

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Proposals are invited for PhD study within the inaugural cohort of the UKRI AHRC funded Doctoral Focal Award programme, 'A Golden Thread', led by The Glasgow School of Art in partnership with The Open University and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)

A GOLDEN THREAD



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

RURAL: LAB
THE GLASGOW
SCHOOL: OF ART



The Open
University



About the Programme:

‘A Golden Thread’ is a Scotland-wide programme of doctoral research training and enterprise development support, led by The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) in collaboration with its academic partners The Open University and Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC). The overall programme will provide cross-institutional training for 20 doctoral students. Six places are available through this first call for proposals, which seeks applications for PhD study on a full-time (three-three and a half years) or part-time (six-seven years) basis, commencing in October 2026. A six-week induction to the programme, focussed on self-care and preparation for study, will take place over summer 2026 (July/August). The programme includes an optional industry placement, post-completion.

Key Themes:

Craft is a key theme for the programme, and all proposals should demonstrate a strong Craft foundation or focus. We welcome proposals from applicants who identify as having a Craft practice (including, but not limited to materials, textiles, ceramics and printmaking) and who work in or across artistic disciplines (including, but not limited to visual arts, design and sound). Proposals are welcome for PhD by practice or by thesis. Candidates are encouraged to shape Craft-led research proposals at the intersection of themes/disciplines traditionally understood as from within the arts and humanities, and those traditionally understood as from within the sciences. These might include (but are not limited to):

- Biomaterials and regenerative design
- Planetary and space sciences, astrophysics and cosmology
- Agriculture, aquaculture, animal sciences and animal care
- Environmental sciences and nature-based solutions
- AI and emerging technologies
- Rural geography, sociology and/or economies

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI):

Programme partners recognise the value of diversity and are wholly committed to EDI principles. ‘A Golden Thread’ is designed to address underrepresentation and marginalisation in Scotland’s doctoral college and the wider creative economy, with specific reference to the geographic marginalisation which can be faced by residents of rural and island communities. **Candidates should preferably be resident in and/or have a demonstrable personal, heritage or practice-led connection to Scotland’s rural and island communities.**

Applications are welcomed from candidates with lived experience of marginalisation and/or who face systemic and structural barriers to doctoral study. Professional and lived experience will be considered in addition to or as an alternative to prior learning.

Programme Framework:

The overall programme is framed by four discrete, but interconnected elements: research training, enterprise development, cohort training, and mental health and wellbeing support.

- The programme begins with a six-week induction focussed on self-care, wellbeing, life and financial administration and preparedness for study.
- Year 1 of the programme focusses on research training, including core research methods and expert-led skills sessions.
- Year 2 includes a bespoke twelve-week enterprise development programme, including skills development masterclasses, industry taster-sessions and 1-1 coaching and mentoring.
- The focus in Year 3 is on thesis and viva support, including peer writing groups, expert coaching, assessor feedback and an optional mock viva.
- Post-completion, students will be offered the opportunity for internship/placement with industry partners.
- Flexible and distance learning will be supported through online and digital/app-based access to live and recorded sessions, resources and archives, and by provision of digital and hard copy materials.
- Cohort training will include student-led activities, research symposia and seasonal schools, and a cross-cohort research project hosted by GSA Rural Lab.

Supervision Arrangements:

Supervisory teams will be cross-institutional, bringing world-class expertise from across disciplines and partner institutions together to best service the needs of individual themes and topics of study. Applicants will register at either the GSA or the OU, depending on which institution would be best placed to support the proposed project. Potential applicants will be advised on best fit and on any institution-specific application requirements.

Consortium Partners:

The GSA and its academic partners are joined in the programme consortium by a national network of arts, cultural and community partners, including the Bernat Klein Foundation, The Crichton Trust, Skyeskyns, Fyne Futures, Shetland Arts Development Agency and Moray Arts Development Engagement (M:ADE). The programme is supported at a strategic level by Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) and South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE).

Research Environments:

The GSA is ranked in the top twenty creative education institutions in the world and offers a world-class and immersive creative experience for practice-led doctoral study. The programme will be hosted by GSA Rural Lab at the GSA Highlands and Islands Campus in Moray, a specialist postgraduate creative campus with excellent and inspiring studios, workshop and exhibition spaces and state of the art research facilities.

Distance learning and connection to place communities will be supported through GSA Rural Lab's Scotland wide network of 'micro-labs', research centres embedded in rural and island community contexts, and its 'macro-labs', centres hosted in collaboration with regional, national and international partners and connecting to national and global agendas.

Students will also benefit from access to the central GSA campus in Glasgow, including its internationally renowned Archives and Collections, from access to Open University's online learning resources and support from SRUC's Enterprise Academy and Rural Policy Centre. Research environments across the wider partnership and consortium include SRUC's new and flagship Rural and Veterinary Innovation Centre (RAVIC) in Inverness, and the library, archives and student services at the multi-institution Crichton Campus in Dumfries.

Application Process:

1. Informal discussion

Prospective applicants are invited in the first instance to contact the Programme Lead, Dr Clare Devaney, at GSA Rural Lab for an informal discussion. Please send a request to dfa@gsa.ac.uk for a convenient time to be arranged.

2. Application form

Following this initial discussion, applicants will be signposted to and invited to complete an online application form, which requires:

- A research title and brief abstract
- An outline research proposal (including an introduction, background/context, research question/s, proposed methods and indicative completion plan)
- A statement setting out key professional, lived and academic experience.
- A statement considering research environments and programme fit
- A representative portfolio of Craft-led creative practice (optional)
- An indication of potential supervisor/s (to be determined in discussion with the Programme Lead)
- Two referees

Alternative formats to the online application form are available on request.

3. Support and guidance

Prospective applicants can register for a series of group webinar sessions in support of application development, including Q&A sessions, tips for writing a research proposal and advice on preparing a practice portfolio. Sessions are scheduled to run between November 2025 and January 2026. 1-1 sessions are also available.

4. Submission

Applications must be submitted by 12 noon on 13th February 2026. Late applications will not be considered.

5. Review, interview, outcomes and feedback

Applications will be longlisted by a cross-institutional academic and executive panel, with oversight from the programme Steering Group. Longlisted applications will continue for consideration by institutional post-graduate research committees. Shortlisted candidates will be invited to interview in March 2026.

All applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application by 30th April 2026.

Feedback will be available on request.

Key Dates:

4th November 2025	Call for proposals opens
November 2025 - January 2026	Guidance sessions
13th February 2026, 12 noon	Deadline for applications
March 2026	Candidate interviews
30th April 2026	Applicants informed of outcome
July/August 2026	Induction programme (6 weeks)
October 2026	Start of training programme