EXPLORING STUDENT AND STAFF PERSPECTIVES ON PREPAREDNESS AND ONGOING SUPPORT FOR TEAMWORK AT UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK.



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WIHEA & IATL
- Education Fund



About the Project

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- Awarded grant from a joint fund between WIHEA and IATL, known as the Education Fund.
- Completed the project in July 2025 with a report written by our student team.
- Learning Circle members have opportunity to contribute and shape advice for teamwork guidelines offered.

Details about the Project

Background

Team

What they did?

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Background



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Background

Teamwork is a critical component of student learning at the University of Warwick because of the development opportunities it demonstrates. However, student experiences of teamwork and their perceived effectiveness of it remain varied. In UK higher education literature on teamwork, the depth of research exploring student experiences of teamwork and the extent to which they are prepared to engage in it, and lacking staff perspectives on how engaged they are with student teamwork is lacking. In addition, to the authors' knowledge, no prior research at University of Warwick has explored teamwork preparedness or staff support from both student and staff perspectives, thus highlighting gaps for this study to explore.

The Research Team

- Original funding to assign 3 researchers from January to July 2025
- Ethics delay caused us to collect data in June 2025.
- Employed 4 student researchers instead for shorter time.

What they did?

- Literature Review
- 3 Data Collection Methods

- Student Survey

- Focus Group with Students

- Staff Interviews

Literature Review: Preparedness

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Research Question

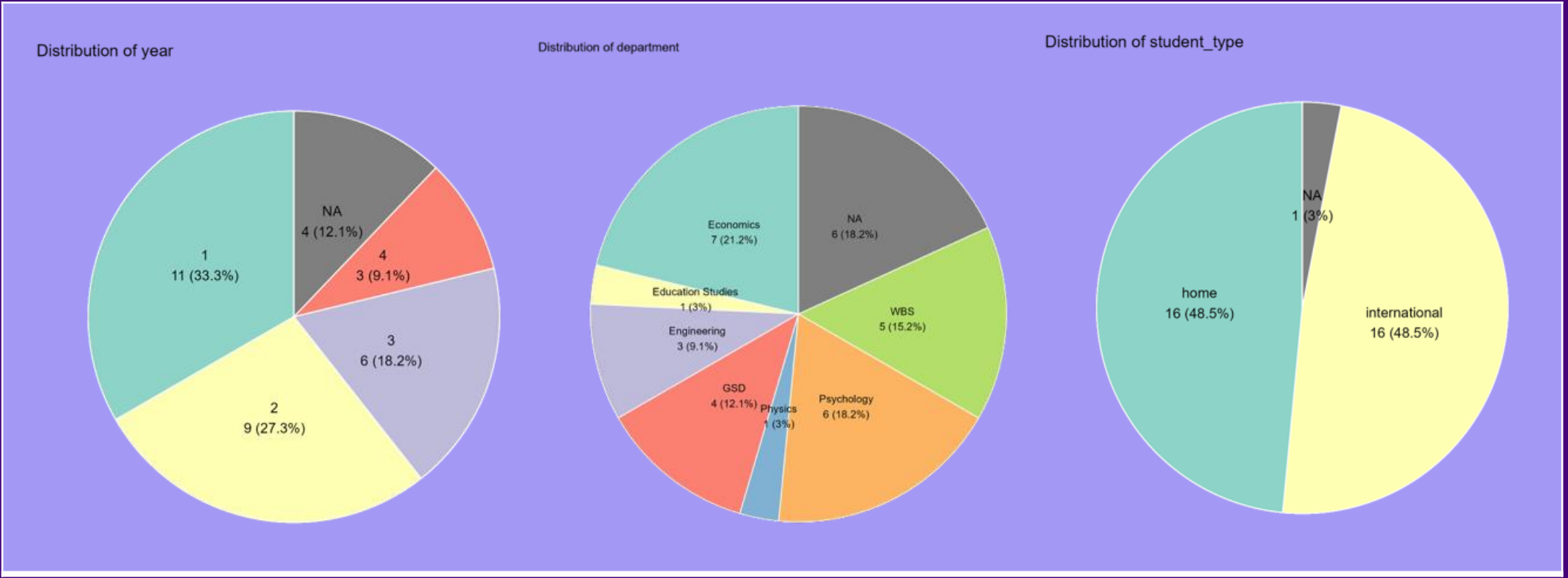
How does teamwork preparedness and ongoing support influence student teamwork experiences and teamwork effectiveness?

