

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work



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Introduction

Climate challenges require collective thinking and action, yet meaningful collaboration rarely happens on its own. This publication brings together three collaborative workshops facilitated by the Climate Advocates at Central Saint Martins during the 2025–26 academic year. Developed in partnership with tutors, course teams and the Educational Development team, the workshops invited students across undergraduate and postgraduate courses to reflect on their experiences of collective learning.

Through anonymous reflections, conversations, mapping, quizzes and surveys, participants shared what it feels like to work across different disciplines, to bridge communication styles, and to negotiate expectations, all whilst caring for oneself and others.

By surfacing these tensions, which often remain hidden within teamwork and overlooked within assessment frameworks, this publication contributes to ongoing conversations about how collective learning can be better understood and supported within creative education.



Who Are the Climate Advocates?

The Climate Advocates Programme forms part of the University of the Arts London's Climate Action Plan, supporting students' engagements with the UAL Principles for Climate, Social and Racial Justice (University of the Arts London, n.d.) and contextualising them within their disciplines and practices.

Recognising that climate change cannot be separated from wider questions of social and racial justice, Climate Advocates work through research, curriculum co-design, consultations and creative projects to explore how creative education can respond to these interconnected challenges. Through collaboration with students and staff, the programme contributes to creating the conditions for new approaches to economic, cultural and societal systems that foreground human and planetary health.

The insights, practices and approaches developed through this work are being shared beyond UAL, contributing to wider conversations around student engagement and co-creation practices in HE. In 2026, Climate Advocates will be presenting at the Researching, Advancing & Inspiring Student Engagement (RAISE) Conference, the Oxford Brookes International Teaching and Learning Conference, and the UAL Creative Education Festival.

Left: Climate Advocates and Changemakers volunteering at the Ealing Beaver Project, 2026. Photo by Jude Alsalam; edit by Runxin Zheng.

From

*What We Carry,
What We Share*



to *Teamwork Makes the
Dream Work, But What If
Nobody Slept?*

This publication builds upon *What We Carry, What We Share* (2025), a collaborative zine developed by Climate Advocates, Changemakers, and collaborators at Central Saint Martins.

The first edition gathered research, workshops, conversations, artistic practices, and reflections on care, conflict, embodiment, and collective learning. It treated collaboration not as a fixed method but as a lived experience, shaped by institutional frameworks, labour relations, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. While the first edition gathered multiple voices and encounters, this publication stays closer to the experience: the discomfort, the uncertainty, the surprise of working with others. Three workshops, positioned before, during, and after collaborative projects, trace how collaboration unfolds and what conditions make it possible or cause it to struggle.

Together, these publications form an ongoing inquiry into how we learn, work, and create with others.



Mapping the Experience

In person

Student

1 week after the unit ended

This workshop took place with students from a postgraduate course at Central Saint Martins following a four-week collaborative project. Designed as a drop-in reflection session, it invited participants to look back on their experiences of working together and consider how collaboration unfolded over time.

Approximately 45 students participated through anonymous writing, conversation, emotional mapping, and group discussion. Using a large-scale collaborative timeline and emotional vocabulary adapted from Nonviolent Communication (NVC) practices (Buckmaster, 2026), participants reflected on moments of uncertainty, tension, alignment, care, and fatigue that emerged throughout the project.

The following sections trace the themes that emerged from these reflections. Organised around key moments in the collaborative process, they offer insights into how students experienced collaboration and what conditions supported or challenged their ability to work together.

Left: Postgraduate students during the workshop, 2026.
Photo by Runxin Zheng.

Entering Uncertainty

The collaborative project began with a high level of uncertainty. Students were introduced simultaneously to an open brief, unfamiliar collaborators, and complex datasets. Many described the first week as disorientating, struggling to understand both the project direction and the working styles of their groups.

One student reflected:

"I felt confused because all my teammates were working on different things but decided to stay confused for week 1, just to see how my team approach this project."

