

Ongoing Conversations: Toolkit

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Ongoing Conversations is a project designed to inspire unexpected connection and collaboration in the field of medical humanities. It was launched in January 2024 by the Centre for Health and Medical Humanities (CHMH) at the University of Kent with the help of an ‘Impact Accelerator Award’.

Inspired by Dr Dieter Declercq and Professor Ian Sabroe’s *Conversations about Arts, Humanities and Health* which ran from 2021 at Kent until September 2024, *Ongoing Conversations* aims to demonstrate the importance of health and medical humanities outside of academia through the art of conversation. Pairing academics and professionals working in fields relating to health and medicine, such as the NHS, comedy, and non-profits, in ‘professional blind date’ style videos, *Ongoing Conversations* encourages people to explore their connections, producing lasting conversations and collaborations in the process.

This toolkit chronicles the creation of *Ongoing Conversations* step by step, tracking the process from initial idea to final videos, detailing our progress chronologically from January 2024 to September 2025.¹ We hope it will serve as a guide, inspiring you to continue the *Conversations* in your own work and perhaps even embark on your own version of *Ongoing Conversations*.

We hope you get as much out of *Ongoing Conversations* as we did, and we are excited to see the legacy this project can create beyond Kent.

Olivia, Lindsey, and Bence

¹ Videos will be released weekly from 1st May 2026 – 22nd May 2026 and can be found on our [website](#) or via our [YouTube channel](#).

Meet the Team:

Post-graduate/ Early Career Researcher (ECR) CHMH Representatives:

Olivia Andrew:

Olivia is a CHASE (Consortium for the Arts and Humanities South-East England) funded PhD researcher at the University of Kent in the final stages of her research, *In Their Own Words: Experiences of Multiple Sclerosis in Britain Between 1980 and 2010*.

Using oral histories, Olivia examines and prioritises lived experiences of MS in this underexplored period, and seeks to influence change within her PhD, raising the voices of those who have largely been silenced throughout history.

Olivia completed a placement with the Multiple Sclerosis Trust from November 2024 to November 2025. During this placement, Olivia worked on numerous projects, putting her research into practice and supporting the Trust's work. Olivia has published in the *British Journal of Neuroscience Nursing*, and has worked alongside Lindsey Zelvin as a Postgraduate Representative for the Centre for Health and Medical Humanities since 2022.

Bence Bardos:

Dr Bence Bardos is a Lecturer in Media Production & Digital Content Creation at City St George's, University of London. His research looks at creativity and cultural meaning in media studies, with a focus on digital participatory cultures, transformation and reuse, remix culture, and online memes. He is also interested in the areas of social media communication, parody, transmedia storytelling, and copyright law.

Coming from an interdisciplinary academic background of media studies, film studies and film and media practice, Bence has taught in the areas of genre filmmaking, media and

marketing, media ethics, fiction and non-fiction filmmaking, screenwriting, horror, film and architecture, and film theory. He has held teaching positions at the University of Kent and Kodolányi János University, Budapest.

Bence holds a PhD in Media Studies and a Masters degree in Film Practice. He has delivered papers at the ECREA European Communication Conference and the Two Decades of Shrek Online Symposium and has upcoming publications in the topics of ironic Shrek fandom, the communicative functions of the Pepe the Frog meme, or the link between 2000s era Cartoon Network and online ‘creepypasta’ horror.

Bence is also a practitioner in film- and media-making, having worked as television editor for AMC Networks International Central Europe, video producer and podcast editor for AHRC research projects, author of the quiz book 'Géniusz Filmkvíz' (2025) as well as freelance translator and social media content creator. His short films and media projects have been screened and awarded in short film festivals in Hungary, the UK, and the United States. He is passionate about media practice, microbudget cinema, and weird films.

Lindsey Zelvin:

Lindsey is a prose writer who recently completed her practice-based PhD in Narrative Nonfiction at the University of Kent in Canterbury. Her thesis, *I Think I've Been Here Before: A Memoir in Fragments and Footnotes*, draws on narratology, medical humanities, memoir and trauma theory in order to craft a methodology for approaching a more authentic and ethical representation of her lived experience of chronic mental illness within her own memoir.

