SWDTP ANNUAL STUDENT CONFERENCE 2026

SHARING COURAGE

RESEARCHING SOLUTIONS FOR TODAY'S CHALLENGES

Be the lighthouse for our futures

25TH NOVEMBER

ROLLE MARQUEE
UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

PLYMOUTH



University of Exeter · Lucem Sequimur · University of Plymouth · UKRI Economic and Social Research Council · UWE Bristol · Bath Spa University · Bournemouth University · Marjon

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SWDTP

Conference Programme and Timetable

10.30 Arrival and Registration

11.00 Welcome by the Conference Committee

11.10 Keynote Presentation Dr Tina Skinner

11.50 Coffee break

12.05

Session 1.A Rolle 115

Where Are the Instructions for Public Involvement?
Jude McClellan, UWE Bristol

From Penguins to Policy: A Placement at the British Antarctic Survey
Jordane Liebeaux, University of Bristol

Session 1.B Rolle 018

Centring the Story: Storytelling Methods for the Creation and Communication of Disaster Knowledges
Emily Slater, University of Bristol

Researching Uncertainty: Charismatic Political Discourse, Youth Polarisation and Ethical Reflexivity in India
Joyleen Kour, University of Bath

Session 1.C Workshop Rolle Marque

The Courage of Our Convictions: Finding and Using Your Scholarly Voice
Claire Hadfield, Plymouth Marjon University

12.55 Lunch

13.45

Session 2.A Rolle 115

"They're Really Well-Established": Researching an Industry Nobody Wanted Me to Question
Jaimie O'Connor, University of Bristol

The Cow in the Room: Managing conflict in collaborative food systems governance
Kezia Kershaw, UWE Bristol

Session 2.B Rolle 018

Courage in Chaos: Cultivating Resilience, Novelty, and Purpose as an Early Career Researcher
Ashraf Ahmed Kuhail, University of Bath

Inconvenient sources: The power of uncertainty in research
Bathsheba Slater-Wells, University of Exeter

Session 2.C Workshop Rolle Marque

Sharing Courage in Researching Challenges That Societies Are Facing Today
Ellie-Anne Jones and Regan Eminson, Bournemouth University

14.35 Coffee break

14.45

Session 3.A Rolle 115

Responsibility in Preparation: LGBTQ+ Inclusive Social Work Education
Ellie Coleman, University of Bristol

Teaching Controversy in Challenging Times: Children's Literature and the Professional Interpretive Judgement of Teachers Teaching Controversial Issues in Primary RE
Selina Day, Plymouth Marjon University

Session 3.A Rolle 018

When Research is Designed for a World that No Longer Exists: Courage, Uncertainty and the Potentialities of Disruption
Liam Hilton, University of Exeter

Navigating Uncertainty: Researching Law in a Changing Regulatory Landscape
Saba Mokhtari, University of Exeter

Session 3.C Workshop Rolle Marque

Working Reflexively with Emotionally Demanding Research
Hayley Redman and Ellie Hepworth, University of Exeter

Scan for full programme!

