

# Extending the Impact of a Lifelong Ageing Workshop

Dr Martina Zimmermann, Dr Joe Wood, and Dr Laura Hughes  
(Department of English), Science Gallery London,  
Joseph Rowntree Foundation, United for All Ages



# PROJECT SUMMARY

The 'Extending the Impact of a Lifelong Ageing Workshop' initiative saw Dr [Martina Zimmermann](#), Dr [Joe Wood](#) and Dr [Laura Hughes](#) (Department of English), collaborate with the [Science Gallery London](#), the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#), and [United for All Ages](#). Together, they hosted an event to showcase up-and-coming researchers working on lifecourse approaches to ageing and enable conversations and collaborations within and across sectors that can both benefit current work and inform future research.

In 2020, Martina was awarded a UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship to explore scientific, medical and cultural discourses about ageing. [The Sciences of Ageing and the Culture of Youth](#) explores how we talk and think about ageing and how the way we do so influences our experiences of ageing, the meaning we assign to getting older and the decisions we are prepared to make about older people. During a Policy Lab held in September 2022 and run by the SAACY team and the Policy Institute at King's College London, participants identified a need for more cross-sectoral conversations that engage in perceptions of ageing.

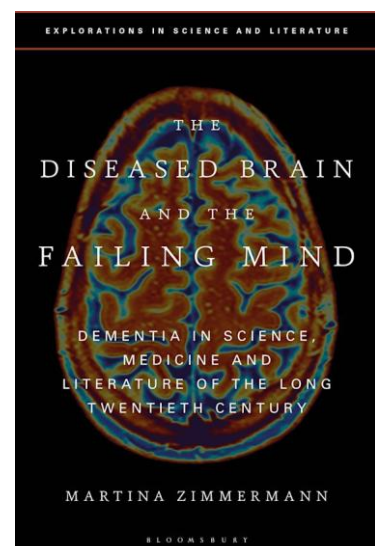
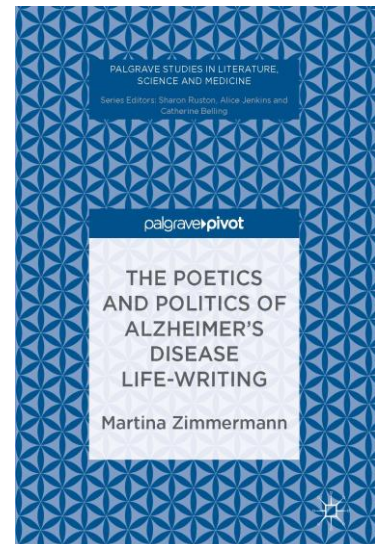
In response to these conversations, Martina, Joe, and Laura organised *Lifelong Ageing*, a workshop which took place at the Science Gallery London. The event, held in spring 2023, brought together early career researchers from the UK and beyond with representatives from a range of third-sector organisations interested in ageing. A [report](#), focused on the workshop's key findings, is accessible online.

## HOW DID THE PROJECT COME ABOUT?

Martina, an interdisciplinary researcher with expertise in pharmacology and literary studies, has long been interested in the ways we think about dementia and ageing. In her first book, *The Poetics and Politics of Alzheimer's Disease Life-Writing* (2017), she examined how people with dementia write about the condition as compared to how carers write about it. In this and her later work, *The Diseased Brain and the Failing Mind: Dementia in Science, Medicine and Literature of the Long Twentieth Century* (2020), Martina notes how wider cultural discourse tends to conflate 'the forgetting self' with 'the ageing self'.

This work inspired the SAACY research programme, an initiative aimed at examining the dynamic conversation between scientific, medical and wider cultural and societal discourses about dementia and ageing.

Inspired by conversations emanating from the Policy Lab, the SAACY team decided to organise a workshop. Their overarching aim was to offer representatives from local and national charities as well as other third-sector organisations the opportunity to engage with emerging research invested in lifecourse approaches to ageing. It was also anticipated that the event could facilitate the development of a network of interested people from across the third sector and academia, fostering shared learning and potential future collaborations.



## WHAT HAPPENED?

Following an open call for papers, nearly 20 early career researchers, from universities based in London and beyond (including Exeter, Galway, Oxford, Sheffield, and Vienna) attended. Representatives from over a dozen charities and other third-sector organizations with an interest in ageing, from the South-East and across the UK more widely, such as Ageing Well Brighton and Hove, Age UK, Centre for Ageing Better, Generations Working Together, InCommon and OpenAge Westminster, also attended.

