

Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Sri Lankan History

Faculty of History

Closing date: 15 June 2025 - 12.00am (BST)

Job Reference: JJ46063



Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Sri Lankan History

*Salary:

Grade 5 £32,546-£35,116

Grade 7 £37,174-£45,413

Contract:

Fixed Term (3 years)

Location:

Cambridge

Faculty:

History

Responsible to:

Professor Sujit Sivasundaram

Working Pattern:

Full Time

The University of Cambridge has a Hybrid Working Policy that aims to enable as many staff as possible to work in a hybrid way if they so wish, whilst recognising that some roles will include tasks that can only be performed on University premises.

Purpose of the role

The UKRI-funded 5-year project, 'Colombo: Layered Histories in the Global South City', which was selected for funding by the European Research Council under its 'HORIZON' programme, is recruiting to its second postdoctoral fellowship.

This is a full-time post for three years, commencing 1 October 2025 or as soon as possible thereafter. The prospective early career scholar will focus their attention within the broad field of 'Modern History of Colombo after c. 1850.'

Colombo has a deeply layered imperial past. It came under a succession of European empires, Portuguese (first trading post in 1518), Dutch (1656-1796) and British (1796-1948). It was also pivotal to the early globalisation of Islam and has housed a series of diasporic and minority communities. This project interrogates how invaders and residents made a city in an unstable environment at the centre of the Indian Ocean, in which arose a diverse society, generating an abundance of cultural production and a sequence of violent politics.

The four pathways of research are as follows:

1) In *environmental terms*, this multiply- colonised and repeatedly-engineered city is built in a wetland without a significant natural harbour;

2) In *social terms*, in a heavily nationalised state, the city has resisted indigeneity, as it is inhabited by many minority communities with long narrations of origin;

3) As for *culture*, Colombo was represented in keeping with recurrent motifs, as a site of transit across the Indian Ocean, including for enslaved and indentured labour as well as settlers;

4) And on *politics*, the heavy work needed, at the bridge of sea and land, set one context for the rise of urban politics between and across communities, including sustained strikes and new political movements.

At its broadest perspective, the project aims to develop resources with which to consider the pasts, presents and futures of this global South city as located within the remit of other global South cities elsewhere.



Key responsibilities

- Undertake innovative research in archives and other repositories into the modern history of Colombo, utilising Sri Lankan languages.
 - With the supervision of the PI (Professor Sujit Sivasundaram), write research articles where appropriate from their own work and move towards publishing a monograph at the completion of their postdoctoral fellowship.
 - Work with the PI to identify key sources for digital humanities research and to design and manage the public platform for the project as required.
 - Work closely and collaboratively with other team members, including doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows; and further afield, academics, public intellectuals and others who engage with this programme of work in Sri Lankan institutions.
 - Fully participate in workshops and conferences connected to the project by presenting papers and assisting with arrangements; attend other conferences, held by other associations and groups, when possible.
 - Work with artists, curators and others to undertake inter-disciplinary research and writing with a view to presenting critical narratives to public and scholarly audiences.
- Engage with tasks connected to the dissemination activities of the project.
 - Attend team meetings and other project events and be able to provide feedback and commentary while also taking on the feedback of others, including the international advisory board connected to the project.
 - Follow the full ethical guidelines for research as also the data management plan for this project.

Please note:

This position will involve some international travel to conduct research/attend meetings/work with collaborators in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. Some evening or weekend work may be required in order to run or attend project-related events.

*Appointment at Research Associate level (Grade 7) is dependent on having a PhD. Those who have submitted but not yet received their PhD will be appointed at Research Assistant level (Grade 5), which will be amended to Research Associate once the PhD has been awarded.

Person Specification

| Criteria | Essential | Desirable |
|---|-----------|-----------|
| Education | | |
| Educated to degree level, normally with a PhD (or close to being awarded a PhD) in a relevant discipline, e.g. Modern History of Asia/Modern World History, | ✓ | |
| Educated to PhD level, with established expertise in South Asian/Southeast Asian/Sri Lankan history | | ✓ |
| | | |
| Specialist knowledge & skills | | |
| Fluency with the use of research materials in English | ✓ | |
| Fluency with the use of research materials in Sinhala and/or Tamil | ✓ | |
| Experience of work in archives and collections in Sri Lanka | | ✓ |
| An excellent project proposal that aligns with the objectives of the project 'The Modern History of Colombo'. | ✓ | |
| Evidence of the ability to publish high quality research | ✓ | |
| Proven ability to conduct a research project, producing clear deliverables and adhering to timelines. | ✓ | |
| Experienced user of Microsoft office; and ability to learn how to use other software tools, if the Project requires. | ✓ | |
| Excellent attention to detail. | ✓ | |
| | | |
| Interpersonal & communication skills: | | |
| Ability and willingness to work collaboratively | ✓ | |
| Ability and willingness to engage in digital humanities research and public -facing work | ✓ | |
| Experience of working in an inter-disciplinary capacity | | ✓ |
| Ability to communicate research effectively to both public and scholarly audiences | | ✓ |
| | | |