15.35 Coffee break

15.45 Life After a PhD Panel

16.45 Closing remarks

17.15 Drinks and Networking

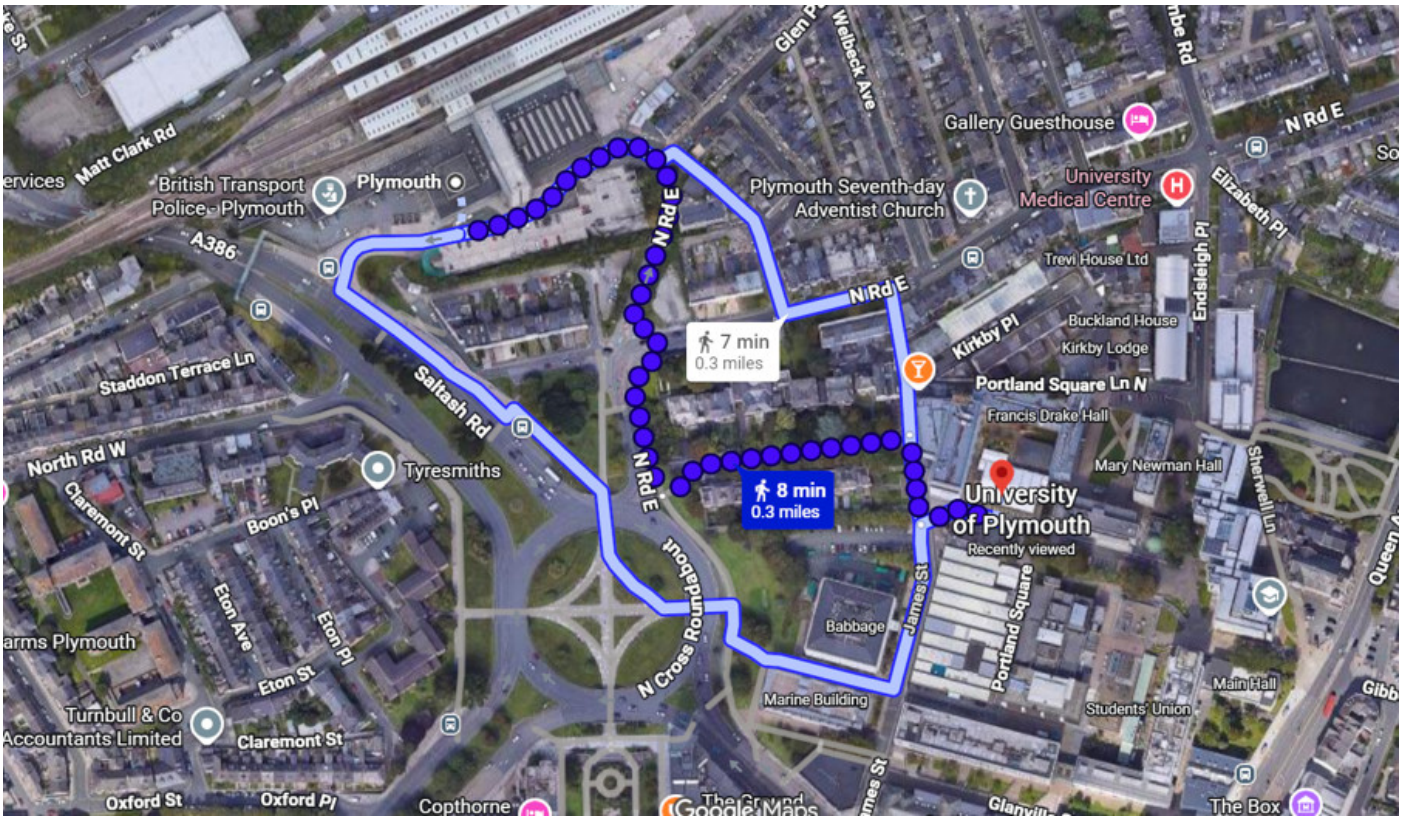
SWDTP

Travel Guide

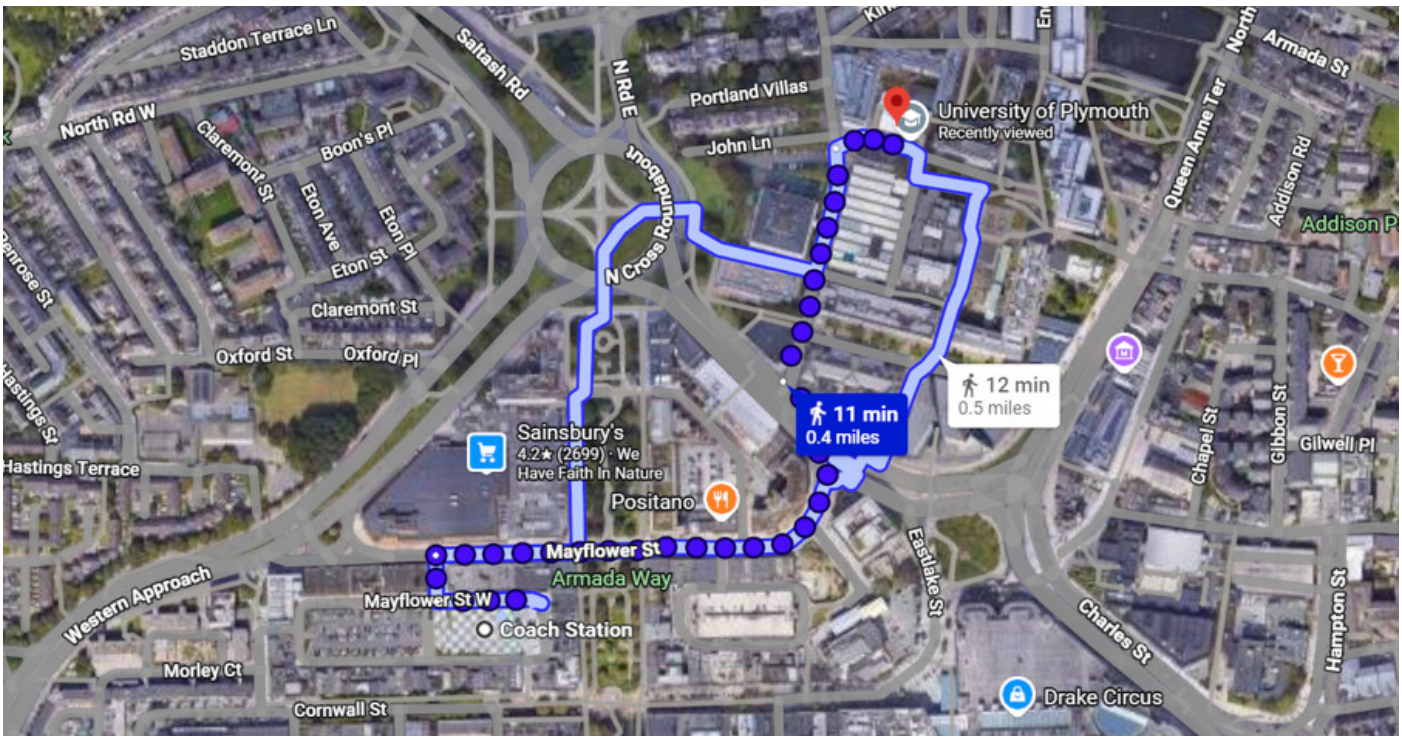
This year's conference is being held in the Rolle Marquee at University of Plymouth.

Please arrive between 10:30am and 10:45am for registration. The first session will begin at 11:00am.

The nearest train station is Plymouth Train Station. From the train station, the University is a short walk.

