Queen Mary University of London PhD Studentship

Creating, Exporting and Exhibiting British Film Stardom, 1920 - 1970

Queen Mary University of London is one of the UK’s leading research-focused universities and a member of the Russell Group with an outstanding reputation in the humanities and social sciences. The British Film Institute is the UK’s lead organisation for film, television and the moving image.

The Film Department at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) and the British Film Institute (BFI) are pleased to announce the availability of a fully funded Collaborative Doctoral Studentship from October 2020 under the AHRC’s REACH Consortium Collaborative Doctoral Partnership Scheme. The doctoral research project will investigate the construction of British film stars in the British film industry. It will ask how these stars embody elements of British identity as promoted in the UK and globally. Applications are invited for this full or part-time doctoral research project, to be supervised by Dr Lucy Bolton (Reader in Film Studies QMUL) and Dr Claire Smith (BFI).

Project Summary

The aims of the project are to discover, through close interrogation of the BFI National Archive’s Special Collections, how the film industry in Britain worked to turn actors into stars and to export them as emblems of Britishness onto international screens. The project’s objectives are to reveal the stories, objects, and players behind these industrial processes, thereby revealing a more diverse picture of the British film industry than prevailing accounts.

The CDP will investigate and analyse how British Film stardom has been created, marketed, exported and exhibited across the period 1920 – 1970. The research will focus on photographic portraiture and personality files within the BFI National Archive, with access to 600 named written archives; 35,000 press campaign books; 20,000 posters; as well as further collections of lobby cards, film fan magazines and trade magazines, moving image archives and key data sets. These items offer unparalleled access to the manufacture and marketing of the British film star, demonstrating the range of artists, photographers and other professionals involved in this process. Combined with the painted, drawn and photographic collections of the National Portrait Gallery, the CDP will enable a broad and in-depth understanding of industrial film stardom in Britain.

Project Overview

The student will be expected to spend at least six months of their CDP at the BFI National Archive in Berkhamsted, with regular visits to the Heinz Archive and Library, London. Through primary research and support from the BFI supervisor, they will be asked to identify actors and performances originating from the Stars of the British Screen exhibition (1985 – 86) of particular relevance to their study. Produced in collaboration with British Film Year, this major touring exhibition embraced the formal portraiture and biographical strands of the National Portrait Gallery’s collection, as well as BFI photography derived from publicity, trade and industrial production. The CDP will use this exhibition as an early stage framework to tease out key actors, performances and visual strategies relating to the key research questions. Subsequent time at the BFI will be used to deep dive into the collections...
to question how ideologies of class, race and sexuality play into the operation of British film stardom; for example, the polarised images of the working-class hero of the British New Wave, and the upper-class heroines of the heritage genre. A core remit is to challenge prejudices about British cinema; to ask if and how they have been supported by industry and heritage-based practices; and to enable new identities and personalities to come to the fore, increasing accessibility to and understanding of British film stardom.

The CDP will contribute to a programme of events which will further public understanding of British identity as promoted by films and the film industry. The CDP will be embedded within the public programme at the BFI. This might include opportunities for public, cross-collection lectures at both institutions and a symposium or conference at QMUL. There will be professional training opportunities in archival and curatorial practice.

The CDP will offer a unique opportunity to interrogate the cultural and social drivers that have created past British film stars, and to cross-examine these performances from screen to archive. It is expected that it will actively shape and inform academic and curatorial approaches to 21st century stardom.

Research Questions

This project will address 4 key research questions:

1) how were British film stars created, promoted and exported between 1920 and 1970 (the student and supervisors will liaise to shape the selection criteria for the time period or stars to be considered in the thesis);
2) what are the specific processes by which an actor in Britain became considered to be a star of national and international cinema?
3) what ideologies about British identity are mobilised in the creation and perpetuation of film stardom?
4) what is the role of heritage organisations, in historical and contemporary contexts, in bolstering or challenging ideologies of film stardom?

Within these questions, the student will be expected to refine and formulate more detailed research questions as part of their development of their doctoral research.

