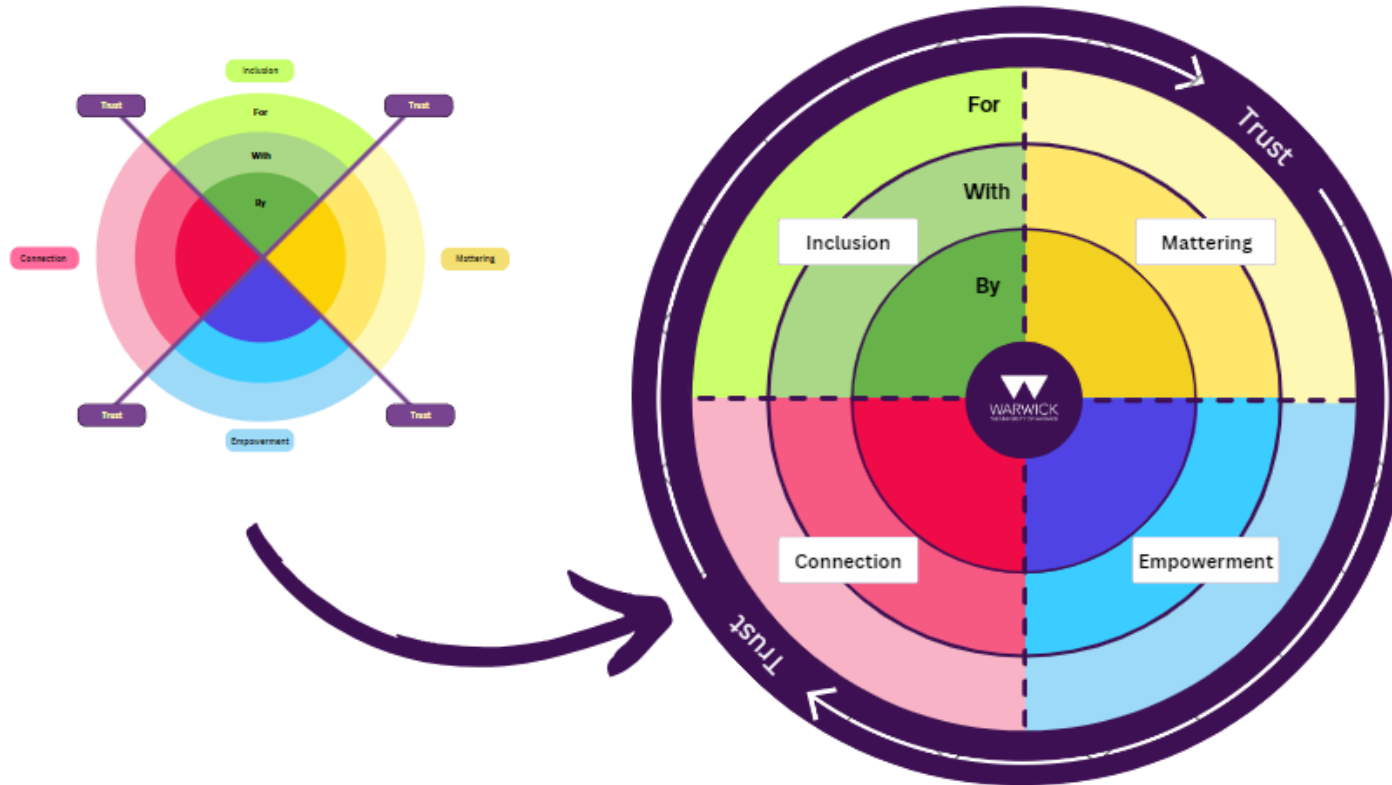


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## The Warwick Building Belonging Framework

[In development – April 2025 version]



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## **Building Belonging - Introduction**

Feeling a sense of belonging is personal. Belonging is supported by creating a welcoming environment where everyone feels valued and included, built on a foundation of **trust**. A shared responsibility for staff and students.