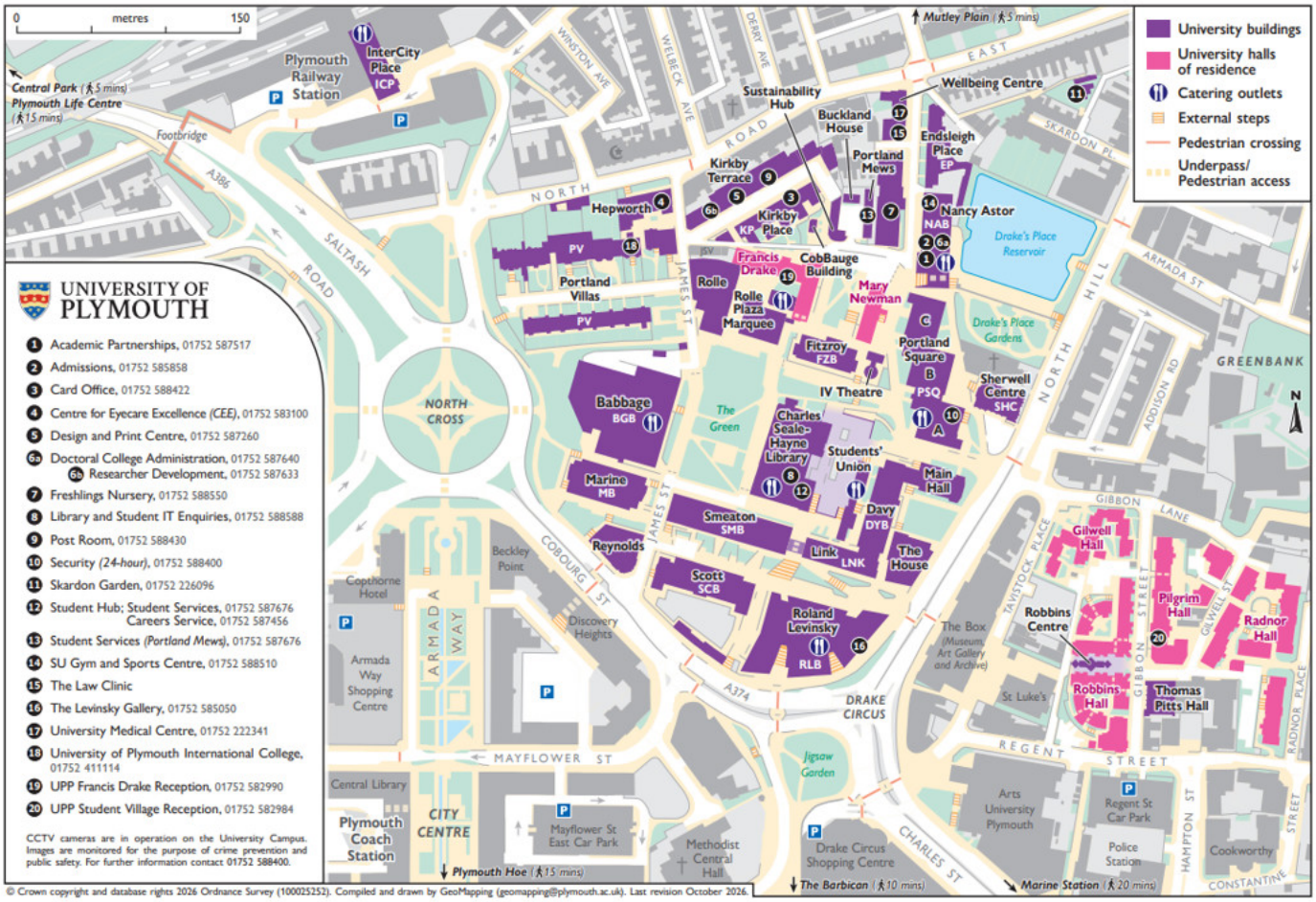


The nearest coach station is Plymouth (Armada Way) Coach Station.
From the coach station, the University is a short walk.



Travel Guide

Map of the University of Plymouth - Main Campus



There are rooms available for privacy and prayer, members of the committee can direct you to these rooms on the day.

Rolle 605 - Quiet room
Rolle 108 - Breastfeeding room
Rolle 604 - Prayer room

Lunch and Refreshments

Tea and coffee will be available throughout the day.
Lunch is provided (including vegetarian and vegan options).
Dietary requirements as stated at registration will be accommodated.

Informal Networking Session

After the conference, please stay for an informal networking session with your peers.

Keynote Speaker

From PhD Research to Social Change: Collaboration, Impact, and Researcher Wellbeing

This keynote address reflects on some of the collaborative research I have been fortunate to undertake with PhD students on gender-based violence, dis-ability, and wellbeing. It explores what drew us to these topics, what we learned through working together, the impacts the research has had, and the diverse career paths that have emerged for the students involved.

Researching sensitive and often distressing issues requires much more than subject knowledge and methodological expertise. It calls for empathy, resilience, ethical awareness, and the courage to engage with difficult experiences in ways that can contribute to social understanding and social change.

This work with PhD students was a key inspiration for the Researcher Wellbeing Project (RWP). The keynote shares findings from the RWP and introduces the guidance, resources, and practical tools developed to support researchers undertaking emotionally demanding work. Alongside this, it considers the wider challenges facing researchers today and the importance of creating research cultures that enable both rigorous scholarship and researcher wellbeing to flourish.

Dr Tina Skinner



Senior Lecturer in Department of Social & Policy Sciences, University of Bath

A prize-winning Associate Professor at the University of Bath (e.g. Excellence in Doctorial Supervision), and Senior Fellow of the Advanced Higher Education academy (AdvanceHE), since the 1990s Tina has undertaken/supervised projects on criminal justice, NGO and educational responses to rape, sexual assault and domestic abuse. She has also undertaken leading studies on the intersection of dis-ability and gender, and the impacts on work and wellbeing.

Bringing these two fields of research together, Tina now directs the Researcher Wellbeing Project (RWP, funded by the UKRI Research England Research Culture Fund) and GW4RWELL (the Great Western 4 Researcher Wellbeing Evidence and Learning Lab, funded by GW4). A key output of the Researcher Wellbeing Project is free guidance and resources for those undertaking emotionally challenging research, including a Researcher Wellbeing Plan Template, guidance on what to do if a researcher or participant gets distressed, and guidance on risk assessment (accessible on the RWP webpage).

