

Arts-Based Wellbeing Workshops



With Dr Laura J Brown

Introduction

A research career can be fulfilling, but it also presents unique challenges, including job insecurity, ethical dilemmas, high workloads, and emotional demands. These creative workshops provide a safe, inclusive space for Early Career Researchers (ECRs) to reflect, process challenges, and strengthen resilience through creative and tactile methods. Using clay, collage, or body mapping, participants engage in hands-on creative exploration to navigate the complexities of research life. Each session is designed to foster connection, well-being, and self-expression while reinforcing positive research culture and peer support. Drawing on expertise in mixed-media arts and participatory research methods, the workshops provide a much-needed space to promote social connection and relaxation.

Facilitator Biography

Dr Laura J Brown (she/her) is a mixed-media artist with a background in feminist global health research, and expertise in innovative creative and participatory research methods. With lived experience of anxiety and depression, Laura has experienced the therapeutic benefits of arts and crafts first-hand and is a passionate creative health advocate. Laura is a certified Art Life Coach and runs arts-based wellbeing workshops at universities across the country and in her local community in Folkestone. Laura cares about equality, diversity and inclusion and also works as a specialist mental health mentor and study skills tutor for university students registered with student wellbeing and disability support services. She is DBS checked and has public liability insurance, ensuring a safe and professional environment for all of her workshops.



Workshop Activities

- Collaborative Clay Workshop: Strength in Research
- Community-Building Collage and Card-Making Workshop
- Body Mapping for Emotionally Demanding Research Workshop

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Collaborative Clay Workshop

Strength in Research

This tactile, interactive session explores the challenges and rewards of academic life through hands-on clay work. Participants engage in sculptural exercises that encourage them to:

- Express their experiences of research challenges through clay
- Reflect on personal identity as a researcher
- Build a collaborative sculpture representing strengths and support



Through guided activities, attendees sculpt, reflect, and co-create, fostering team building, trust, and a sense of collective resilience. (Optional follow-up session available for painting and finishing sculptures.)



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Feedback from

Collaborative Clay Workshop: Strength in Research

"A really good way to connect with colleagues. It was really nice to share what we value in our colleagues and how they value us, as there often isn't space to do that."

"I really enjoyed the workshop, it was nice to get my hands dirty doing something completely different. It was relaxing and cathartic! I really liked the activity where we each made something to represent others in the room. It was a good opportunity to give people complements and tell them what about them inspires you, as well as it being really nice to hear positives that other people shared about you. We definitely don't do this enough and I think it was a really nice exercise. Thank you so much Laura, you're a real ECR champion and we're so grateful!"

"It was a great workshop, I would highly recommend it to everyone. It was a very supportive environment where we could speak about our experiences and get to know one another much better."

"It was cathartic, relaxing, fun, emotional and constructive. One of the highlights of my time at IGH. It was lovely to really connect with colleagues in such a real and loving way."

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Community-Building Collage & Card-Making Workshop

Using collage, this workshop helps researchers reflect on research culture, express gratitude, and explore their own strengths. Activities include:



- Creating collages that represent the challenges and limitations of research
- Exploring positive research culture through expanded collage-making
- Designing cards of appreciation for colleagues
- Writing self-affirmation messages to foster confidence and self-worth



This workshop is designed to reframe challenges, encourage gratitude, and build a sense of community among researchers while identifying ways to improve research culture.

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Feedback from

Community-Building Collage & Card-Making Workshop

"A delightful morning, creating and expressing in a safe space. Mirroring some of my work to my progress as a researcher. Getting to know new faces and learn from different journeys. There are no expectations, everyone feels "equal" at the table."

"Laura's creative wellbeing workshop allowed me to reflect on my journey through academia in a non-judgemental, artistic, safe-space. The unity I felt with my peers by sharing unique as well as common experiences was so valuable. I truly hope the workshops continue in the future. I am a visual person and this was such a good way to illustrate my journey through a creative fun form. I love the creative, safe-space and the supportive environment the workshop provides. Everyone feels welcome, validated and we get to be in touch with our creative side- something that academics usually forget they have or cannot allocate time for."

"I really enjoyed the workshop; it was a safe and fun environment. It provided an excellent opportunity for us to discuss and reflect on our academic journeys and share what we find positive about academia. Laura's guidance helped me process my thoughts differently, allowing for deeper reflection. The smaller group size made it easy to connect with everyone, fostering an intimate environment that encouraged us to open up. This allowed us to see things from each other's perspectives, build a stronger sense of community, and get to know each other better. Thanks Laura! I loved the workshop <3"

"The workshop was brilliant. I was totally immersed in the activity, it was really nice to use a more creative outlet for the discussion of our experiences as PhD students and ECRs. The order and flow of the activities made sense and helped me think through the themes of the workshop. Building up from the individual collage to the group one and doing the gratitude cards at the end made a lot of sense to me."