Survey

- An online survey was designed using the Qualtrics software with questions adapted from several studies explored in the literature review (Allen, et al., 2024; Nagy, 2023). The survey was designed as a 5-point Likert scale ranking (Appendix 1: Qualtrics Student Survey).

- The survey was published and open for responses between the 30th of June and 18th of July 2025. A total of 53 responses were collected from students in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses who completed both assessed and non-assessed teamwork tasks during their time at University of Warwick.

Survey Results



Survey Results

- Notably, although ongoing support is crucial for both general experience and effectiveness, only 57.6% of students reported feeling supported during teamwork, and just 15.2% strongly agreed that they were supported. This relatively low level of perceived support may contribute to the less-than-optimal teamwork experience and effectiveness reported by students.

Focus Group

Design

- Focus group questions were designed uniquely by the study authors on the core research questions exploring students' preparedness for teamwork and the ongoing support they receive (Appendix 2: Focus **Group Questions**).

- The focus groups included a critical component which asks participants to brainstorm useful teamwork resources in order for them to reflect on resources they currently use or would find beneficial in future.

- The discussion section of the report explores how the overall teamwork factors shaped students' experience of teamwork and its effectiveness, which complements the student survey results.

Focus Group - Results

Theme	Example Quotation	Theme Description
Gaps in Teamwork Preparedness and Teamwork Expectation Setting	*"Four people were like freeloaders of the group… no matter how much you ask them to pitch in, they would say 'it doesn't matter', and you would have to go along with it be*cause someone has to take up the work and wrap it up."	Few students have prior exposure to teamwork skills such as collaboration, leadership, and conflict management before beginning teamwork tasks at university, leading to teamwork dysfunction.
Intercultural Awareness and Communication Training as a Form of Teamwork Preparedness	*"Some of them might even be from, you know, other cultures and they might say they don't really have a good understanding of English and that's why they're not participating."*	Despite a multicultural setting within classrooms, the absence of any formal preparation in intercultural communication led to team misunderstandings, silence and isolation from team members, and discomfort in resolving disagreements.
Role Clarity and Leadership Development as Ongoing Support Needs	*"He kind of self-nominated (himself)…when I did something wrong, he said I shouldn't do coding at all."*	The presence or absence of clear and equitable leadership and defined roles and responsibilities significantly influenced the effectiveness of teamwork and the extent to which team members could contribute equally to the task.
Gaps in Institutional and Ongoing Staff Support	*"If you talk to them (teaching staff) about (teamwork challenges) like, 'I have a free rider or the rest of my group isn't responsive,' they're like, 'Oh, you have that feedback form, or you can just give them low marks, or this always happens.'"*	Many teaching staff were found to be absent or disengaged from student teamwork conflicts, leaving students to self-organise or solve teamwork problems on their own.
Independently Learning from Teamwork	*"The best part is, like everyone said, (you can) get different opinions and different perspectives (from teamwork)."*	Many students gained problem-solving, empathy, and adaptability skills, but often only after struggling with preventable challenges. Independently managing teamwork conflicts was

Semi-Structured Interviews

- To better understand the teamwork experience at University of Warwick and explore ways to improve it in the future, it was also essential to hear from staff on how teamwork is designed and delivered. Past literature exploring staff perspectives on teamwork were adapted for this study (Allen et al., 2024; Bayne et al., 2022; Brignardello-Petersen et al., 2025; De Prada et al., 2022; Francis et al., 2025). The final interview questions used in this study were adapted by the study authors (Appendix 3: Semi-Structured Interview Questions for **Staff**).

Participants

- For this study, seven staff members were purposively sampled from University of Warwick for a virtual 60-minute interview. The staff members chosen were those with teaching experience with elements of teamwork, and whom had prior relationships with the study's authors and supervisors.