The workshop, *Lifelong Ageing*, was held at the Science Gallery London in May 2023. The talks, from disciplines as diverse as Neuroscience, Anthropology, Music, Medicine, and English, were generally accessible.

Contributors broached several questions, including:

- What does it mean to flourish as we age?
- How can technological, intersectional and intergenerational approaches help ageing research?
- Most importantly, how can we make our research relevant to people's everyday realities?

[Camille Aubry](#), a live illustrator and cartoonist in attendance, prepared live illustrations of the conversations throughout the day, recording the principal themes of discussion related to the different workshop panels. The live illustrations are available to interested parties in the future.



*Esca van Blarikom discussing 'flourishing with illness'*

Source: Joe Wood, '[Lifelong Ageing – Talking Across Disciplines and Sectors](#)', *SAACY Blog* (2023).

**“I learnt a completely new way of thinking about medicalising ageing and how it might not always be a bad thing”.**

— An anonymous attendee at the *Lifelong Ageing* workshop

## WHAT WAS THE PROJECT'S IMPACT?

Lifelong Ageing had multiple important positive impacts for the third-sector attendees, the early career researchers who participated in the event, and the SAACY team more broadly.

The event offered attendees the valuable opportunity to develop their knowledge of a range of innovative and stimulating approaches to ageing. An evaluation assistant present during proceedings observed that, unlike at other academic events he had attended, the workshop ‘did not run out of steam’ and remarked upon the fact that ‘levels of interest and engagement remained high throughout’. His observations chime with reflections by those attending the event. One participant, for instance, recalled feeling stimulated by ‘the inspiring and invigorating’ range of topics discussed. Another, reflecting upon the experience of attending, asserted that they had ‘learnt a completely new way of thinking about medicalising ageing and how it might not always be a bad thing’.

Several third-sector attendees pledged to make specific changes to their practice as a direct result of attending the workshop. To give one example, a GP, drawing on a presentation offered during the event, expressed their desire to integrate greater consideration of the connection between hearing problems and possible symptoms of dementia presented by a patient into their daily practice. In another instance, a charity worker highlighted that they planned to instigate a scheme of work focused on pelvic floor issues after hearing one of the talks.

The event was also conceived as a networking opportunity. It was beneficial in helping those from outside the academy develop relationships with researchers focused on ageing. It also offered early career researchers the possibility to develop relationships with peers and discover the impact of their research activities.

The workshop also offered numerous benefits to the SAACY team, enabling the expansion of their third-sector network. These contacts have helped increase the reach of SAACY policy work, especially the sharing of the Policy Report entitled ‘[Shifting How We View the Ageing Process](#)’ that arose from the Policy Lab held in Autumn 2022.



A detail from Camille Aubry’s [live illustration](#) focused on one of the *Lifelong Ageing* discussion panels



## THE SAACY TEAMS' TOP 3 TIPS FOR IMPACT

1. LinkedIn offers an excellent platform for identifying relevant individuals in the third sector.
2. When emailing and reaching out try to foster a sense of care, by, for example, highlighting how the addressee's contribution would benefit the event. This approach supports a respectful and collaborative atmosphere.
3. When hosting events, it is important to consider granular details relating to venues, such as proximity to major transit hubs or the availability of step-free access.

## FURTHER READING

Martina Zimmermann, *The Poetics and Politics of Alzheimer's Disease Life-Writing* (Basingstoke, 2017).

Martina Zimmermann, *The Diseased Brain and the Failing Mind: Dementia in Science, Medicine and Literature of the Long Twentieth Century* (London, 2020).

Nicolas Farina, Laura Hughes, Alys Griffiths and Parveen Sadia, 'Adolescents' experiences and perceptions of dementia', *Aging & Mental Health*, 24 (2020), 1175-81.

Joe Wood, 'Cicely Saunders, 'Total Pain' and Emotional Evidence at the End of Life', *Medical Humanities*, 48 (2021), 411-20.

Laura Hughes and Martina Zimmermann, 'Older Adults' Perspectives, Experiences, and Expectations of Ageing in England: A Grounded Theory Study Protocol', *Social Science Protocols*, 6 (2023), 1-9.



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For further information:  
Email: [ah-impact@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:ah-impact@kcl.ac.uk)  
Or visit: [www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/research/impact](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/research/impact)