The Faculty of History

The History Faculty's 100 academic staff (teaching officers employed by either the University or the Colleges) constitute one of the largest and best history departments in the world. Times Higher Education ranked Cambridge History third in the world and first in the UK in the Times Educational Supplement World University Rankings 2021 – measures of both quality and depth. The Faculty was ranked first in subject in the Guardian 2020 guide and the Complete University Guide 2021. In the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF) the Faculty submitted the work of 135 historians. In terms of 'research power' (GPA x FTE), it ranked second in the sector. 46% of the Faculty's research was judged 4* ('world leading') and 34% as 3* ('internationally excellent'). Some 600 undergraduates study a single Honours degree in History or joint Honours degrees in either History & Politics or History & Modern Languages.

In October 2022, the Faculty launched a new first and second-year undergraduate

programme (Parts Ia and Ib of the History Tripos), which represents a significant modernisation of our curriculum and an opportunity to innovate and diversify in terms of content.

Over 100 MPhil students each year take one of the Faculty's eight MPhil programmes, and there are around 300 PhD students.

James Stirling's History Faculty Building (1968) is 'listed' as architecturally significant. The Stirling building will soon be vacated to allow for a full refurbishment. The Seeley Library (which houses 100,000 volumes) has temporarily moved into a dedicated and newly designed space in the West Room within the University Library until building work is completed.

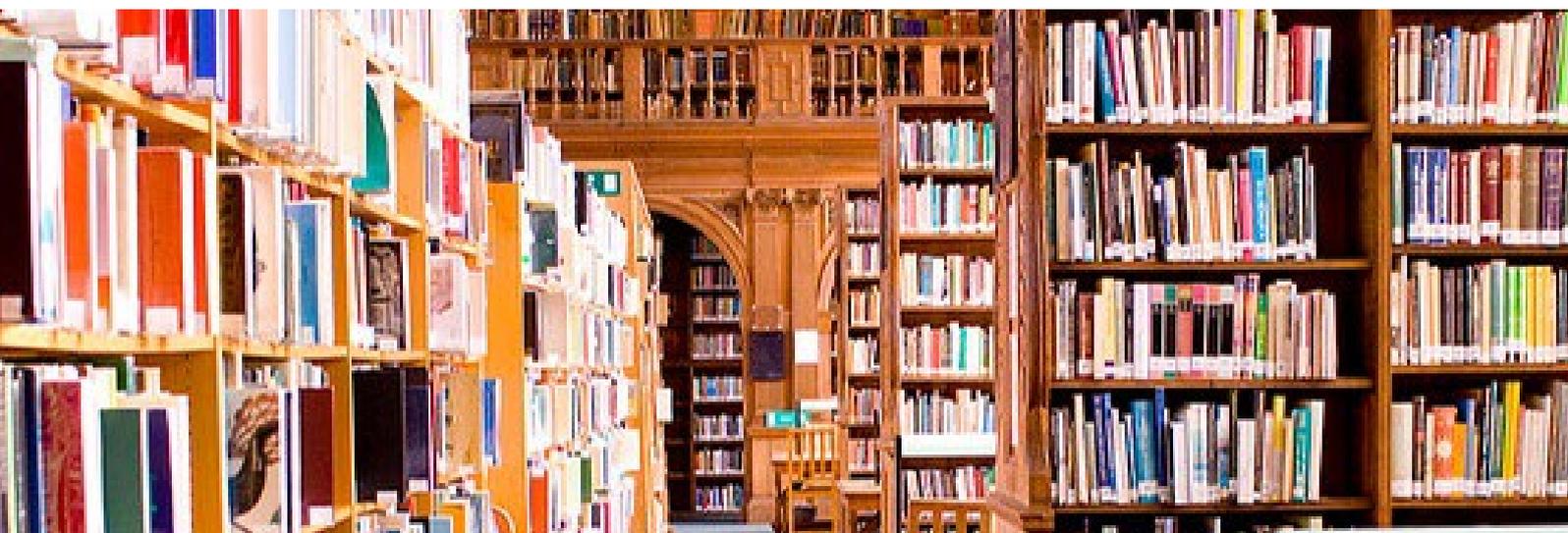
The Faculty has more than thirty specialist research seminars and is divided into eight Subject Groups: American; Ancient and Medieval; Economic and Social; Early Modern; Modern British and Irish; Modern European; Political Thought and Intellectual History; and World. All staff members belong to one or more Subject Groups.