Lindsey has published articles in the *Journal of Medical Humanities* and *Brief Encounters*, the CHASE (Consortium for the Arts and Humanities South-East England) peer-

reviewed, postgraduate journal. She is also a contributing author to the anthology *Women Write Now: Women in Trauma* (2022).

Since 2022 Lindsey has served as one of the Postgraduate Representatives of the University of Kent's Centre for Health and Medical Humanities. In March 2025, she became an Associate Editor for *The Polyphony: Conversations Across The Medical Humanities*, a web platform hosted by the [Institute for Medical Humanities](#) at Durham University with financial support from the [Wellcome Trust](#).

CHMH Co-Directors (2022 – 2025):

Dr Stella Bolaki:

Dr Stella Bolaki is Reader in American Literature and Medical Humanities at the University of Kent and former Co-Director of Kent's Centre for Health and Medical Humanities (2022–2025). Her work brings together literary scholarship, particularly in women's writing, and creative practice to explore how experiences of illness, care and marginalisation can be better understood and represented. She is the author of *Illness as Many Narratives: Arts, Medicine and Culture* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016) and has led several collaborative and community-facing projects, including *Artists' Books and Medical Humanities* and *The Artist's Book: Mothers' Experiences of Adoption*.

Dr Dieter Declercq:

Dr Dieter Declercq is a Lecturer in Medical Humanities (Narrative Medicine) at the University of Glasgow. Dieter's work contributes to activities in the [Medical Humanities Research Centre](#), as part of developments around narrative medicine across the College of Arts & Humanities,

as well as to teaching and research in the Film & Television Studies programme, in the School of Culture & Creative Arts. His work seeks to foster fruitful interaction between arts, humanities, and health. Dieter has researched the important contributions of popular media and aesthetic activity to our lives, health and wellbeing – with a specific focus on narrative.

January–April 2024: The Beginning of *Ongoing Conversations*

In January 2024, the CHMH received an AHRC Impact Accelerator Award (IAA) from the University of Kent. This award, designed to support researchers to accelerate the impact of their research and foster collaborative partnerships to drive change in health and wellbeing, histories and heritage, and society and environment, was the genesis of the *Ongoing Conversations* project.

Before the IAA funding, the [CHMH had been running workshops](#) on a variety of topics related to researcher wellbeing within the medical humanities. Through such workshops we saw connections developing in real time across fields, professions, and disciplines. With the IAA funding, we set out to explore these connections and showcase the wider importance of medical humanities outside of academia. Our project, therefore, needed to make conversations and connections between academics and professionals easier and more visible to the wider population. And so, *Ongoing Conversations* was born!

Developing the structure of *Ongoing Conversations* took weeks of discussion, brainstorming, and workshopping. We repeatedly adjusted the format, trying to identify which techniques would best serve our objective. Although we knew from the beginning that we wanted to find a way to make connections through a fun format, we weren't sure how best to do it. As researchers, students, and professionals ourselves, we knew that in many ways our greatest passion is often our subject. But how could we showcase this in a fun, watchable, video?

Then we found it. 'Professional blind dates'. We would capture that moment of excitement when you meet someone at a conference, start talking about your research, and suddenly feel the intellectual sparks fly as you realize how much you have in common – and how much you might learn – from this person who was a stranger just a few minutes before.

We decided to pair academics in the medical humanities at Kent with professionals working in fields related to health and medicine who may not otherwise meet. We created a video format centred around conversation, ensuring it was structured enough to ensure the pairings knew what to expect and do, but freeform enough to allow for spontaneous and generative conversations (more on this later). The result was engaging, natural conversations between two people learning about – and from – each other as they exchanged ideas, insight, advice, and support, while creating compelling and captivating connections.

The result was four ten-minute videos of which we are very proud. Pairings included:

Dr Max Pickard, Consultant Psychiatrist, and **Cariad Martin**, PhD student in Film and Media Studies.

Dave Chawner, Stand Up Comic, Author, Presenter and Mental Health Campaigner, and **Dr Roanna Mitchell**, Senior Lecturer in Drama and Theatre.

Dr Salma Elnahas, Speciality Doctor in Psychiatry, and **Jane Davidson**, PhD student in Veterinary History.

David Stokes, CEO of Nucleus Arts, and **Dr Patricia Novillo-Corvalán**, Reader in Comparative Literature.

