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# **Inclusive Education Best practice Toolkit 2023**

**A student co-creation project**



**DSEP TEAM  
FACULTY OF ARTS**

**2023-09-20**

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# Summary of Report

This Best Practice Toolkit is part of a series of inclusive education activities undertaken by the Faculty of Arts during 2023.

The project brings together a toolkit of student-led recommendations to inform future inclusive educational practice, with a focus on the Arts and Humanities. The toolkit is a co-creation production involving student project officers working with student focus groups and staff from the Faculty of Arts.

During the project, the student project officers conducted focus group discussions with Arts and Humanities students representing all levels of study. The groups discussed three inclusive education topics:

- **The attainment gap**
- **Redesigning the curriculum**
- **Assignment feedback**

Using the results of the focus groups, the toolkit approaches the three core topics with an intention to:

- **Understand the role of inclusive education** in a higher education setting and to identify the barriers to an inclusive student experience;
- **Identify potential solutions** to these barriers – as recommended by the students;
- **Shape a toolkit of recommendations** to address the identified barriers;
- **Look at the implementation and the evaluation** of the toolkit in order to inform educational practice in the Arts and Humanities.

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# 1.0 Co-creation

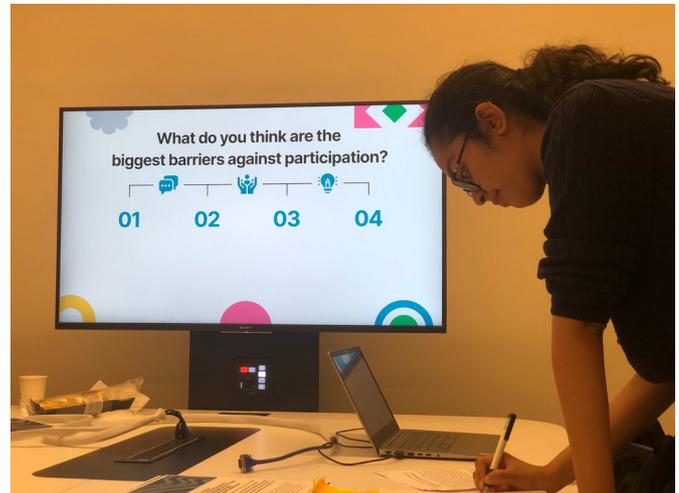
This co-creation project was designed to have a significant input from students working both as project officers and members of focus groups.

The Faculty advertised an open call to all Arts and Humanities students to apply for part-time paid project roles. After a formal application and interview process, three project officers were appointed. Each of these project officers was allocated a particular topic to work on as their own mini project. They were set a task to review their allocated topic through an inclusive education lens informed by discussion with their peers. Six focus groups were held with a total of thirty-four student participants.

It was identified that the roles of project officer and student representative offered participants a significant skills and experience learning opportunity. The DSEP team worked with the Warwick Core Skills Award team to accredit the learning opportunity so that completion of the project or participation in the focus groups could be counted as points towards the award.

# 1.1 Development Workshops

As part of the co-creation element of the project, the student project officers were asked to collaborate with Faculty of Arts staff on three skills development workshops. These workshops were designed and led by the Faculty DSEP.



## Workshop 1

### **Inclusive education awareness :**

To develop the student project officers' interest in the broader inclusive education subject as well as their own specific project topic, using digital tools to co-create (figure 1.0).

