



## SECTION 1: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

Proposed Project Title:	Developing new models to evaluate the impact of Open Clasp's theatre for social change		
Project Summary: (Maximum 100 words)	Open Clasp theatre company has received international acclaim for theatre-making that integrates creative and socially-engaged practice in unique and powerful ways. Articulating the full extent of Open Clasp's impact is a challenge because its work sits at the boundaries of a range of practices. This project will devise, test and reflect upon new impact-evaluation methods in dialogue with academics and arts practitioners. It will develop new models for Open Clasp, which can be shared as best practice across the sector, and make a significant intervention in debates on cultural value and the arts.		
Name of non-HE Partner Organisation:	Open Clasp		
Name of Contact at non-HE Partner Organisation:	Ellie Turner	Email Address:	ellie@openclasp.org.uk
Primary AHRC Subject Area:	Drama and Theatre Studies		
Secondary AHRC Subject Area (if <b>Interdisciplinary</b> ):	Choose an item.		
Does the project Include a creative practice component?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
If you have listed two subject areas above, do you consider the project to be interdisciplinary?		YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>If Yes, please briefly state why:</b> (Maximum 100 words):			
<b>Please provide full details of the proposal and make your case for support below:</b> (Maximum 750 words)			
<b>Research context</b>  Award-winning theatre company, Open Clasp (OC), helps working-class women affected by the criminal justice system to become 'co-producers' of original theatre work that explores, shares and documents their personal experiences. This supports the women, gives focus to their efforts to turn their lives around and animates the structural inequalities they face; it also aims to influence policy makers and educate service providers. The intimate relationship between the creative and socially-informed aspects of OC's work is distinctive, significant and unusual in the sector; comparable companies, like Clean Break, run these strands of activity separately (McAvinchey, 2020). However, this integration creates challenges for articulating and evaluating the value of OC's			

work because its impact is complex and wide-ranging. This project will engage with current academic thinking on cultural value (Kaszynska, 2018), in order to strengthen and develop OC's impact-evaluation practices. OC is working at the boundaries of a range of practices, so the new models of good practice that are designed, developed and tested can inform and influence other theatres and those making art for social change.

### **Research questions**

This CDA project will develop new processes for impact evaluation that can accommodate OC's integration of creatively ambitious theatre-making and a programme of activities that aim to effect social change. It has four key research questions:

- how can we articulate the unique way that the company's feminist, democratic ethos informs its ways of working and its aesthetic?
- what kind of impact evaluation practices would be best suited to revealing the value of both this way of working and its outcomes?
- how might these evaluation practices support and sustain the company's current and future work in both offline and online contexts?
- how can this evaluation model be shared as best practice with other companies in the sector?

New and experimental models arising from the project might substantiate institutional change effected by OC, provide empirical data to support the claim that OC reaches 'women and girls furthest from the arts', or demonstrate value for the communities OC works with. They might be designed for online contexts and to evaluate OC's use of digital media to engage international audiences and partners. OC's digital engagement predates the Covid-19, but has become more central to future programming a result of the pandemic (*Key Change*, 2017, <https://www.openclasp.org.uk/productions/key-change/>; *Rattle Snake*, 2019, <https://www.openclasp.org.uk/productions/rattle-snake-online/>).

The project taps into broader intellectual concerns about cultural value: it will engage wider research communities (e.g. Centre for Cultural Value, Leeds), and make a significant contribution to current debates on impact-evaluation.

### **Research methods and timeline of activities**

The studentship will employ a range of research methods, including dedicated placements with OC, fieldwork, data collection and desk-based research.

