

Project Proposal



SECTION 1: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

Proposed Project Title:	Managing 'Wildness': Creative Writing and Landscape Restoration		
Project Summary: (Maximum 100 words)	This studentship will develop understanding of the meaning and value of 'wildness' and the human context of a landscape management project. The candidate will carry out practice-led research into the Lottery-funded Kielderhead Wildwood project, which is restoring natural processes and ecosystems in the remotest area of England. Engaging with the site, its restoration and management will address urgent global questions around climate, land management and human–nature relations. It will enhance understanding of how landscape project work, what they mean, and why they matter. The studentship builds on an existing partnership between Northumberland Wildlife Trust (NWT) and Northumbria University.		
Name of non-HE Partner Organisation:	Northumberland Wildlife Trust		
Name of Contact at non-HE Partner Organisation:	Katy Barke (Living Landscapes Projects Manager)	Email Address:	Katy.Barke@northwt.org.uk
Primary AHRC Subject Area:	Creative Writing		
Secondary AHRC Subject Area (if Interdisciplinary):	Choose an item.		
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)			
<p><i>Research context</i></p> <p>The Kielderhead Wildwood is a landscape restoration project establishing a native upland woodland on 100 hectares of open moorland in a remote area close to the Anglo-Scottish border. Through low-density planting and restoration of natural processes the project seeks to create a wild landscape which supports a wide range of flora and fauna, helps with carbon storage and water quality and allows for the return of species from water voles and black grouse to golden eagles and pine martens. The project is funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and is a partnership between the landowner, Forestry England, and Northumberland Wildlife Trust (NWT), which is delivering the project on the ground. The project runs for five years initially but the long-term vision is to expand the site and develop a large area of wild woodland in the area, and to develop a new vision for land management. The project serves as a case study for thinking about land management practices and for what we mean by speaking of wild places. The fact that the wildness at Kielderhead is actively managed shows that human and natural processes remain linked, and indicates that understanding the human context of wildness and wilding will be crucial to such projects in the future.</p> <p>The practice of rewilding has been widely and often vociferously discussed in recent years among ecologists, landowners, farmers, policymakers and the public, as well as in nature writing and other creative genres. Less attention has been paid to wildness, a concept</p>			

posited less on controversial species reintroductions and more on the restoration of natural processes and recalibration of the ways in which people manage, visit, and value landscapes. The Kielderhead Wildwood project provides an opportunity to think through these issues but is necessarily focused on ecology and practical work. This studentship will explore the human context of the Wildwood project, following the project staff as they deliver the project and using creative practice to articulate in all its nuance and affect what it means to manage land for wildness, and what wildness might mean to people living now.

Research questions

The studentship will ask:

- How can a creative writer develop understanding of the human context of a landscape restoration project?
- How can a creative writer advance and enrich the notion of 'wildness' in relation to landscapes?

The research will explore the delivery of a landscape restoration project as a complex programme of activities: the range of activities on- and off-site; the institutional context; day-to-day routines; engagement with expert, professional and public stakeholders; and above all the lived experience of project staff. It will account for landscape restoration as a human activity and reflect on the nature of land 'management' which seeks to reduce human agency in favour of natural processes. It will also engage with the site itself to develop an understanding of what 'wildness' means in this specific place and in our wider cultural and ecological context. In this way it provides imaginative access to a remote and inaccessible project site and enables readers to think through their understanding of wildness, contributing to multidisciplinary understandings of this emerging concept.

Research methods

The research will be led by the creative practice of the researcher, which may be in poetry or prose, nonfiction or fiction. The student will engage with the Kielderhead Wildwood project by working with project staff and volunteers, consulting project documentation and other archives, and making field trips to the project site. This engagement will inform the production of a book-length creative work. Alongside the creative work the research will carry out critical research into contemporary nature writing; writing on rewilding and wildness; and conservation management and ecology. While focused on creative writing the research will range over environmental science, geography and history. The critical research will inform a reflection on the writing process which articulates the answers to the research questions embodied in the creative work.

Outcomes

The creative and critical outputs will together advance the ability of creative writing to engage with and account for land management projects and to extend understanding of the concept of wildness, human-landscape relations, and the processes of landscape restoration, all of which will be crucial as the climate crisis demands that people reappraise the ways they value, use, and manage landscapes. By applying practice-led research methods in creative writing to a wildness project it will articulate a vision of wildness which influences discussions, across the academy and beyond, about our relationship to the natural world.