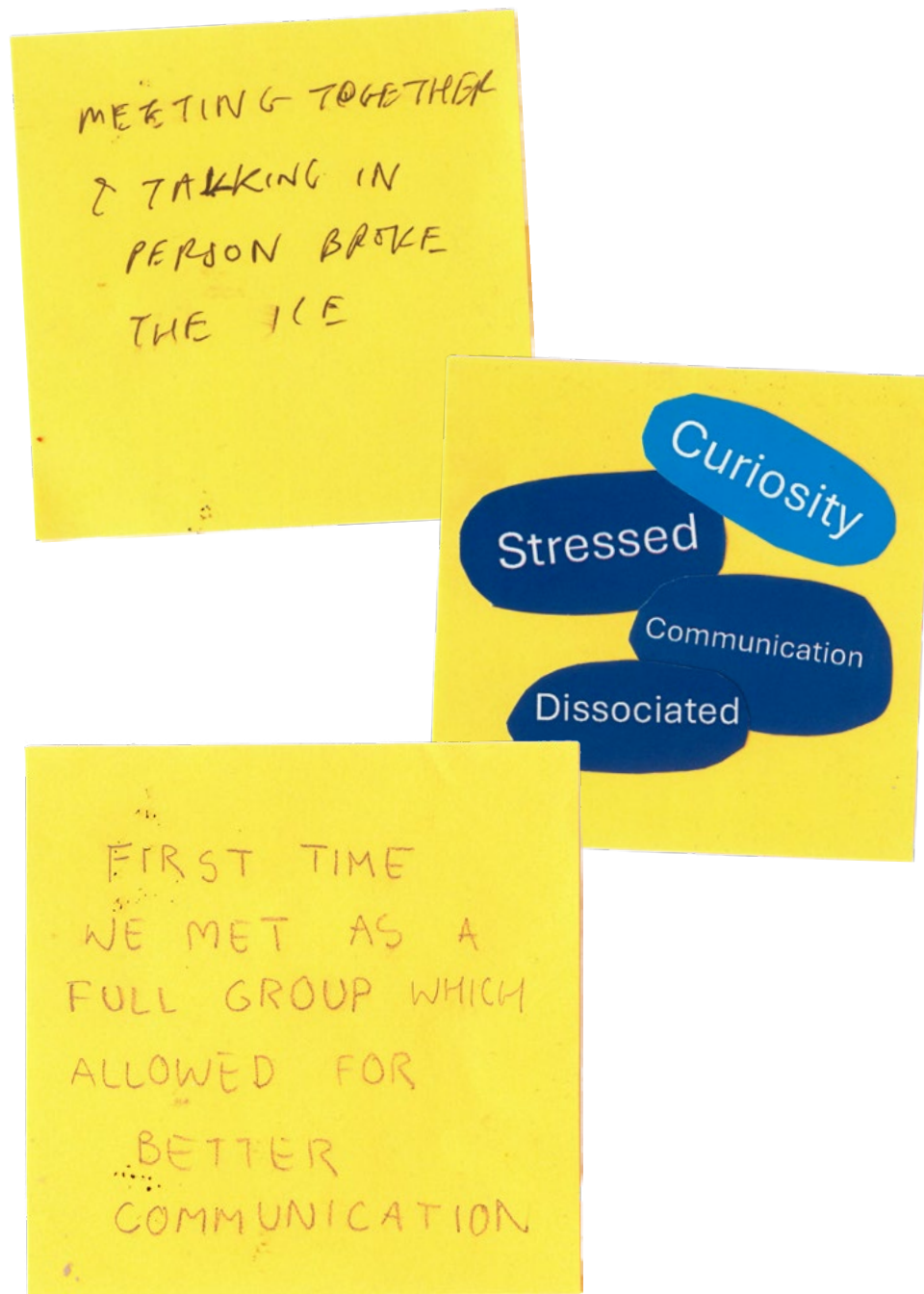
Yet uncertainty was often accompanied by curiosity. Early conversations and informal interactions helped groups move from individual confusion towards collective exploration. Students described learning about one another's skills, experiences and perspectives, while some expressed relief in realising they were "not going through this alone".

Communication emerged as an early challenge. Participants frequently mentioned difficulties aligning expectations, articulating ideas, and deciding on shared directions. Working with unfamiliar datasets added another layer of complexity. While some valued engaging with "actual data", others found the material difficult to interpret, which sometimes reduced confidence and participation within the group.

I felt confused because all my teammates were working on different thing but decided to stay confused for week 1, just to see how my team approach this project.

I ALSO DECIDE
TO STAY
CONFUSED

Top: Anonymous participants' reflections, responding to prompts about Week 1 of the collaborative project.



Negotiating Difference

By the second week, experiences of collaboration began to diverge more clearly between groups. For some, relationships strengthened as trust developed through regular discussion and face-to-face interaction. Meeting in person helped groups “break the ice”, creating momentum and a stronger sense of collective purpose.

Students who described positive collaborative experiences often referred to *bonding*, *alignment*, *reliability*, *meaningful discussion*, and *curiosity*.