## Workshop 2

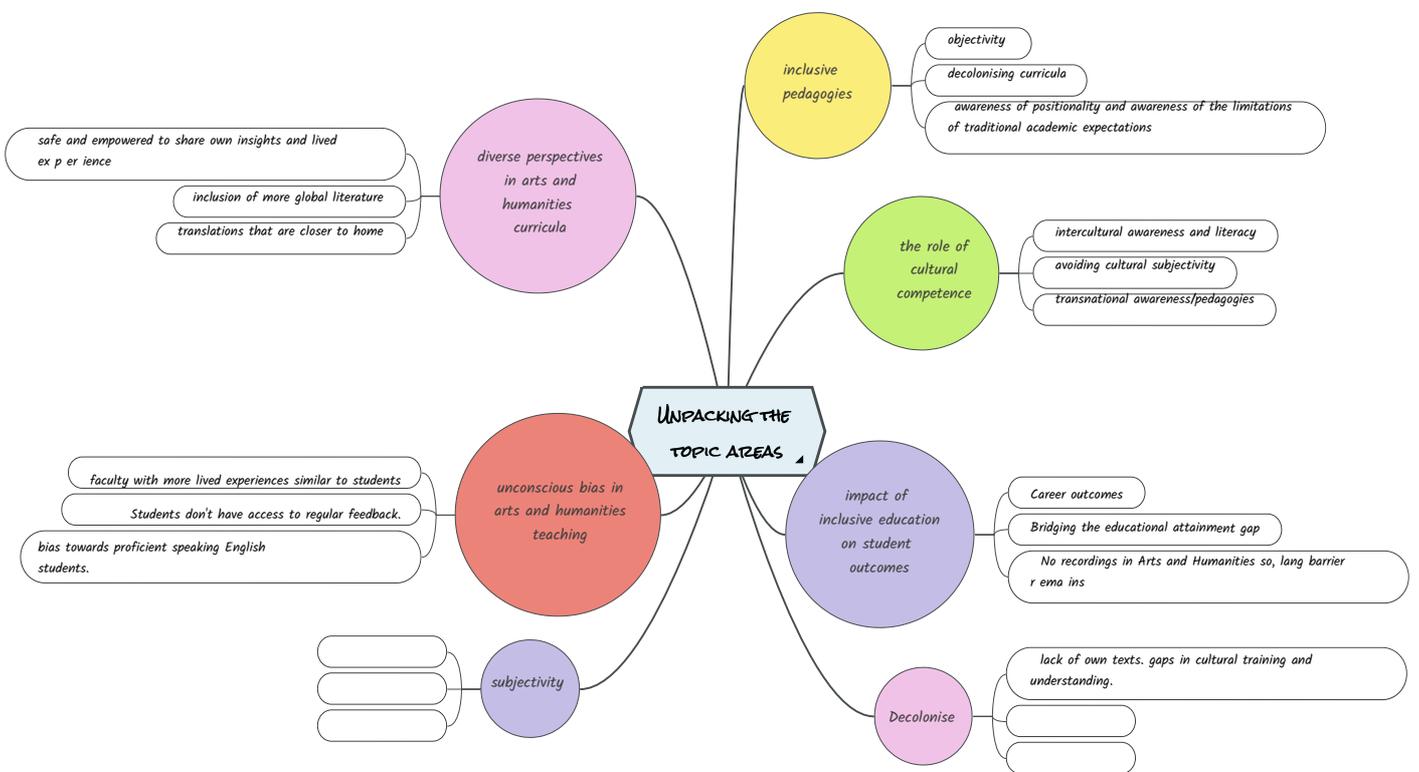
### **Running focus groups :**

To provide student project officers support and guidance on the recruitment, organisation, and delivery of the focus groups.

## Workshop 3

### **Generating student voices :**

To guide the student project officers on how to generate findings from the focus group discussion and how to formulate recommendations from the focus groups to inform future practice.



**Figure 1.0** One mindmap co-created by students and staff using Mindomo

# 1.2 Student-led Focus Groups

'The focus groups turned out to be incredibly productive, fostering stimulated constructive thinking patterns that helped us identify the gaps in attainment and find prospective pedagogical methods that could promote diversity and inclusivity in the classroom. A shared sense of purpose was the foundation of the conversation. Teamwork and open communication with the heightened sense of responsibility ensured that our discussions remained positive, practical and encouraging.'

-Sunehar Aneja, UG, English Literature and Creative Writing

FACULTY OF ARTS INITIATIVE  
**Focus Group**  
7th and 12th June 2023  
FAB 2.46, 1PM - 2:30PM (7th June)  
FAB 2.26, 1PM - 2:30PM (12th June)

**WE WANT YOUR OPINION!**

We warmly invite you to join us for a focus group meeting to reflect on the inclusivity of the curriculums of the Faculty of Arts courses. We would value your feedback and encourage you to bring forth any opinions you have on how we can instill diversity and inclusivity into the curriculum taught in higher education today.

