

University of East London – Research Excellence PhD Studentships

The University of East London (UEL) invites applications from highly qualified and motivated students for a Research Excellence PhD Studentship starting in September 2024. The Research Excellence PhD Studentships are the premier postgraduate merit studentship at UEL and provide full tuition fees and a generous stipend.

Founded in 1898, we at the University of East London (UEL) are proud to change lives through education, research and knowledge exchange. Our 10-year strategy, Vision 2028 is to advance industry 5.0 careers-first education and provide a clear path to the jobs and opportunities of the future. We're committed to driving diversity in the 5.0 talent pipeline, working in partnership to promote talent wherever it is found and creating a balanced, inclusive, and green future.

UEL is an innovative academic community, delivering high-quality applied research that is impact-led, intellectually stimulating, socially relevant and for public good. UEL's research efforts are shaped by its location, East London, one of the most diverse regions in the UK undergoing rapid urban transformation that presents both challenges and opportunities for thinking and acting on the city's future. In addition, London is at the heart of a rich global landscape and UEL is entwined into this landscape through its research engagement with areas of central and local government, science, technology, education, health, and arts.

The Research Excellence PhD Studentships are central to the University's strategy to enhance the research volume, quality and impact and part of our investment in research people, culture and environment. At UEL, PhD researchers will be supported by a community of supervisors committed to their timely progress and development as professional researchers with publishable outputs. All postgraduate research students at the University of East London benefit from a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme designed specifically for PGRs to support them to develop academic and professional skills and an understanding of key doctoral milestones. The programme consists of three key strands:

Researcher-Ready: This strand of training focuses on helping PGRs navigate the doctoral journey while developing key skills in research design, research theory, ethics, and academic writing.

Empowering Researchers: This strand of the RDP focuses on peer-to-peer mentoring, ideas sharing, wellbeing, and community.

Pioneering Researchers: This strand of training focuses on employability skills, entrepreneurship, and knowledge exchange for academic, industry, alternative career paths.

The School of Arts and Creative Industries

The research will be hosted by UEL's School of Arts and Creative Industries (ACI), the department of Performing Arts and The RIX Centre.

Research students and staff in ACI are active in areas ranging from film studies to cultural theory, the performing arts, and art and design. Their research is embedded in our East London location and issues of diversity and marginalisation, cultural and social regeneration, social justice and community cohesion, are central themes. We aim to question and illuminate, and to engage students and the wider community as well as academic staff in the excitement of discovery and debate, both in scholarly publications and creative practice research.

Rix Inclusive Research is a centre with the mission is to improve the lives of people with learning disabilities through effective use of digital and multi-media technologies. The Rix Inclusive Research Institute is one of Universities' flagship Research Centres and a champion of the UEL Civic Engagement mission to challenge social injustices and 'make a difference'.

About the Studentship:

Proposed Project Title: Exploring and extending the social impact of disabled-led theatre making through the work of Access All Areas and Not Your Circus Dog Collective

Project Summary:

Through an examination of London-based performance company *Access All Areas Productions* and the development of the collective *Not Your Circus Dog Collective*, the research will ask how the impact of performances and workshops can be tracked and articulated through frameworks developed from and based in neuroqueer/crip theory and practice. Through an examination of the process of developing and touring *Not F**kin' Sorry!*, this research will interrogate the potential of radical performance to change how learning disability and Neurodiversity is understood. The project will address impact measurement frameworks, particularly in their relation to UK wide-funding structures, and offer new methods for generating, tracking and demonstrating impact from a neurodivergent perspective. The researcher will work closely with Liselle Terret, an Associate Professor of Performance and director of Not Your Circus Dog, whose work as a performance artist and director foregrounds her identification as neuro-divergent artist disrupting theatrical norms through a radical neuroqueer, crip, collaborative and feminist approach to practice-research.

Industry Partner: Not Your Circus Dog Collective/Access All Areas

Research Context:

Access All Areas (<https://accessallareasproductions.org/>) is an award-winning, London-based, performance company that creates ground-breaking and disruptive performance. Co-led by learning disabled and autistic artists, their programme of work challenges exclusion at every level of culture and looks to transform an ableist society. This research project will focus on Not Your Circus DogCollective (NYCD), a collective of neurodivergent performers developed out of Access All Areas, and their punk-Crip-queer theatre production *Not F**kin' Sorry!*, which drew on the company's lived experiences of disability discrimination.

NYCD brings the lived experience of disabled artists to the centre for emancipatory self-representation. It is grounded in ethics of care and collaboration and its work interrogates the relationship between audiences and Crip/queer performers. *Not F**kin' Sorry!* was developed in partnership with disabled artists, co-constructing radically political questions about continued exclusion and discriminatory assumptions around binaries of 'ability/disability'. It has brought together artists whose work usually falls outside dominant cultural markets to high profile stages (The Royal Court, Soho Theatre, South Bank Centre).