One student reflected:

“We established our expectations from the beginning so we could align our thinking and manage the workload.”

Left: Anonymous participants’ reflections, responding to prompts about Week 2 of the collaborative project.

The group is still uneven.
(already abandoned)
We cannot unify our
opinions.
It's really hard to
decide a direction.
We're in different fields.
hard to collaborate

personally I feel the group work
(the direction & development)
relies a lot on how well the
group mates can manage to
merge their skills/practices
together. It would be helpful
if there could be guidance
or more time for this.

Other groups encountered growing tensions around communication, disciplinary differences, and uneven participation. Participants described challenges in merging different approaches and expectations, while unclear decision-making processes sometimes made it difficult to move forward. One participant reflected:

"We cannot unify our opinions... it's really hard to decide a direction."

Across both positive and difficult experiences, communication consistently shaped how collaboration unfolded. The ability to listen, negotiate, and adapt often proved more important than disciplinary background or technical expertise.

Left: Anonymous participants' reflections, responding to prompts about Week 2 of the collaborative project.

Alignment and Friction

Feedback sessions marked an important turning point in the project. Although interim presentations were frequently described as stressful, they also helped many groups clarify their direction and strengthen alignment.

One participant noted that:

“Project direction became clear and the group started to align.”

Discussion and negotiation played a central role during this stage. Students often described “back-and-forth” conversations as demanding but necessary, helping groups work through earlier misunderstandings and disagreements.

Left: Anonymous participants' reflections, responding to prompts about Week 3 of the collaborative project.

- nerve ~~was~~ wrecking at times
but mostly informative & open mind
- very helpful to see others' WIP
and hear people's opinions
about my own work.

PROJECT DIRECTION
BECAME
CLEAR - GROUP
STARTED TO
ALIGN.

it was hard to
fix things after
feedback, a lot of
back & forth, however
conversations helped
to overcome frustration

Want
more
silliness

MAKING SURE THAT
EVERYONE HAS
A MOMENT TO
SHINE ☺

I believe that there is
no 'equal' amount of
work when you are in
a group. However, I don't
see it as a bad thing,
as long as everyone
puts in effort & tries
their best to deliver.

This period also brought the highest levels of emotional intensity. As deadlines approached, students frequently mapped feelings of stress, nervousness, pressure, and fatigue. Interestingly, two participants independently called for "more silliness" within the collaborative process. Their comments suggest that humour, play and informal social connection were not distractions from collaboration but important ways of sustaining it during moments of pressure.

In response, peer support became increasingly important. Some groups deliberately created opportunities for "everyone to have a moment to shine", while others introduced clearer communication structures and planning processes to support participation.

Not all students felt supported when difficulties emerged. One participant reflected:

"I didn't really feel supported by the tutors when I said I was struggling with my group."

Questions of fairness and contribution also became more visible. While some worried about unequal workloads, others recognised that equitable collaboration did not necessarily require identical tasks.

Left: Anonymous participants' reflections, responding to prompts about Week 3 of the collaborative project.

Fatigue and Resolution

The final week was characterised by a mixture of relief, appreciation, exhaustion, and reflection.

For many students, the project concluded with stronger relationships and a greater sense of cohesion. Participants reflected positively on moments of openness, mutual support, and collective achievement.

Alongside these positive experiences, emotional and physical fatigue were widespread after four intensive weeks of collaboration. The words *tired*, *burnt out*, *nervous*, *overwhelmed*, and *relieved* appeared repeatedly throughout the workshop mapping exercise.

Time pressure remained a significant concern. Many students felt they needed more time to build trust, navigate tensions, and develop shared understanding within their groups.

Despite these challenges, communication, openness and care emerged as the qualities most consistently associated with successful collaboration. The reflections suggest that collaborative work depends not only on what is produced, but also on the relationships, trust, and shared understanding developed throughout the process.

Left: Anonymous participants' reflections, responding to prompts about Week 4 of the collaborative project.

COMMUNICATION
is
IMPORTANT

Felt like
we needed
more time
to effectively
work together
or I wanted
more time

Fatigued

Burnt out

Freedom

Takeaways for Students

Align expectations early

Groups that discussed goals, communication styles, and workloads early often navigated uncertainty more effectively.

Communication is part of the work

Successful collaboration depended less on disciplinary background and more on how groups communicated, listened, and adapted together.

Conflict can be productive

Disagreement often revealed different priorities, assumptions, or working styles rather than failure.