Life After a PhD Panel



Darya Klymenko

Darya is in the write-up stage of her PhD in experimental psychology, investigating how adults and children process accented speech. Last year, she did a placement with a company called Zapmap where she analysed electric vehicle charging data and driver survey responses. She has carried on doing a few hours a week for them after the placement and is hoping to keep building her career as a data analyst after her PhD.

Professor Jeremy Goslin

Jeremy started his academic journey doing bachelor's degree in information technology and then went onto do a masters in Speech and Language Processing. He did his PhD in the department of computer science, at the University of Shefield, on theoretical and human syllabification and then went onto be a research fellow in the neurocognition lab at Tufts University. He received a RCUK research fellowship at the University of Plymouth and then went on to become a lecturer, then an associate lecturer, and then a professor. He is now the Head of the School of Psychology here, at the University of Plymouth.





Salma Yassine

Salma is an SWDTP-funded PhD researcher based at University of Exeter's Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies. Salma's research interests range from film and media studies to gender and sexuality studies in Arab cultural contexts. They completed an SWDTP-funded placement at the Arab British Centre in London. They also recently received the Impact Fund from the SWDTP and successfully organised and co-delivered a lecture-performance and film screening event at Exeter Phoenix.

Presentation Abstracts

Where Are the Instructions for Public Involvement?

Jude McClellan
Session 1.A at 12.05

Public involvement and engagement are increasingly recognised as essential components of impactful public health research, with co-design, co-production and other participatory approaches often presented as the gold standard for working alongside communities. In theory, the distinctions between these approaches can seem clear. In practice, however, researchers can find themselves navigating considerable uncertainty about where their project sits, what constitutes meaningful involvement, and whether their methods are sufficiently participatory, feasible, or legitimate. Instructions are hard to find, and guidance seems to come in the form of principles.

For postgraduate researchers in particular, this uncertainty can be uncomfortable. We are trained to seek clarity, rigour and justification, yet participatory research often requires us to work in spaces where outcomes, relationships and processes cannot be fully anticipated. Tensions can emerge between participatory ideals and the practical realities of time, resources, ethics and access. Questions arise: What happens when a project cannot be fully co-produced? How do we engage inclusively with people whose voices are rarely heard? How do we avoid inadvertently excluding, silencing or burdening participants while still moving the research forward? And where are the instructions?

Drawing on my experiences of beginning to work with people living with young onset dementia, this presentation reflects on the uncertainties of involving people with lived experience in research. I argue that meaningful participation is not achieved by having all the answers before we start. Rather, it requires a willingness to sit with uncertainty, relinquish some control, and learn alongside those whose expertise comes from lived experience. By sharing both challenges and reflections from my ongoing PhD journey, I explore how becoming more comfortable with not knowing may be an essential skill for participatory research.

From Penguins to Policy: A Placement at the British Antarctic Survey

Jordane Liebeaux
Session 1.A at 12.05

The proposed presentation will focus on the three months placement I undertook earlier this year at the British Antarctic Survey (Cambridge, UK). As my PhD research focuses on Antarctic environmental law and governance, I worked with the Environmental Office at BAS to draft and contribute to various policy papers with the United Kingdom delegation to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, which was held in May. The Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting is the annual diplomatic gathering of all the States that ratified the Antarctic Treaty to discuss Antarctic affairs, including environmental ones.

The presentation will therefore reflect on the role of research in Antarctic environmental policymaking, the challenges encountered for policy impact, and main take aways. The papers I worked on touched on emperor penguins and ship traffic, seals and biosecurity, ballast water management, and cumulative impacts around research stations in Antarctica.

This aligns with the conference theme of impact as contributing to policymaking is a possible path for researchers to bring about change and influence decision-makers. The presentation will for instance discuss the information papers I worked on and how they practically impacted decisions at the Meeting. This would be an opportunity to share a story from a placement, which is now required by the SWDTP, answer questions about placements, and highlight the value of interdisciplinarity, as a major part of my work involved bridging the gap between natural sciences, law, and policy.

Centring the Story: Storytelling methods for the creation and communication of disaster knowledges

Emily Slater
Session 1.B at 12.05

Natural and anthropogenic hazards pose a threat to populations and communities worldwide, amplified by the climate crisis and the interconnectivity of social, economic and environmental systems (Pescaroli & Alexander, 2015). Although technocratic framings of risk are historically dominant, the need to integrate scientific and local knowledges to effectively mitigate disaster risk is increasingly acknowledged (Gaillard & Mercer, 2013; Griffin & Barney, 2020). This requires increased attention to, and communication of, community perspectives of disaster risk, a necessity driving methodological innovation across the disaster studies discipline.

One emerging avenue for exploring these community perspectives is storytelling, a form of sharing information and experiences that constitutes the foundation of human communication. In disaster-affected communities, storytelling is a near-ubiquitous sense-making process that promotes disaster resilience and recovery (Nagamatsu, Fukasawa & Kobayashi, 2021). Stories also offer an emotive, memorable alternative mode of communication for uncertain challenges like disaster risk (Dahlstrom, 2014). In addition, storytelling has been increasingly adopted as a research method, allowing participants to share their experience in their own words and thereby reveal hidden motivations, ideas and perceptions about disaster risk (Hati, 2025). While disaster storytelling research is growing into a substantial interdisciplinary research area, the research methods employed to elicit and understand disaster stories remain loosely defined and broadly applied.

This presentation aims to explore the emergence and development of the storytelling method in disaster risk research and illuminate the contributions that such methods can make to risk communication and reduction practices. I share the findings of a systematic review of existing disaster storytelling research, guided by the PRISMA guidelines and checklist (Page, et al., 2021) and completed during the first year of my PhD. I propose that plural definitions and approaches to storytelling have simultaneously emerged across sub-fields without obvious cross-fertilisation, but which are united by four shared principles. Adherence to these principles, rather than a strictly defined method, creates the space for the methodological flexibility that is integral to maximising value for both the researcher and participant. By embracing alternative methodologies tailored to the research context, it is possible to co-create rich shared knowledges that offer substantial insight for disaster risk reduction.

