

## Suggested procedure and guidelines for face-to-face research conversations in pairs

The research conversations you will be engaged in take place in a pair, with another participant you are unlikely to have had a research conversation with before. They are an opportunity to both support and be supported in systematic reflection, and to understand others' perspectives in the department. Each conversation will last for around 40 minutes, with each partner taking an extended turn (20 minutes each) to talk about and be questioned about their involvement and/or attitudes to research. Further below, you will find our suggestions for 'icebreaker' prompts to keep the conversation going. Before you start, though, please read through the following clarifications and guidelines:

### Aims of the research conversations

The main intended overall aim of the conversations is to help develop 'research culture' in the department, involving you and other participants in listening carefully to and deepening understanding of others' perspectives. At the same time, you will get the opportunity to share – and thereby perhaps develop – your own viewpoints, attitudes and ideas.

Having said this, our second main aim is simply exploratory and evaluative – we do not *know* that the conversations will be useful or even enjoyable although, if they are perceived as such, we'd like to see if they can become more widespread in the university. We are interested in finding out your perceptions of the conversations and their value and will be asking you to reflect on them later, as an integral part of the day's activities.

So, we do *not* have an expectation that the conversations will lead in any immediate way to improved or new research, though we hope they might in the long run. We invite you, too, to engage in and reflect on the conversations for their own sake not for any potential instrumental gain they might bring. Here are some guidelines which we hope will help make the conversations productive from these points of view:

### Rapport

Try to build a trusting relationship based on:

- genuineness (be sincere and truthful in your interaction, with an understanding attitude)
- open-mindedness (be willing to consider new ideas)
- free-heartedness (create an environment to help your partner feel free to express their true feelings and opinions)

### Speak extensively

Divide the time you have for the overall conversation equally in half and ensure that each partner gets to speak and be listened to 'attentively' (see below) for a roughly equal amount of time during each session. (Suggested overall length of time: 40 minutes; so, 20 minutes as speaker each.) Try to get through all three of the main questions below during your turn, but don't worry if you don't reach the end. As a speaker, you should allow the listener to guide the conversation with their questions.

## Listen attentively

When it is your turn to be 'listener', do not attempt to engage in a 'back-and-forth' ('normal') conversation but instead give the floor to the speaker and encourage them to take extended turns.

Some things you should *not* do:

- \* do not give advice or offer opinions or judgments
  - \* do not use the speaker's experience as an opportunity to share experiences of your own
- Instead, you should focus on *listening* attentively and non-judgmentally, by, for example:
- \* encouraging the speaker with nods, smiles etc.
  - \* remembering to sometimes 'reflect back' what they say to enable them to think about it.

## Ask questions

As a listener, you can also engage in:

- \* asking for clarification, for example in cases where you may not understand due to coming from different a disciplinary or professional role background;
- \* probing for more information or deeper reasons, especially when the speaker appears to be focusing on something of particular importance to them. Consider using phrases like the following for this:

*I noticed that ...*

*You mentioned that ...*

*I was interested that ...*

*I was interested that you said....*

*So, would you say that.... / do you think that... ?*

*You mentioned that ... Why do you think this is important?*

*I noticed that when you talked about...*

*You used the phrase X, which sounded like you...*

So, you can move the conversation on by reflecting back what you have heard and/or asking questions but preferably not by adding your own opinions or experiences since this takes the turn away from the main speaker.

## Reflect afterwards

After you've each had your 20-minute turn, please take 10 minutes to engage in a 'natural' conversation (e.g. responding, at this point, to what you've heard by sharing your own experiences - or even advice - or reflecting on any points arising).

## Respect confidentiality

Don't share any personal information (including difficulties, successes etc. of your partner) outside your one-to-one sessions, unless you have permission from your partner to do so. Instead, share comments about the questions asked and about the overall experience.

*The above is adapted from: Smith, R. & Kirkman, J. 2021. Exploratory Pedagogic Inquiry Booklet, Part 0. University of Warwick WIHEA Pedagogic Research in Higher Education Learning Circle.*

## 2. Research conversation questions

There are three main questions on the other side of the page to ask one another in the course of your conversation – please read through these before beginning. Follow the 'Suggested procedure and guidelines' in carrying out the conversation. As a listener, you should mainly respond to what the speaker says (see 'Listen attentively' and 'Ask questions' in the guidelines). Additionally, under each main question, there are also some specific, optional prompts to help you keep the conversation going if necessary: Read through these, too, before beginning and consider which ones you might use.

Before beginning, introduce yourself briefly, stating your current role / status within the department.

After each person has taken a 20-minute turn, feel free to talk freely for 10 minutes, interacting more 'normally' about anything that came up in the conversation.

## **1) What does research mean for you, in your role/current status in the department?**

*Possible follow-up or alternative prompts:*

E.g.

- How does research specifically fit into your role/current status?
- In what ways do you engage in or with research in your daily tasks?
- How has the role of research in (or around) your work evolved since you started in your current position?
- How do you *feel* about research in your current role/current status?
- How much time do you spend on research in comparison to other parts of your life?
- What different *types* of research are you / have you been engaged in/with, if any?

## **2) What is your motivation for being involved with, doing and/or learning about research?**

*Possible follow-up or alternative prompts:*

E.g.

- What initially inspired or motivated you? *or* What would/might motivate you?
- How has your interest and understanding of research changed over time?
- What is your current motivation for being involved with research?
- Was/Is your motivation more intrinsic (from the inside) or extrinsic (from the outside)?
- What is the most rewarding research you have been involved with? What made it so rewarding?

## **3) What do you aspire to in relation to research in the future?**

*Possible follow-up or alternative prompts:*

E.g.

- How would you like to change your current relationship with research?
- What kind of research (if any) might you like to get involved in or with in the future?
- If you are currently not doing a research project, is there something you would like to work on?
- Looking ahead, are there any specific areas or topics outside your field that you're eager to explore through research? What draws you to those areas?
- What are your next steps / What would help you to achieve your aspirations?