

PLAY THE CAMPUS

Open Call
for Artists

Introduction

UP Projects have been appointed to commission three new public artworks for the North East Quadrant (NEQ) development at the University of Southampton's Highfield campus. UP Projects in partnership with John Hansard Gallery are seeking expressions of interest from artists who wish to be considered for one of these commissions currently titled *Play the Campus*.

All three commissions will respond to the themes laid out in *The Welcoming Campus: Art People and Nature in Dialogues* - the public art strategy for NEQ also developed by UP Projects. It is envisaged that the public art offer for the NEQ will activate the designs for the public realm and support the University's broader ambitions to create a welcoming, inclusive and sustainable place for students, staff and neighbouring communities to enjoy.

This document outlines how interested artists can put themselves forward for consideration to develop *Play the Campus*, a commission that seeks to embed a series of playful interventions across the NEQ that will inspire connections, reflect diversity and support both mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Read on to find out how to apply to be considered for this new commissioning opportunity.



About University of Southampton

NEQ Campus

Highfield Campus serves as the principal hub for the University of Southampton, situated approximately three miles north of the city centre, near Southampton Common. The campus was officially inaugurated in 1914 but was repurposed as a military hospital during World War I. It reopened in 1919, initially comprising an arts building, shared lecture rooms, and science laboratories.

Significant expansion occurred in the 1960's under architect Sir Basil Spence, who developed a masterplan that introduced modernist architecture and landscaped social spaces. Public art has been a key feature of campus life for many years. Notable sculptures include Puy de Dôme by F.E. McWilliam, a reclining figure inspired by the volcanic region in France, and two standing forms by Barbara Hepworth, positioned to engage in visual dialogue across a stream.

Currently, the campus is undergoing a major transformation with the NEQ development. This £180 million project aims to enhance the student experience by integrating state-of-the-art teaching and learning facilities with social spaces. Situated at the corner of Burgess Road and Broadlands Road, the NEQ will feature a five-storey, 15,000 sqm teaching and learning building designed by Sheppard Robson Architects. The facility will include large lecture theatres, flexible teaching spaces, seminar rooms, computer labs, and independent study areas. A central atrium will connect three interconnected blocks, fostering collaboration and social interaction. The building will also house a student hub offering pastoral and wellbeing support, a café, changing facilities, and a nursing room.

The surrounding landscape will enhance biodiversity and provide outdoor spaces for study and relaxation. Improved pedestrian and cycle routes, along with a mobility hub supporting shared transport options, will promote sustainable travel to and from the campus.

The key aims for the new NEQ are to create:

- Generous and welcoming public green spaces that increase biodiversity.
- A sense of arrival onto the Highfield Campus.
- A great place for staff, students and the public to work, meet and be.
- Well-designed spaces and places to enhance a greater sense of wellbeing.

About UP Projects

UP Projects is the UK's leading public art organisation specialising in socially engaged public art commissioning. We bring world class artists out of the gallery and into public spaces to create new work with communities across the UK and beyond. Our work is always responsive to context often activating unexpected corners of the public realm. Our 20 years' experience champions a bold yet sensitive approach that values time and takes care to bring about social change.

UP Projects is working in partnership with the University of Southampton's John Hansard Gallery, Turner Sims, and Public Engagement with Research Unit to develop and deliver the NEQ public art strategy.



Our House is Custom House by Jessie Brennan, 2019
Image courtesy Alastair Fyfe



Newham Trackside Wall by Sonia Boyce, 2021. Image courtesy Benedict Johnson

The Welcoming Campus: Art, People and Nature in Dialogue

Led by UP Projects, the NEQ public art strategy, draws inspiration from the pioneering vision of Highfield Campus architect, Basil Spence. Building on Spence's legacy, *The Welcoming Campus: Art, People and Nature in Dialogue*, reimagines public art as a connective, community-driven, and ecologically responsive force.

Public art is envisaged to be developed through meaningful engagement with University communities, local partners, and the wider city, encouraging shared ownership and the exchange of knowledge. As the NEQ evolves, it is hoped that public art will serve as a unifying thread between the campus's green and blue spaces, reflecting both Spence's vision and the University's ongoing commitment to high-quality design, public art, and sustainability.

The public art strategy outlines four key principles and three overarching themes that guide how public art should evolve at NEQ - these are outlined below.

Public Art Principles:

- 1. Connecting Communities:** The new commissions will encourage collaboration and dialogue between the campus, local partners, and the wider city.
- 2. Reflecting Diversity:** The new commissions should be accessible, engaging, and inclusive; and enable people from all backgrounds to see themselves reflected in the public realm.
- 3. Responding to Nature:** The new commissions will be integrated into the landscape to celebrate ecological systems and respect natural materials.
- 4. Supporting Environmental Sustainability:** The new commissions will prioritise environmental sustainability from the outset.