Researching Uncertainty: Charismatic Political Discourse, Youth Polarisation and Ethical Reflexivity in India

Joyleen Kour
Session 1.B at 12.05

Researching charismatic political discourse in politically sensitive contexts requires scholars to navigate uncertainty not only as a constraint, but also as a constitutive feature of the research. This presentation reflects on my MRes dissertation which examined Narendra Modi's political discourse and its relationship to youth polarisation and social cohesion in India. This presentation engages with the question on how uncertainty shaped the project's design, participants' engagement, the researcher's methodological decisions and the interpretation of political voices.

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach. First, selected speeches were analysed using the Discourse-Historical Approach, with attention to rhetorical strategies, ideological framing and the construction of political in-groups and out-groups. Second, an online survey explored political perceptions among young people aged 18–35. However,

the research unfolded within a digitally mediated and politically sensitive environment marked by mistrust, concerns about surveillance and fear of political repercussions. These conditions contributed to low response rates, restricted access to minority perspectives and the possibility of self-censorship.

The presentation traces the motivations, dead ends and methodological pivots that shaped the project. It considers how data minimisation, anonymisation, adaptive sampling, manual transcription and translation, and reflexive journaling were used to protect participants while maintaining methodological rigour. It also reflects on researcher positionality and the limits of interpreting data produced under conditions of uncertainty. Rather than treating ethical and methodological challenges as external obstacles, the presentation examines how they became part of the empirical context and influenced what participants felt able or willing to say.

The central argument is that uncertainty can generate methodological creativity and deepen ethical reflexivity. At the same time, it exposes the unequal conditions through which political knowledge is produced, voices become visible and research impact is assessed. By documenting emerging forms of youth political engagement and polarisation, the project contributes to debates on charismatic politics, democratic backsliding and social cohesion. It ultimately argues that early-career research in uncertain times can be both critically engaged and socially responsible when it acknowledges the limits of its evidence, prioritises participant safety and treats uncertainty as an object of analysis rather than merely a problem to overcome.

Keywords: charismatic political discourse; youth polarisation; India; political uncertainty; ethical reflexivity; researcher positionality; democratic backsliding; social cohesion

"They're Really Well-Established": Researching an Industry Nobody Wanted Me to Question

Jaimie O'Connor,
Session 2.A at 13.45

Aim: To reflect on what it takes to pursue research that established authorities actively discourage and to show how that discouragement became part of the argument itself.

Early in this PhD, I was told by people regulating the UK weight-loss industry that there was little point studying it as the major companies of focus are long-established and reputable, and the real story now is weight-loss injections. Both claims are reasonable on their face. But I argue that this is precisely why the industry has escaped scrutiny for so long - it is too normalised to seem worth questioning, and the policy conversation has moved on before the behavioural and commercial programmes millions still use were ever properly examined.

I persisted anyway. Using a social-harm (zemiological) framework informed by feminist body scholarship, my research asks whether the weight-loss industry can comply with regulation and still cause foreseeable and preventable harm to consumers. Evidence is drawn from a qualitative content analysis of public-facing marketing from two of the UK's largest weight-loss companies, alongside interviews with the women who used these programmes, former employees, and regulatory professionals.

The findings suggest harm is produced through design: claims that are deliberately misleading by implication, testimonials that imply typical results from exceptional cases, and digital environments that place risk and responsibility onto the individual. Compliance, in other words, is not the same as harm prevention, and the confidence that "well-established" means "safe" is part of what allows the harm to continue unremarked.

The presentation offers this as a case study in researcher courage in the persistence required to keep investigating something the relevant experts have declared minor or old news. It speaks to any researcher who has been told their question is the wrong one.

I hope attendees will leave with a concrete example of how compliance and harm coexist, and a reminder that "no one thinks this matters" is sometimes the strongest reason to continue.

The cow in the room: managing conflict in collaborative food systems governance

Kezia Kershaw
Session 2.A at 13.45

UK food systems are in urgent need of transformation for social and ecological sustainability, as laid bare by the recent extreme heat and drought of summer 2026. A critical component of necessary transformation is the future of animal agriculture, primarily ruminant livestock (cows and sheep), given over 70% of the farm land in the UK is given to raising and feeding animals (including crops for animal feed). However, it is very challenging to talk about this topic. In this presentation I will share my interim research findings from a case study of collaborative multi-stakeholder governance, a process by the Agri-Food for Net Zero Network that led to the publication of a report on how to get the UK food system to net zero by 2050. Using mixed methods (interviews and social network analysis) I am exploring: how has an existing, successful initiative engaged the contentious issues of the future of livestock? What can we learn from the successes and challenges, to inform courageous research and action for a sustainable UK food system?

Courage in Chaos: Cultivating Resilience, Novelty, and Purpose as an Early Career Researcher

Ashraf Ahmed Kuhail
Session 2.B at 13.45

Researching in a rapidly changing world takes on a fundamentally different meaning when the chaos is not abstract, but deeply personal. As a Palestinian early career researcher, a survivor of the genocide in Gaza, and a father navigating life in the UK with five children, my academic journey is shaped by acute trauma, heavy family responsibilities, and ongoing anguish for loved ones left behind. This paper explores how navigating severe personal uncertainty and profound loss intersects with the academic imperative to innovate and create meaningful societal impact. Rather than viewing personal trauma and systemic disruption purely as barriers, I examine how lived experiences of survival foster a distinct form of resilience, driving novel methodological perspectives and a relentless commitment to purpose-driven research. By critically reflecting on the dual burden of displacement and academic expectations, this work advocates for an empathetic re-imagining of early career research support—one that recognizes the courage it takes to pursue knowledge, advocate for evidence-informed solutions, and generate real-world change while carrying the weight of ongoing conflict and profound human responsibility.

