



Starting Conversations

Co-creating resources to support the transition to university



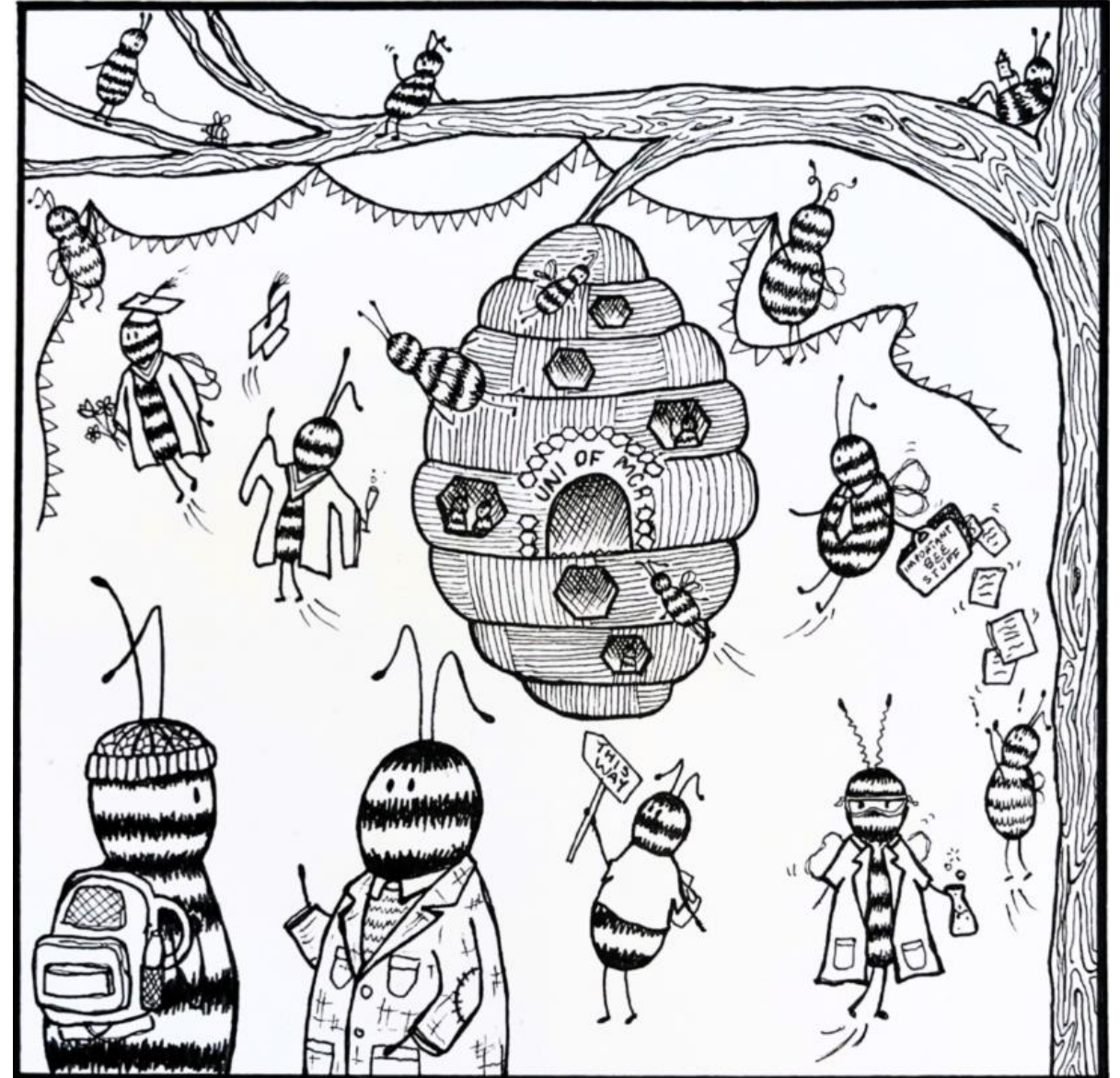
T&L Conference 2025

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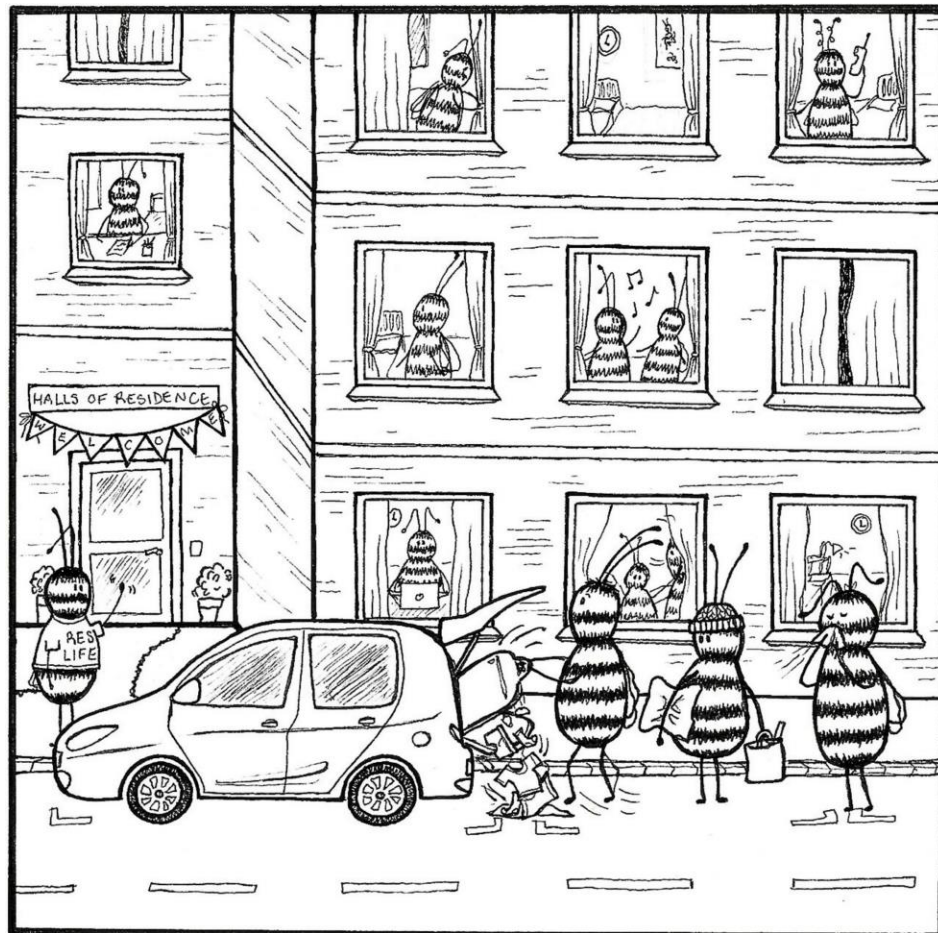
Funded by SHS Dragons Den

Talk Outline

- Background to the project
- Process for creating resources
- Sharing and future directions



PART OF THE HIVE



Transitioning To University:

Pre-arrival Worries

- Starting university can be a daunting experience.
- Peck & Shaw (2024) surveyed 2,141 UK-domiciled HE applicants via UCAS (May 2023) for an UG programme starting in September 2024.
 - 41% worried about “fitting in with new classmates”
 - 30% about “getting on with fellow students”
 - 43% concerned about coping with academic level
 - 32 % lacked confidence in their ability to study
 - 30% anxious about cost-of-living
- Even harder for international students who commonly face ‘acculturative stress’ from:
 - Cultural differences, language barriers, limited social integration, academic pressures, and homesickness (Jiang & Xiao, 2024)

Transitioning To University: New experiences

- **Grade Shock Students**

- Grades tend to decline by approximately 12% when transitioning from high school to university (Gaudreau et al., 2023)

- **Independent Living**

- Students struggle with the sudden domestic independence (Johansson, 2023)
 - Cooking, budgeting, and self-care
- Fear being negatively judged if they can't cope

- **Mental Health**

- rates of mental health symptoms are *higher* in university students than in their non-student peers of the same age (McCloud et al., 2023)



LEARNING TO JUGGLE

We Know That...