**BENEFITS:**

- Further your understanding on the way the curriculum design works for the Faculty of Arts courses
- Chance to network and interact with others
- Lunch, hot drinks, and snacks will be provided
- Every participant will also receive a £20 voucher

Send your confirmation to [sunehar.aneja@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:sunehar.aneja@warwick.ac.uk)

The developmental workshops set the framework for the student-led focus groups. The three project officers recruited a diverse but self-selecting group of Arts and Humanities students on to the workshops. Each of the focus group sessions involved five-six participants and lasted around an hour. As well as running their own focus groups, the project officers were encouraged to sit in on other focus groups to audit and learn from the overall process.

During the focus groups, the participants' views were collected through digital and physical co-creation tools (e.g., questionnaires, stickers, using Miro and Mindomo, etc.). Using a process of reflective practice and open questions, participants were guided to share and reflect on their own experiences and views on the topic being discussed. The participants were asked to identify specific issues and concerns and to suggest what they felt could be changed to improve the situation for particular groups or students and for the overall student experience.

After the discussion, the project officers were encouraged to identify their own learning from the focus groups.

They reflected on the overall process:

- from learning how to help a group reach a consensus;
- to gathering information based on the participants' interactions;
- and the identification of problems and formation of solutions.

## 1.3 Student Projects

The student project officers collaboratively explored inclusive education topics with the DSEP team, producing reports that delved into the attainment gap, curriculum redesign, and assignment feedback. These reports comprehensively address concerns expressed by student participants, shedding light on various aspects of teaching, learning, and broader issues affecting the student experience and engagement. These reports have captured the diverse voices of student participants, reflecting the complexity of student needs. This complexity is evident in the frequently overlapping and even contradictory views expressed by the students.

### Project 01

**“Let’s celebrate the arts!”**

**Breaking the Class Stigma of Arts and Humanities Degrees**

**Caitlin Hoyland, BA History, BA**

This topic considered the ways in which Faculty of Arts’ departments can better support students from different socio-economic backgrounds to succeed in their degree studies and to have the best possible university experience. The issue raised most frequently by the student participants was the lack of communication across departments. This was felt to affect negatively the students’ ability to feel empowered to reach their full potential in their degree studies. The recommendation of this project is that departments should have a more joined up and effective communication mechanism to facilitate communication between departments and their shared student body. If communication was improved it would ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds were able to take advantage of all available opportunities including choosing modules in Arts and Humanities to enrich their academic and career potential.

## Project 02

### **Building Bridges and Embracing Diversity: Fostering Inclusivity by Redesigning the Curriculum**

**Sunehar Aneja, English Literature and Creative Writing, UG**

The response to this topic focuses on the inclusive pedagogies and the curriculum changes that can be implemented in the Faculty of Arts to make the higher education environment more diverse and equal. The report highlights the need for certain measures and identifies the gaps in the current system that signify the lack of representation and global perspectives in the curriculum. This report advocates the idea of building a supportive community as the first step towards a more inclusive society that promotes individuality, acknowledges uniqueness and does not shy away from difference.

## Project 03

### **A Guide to First Class Assignment Feedback: Students' Perspectives**

**Ayushi Rakesh, English and Comparative Literary Studies, PGT**

The project aimed to get the students' perspective on assignment feedback when studying Arts and Humanities courses. Through the focus groups, students at various levels of study (UG/PGT/PGR) identified the specific challenges that they were experiencing, in particular: challenges with language barriers, the need for departmental support in improving academic writing skills and dissatisfaction with vague assignment feedback. The potential benefits of student-initiated clubs and peer review-based assignments were also highlighted by the focus groups. The report emphasises the importance of dialogue-based feedback and clear communication of marking criteria. The report identifies practical two-way solutions to enhance a student's learning experience and to foster a conducive academic environment.

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## 2.0 The Toolkit

Using the insights generated from the focus groups, this toolkit aims to offer tips and insights into how to improve and enhance the students' education experience.

## 2.1 Inclusive Education in Higher Education

The implementation of an inclusive education approach in higher education involves a complex interplay of policy, practice and research. Originally developed for students in schools (Forlin & Loreman, 2014; UNESCO, 2018) using inclusion as a perspective has been extended to higher education to guide institutions looking to create a more inclusive learning environment (Basit & Tomlinson, 2012; Hewett, 2016; Moriña, 2017; Whiteford, 2017; Collins et al, 2019).