Inconvenient sources: Reframing uncertainty from barrier to resource

Bathsheba Slater-Wells
Sesion 2.B at 13.45

This presentation reframes uncertainty and inconvenience as strengths of our research, rather than burdens. It aims to provide attendees with a theoretical framework to use inconvenience as a resource to enhance both methodology and analysis, with a worked example drawn from my own experience in education research.

Uncertainty is a necessary dilemma for researchers designing projects for situations they cannot control. Particularly for those of working with human participants, it can be difficult to predict: who will choose to participate in our research; where and when people will be; what people will say in response to our questions; whether people will answer the specific questions we pose to them at all.

All these forms of uncertainty can be inconvenient for researchers attempting to determine the logistical organisation of their project or produce answers to a particular set of questions.

This presentation reframes inconvenience from a barrier to a resource. I draw on a case study from my own educational research to consider participant traits and actions that could be read as 'inconvenient' by researchers. I then apply Berlant's account of the 'inconvenience of other people' (Berlant, 2022), the desire to be in relation with other people that is always in tension with the friction those relationships bring with them. I use this account to re-read inconvenience in research as ethically and politically productive.

Being open to the inconvenience of others means recognising the limitations of our own independence and the assumed understandings that we base our research on. As such, it opens questions that are hugely generative for our research. How can inconvenience reveal the limits of dominant frameworks of knowledge that structure our fields? How can inconvenience challenge power structures underlying our research? Ultimately, how can inconvenience expand the questions it is possible for our research to answer?

Inconvenience cannot be avoided. The people who are inconvenient to our research are precisely the people we want to involve. But rather than attempting to resolve uncertainty, we can centre this and the inconvenience it brings, allowing it to unsettle the assumptions we make about how knowledge is produced and which questions are worth answering. While discomforting, this process of unsettling ourselves and our assumptions can open new avenues for analysis that can only make our research richer.

Responsibility in Preparation: LGBTQ+ Inclusive Social Work Education

Ellie Coleman
Session 3.A at 14.45

Background

LGBTQ+ adults continue to experience a range of health and social care inequalities, including discrimination and poorer mental health outcomes (Government Equalities Office, 2018; LGBT Foundation, 2023).

Although social workers play a pivotal role within the social care workforce (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021), social work education is noted to pay limited attention to sexual orientation, sex and gender identities (Hicks and Jeyasingham, 2016; Hudson-Sharp, 2018) and research highlights gaps in knowledge and confidence when working with LGBTQ+ service users amongst social work practitioners (Sommerville, 2015; Inch, 2017).

While evidence suggests effective education can challenge heteronormative attitudes and enhance professional confidence (Schaub et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2023), Social Work England provides limited direction regarding how programmes should actually address the needs of LGBTQ+ adults.

Research Question

This project asks: How does social work education in England address the needs of LGBTQ+ adults? It will examine curriculum documents, regulatory standards and frameworks and explore educator approaches to and experience of teaching and the factors that enable or constrain LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Methodology

Adopting a sequential, multiphase design, this study integrates findings across three interconnected phases, with each phase informing subsequent stages. Early consultation with LGBTQ+ adults with experience of social care and/or social work practitioners will help ground the study and shape its focus on meaningful inclusion. Subject to ethical approval, the study will comprise three phases. To explore the explicit curriculum, phase one will involve qualitative content analysis of social work curricula, professional standards, regulatory frameworks and training guidance to explore how the topic is conceptualised. The implicit curriculum will be explored in phase two and three.

Phase two will involve vignette-informed interviews with social work educators and phase three will include focus groups with a sperate sample social work educators, with data produced across these phases being analysed using Reflexive thematic analysis. Ethical approval is currently being sought, with data collection anticipated to commence following approval.

Conference Theme

This research aligns with "Creating Impact in Challenging Times" theme as it addresses an established inequality while examining a key point at which change can occur in a complex socio-political climate. The study aspires to create impact by generating an evidence base capable of informing curriculum development and wider professional and regulatory discussions. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to improved training of social workers and experiences of LGBTQ+ adults.

Teaching Controversy in Challenging Times: Children's Literature and the Professional Interpretive Judgement of Teachers Teaching Controversial Issues in Primary RE

Selina Day

Session 3.A at 14.45

Primary Religious Education (RE) provides an important space for children to encounter complex and controversial issues. However, teaching such issues requires teachers to navigate questions of representation, appropriateness and meaning within increasingly complex educational and social contexts. Contemporary children's literature offers opportunities to facilitate these encounters through narrative, yet its use for teaching controversial issues within primary RE remains underexplored.

This doctoral study investigates how primary teachers exercise professional interpretive judgement when using contemporary non-religious children's literature to engage with controversial issues in RE. It explores how teachers interpret texts, anticipate the meanings they may generate and negotiate their pedagogical possibilities within particular classroom contexts. Rather than positioning controversiality as an inherent property of a text or topic, the study considers how meaning and perceptions of controversiality are socially constructed, interpreted and negotiated within particular educational contexts.

Situated within an interpretivist paradigm and informed by a social constructivist lens, the study employs a qualitative three-stage design comprising pre-lesson interviews, participant observation of multiple sequences of lessons across primary age phases and schools in Devon and London, and post-lesson interviews. This design enables professional interpretive judgement to be examined across time: as anticipated before teaching, enacted during the pedagogical encounter, and reflected upon and reconstructed afterwards.

Emerging findings indicate how teachers negotiate the pedagogical possibilities offered by children's literature alongside questions of representation, subject knowledge, controversiality and perceived risk. These insights inform the development of a Conceptual Book Framework designed to support, rather than prescribe, teachers' professional interpretive judgement when considering literature for controversial issues in primary RE.