Collaboration is emotional labour

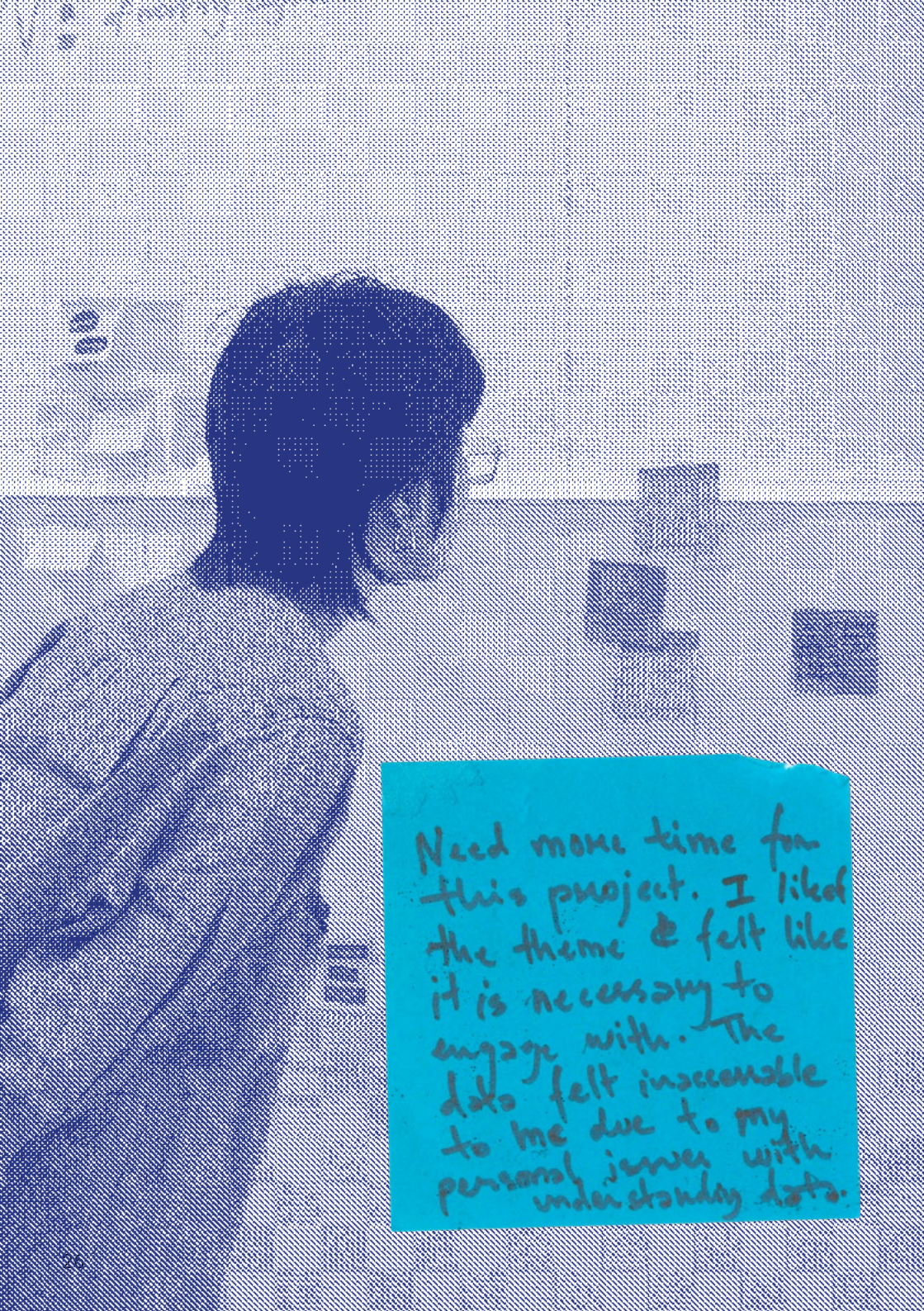
Students frequently described collaboration through emotional experiences such as stress, trust, uncertainty, frustration, humour, and care.

Different contributions can still be equitable

Equal contribution did not always mean identical tasks. Many students reflected positively when groups recognised different strengths and capacities.

Top right: An anonymous participant's reflection on future collaborative practice.
Left: Postgraduate students during the workshop, 2026. Photo by Runxin Zheng.

Communication is important even in basic things. Different people use different means, so it is important to pre-establish ways of communication in advance, + to stay as open as possible.



Need more time for this project. I liked the theme & felt like it is necessary to engage with. The data felt inaccessible to me due to my personal issues with understanding data.

