

Experiences of applying for a Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) with the NWCDTP.

Slide 1: Introduction

Hi everyone, my name's Pam Forster and I'm a PhD student in Linguistics at Lancaster University. I'm here to outline my experiences of applying to study for a PhD on the Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) pathway with the NWCDTP.

Slide 2: First Steps

How did I approach this? My very first steps were to contact potential supervisors at Lancaster University to discuss my proposal to study linguistic change in Lancaster over time. A key element of my proposal was that I really wanted to analyse such changes in the context of Lancaster's changing socio-economic history over the past 120 years or so. Given my focus on the city of Lancaster itself, we discussed the possibility of my research potentially being of interest to local heritage organisations and how I could best engage with them throughout the project. As part of these discussions, my supervisors suggested that I look into the CDA route offered by the NWCDTP.

Slide 3: Finding a Partner Organisation

As mentioned in the earlier slide, my research analyses linguistic change in Lancaster over time. In order for my analysis to cover as long a timespan as possible, I needed to identify sources of early spoken data. I reached out to Lancashire Archives, based in Preston, as they house irreplaceable sound archives from oral history interviews conducted with local people in the Lancaster area. These include the North-West Sound Archive and the Elizabeth Roberts Working Class Oral History Archive (ERWCOHA). Both of these archives hold data which is perfect for my research, with interviews with participants born as far back as the late 19th century!

Thankfully, Lancashire Archives were very interested in my proposal and were already familiar with the requirements of the CDA route as they had worked with a student on a similar scheme previously. We had an initial online meeting towards the end of summer 2021 and they very kindly agreed to being my collaborative partner!

Slide 4: The Application

The first thing I'd highlight about applying for a CDA is that the deadline is earlier than it is for the standard doctoral scholarship. I needed to apply in October 2021 as opposed to February 2022 for entry in October 2022. There is also more paperwork to finalise as part of a CDA application. The application form itself requires a research proposal, timeline, and details of the impact the research will have on the collaborative partner. I also needed to ask Lancashire Archives to provide a letter of support as part of the application.

I also needed to ask my university supervisors to complete a "student nomination form" as part of this process. This form asked for further details of my relevant experience, qualifications, and the training and support offered by Lancashire Archives as part of this project.

Of course, in addition to these documents, I also needed to provide two references. The obvious reference for me to request was the one from my MA dissertation supervisor as he could comment on my recent academic background. I also asked my former line manager at work for a reference as my previous work experience formed an important part of the application. By that, I don't mean that I had direct experience of working as a researcher outside of my MA or that I had worked in archival management myself. The work experience I highlighted in my

application was my project management experience and how I would transfer these skills to my PhD. Oh, and don't forget to apply to the PhD programme you will be following at your individual university too! I did this at the same time as applying to the NWCDTP and it was a relatively straight forward process.

I submitted my PhD application to the NWCDTP in October 2021 and was informed that it was successful at the end of November, so thankfully I didn't have to hold my breath too long! It was then necessary to draw up a formal contact between myself, Lancaster University, and Lancashire Archives. I thought this would be a really complicated process but thankfully the legal teams at the university and Lancashire Archives knew what was involved and to be honest, in the end I only needed to read through the contract and sign it.

Slide 5: The Project So Far

I've now completed 2 years of my PhD. As I'm part-time, this means that I have just finished the end of my first year. I've honestly loved every minute of it and I've learnt so much! Of course, I am subject to the same PhD requirements as I would have been if I had applied for the standard application route. So I need to write a thesis of around 80,000 words and I have recently passed my pre-confirmation panel. I've also presented my work at conferences and outreach events, and it's been great to receive some very positive feedback.

However, the huge advantage of being on the CDA route is that you get to work in collaboration with 3rd party organisations. These are very much two-way collaborations in that there are benefits to the researcher and the organisation they are working with. My supervisor at Lancashire Archives is a professional archivist who has played a key role in advising me on relevant sources for my data collection and the context in which they were created. In addition, she has also advised on accessing historic photos of the local area that are held at the archive and these have really brought my presentations to life! I've also benefited from the expertise of the conservation team at the Archives in learning how to digitise recordings in the professional sound lab, and the creation of appropriate metadata for each recording. These recordings have been on different formats: mini-disk, cassette, DAT, and reel-to-reel. I don't think I had even seen a reel-to-reel machine before I started my PhD, let alone think that I would ever get the opportunity to learn how to use one!

In the next few weeks, I will be taking part in an outreach event at the Archives which I'm really looking forward to. This will give us the opportunity to promote the sound archives and how they can be used not just from an oral history perspective (which is interesting in itself) but also from a linguistics angle.

So the advantages of a CDA for me as a researcher is that I am gaining skills and knowledge that I just would not have had access to on the standard application route. In terms of the benefits that my research brings to the Archives, I am directly contributing to their organisational objective to digitise these recordings to secure their preservation for the future. In addition, I'm also contributing additional contextual information to their existing catalogue descriptions and developing a Lancashire dialect corpus for future research. I am also promoting our collaboration through a range of outreach activities and conferences as I mentioned earlier.

Slide 7: Go For It!

So in conclusion, I would strongly recommend applying to the CDA route. This is a fantastic opportunity to develop a strong collaboration with experts in a sector you are interested in and

gives you the chance to really contribute to their organisation. You will also gain valuable experiences and skills that are outside of the standard PhD training. I'm really glad I applied to this route and am very grateful to Lancashire Archives, my university supervisors and the NWCDTP for all of their support. Good luck with your application!