The presentation aims to share emerging insights into how professional interpretive judgement operates when teachers use children's literature to engage pupils with controversial issues, and to consider the implications for supporting teachers to navigate complex and potentially contested classroom encounters. It will introduce the developing Conceptual Book Framework and invite discussion about how such a framework might support, rather than constrain, professional judgement.

The study argues that professional interpretive judgement is central to enabling meaningful, critical and dialogic engagement with controversial issues through children's literature in primary RE.

When Research is Designed for a World that No Longer Exists: Courage, Uncertainty and the Potentialities of Disruption

Liam Hilton
Session 3.B at 14.45

This presentation explores what happens when the conditions in which a research project was conceived change so dramatically that, quite literally, the world it was designed for no longer exists. Reflecting on the uncertainties and disruptions that have shaped my PhD research, I will explore how these have led to unexpected connections, collaborations and community, allowing the research to develop in ways it otherwise might not have. These disruptions have enriched the project while creating opportunities for greater positive impact on the queer Palestinian community my work seeks to amplify and support.

My PhD research explores the lived experience of diasporic queer Palestinians living on Turtle Island (North America). It was originally conceived around fieldwork in Palestine, building on my work and contacts there as a Human Rights Observer. The escalation of violence into an environment of genocide from October 2023 onwards rendered my planned research design untenable, requiring a fundamental reorientation, both geographically and conceptually, towards diasporic Palestinian communities. As political circumstances continued to change, decisions about where research could ethically and practically take place required repeated reconsideration, ultimately taking the project across several locations throughout Turtle Island.

These disruptions have extended beyond research logistics. Had I conducted research in Palestine, I may have been afforded a level of trust by the perceived sacrifices involved in being there. Conducting research within diasporic communities during a time of genocide, while the countries in which they live actively support the state engaging in genocide, instead required navigating questions of trust, positionality and suspicion regarding my intentions and affiliations. This required me to reassess how I approach recruitment and relationships with those participating.

Disruption cannot be understood solely as an obstacle to overcome. Moving the research across geographical and intellectual contexts has generated unexpected encounters, questions and possibilities that could not have been anticipated. It has required me to consider more deeply my responsibilities towards the queer Palestinian community, my relationships with collaborators, and what forms of knowledge can emerge through disruption.

This presentation therefore asks what courage in research means when the material conditions underpinning a project no longer exist. It explores how researchers might respond to uncertainty not merely through perseverance, but through a willingness to reconsider project plans and research assumptions. It concludes by considering how these experiences have shaped the future direction of the research and how its outcomes might be communicated beyond the university, creating space for creative dialogue and wider societal engagement.

Navigating Uncertainty: Researching Law in a Changing Regulatory Landscape

Saba Mokhtari
Session 3.B at 14.45

For legal and socio-legal research projects that consider different aspects or impacts of regulations and policy frameworks, the regulatory structure usually provides the foundation upon which the analysis is built. However, when that legal framework continues to change throughout the research process, researchers must continually revise their research questions, refine the scope of their study, and adapt their methodological approach.

This challenge has been central to my research on

marine conservation law. Since beginning my postgraduate study in 2024, significant developments in the regulatory framework governing habitat protection have altered the legal context within which my research is situated. These changes have required me to revise my PhD research proposal several times to ensure that the project remains relevant while maintaining a coherent focus. At the same time, the limited academic literature in this emerging area has made it difficult to identify a clearly defined research gap.

In this presentation, I will reflect on how embracing uncertainty has strengthened rather than hindered my research. I will discuss the strategies I have used to develop my PhD research questions that remain relevant despite regulatory rapid changes, adopt a flexible methodology capable of responding to new legal developments, and address gaps in the literature by drawing more extensively on empirical findings.

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Workshop Abstracts

The Courage of Our Convictions: Finding and Using Your Scholarly Voice

Claire Hadfield
Session 1.C at 12.05

Theme: Exploring how researchers can articulate and justify their perspectives while navigating uncertainty, self-doubt and questions of legitimacy and belonging.

Aim: Support postgraduate researchers in recognising the value of their scholarly voice, identifying barriers to using it, and developing practical strategies for making courageous, reflexive and evidence-informed contributions to their research communities.

Main Activity: Through guided reflection and paired discussion, participants will explore the experiences, values and perspectives that shape their scholarly voice. Using a structured scaffold, they will formulate, articulate and rehearse a contribution drawn from their own research, responding to constructive questions and refining their position, before leaving with practical actions to take forward.

Sharing Courage in Researching Challenges That Societies Are Facing Today

Ellie-Anne Jones & Regan Eminson
Session 2.C at 13.45

The aim of this workshop is to explore and encourage how researchers can address current difficult societal issues in research despite uncertainty or resistance. The session will begin with two 5-minute presentations showcasing impactful research case studies on food security among marginalised consumers and Queer, Romani and Traveller mental health studies. This will be followed by a 10-minute small-group discussion exploring potential barriers to researching sensitive topics, a 10-minute activity applying these ideas to participants' own research, and a final 10-minute session focused on developing an action plan to increase research impact, identifying ways to overcome these barriers. Potential skills gained include developing interdisciplinary and critical thinking skills for conducting research on sensitive topics.

Workshop Abstracts

Working Reflexively with Emotionally Demanding Research

Hayley Redman & Ellie Hepworth

Session 3.C at 14.45

It is widely recognised across disciplines that doctoral students are often inadequately prepared for the demands of conducting emotionally challenging research. As postgraduate researchers, we have encountered this gap firsthand. In this workshop, we aim to raise awareness of emotionally demanding research, discuss how we can prepare and mitigate these challenges, as well as introduce a variety of ways for working reflexively beyond the traditional reflexivity journal. This session will be suitable for PGRs at any stage of their PhD journey, offering the opportunity for peer support and peer learning.