The videos (released weekly from 1st May 2026 – 22nd May 2026) can be found on our [website](#) or via our [YouTube channel](#).

The initial format of the videos required our academics to bring an object related to their research. Professionals were asked to bring a question or problem that they faced in their work. The videos would then be structured as follows (although this became flexible as the actual filming progressed):

1. Introductions

2. Professionals would introduce their question/problem.
3. Academics would introduce their object and research.
4. The pair would discuss these objects/ questions/ problems etc.
5. Towards the end of filming, the pair would be asked to consider why they'd been paired; what was their connection?

It is important to note that these videos were not intended to 'solve' the professionals' problem or directly answer their question. The format was instead designed to provoke conversation and collaboration between the pairings, sparking connections which we hoped would continue beyond the videos themselves.

Our Timeline:

1. January 2024: Impact Accelerator Award funding granted for project
2. January – April 2024: Developed the structure for *Ongoing Conversations*
3. April 2024: Approached external stakeholders to participate in the project
4. April – May 2024: Briefed interested stakeholders on the format of videos and helped them develop practical questions to bring to the conversation
5. May 2024: Reached out to academics through the CHMH mailing lists
6. 13th May 2024: Workshop to brief and prepare interested academics for the videos where they discussed ideas for objects and role-played scenarios to practice for the filmed conversation
7. June 2024: Created pairings designed to stimulate interesting conversations and unexpected connections
8. July – September: Filmed the four conversations on Zoom
9. September 2024: Edited videos and sent drafts to participants before screening them for conferences audiences

April 2024: Approaching Participants

We needed to recruit two groups of participants for the project: academics at Kent involved in the CHMH; and professionals working in the fields of health and medicine. We utilised the connections within the CHMH, using our mailing lists to send a call for participants across the academic network. To recruit professional participants, we sent individual emails to external stakeholders/ partners who had been involved with and/or expressed interest in the CHMH, building on these previous connections to expand our network for the project.

Below are template emails based on the ones we sent to our participants for you to edit and adapt for your own recruitment. It is important to note that response times could be slow, hence our emphasis on set dates for the workshops and briefings to encourage timely replies.

Example email - External Stakeholders

Emails to external stakeholders were sent via the CHMH email address from the Centre's Co-Director Dr Stella Bolaki. We thought it was important for the first communication to come from one of our Co-Directors – we also hoped it would increase the chance of replies. The email below is a template of our initial email to external stakeholders, edited to allow you to use for your own purposes.

Dear [name],

I hope this email finds you well.

I am contacting you with an invitation to participate in a new initiative of the [Your centre/affiliated university]. We are producing a series of short videos which connect stakeholders working in health and wellbeing, such as yourself, to researchers in our Centre. Our invitation is for you to briefly introduce a question or issue you face in your work, and then to explore in conversation with one of our researchers, how medical/health humanities research can help to address that issue.

This process would happen online over Zoom. There would be three short stages for your involvement:

1. Online briefing to prepare for a conversation with a CHMH researcher on at a time and date which suits you.

2. A 20/30-minute conversation with a CHMH researcher in June or July (at a suitable date for you both).
3. An opportunity to review our edited 10-minute video of the conversation before it goes live on our website.

This is intended to be an enriching opportunity for you to gain new perspectives on an existing issue in your work. We hope you will consider participating.

If you are interested, [name and email] can provide further information about the mechanics and structure of the project.

Many thanks,

Example email – Academics:

To recruit academics within the University for the project, we sent an email through the CHMH mailing list. We also reached out to specific academics we thought would be interested in participating.

The following is a template email.

Dear all,

We are contacting you with an invitation to participate in a new initiative of the [Centre name]. Colleagues and PhD students working in Arts and Humanities are welcome to participate.

We are producing a series of short videos which connect stakeholders working in health and wellbeing to researchers in the medical humanities. Our ambition is to create videos aimed at a non-academic audience which demonstrate how medical humanities research impacts on real-

world issues experienced by a variety of stakeholders working in ‘health’. These filmed conversations between researchers and external stakeholders will demonstrate this process in real time. The filming will take place online at a date that is convenient for all parties.

As an initial step, we will be hosting two workshops to provide more information about the format we have in mind for the conversations and videos. During these meetings we will workshop how to briefly discuss your research with non-specialist audiences as well as ways to connect that research to an object you bring to the conversation.