The foundation of this approach to inclusive education lies in equality legislation, such as the UK Equality Act (2010). The Act is designed to protect individuals from discrimination and to promote equality in all aspects of life, including education. It requires education providers to make 'reasonable adjustments' (including anticipatory adjustments) to remove barriers and ensure no student is put at a disadvantage. This scholarship and policy context informed both the approach and the direction of this project, as demonstrated by the collaborative work between the staff members and the student community.

At the University of Warwick, the Dean of Students Office provides the Inclusive Education Model, which is '**a layered and whole-institution approach to reducing awarding gaps and increasing continuation rates**'. These policies provide some key sources (Inclusive Education Model Committee Paper; Inclusive curriculum) that map the implementation of inclusive education within the institution. This toolkit is aligned with the approach recommended in the University's Inclusive Education Model.

The toolkit also draws from Schuelka's (2014) report on inclusive education which emphasises the '**continuous, systemic, and sustained**' **approach to transforming educational practices and cultures** (p.7). The toolkit is intended not as a set of officially endorsed instructions by the Faculty, but rather as a view of the students' expressed desires and a source of inspiration for change in practice.

## 2.2 Barriers and Recommendations

The student focus groups identified various barriers that prevent student engagement and learning. The report also considered good practice that facilitates students' participation in an inclusive university experience.

### 2.2.1 Attainment Gap

Caitlin Hoyland's project focused on how a student's socio-economic background could impact on their engagement with their university experience and ultimately their future employment. Caitlin split her focus groups into two: first year students (group 1) and second and final year students (group 2). Students discussed their transition to university and their concerns about future employability. The participants expressed their need for support in terms of transitioning to HE and enhancing their employability skills and experience.

#### Identified barriers -

- challenging transition to university for WP students
- lack of communication between key support areas (home department, personal tutor, module leader)
- lack of acknowledgement of the different backgrounds of students
- insufficient career advice and support, especially for the Arts and Humanities degrees in a culture which is increasingly STEM and business-oriented
- boundaries that separate people from different social-economic backgrounds.

#### Recommendations -

- a clearer guide to key university and departmental resources
- more accessible pro-active support from academic staff
- careers advice that acknowledges the transferable skills gained in studying an Arts and Humanities degrees
- the opportunity for connections with departments outside of the Arts and Humanities and the opportunity to connect and network with alumni
- clearer inter-departmental communications on assessment deadlines and wider student experience issues
- acknowledgement by departments of the diversity of student backgrounds and an understanding of the impact that this might have on the student experience
- a celebration of the Arts and Humanities across campus.

## 2.2.2 Redesigning the curriculum

Sunehar Aneja's project investigated the curriculum design and its impact on student participation in their study and wider university experience. The students engaged in the two focus groups shared their perceptions of diversity, inclusivity and equality, and reflected on how these aspects affected their own teaching/learning engagement and progression. The discussion in the groups focused on the barriers to participation that exist around coursework and reading lists. The student report proposes some inclusive pedagogies to help increase inclusivity in the development and delivery of the Art curriculum.

### Identified barriers -

- financial constraints – complicated application process, need to work and study, lack of scholarships, student finance does not account for family dynamics
- social constraints – language barriers, low self confidence, cultural barriers and heritage gaps, lack of drop in sessions with mentors
- lack of diversity in reading lists (e.g. feminist and ethnic minority voices)
- attainment gap – lack of introductory modules, not all at the same starting point, lack of sessions to discuss feedback
- support gap – lack of diversity in reading lists, lack of choice of assessments and modules, lack of knowledge about well-being services, accessibility issues for students with disabilities, lack of lecture recordings.

### Recommendations -

- improved awareness of student accessibility and disability issues
- diversification of reading lists
- recorded sessions which are accessible to students who have difficulty attending the lectures
- introductory and drop-in sessions at the start of term one
- student mentorship programme to support first-years and freshers
- wider module choice and modes of assessment.

## 2.2.3 Assignment feedback

The two focus groups led by Ayushi Rakesh focused on assignment feedback. Students shared their views of the assignment feedback they had received and expressed some confusion in terms of understanding the academic criteria and the marking rubric. In both groups, students expressed a clear need for more support from departments to improve their academic reading and writing skills.

### Identified barriers -

- challenges related to language barriers and understanding academic expectations
- the need for more support from departments to improve academic writing skills
- abstract-based feedback that lacks specificity and fails to provide constructive guidance
- the potential benefits of student-initiated clubs and peer review societies for feedback and networking opportunities.

