



# Existential Dis/connections

Faculty of Wellbeing Education  
and Language Studies (WELS)

Call for PhD projects starting in October 2024

# Contents

<b>Project description</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>School</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Members</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Aims</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Contribution</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Website</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PhD project</b>	<b>5</b>

# Project description

## School

Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

## Members

Prof Erica Borgstrom	<a href="https://www.open.ac.uk/people/esb79">https://www.open.ac.uk/people/esb79</a>	<a href="mailto:erica.borgstrom@open.ac.uk">erica.borgstrom@open.ac.uk</a>
Dr Gillian Ferguson	<a href="https://www.open.ac.uk/research/people/gf873">https://www.open.ac.uk/research/people/gf873</a>	<a href="mailto:gillian.ferguson1@open.ac.uk">gillian.ferguson1@open.ac.uk</a>
Dr Joanne Jordan	<a href="https://www.open.ac.uk/research/people/jj6346">https://www.open.ac.uk/research/people/jj6346</a>	<a href="mailto:joanne.jordan@open.ac.uk">joanne.jordan@open.ac.uk</a>
Prof Jane McCarthy	<a href="https://www.open.ac.uk/people/jcrm2">https://www.open.ac.uk/people/jcrm2</a>	<a href="mailto:jane.mccarthy@open.ac.uk">jane.mccarthy@open.ac.uk</a>
<p>The project team is growing and includes people within different OU Faculties and external to the university. Initial queries about the doctoral project should be directed to Prof Borgstrom.</p>		

## Aims

Our vision is to create a research and practice network, both inside and outside the OU, that connects academic silos and for the first time fully acknowledges:

- the interconnections between the following three existential issues:

- Human dominion over, and exploitation of, all life and resources on earth
  - The climate and ecological emergency (CEE)
  - The ubiquity of death, loss and change
- how each of the three have been and remain permeated by (neo)colonial thinking and activity.

## Methodology

The project is seeking to use decolonising methodologies, open to creativity and decentring hierarchies of knowledge.

## Contribution

We seek to further broaden change, academically and in public discourse through varied innovative activities, to recognise the significance of how death, loss and change permeate these crises, to create understanding of the connections between these three aspects. Such understanding will enable new recognition of connections between peoples and with the living world, without which responses to the CEE are deeply undermined.

The project seeks to also inform UK policy and everyday lives, to shift narratives and practices.

## Website

<https://societal-challenges.open.ac.uk/challenges/existential-ldisconnections/237>

# PhD project

We would expect the doctoral researcher to identify one aspect of the wider remit that they would like to work on and explore. Potential topics could be, for example but not limited to:

- a focus on specific examples at the intersections of climate emergency and grief;
- design and evaluate public awareness drawing on thanatology;
- examine grief and climate activism.