Whether you have already worked with external stakeholders or are new to such a process, we would love for you to take part in this project. We hope it will be an opportunity to demonstrate the impact of your research in the wider field of health in a fun and engaging way.

We are in the process of contacting external stakeholders to pose some questions that relate to issues they face in their work, and will brainstorm these as examples during the workshops. To keep things spontaneous, we won’t tell colleagues in advance who they will be paired with for their filmed conversation. The premise of these videos is that pairing a researcher and external stakeholder in conversation will allow them to develop a connection that supports them both. Of course, we will coach colleagues in advance on what to expect during filming and give you opportunities to practise parts of these conversations during our sandpits.

Details of the sandpits are below (**you only need to sign up for one of them**).

- **[Date, time, location (this one was in person)]**

OR

- **[Date, time, location (this was online)]**

Please reply to [email] to express interest in the sandpits or for any questions.

Best wishes,

May 2024 - Briefings:

Briefings for External Stakeholders:

As noted, when we were recruiting external stakeholders to participate in *Ongoing Conversations*, we stated that we would conduct online briefings to discuss the project and their involvement.

These briefings were initially planned as ‘group’ sessions with multiple external partners. However, calendar issues led to these becoming individual briefing sessions instead. Whilst we cannot speak to the experience of group briefings due to our circumstances, the individual sessions worked well, and we would advise their use in any replication of the project. The individual briefings allowed us to discuss the project in more detail and address each participant’s concerns, meaning we could work closely with each external stakeholder to develop their question/ problem. This process allowed us to build rapport with each stakeholder prior to filming, which increased their trust in us as facilitators. It also gave us a better sense of their personality and interests, which was incredibly helpful when it came to creating the pairings for each video.

Briefings were held over Zoom and lasted about an hour. We ensured the atmosphere was relaxed, taking time to chat to each stakeholder as they joined the call to make sure they were comfortable. We found that participants were initially sceptical as to what the project might involve and therefore nervous about the formality of the briefings. By putting them at ease early on, we were able to get them interested in, and excited for the project.

We discussed the goal of *Ongoing Conversations* with participants, emphasizing the importance of connection and conversation. We then explained the format and structure of the videos, answering any questions that arose. Following this, we workshopped the question/ problem they planned to bring to filming. Everyone had something in mind, as we’d mentioned

the need for this in our emails; our job in briefings was to help them refine their ideas, while noting them down to help us match them to an academic.

We hope these briefings helped stakeholders feel comfortable, reassured, and included. Our priority in this project was always the wellbeing of our participants, without whom we would not have *Ongoing Conversations*.

Workshops for Academics:

In addition to the briefings with external partners, we held workshops for our academic participants. The goal of the workshop was three-fold: (1) to have a discussion with our academics about the format and structure of the videos in an interactive environment, (2) to engage in improvisation exercises to simulate the scenario of the “professional blind date” conversation, and (3) for us to gain a sense of the right pairings for our matchmaking with external partners.

The improvisation exercises – in which we acted as the external stakeholders – allowed our academics to safely step outside their comfort zone of lectures, keynotes and conference talks. We found that improvisation and play proved valuable tools in this early stage, as our participants sought to adapt to different scenarios. For reference points, we offered two sample questions from professionals early on:

‘How do we, as medical professionals, encourage trust in our patients when we have limited time/ resources to build that trust?’

And:

‘How do we encourage vulnerable individuals connect with us (as a charity) when they’ve been let down by organisations in the past?’

Two rounds of improvisation would then branch out to cover new topics and even derail into other interesting bits of discussion. These simulated conversations involved an additional question; we asked our academics to think of an object which was relevant or symbolic of their research, and to think about what this object could bring to the conversation. Beyond being a useful tool for visualising complex research, the object would also act as an added puzzle piece to elevate and structure the conversations.

After two rounds of improvisation, we asked our academics to feed back about their experience in the form of a Q&A. Beyond providing additional clarification on the structure, we were happy to see that opening up the conversation in this final section also allowed for a reflection on the format. Participants remarked about leaving their comfort zone of academic theory to see where their research and medical practice can intersect or inform one another. This feedback, as we will explore below, was similarly reflected in the overall feedback we received for the *Ongoing Conversations* project as a whole. It was essential that all our participants felt safe and supported, both by us and by their conversation partners. Some were PhD students talking about their research for the first time in a public setting. Others were a bit camera shy at first, a little disconcerted by the idea of being filmed. We wanted to make sure that each participant enjoyed their experience of the project, and that meant ensuring that we set them up for success from the beginning.

