

Exploring opportunities for developing and broadening inclusion in Unilever archives.

Project details

The Unilever Art, Archives and Records Management (UARM) team look after one of the most important collections of business records in the world. The collections contain original documents, printed sources, images, films, minute books, financial records, advertising and packaging, architectural plans and maps of current and former Unilever sites. Well-known brands, such as Colman's, Wall's, Lipton, Persil, Pears Soap, Lux, PG Tips and Marmite, all feature in its collections. The collections have been recognised as being of international significance through the award of 'Designated Status' by the Arts Council England for both the Unilever and United Africa Company collections.

Unilever are working to create a fairer, more socially inclusive world – in the business, through their brands and in wider society. Unilever have set clear goals to eliminate any bias and discrimination in their policies, accelerate diverse representation in their leadership, and remove barriers for people with disabilities. UARM is keen to mobilise this rich resource to help meet Unilever's objective of being a beacon for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) and values-based leadership. UARM are part of the of the Global Marketing team which is led by Unilever's Chief Equity, Diversity and Inclusion officer so this PhD project will both support the company aims and reach the right part of the organisation to make positive change.

UARM/University of Essex research shows that archival records relating to marginalised histories are not catalogued in searchable or appropriate ways and so are not available for use. The PhD student will work with the supervisory team to identify a community/communities under/mis-represented and marginalised in the collections with whom they would like to work. The collections are most likely to be able to support research relating to people of colour, LGBTQ+ and/or disabled people.

The project will involve reviewing the existing archival holdings relating to the chosen ED&I focus from a critical perspective, looking for current descriptive practices as well as gaps and silences. We anticipate that the staff magazines, oral histories (the 'Talking Lives' collection) and photographs will prove most useful. This work, alongside wider theoretical, methodological and practice-based research on questions of power, inclusion and exclusion in archives would provide the basis for the next phase of the project, focused on collaboration.

In this phase, the student would design and run a series of activities (such as focus groups, workshops and citizen science-style ‘Archivathons’) in conjunction with existing staff networks and volunteers who have experience advocating for their communities, targeting groups local to Unilever’s Archives in Port Sunlight and London Head Office. Wider public engagement is also an option. These activities would identify issues of access and description and develop and then implement new, inclusive subject tags.

A final evaluation and dissemination phase will allow the student not only to develop their original contributions to knowledge but also to share their findings and the results of their work with senior staff with ED&I responsibility and within the archive sector.

The supervisory team see the knowledge exchange benefits of the PhD as the following:

- The project aims to set an example within industry for methods of co-producing descriptive tags and terminology for archival records; the PhD student will develop potentially sector-leading expertise in collaborative, community-based ED&I work in archives
- The student will be able to address gaps in professional literature and practice through publications and presentations
- The emerging relationship between UARM and global ED&I teams within Unilever will be strengthened, showing the value of collaborative research projects to the parent company
- The student will produce accessible, representative terminology to describe and tag records relating to (for example) race and ethnicity, disability or LGBTQ+ lives
- Internal and external participants will be actively involved in shaping how their communities are described in Unilever’s archives and will gain greater understanding of and experience with archival processes, introducing under-represented groups to archives work, a field with longstanding issues with lack of diversity
- By foregrounding community-chosen language, searchability and accessibility will be expanded and harm reduced for future affected researchers.

What we offer:

Type of award	Funding available
Full-funding award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home or Overseas tuition fee waiver. • Living costs stipend at the UK Research and Innovation recommended level per year. The amount is yet to be confirmed for 2023-24, but to give an indication, the 2022-23 rate was £17,668

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• £2,500 (in total) in the University of Essex Proficio funding, which may be used to ‘buy’ advanced skills training, including conferences and travel. |
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The UARM team is well-established and will offer the PhD student opportunities for training, shadowing, advice and support throughout their studies, tailored to their chosen project and to future career interests.

The supervisory team is well-connected into archives networks and will support and encourage the student to share findings, access training opportunities and conferences and make professional connections, including through the Business Archives Council and the Archives and Records Association.

The design of the project, with a central phase of collaboration and co-design of activities will give the student invaluable community engagement and project management experience. By evaluating these activities in the final phase, the student will also have evidence of the impact of their work beyond the thesis.

We would particularly welcome applications from the applicants with any of the protected characteristics under the [Equality Act 2010](#) or those who may find themselves in the position of underrepresentation and vulnerability, e.g. refugees, with relevant permissions to study in the UK.

How to apply:

This is a single application for the Phd and scholarship. You will need to apply for “PhD History” specifying the project “**Exploring opportunities for developing and broadening inclusion in Unilever archives**” and to submit the required documentation. Our online application process is quick and straightforward, and the following pages give you all the details: [PhD application information | University of Essex](#)

When you apply, you’ll be asked to state your “Proposed research topic or area of research”, and should state “Unilever Art, Archives and Records Management Studentship”.

You do not also need to submit a research proposal, but you should also provide a personal statement (max 1000 words) which explains your motivation and aptitude for applying for the studentship. In preparing your personal statement, please ensure you include a clear narrative identifying the mis / under-represented / marginalised community/ies, or the particular intersectional identities, you wish to focus on.

You can learn about postgraduate research at the University of Essex more generally here:

<https://www.essex.ac.uk/postgraduate/research>.

You should apply for a place to study as soon as possible, and at the latest by **Friday 26th May at midnight GMT.**