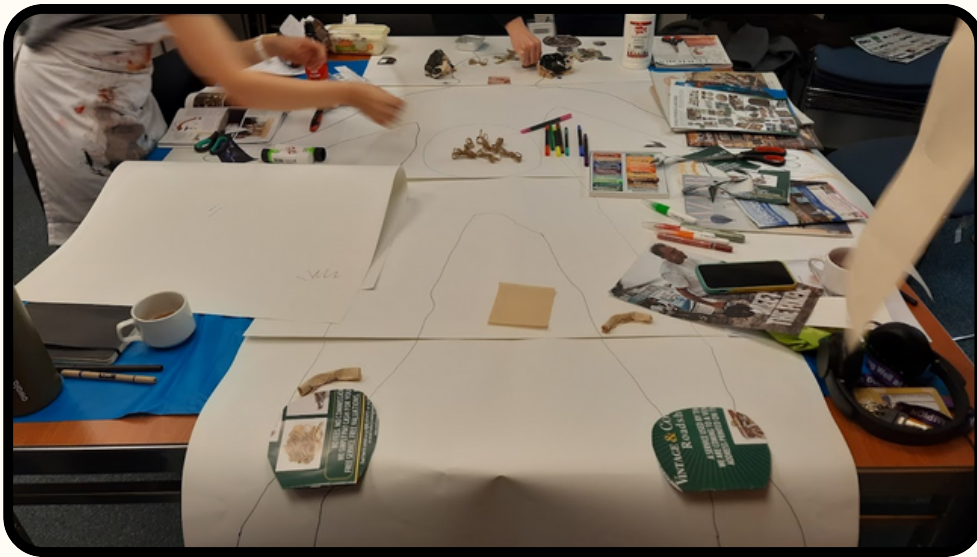
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Body Mapping Workshop for Emotionally Demanding Research

Through collaborative body mapping, participants use collage, paint, and symbolism to explore:



- How emotionally demanding research impacts the body and mind
- The emotions and responsibilities researchers carry
- Ways to process and build resilience

Participants work in small groups to co-create large-scale body maps, using words, images, textures, and colour to express and reflect on their experiences. The workshop provides a unique space for peer connection, shared understanding, and emotional processing.

Ideal for PhD students, qualitative researchers, those working in sensitive fields, and research teams looking to build emotional support strategies.



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Feedback from

Body-Mapping Workshop for Emotional Demanding Research

"Laura ran an insightful body mapping workshop focused on emotionally challenging research. Her approach was sensitive, kind and thoughtful. Throughout the workshop, Laura offered invaluable guidance and support, making us feel safe and fully engaged in the process. It was a unique and enriching experience, unlike anything I had participated in before and I am grateful to have been a part of it."

"I participated in one of Laura's arts-based workshops with my colleagues. Laura made everyone feel comfortable and created a really relaxed and welcoming space. The activities were a great way to get people talking and helped open some really good conversations. Laura is a knowledgeable, thoughtful, and fun facilitator who clearly knows how to create the right space for people to engage."

"I loved the use of mixed media to facilitate conversations around difficult topics. It created a safe, engaging, and even fun environment where I felt more comfortable opening up. This approach helped me connect with colleagues who are navigating similar challenges in emotionally demanding research, and reminded me that I'm not alone in these experiences."

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Logistics

Each workshop is designed as a 3-hour session for groups of up to 10 participants, and can be adapted for longer or shorter durations if required. Sessions cover related themes but are independent, meaning they work well as stand-alone workshops or as a series.

Workshops can be booked individually or as a package.

Costs

£300 per workshop

Fees may vary depending on group size and setting, and include preparation, facilitation, and materials. If you would like to explore options to fit your budget or funding situation, please get in touch to chat about possibilities.



Conclusion

By providing ECRs with opportunities for creative expression, reflection, and community-building, these arts-based workshops aim to contribute to the cultivation of a positive and supportive research culture within and across academic institutions. Investing in the well-being of ECRs is essential for nurturing a thriving research community and fostering innovation and excellence in academia. Please get in touch if you'd like to explore the possibility of having these impactful workshops delivered for the benefit of your Early Career Researchers.

Click the icons for more!