Creating the pairings:

Sandpits and briefings were designed with the dual purpose of preparing participants for their conversations while also providing us with the information needed to create our pairings. Therefore, following the online briefings with external stakeholders and in-person sandpits with academics, we were able to begin making pairs. Knowing the kind of objects the academics planned to bring and which question/ problems the stakeholders had developed was essential to creating pairings that would be generative, exciting, and fun to watch. We also took into consideration the personalities and additional work of our participants. By getting to know them in advance of making these pairings, we were able develop a sense of who would most inspire, challenge, and enjoy being in conversation with each other.

We think the pairings worked perfectly and thoroughly enjoyed watching the *Conversations* unfold live. It was wonderful to witness the passion, kindness, and enthusiasm the participants expressed for each other's work and the possibilities of their continued collaboration.

July – September 2024 - Filming the *Ongoing Conversations*:

Once the pairings were made, we began organising the filming schedule. Each filming session was booked for one hour. Although we predicted that the conversation itself would only go for twenty minutes, we wanted to make sure the participants weren't rushed and allow for potential technical difficulties.

To ensure the pairs did not know each other, we emailed them both separately to schedule a time and date to film. We asked the external partner for their availability across multiple dates, before asking academics which date from the list best suited them. We filmed from July – September which meant most teaching had ended, but marking and holiday constraints remained. All this to say that this process is best organised with a longer timeframe to suit all availabilities and to not pressure the academics or stakeholders.

Once times and dates for filming were established, we began to film the videos. As mentioned, the Zoom calls were scheduled for one hour, but the filming itself was usually completed within 30 minutes. These calls included an introductory briefing with each participant individually, twenty minutes of filmed conversation, and a final de-brief together.

Before the *Conversations*:

Before filming took place, each participant was greeted by a facilitator on a separate Zoom call. The academic and stakeholder were sent individual Zoom links to ensure the pairing did not meet in advance of filming. This initial call lasted about five minutes and was put in place to ensure participants were relaxed and ready to begin the conversation. From a technical perspective, this individual briefing allowed us to ensure appropriate backgrounds and identify any connectivity, sound, or video issues in advance of filming. Each participant was reminded

of the video structure, had time to ask any last-minute questions, and were reassured of the goals of the project: conversation and connection. The participants were then given the main Zoom link.

Participants were told that we, the facilitators, would be present during the call to help them, but would be off camera and microphone, only communicating via the chat if they were going off track or running out of time. We asked them to pretend we were not there. They were then asked to join the call when they were ready and speak only to their conversation partner.

During the Conversations:

As facilitators, we were in the Zoom call, but off camera and microphone. We were there only to ensure everything was running smoothly, and offer guidance on returning to the structure, or wrapping up the conversation when running out of time.

To ensure the final videos would be roughly ten minutes long, filming lasted about twenty minutes, and we were strict on that time limit to ensure we didn't have to cut vital bits of the conversation. This was a tough time limit for many participants, as conversations were often going so well that they didn't want to stop. However, this seemed to encourage them to continue their collaboration after filming, which was an incredibly positive result for us.

We wanted to ensure that conversations were natural and unplanned. Therefore, while we created a structure for the videos, we did not correct participants when they deviated from it. Instead, we waited to see where their conversations took them, offering encouragement and guidance in the chat to ensure they hit the essential talking points.

The rough structure, and talking points for the videos were as follows:

1. Each pair entered the Zoom call and introduced themselves.
2. The academic introduced their object and research.
3. The stakeholder introduced their problem.
4. The pair discussed these objects/ questions in the context of their work and lives.
5. The conversation ended on the reason for their pairing; what was their connection?

When the conversations approached twenty minutes, we prompted the pair via the chat to begin to wrap up their conversation and craft a sentence identifying their connection. This was our main intervention throughout the filming process. The pairs were having such good conversations that they could have talked for far longer, but to ensure the goal of ten-minute videos, we had to be strict on our time limits.