When students and staff feel they belong, they thrive. To help all staff and students feel they belong at Warwick, we want them to trust:

- Their voice is valued, and they have a place at Warwick (**Inclusion**).
- Their contributions are recognised and celebrated at Warwick (**Mattering**).
- They can build meaningful relationships with others at Warwick (**Connection**).
- They have the freedom to make their own choices and shape their own path (**Empowerment**).

**The Warwick Building Belonging Framework** draws on these four elements- **inclusion, mattering, empowerment, and connection**, acknowledging that each are connected by an enabling factor, **trust**.

Developed with Warwick students and staff, supported by WIHEA (Warwick International Higher Education Academy), AdvanceHE and WONKHE/Pearson, this framework is designed to support and guide you in building belonging within your context. While not exhaustive, this framework can help you build a stronger sense of belonging into every interaction and context, from application to graduation and beyond.

There is no-one-size-fits-all approach, and success will depend on understanding the audience and their needs in your area. This is why **trust** and **co-creation** are core components of this framework. Trust is the thread that weaves throughout the elements of belonging, and when present, encourages collaboration and co-creation. Trust is when the audience feels they can rely on others, they feel safe to be themselves, ask questions, and take on new opportunities. Hence, trust is embedded within each of the elements because of the enabling and critical role it plays.

**Co-creation** in this context is referred to in the different ways of working, **For** the audience, **With** the audience, and **By** the audience. These levels of participation are included because of the influential role they play in audience's sense of belonging and thriving within,

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and beyond, Higher Education (HE; [Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bovill, 2021](#)). It is by respectfully working with your audience and acknowledging the role of power that understanding and trust can grow, and thus a sense of belonging.

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## Building Belonging

### How to use this Framework

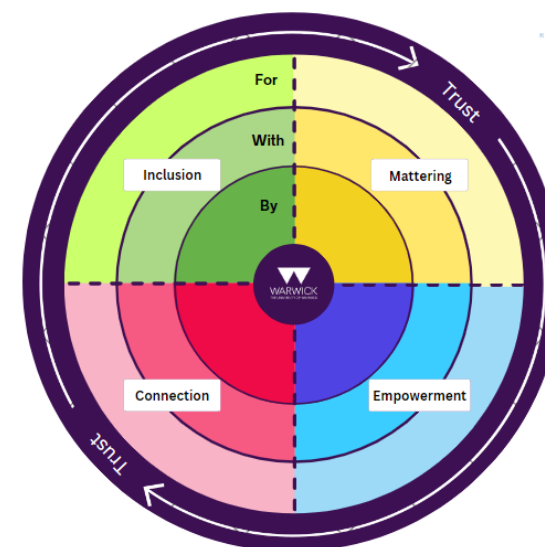
Each element has three categories: practical actions and outcomes, self-assessment questions and examples of best practice within and beyond Warwick. Use these to reflect, visualise, map, and enhance the initiatives and projects you are conducting, now and in the future.

**For:** This category focuses on activities initiated by lead/organiser that aim to create a welcoming foundation and foster belonging.

**With:** Activities in this category involve collaboration and working in partnership with the audience.

**By:** This category focuses on supporting and empowering the audience to lead and take ownership of their experience within the University community.

By using the 'Practical Actions & Outcomes' as well as the 'Self-Assessment Questions' and examples of 'Best Practices' within and beyond the University of Warwick, trust can be (re)built and all elements of building belonging can develop.



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## Building Belonging

**Inclusion** – when individuals’ trust that their voice is valued, and they have a place at Warwick.

**Inclusion** is about creating a welcoming environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and they belong. It celebrates diversity and ensures everyone has a chance to participate and contribute.

**The fundamentals of inclusion, which can be seen in the following section, are:**

- **Equity, Accessibility and Adaptability.** Ensuring all (potential) audience members can access the resources and opportunities equally. This may include modifying and adapting the curricula, format of delivery, information availability and/or the physical space to meet the diverse needs such that all can participate and contribute<sup>1</sup>.

**Considering these fundamentals throughout will support your practice in building belonging.**

The following are examples of what can be done ‘For’, ‘With’ and ‘By’ your audience to support the building of belonging.