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)

Northumberland Wildlife Trust (NWT) will provide office space and access to the specialist expertise of project staff.

The Wildwood site is remote and not easily accessible. Where possible NWT will facilitate access alongside staff and volunteers and use, where appropriate, of NWT vehicles. As this will not always be possible, additional fieldwork costs (covering travel, accommodation, subsistence, and PPE) totalling £2,000 are requested from Northern Bridge.

Typically the researcher will be with NWT staff when on site visits but some lone working is likely so a lone worker safety device (£972) will be needed to meet NWT/NU lone-working protocols.

The researcher is likely to need specialist training in some aspects of ecology/conservation management. The exact nature of this will depend on the successful candidate's research plan. Where possible this will be supplied in-kind by NWT, but Northern Bridge is requested to provide £500 for any training that has to be sourced externally.

The student will benefit from the rich programme of public engagement research provided by the Northern Bridge partnership, in particular to support their delivery of creative writing workshops to NWT staff and volunteers.

Total requested from Northern Bridge: £3,472

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)

The studentship emerges from an existing partnership between Northumbria and NWT, led on the Northumbria side by the principal supervisor (Williams), which explores interdisciplinary approaches to the Wildwood. It will be overseen via the regular NU/NWT partnership meetings (quarterly), ensuring both academic and partner aims are met. The student will meet with academic supervisors at least monthly, with NWT staff present as appropriate. The supervision team will keep in regular email and phone contact with NWT staff.

The student will spend an average of 1-2 days a week with NWT staff, including site visits as well as working in NWT offices where they will have desk space. They will shadow NWT staff and take part in the project work programme as appropriate, under the mentorship of Graham Holyoak, the Wildwood Project Officer. The student will work according to NWT policies and procedures, including relevant inductions.

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 unparalleled access to the Wildwood project both physically and institutionally. Working with NWT will enable physical access to the remote site and shadowing staff and volunteers will provide experiential access to every aspect of the work programme. Working with the mentor and other specialist staff, the student will learn specialist ecological knowledge and conservation skills and develop understanding of how the Wildwood fits into the wider landscape of Northumberland and the wider work of NWT. The Kielderhead Wildwood plays a leading role in developing wild landscapes in the UK and developing conversations about the practice and concept of managing landscapes for wildness, and the studentship thus offers a unique opportunity for a creative writer to take part in those conversations.

NWT will benefit from having a creative writer engage with the Wildwood project for a sustained period. The existing Northumbria–NWT partnership was developed to serve NWT’s desire to understand the human context of its conservation work and to use the Wildwood as a way of initiating and developing wider conversations about the meaning of ‘wildness’ and its relation to land management and restoration. The studentship and its research questions directly serve this aim. The creative output of the thesis, a book-length creative work, will provide a way of disseminating the research, prompting further conversation, and publicising the Wildwood project. It will also help NWT to understand the full human context of its own projects and its staff and volunteers, supporting the development of future projects. NWT will also benefit from having a practising writer within the organisation; during the studentship the student will deliver three creative writing sessions designed to enable staff and volunteers to articulate and reflect on their involvement with the Wildwood project.

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)

NWT will provide:

- Sustained supervision and support through the mentor
- Opportunities to shadow staff involved in management and delivery, and to take part in work on site
- Access to specialist knowledge and expertise through project staff and inhouse training
- Access to documentation, archive, research data relating to the Wildwood project
- Support and training required to access the site and carry out the research safely, including via its existing system for remote lone working
- Office space in Newcastle and Kielder; some transport to the site and between offices; and where possible access to a vehicle

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

(Maximum 300 words)

Northumbria University has an existing partnership with NWT centred on the Kielderhead Wildwood project. Beginning in 2018 Williams led ‘Articulating Landscape: Research Perspectives on the Kielderhead Wildwood’, a project using fieldwork and the specialist knowledge of both conservation professional and researchers from a number of disciplines to contextualise and interrogate the Wildwood. A digital conference happened in 2020, with a further conference and publication of a book for general readers agreed by 2022. These activities have been formally agreed and are funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund as part of the Kielderhead Wildwood project.

