

Summary Report

# CollaborAcademy: co-creating a syllabus for 'learning to collaborate'



FUTURE FIBRES

**CollaborAcademy**

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## Thank you

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All photographs were taken by participants during the research activity and are provided for illustrative purposes only, courtesy of CollaborAcademy, University of the Arts London.



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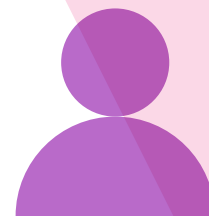
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# Introduction



Collaboration between different disciplines and system actors is becoming increasingly important in the face of complex challenges. The future sustainability of textiles and clothing is one complex challenge that can benefit from improved collaboration across the value chain.

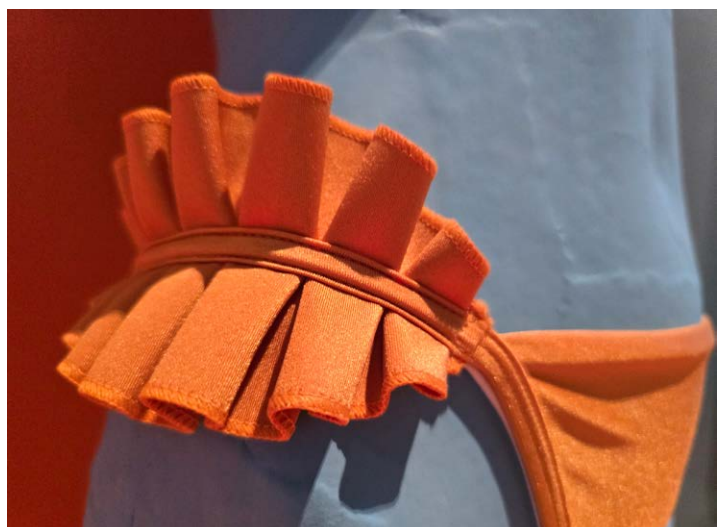
The Future Fibres Network+ (FFN+) was established with a UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) grant to improve collaboration between the environmental sciences, social sciences, textiles and clothing design, and with the textiles and clothing industry.

CollaborAcademy is a research study initiated with an FFN+ mini project grant to develop a short course syllabus for 'learning to collaborate'. The study took a participatory design approach, where 12 doctoral researchers from the environmental sciences, textiles and clothing design worked together to test, explore and propose the features of the syllabus. An industry and academic panel were convened to critique the draft syllabus and provide further direction for its development.

**This summary report outlines the key features of the prototype syllabus comprising:**

- Six Core Principles
- Five Learning Units
- Six Learning Scenarios

The prototype syllabus can be a starting point for anyone wishing to build collaborative capacity within their institution or organisation. This research will support further pedagogic development within the Complex Collaborations Design Research Hub (Complex Collaborations Hub) at University of the Arts London.