What you can do **For** the audience to support inclusion:

- **Review materials and communication for inclusive language and accessibility-** This ensures everyone feels addressed and can understand the information presented.
- **Offer a variety of accessible resources and learning materials that cater to diverse learning styles and backgrounds-** This could include text, audio, video, and visual aids.
- **Provide support services specifically designed to cater for and connect individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures-** Offer and signpost workshops on cultural competency and connect individuals with relevant university resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Kefallinou, A., Symeonidou, S. and Meijer, C. J. W., “Understanding the Value of Inclusive Education and its Implementation: A Review of the Literature,” *Prospects* 49, (2020): 136, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09500-2>.

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- **Organise events and activities that celebrate diversity within the Warwick community-** This could include cultural festivals, heritage showcases, or international student gatherings.

What you can do **With** the audience to support inclusion:

- **Use inclusive language in everyday interactions,** starting with course intro sessions, email signatures, and pronunciation guides- This means avoiding stereotypes, using gender-neutral terms when appropriate, and respecting everyone's identities.
- **Be open to different perspectives and experiences-** Actively listen to classmates or colleagues from diverse backgrounds and engage in respectful discussions, following principles of Active Bystander training.
- **Work with your audience to understand and meaningfully implement accessible and inclusive practice-** This could be collaborating with your audience to understand how they like to be communicated with and what stops them from engaging.
- **Co-create opportunities for the audience to share their unique experiences and backgrounds-** This could involve icebreaker activities, cultural presentations, or group projects that celebrate diversity.
- **Seek out opportunities to learn about different cultures and perspectives-** Co-design, promote and participate in events celebrating diversity, join international student clubs, or engage in conversations with peers from different backgrounds.

What can be done **By** the audience to support inclusion:

- **Openness to feedback via different channels and how it will be utilised-** This could be making space for feedback tools and channels at the beginning and end of sessions, including tools that allow anonymity.
- **Organise events or activities that celebrate diversity and promote inclusivity-** This could involve cultural exchange programmes, international student mentorship initiatives, or workshops on fostering inclusivity within student groups.

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- **Advocate for inclusive practices within student/staff organisations and clubs-** Work with leaders to ensure everyone feels welcome and can participate fully.
- **Create safe spaces for individuals from diverse backgrounds to connect and share their experiences-** This could be a student-led support group or a forum for open discussions.

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## Building Belonging

**Inclusion** – when individuals’ trust that their voice is valued, and they have a place at Warwick.

**The fundamentals of inclusion, which can be seen in the following section, are:**

- **Equity, Accessibility and Adaptability.** Ensuring all (potential) audience members can access the resources and opportunities equally. This may include modifying and adapting the curricula, format of delivery, information availability and/or the physical space to meet the diverse needs such that all can participate and contribute<sup>2</sup>.

**Considering these fundamentals throughout will support your practice in building belonging.**

### Examples of Practical Actions & Outcomes

- **Use inclusive language and avoid bias:** be open to learning what individuals’ preferences are e.g., name and pronouns.
- **Value diverse perspectives and backgrounds:** be open to acknowledging and addressing assumptions.
- **Offer support tailored to different individuals’ needs**
- **Create opportunities for everyone to participate and be heard:** you can use things such as peer dialogue techniques and design thinking tools to structure synchronous and asynchronous content.

### Self-Assessment Questions

- Do I use inclusive language that respects everyone’s identities?

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<sup>2</sup> Kefallinou, A., Symeonidou, S. and Meijer, C. J. W., “Understanding the Value of Inclusive Education and its Implementation: A Review of the Literature,” *Prospects* 49, (2020): 136, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09500-2>.

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- Do I use spaces which every audience member can physically access and navigate?
- Am I open to different viewpoints and experiences in my interactions with others?
- Do I provide support or resources that cater to diverse individuals' needs?
- Do I create opportunities for all to participate in discussions or activities?
- Do I acknowledge and celebrate the unique contributions of all individuals?

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## Building Belonging

**Mattering** - Contributions are recognised and celebrated at Warwick.

**Mattering** motivates and supports engagement and thriving because of feeling valued and appreciated for your contributions to the Warwick community.

