

Project Proposal Application

To be completed by the lead proposed supervisor, with input from the non-HE Partner Organisation.



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

SECTION 1: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

Proposed Project Title:	Clay (co)Construction – using creative practice to improve health and wellbeing and social isolation within the veteran community in Sunderland.		
Project Summary: (Maximum 100 words)	A partnership between University of Sunderland and Veterans in Crisis Sunderland (VICS), this creative practice project will explore clay as a creative medium for reducing social exclusion and increasing individual and mutual health and wellbeing within the veteran community. This project provides the student with a unique embedded perspective from which to shape new knowledge, advance research and develop best models of practice within the arts and health. The project will develop approaches and resources that will contribute towards co-production of creative capital and sustainable future development for veterans and their community.		
Host Academic Institution:	University of Sunderland		
Name of Non-HE Partner Organisation:	Veterans in Crisis Sunderland (VICS)		
Name of Contact at non-HE Partner Organisation:	Ger Fowler	Email Address:	Ger@veteransincrisis.co.uk
Name of Non-HE Partner Organisation (if more than one):			
Name of Contact at non-HE Partner Organisation:		Email Address:	
Primary AHRC Subject Area:	Applied Arts: History, Theory and Practice		
Secondary AHRC Subject Area (if Interdisciplinary):	Community Art including Art and Health		
Does the project Include a creative practice component?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		
If you have listed two subject areas above, do you consider the project to be interdisciplinary?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>		
If Yes, please briefly state why: (Maximum 100 words):			

Please provide full details of the proposal and make your case for support below:

(Maximum 750 words)

This creative practice PhD will use clay to explore health and wellbeing through artwork to address social isolation within the veteran community in Sunderland. The research candidate will work collaboratively with VICS in the co-construction of creative practice, methods and approaches. They will develop their own unique perspectives derived from the following research questions.

1. How might clay as a creative medium be used to improve health and wellbeing and reduce social isolation within the veteran community in Sunderland?
2. In what ways can creative practice engagement support health and wellbeing and the understanding of what it means to be a veteran in a civilian society, thus energising and improving reality orientation for the veteran individual and community?
3. How can a clay creative practice engender and support sustained (economic, environmental and social equality) future development within the North East and wider Veteran community?

Aims;

To explore how engagement with clay based creative practice may improve veterans' general sense of mental wellbeing and lead to feeling less socially isolated.

To understand individual and collective veteran identity through clay based creative practice in the co-construction of new knowledge to inform and build future developments and support services for veterans and their families.

To undertake clay based creative practice with veterans to develop and establish possible models of best practice.

To support development of a of sustainable model for clay based creative practice as part of a resettlement of veterans in Sunderland into civilian life.

The use of clay within a health and wellbeing context continues to develop with studies showing benefits in terms of stress reduction (Elkins – Abuhoff, 2008) the acquisition of skills (White, 2006) and hence development of self-esteem and improved confidence (Kramer, 2000). Clay as a creative medium has also proven effective in terms of improving daily function and maintaining wellbeing (Nan and Ho, 2017) and due to its material characteristics and ease of forming (Sholt and Gavron, 2006) also contributes to a reduction in social isolation and improvement of self-esteem (Aydin and Kutlu, 2021). This project aims to contribute new understanding derived specifically from a creative practitioner research perspective working with clay within a collaborative context and aims to inform potential wellbeing approaches (*Clay Transformations*, AHRC, Argyle and Winship, 2015). Working with veterans the project will explore clay as a creative medium through collaborative making to develop models that aim to improve health and wellbeing and reduce social isolation. The project will specifically aim to build upon existing research models (Grant, 2017) towards a sustained future for clay based creative practices for Veterans in Crisis Sunderland (VICS) and their service users.

The candidate will bring their own innovative approaches to making based upon workshop-oriented clay processes these might include, hand building, moulding and surface decoration. The creative practice will be informed by personal experiences developed through co-constructed themes that will be evaluated within the following methodology.

This research will employ a multi-methods approach which positions creative practice as central. Experiential and reflective (Schön) art-based methods (Gray and Malins) will be used for the ceramics-based arm, and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) employed to illuminate subjective participant experiences with data collected through semi-structured individual interviews. Both arms will be supported by a rhizomatic analysis (Hickey-Moody, 2015) to enhance the collaborative nature of this research. Using constructivist grounded theory will allow exploration of and support for veterans to make meaning of their post-military lives.