Takeaways for Tutors

Openness requires scaffolding

Students appreciated the openness of the brief, but many struggled without clearer structures for alignment and support.

Data literacy shaped participation

Confidence working with datasets directly affected engagement and self-confidence throughout the project.

Collaboration requires facilitation

Students often needed mediation, check-ins, or clearer intervention structures when tensions emerged.

Emotional labour is often invisible

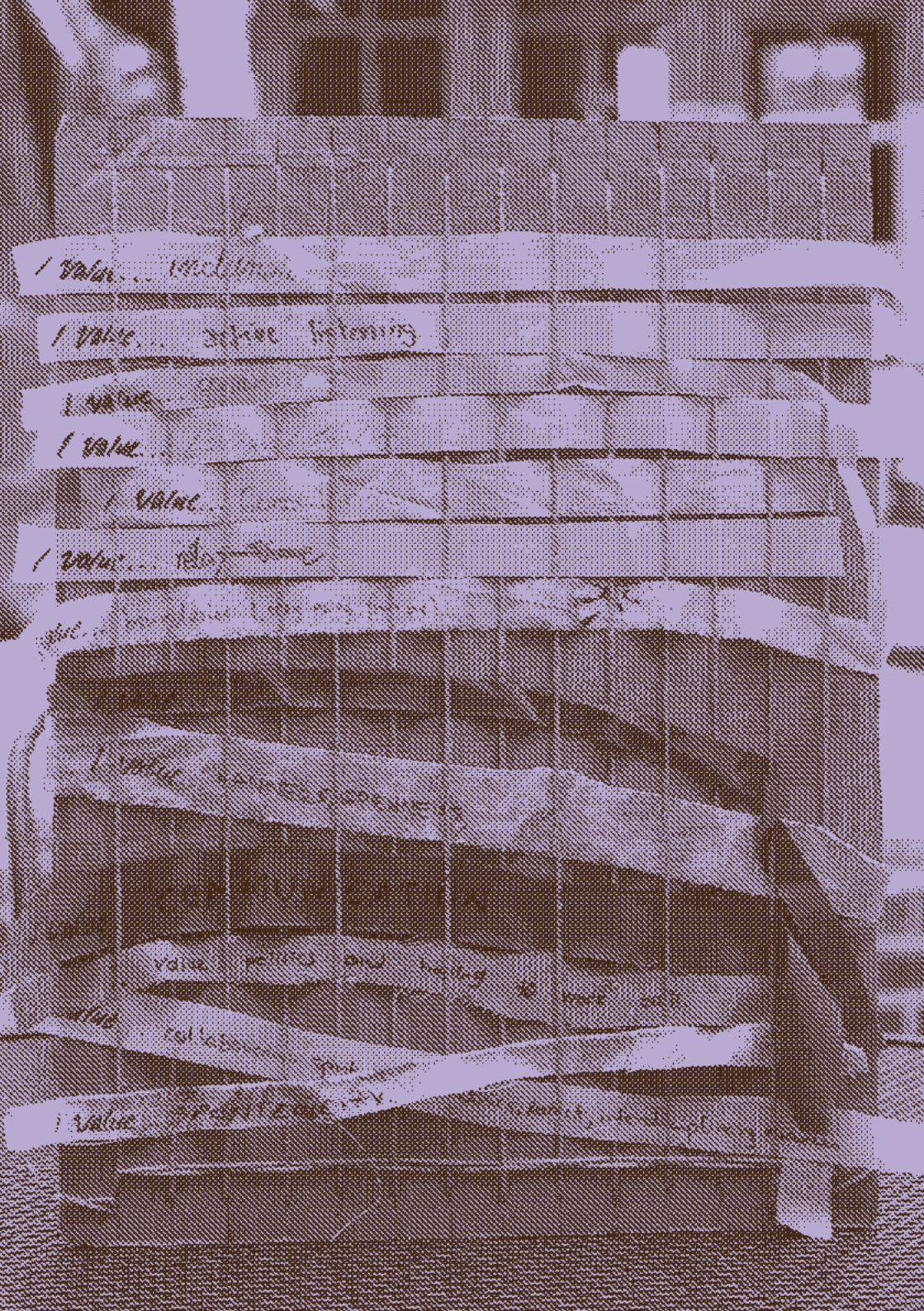
Final presentations rarely reflected the interpersonal complexity behind collaborative work.

Time affects trust

Many groups only reached stronger alignment near the end of the project timeline.