Access All Areas has a goal to change the culture in the UK to be 'more inclusive for learning disabled and autistic talent' and change how neurotypical audiences and society members engage with the broad lived experience of neurodivergent people, both artists and non-artists. This research project will investigate that claim and how it can be tracked and demonstrated, through research that investigates theories of change and impact from a crip/queer perspective. How can this change translate to society more broadly and what are the most salient ways to track and articulate the reach and significance of that change through a model based and embedded in neurodivergent perspectives? The project will look at both how crip/queer artists are telling their stories, and the wider impact of those stories on both the cultural sector and broader relations to the lived experience of Crip/Queer bodies and people throughout the United Kingdom. This will include development of impact frameworks from a queer/crip perspective, examinations of artist supporting development models and audience supporting development models and how to measure impact based in networks.

NFS! and the work of NYCD and AAA are grounded in theories of practice-as-research (PaR) and this doctoral thesis will interrogate how PaR, especially in the context of theatrical practice and public outputs, can lead to demonstrably significant change in the public sphere. Through close engagement with Emancipatory Disability Research and the Political-Relational Model of disability (Kafer 2013), it will develop/interrogate/investigate workshop methods for the generation, tracking and articulation of "impact" as part of Access All Areas' work on NFS. The project will build on the work of Liselle Terret (<https://uel.ac.uk/about-uel/staff/liselle-terret>), and her methods foregrounding learning disability or Crip aesthetics and re-affirming the disabled artist as co-creator and collaborator in authoring performance. The resulting doctoral thesis will have a strong practical component, presenting high quality resources that can be applied to the evaluation of a project's public engagement components, after the end of the project and through to the future.

Possible Research Questions:

- What does it mean to make queer/crip impact? How can that be measured and analyzed? How does it differ or improve on normalised methods for tracking the reach and significance of cultural outputs?
- How can Crip and queer performance create an accessible aesthetic to engage the wider public/audiences in active considerations of their own lives?
- How can a new Crip theatre implicate audiences in challenging ongoing discrimination experienced by learning-disabled people?
- How can theatre-making processes be deployed to enable, include, champion, and celebrate neuro-diverse and learning-disabled artists as equals and as leaders in the industry?

- How can performance/theatre processes and artefacts be used in education, training and development to make change in the systems of support and care that govern the lives of learning disabled and autistic people.

Research Methods and Timeline

Year 1

- Desk-based research: survey/review literature on queer/crip theatre and impact-evaluation
- Development of methodological framework
- Ethics process and review
- Initial fieldwork:
 - Identification of appropriate stakeholders/impacted persons
 - Workshops, interviews with those who have participated in or been impacted by access training, bespoke consultation, co-creation etc., including but not limited to neurodiverse and/or disabled artists, and organisations/companies looking to make their work more accessible.

Year 2

- Continued fieldwork: gathering and analysing data on current impact-evaluation practices, e.g. workshops, interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observations; examination of comparable companies.
- Continued desk-based research: practices of comparable companies;
- Devising, implementing and evaluating new models using an iterative process of test pilots. (3 x 1 months. OC)

Year 3/4

- Write up, including the development of practical, high-quality resources that can be used by stakeholders as a result of the research project.
- Expectation of 1 peer-reviewed publication, co-authored with a REF eligible employee (Liselle Terret)

Some examples of relevant publications:

Selwyn, E. and Terret, L. 2019. Defiant bodies: a punk rock Crip queer cabaret: crippling and queering emancipatory disability research, in Duffy, P., Hatton, C., Sallis, R. (eds.) Drama Research Methods Series: Provocations of Practice, Bold Visions in Educational Research, 161-180. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004389571_010

Terret, L. 2016. Repositioning the Learning-Disabled performing arts student as critical facilitation, in Preston, S. (ed.) Applied theatre: facilitation pedagogies, practices, resilience Methuen Drama. 131-150 <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472576965.ch-006>

Terret, L. 2018. An Overview of Performing Arts as They Relate to Disability in the United Kingdom in Castaño, A. (ed.) Jornadas sobre la Inclusión Social y la Educación en las Artes Escénicas (2009-2018) El Instituto Nacional de las Artes Escénicas y de la Música (INAEM). pp. 251-259

Funding

The studentship is for a period of three years including fees and an annual stipend of £20,622 (2023/2024), plus a training bursary of £2,000. The candidate will be expected to complete the full application and admissions process to start July 2024 or September 2024.

Additional Information

Find out more about the School of Arts and Creative Industries:

<https://uel.ac.uk/about/our-schools/school-arts-creative-industries>

The PhD Process:

<https://uel.ac.uk/postgraduate/courses/mphil-phd-school-arts-creative-industries>

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Informal enquiries about the studentships should be addressed in the first instance to:

ACIstudentships@uel.ac.uk

The closing date for applications is 1st July 2024. Shortlisting will take place by 8th July. Interviews will take place during the week commencing 15th July. If you are successful at interview and offered a studentship you will be directed to complete the UEL application process [further information is available at – School specific course page]

Criteria:

Evidence of sustained commitment to Drama, Theatre and Performance particularly in relation to community engagement and impact.

BA qualification or equivalent

A Masters degree, MRes or MA or equivalent

Aptitude and experience in primary research and/or action research.

Evidence of strong organizational ability.

Proposals:

Your application should include:

- 1-page proposal detailing the focus and conceptual framework you would like to use to contribute to the project as laid out in the advert, your potential theoretical and contextual literature(s).
- 1-page personal statement detailing the experience and skills you will bring to the project.
- Maximum 1-page CV.