**The fundamentals of mattering, which can be seen in the following section, are:**

- **Recognition and acknowledgement. Acknowledging** the audiences' **participation, contributions** and **individuality** supports a sense of significance. This can be done through personalising feedback, celebrating wins or milestones, as well as creating opportunities for the audience to build on and showcase their talents and interests<sup>3</sup>.

**Considering these fundamentals throughout will support your practice in building belonging.**

The following are examples of what can be done 'For', 'With' and 'By' your audience to support the building of belonging.

What you can do **For** the audience to support mattering:

- **Provide clear learning objectives and expectations at the beginning of courses or projects-** This helps the audience understand how their contributions matter in the bigger picture.
- **Offer opportunities for all audience members to participate actively in and beyond the class-** This could involve discussions, presentations, group work, or interactive activities.
- **Acknowledge audience members' contributions, both big and small-** This could be a simple verbal thank you, written feedback highlighting their strengths, or recognising their achievements in class or departmental announcements.

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<sup>3</sup> Elliott, Gregory C., Kao, Suzanne., and Grant, Ann-Marie, "Mattering: Empirical Validation of a Social-Psychological Concept," *Self and Identity* 3, (2004): 345, DOI: 10.1080/13576500444000119.

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- **Offer opportunities for the audience to showcase their work to a wider community-** This could involve poster presentations, student conferences, or opportunities to publish their work (with their consent).

What you can do **With** the audience to support mattering:

- **Provide constructive and empathetic feedback in a timely manner-** Feedback helps individuals learn and grow, demonstrating that their work and progress matter.
- **Create opportunities for the audience / individuals to offer feedback on teaching methods and learning experiences-** This shows that their opinions matter and can shape their educational environment.
- **Seek out opportunities to provide feedback on their learning experience-** This could involve participating in course evaluations, meeting with faculty during office hours, or engaging in constructive conversations about how to improve the course or department.
- **Actively participate in class discussions and contribute their unique perspectives-** Sharing their ideas shows they are invested in the learning process and their contributions matter.

What can be done **By** the audience to support mattering:

- **Creating space and support structures that enable the audience to lead on sections/activities/sessions** on topics relevant to the initiative or audience's needs.
- **Develop peer mentoring programmes where the audience can support and learn from each other-** This fosters a sense of community and demonstrates that their knowledge and experience matter to their peers.
- **Organise audience-led workshops, study sessions or spaces on topics relevant to the course or student needs-** This allows students to share their expertise and contribute to the learning of others.

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- **Advocate for student/audience representation in departmental or university decision-making processes-** Having a voice in shaping their academic environment shows that their perspectives matter.

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## Building Belonging

**Mattering** – Contributions are recognised and celebrated at Warwick.

**The fundamentals of mattering, which can be seen in the following section, are:**

- **Recognition and acknowledgement.** **Acknowledging** the audiences' **participation, contributions** and **individuality** supports a sense of significance. This can be done through personalising feedback, celebrating wins or milestones, as well as creating opportunities for the audience to build on and showcase their talents and interests<sup>4</sup>.

**Considering these fundamentals throughout will support your practice in building belonging.**

The following are examples of what can be done 'For', 'With' and 'By' your audience to support the building of belonging.

### Examples of Practical Actions & Outcomes

- Acknowledge student achievements and contributions.
- Provide constructive feedback that helps students grow.
- Show genuine interest in students' goals and aspirations.
- Offer opportunities for students to take ownership of their experience.
- Recognise the value of students' unique perspectives.
- Make office hours easy to find and understand (e.g., is booking required, online only, duration).

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<sup>4</sup> Elliott, Kao, and Grant, "Mattering: Empirical Validation of a Social-Psychological Concept," 345.

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### **Self-Assessment Questions**

- Do I acknowledge and celebrate student/audience achievements, both big and small?
- Do I provide clear and constructive feedback that helps students/the audience improve?
- Do I show genuine interest in students'/the audiences' academic and personal goals?
- Do I create opportunities for students/the audience to take initiative and lead in activities?
- Do I actively seek out and value students'/the audiences' perspectives?

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## Building Belonging

### Connection

**Connection** fosters a sense of belonging and support and is about building meaningful relationships with others at Warwick.