### Recommendations -

- provision of academic writing seminars and workshops
- clearer communication of all marking and assessment criteria from the beginning of a course and module
- clear and unambiguous feedback which identifies the steps that need to be taken to improve performance
- training for teaching staff to recognise social, cultural and linguistic barriers to learning for students from diverse backgrounds
- encouragement of peer-based dialogue and reviews to facilitate learning.

## 2.3 Enacting the Toolkit of Recommendations

This section of the report proposes the action to be taken to deliver the toolkit of recommendations to improve the inclusive education student experience. Some of the actions involve consultation and discussion with existing governance structures and service areas to socialise the findings from the three projects and to look for collective solutions to the recommendations. Other proposals for action will involve faculty, departmental or service area led initiatives to provide additional support or missing elements of support for students.



The final set of activities will set in **train new, smaller staff-student co-creation projects** as part of the Faculty of Arts' ongoing inclusive education activities. The intention is to evaluate the progress on implementing the toolkit at the next Faculty of Arts Inclusive Education Conference using the methodology outlined in Section 1.0 of this report.

## **2.3.1 Project 1 (Attainment)**

### **- Proposed Next Steps**

#### **Reassurance that asking for help is important**

- Engage with Faculty Education Committee to open out discussion on inclusive academic guidance with departmental and student representatives
- Continued delivery and dissemination of WP training and guidance for personal tutors within the Arts Faculty in collaboration with the Dean of Students' Office.
- DSEPs promote Study Café for Welcome Week as a Faculty support opportunity.

#### **Improved Inter-departmental Communications**

- Engage with Faculty Education Committee to open out discussion on inter-departmental communication with departmental and student representatives
- Engage with DSEP and Faculty Academic Administration Group to look at joining up academic coordination/administration.

#### **Connecting with Alumni and Careers Opportunities**

- Engage with the Alumni team to look at alumni mentoring opportunities and to ensure the diversity of student stories that are shared
- Engage with departments to look at the cross-faculty and the inter-faculty communication of student opportunities
- Engage with Student Opportunity to ensure that the opportunities shared are available to students from a broad range of backgrounds and degree courses
- Encourage students to actively approach career advisors and consultants based in the departments to promote Arts and Humanities opportunities.

#### **Valuing Arts and Humanities**

- Engage with Careers, Warwick Core Skills and WP team to feedback concerns and to look at an action plan with student input to address the recommendations – involve students and alumni in pro-actively identifying the transferable skills provided by an Arts and Humanities educational experience
- Continue on-going plans to celebrate and promote the Arts and Humanities at Warwick – FABFest, work with Communications on Arts stories (students and staff), work with Alumni team on Arts alumni stories.

## 2.3.2 Project 2 (Curriculum) – Proposed Next Steps

### **Increasing choices for modules and modes of assessment**

- Initiative to join up Module Selection across the Faculty and have an Arts Module Fair for 2024
- Discuss with Education Committee/departments how to get students familiarised with the topics/approaches of the module so that students can prepare in advance
- Engage with Education Committee/departments to look at module assessment and possible variations and alternatives.

### **Diversifying the reading lists**

- Encourage the practice of reviewing reading lists to identify gaps in diversity, e.g. different ethnic communities, races, genders, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and varying ideologies
- Collaborate with librarians and experts in various fields to look at how to curate a diverse range of reading opportunities
- Engage with EDI committee in the Faculty to provide faculty members with training on diversity, equity, and inclusion in curriculum development.

### **Improving the accessibility of learning resources**

- Open out discussion of the issue of lecture recording in Arts as an inclusive practice through Education Committee, HoDs Plus
- Provide sessions for both students and faculty about the availability and use of assistive technologies that can enhance accessibility (e.g. [DAHL events](#), [DAHL showcase](#)).

### **Enhancing the mentorship programmes**

- Enhance the understanding of mentor/mentee relationship and guide the students to make the most of mentoring meetings through workshops
- Develop a combination of structured mentorship programs and a less formal set of resources, e.g. Study Café, to support students' general needs/study goals.