After the Conversations:

Following the conversations, we stopped the recording and thanked each person for taking part, reflecting how much we enjoyed their conversations. We then asked if they wished to share their email addresses with one another for further collaboration. If they said yes (which they all did) we sent a follow up email to both participants thanking them again and discussing the next stage of the project: editing the videos. We assured them that once videos had been edited by us, they would have the chance to review them and request that we edit, remove, or amend anything they didn't want in the final cut.

We had extremely positive responses from each participant. One pairing discussed plans to meet and tour the gardens of Nucleus Arts (the stakeholder's workplace). When we caught up with them a few months later, this tour had indeed happened, demonstrating the lasting connections created in their initial video.

September 2024 onwards - Editing the *Conversations*:

From the twenty minutes of film, the videos were edited down to ten minutes.

The editing process worked with the recorded Zoom video and audio files (with an audio track for each speaker) and the Adobe Premiere Pro software. Due to the organic nature of the conversational format, we were faced with the challenge of preserving the conversations as they took place against keeping to our scope of shorter, digestible videos adhering to a chaptered structure. On paper, the separate sections ('The question', 'The object' etc.) followed one another comfortably, but in practice the participants would sometimes find their own way around the discussion, or engage in tangents of conversation which strayed too far from the initial setup. We made the decision to embrace some of this spontaneity as much as possible while still adhering to the broader strokes and scope of our format, and we were delighted to see how each pairing would bring their own personality and dynamics to the conversations.

To preserve the integrity of the discussions, we opted to avoid regular jump cuts and more abrupt transitions whenever possible. When the participants were shown on screen, their discussion would mostly play uninterrupted, with occasional dissolves in some instances.

Observing the originally set ten minutes meant that some interesting strands of discussion had to be edited out. We made an effort to ensure that the final cuts of the videos represent the conversations taking place truthfully, but of course not exhaustively: it is clear to us that twenty, thirty, or even sixty minutes wouldn't be enough to explore the complex and nuanced topics raised by our participants. By nature, the edited videos offer a glimpse into the meeting of people and ideas, and point towards the future: conversations not finished, but *Ongoing*.

Reflections:

Our Reflections:

Whilst this was a time-consuming project, it was exciting and rewarding to be part of. Listening to the Zoom conversations take place felt like listening to a podcast and held some wonderful moments. We are proud that this project made those moments happen.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this project was that we got to capture people's enthusiasm on film which filled us with joy and made the hard work worth it, encapsulating why, as academics, we are in this work – because we love our subjects.

Importantly, *Ongoing Conversations* illustrates how conversation can be used as an effective and impactful method of inquiry, showing first hand these benefits. We highly encourage more people, academics, and university centres to engage in this type of research, drawing on this 'Toolkit' to help facilitate this research.

Seeing this work come to life has been wonderful, and we hope you enjoy it.

Reflections from participants:

As part of *Ongoing Conversations* and our IAA funding, we asked our participants for feedback on this project. Below is a selection of responses from participants, demonstrating the impact *Ongoing Conversations* had.

‘Overall, it was a really exciting opportunity to share my ongoing passion in the medical humanities, particularly with a broader general audience. I greatly appreciated the opportunity

to meet [my partner] and to take part in such an intellectually stimulating and genuinely enjoyable conversation’.

‘I could see the similarities in the pairing, of using creative approaches to help people with their mental wellbeing in various ways. It surprised me in the sense that I expected to be paired with an org or service where my work might be helpful, rather than with someone who actually does something quite similar. However, the conversation meandered in some interesting ways’.

‘It was sad to end the conversation, because it was so stimulating.’

‘I was initially surprised by the pairing, although the conversation furthered my interest in identifying ways that my research had potential to reach beyond my field, into family social care and health’.

‘My biggest takeaway was to keep close to heart the reminder that we need a plurality of approaches because, especially with mental health, what works for one person might not work for another. That's really important for everyone involved in wellbeing/healthcare pathways to always keep in mind.’

Further Resources:

Thank you for taking the time to read our *Ongoing Conversations* 'Toolkit'. We hope this resource will help you to create your own *Conversations* and share your passions.

The videos, and further information can be found on our website and YouTube:

<https://research.kent.ac.uk/chmh/ongoing-conversations/>

www.youtube.com/@CHMH_UniKent