Positive, humanised relationships between academic staff and students are linked to better student wellbeing and learning (Felter & Lambert, 2020)

Normalising experiences helps students feel less isolated, reduces stigma and makes them more willing to engage with support (Devendorf, Wilson & Ingram, 2025)

Demystifying university life, exposing the 'hidden curriculum' and explicitly discussing academic culture improves students' sense of belonging and academic success (Heim et al., 2024)

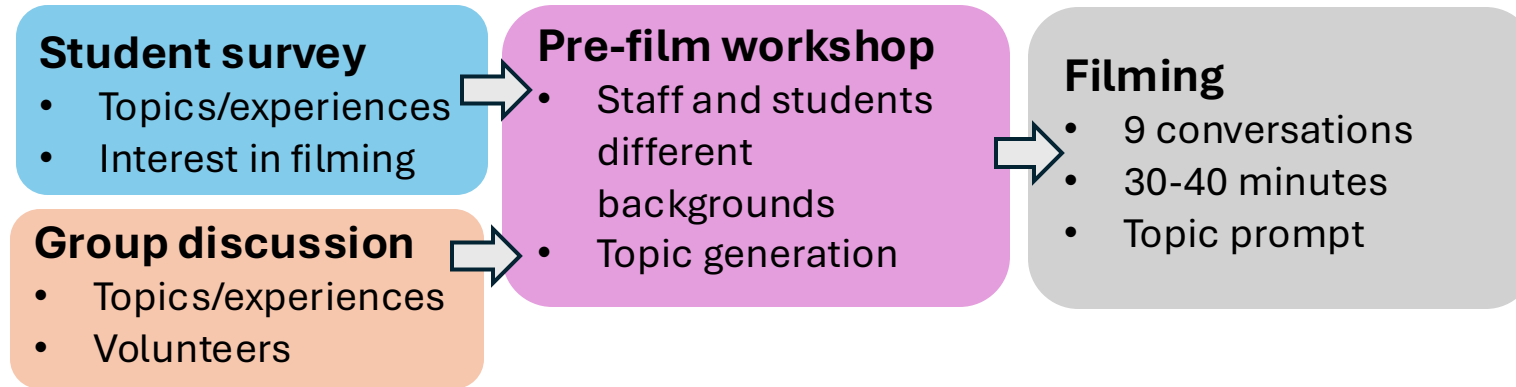


Starting Conversations

- SHS Dragons Den funding 2023/24
- Multimedia approach to **demystify common misconceptions**, normalise a wide variety of **university experiences** & **humanise staff**
- **Staff and student voices within the project**
- Designed primarily for Psychology students
 - Content is relatable and applicable for any students