## 2.3.3 Project 3 (Feedback)

### – Proposed Next Steps

#### **Clear communication of marking criteria**

- Provide guidance on how to introduce the marking and assessment criteria at the beginning of the course to give students a clear understanding of academic expectation
- Use various communication channels, such as the course syllabus and other resources (text and pre-recorded videos) on Moodle page, in-person discussions, to share assessment criteria and reinforce student understanding of marking criteria through repetition across multiple platforms
- Provide sample assignments or past student work that align with the assessment criteria to help students see how the criteria are applied in practice
- Offer Faculty/departmental-level workshops designed to improve student feedback literacy.

#### **Establishing peer-based community for reviewing essay**

- Initiate Faculty/departmental student learning circles for peer learning support and to identify where resources are difficult to find, linking to resources from the WIHEA peer mentoring learning circle
- Faculty DSEP guide and support the peer-led learning circles - answering questions, addressing concerns, and ensuring that reviews are conducted respectfully
- Continuously gather feedback from students about their experiences with peer review, using this input to refine the process and address any challenges.

#### **Support for improving student academic writing**

- Academic writing boot camps for first years or new PGTs offered by individual departments and the Faculty
- Study Café – academic guidance support (students) guided and facilitated by faculty DSEPs
- Offer themed writing workshops/courses focusing on various aspects of academic writing, such as essay structure, citation styles, critical thinking, and research techniques. These workshops can be tailored to different skills.

## 2.4 Evaluating the Implementation of the Toolkit

The Faculty proposes to take a dual approach (Figure 1.0) to evaluate the implementation of this toolkit of recommendations. First of all, we will look at the implementation of the toolkit in the context of its achievement of wider University and national higher education strategies. Secondly, we propose to take a flexible and adaptable approach and to look at the implementation within the context of other frameworks/models. This second approach will be informed by on-going changes in educational strategy, culture and society and will include student feedback on the toolkit and the implementation process.

The first phase of the toolkit review will take place during the latter part of the 2023/24 academic year and will form part of a report to the June 2024 Faculty Inclusive Education Conference.

Implementing the toolkit	Evaluating inclusive education in practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inclusive initiatives promoted at faculty/departmental level that improve the student experience</li><li>• Inclusive pedagogies and curriculum design that promote learning outcome for all students (<u>Warwick curriculum design toolkit</u>)</li><li>• Effective communication channels and equitable distribution of resources</li><li>• Staff trained in inclusive pedagogy who acknowledge the role of inclusion in module design and classroom practice</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keep the guidance flexible and adaptable to change at individual level (Education strategy at Warwick – <u>student experience</u>)</li><li>• Consider the complex dynamics and intersectional factors that influence a student’s university experience.</li><li>• Cross-reference the record of student learning outcomes and engagement with other departments and central service at Warwick (e.g. Warwick Award)</li><li>• Develop the theory of change (<u>Inclusive Education Model</u>) with clearly defined mechanisms for change.</li></ul>

**Figure 2.0** Dual model for evaluating the success of implementing the toolkit

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## 3.0 The Way Forward

This report summarises the results of this co-created University funded inclusive education project in the Faculty of Arts. It provides a student-informed insight into some of the current barriers to inclusive education for students of the Arts and Humanities and makes recommendations from the student perspective as to how these barriers could be addressed and the learner experience improved.

The findings drawn from this report will be used to build on and extend the recommended toolkit coming out of this project and will inform future co-creation projects on inclusive education.

The next step to implementing this inclusive education toolkit is to put in place structures that support students to develop and enhance their own communities and networks for learning, focusing on learning resilience, wellbeing and belonging.

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# Acknowledgements

This report could not have been completed without the Dean of Student Office who funded the Inclusive Education project in the Faculty of Arts. We would like to register our appreciation for the contributions of the 34 students participating in the focus groups who shared their views so generously. We are grateful for the contributions of the staff members who advised and co-created this project: Victoria Hill, David Lees, Ida Lübben, Rachel Moseley, Robert O'Toole, Sarah Richardson, Diana Stonefield, and Rebecca Stone.

The completion of this report could not have been achieved without the support and assistance of the Executive Officer team in the Faculty of Arts. The final credit should go to the three dedicated student project officers, Caitlin Hoyland, Sunehar Aneja, and Ayushi Rakesh for their fantastic contribution to inclusive education at the University of Warwick.

Bing Lu, Director of Student Experience and Progression, Faculty of Arts

**We thank you for your dedicated support in our efforts to contribute to the inclusive education projects.**

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