**The fundamentals of connection (highlighted in bold), which can be seen in the following section, are:**

- **Human interaction.** Face-to-face interaction is the most powerful type for forming and maintaining connections but, if this isn't possible, try to include space for **vulnerability** and 'humanness'; **listening** and getting to know one another on a more personal level. This could be providing space to ask how someone's day or week is going? If they are looking forward to something or if they have any hobbies or interests?

**Considering these fundamentals throughout will support your practice in building belonging**<sup>5</sup>.

The following are examples of what can be done 'For', 'With' and 'By' your audience to support the building of belonging.

What you can do **For** the audience to support connection:

- **Use Teaching exercises - Say My Name - Warwick as an icebreaker activity or team-building exercise during the first week of classes-** This helps students get to know each other and build rapport early on.
- **Facilitate opportunities for audience interaction in class-** This could involve group discussions, presentations with teamwork, or collaborative projects.

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<sup>5</sup> Bonhoeffer, J. "The Science of Belonging." *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, 14 April 2025, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/heart-of-healthcare/202504/the-science-of-belonging>.

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- **Create online forums or discussion boards for students to connect and share ideas outside of class-** This can be particularly helpful for online or blended learning environments.
- **Promote audience involvement in departmental events, clubs, and societies-** Connect students with relevant opportunities based on their interests.
- **Within your role you are reliable, consistent and follow through. If/when this is not possible, this information and updated expectations are clearly communicated-** This supports your audience in managing change, as well as modelling openness and trust.

What you can do **With** the audience to support connection:

- **Be approachable and open to conversation-** Create an environment where students feel comfortable approaching staff or peers with questions, concerns, or ideas.
- **Organise social events or activities outside of class time-** This could be coffee chats, department picnics, or informal gatherings to foster connections in a relaxed setting.
- **Attend departmental events and participate in student clubs or societies-** This is a great way to meet people with similar interests and build a strong support network.
- **Initiate conversations with classmates and collaborate on group projects-** Take the initiative to get to know the people around you and build connections within the learning environment.

What can be done **By** the audience to support connection:

- **Organise audience-led social events or activities that cater to diverse interests-** This could be movie nights, game nights, cultural celebrations, or workshops based on shared hobbies.

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- **Develop peer mentoring programmes where experienced participants support and guide new participants-** This fosters a sense of community and provides opportunities for participants to connect and learn from each other.
- **Create online communities or social media groups for participants to connect-** This allows participants to connect with peers across different programmes, year groups, or locations, fostering a broader sense of belonging within the university community.

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## Building Belonging

**Connection** – Individuals can build meaningful relationships with others at Warwick.

The fundamentals of connection (highlighted in bold), form the foundations for each of the examples of practical actions and outcomes, as well as the self/practice-assessment questions:

- **Human interaction.** Face-to-face interaction is the most powerful type for forming and maintaining connections but, if this isn't possible, try to include space for **vulnerability** and 'humanness'; **listening** and getting to know one another on a more personal level. This could be providing space to ask how someone's day or week is going? If they are looking forward to something or if they have any hobbies or interests?

Considering these fundamentals throughout will support your practice in building belonging <sup>6</sup>.

### Examples of Practical Actions & Outcomes

- Be approachable and open to conversation.
- Encourage interaction and collaboration among students.
- Organise events and activities that foster connections.
- Help students find common interests and build friendships.
- Create opportunities for mentorship or peer support programmes.

### Self -Assessment Questions

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<sup>6</sup> Bonhoeffer, J. "The Science of Belonging." *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, 14 April 2025, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/heart-of-healthcare/202504/the-science-of-belonging>.

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- Do I create a welcoming and approachable atmosphere for the audience?
- Do I encourage the audience to interact and collaborate with each other?
- Do I organise or participate in events that bring the audience together?
- Do I help students find potential mentors or peers with similar interests?
- Do I promote opportunities for the audience to build strong support networks?

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## Building Belonging

**Empowerment** – Individuals have the freedom to make their own choices and shape their own path.

**Empowerment** is about supporting and enabling individuals to make their own choices and shape their learning journey. It fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for their success.