This studentship will form part of the partnership and will be overseen during the quarterly partnership meetings, as well as informally on a more regular ongoing basis. The student will be based with NWT for 1-2 days a week on average, either in NWT offices or on site visits.

The main risks of the studentship relate to the remote and inaccessible nature of the project site: it takes a long time to travel to, even with the use of a vehicle, over a rough forestry track. NWT has committed to providing transport and site access where possible, but the studentship also includes some travel, accommodation and subsistence costs to cover other instances where necessary, as well as costs for appropriate PPE. Should Covid-19 continue to cause disruption, the student will follow NWT and Northumbria procedures; the research itself will reflect on such disruption.

NWT will provide training in accessing the site safely, and the student will follow NWT procedures in relation to lone working. By adopting the best practice of the organisation which knows the site best, the risks around access will thus be mitigated. The student’s use of these procedures will also be formally reviewed during supervisions and at quarterly partnership meetings.

SECTION 2: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

First Supervisor:	Ass. Professor Tony Williams	School/Department:	Humanities
Second Supervisor:	Ass. Professor Elizabeth-Jane Burnett	School/Department:	Humanities
Additional Advisor:	Graham Holyoak, Kielderhead Wildwood Project Officer	Organisation/Institution:	Northumberland Wildlife Trust
Additional Advisor:		Organisation/Institution:	

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 Tony Williams is Associate Professor of Creative Writing at Northumbria. He has published three volumes of contemporary pastoral poetry which interrogate the relationships between people and landscapes and the values encoded in landscape. He has a particular interest in the upland landscapes of Northumberland (*Hawthorn City*, 2019), Sheffield and the Peak District (*The Midlands*, 2014; *The Corner of Arundel Lane and Charles Street*, 2009). His AHRC fellowship 'The Writer Walking the Dog' interrogated writing practice in relation to human occupation and movement through landscape. His poetry has been a PBS Pamphlet Choice and has been shortlisted for the Aldeburgh, Portico and Michael Murphy prizes. He is also an award-winning short story writer and novelist. He has published on the reflective element of creative writing research, a central element of any PhD in the discipline but particularly in this studentship where the student will be articulating and reflecting on conservation practice through writing. He leads Northumbria's partnership with the Kielderhead Wildwood project and is thus uniquely placed to supervise this studentship. He has two PhD completions as principal supervisor, is currently supervising four as principal (with three due for completion this year), and has examined five PhDs internally and externally. He has completed institutional PhD supervision and ethics training. <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/our-staff/w/dr-tony-williams/>

Dr Elizabeth-Jane Burnett is Associate Professor of Creative Writing at Northumbria. She has published creative and critical environmental writing. The poetry collection *Swims* (2017), exploring activism and swimming, was a Sunday Times Poetry Book of the Year, highly commended in the Forward Prize and longlisted for the Laurel Prize (the best collection of environmental poetry to highlight the climate crisis). The forthcoming poetry collection *Of Sea* (2021) explores coastal invertebrates. The nature writing memoir *The Grassling: A Geological Memoir* (2019) examines soil, grass and woodlands, and won Penguin Random House's WriteNow award. The literary critical monograph *A Social Biography of Contemporary Innovative Poetry Communities: The Gift, the Wager and Poethics* (2017) analyses the relationship between writing communities and activism. A shortlisted AHRC/BBC New Generation Thinker (2017), she is frequently featured in BBC environmental programming. She is a British Council/National Centre for Writing International Literature Showcase winner (2020), described by Owen Sheers as one of ten writers 'shaping the future.' She has one PhD completion as principal supervisor, one current principal supervision and external examining experience. She is currently leading the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust small grant project, *Creative Writing and Climate Change: Moss, Wetlands and Women*. [https://researchportal.northumbria.ac.uk/en/researchers/elizabethjane-burnett\(d9bfd5bd-c957-40e9-b57c-4862021ea590\)/publications.html](https://researchportal.northumbria.ac.uk/en/researchers/elizabethjane-burnett(d9bfd5bd-c957-40e9-b57c-4862021ea590)/publications.html)

Graham Holyoak is Kielderhead Wildwood Project Officer at Northumberland Wildlife Trust and is an experienced project manager with a background in countryside management and river related work. Alongside managing the Kielderhead Wildwood project, he is also Project Officer for the National Lottery Heritage Funded Restoring Ratty project, which is reintroducing water voles into Kielder Water & Forest Park. This project won the 2019 Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management Best Practice Large Scale Nature Conservation Award. He will mentor the student and sit on the supervisory team.