Left: Facilitator Jiaqi (Kiki) Zheng reading the collaborative timeline map during the workshop. Photo by Runxin Zheng.

Bottom right: An anonymous participant's reflection on future collaborative practice.



Creative Unions

Creative Unions is an undergraduate collaborative unit at Central Saint Martins that brings together people, ideas, and practices from across a spectrum of disciplines and cultural backgrounds. It gives learners the chance to work with peers from other courses, and every student on a BA programme takes it in their first or second year as part of their degree.

The unit has now reached its fourth iteration. Back in its third cycle in 2025, Climate Advocates and Changemakers delivered a pop-up interactive activity at the launch in the Friends House auditorium: *What We Carry, What We Share*, which also lent its name to the first edition of the zine. Participants were invited to respond to one of three prompts: *I value...*, *I wish...* or *I offer...*, reflecting on what they hoped to bring to their groups. They then wove their ribbon into a communal loom and took another home in return, exchanging intentions, aspirations and offerings.

This year, Climate Advocates carried these emerging elements forward by developing two new online interventions for the Creative Unions. The first was staff-only, delivered with the Educational Development team (Carole Morrison, Amita Nijhawan, Monika Gravagno). The second was student-only, co-facilitated by climate advocates Jiaqi (Kiki) Zheng and Runxin Zheng, and co-designed with programme lead Monika.

Left: A communal loom. Photo taken by 2024-25 Changemakers.

Building Collaboration Agreement

Online via Teams

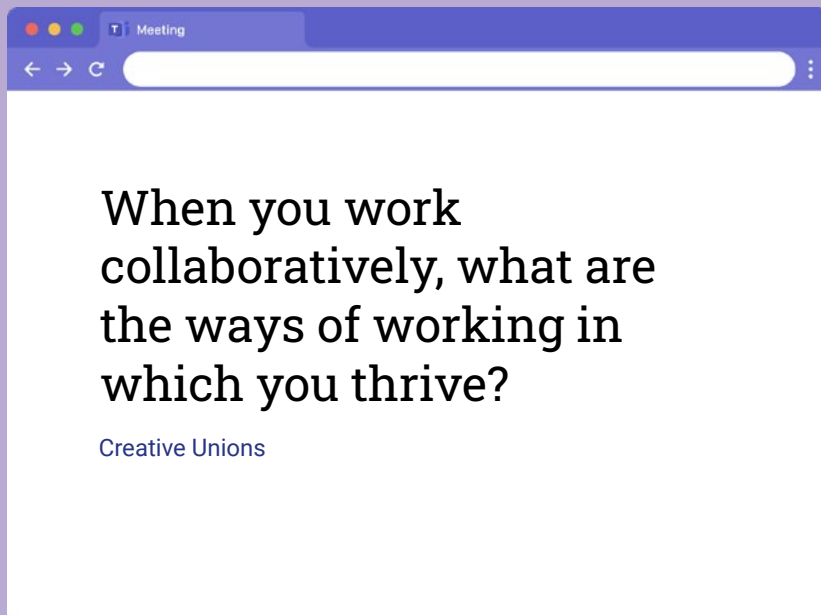
Staff

2 weeks before the unit starts

Creative Unions brings together approximately 30 staff members from diverse disciplinary backgrounds to teach collectively across programmes. Colleagues from the Education Development Team (Amita Nijhawan and Carole Morrison), a Climate Advocate (Jiaqi Zheng), and Monika Gravagno facilitated a two-hour staff development workshop focused on developing shared agreements for collaborative teaching practice.

The workshop drew on Arao and Clemens' work and anti-oppressive, equity-centred pedagogies that understand learning as relational, participatory, and reflective (Tanti, 2025).

Rather than establishing rules, the aim was to co-create shared agreements and aspirations: collective commitments that encourage humility, curiosity, accountability, and respect in relationships with colleagues and students. The workshop also modelled a process that staff could adapt with students undertaking collaborative projects.



The session was structured around five dialogic questions explored in small groups using Padlet:

What ways of working help you thrive?
What has worked well in this unit, and why?
What has been challenging, and why?
What values underpin this work?

Participants were then invited to synthesise their reflections by imagining what a shared agreement for the teaching team might look like. These included:

Preparation and reflection

Co-planning, preparatory meetings, and ongoing reflection.

Playing to strengths

Drawing on individual expertise while encouraging risk-taking and growth.

Shared responsibility

Distributing labour equitably and avoiding unequal workloads.

Adaptability and flexibility

Responding to different disciplines, cohorts, and contexts.

