NOT-EQUAL

EPSRC Network+: Social Justice through the Digital Economy
Call for Collaborative Proposals: Application Form

We are seeking to fund proposals for Not-Equal's second call for collaborative proposals. For full guidance please see details of the call on the Not-Equal website.

Pilot research projects can be between 6-8 months in length. We expect to fund up to 7 projects of up to £40k (80% FEC) for this funding call (will consider shorter projects with smaller budgets).

Please submit this form before the deadline of **5pm, 29th May 2020** to notequal@newcastle.ac.uk, with the subject line 'Application Submission'.

Applicants will be advised on the outcome of their proposal by the 30th July 2020.

GENERAL INFORMATION	
Lead Applicant (PI): Joanne Armitage **Email address:** eenjla@leeds.ac.uk **Job Title:** Lecturer in Digital Media **Department:** School of Media and Communication **Organisation:** University of Leeds	**Co-Investigators (names and organisations):** Helen Thornham, School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds **Email address:** H.Thornham@leeds.ac.uk Chris Birchall, School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds **Email address:** C.T.Birchall@leeds.ac.uk **Collaborative Partner(s):** • Space 2, UK • Espacio Nixso, Argentina • C-Innova, Colombia • Media Lab MX, Mexico **Project Title:** ED/DE (Equally Digital/Digitally Equal) **Project Tagline:** Sustaining activism with digital technology through physical separation

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WHICH CHALLENGE AREA AND TOPICS DOES YOUR PROPOSAL RESPOND TO?				
CHALLENGE AREA	**X**	**TOPIC**	**X**	
Algorithmic Social Justice		**Recognition**		
Digital Security for All		**Re-distribution**		
Fairer Futures for Business and Workforce		**Enablement & Radical Trust**		
Topics across challenge areas	X	**Proactive Resilience & Reparation**	X	
		Accountability & Care		

1. SUMMARY

Please provide a summary of your proposed research project. Please include an overview of the aims, impact, innovations, method, team and how it aligns with Not-Equal. This section should be understandable to the general public (<400 words).

ED/DE has been developed in partnership with four cooperatives in four different countries (Space2, Leeds, UK; Espacio Nixso (Buenos Aires, Argentina; C-Innova, Bogotá, Colombia; MediaLabMX, Mexico City, Mexico) in order to examine and technologically respond to the challenges of inequality, social justice and enablement in a moment of unprecedented change caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Each cooperative is currently seeking new ways to continue their work and engage vulnerable groups in social justice projects and we want to collectively evaluate these practices and methods to (1) develop new sharable and collaborative practices fit for the current global condition (2) ask how the lived necessity of digital engagement has reimagined issues of inequality and social justice as datalogical, socio-technical and algorithmic (for example).

We propose to collaborate with these four cooperatives who work within their local communities with particular-focus on those who are most vulnerable within them. What distinguishes the organizations are their experiences and investment in the digital prior to the COVID-19 pandemic: some have built platforms for collaboration, some have only turned to technology through necessity, and some have long used technology as a mode of thinking through or resisting existing infrastructure. We want to understand how the shift to entirely *digital* activism and organizing has impacted their practices: what technologies they use, how they are 'hacking' them or building their own; the work they can do and the work they cannot do. In short how the promises of technology measure against their needs, expectations and practices. Most importantly, how they are all continuing their focus on inequality & social justice, and how inequality & social justice themselves are being differently negotiated, understood and interwoven with the digital. Our project will be conducted through interviews on video technology, through collated auto-ethnographic materials and through slow-sharable, tangible prototypes. This aligns our work with key themes with Not-Equal in how we critically analyse technology, build technology and think about who and what it is for.

2. HOW DOES YOUR PROPOSAL ALIGN WITH THE THEMES AND OBJECTIVES OF NOT-EQUAL?

Please describe how your proposal responds to the second call for collaborations and how does your proposal enhance a cross-disciplinary way of working. (<300 words).

