AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Training Partnership entitled *True Colours: The effects of detergent use on the historic interpretation, understanding and conservation of museum textiles (Open University/V&A Museum, CDP 2019)*

Photograph of the textile Conservation Studio at the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum

This PhD is a collaboration between the V&A Museum and the Open University, using an interdisciplinary approach to study the conservation of museum textiles. It is noteworthy that heritage in 2015 made a £20.2 billion/year contribution to the UK economy, and its sustainability depends on heritage science. This interdisciplinary PhD research project involves better understanding the underlying science and improving current wet cleaning processes for historic textiles to ensure their longevity for future study. This important subject in conservation work has worldwide relevance as the removal of soiling from textiles in museum collections often relies on washing or ‘wet cleaning’. The process involves the use of anionic and non-ionic detergents (i.e. surfactants) but little is known of the long-term effect of their use on museum textiles.

During this project you will be mainly based at the Open University (OU) in Milton Keynes but will spend time at the V&A museum working with staff from the Conservation Studio. Full-training will be provided in relevant analytical techniques, materials testing and the development of interview questions at the Open University and in textile cleaning at the V&A. This project will provide a wide range of experience and so would be ideal for either pursuing a career in the heritage, museum conservation or analytical science sectors or in academia.

This research project will take as a case study the redisplay of the costume gallery at the V&A which is due to open in 2023. This is one of the most popular galleries in the Museum and relies on its presentation to engage and correctly inform the viewer. Working closely with a senior textile conservator and in conjunction with the Chief Curator of the costume gallery redisplay, you will conduct and record interviews with both curators and conservators at the V&A and other museums that hold costume collections, to identify their objectives for the long-term care and interpretation of articles. Critically, you will also evaluate how these museum professionals balance display presentation against effective cleaning, placing this with the broader context of existing research on practices of museum display and interpretation.

Very little analytical research has been carried out in this area, so the results of this project will inform textile conservation practice worldwide and so be enormously beneficial for textile...
collections globally. In a previous pilot project between the OU and the V&A, we found that interference occurred when analysing for detergent residues from the presence of natural compounds such as lanolin acids from wool. Consequently this challenging aspect needs to be carefully accounted for in our future studies.

Please also see the links below:


Further details of the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership scheme and the associated cohort development events can be found at https://www.ahrc-cdp.org/

Supervisory team: Dr Simon Collinson and Dr Alex Forsey (Open University) and Frances Hartog and Joanne Hackett (Victoria and Albert Museum)

Contacts: For informal inquiries relating to this interdisciplinary collaborative PhD opportunity please contact the lead supervisor, Dr Simon Collinson (simon.collinson@open.ac.uk).

Requirements and Funding:

Candidates should possess a degree in a relevant subject area, such as a 2:1 or higher in chemistry, analytical chemistry or a related discipline aligned to the studentship. It would be beneficial if an applicant can demonstrate experience of using analytical techniques in chemistry and an enthusiasm for working with the heritage sector. Good numeracy, ICT, communication and organisation skills are highly desirable.

This 3year PhD is an AHRC funded Collaborative Doctoral partnership (and includes a “Student Development Fund” equivalent to 0.5 years of optional additional funding) and provides a stipend of approximately £15,578 per year (2019 rate). There will also be support for conference and workshop participation.

Also note for a suitable candidate part-time study may be available.

Students must also meet the eligibility requirements of the UK Research Council for graduate students. The student would be required to live in the UK and within commuting distance of The Open University in Milton Keynes.

How to Apply:

Please send an email with your CV, a completed application form (to obtain the appropriate form use this link: http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process), and a personal statement outlining your suitability for the studentship, what you hope to achieve from the PhD and your research experience to date to STEM-LHCS-admin@open.ac.uk

The closing date for applications is 5th June 2019.
Interviews will be arrange promptly after the closing date, and can be conducted via Skype if appropriate.

The School of Life, Health & Chemical Sciences at the Open University holds Athena Swan Bronze status. Equal Opportunity is Policy of the Open University.