#### **Year 1 (2021-22)**

- Fieldwork: gathering and analysing data on OC's current impact-evaluation practices, e.g. interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observation. (6-month placement, OC)
- Desk-based research: survey/review literature on cultural value and impact-evaluation

#### **Year 2 (2022-23)**

- Desk-based research/ fieldwork on the 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 (2023-25)**

- Writing up a thesis that demonstrates new models for evaluating creative/socially-informed work and shows how these could be deployed by other companies. (3 p/yr meetings, OC)

The submitted thesis may not be a linear piece of academic writing; other forms might be appropriate, including creative/hybrid outputs. It should include an output for OC, e.g. toolkit, executive summary, report for funders.

### Case for support

The studentship emerges from an existing collaboration between OC and NU (initiated, 2017; MoU, 2020), resulting in public engagement events (June 2019), creative outputs (Sweeney, 2019 & 2020) and peer-reviewed publication (GPS/JADT, 2021). The CDA will be supported by the activities of the Performance Research Group and benefit from NU's commitment to civic engagement, demonstrated by its application for Engagement Watermark Accreditation.

The project is designed to provide **intrinsic support** for OC to further enhance and develop its impact and evaluation, and to feed richer learning from this back into the company's work. It will offer **process support** through the design, development and implementation of new methods grounded in an extensive and systematic review of current theory and practice. It will present **public engagement benefits** by finding ways to identify and articulate the effects that OC's work has upon audiences, service providers and policy makers, and by generating a body of reflective, analytical work that can make an original contribution to debates around impact and evaluation in social change-oriented theatre/the arts more broadly.

**Please provide details of any resources and facilities, including details of any high cost equipment, fieldwork, training, etc., that may be required to complete the project successfully, and where you will seek these resources (e.g. NBCDTP; partner resources; departmental/school funds). Please include estimated costs: (Maximum 200 words)**

At OC, the student will undertake in-house training on safeguarding policies and procedures for in-person and online contexts; they may also be required to undergo a DBS check (£90).

All NU PhD students undertake an initial Training Needs Analysis (TNA) to ensure that they acquire the necessary research skills and develop into well rounded researchers; this is updated annually. The HaSS Faculty Postgraduate Training and Researcher Development Programme offers compulsory and non-compulsory training opportunities relevant to this project, including: HSS8002 Information Skills, for desk-based research/information management, and HSS8004 Qualitative Methodology, for fieldwork/ data analysis. Depending on the project's development, specialist external training may be desirable, e.g.:

- Interview and oral history training, Oral History Society/ British Library (Introductory course, £130; Advanced, £140)
- Public engagement training, National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (Engage Researcher Academy, £990)
- Focus group training, Social Research Association (One-day course, £220; Two-day course, £440).

The student may apply for a small or a large NBTP grant to support this additional training. If there is wider interest within the consortium, we will consider an application for either an innovation grant (student) or a cohort training grant (supervisors) to bring this expertise to Newcastle.

**Please outline the arrangements for communication between the partner organisation and academic host organisation in regard of the project management and the monitoring of academic progress: (Maximum 150 words)**

This CDA emerges from a collaborative relationship between OC and NU, established in 2017 and formalised by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2020: the OC/NU working group meets at regular intervals throughout the year.

Monthly supervisions will provide an opportunity for the student to receive ongoing feedback and support. Contact with OC will be more frequent in years 1 & 2 when the student will undertake regular, time-limited placements with the company. As the project moves into the writing up period (years 3 & 4), contact with OC will

be structured around 1) a trustee and staff task and finish group, providing the student an opportunity to draw on the company's rich experience and expertise in theatre, culture, probation, participatory arts, and 2) AGM and quarterly Board meetings, where research findings and outputs can be disseminated and discussed.