Proactive resilience and reparation is at the core of what motivates the groups we work with. Espacio Nixso develops projects on issues of literacy in rural communities, Space 2 builds creative projects within Leeds, offering NVQs and mentoring within them, whilst C-Innova works with communities to co-develop technologies. In this sense, we understand resilience and reparation in relation to local community requirements, as differently defined within each community and specific to their needs. This work is about the **redistribution** of power and skills through the **enablement** of individuals and groups. We understand resilience and reparation in terms of the wider context in which each community is located—political, environmental, technological, socio-cultural and economic. With the global pandemic, these wider contexts have all shifted, and we need to rethink resilience, reparation, redistribution and enablement using different conceptual, critical and technological tools. Whilst maintaining the ethos of each community and cooperative in terms of communication, environment, embodiment for example.

Our cooperatives produce and reproduce software that disrupts, reconfigures and reproduces the power monopolies of many digital organisations. As these groups are now increasingly dependent on these technologies – sometimes even in the face of real and previous criticism of those technologies, we need to consider protocols for use, uptake and sharing. We need to evaluate practices and technologies in ways that consider the needs of those communities and find new ways of working with digital infrastructures.

Each cooperative has a range of expertise from coding and programming, to graphic design, engineering, creative and performing arts. Many include self-taught and professional individuals and the range of experiences from the community members themselves. Armitage, Birchall and Thornham all offer different expertise and skills. This is a co-created and designed project where we aim to work with (not on) all participants and as such, is inherently cross-disciplinary.

3. CASE FOR SUPPORT

Please describe your proposed project. This should include your aims and objectives, the design and method of your project, context, background literature and data to be collected. Please also indicate why this research is important and for whom (<1000 words).

Our project focuses on issues of inequality and social justice in a moment of unprecedented change caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The groups we collaborate with develop creative projects with and within marginalized and vulnerable communities through established practice-based, creative, technological and design workshops. These activities normally involve face-to-face work with groups and the sharing of hardware technologies or equipment, the tangible building of prototypes (art works, installations, wearables) in real-time, together. However, like much of the world, these organizations and their practices have been significantly impacted by the pandemic.

The premise for our project is that these unprecedented times has unevenly and problematically centred technology in all of our lives as the main mode through which we interact, organize and sustain our practices. The promises of digital technology—of being fast, anticipatory, sensory, interoperable, supportive, productive—are all being questioned and complicated through an increasingly mundane take up of digital across all aspects of our everyday lives.

The aim of our project is to critically evaluate existing digital technology infrastructure and its potentials for

facilitating the kinds of work these organizations are doing. All collaborating organisations work with vulnerable groups on issues of inequality and social change: but what constitutes vulnerability, equality and social change is different. We want to know how, within already complex digital-social structures, inequality—as algorithmic, infrastructural, social, geo-political—is now being renegotiated through and with technologies. We want to understand these processes of negotiation in the hope that such an understanding will help us better think through and build for, equality (that is now more than ever and no longer by desire but through necessity: digital).

Our aims are led by the following questions:

Q1. How are each organisation differently understanding inequality and how does this measure against their understanding of the digital?

Q2. How have practices changed over the last few months and what is now considered as crucial for each group?

Q3. What existing technologies are being used and what are the rationales for this?

Q4. How are they being modified and why?

Q5. What themes/issues emerge through this process particularly with regard to issues of in/equality?

Q6. How can we build new ways of working, collaborating and sustaining that continue the ethos of each community organisation?

Q7. What lessons can be learnt from our project specifically in relation to re-conceptualising inequality and social justice and in terms of rethinking methodologies and practices, that consider the new digital-first context in which we all find ourselves?

The project is organised into distinct phases with different work packages running in parallel. Below we detail the objectives and outcomes delivered across the project. This is outlined by the following objectives (O1–O7).

First the project will begin to respond to **Q1– 4**. This will be in part ethnographic including auto-ethnographies of the everyday, but also supplemented through interviews or staged discussions/collaborations.