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 join a strong research environment at Northumbria University. English has 43 staff members, all of whom will be entered for REF2021, and was ranked 15th for outputs in REF2014. Northumbria's 54 current PhD students form an active and supportive community of researchers. Creative writing represents a particularly successful element within the wider English PhD programme. Current and recent graduates have achieved success as both professional writers (novelists, short story writers, and poets) and academics (e.g. lectureships at Edinburgh, Sussex, Lincoln, Cumbria and Worcester).

The project's engagement with other disciplines mean that making use of existing research networks will be crucial. The Northern Bridge consortium is an especially apt home for the project, possessing research strengths in creative writing, the environmental humanities,

ecopoetics and ecocriticism, and geography, which the student will benefit from through events, training and advice from individual researchers.

The existing Northumbria–NWT Wildwood partnership provides a natural home for the student, providing specialist knowledge and support, and opportunities to present work at partnership events. The partnership will provide access to training and expertise in English literature, art and art history, environmental history, ecology and environmental science, and to extensive academic and professional networks studying wildness. Contributions by NWT staff to academic events have been crucial, enabling researchers to learn from practical knowledge and experience of landscape restoration on the ground. NWT's knowledge and contacts have facilitated international contributions and significantly expanded Northumbria's research networks. The strength of the partnership means that Northumbria is uniquely placed to host this studentship and advance the shared aims of partners to deepen understanding of wildness and the Wildwood project.

The student will also be placed within two highly active research groups. The Creative Writing research group includes researchers working in prose fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, script and the graphic novel. Its members have won numerous awards, carried out AHRC-funded research, and are active as editors and board members of learned bodies. The group provides a community of creative practice which will support the development of the student and their work. The Environmental Humanities research group, whose interests include the history of national parks, nature conservation and environmental activism, and which organises events such as the BA-funded Rural Modernism conference in 2019. Through the group Northumbria will host the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (UK and Ireland) conference in September 2022 with opportunities for the student to present work and to get involved in organising.

Humanities PhD students benefit from a bespoke training programme which complements the well-established processes and training provided by Northumbria's Graduate School. PhD students are based in the Glenamara Centre, located in the same building as the PhD supervisors and with access to fully equipped workspaces. Further resources are provided at the library's new Research Commons. The Institute of the Humanities provides a forum for research at a departmental level and PhD students are regular and valued participants in all its events.

SECTION 4: STUDENT SPECIFICATION

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

Lead Supervisor (or alternative Contact)	Dr Tony Williams	Email:	Tony.williams@northumbria.ac.uk
Expressions of interest must be received no later than:		(06/01/21)	
Expressions of interest should be accompanied by the following documentation:		<i>Please provide a 2-page CV, a short sample (up to 2,000 words) of your creative work, and a personal statement of no more than 1000 words indicating your preparedness for this project and the contribution you would make to it.</i>	
Interviews for shortlisted candidates are expected to take place:		In February 2021	

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.

Education and Professional Qualifications	Essential Criteria	Applicants should possess an Undergraduate degree of at least upper second class Honours (UK), or equivalent from an overseas university, and a Masters degree in a relevant discipline completed or in progress and due for completion before the start of the PhD. Applicants who do not hold these qualifications must demonstrate equivalent intellectual competence: a record of high-quality and relevant publications, professional practice or work experience that has equipped the applicant with outstanding research skills
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	Desirable Criteria	
Research and Impact Experience and Training	Essential Criteria	Ability to manage the research project and meet timescales Experience of research skills and methodologies relevant to the project
	Desirable Criteria	
Professional Practice and Job-related Experience	Essential Criteria	Experience of carrying out creative writing projects through to completion
	Desirable Criteria	Experience of working or volunteering in the conservation/land management sector
Interpersonal Skills	Essential Criteria	Excellent interpersonal skills, including the ability to initiate, develop and maintain good working relationships
	Desirable Criteria	
Other Factors	Essential Criteria	
	Desirable Criteria	