**What benefits will accrue to the student and the partner organisation as a result of your collaboration?**  
(Maximum 300 words)

The student will benefit from:

- extensive and well-supported access to OC's working processes
- dedicated time to undertake in-depth research based upon current critical thinking
- a project design that provides a unique opportunity to undertake original research in a collaborative context
- opportunities to devise, test and reflect on innovative methodologies in dialogue with both academics and arts practitioners
- the experience of learning to adapt to different institutional contexts
- the opportunity to apply practically the findings of their research, testing these for effectiveness in real world settings
- project management experience, especially with regard to managing the expectations of a range of different stakeholders

This research project will provide OC with new tools for communicating their impact to funders, partners and those they seek to influence. 70% of OC's income comes from Arts Council England (55%) and other Trusts and Foundations. This source of income ensures OC's sustainability by covering its core costs. The security of this income is reliant on accurate impact measurement. By concentrating on designing, developing and testing new evaluation practices, this project will support the small team at OC to 'upskill' and become more efficient, effective and dynamic in their processes. Other potential benefits may include:

- Finding ways to demonstrate institutional change on partner organisations, e.g. Cleveland Police
- Collecting empirical data to substantiate key claims, e.g. 'We work with women and girls furthest from the arts'
- Capturing and recording intangible, tacit or ephemeral knowledge, e.g. case studies of women who have worked with the company and felt the value of its methods
- Having an opportunity to think not only of how impact can be evaluated, but also why and for whom
- Support in developing new ways to communicate the value of this work to the communities, participants and co-producers who support OC's work

**Please briefly state what financial (if any) or in-kind contribution the partner will be making over the duration of the award:**  
(Maximum 100 words)

OC has committed to contributing substantial in-kind support for the duration of the award:

Executive Director role including induction (1 day), weekly supervision 1 hr p/week x 24 wks	£2,180
Finance & Office Manager role including admin and tech support -1 day £205 p/day x 24 wks	£4,920
ED supervision / regular meetings 1 hr p/mnth over 3 years 36 hrs £70 per hr (based on £500 per day)	£2,520
DBS check if required due to activity (tbc)	£90
Internal evaluation of working with a researcher	£280

Subtotal            £11,490

Contingency @ 5%	£574.50
Total	£12,065

**Please describe the nature of the collaborative arrangement and the activities the student will be taking with the organisation:**

*(Maximum 300 words)*

In year 1 the student will undertake a 6-month placement with OC to collect and analyse data on the company's current impact evaluation practices. Through grounded observational work, the student will observe the different processes involved in OC's evaluation, including:

- How the company monitors engagement, e.g. number of attendees, demographics, etc.
- The questions and methods OC use to evaluate engagement, e.g. paper-based/online surveys, data retention practices
- How, when and why the company conducts case studies on individuals, community groups or partner organisations

The student will collect and analyse data from a range of different sources in order to examine how the company makes use of this information in its communications with funders, for marketing and PR.

In year 2, the student will design and develop new models for collecting and evaluating impact, which will be tested on selected OC projects. Carried out over 3 distinct 1-month placements, these tests may follow an iterative design process and will offer the student an opportunity to test their ideas in a range of different projects and contexts. The nature of the projects will depend upon OC's programme in 2022/23 and could range, for example, from work in prisons to online engagement with international groups.

In years 3 and 4, the student's engagement with OC will be channelled into a staff and trustees task and finish group. This group will meet three times per year and will provide the student with access to the wide range of experience in theatre, arts funding, social work and cultural policy that OC board members possess. OC's AGM and quarterly board meetings will also provide an opportunity for the student to disseminate and discuss the research findings in this final phase of the project. We expect that one output from the submitted thesis should be a piece of work created for the benefit of OC, e.g. a summary report or a toolkit.