Student agency

Creating opportunities for dialogue, experimentation, and collaborative decision-making.

Process over product

Valuing participation, contribution, and learning alongside outcomes.

Care and belonging

Fostering supportive, welcoming environments.

Peer support and openness

Encouraging collaboration, transparency, and mutual learning.

Share the air

Creating space for multiple voices and perspectives.

Positionality and power

Recognising how lived experiences shape participation.

Constructive disagreement

Supporting respectful agonistic conversations.

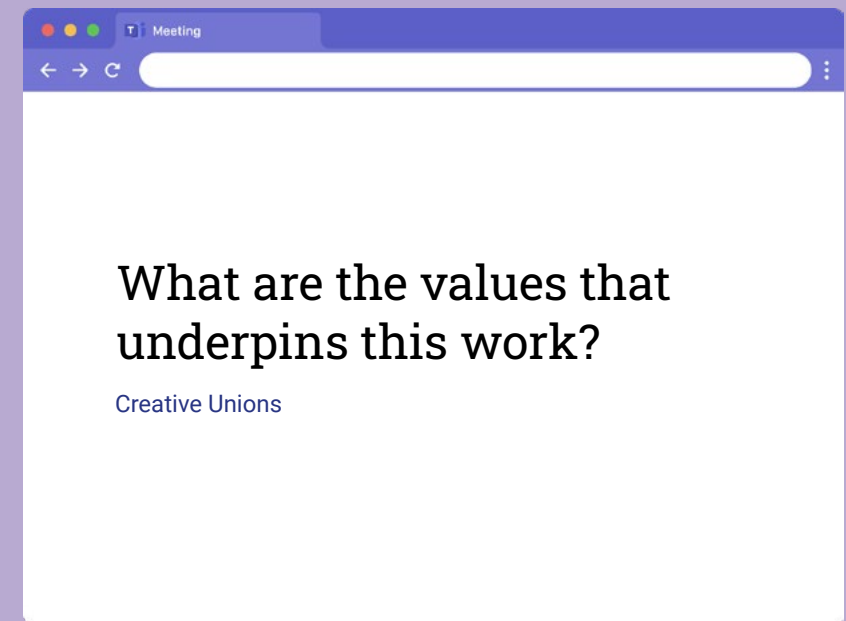
Anti-oppressive practice

Addressing power imbalances through anti-racist and inclusive approaches.

Evaluation feedback indicated that participants were most engaged during the interactive elements of the workshop, particularly breakout discussions, Padlet activities, and opportunities to exchange experiences of collaborative practice. Staff valued hearing colleagues' perspectives, engaging with questions of equity, inclusion, and positionality, and exploring disagreement as a productive aspect of collaboration.

Some participants, however, questioned how the shared agreements would translate into practice and highlighted both the limitations of the online format and a desire for more embodied and material forms of engagement. These responses revealed a broader tension between collaborative aspirations and institutional realities, suggesting that while shared agreements can provide a foundation for collaborative cultures, their impact depends on sustained enactment, institutional support, and accountability.

Rather than offering a solution, the workshop positioned shared agreements as a living framework for collective responsibility. By practising the co-creation of agreements as educators, staff develop approaches that can also be used with students, helping to foster more equitable, reflective, and collaborative learning environments across disciplinary boundaries.



Personality test: My role in a team is ...

The Manager
"let me organise it."

Selected by 16 of 70 participants

The Listener
"How are you feeling?"

Selected by 14/70 participants

The Overachiever:
"I had 3 new ideas
yesterday!"

Selected by 5/70 participants

The Firefighter
"Call me when you
need help."

Selected by 10/70 participants

The Doer
"Alright,
let's get to work!"

Selected by 11/70 participants

The Chiller
"No rush. The project will
work out, somehow."

Selected by 14/70 participants

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work, But What If Nobody Slept?

Online via Mentimeter

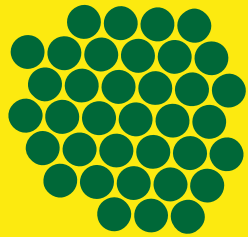
Student

Week 2 of 5 of the Unit

This session gave students space to pause early and think about how they work with others, not just what they were making. It held together two threads: understanding personal habits, limits and availability; and practising listening and curiosity in a group. Through quizzes spanning multiple choice, sliding scales, and short answer sentences, students reflected on positionality and communication style, and named strategies they could take straight back to their assigned group.

Left: Anonymous responses to a multiple-choice question gathered through the Mentimeter workshop.