Semi-Structured Interviews - Results

Theme	Example Quotation	Theme Description
Skills Development	*"Depending on the module, (it is) quite likely that students will come from different disciplines. So, any kind of group work is going to improve people's abilities to communicate or give people the opportunity to improve their communication skills and their ability to plan and work as a group and then deliver it."*	Teamwork was identified as critical to developing skills such as communication, negotiation, leadership, and information literacy.
Career Preparation	*"If students get a job straight after they finish their degree, being able to work in teams, communicate effectively, and all the sorts of things that you might imagine someone who was going into a job straight after being an undergraduate would need are critical to learn."*	Teamwork was embedded in modules as it acts as a replication of professional life after university which students are likely to encounter.
Meeting Student Demand for Teamwork	*Students said (teamwork) was something that they wanted to practice. That was a really big element (for including teamwork)."*	Students recognised their own desire to practice teamwork skills and shared that with their module convenor.
Bridging Peer Learning Gaps	*"(Teamwork involves) the opportunity to develop a kind of learning that I as a teacher can't really provide. So, I can provide my take on, you know, a poem by Wilfred Owen, or my take on excerpts from a neuroscientist about the history of neuroscience. But what I can't do is be another student who's saying something like, you know, 'I don't really quite get this,' so I think that peer element (of teamwork) is important."*	Because students are likely to understand learning concepts in ways staff may not, teamwork was found to bolster learning as opposed to when students learn individually.
Expanding World Views	*"(You can) find ways of working with people who might have very different views from your own and who might potentially hold those views quite strongly or might be quite passionate about those things. It's a life skill."*	Teamwork provides an opportunity to engage with various ways of knowing.
Efficiency and Practicality for Large Student Cohorts	*"There's an honest answer I can give here which is that sometimes it's about efficiency. If you've got really big modules. The honest answer is that sometimes I think about doing teamwork because if there's 250 students, it's easier to mark them that way."*	Teamwork can be an effective way for staff to deliver and grade student learning, especially when cohort sizes are large.

How do staff prepare students for team-work?

Theme	Example Quotation	Theme Description
Communicating the benefits of teamwork and teamwork task	*"I do definitely talk about the desire for them to develop teamwork skills. I don't formalise by saying 'these are the specific skills I want you to develop.' I think partly because everybody develops different skills and I'm learning from the students which skills are valuable for each task."*	While staff often clearly explain the teamwork task, the benefits of teamwork (such as the skills students can develop) are expected to be implicitly learned and understood by students without being explicitly told what those skills are.
Clarifying teamwork behavioural expectations	*"I will supply (students) with guideline document on how they should work together, what are the benefits of working together, and if there are any disputes, how they should try and solve the disputes themselves."*	Where staff do outline the benefits and expectations of teamwork, they self-design these contents and disseminate them as PDF documents, seminar slides, or Moodle pages for students.
Training for inclusivity in teamwork	*"Working where a student has mitigating circumstances or reasonable adjustments for something. What is the relevant mitigation for group work? You know, we're saying this is a skill that you need to have, but I don't know, for learning needs for neurodiverse conditions. For a student with extreme anxiety, what is the reasonable adjustment for that? None."*	There is a significant gap in practicing inclusive teamwork behaviour when working with students with mitigating circumstances, neurodivergence, disabilities and intercultural and gendered differences.
Team building activities	*"By doing things like a contract, it in my experience, those types of negotiations are things that you end up having as the group goes on anyway."*	The designs are useful to build a good teamwork environment is not discussed and how it might influence the teamwork perceptions of students.
The role of Graduate Teaching Assistants	*"I had some (graduate teaching assistants) help me design that activity (for teamwork). (…) So they do run an intercultural training programme, but I just got them to distil that down into one slide."*	There is little awareness that cross-departmental Graduate Teaching Assistant support and collaboration is feasible.
Resources Exploration	*"It would be really helpful if it was more publicised widely because the presentation was great."*	University information and resources for teamwork are not very accessible.

On going issues

Theme	Example Quotation	Theme Description
Managing teamwork conflict	*“Issues like not being responsive to emails and then just being responsible for some time and then no communication at all. And of course, things like ‘we've done 90% of the work’ and ‘this person has not contributed to anything.’”*	Staff were active in capturing student conflicts (mainly free riding and issues of unresponsive students) but with little known role of how to get appropriately involved in resolving such conflict.
Staff capacity to support teamwork processes	*“Academics don't have the time necessarily to be able to act as a facilitator for group work when it goes wrong. Yes, I've got my seminar lessons. Yes, I've got my office hours. But to be able to sit down and get a group that's dysfunctional around a table and to actually do some actual work with them on facilitating that conversation (is challenging).”*	Although staff can be present to support the conflict-resolution process between students, many are constrained by time and resources and would prefer additional guidance from the university for students to use independently (such as when conflicts arise).
Increasing the role of Graduate Teaching Assistants	*“Bringing in Postgrads to actually work as their facilitators has definitely helped as well with the undergrads, because we found that they were a bit scared of the staff members because we mark their assignments. So having a near peer facilitator has made a huge difference.”*	Efficiently involving Graduate Teaching Assistants as a feedback platform is rarely discussed as a form of ongoing support for teamwork despite its potential to increase support capacity.
Promoting formal teamwork feedback processes	*“I've revised my advised my guidelines to say that if you see that a student has been not commutative or not responded to emails, let me know by the end of the term so that I am able to track the student and be able to talk.”*	Many students are unaware that teamwork issues and feedback can be communicated to staff for further intervention, thus formal feedback processes should be set up and clarified to students before the teamwork process begins.