## SECTION 2: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

First Supervisor:	Dr Rosalind Haslett	School/Department:	SELLL
Second Supervisor:	Professor Joanna Robinson	School/Department:	SELLL
Additional Advisor:	Ellie Turner	Organisation/Institution:	Open Clasp
Additional Advisor:	Catrina McHugh	Organisation/Institution:	Open Clasp

**Explain how the expertise of the supervisory team and external advisors will allow them to support the proposed project and the selected student:**

*(Maximum 500 words)*

**Dr Rosalind Haslett** is part of a collaborative team, drawn from Newcastle University and Open Clasp, working to support the company to develop a creative and critical approach to its archive (<https://www.openclasp.org.uk/2019/06/open-clasp-open-archive/>). She has an established profile in engaged research, having previously worked with both Northern Stage and Live Theatre on their archives and oral histories (<https://www.live.org.uk/blogs-resources/story-yet-no-end>) and has published journal articles that draw upon archival and conversation-based research with local theatre communities (*Contemporary Theatre Review*, 2019 and *Performance Research* 2020). Dr Haslett leads the AHRC-funded interdisciplinary project 'Engagement, Place and Identity: the Social Value of the Arts in Newcastle', supporting three CDAs with three different cultural partners from the region (Amber Collective, Live Theatre and Northern Stage). She has supervised one PhD student to successful completion (2019) and has experience as an external examiner (Ulster, 2020). She is currently supervising four PhD students working on contemporary arts practice in the North East, including two CDAs with Amber and Northern Stage. <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/elli/staff/profile/rosalindhaslett.html#research>

**Professor Jo Robinson**, who will be joining SELLL at Newcastle in February 2021, has supervised nine PhD students to successful completion, including three AHRC CDA/CDP students in collaboration with Nottingham Playhouse Roundabout, New Perspectives Theatre Company and the British Library; she is currently supervising a fourth CDA student (funded by Midlands4Cities DTP) working with Oxford Lieder. Professor Robinson has extensive experience of interdisciplinary collaborations with external partners, including through her work as PI on the AHRC-funded Cultural Value project, 'Citizen Scholarship in Nottingham: understanding the value of engaging users with heritage and culture', which has worked to develop both innovative strategies for engaging new audiences with heritage and to understand and deploy models of best practice in evaluating the benefits of those engagements. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/people/joanna.robinson>

**Ellie Turner** is **Executive Director of Open Clasp**. She has a wealth of knowledge of the North East arts and culture sector from positions both within arts and culture organisations and then as a funding specialist managing partnership programmes, developing philanthropy and funds to benefit the North East voluntary sector. She is a specialist in charity governance, leadership and in developing national partnerships to support *arts for social change* campaigns. Ellie is Joint Chief Executive alongside **Catrina McHugh, MBE**, the company's **Artistic Director**, who established the company in 1998. Catrina has dedicated her professional life to making ground-breaking theatre that matters, and changes lives for the better. Her philosophy is written into the DNA of Open Clasp, which seeks to 'Change the World – one play at a time'. In 2017, Catrina was made a MBE "for outstanding services to disadvantaged women through theatre". In 2018 she was given the Charity Leader of the Year Award at the North East Charity Awards as well as 'Writer of the Year' for *Rattle Snake* at the 2018 Journal Culture Awards. As a company Open Clasp take a collaborative approach to their work, and collectivity is a core element of their ethos. Consequently, while Ellie will lead on this project, Catrina will also support the CDA project in an advisory capacity.

### SECTION 3: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

**Please provide details about the research environment the selected student will be joining and its suitability:**  
(Maximum 500 words)

The School has a lively research culture to which academic staff, graduate students and distinguished visiting speakers contribute. There is a significant drama specialism in SELLL, including Professor Kate Chedgzoy, who has been centrally involved in the OC collaborative partnership since 2017; theatre and performance scholars Dr Helen Freshwater and Dr Kate Craddock; literature scholars with research specialisms in theatre and performance, including Dr James Harriman-Smith, Dr Kate De Rycker, Dr James Cummings, and Professor Jenny Richards; Dr

Emma Whipday, an early modern scholar and playwright; writers Professor Jacob Polley and Dr Preti Taneja who have written for radio and the stage and in Dr Taneja's case been RA on a theatre for social change project; and playwright Dr Zoe Cooper. The School has strong links with local arts institutions and theatre companies including New Writing North, Arts Council England, Northern Stage, Cap-a-Pie and Live Theatre. We regularly welcome visiting speakers and teachers from these institutions and collaborate with them on research, impact and engagement projects.