O1 We will conduct **semi-structured interviews** with organizations and their communities to establish their understandings of inequality and the digital; how their practices have changed over the last few months; what has become important; the current state of their technological infrastructure. These interviews will then be thematically analysed.
Outcomes: 4.5, 4.7

O2 Whilst interviews are in process we will develop **auto-ethnographic kits** (an online app) that will allow all group members to log reflections and audio-visual material on lived experiences, concerns, frustrations not only in terms of their work, but also in relation to the themes of inequality and social justice. The idea for this has emerged from conversations with the cooperatives: the app will be shared in month 2, and used for the duration of the project. Towards the end of the project each individual can choose to share (or not) their content for archiving and future work, or the content can be kept as a private reflection for the individuals own use.
Outcomes: 4.4, 4.9

O3 We will setup the **infrastructure and practices** for documenting the project to encourage regular, short contributions from different collaborators. This will also function as a space for archiving auto-ethnographic material, showcasing visualisations and hosting other project outcomes. This is a key methodological step in relation to generating and working with ethnographic material whilst physically separate.
Outcomes: 4.1, 4.2, 4.3

The next month will be a discursive phase where findings are shared and collaborators are invited to respond both conceptually and practically to them. This allows us to respond to various issues in **Q5**.

O4 We will host an **online workshop** that brings together all collaborators and discuss these findings. From this we will establish themes within and across organisations to develop mini projects exploring the different issues and resonances of inequality.
Outcomes 4.5, 4.6

From month 4 collaborators will generate concepts and technologies that respond to the workshopped issues. The cooperatives will return to their communities to respond through mini projects that involve build work, and that will create a range of outputs (unknown at this stage) and continue until the end of the project. At the same time, we will begin data collection to examine these issues within a broader context addressing **Q6 and 7**.

O5 Develop, test and iterate: We will **prototype responses** to the specific issues experienced by organisations—in terms of new software and hardware built with certain ethos in mind, and in terms of methodological prototypes that we will develop. We imagine some of our prototypes will take the form of software and hardware, written and or visual materials and online installations.
Outcome 4.11.

O6 Whilst the build is in progress and in response to the themes generated we use digital methods, including web-scraping, to evaluate a broader range of experiences. This will allow us to situate and understand our findings within a broader context.
Outcome 4.5, 4.10

O7 Project close meeting for reflections, **next steps** and finalising the project report and documentary.
Outcome 4.8, 4.9, 4.12.

The beneficiaries of this project are our collaborators, but also our wider networks of digital/technological activism and those within the not-equal network.

4. RESILIENCE PLAN

Please describe how you would carry out your project with social distance measures in place. For example, deliver workshops via Zoom instead of in person (<300 words).

The project will be organized through Open Source communication software and existing technologies developed by the organizations we work with. Video meetings will be held through Jitsi and shared documents through Open Office. Meeting notes will be collected using RiseUp Pad. We will not undertake in-person meetings, nor will we require in-person meetings. Collaboration will still be achieved either synchronously through the channels suggested above, or asynchronously (by posting prototypes or hardware, by geocaching kit) so that certain elements of collaboration like iteration, creativity and duration can be continued.

Given the aim of our project is to critically evaluate existing digital technology infrastructure and its potentials for facilitating the kinds of work these organizations are doing, we need to also work through and with these technologies for the project itself. One of the questions for us all is not only how to continue to research within the contemporary context, but also how this context – and the necessary uptake of digital technologies – is redefining and reshaping research. The work packages discussed above and the innovative content and methods they will necessarily produce, have been designed with the rules around social distancing in mind and in negotiation with the organisations we will work with.

5. INNOVATION

Please explain the innovative aspects of the proposed research project (<150 words).

This project asks pressing questions about digital communication at a time when it is of critical importance. From this, we will consider how we could imagine, build and experience it differently? Here innovation lies in the critique of existing infrastructure but also in the lo-fi prototypes that will be developed in response to these issues.

The return to a go-slow build of prototypes will raise methodological questions around what is valued and claimed about co-creation. The seperate-yet-connected auto-ethnographies which will be edited and collated together will offer much more than an 'output' for the project and a 'data collection tool'. They invite everyone to express themselves and will raise questions around the politics of doing research, the lived experiences of it in the contemporary climate. Here we intervene in methods and sustain critical technology practices when physically separate to actively promote the ethos of collaboration and showcase innovation.

6. NON-ACADEMIC PARTNERS

Please explain how your non-academic partners will engage with the project e.g. in-kind time, use of facilities, etc. (<150 words).

Our non-academic partners are all small cooperatives/community groups that will be paid for their time working on this project and resources consumed in the process of it. As they organize as collective spaces, access to their infrastructure (maker labs and workshop spaces) would be in-kind. However, we don't anticipate using these spaces for formal project meetings or outcomes. Project partners will be both the communities that we work with to identify issues for digital collaboration and collaborate with to develop prototypes and speculative technological outcomes.