This proposal builds upon 2 previous projects between the University of Sunderland and VICS, *Time for Tea* (Armed Forces Covenant) and *Make* (Positive Pathways) where artists worked with veterans and their families through workshops in clay and glass that introduced creative workshops to the organization which provided an alternative form of veteran engagement. The outcomes of the research will include a research dissertation, a body of creative practice from both the researcher and the VICS community and the development of a sustainable model for clay based creative practice that will support future development. There is potential provision for exhibition within the public spaces of the National Glass Centre which also showcases contemporary ceramics practice and research. Contribution will also be made to understanding and developing the health and wellbeing of the veteran community and it is envisaged that this will disseminate through appropriate channels, including journals BMJ Military Health, Arts and Health, fed into the Sunderland Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group (to inform local policy and service development) and disseminated to the Integrated Care Board General practice and to other veteran support groups regionally and nationally.

Provide details of any resources and facilities, including 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)

The student will have studio space in the glass and ceramics department at the National Glass Centre, which provides a comprehensive set of innovative facilities that are available to the student alongside materials that support the creative practice research. The student will also be integrated into the Health and Care Workforce Interdisciplinary Research Network, where Health Sciences and Wellbeing and Arts and Creative Industries converge. In addition, the Helen McArdle Nursing and Care Research Institute will provide resources and support the health and wellbeing element of the research. Whilst the project is based in Sunderland and the North East, if needed, funds for any additional national travel will be sought from NBCDTP grants and external resources for example the Armed Forces Covenant. Where appropriate the student can apply for internal funds at the University of Sunderland, for example to cover conference attendance.

Outline the arrangements for communication between the non-HE partner organisation and the academic host institution in regard to project management and monitoring academic progress:
(Maximum 200 words)

The student will have monthly academic supervisions (Livingstone/Graham) and full supervisor/advisor (Fowler) meetings every three months which will take place at VICS where the student will have a space in the office working alongside the team. Deadlines for the project will be set at the start and the student's progress will be monitored through the regular meetings, formal academic reviews (annual monitoring and progression) and at agreed points within the research. The supervisory team will be responsible for monitoring the research at PhD level and VICS will provide training, support and professional development required to complete the research project. The student will feed into the Sunderland Armed Forces Steering Group three times a year, so the project has potential to inform service development from the onset. The supervisory team will use an online system (e- vision) to record meetings, set research goals and outcomes and support communication and planning.

What benefits will there be for the student and the non-HE partner organisation as a result of your collaboration?
(Maximum 300 words)

The collaboration will benefit the student and partner as follows:

The student will gain experience by working with VICS and becoming a member of the team. The student will gain considerable knowledge and professional insight with regards to veteran health and wellbeing and will be central to development through research collaboration and implementation. They will develop practical experience of socially engaged practices within a specific art/health and wellbeing context that will support professional management and engender transferable skills that will contribute to the enhancement of career opportunities and employability post doctorate. The student will gain experience of developing sustainable models of practice that emerge from the collaboration and the authentic position in which to research and test clay as a creative medium.

Veterans in Crisis Sunderland (VICS) is a social enterprise run by veterans, for veterans aimed at supporting those living in Sunderland who are experiencing health and wellbeing and social isolation issues. VICS will benefit greatly from the research project through the enhancement of the small team where new knowledge and insight will be developed from a creative practice/research perspective. The students research will provide invaluable development of models and approaches that will support a sustainable future for veterans in Sunderland and the North East. The project will develop methods for engagement that will support VICS development and implementation of health and wellbeing and social isolation provision. Veterans are an underserved population in terms of wellbeing support as part of their resettlement into civilian life and as such experience disparities in services provision to support wellbeing. The Office of Veterans Affairs has been set up to support the veteran population in the UK and is currently scoping out what is needed to improve support. This work has potential to provide evidence of wellbeing needs.

State what financial (if any) or in-kind contribution the non-HE partner organisation will be making over the duration of the award:
(Maximum 100 words)

Veterans in Crisis Sunderland (VICS) will support the research project by providing professional expertise, direct contact with participants and mentoring in terms of how to engage with service users, handle difficult situations and signposting to services. VICS will provide access to the organisation and its service users, so that the student gains authentic insight into the lives of veterans. VICS will support the development and promotion of the research within VICS and the dissemination to extended networks in the region and nationally. VICS will provide expert training in working with veterans and support the candidate throughout the project.