The School of Humanities and Social Sciences

The School of Humanities and Social Sciences is, in terms of student numbers, the largest of the six Schools in the University and is currently comprised of:

- Faculty of History
- Faculty of Economics
- Faculty of Education
- Faculty of Law
- Faculty of Human, Social and Political Science, which is made up of:
 - Department of Archaeology including the McDonald Institute or Archaeological Research
 - Department of Social Anthropology including the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and the Mongolian and Inner Asia Studies Unit –
 - Department of Sociology
 - Department of Politics and International Studies, incorporating:
 - Centre of African Studies
 - Centre of Development Studies
 - Centre of Latin American Studies
 - Centre of South Asian Studies
 - Centre for Gender Studies
- Faculty of Law, including the Institute of Criminology and the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law
- Department of History and Philosophy of Science, including the Whipple Museum of the History of Science
- Department of Land Economy

The School covers a wide range of disciplines with differing methodologies, from highly quantitative analysis of 'big data' to ethnography and the analysis of the material culture and thought of past societies. The geographical range is equally broad, with Centres of African, Latin American and South Asian Studies, and specialists within each Department or Faculty. Each institution has its own research profile. The School is participating in university-wide Strategic Research Initiatives such as public health, global food security, energy and conservation which bring the insights of social sciences to bear on some of the major issues facing the world today.



Terms of Appointment

Tenure and probation

Appointments will be made on a fixed-term basis for a period of 3 Years. Appointments will be subject to satisfactory completion of a six-month probationary period.

Hours of Work and Working Pattern

Although the hours of work for the position are 37 hours per week, working Monday – Friday, we welcome applications from individuals who wish to be considered for part-time working or other flexible working arrangements.

Pension

You will automatically be enrolled to become a member of USS (Universities Superannuation Scheme) – a hybrid pension scheme. For further information please visit: www.pensions.admin.cam.ac.uk/.

Annual leave

Full time employees are entitled to annual paid leave of 41 days inclusive of public holidays. For new part-time employees, annual leave will be pro rata'd based on days worked.

General information

Pre-employment checks

Right to work in the UK

We have a legal responsibility to ensure that you have the right to

work in the UK before you can start working for us.

If you do not have the right to work in the UK already, any offer of employment we make to you will be conditional upon you gaining it.

Health declaration: Once an offer of employment has been made the successful candidate will be required to complete a work health declaration form.

Qualifications: The person specification for this position lists qualifications that are essential and/or desirable. Please note that if you are offered the post you will be asked to provide your relevant original certificates of these qualifications.

References: Offers of appointment will be subject to the receipt of satisfactory references.

Information if you have a disability: The University welcomes applications from individuals with disabilities. We are committed to ensuring fair treatment throughout the recruitment process. We will make adjustments to enable applicants to compete to the best of their ability wherever it is reasonable to do so and, if successful, to assist them during their employment.

Information for disabled applicants is available at <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/staff/disabled/>

We encourage you to declare any disability that you may have, and any reasonable adjustments that you may require, in the section provided for this purpose in the application form. This will enable us to accommodate your needs throughout the process as required. However, applicants and employees may declare a disability at any time.

If you prefer to discuss any special arrangements connected with a disability, please contact, the Department Administrator, who is responsible for recruitment to this position. Alternatively, you may contact the HR Business Manager responsible for the department you are applying to via hrenquiries@admin.cam.ac.uk.

The University

The University of Cambridge is consistently ranked one of the best universities in the world, achieving academic excellence through its Faculties, Departments and other Institutions, together with the 31 Colleges.

The University is renowned for its record of discovery and innovation. It is one of the great institutions, with a regional, national and global reach, attracting the very best and brightest minds. Our staff and students shape the world around us for the better: we attract and partner with like-minded people.