We have already established working relations with these organisations including having set up purchase requisition orders with them. This means that even though Latin America is entering a period of increased insecurity we have established channels for enabling this project to go ahead.

7. SOCIAL IMPACT

Please describe the expected social impact of your project (<300 words). This should be understandable to the general public. Please note that the community panel will consider and assess this section against the following criteria. To what extent does the proposal:
1) Consider and respond to the needs of a community (e.g. provide an example of the beneficiaries of your project and the value it would generate for them);
2) Help to overcome/reduce/avoid barriers to access and participation in technology and services (e.g. provide an example of the barriers and how your project addresses such barriers);
3) Support new connections between communities of interest (e.g. provide an example of how the project creates opportunities for new connections between people and/or fosters community building).

This project works with groups whose fundamental aims are to decrease inequality, through social justice projects.

The rapid move to digital working presents many challenges for community organizations and co-operatives who organize workshops for training and education purposes (often) with marginalized groups. Access to 'necessary' digital technologies is uneven between the organizations and the communities that they work with. Many are in the early stages of finding new ways of working. The needs of the organizations and their communities will be established through dialogue with researchers—reflecting on the ways that digital collaboration are shaping current working practices and how they are continuing to focus on issues of inequality and social justice. This means that the beneficiaries of the project are articulating and forming the basis from which the project develops. This project uses existing networks to bring together a group of international collaborators. The opportunity for further collaboration is embedded in the research design as it provides opportunities for practical collaboration by using, repairing, testing and remaking each other's technologies.

One group that we are working with, Espacio Nixso, for example, build electronics-teaching kits out of trash. Normally they work with in-person groups to teach electronics using these kits, the groups can't take the kits home because of the scarcity of materials. In this project, we would work together to find different ways of teaching electronics that can be reproducible but also not rely on participants owning existing technologies such as laptops etc. One suggestion would be to make low-fi kits that could be assembled with documentation and record and process data that can be shared using sensors. This kit would then be shared (through geocaching or postal routes) and would slowly deteriorate as the digital material builds.
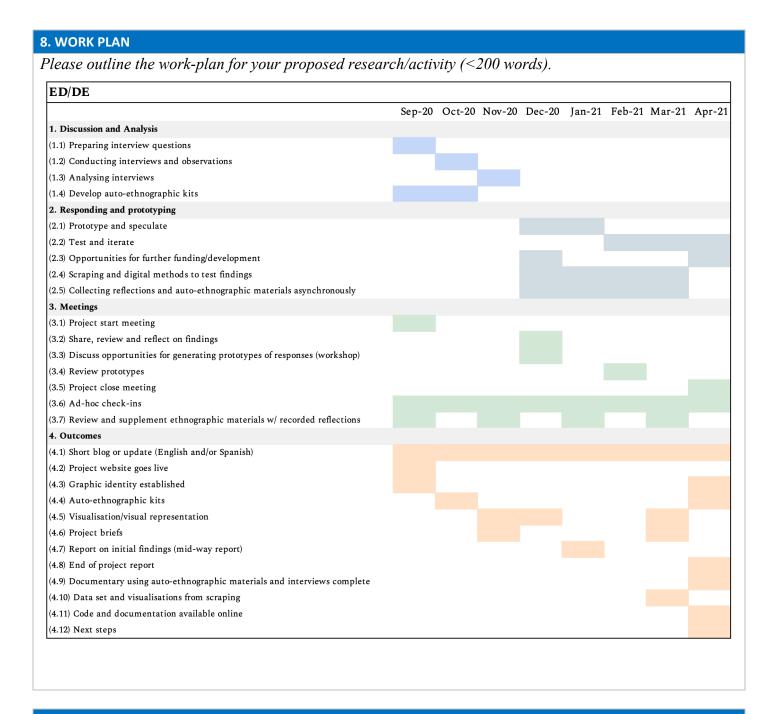
8. WORK PLAN

Please outline the work-plan for your proposed research/activity (<200 words).