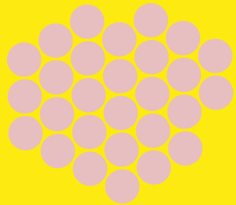
I struggle when...



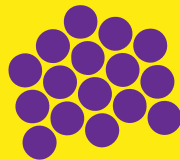
31% No ones shows up



17% No one listens to me



14% I don't like what I do



24% I don't know my roles



7% I don't have the support system



6% My background is misunderstood

Trust needs time and recognition

A recurring challenge was building trust at the point when energy and capacity were often at their lowest. Across both cohorts, students expressed a shared need to feel seen and heard, with their contributions recognised through clear roles, honest communication and thoughtful task delegation.

Care, capacity and sustainability

Rest and sustainability surfaced throughout the workshops. These concerns became most visible when expectations were misaligned, when cultural differences and language barriers remained unspoken, or when students were balancing study alongside work and other responsibilities.

In response to the question, "In group work, I wish others understood that I...", one student reflected that they wished others understood they "can't do everything on my own, I'm relying on my team." Listening was as important as producing outcomes. Students felt most supported when "people expand on my ideas" and when contributions were "recognised throughout the project, not just immediately after."

Left: Anonymous responses to a multiple-choice question gathered through the Mentimeter workshop.

In group work, I wish others understood that I...

Want them to be present and express their ideas because they are valuable

Want to see affirmation and appreciation among group members

I want to know what everyone is thinking not just one or two confident members of the group

Like problem solving but don't want to necessarily lead

Need time to communication and express my ideas

Want to hear their thoughts whether positive or critical/analytical

Can't do everything on my own, I'm relying on my team

Struggle with anxiety, I want to contribute but it can be difficult sometimes

Shared struggles create connection

A powerful realisation for many students was discovering that their challenges were shared. As one participant reflected, "Others want to do their part but also not be the lead. I thought I was somewhat alone in this."

This recognition shaped how students understood their own roles within group work. Across the six group-work personas, organisers and doers were often the ones who remained engaged, alongside those who wanted to contribute but felt overwhelmed by coursework, responsibilities and the pressures of life in London.

Small shifts can support future collaboration

By the end of the sessions, both confidence in working with others and awareness of personal needs increased by 1-2 on the scale of 1-10. This suggests that creating space to reflect on challenges early in a project can have a meaningful impact. Many students left with practical mini-plans for their next steps.

A complete dataset is available online via the QR code at the end of the toolkit.

Left: Anonymous responses to a open-ended question gathered through the Mentimeter workshop.

Acknowledgements

Text

Jiaqi (Kiki) Zheng, Runxin Zheng and Monika Gravagno

Graphic design

Runxin Zheng, Jiaqi (Kiki) Zheng

Editorial review

Monika Gravagno and Charlotte Young

2025-26 Climate Advocates cohort

Charlotte Young, Hannah Ogahara, Jiaqi (Kiki) Zheng,
Mitalie Tripathi, Runxin Zheng, Selen Sarayli

We thank Monika Gravagno, Climate Advocates Programme Lead, for her generosity, attentiveness and encouragement.

With gratitude to the 2025–26 Changemaker Programme and the past cohorts of both programmes. This publication exists because of the people who came before us and those still tending the same ground.

Special Thanks

Matthew Chrislip, Kieran Mahon, Amy Urry, Carole Morrison, Amita Nijhawan and Ceridwen Buckmaster for being part of the collaboration, opening spaces for experimentation, and contributing their expertise to make these workshops possible.

Cara Lloyd and the CSM Printing Workshop team for their support in bringing this publication to life.

Workshop Participants

We thank every student who generously shared their experiences, reflections, frustrations and learnings throughout the workshops. They turned up, spoke honestly, and worked through the messiness of collaborating with others. This publication is built from what they offered.

Use of AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used during the development of this publication to support editing, proofreading, and the refinement of written text. AI-generated outputs were critically reviewed, revised, and adapted by the Climate Advocates team throughout the editorial process. All editorial decisions, interpretations, and final content remain the responsibility of the publication contributors.

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This publication documents one strand of work undertaken by the CSM Climate Advocates during 2025–26. To explore all resources and other projects developed through the Climate Advocates programme, scan the QR code.

Top: Climate Advocates and Changemakers volunteering at the Ealing Beaver Project, 2026. Missing participants were later added as beavers.
Photo by Jude Alsalim; edited by Runxin Zheng.





But What If Nobody Slept