Whether contributing to the development of new anti-cancer drugs, adding to the understanding of how black holes are formed, revolutionising the study of ancient settlements, convening academic expertise to offer solutions to the climate crisis, or analysing public attitudes towards democracy around the world, the University's research is remarkable in its breadth, quality and impact. The University also sits at the heart of Europe's largest technology cluster and has catalysed more than 1,500 high-tech companies. And yet what inspires our 24,000 students and 13,000 staff is not what has already been achieved, but what is possible in the future.

The education and experience of our students, based on a partnership between the University's academic Departments and Faculties and the 31 Colleges, is second to none. Every student is a member of one of the Colleges, each a community of students, academics and staff drawn from across the University's comprehensive range of subject areas.



The University is a self-governing community, with a system for decision-making that provides a high degree of accountability and transparency to its members. Each Department and Faculty is part of one of six academic Schools, but each of them, and each individual academic, has a great deal of autonomy. The Colleges are independent and self-governing, working in a symbiotic relationship with the University.

The University has a number of Institutions that are independent of any Faculty or Department and are not part of the academic Schools. These include the Institute of Continuing Education (which provides high-quality education to adults throughout their lives), the Fitzwilliam Museum, Kettle's Yard (an historic house and gallery that holds important collections of modern art) and the University Library. In addition to their diverse contributions to University and public life, these non-School Institutions are also important centres of teaching and research.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment provides academic publishing, examinations and learning materials worldwide, supporting the dissemination of research, academic development at school and in higher education, and international student mobility. Legally, the Press & Assessment is a department of the University. It provides very important funds to invest in the academic purposes of the University.

The University has made truly remarkable contributions to the sum of human understanding, with breakthrough ideas and discoveries that have changed the way we understand ourselves, our planet, and the universe around us. Yet the global and national contexts in which it operates are fast-changing and increasingly filled with uncertainty. In a world that is becoming politically, economically, socially, and technologically ever more interconnected but even less equal, the University's mission – “to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence” – has never been more relevant.



About Us

The University is one of the world's leading academic centres. It comprises 150 faculties and departments, together with a central administration and other institutions. Our institutions, museums and collections are a world-class resource for researchers, students and members of the public representing one of the country's highest concentrations of internationally important collections.

The University has an annual income of £2 billion. Research income, won competitively from the UK Research Councils, the European Union (EU), major charities and industry, exceeds £500 million per annum and continues to grow.

The Colleges and the University remain committed to admitting the best students regardless of their background and to investing considerable resources both in widening access and financial support. The 31 Colleges are self-governing, separate legal entities which appoint their own staff. Many academic staff are invited to join a College as a Teaching Fellow, which provides a further social and intellectual dimension. The Colleges admit undergraduate students, provide student accommodation and pastoral support and deliver small group teaching for undergraduates.

The University awards degrees and its faculties and departments provide lectures and seminars for students and determine the syllabi for teaching.

Our instinct for seeking out excellence and setting up enduring and mutually beneficial collaborations has led us to establish strategic partnerships across the globe. Whether it is the successful Cambridge-Africa Programme involving universities in Ghana, Uganda and elsewhere on the African continent; or the close association with the government of India to pursue new research in crop science; or the creation, with Germany's Max Planck Institutes, of a Cambridge-based centre for the study of ethics, human economy and social change – international partnerships are now an inextricable part of the University's make-up.

“Through its outstanding education, research and innovation, the University of Cambridge has made – and continues to make – a lasting contribution to human knowledge and is flourishing. By working at the University of Cambridge, you will be joining a vibrant community of students, scholars and professional services staff committed to supporting and enhancing the University's mission to contribute to society.”

*Professor Deborah Prentice,
Vice Chancellor 2023*



Working at the University

Working at Cambridge you will join a diverse, talented and innovative community, with more than 24,000 students and over 13,000 staff from all walks of life and corners of the world.

The University continually explores strategies to attract and retain the best people. It is committed to supporting its staff to achieve their best. We are a fair, diverse and inclusive society and we believe our staff are our greatest asset. There is strong commitment to developing institutional leadership and supporting and encouraging staff development at all levels.