ED/DE

	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Apr-21
1. Discussion and Analysis								
(1.1) Preparing interview questions	▓							
(1.2) Conducting interviews and observations		▓						
(1.3) Analysing interviews			▓					
(1.4) Develop auto-ethnographic kits	▓							
2. Responding and prototyping								
(2.1) Prototype and speculate					▓	▓		
(2.2) Test and iterate							▓	▓
(2.3) Opportunities for further funding/development					▓			▓
(2.4) Scraping and digital methods to test findings					▓	▓	▓	
(2.5) Collecting reflections and auto-ethnographic materials asynchronously					▓	▓	▓	▓
3. Meetings								
(3.1) Project start meeting	▓							
(3.2) Share, review and reflect on findings								
(3.3) Discuss opportunities for generating prototypes of responses (workshop)					▓			
(3.4) Review prototypes						▓		
(3.5) Project close meeting								▓
(3.6) Ad-hoc check-ins	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
(3.7) Review and supplement ethnographic materials w/ recorded reflections	▓	▓	▓					
4. Outcomes								
(4.1) Short blog or update (English and/or Spanish)	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
(4.2) Project website goes live	▓							
(4.3) Graphic identity established	▓							▓
(4.4) Auto-ethnographic kits		▓						
(4.5) Visualisation/visual representation		▓					▓	
(4.6) Project briefs		▓	▓					
(4.7) Report on initial findings (mid-way report)					▓			
(4.8) End of project report								▓
(4.9) Documentary using auto-ethnographic materials and interviews complete								▓
(4.10) Data set and visualisations from scraping							▓	
(4.11) Code and documentation available online								▓
(4.12) Next steps								▓

9. HOW WILL YOU COMMUNICATE THE FINDINGS OF YOUR RESEARCH TO THE PUBLIC?

Please outline your dissemination plans e.g. events, networking with local support groups, creating vlogs, writing blogs, etc. (<200 words).

Our dissemination plans are as follows:

- Monthly blog updates from different aspects of the project
- A report on initial finings
- A visualization of the themes and issues that emerge
- An online workshop thinking through issues and developing outcomes

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- A website or page with project overview, project documentation and collaborator details
- Comprehensive documentation of the different prototypes generated
- Data sets and visualizations from digital methods
- A video documentary/summary/online installation of the project, taken form the auto-ethnographies and other recorded material (such as build work, thoughts, reflections)

10. EXISTING FUNDING

Will any existing funding be used on this project (e.g. PhD funding)? If so, please provide information about these and how they will be used for the project (<150 words).

We are currently engaged in another project in Latin America (Sustainable Making for Feminist Action AH/T00830X/1). This looks specifically at issues of sustainability and feminism. There is space and scope to deliver events in tandem and across the two projects. This also means that we have existing contracts setup with the organisations that can be repurposed for this grant.

11. EXPERIENCE & INTERACTION OF TEAM

Please indicate any previous relevant experience, qualifications and publications of the lead applicant and team. If applicable, please detail how the PI-postdoctoral partnership will be beneficial (<300 words).

Dr Joanne Armitage is an early career researcher with extensive EKT experience working with arts and activist organizations. Her work is concerned with issues of technology and embodiment, which she explores through the collaborative and critical production of technology. She currently leads the AHRC funded Sustainable Making for Feminist Action project and works on the ERC funded Airkit proof-of-concept grant, University of Cambridge. She has organized and led numerous events relating to the design of equitable technologies including Automation and Me, a hackathon that examined feminist issues in automation. She will manage the project, co-ordinate online materials, produce the blog updates and build the auto-ethnographic app. She will liaise with the community groups in terms of build and software requirements, and work to build – if appropriate- robust tangibles from the prototypes of the project.

Dr Helen Thornham is an Associate Professor in Digital Cultures with experience of large and small research project including those in Latin America and across the globe. She is widely published and has over £2 million worth of grant capture from across the RCUK. She is a digital ethnographer whose work focuses on issues of digital inequalities and is international in nature. She will mentor Armitage and Birchall, contribute to online content and lead academic outputs.

Dr Chris Birchall is Lecturer in Digital Media and a coder and programmer. He specialises in building open source and bespoke scraping software and will build the auto-ethnographic app, and map the experiences of the project teams onto data from wider communities of practice from across the globe.

Space 2, C-Innova, Espacio-Nixso and MediaLabMX will all contribute expertise in the forms of technological design

and prototyping, build, audio-visual work, content and data. This is very much a collaboration.