SWDTP

2026 Conference Organising Committee



Becky Coniam-Gudka

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The University of Exeter



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Co-Chair and Workshops Team
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Mili Slouková

Abstract Liaison and Marketing Team
The University of Bath



Mirah Zhang

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What to expect

In preparation for the SWDTP Student Conference on 25th November, the conference committee wanted to share this guide! Whether it's your first ever conference, or you just want a refresher on how to make the most of the day, we hope this is helpful.

The guide was made with our upcoming conference in mind - but most points are relevant for any conference!

Attending a conference, especially for the first time, can be a little daunting. They involve a significant amount of attention, from finding the venue, to introducing yourself, and then engaging with the presentations and the socialising… one of our committee members describes this as feeling, 'exciting and drowning at the same time'.

Conferences are a fantastic opportunity to connect with like-minded people, and can bring loads of exciting opportunities of exchange and support. You may meet incredible people that later became close friends, collaborators, and even employers.

Every single conference is different. Each one has its vibe, its values and its people. However, a lot of the experience of attending or presenting at a conference has to do with you, and how you are.

SWDTP

Conference Values and Code of Conduct

The SWDTP Conference celebrates the vibrant postgraduate research (PGR) community and aims to foster the exchange of ideas across the diverse range of research undertaken by our members.

We are committed to creating an inclusive environment in which all participants can engage and contribute on an equal footing. We encourage everyone to respect different perspectives, share ideas openly and provide constructive feedback where appropriate. All participants are expected to treat one another with dignity and respect.

Harassment, bullying or any behaviour that may make others feel uncomfortable will not be tolerated. Together, we can ensure that the conference is a welcoming, supportive and rewarding experience for everyone.

Before the conference

Look at the programme and posters in advance to plan which sessions you plan to attend and a couple of people you might like to speak to.

Prepare a short intro about yourself: e.g., "Hi, I'm [name], a PhD student at [university] researching [X]..."

If you have accessibility needs, don't hesitate to contact us If presenting, email your presentation to the organisers as a back-up



Extra packing list tips

The app 'Blinq' can work well as a digital business card, with a free plan available.

Unless presenting, you probably don't need your laptop and charger – one committee member says,

'I always end up carrying my laptop and charger for no reason!'

Check on Google Maps where the venue is and plan how you'll get there in time

Try and get a good sleep the night before, and a full, nourishing breakfast on the morning of the conference!



Plan your outfit

Something that you'll be comfortable in, that can also be smart or smart-casual. Layers are a must for the colder seasons! If you're unsure, here's a bit of outfit inspo modelled by our previous SWDTP conference attendees (and staff!)





At the Conference

1. When you arrive, there will be a desk where you can register.

2. Arrive in time to do this before the first session.

3. It can be a long day taking in a lot of information, make sure you are caring for your own wellbeing! So, stay hydrated, eat, and take time outside if needed (or if things feel overwhelming). These will help you to properly function and engage. Make sure that you listen to your body and your mood! We have a quiet room, breastfeeding room and prayer room available. Please ask the Committee if you need help finding these.

4. Get familiar with the venue layout so you can easily find the rooms of presentations you wish to attend

5. Keep your phone on 'Do Not Disturb' – you don't want to be the person awkwardly silencing an incoming call during a presentation!

6. Try and speak to different people, be curious and ask about their journey to academia and their research. We can learn so much from each other!

7. If approaching people feels daunting, it's okay to start with small talk about the venue or a session you just attended.

8. Connect on LinkedIn/Bluesky/Whatsapp with people you meet

9. It's normal to feel a bit of imposter syndrome when others seem so confident about their work. But remember that you bring something unique to the table including your passion, your ideas, and the reason you were chosen for your course in the first place!

10. Also remember that everyone's research journey and PhD timeline looks different…

During Sessions and Afterwards

Attendees



If you are late to a session, enter quietly and with as little disruption as possible.

Respect the speaker and actively listen – do not sit on your phone/ laptop etc. and try to avoid side conversations when someone is presenting.

Ask questions – sometimes this can feel intimidating, but kind and constructive questions will be welcomed by speakers.

Tell people if you enjoyed their talk/poster etc – it can be very nerve-wracking presenting and for some of our presenters it will be their first time presenting to a group this size!

Engage in workshops as much as you can, to get the most out of them Not every presentation will be directly relevant to your research, but there is always something useful or interesting you can take away. Embrace hearing about ideas and methods beyond your research 'box'! Who knows, it may give you a new perspective you hadn't previously considered!

Speakers



Practise a mock presentation to familiarise yourself with the content. Try to arrive at your session room early. Deep breaths to focus!

Avoid jargon. You can simplify your presentation to encourage interaction - focus on sharing your research ideas with the audience rather than striving for perfection.

Speak clearly and maintain eye contact. Do not rush your presentation, but keep within the time slot (We will give you reminders about time)

Take notes during question time and respond thoughtfully. If you blank on an answer or are unsure, you can always say you'll get back to the person later!

Afterwards



Take some time to reflect:

What inspired you? What could inform your own work? Who might you like to keep in touch with? What would you do differently at the next conference?

If you can, send a follow up message to those you would like to stay in touch with. (Otherwise, new connections can sometimes be forgotten about!)

Speakers - learn from your SWDTP Conference experience as a guide for future improvement

Enjoy yourself, look after yourself, and stay curious!

We hope that you have found this guidance useful, and please don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions about the SWDTP Conference day.

If you're unsure who to talk to on the day, come and say hi to the committee or SWDTP staff - we're here to help you feel welcome! We can't wait to see you all on the 25th!

SWDTP