Describe the nature of the collaborative arrangement and the activities the student will be undertaking with the non-HE partner organisation:
(Maximum 300 words)

The student will become part of the VICS team and will shadow staff and work with veterans under the supervision of the team. In the first few months the student will familiarise themselves with the organisation, this will be supported by ethics training and approval provided by the University of Sunderland and VICS. During the first year further training in qualitative, participatory, and creative research methods will be provided and this will include specific health and wellbeing and arts and design training provided by the appropriate institutes and university networks. The student will observe and engage in the working of VICS gaining experience in the first year through engagement with social and physical activities, workshops supported by local agencies and organisational meetings, this will support the building of a relationship with the

veterans and engender the co-construction of creative capital and methods for a sustained future as the research progresses. In the second year the student will develop practice and the investigation of clay in the studio and will test and develop the research through creative practice activity with the veterans. Models of practice for example completed clay PhD research (McHugh, 2015) will be explored through collaboration and reflected upon using appropriate research methods and analysis in-line with research questions and aims. In the third year the creative practice will be completed and disseminated through exhibition and other platforms as developed by the student and VICS. The research will contribute to both arts practice and health and wellbeing fields and as such will disseminate through publication and platforms aligned to VICS networks and the health profession. The student's expertise and completed research will inform and contribute to future developments for veteran health and wellbeing and demonstrate the significance of clay and material practice within this context.

SECTION 2: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

Primary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Prof Andrew Livingstone	School or Department:	Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries
		Email Address:	andrew.livingstone@sunderland.ac.uk
Secondary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Prof Yitka Graham	School/Department:	Faculty of Health Sciences and Wellbeing
		Email Address:	YITKA.GRAHAM@sunderland.ac.uk
Name of the Advisor based at the non-HE Partner Organisation:	Ger Fowler	Organisation/Institution:	Veterans in Crisis Sunderland (VICS)
		Email Address:	Ger@veteransincrisis.co.uk
Name of additional internal or external advisor or academic supervisor, if any:		Organisation/Institution:	
		Email Address:	

Explain how the expertise of the supervisory team and external advisor(s) will allow them to support the proposed project and the selected student:

(Maximum 500 words)

This research will be supported across the subjects of applied arts/creative practice with a specialism in ceramics and health and wellbeing sciences – the supervision team are well positioned to support and guide the research development and consolidation.

Professor Andrew Livingstone is leader of CARCuos (Ceramic Arts Research Centre University of Sunderland), with 20 successful PhD completions. He has completed research on both practical and theoretical aspects of ceramics and wider arts discourse including sculpture and conceptual application. His publications *The Ceramics Reader* (Bloomsbury) and *Beyond Disciplinarity: Historical Evolutions of Research Epistemology* (Routledge) will help support contextual development and understanding in terms of arts criticality and research methodologies. His expertise and professional experience of contemporary ceramic practice will help guide practical development and contextualization. Andrew has worked in collaboration with VICS on the project MAKE 2021/22 and worked within socially engaged practices over twenty years. He has supervision expertise in clay community and health and wellbeing engagement including completed PhD research (McHugh, 2015, AHRC) (Grant, 2017) and current research into clay and recovery and wellbeing (Bagi, AHRC) and (Lucas, AHRC).

Professor Yitka Graham is the Head of the Helen McArdle Nursing and Care Research Institute, with 2 successful PhD completions. She has led on participatory arts and wellbeing projects with veterans in collaboration with the National Glass Centre. She has expertise in qualitative methodology, participatory action research methods, health inequalities, public and patient involvement in research and has subject expertise in the stigma of obesity, hidden illnesses, social prescribing and patient and public advocacy for greater understanding of stigmatised health conditions. She is the University's Veteran's Champion and sits on the Sunderland Armed Forces Covenant Steering Group, a city-wide initiative to support health and wellbeing of military and veteran citizens. Yitka Graham is co-supervisor for Sam Lucas' PhD into clay, recovery, and wellbeing.

Ger Fowler is founder and CEO of Veterans in Crisis Sunderland (VICS) which he founded in January 2018 as there was no provision for Veterans in Sunderland. As a veteran himself he was diagnosed with PTSD in the early 90's and set out to support veterans and their families with similar diagnosis, health and wellbeing and social isolation issues. He has developed a working model to support veterans based upon entering the organisation as a client then progressing to a volunteer, and ultimately gaining part time then full-time work if appropriate to the veteran individual. VICS have an on-site councillor, run activities from 9-5 Monday to Friday and 7-5 on a Saturday. In addition to supporting health and wellbeing and reducing social isolation VICS help veterans and their families in Sunderland with issues that include housing, employment and the

development of social activities. Ger offers professional expertise and will work with the student to develop the veteran relationship, advise on models of best practice, and support the project to completion.

SECTION 3: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Please provide details about the research environment the selected student will be joining and its suitability:

(Maximum 500 words)

The student will be affiliated to the Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries research environment and will join a vibrant community of research students, staff, research associates and international visitors. In addition to wider university doctoral activity and support the student will form part of postgraduate art and design research which provides subject-specific research training with monthly sessions that cover practice-led methodologies and ethics.