**The fundamentals of empowerment, which can be seen throughout the following section, are:**

- **Transferring power.** This can be done by promoting audience choice, inquiry, community-building to foster agency and shared responsibility.

**Considering these fundamentals throughout will support your practice in building belonging**

The following are examples of what can be done ‘For’, ‘With’ and ‘By’ your audience to support the building of belonging.

What you can do **For** the audience to support empowerment:

- **Offer a variety of learning paths and resources within courses-** For example, options for independent research projects, choosing elective modules with different focuses, or different learning materials based on preferred learning styles.
- **Provide opportunities for students to make choices about their learning-** This could involve allowing them to choose essay topics, design their own research projects, or select presentation styles.
- **Set clear learning objectives but allow students flexibility in how they achieve them-** This empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey.
- **Offer opportunities for students to present their work and ideas in creative ways-** This allows them to express their individuality and demonstrate their learning in a way that feels most comfortable for them.

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What you can do **With** the audience to support empowerment:

- **Encourage critical thinking and independent learning skills-** This empowers students to take ownership of their learning and make informed decisions and develop their area(s) of interest and expertise.
- **Provide guidance and support without being overly prescriptive-** Offer resources and answer questions but allow students the space to explore solutions and make their own choices.
- **Take initiative in seeking out additional learning and networking opportunities-** This could involve attending guest lectures, participating in workshops, or exploring topics of personal interest beyond the curriculum (working with WIHEA, IATL, Dean of Students).
- **Build in skills development-** Working with your audience to understand their skills and skills gaps. This could include developing effective workload management, prioritisation of tasks, and empowering them to engage in learning opportunities.
- **Develop understanding and/or initiatives that will support diverse participation with the audience-** This could include sharing concerns, questions, and constructive feedback.

What can be done **By** the audience to support empowerment:

- **Organise audience-led study groups or discussion forums where students can learn from each other and explore topics independently-** This allows students to set the agenda, choose the focus, and take ownership of their learning process.
- **Advocate for audience-led research projects or initiatives such as the Social Mobility Student Research Hub-** This empowers students to pursue their own academic interests and contribute to the scholarly community.
- **Develop audience-run learning resources or online communities-** This allows students to share their knowledge, expertise, and preferred learning styles with their peers, fostering a sense of shared ownership in the learning experience.
- **The audience has space and is trusted to take accountability in decision-making processes-** This could include advocating for fair and transparent policies within the context the initiative operates.

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## **Building Belonging**

**Empowerment** - Individuals have the freedom to make their own choices and shape their own path.

**The fundamentals of empowerment, which can be seen throughout the following section, are:**

- **Transferring power to the audience (e.g., learners or participants).** This can be done by promoting choice, inquiry, community-building to foster agency and shared responsibility.

**Considering these fundamentals throughout will support your practice in building belonging.**

### **Examples of Practical Actions & Outcomes**

- Provide opportunities for the audience to co-design their academic and non-academic experiences.
- Offer a variety of resources for different learning designs.
- Encourage critical thinking and independent learning.
- Respect students' decisions and choices within academic boundaries.
- Provide guidance and support without being overly prescriptive.

### **Self-Assessment Questions**

- Do I offer the audience choices in their learning, such as selecting optional modules or using student-devised assessments?
- Do I provide a variety of resources and learning methods to cater to different learning needs?
- Do I encourage individuals/the audience to think critically and develop their own ideas?
- Do I respect individuals'/the audiences' choices?
- Do I provide guidance and support without micromanaging the audiences' journey?

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## Building Belonging: Examples of Best Practices within and beyond Warwick

- [Access and Participation Plan \(2020-25\)](#)
- [Neurodiversity toolkit](#)
- [Peer dialogue](#)
- [Resources and training - Inclusive Education \(warwick.ac.uk\)](#)
- [SLS Student Networks](#)
- [Stanford disability language guide](#)
- [Social Inclusion](#)
- [The Inclusive University Project AccessAble](#)
- [WIHEA Learning Circle](#)
- [Words We Live By: A Guide to LGBTQ+ Language](#)

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