Starting Conversations: Process



Filming naturalistic conversations



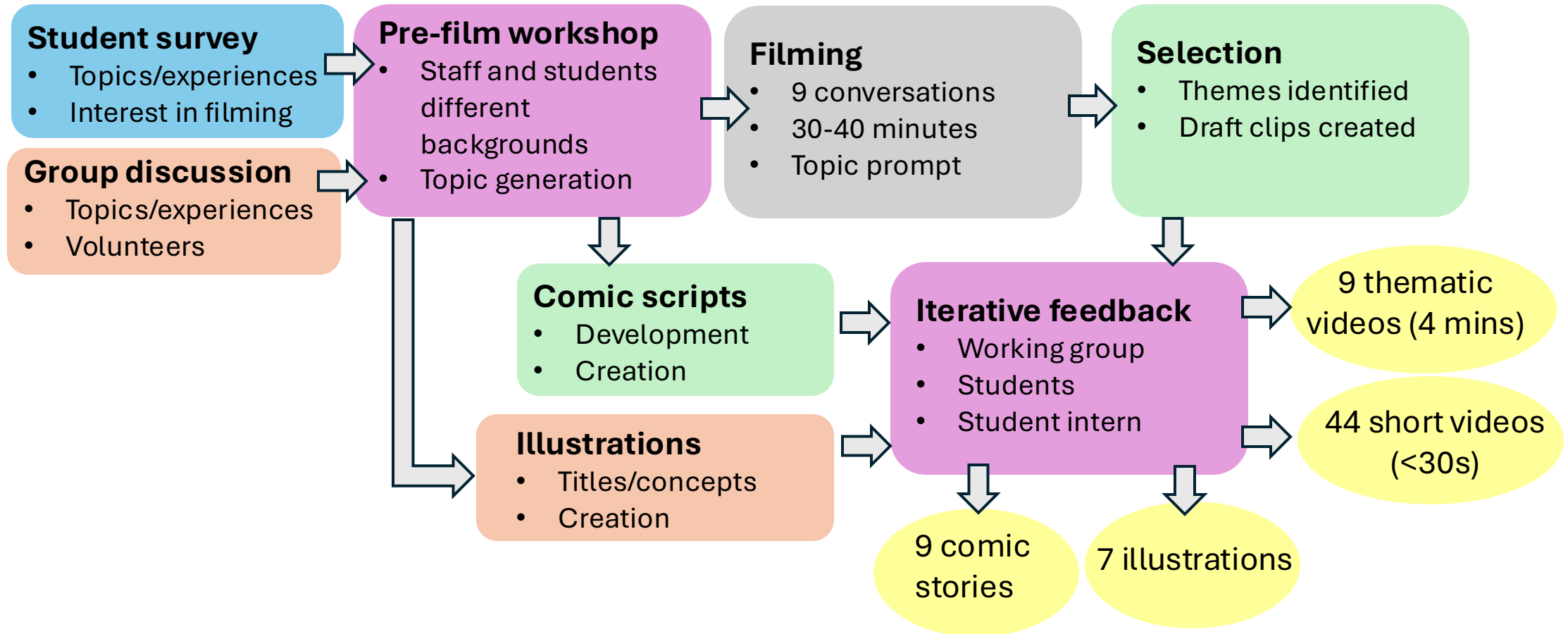
Positives

- Rich material with lived experience
- Themes/topics emerged
- Built rapport
- Diversity of experiences and backgrounds

Challenges

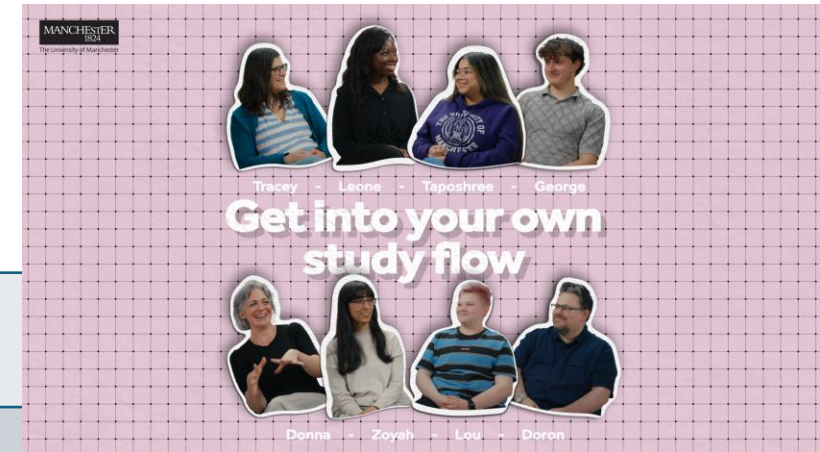
- Availability of volunteers
- Time consuming to extract themes

Starting Conversations: Process



Videos on themes

<i>"Find your people"</i>	Meeting people, making friends
<i>"What we're asking from you is different"</i>	Getting your first mark, reading feedback
<i>"Reach out for help"</i>	Asking for help
<i>"The feeling of being different"</i>	Different cultures, dealing with homesickness
<i>"Get into your study flow"</i>	Time management and procrastination
<i>"Seek your interests and opportunities"</i>	Getting work experience, developing interests
<i>"Is everyone going to look at me?"</i>	Daunting size, lecture nerves
<i>"Don't put yourself under too much pressure"</i>	Take the pressure off yourself in the first year
<i>"The freedom to explore"</i>	Growing as a person at university, exploring social and cultural elements



Short video clips

- Range of topics (overlapping with longer themes)
- Some more specific e.g. relevant to international students

“I'm actually finding it like, I'm not trying to fit in the population currently. I'm accepting who I am because I, I never be, because the background is different.

The knowledge is different. The family structure is different. And sometimes I feel a bit awkward when, when British people are saying jokes that I don't understand, but, but I feel like it's okay now.”

Sharing and using

Our Current Resources:

- Comic strips
- Bee illustrations
- Long videos (<4min)
- Shorter social media type clips (<30sec)

Coming Soon:

- Booklet (online & paper format)
- Student facing Sharepoint
- Staff Sharepoint- resource repository
- Survey for those using resources

Stay in touch



Starting Conversations: Creatively
supporting the transition to
university



Starting Conversations - Summary

- Set of multimodal resources to support transition
- Co-created with students and across a team of academics
- Designed to initiate discussions and encourage students to ask questions
- Potential to build on resource or apply to other transitions (e.g. to PGR)