The University offers a variety of roles including academic, research, professional, managerial and support roles. We also offer extensive benefits and excellent learning opportunities within a stimulating working environment.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The University has built its excellence on the diversity of its staff and student community. We aim to be a leader in fostering equality and inclusion, and in promoting respect and a sense of belonging for all. We encourage applications from all sections of society. All appointments are made on the basis of merit. We have an Equal Opportunities Policy, along with a range of diversity groups, including the Women's Staff Network, Race Equality Network and LGBT+ Staff Network. More details are available here:

<http://www.equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/>

The University's estate is undergoing the most significant transformation in its history. Cambridge has been able to create a science and technology campus to the west of the city centre, and is expanding further to the north west of Cambridge including investing in affordable homes for University key workers and community facilities. Even with their continued development, the University remains within walking or cycling distance across the campus. The University is a major partner on the Cambridge Biomedical Campus and continues to redevelop its historic city centre sites demonstrating a clear determination to ensure that we can offer the best facilities and opportunities for our staff and students.



The University has a bronze Race Equality Charter award, with a framework for improving the representation, progression and success of minority ethnic staff and students within higher education. Furthermore, the University's silver Athena swan award recognises and celebrates good practice in recruiting, retaining and promoting gender equality.

Living in Cambridge

Cambridge is rich in cultural diversity. From beautiful University and College buildings, museums and art galleries, quaint gardens and punts on the River Cam, to a vibrant restaurant and café scene, our employees are surrounded by the wonderful features of this unique city.

You can find a wide range of high street shops and 3 shopping centres, with independent alternatives at the historic market and nestled within the passageways in the city centre. You will find a cinema, bowling alley, a nightclub and various live performances at the Cambridge Leisure Park, with further entertainment options at the Corn Exchange, Arts Theatre and the ADC Theatre. Further information can be found on the Visit Cambridge website.

If you prefer the faster pace of life, London is a 45-minute train journey away. For those travelling from overseas, Stansted Airport is just 45 minutes away and Heathrow Airport under 2 hours away. The University is a short distance from a host of other attractions such as Ely Cathedral, Newmarket Races and various wildlife parks and stately homes. Cambridge is also within easy reach of the beautiful Broads and coastlines of Norfolk and Suffolk.

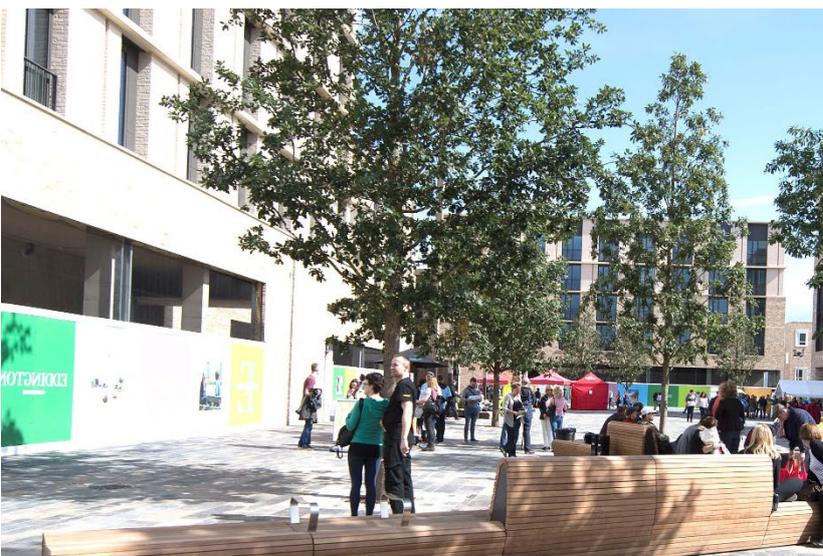
Relocation Support

The University recognises the importance of helping individuals to move and settle into a new area. We provide support and guidance to those relocating internationally or domestically to take up a post at the University of Cambridge, liaising with other University offices and selected partners to ensure comprehensive relocation support is available. This includes: accommodation, childcare, schools, banking, immigration and transport. If you would like further information, please visit <https://www.accommodation.cam.ac.uk/RelocationService/>. The Shared Equity Scheme and the Reimbursement of Relocation Expenses Scheme provide financial assistance to qualifying new members of

Accommodation Service

The University Accommodation Service helps staff, students and visiting scholars who are affiliated to the University in their search for suitable accommodation in Cambridge. The dedicated accommodation team can provide access to a wide range of University-owned furnished and unfurnished properties, and has a database of private sector accommodation available for short and long-term lets. For further information and to register with this free service please visit:

<https://www.accommodation.cam.ac.uk/>



What Cambridge can offer

We offer a comprehensive reward package to attract, motivate and retain high performing staff at all levels and in all areas of work.