Details of award

This CDP doctoral training grant will fund a full-time studentship for 45 months (3.75 years) or part-time equivalent. The studentship has the possibility of being extended for an additional 3 months to provide professional development opportunities, or up to 3 months of funding may be used to pay for the costs the student might incur in taking up professional development opportunities.

The award pays tuition fees up to the value of the full-time home/EU UKRI rate for PhD degrees. Research Councils UK Indicative Fee Level for 2020/21 is £4,407.

The award pays full maintenance for UK citizens and residents only. The National Minimum Doctoral Stipend for 2020/21 is £15,285, plus additional stipend payment of £600 for collaborative doctoral students, plus £2,000 London weighting, making a total of £17,885.
Further details can be found on the UKRI website [https://www.ukri.org/skills/funding-for-research-training/](https://www.ukri.org/skills/funding-for-research-training/).

The student is eligible to receive up to £850 p.a. for the first three years towards expenses incurred at the BFI.

The student will also be able to claim back research-related expenses as a PGR student of QMUL.

The project can be undertaken on a full-time or a part-time basis.

**Studentship information and entry requirements**

This studentship is open to UK/EU students who meet the residency requirements set out in the UKRI Conditions of Research Council Training Grants:

[https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/grant-terms-and-conditions/](https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/grant-terms-and-conditions/)

We want to encourage the widest range of potential students to study for this CDP studentship and are committed to welcoming students from different backgrounds to apply.

Applicants should ideally have or expect to receive a relevant Master’s-level qualification, or be able to demonstrate equivalent experience in a professional setting. Suitable disciplines include Film Studies, Media Studies, Cultural Studies, Art History or History.

Students who hold Master’s level qualifications from outside the UK must send copies of their diplomas, copies of their transcripts (with a certified translation into English of their transcript if it is not in English) to sllf-pg@qmul.ac.uk.

Applicants will normally have a track record of high academic achievement, relevant to this research proposal, demonstrated by a first class or high upper second undergraduate Honours degree and/or a Master’s Degree (or equivalent) and supported by two references (either two academic references, or one may be work-based if relevant to the Heritage/Archives/Library/Museum sector). The ability to work independently with the support of a supervisory team, and the enthusiasm to contribute to a vibrant and stimulating research environment are essential.

Applicants must be able to demonstrate an interest in film and their related archives, and the potential and enthusiasm for developing skills more widely in related areas. As a collaborative award, the student will be expected to spend time at both QMUL and the BFI National Archive in Berkhamsted.

The successful candidate will be eligible to participate in CDP Cohort Development events ([https://www.ahrc-cdp.org/category/upcoming-training-opportunities/](https://www.ahrc-cdp.org/category/upcoming-training-opportunities/)), and will be expected to take part in PGR events at QMUL.

All new CDP students will be expected to attend the CDP Student Launch Event currently scheduled for Monday 21 September 2020 at the British Museum and to attend the induction for new PGR students at QMUL.

**Application process**

Students should apply to QMUL using the application process to be found here:
Each application should include: a completed application form; proof of English language ability for overseas applicants from non-English speaking countries; Curriculum Vitae (CV); a one-side A4 statement of purpose; and two references. Instead of the usual research proposal, applicants are invited to supply a 1,000-2,000-word response to the project outline, indicating why you are interested in the topic and what you will be able to bring to project.

Please indicate on your application form that you are applying for this REACH Consortium studentship.

Closing date for applications is **1 June 2020**. All short-listed applicants will be interviewed shortly after the closing date (using appropriate online methods such as Skype or Zoom).

The studentship is scheduled to begin on **1 October 2020**

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the start date may be treated flexibly in line with UKRI guidelines.

Please address any enquiries about the project or the studentship to:

Lucy Bolton (l.c.bolton@qmul.ac.uk) and Claire Smith (claire.smith@bfi.org.uk)

Interested candidates are strongly encouraged to get in touch prior to submission to discuss their application.

For more information about the application process, please contact: slf-pg@qmul.ac.uk