For postgraduate students specifically, the research environment within the School/University is rich and well resourced. A dedicated and highly skilled member of the School professional services team oversees PGR business. Physical work facilities are provided within the Postgraduate Suite, which includes work space and IT facilities, as well as providing a collective home for the Schools' PGRs which supports their self-organisation as a community, including reading groups and social events. The Robinson Library is well resourced and has been actively enhancing its holdings relevant to theatre and performance.

Beyond the school the CDA student will be encouraged to join the new Performance Research Group which has emerged from the activity and ongoing dialogue of an interdisciplinary community of performance researchers gathered from across the University, including colleagues in sociology, geography, architecture and business. The student will also have the option of engaging with a number of other active NU research communities, which are relevant to this project, e.g. Oral History Unit, Gender Research Group. The three Faculty research institutes – NICAP, NUHRI and NISR – share a concern to recognise, record and evaluate the contribution that cultural organisations make to the life of the region, and will provide a sustaining interdisciplinary context for the project team and student. Through its Engagement and Place strategy, Newcastle University fosters a supportive environment for collaborative working to mutual benefit with partners beyond the university: this will provide the student with opportunities to access training and events focused on developing skills and building relationships to enhance engagement and impact. Within this framework, the student will benefit from learning from the Creative Fuse project, which brought together all 5 North East universities to highlight the importance of the creative, digital and IT sector in the region.

Beyond the university, the training opportunities offered by the Northern Bridge consortium, the opportunities to connect with students in other disciplines working on related issues, and the presence at other universities in the DTP (notably Northumbria and QUB) of colleagues with pertinent research expertise, means that the wider research environment is an excellent fit for this project.

#### SECTION 4: STUDENT SPECIFICATION

**For further information about this Collaborative Doctoral Award and to submit an expression of interest, please contact:**

<b>Lead Supervisor (or alternative Contact)</b>	Professor Kate Chedgzoy	<b>Email:</b>	kate.chedgzoy@newcastle.ac.uk
<b>Expressions of interest must be received no later than:</b>		1 February 2021	
<b>Expressions of interest should be accompanied by the following documentation:</b>		A 1 page project proposal (this should outline your interest in and motivation for the project, as well as suitability for the mode of study), transcripts of marks for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, and a 2 page CV	

Interviews for shortlisted candidates are expected to take place:	From 1 February 2021
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#### APPLICANT SPECIFICATION

*Note, applicants must also meet the criteria for the acceptance on a doctoral programme as set out by the host institution's Postgraduate Admissions Service.*

<b>Education and Professional Qualifications</b>	Essential Criteria	
	Desirable Criteria	
<b>Research and Impact Experience and Training</b>	Essential Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Firm and feasible plans for a substantial, rigorous and significant research project that aligns with the project aims</li> <li>Willingness to engage with both academic and nonacademic audiences.</li> </ul>
	Desirable Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience of working with non-academic partners on scholarly research or the development and evaluation of impact.</li> </ul>
<b>Professional Practice and Job-related Experience</b>	Essential Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excellent organisational abilities and time management skills, and the ability to prioritise workload and work to deadlines.</li> <li>Understanding of the importance of the wider significance of research on theatre and performance.</li> </ul>
	Desirable Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience of working with non-academic partners on public engagement or impact-evaluation processes.</li> <li>Expertise by experience relevant to the project</li> </ul>
<b>Interpersonal Skills</b>	Essential Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to work independently as well as part of a team.</li> <li>Excellent oral and written communication skills with a wide range of different audiences.</li> </ul>
	Desirable Criteria	
<b>Other Factors</b>	Essential Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The opportunity is open to women only. Open Clasp Theatre Company have an exemption from the charity commission under the Equality Act 2010 Schedule 9, Part 1.</li> </ul>
	Desirable Criteria	