



AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) Studentship – ‘Just acquisitions? Law and ethics over time in Kew’s overseas plant collecting history’ with Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and Royal Holloway, University of London.



Start date: 1st October 2026

Application Deadline: 8 May 2026

Interviews will take place 26-29 May 2026

The ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS, KEW (RBG KEW) and ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON (RHUL) are pleased to announce the availability of a fully funded Collaborative doctoral studentship from October 2026 under the AHRC’s [Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships \(CDP\) scheme](#)

This project, undertaken in RHUL’s Department of Law and Kew Gardens, explores the history and trajectory of Kew’s plant collecting and plant export activities since Kew’s colonial beginnings, including contemporaneous developments in international environmental law, through to global justice and human rights issues.

This project will be jointly supervised by CHINA WILLIAMS, Kew’s Legal Agreements Advisor and PROFESSOR MARK NESBITT, Plant Humanities Research Leader at RBG KEW; and PROFESSOR JILL MARSHALL, Professor of Law at RHUL, and the student will be expected to spend time at both RHUL and RBG KEW, as well as becoming part of the wider cohort of CDP funded students across the UK.

The studentship can be studied either full or part-time.

We encourage applications from a diverse range of people, from different backgrounds and career stages.

Students should have a Master's Degree in a relevant subject or can demonstrate relevant equivalent experience.

The studentship is open to both home and international applicants.

Project Overview

Using critical legal lenses - 'justice in acquisitions' and 'transfer' theories, this project will explore innovative issues of cultural identity, international law and legal theory in the plant world. It will involve a combination of close analysis of historical documents in Kew's rich archival record of plant-collecting expeditions as well as more recent overseas collecting agreements fully databased since 2000, and crucially, it uses a legal perspective not previously applied to these sources. The project revisits how specimens were acquired by Kew, known for its global, historic collections of plants and fungi, resulting in its position today as a leading international plant science research centre and visitor attraction. The project thus encompasses rich original archival work from material available at Kew, and critical socio-legal analysis on equality, historical accountability, economic and social justice.

Research questions include:

1. What evidence exists on the planning and organisation of RBG Kew's plant-collecting expeditions and plant exports, 1840–1950? What agreements were made with in-country authorities?
2. How have these frameworks influenced present-day agreements and how do these now operate?
3. What international laws were/are relevant in this context and how did/do they relate to Kew's own arrangements? What impact did/do these have?
4. What insights can be drawn from legal theoretical perspectives and scholarship in the fields of human rights law, and racial and ecosystems injustice, when used as frameworks for analysing Kew case studies?
5. What has been discovered to inform debates concerning restitution/ reparations/ remedies in the field of biodiversity?

Research with RBG KEW

This research studentship is one allocated to RBG KEW by the AHRC. The successful student will be expected to spend time carrying out research and gaining relevant experience with the partner at Kew Gardens, in southwest London, as part of the studentship, as well as time at RHUL and in legal libraries, etc.

Details of Award

CDP doctoral training grants fund full-time studentships for 4 years (48 months) or part-time equivalent up to a maximum of 8 years but in accordance with RHUL regulations.

The studentship funds full-time or part-time UK-rate tuition fees and standard UKRI-rate stipend (£23,805 including London Weighting for the 2026/27 academic year) for 4 years. Students with an 'overseas' fee status can apply with the difference between the UK and overseas fees rate covered by RHUL and they will be required to reside in the UK until completion of the PhD. The stipend is tax free, and is the equivalent of an annual salary, enabling the student to pay living costs. There is also a CDP uplift of £600 per year for travel between institutions.

Further details can be found on the [UKRI website](#).

The successful candidate will receive guidance from RBG Kew on how to access additional travel and related expenses over the course of the project.

The successful candidate will be encouraged to participate in professional development events and activities organised for all Collaborative Doctoral Partnership students who are registered with different universities and studying with cultural and heritage organisations across the UK. These activities are organised by a coordination team based at the V&A and are designed to provide CDP researchers with the knowledge, networks, and skills to thrive in their future careers.

Eligibility

- This studentship is open to both Home and International applicants.
- To be classed as a home student, candidates must meet the following criteria:
 - Be a UK or Irish National (meeting residency requirements), or
 - Have settled status, or
 - Have pre-settled status (meeting residency requirements), or
 - Have indefinite leave to remain or enter
- The latest revision of the AHRC Training Grant Funding Guide is available [here](#).
- International students are eligible to receive the full award for maintenance as are home students with RHUL covering the difference.
- We want to encourage the widest range of potential students to study for a CDP studentship and are committed to welcoming students from different backgrounds to apply. We particularly welcome applications from people of Global Majority backgrounds as they are currently underrepresented at this level in this area.
- Applicants should have a Law Degree at undergraduate level *and/or* a Law related master's degree *and/or* some understanding of legal history *and/or* philosophy of law, international law *and/or* human rights. Ideally you should have or expect to receive a relevant Masters-level qualification in a relevant subject such as Law, Global Justice, Development, or Anthropology or be able to demonstrate equivalent experience in a professional legal or research setting.
- Applicants must be able to demonstrate an interest in the cultural and heritage sector, particularly botanic gardens, libraries, and archives, and in relevant topics such as history of plant collecting, as well as the potential and enthusiasm for developing skills more widely in related areas.

- As a collaborative award, students will be expected to spend time at both the University and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

NB. All applicants must meet UKRI terms and conditions for funding. See:

<https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/grant-terms-and-conditions/>

Project details and how to apply

For more information and how to apply see <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studying-here/postgraduate/law-and-criminology/law-phd/> Feel free to contact Professor Marshall if you have any further questions jill.marshall@rhul.ac.uk

To ensure your application is linked to the studentship competition, please identify the funding scheme you are applying for, ie. 'AHRC CDP - Marshall', in the 'Supervisor and Research Topic Information' section, under: 'What is the title of your research?', then select 'Yes' to the question 'Is this an advertised research project?'. You will be able to upload your research proposal and other documents in the 'Supplemental items and documents' tab after you have submitted your application.

We ask all applicants to complete a voluntary EDI [monitoring form](#). All responses are anonymous.

All CDP projects are part of a nationwide programme called the Collaborative Doctoral Partnership consortium. The CDP consortium will host an online webinar for prospective applicants on 13 April 2026 at 11:00. These webinars will provide an overview of the CDP funding scheme.

To sign up for a webinar, please email cdp@vam.ac.uk with the subject line "Prospective Applicant Webinar" from the email address you would like to join the online meeting from. Sign up will close on 10 April 2026 at 17:00.

Please note, the webinars will not focus on individual projects.

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