The University offers a wide range of competitive benefits, from family leave entitlement, to shopping and travel discount schemes. Our generous annual leave package contributes to the positive wellbeing of our University employees. Sabbatical leave enables academics to focus on research and scholarship, whilst still maintaining their full salary. The University also has a [career break scheme](#) for academic and academic-related staff, with additional flexible working policies for all other staff.

Pay and benefits

The University salary structure includes automatic service-related pay progression in many of its grades and an annual cost of living increase. In addition to this, employees are rewarded for outstanding contribution through a number of regular pay progression schemes. The University offers attractive pensions schemes for employees, with an additional benefit of a salary exchange arrangement providing tax and national insurance savings.



CAMbens employee benefits

The University offers employees a wide range of competitive benefits, known as CAMbens. CAMbens offers something for everyone across a range of categories, including:

- Financial Benefits, including shopping discounts (both local and national) and a Payroll Giving scheme;
- Relocation and Accommodation Benefits, including relocation assistance and interest-free Rental Deposit Loans;
- Travel Benefits, including Cycle to Work, discounts on train season tickets and interest-free Travel to Work loans;
- Family Friendly and Lifestyle Benefits, including support with childcare and family friendly policies;
- Health and Wellbeing Benefits, including a University Staff Counselling Service, discounts at the University Sports Centre, and other local gyms, and healthcare schemes.



What Cambridge can offer

Family-friendly policies

The University recognises the importance of supporting its staff. We have a range of family-friendly policies to aid employees' work-life balance including a generous maternity, adoption and shared parental leave entitlement of 26 weeks' full pay, and paid emergency leave for parents and carers.

Other family-friendly support includes:

Our highly regarded workplace nurseries, a childcare salary exchange scheme and a high-quality holiday Playscheme are available to help support University employees with caring responsibilities (subject to demand and qualifying criteria). Further childcare information can be found here:

<https://www.childcare.admin.cam.ac.uk/>

The Newcomers and Visiting Scholars Group (<https://www.nvs.admin.cam.ac.uk/>) is an organisation within the University that welcomes the partners and families of visiting scholars and new members of the University. Run by volunteers, the group offers opportunities to visit interesting Cambridge venues, learn about the community, take part in social events and gain local knowledge while developing a strong support network of both residents and other newcomers.

Your wellbeing

The University's Sport Centre, Counselling Services and Occupational Health are just some of the support services available to University employees to promote their physical and mental wellbeing. The University delivers The Festival of Wellbeing annually, which is a programme of stimulating talks and activities, which aim to promote wellbeing and good mental and physical health. The University also hosts the [Cambridge Festival](#), which is a great opportunity to get your first taste of public engagement, through volunteering, supporting hands-on activities or proposing a talk.

Development opportunities

We support new employees to settle in through various activities as well as supporting their professional and career development on an ongoing basis. Our Personal and Professional Development (PPD) team provide development opportunities for all University employees, including face-to-face sessions, online learning modules and webinars. All employees also have unlimited access to LinkedIn Learning to support their development. Both new and existing employees can undertake funded Apprenticeships, which lead to a range of vocational and professional qualifications. We offer reduced staff fees for University of Cambridge graduate courses and the opportunity to attend lectures and seminars held by University departments and institutions. A range of University training providers also offer specialist learning and development in their own areas e.g. teaching and learning, digital literacy, finance, health and wellbeing, safety.



How to apply

Applications should be submitted online via the University of Cambridge jobs page www.jobs.cam.ac.uk by clicking “Apply online” in the job advert. You will need an email address to register for our online system.

Conversations about flexible working are encouraged at the University of Cambridge. Please feel free to discuss flexibility prior to applying (using the contact information below) or at interview if your application is successful.

Please ensure you add the following documents:

- A statement of interest of 500 words;
- A CV, including details of two academic referees;
- Two samples of written work up to 20,000 words either in print or in MS;
- A research proposal of up to 1000 words on Modern History of Colombo.

As part of the application process, you are asked to supply the names of two academic referees. Please note that (if you consent) we will contact your referees in advance after shortlisting but prior to interviews.

Applicants seeking further information are invited to contact Professor Sujit Sivasundaram: sps20@cam.ac.uk

If you have any queries regarding the application process please contact hr@hist.cam.ac.uk

Closing Date for applications: 15 June 12.00am (BST)