12. BUDGET BREAKDOWN

Please provide a detailed budget breakdown and justification for your budget - for example: salary grade, point, duration and %FTE: specified journeys or conferences; identified items and quantities of consumables (<300 words).

Joanne Armitage, Grade7.7, 20% = £7,117

Managing project; organizing and chairing meeting (3.1, 3.2, 3.5, 3.6) leading reports (4.7, 4.8, 4.12); developing and maintaining website resources (4.2, 4.11); support observation and empirical (1.1, 1.2, 1.3); working with groups to develop concepts and technologies (4.6); lead in testing and refining prototypes (3.3, 3.5).

Helen Thornham, Grade 9.6, 8 months, 13.33% = £7,008

Mentor Armitage; lead observation and empirical research (1.1, 1.2, 1.3); provide intellectual leadership.

Chris Birchall, Grade 8.5, 8 months, 5.33% = £2,205

Develop auto-ethnographic kit (1.4, 4.4), digital methods lead (2.4, 4.10); support on website and materials.

Pots for project collaborators: 4 groups at £4750 each = £19,000

For groups to develop, prototype, test and iterate their digital responses (2.1, 2.2). Rather than stipulate a breakdown of costs from our community partners at this stage (which, given their precarious position requires a lot of unpaid work) we have budgeted £5k per organization. Sub-contractor salaries (4.1, 4.6, 4.11) (local day rates), time spend documenting/auto-ethnography, consumables, low-cost equipment/tech such as tools and lo-fi computing hardware.

Graphic identity (4.3) = £1000

Visual identity for web, reports, video and online meetings/events.

Visualizations (4.5, 4.10) = £1000

Work across different data and w/ collaborators to generate visualizations of project process.

Documenting project process (3.7) = £1000

Collating auto-ethnographic materials and recording reflections.

End of project video/installation (4.9) = £1000

Edit together all materials for 6-minute video/installation

(All 4 days @ £250 per day)

Consumable electronics and postage = £400

Consumable electronic parts to test and support prototypes (UK).

Data storage costs = £220

The project will be organized through remote working to reduce environmental impact and keep collaborators safe

through physical distancing. We will concentrate on producing high quality artefacts and outputs by working with freelance media professionals.

NB: Numbering refers to work plan.

13. TOTAL PROJECT COST

Please list in GBP under the headings – Overall Cost, Staff, Travel and Other

	Directly incurred costs (80%)	**Directly incurred costs (100%)**
Staff	13,064	16,330
Non-Staff Costs: Consumables	18,936	23,670
Non-Staff Costs: Facilities/Equipment		
Non-Staff Costs: Travel		
Non-Staff Costs: Estates (RA's only)		
Non-Staff Costs: Indirect (RA's only)		
Overall Cost*	Total Not-Equal Funding Requested: 32,000	Total for information only: 40,000

Directly Incurred Posts

Role	Post	Start Date	Period on Project (months)	% of Full Time	Scale	Increment Date	Basic Starting Salary	Super-Annuation and NI (£)	Total cost on grant-80% FEC (£)	Total cost on grant-100% FEC (£)

*Please note you are able to claim for RA time and RA relevant FTE related costs, PI/Co-I time and other non-staff costs. You are not able to claim for FTE related costs attributed to PI/Co-I time.

Further Information

If you have any further questions regarding this call for proposals, please contact notequal@newcastle.ac.uk or Rachel Sparks (Not-Equal Project Manager) on 0191 2088268.

Privacy Notice

Not-Equal is collecting your data to record submission of your application, and we will only contact you to provide you with information about the application and related Not-Equal activities.

You have provided your consent for the University to process your personal data for the purposes detailed above. You have the right to request that the University deletes this personal data at any time, noting if you do so, the University will be unable to provide you with information relating to Not-Equal. On an annual basis we will ask you to confirm that you wish to continue to receive this information: if you don't or you do not respond, we will delete your personal details within one calendar month.

We won't share your data with anyone outside the University, unless required to by law, and it will be stored securely within Open Lab at Newcastle University.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact rec-man@newcastle.ac.uk

If you would like more information about how we manage personal data more generally, including your rights under law, and the contact details of the University's Data Protection Officer, please see our website: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/data.protection/PrivacyNotice.htm

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