Public Art Themes:

- 1. Knowledge Exchange:** Promote non-hierarchical dialogue and sharing ideas between the University, city, and its wider communities.
- 2. Wellbeing:** Enhance the physical and mental wellbeing of the campus community, offering moments of pause and calm in the busy academic setting.
- 3. Play:** Putting play at the centre of the campus experience, inviting intergenerational users to be creative in their interaction with their surroundings.

All artists commissioned to work on commissions at NEQ will be expected to respond to the public art strategy aligning with the aforementioned principles and themes. To download the full public art strategy please click [here](#).

Play the Campus: Commission Opportunity

UP Projects in partnership with John Hansard Gallery are seeking expressions of interest from artists who wish to be considered for Play the Campus, an exciting new commissioning opportunity that looks to realise a series of playful interventions across NEQ.

Below we summarise the aspirations for this commission alongside topline details around budget and key milestones relating to the commission.

Play the Campus

Proposed Site: Across the NEQ Campus (specific locations to be determined in collaboration with appointed artist and landscape architects, Fabrix).

This commission invites an artist to explore how play can inspire connection, learning, and wellbeing across the NEQ Campus. Engaging students, local residents, and young people, the work should draw on games, rituals, and modes of play from diverse communities to encourage interaction and shared experience. The artist is invited to consider how play can stimulate knowledge exchange, support physical and mental wellbeing, and create spaces for gathering, collaboration, and friendship in dialogue with the other two commissions at NEQ. The work may also complement existing landscaping and contribute to wayfinding elements, helping people navigate and enjoy the campus environment. It is envisaged that the commission will be shaped by community engagement with students, staff and other users of the Highfield Campus.

Budget

- Artist Fees: £15,000
- Community Engagement Budget: £8,000
- Production Budget (incl. Installation): £50,000



Key milestones associated with the commission:

- **November 2025**
Open call live (deadline: 1 December 2025)
- **December 2025**
Artist shortlisting process
- **January 2026**
Artist interviews in person in Southampton
- **February 2026**
Artist appointed for *Play the Campus*
- **March 2026**
Community engagement plan developed
- **March - July 2026**
Community engagement activities take place
- **July - October 2026**
Artwork proposal developed
- **December 2026**
Fabrication starts
- **March - April 2027**
Artwork installation and launch

Other key milestones and processes will be shared with the appointed artist.

Eligibility

This commissioning opportunity is aimed at a socially engaged artist with experience of producing high quality work in the public realm. We particularly encourage expressions of interest from artists who have a connection to or existing knowledge of Southampton.

Please refer to the eligibility criteria below and if you are able to demonstrate that you align with this criteria, we welcome your expression of interest.

- Demonstrable experience of producing high quality permanent work in the public realm.
- Experience of the complexities of working in the public realm and on projects with multiple stakeholders.
- Demonstrable experience of inspiring playful engagement through public art.
- Demonstrable experience of sensitively engaging communities in the creation of creative/public art projects.
- A commitment to championing diverse voices and narratives in the public realm.
- A commitment to environmental responsibility and considering the environment when conceiving projects.

How to Apply

If you would like to respond to this open call, please send an expression of interest by **12pm on Monday 1 December 2025 to info@upprojects.com**. This should be sent as a single PDF document of no more than 10Mb that includes:

- Cover note outlining why you are interested in this opportunity (1 page)
- Artist biography including contact details (1 page)
- Up to four examples of previous work that are relevant to this commissioning opportunity and that respond to the criteria outlined in the Eligibility section. Please include images as well as text (Max. 4 pages)
- Confirmation of your availability in 2026 to accommodate this project alongside other commitments (1/2 page)
- Details of your connection to Southampton or the surrounding area if/ as applicable (1/2 page)

Selection Process

All expressions of interest received during will be reviewed by a project selection panel consisting of key representatives from UP Projects and John Hansard Gallery.

Through this process, three artists will be shortlisted based on the artist selection criteria outlined in the eligibility section and invited to attend an interview at the University of Southampton on 6 January 2026. Please note all travel expenses to attend the interview will be covered.

Following interviews, the successful artists will be notified within two weeks of the above date, and contract signing will take place in January 2026.

Please note that any applications received after the closing date (**12 noon on Monday 1 December 2025**) will not be accepted. Unfortunately, we will only be able to offer feedback to the three shortlisted artists. Those who have not been shortlisted will be informed by email by 17 December 2025.

Questions

Should you have any questions relating to this opportunity, please email info@upprojects.com. All answers will be published on the UP Projects website for transparency.



UP
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**John
Hansard
Gallery**