving of consideration for funding.
7	
6	A solid applicant: evidence of good past academic achievement and potential is provided, and the candidate is reasonably well prepared for doctoral study. Some aptitude for/ experience of collaboration or partnership working. But in the highly competitive context of this competition not possible to be considered for funding.
5	

4	An applicant with some strengths but about whom there are reservations concerning past academic achievements, potential for original independent research, or preparedness for doctoral study. Little aptitude for/ experience of collaboration or partnership working. Not recommended for funding.
3	
2	An applicant who falls significantly short of the expected standards in one or more areas. No aptitude for/ experience of collaboration or partnership working. Not suitable for funding.
1	

2. The Research Proposal

In assessing the quality of the Case for Support, assessors will be looking for the following:

Research question(s), issue(s) or problem(s). Are the research question(s) or problem(s) clearly defined? How important is it that these questions should be addressed?

Research context. What other research is being, or has been, conducted in this area? What particular contribution will this project make to the advancement of knowledge and understanding in the field? Has the the proposal been placed in an appropriate context, giving due consideration to other work in the field?

Research methods. How, during the PhD, will the applicant seek to answer the questions or address the problems? Is there an adequate rationale for the chosen research methods? Do the research methods provide an appropriate means by which to answer the research questions? Is there evidence that the project can be feasibly completed within up to three and a half years of full-time funded study or up to seven years of part-time funded study? Is the research likely to raise ethical or safety issues, and if so, are these addressed in the proposal?

How will the partnership be organised, and how will working with an industry partner support the completion of the PhD project?

A strong application will have a well-defined proposal, researchable questions and a feasible timetable. The proposal will have identified relevant sources, an appropriate approach / methodology, and will show awareness of the research context and the significance of the proposed contribution to the field. Partnership arrangements will be clear and convincing. The proposal should build on the applicant's background. A weak application would have less well-defined research questions, an insufficient awareness of the research context, an underdeveloped approach / methodology and have given less attention to the practicalities of conducting the research in a timely manner.

Marking Scheme for the Research Proposal

Grade	Descriptor
12	An outstanding research proposal. Research questions/ problems are clear and cogent, and the proposal demonstrates a comprehensive awareness of the research context and of the contribution that the research will make to the field, as well as a compelling case for its intellectual importance. The methodology is appropriate, and the research is thoroughly feasible within the period of supervised study. Any ethical/ safety issues have been identified and appropriately addressed, and the organisational and intellectual aspects of partnership working have been fully thought through. To be funded as a matter
11	

	of the highest priority.
10	A very strong proposal. Research questions are clear and cogent, the applicant has a keen awareness of the research context and a sense of the contribution that the research will make, and makes a very strong case for its intellectual importance. The methodology is appropriate, and the research is likely to be feasible within the period of supervised study. Any ethical/ safety issues have been identified and appropriately addressed, and the organisational and intellectual aspects of partnership working are clear and viable. To be funded as a matter of priority, but does not merit the highest priority rating.
9	
8	A strong proposal: research questions are clear, and the applicant demonstrates awareness of the research context, the contribution that the proposed research will make, and makes a strong case for its intellectual importance. The research is probably feasible within the period of supervised study. Any ethical/ safety issues have been identified and appropriately addressed, and the organisational and intellectual aspects of partnership working are satisfactory. Worthy of consideration for funding.
7	
6	A solid proposal: research questions are identified, and the proposal demonstrates some awareness of the research context, and the contribution the research will make. There is some awareness of its intellectual importance. The research may be feasible within the period of supervised study, and ethical/ safety issues have been identified. The organisational and intellectual aspects of partnership working have been only minimally addressed. In the competitive context of this competition not possible to be considered for funding.
5	
4	A proposal with some strong aspects, but with weaknesses in one or more of the following areas: research questions/ problems, awareness of research context, contribution to the discipline, intellectual significance, methodology, feasibility, or ethical/ safety considerations. The organisational and intellectual aspects of partnership working are inadequate. Not recommended for funding.
3	
2	A proposal with serious shortcomings in one or more areas. Not suitable for funding.
1	

3. Supervision

This section of the Application Form should comment on the suitability of the supervisory team, noting research expertise and publications that are relevant to the applicant's project, the supervisors' previous track record of successful supervision and any involvement in postgraduate training. It is important to demonstrate not just the quality of the supervisors' research, but the fit of the applicant and project with the supervisors' areas of expertise. When considering the supervisory team, and training and development requirements, Schools/ Departments are strongly advised to look beyond their own institution and indeed their own Consortium in order to identify possibilities for cross-institutional supervision.