Recommendations (To be reviewed).

Issue Identified	Issue Description	Recommendations for Guidance	Example Quotation for Recommendation
Challenges self-organising and leading teams.	Students lack the exposure and skills to self-organise roles and responsibilities in their teams and lead their teamwork process inclusively and effectively.	• Clearer guidance or training on collaborative skills, responsibilities and conflict management early in the term (Allen et al., 2024; Bayne et al., 2022; Francis et al., 2025) • Ongoing tutor check-ins, role negotiation templates, and leadership training (such as a brief) to help prevent power imbalances and improve coordination within student teams (Allen et al., 2024). • Icebreaker activities at the beginning of teamwork processes to build relationships with other students (Bayne et al., 2022). • Having preliminary discussions on individual student roles and responsibilities(Allen et al., 2024). • Promote the use of internal group deadlines and regular sharing of team progress between deadlines (Francis et al., 2025). • Wider department and university training opportunities for leadership and other key teamwork skills to strengthen independent team working (Allen et al., 2024; Bayne et al., 2022).	*"I think I would have them get into groups and I would first focus on having them get to know each other, to know each other outside of just a purely group member academic context and build respect and trust and repertoire."* *"I think by allocating these small roles, if one (student) had finished the work earlier, they still know the other person will have it done by one week because that's the set (roles and responsibilities."*
Lack of training and awareness on inclusive teamwork practices.	Stereotyping/Othering students still occurs between students- need more integration and cohesion. Alternatively, students are not aware of existing university resources.	• More accessible and visible university resources and a diversification of resources (e.g., Warwick Intercultural Training Program). • Learning from each other and the diversity of cultures that exists in various environments within and outside of the classroom. • Introduce micro-workshops early in teamwork tasks/term modules to train specific teamwork skills (Allen et al., 2024; Bayne et al., 2022; Francis et al., 2025). • Cap group size where possible to reduce coordination overload and dominance issues (Bayne et al., 2022).	*"I did this thing called Teamwork Warwick, which is a work experience with the university, and we had people from different degrees. In the training, we had this thing called a Intercultural Workshop."*
Challenges communicating teamwork conflict/feedback to staff.	Lack of awareness for students to know where to share teamwork feedback, or power dynamics which impede feedback communication process.	• Asking departmental teaching staff how to be contacted when conflict arises during teamwork for consistent support mechanisms to be available (Francis et al., 2025). • Implement mid-project peer reviews as opposed to solely end-of-project feedback reviews (Francis et al., 2025).	*"There is a power dynamic there and there, there, there could be reservations about speaking to me perhaps from certain groups or even certain people, certain types of people might feel reluctant to tell me about things that they're struggling with in their team."* *"I feel like my issue with it was I thought it should be like done twice in the middle of the project and at the end. So, they can maybe step in if there are any problems with the team dynamics."*
Challenges with verbalising teamwork experiences.	Students lack the vocabulary to articulate teamwork skills and challenges, which may influence their perceptions of teamwork, their responses to problems, and how willing or able students are to seek help. Staff may also struggle to verbalize the components of effective teamwork, making it harder to guide students or design teamwork.	• Documentation of teamwork through reflection activities before, during, and at the end of teamwork tasks (Allen et al., 2024; Francis et al., 2025). • Build in- role negotiation discussions in Week 1 of group projects (Francis et al., 2025). • Wider university training and support for staff to communicate specific teamwork skills, challenges, and expectations for students when working in teams (Allen et al., 2024; Bayne et al., 2022).	*"I think I used AI to help me come up with certain (teamwork) skills."*
Reframing conflict as growth as opposed to conflict as disruption.	Students may respond to conflict either proactively or negatively when it arises.	• It is important to accept that problems are a natural part of teamwork, take responsibility, and actively work toward resolving them. Teamwork strategies and skills are developed through these practices. • Create space for rotating or shared leadership so assertive students do not always have to step in. • Encourage subgrouping or workstream division when conflicting ideas emerge.	*"I think you just learn to do it and then you just learn it. No matter how much they theoretically explain."*
Lack of awareness on University of Warwick external resources for teamwork	Students do not know that external resources created by the wider university exist, or where to find them. The university needs more accessible and diversified resources.	Students can explore additional support such as with: • Student Opportunity • External reading list or resources • Peer mentoring or buddy systems	*"We do we do link students up to different resources and student opportunities."* *"Even a database of pedagogical literature work. Google Scholar search things will come up and I can read some papers to some extent that's*

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