The student will be part of CARCuos the ceramic arts research centre at The National Glass Centre, University of Sunderland. The centre aims to develop, support, and disseminate new knowledge and scholarly activity whilst also providing a platform for research and discussion aligned to ceramic and wider arts discourse. Together with the National Glass Centre research centre they provide resources that include a research gallery for exhibition and research project development, a reading room for concentrated study including access to completed PhD's and art exhibition/catalogue and an environment to develop seminars and symposia aligned to the research. The centres host resident artists, guest speakers and symposia which will provide the student with a rich resource.

The two faculties, Health Sciences and Wellbeing and Arts and Creative Industries converge with their Health and Care Workforce Interdisciplinary Research Network, offering a space for creative thinking, training education and interaction. The Network has a core theme of Arts and Wellbeing, having successfully delivered projects in collaboration with the National Glass Centre involving marginalized populations in the local community. The student will be aligned to this Interdisciplinary Network which supports opportunities to situate the research across the two Faculties to maximise the resources available through the University. This Interdisciplinary Research Network has a multidisciplinary, diverse membership which offers opportunities to network with other research students from different backgrounds and other staff between the two faculties, to provide further experiential learning which will support the student through their studies.

The Helen McArdle Nursing and Care Research Institute oversees the governance of the Health and Care Workforce IRN and is home to the Sunderland Social Prescribing Research and Knowledge Exchange Centre, to, leading on the development of a robust evidence base for non-clinical wellbeing interventions to inform policy and practice. Central to the Institute's strategy is the development of research students, providing training and mentoring to support career aspirations and experiential learning.

VICS forms a vital part of the research environment that includes numerous partners and networks that provide an invaluable resource for this project. VICS is a social enterprise run by veterans, for veterans aimed at supporting those living in Sunderland who are experiencing health and wellbeing and social isolation issues. They work closely with statutory, public, and cultural organisations which provides a unique professional environment for this research.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a pledge that acknowledges and understands that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces. The University of Sunderland and Sunderland CCG have attained the award level of Gold for the Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme and VICS has been awarded silver.

SECTION 4: PERSON SPECIFICATION

In the event that your application is successful we would like to advertise the award on the Northern Bridge Consortium website as soon as possible following the announcement of the results. We'd therefore be grateful if you could complete the following Person Specification.

For further information about this Collaborative Doctoral Award and to submit an expression of interest, please contact:			
Lead Supervisor (or alternative Contact)	Prof Andrew Livingstone	Email:	andrew.livingstone@sunderland.ac.uk
Expressions of interest must be received no later than (dd/mm/yy):			28/01/2023
Expressions of interest should be accompanied by the following documentation (e.g. 2 page CV; personal statement):			An up to date two-page CV, a sample of written work (up to 2,000 words), a portfolio of creative practice, and a personal statement (up to 1,000 words) that details the applicant's academic, creative practice or professional achievement, and preparedness for this doctoral project and describes the specific academic and/or creative contribution they would make to it. If the applicant is selected for interview, at least one academic reference that describes how their skills, abilities and experience of the applicant make them suitable for postgraduate study should be provided.
Interviews for shortlisted candidates are expected to take place: (e.g. Week Commencing dd/mm/yy)			Week Commencing 20/02/2023

PERSON SPECIFICATION		
<i>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.</i>		
Education and Professional Qualifications	Essential Criteria	Applicants should hold an Undergraduate degree of at least upper-second class Hons in the UK or equivalent from a HE institution overseas and a Masters degree (either completed or due to be completed before the start of the PhD) in a relevant subject area. Applicants who do not possess these qualifications should evidence equivalent intellectual abilities through a good track record of relevant publications, exhibitions, creative practice, or work experience that evidence highly developed research skills.
	Desirable Criteria	Experience of exhibition organisation and/or working with communities in workshops and outreach events.
Research and Impact Experience and Training	Essential Criteria	Evidence of developed research skills and working methodologies relevant to the project, proven ability to manage and deliver research projects in set timeframes.
	Desirable Criteria	
Professional Practice and Job-related Experience	Essential Criteria	Experience of designing and delivering research and/or creative projects.
	Desirable Criteria	
Interpersonal Skills	Essential Criteria	Excellent communication skills, including ability to communicate ideas clearly, team working and collaboration, innovative problem-solving skills, resilience.

	Desirable Criteria	
Other Factors	Essential Criteria	
	Desirable Criteria	