Marking Scheme for Supervision

Grade	Descriptor
6	An outstandingly close fit between supervisory expertise and the proposed project. Involvement of the Partner organisation is excellent, and very closely aligned with to the needs of the project and student. To be funded as a matter of the highest priority.
5	A very strong fit between supervisory expertise and the proposed project. Involvement of the Partner organisation (if applicable) is fully appropriate and well aligned with to the needs of the project and student. To be funded as a priority, though does not merit the highest priority rating.
4	A strong supervisory fit. Expertise of the Partner organisation supervisors is appropriate and reasonably well aligned with to the needs of the project and student. Worthy of consideration for funding.
3	A good supervisory fit. Involvement of the Partner organisation (if applicable) is acceptable, but may not be aligned with to the needs of the project and student. In the competitive context of this competition, not possible to be considered for funding.
2	Supervisory arrangements that have some strengths, but with weaknesses in fit between the project and expertise of the supervisory team. Involvement of the Partner organisation (if applicable) is below an acceptable standard, and not aligned with to the needs of the project and student... Not appropriate for funding.
1	Significant shortcomings in one or more areas; not suitable for funding.

A strong application will be where the supervisors have expertise in an area closely related to the proposal and where the involvement of the partner organisation is strongly supportive of the project. A strong application will also have considered the opportunities available across the two consortia, and built these into the application where they add value. In a weak application the supervisor will not be expert in the area.

4. Training and Development and Research Environment

The application should address the ways in which the research strengths of the subject in the Department/School, as well as any interdisciplinary research groups, clusters, Centres, and Institutes, specialised facilities/ resources, and external partnerships are relevant to the applicant's research project. The ways in which the applicant will be integrated into this environment should be specified. This section of the Application Form should also identify any skills training and professional development needed for the successful completion of the research project. This should be specific to the applicant and the project; please do not include general statements about the generic skills training available within the consortia. When considering training and development requirements, Schools/ Departments are strongly advised to look beyond their own institution in order to identify possibilities for research group participation and training opportunities, including those provided by external organisations.

Marking Scheme for Training and Research Environment

Grade	Descriptor
6	Compelling evidence that the student will be well integrated into the research environment of the Partner organisation, as well as into appropriate university-based research groups/ clusters/ Centres/ Institutes. There is a clear sense that his/her training and development needs have been fully considered, and that the proposed involvement of the Partner organisation is outstanding. To be funded as a matter of the highest priority.
5	Evidence that the student will be integrated into the research environment of the Partner organisation, as well as into appropriate university-based research groups/ clusters/ Centres/ Institutes. Most of the student's training and development needs have been considered and the proposed involvement of the Partner organisation is very good. To be funded as a priority, though does not merit the highest priority rating.
4	A sense that the student will be integrated into the research environment of the Partner organisation, as well as into appropriate university-based research groups/ clusters/ Centres/ Institutes. Some of the student's training and development needs have been considered, and the Partner organisation offers some appropriate support. Worthy of consideration for funding.
3	Evidence that there is a research environment at the Partnership organisation, as well as university-based research groups/ clusters/ Centres/ Institutes, into which the student may be integrated. Training needs have been addressed, but cursorily, and the development opportunities offered by the Partner organisation are limited. In the competitive context of this competition, not possible to be considered for funding.
2	A research environment that has some strengths, but with weaknesses in respect of: school/ departmental research strengths and/or interdisciplinary infrastructure. Insufficient attention given to research training needs. Involvement of the Partner organisation in terms of research environment and development opportunities is inadequate. Not appropriate for funding.
1	Significant shortcomings in one or more areas; not suitable for funding.

A strong application will be where the applicant will be well integrated into the School/ Department and/or appropriate interdisciplinary structures, and in partner organisation; facilities or resources are available to support the applicant's research; and the applicant's training needs have been fully considered, along with a clear sense of how these will be met. In a weak application the Department/School or partner organisation will not be suited for the proposed research and/or there will be no interdisciplinary structures to provide a supportive research environment. A weaker application may be characterised by limited consideration of the training needs of the applicant, which may constrain their ability to conduct the research.

Appendix 2

Template email for contacting referees

Applicants are responsible for making contact with their prospective referees at the earliest opportunity, and ensuring that they are available to provide references during the application and selection period. It is also important that references explicitly address applicant's suitability for doctoral research. The following is a suggested email that applicants can amend as appropriate and use when contacting referees. You are strongly recommended to include a draft of your research proposal when writing to your referees.

Dear xxxx

I am applying for a place to study for a PhD at Durham University/ Newcastle University/ Northumbria University/ Queen's University Belfast/ University of Sunderland, and for an AHRC National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) studentship. The funding is offered through the Northern Bridge Doctoral Training Partnership (www.northernbridge.ac.uk) and the Northumbria-Sunderland Consortium in Art and Design (<https://nuwebapps.northumbria.ac.uk/northumbria-sunderland-cdt/>).

I am writing to ask if I might name you as one of my nominated referees. References will be required by Monday 19 June 2017 at the latest. If you are available to write a reference, assessors have indicated that they would find it very helpful if you could address the following in your reference:

- Details about how long you have known me and in what capacity.
- Comments on my academic performance to date, and/or on my performance in any post or position of responsibility.
- Comments on my actual or predicted master's performance, including information on individual modules where relevant.
- My preparedness for doctoral research, including my research skills, and the likelihood of timely completion of my project.
- My track record of collaboration and aptitude for partnership-working.

With many thanks in advance for your help,

Yours sincerely