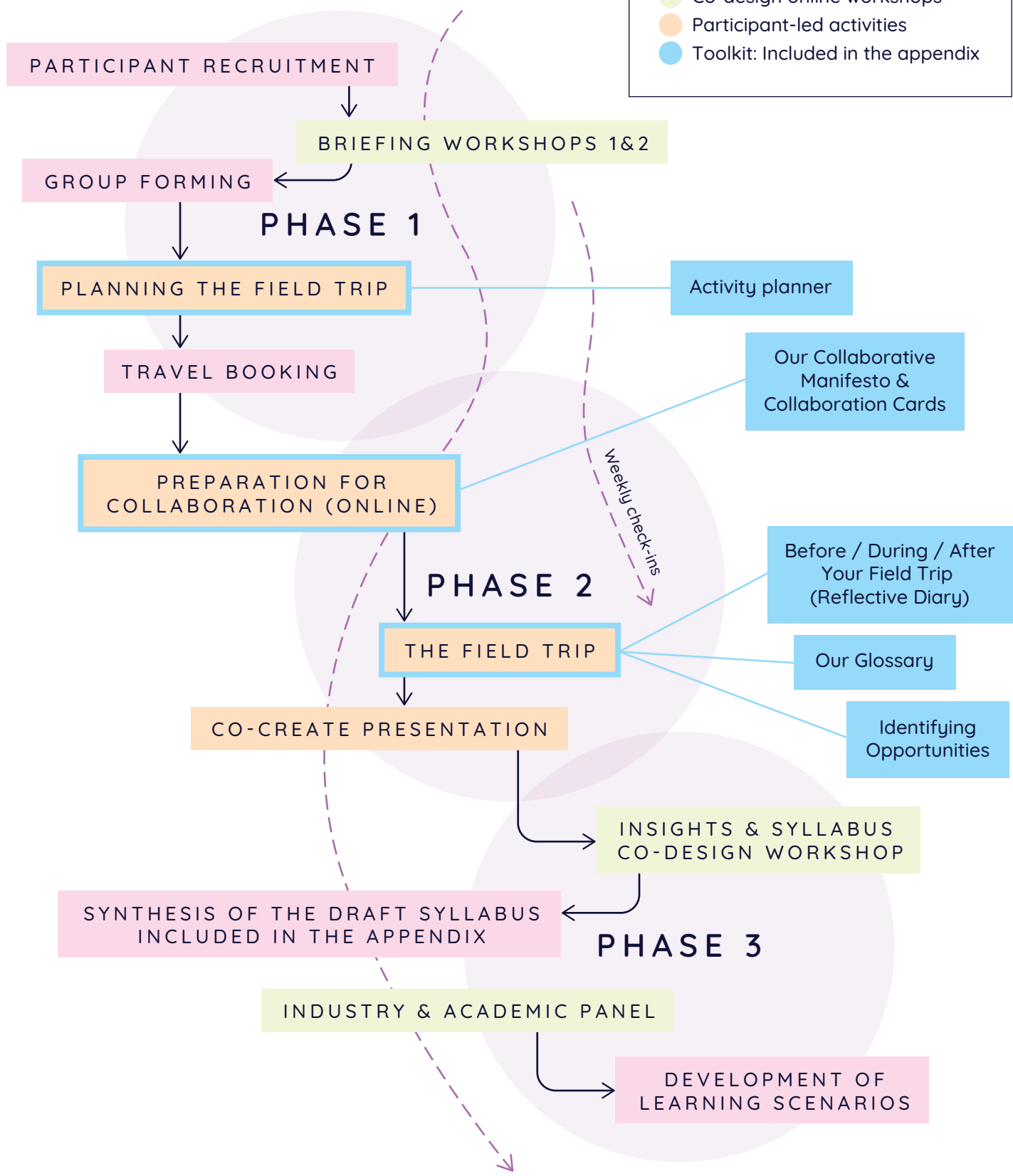


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# What we did

**KEY**

- Research team-led activities
- Co-design online workshops
- Participant-led activities
- Toolkit: Included in the appendix



**CollaborAcademy**

The CollaborAcademy approach is based on our experiences of supporting collaborative research and teaching collaborative practice in the Complex Collaborations Hub at UAL.

We have found that creating opportunities for ‘experiential dialogue’ (talking whilst experiencing something together) is central to enabling people with different perspectives to learn how to collaborate. We brought this aspect into the CollaborAcademy study by introducing ‘field trips’ as the main site for learning. We ran workshops before and after the field trip to support the participants in preparing to collaborate, to share their experiences and co-design the syllabus.

**In summary, these were the main steps:**

- **Participant recruitment:** We recruited 12 doctoral researchers from environmental science, textiles and clothing design to take part in the study.
- **Toolkit development:** We developed a tool kit to support the participants while they learned to collaborate (included in the Appendix).
- **Online briefing:** We ran an online briefing workshop to introduce the study process and the toolkit, and to get to know one another.
- **Group-forming:** Four mixed discipline groups were defined, each with three participants. The selection was largely made according to geographic location, to make it easier to travel to a common location for the field trip. Other factors considered were common interests and disciplinary mix.
- **Preparing to collaborate:** Over six weeks, the participants met online to select a field trip location and prepare to collaborate using the toolkit.
- **Field trip:** During the field trip the groups completed two tasks using the toolkit.
- **Syllabus co-design:** The teams co-presented their experience in an online workshop, where they also co-designed the key features of a ‘learning to collaborate’ syllabus.
- **Industry and academic feedback:** A ‘draft syllabus’ was synthesised from the findings and presented to an industry and academic panel.
- **Refinement:** Core principles, learning units and scenarios were developed in response to participant and panel feedback.
- **Analysis:** At each stage the data was reviewed and discussed by the research team to inform the next stage.

# Participant Reflections

**Through the participants reflections the study showed that:**

1. Preparing well for their collaboration enabled the students to be more open to different perspectives when meeting in-person.
2. Attending an in-person field trip enabled the participants to not only learn about one another but also learn about themselves and about the topic from different perspectives.
3. The focus on language allowed participants to break down barriers to understanding and they found the glossary was important to their learning experience.
4. The site of the field trip was important, and the participant reflections suggested that some participant/site combinations fostered collaborative learning more than others. Diverse teams visiting everyday sites, such as one another's workspaces or museums appeared to lead to a greater focus on collaboration.

“We spent the best part of maybe one and a half to two hours filling out the manifesto and just discussing in real detail everything we kind of do and think about on a day-to-day. We then took a tour around the many different labs and kind of spread across the campus at Leeds”

**PARTICIPANT H**

“We had a very sort of fluid outlook of other disciplines and I think that that was to do with meeting up so frequently beforehand, we tended to be more accepting to others viewpoints”

**PARTICIPANT C**

“There were a lot of different wordings that we didn't understand. So we had to ask Participant C quite a lot. Because there's different like anagrams and different words for different things.”

**PARTICIPANT B**

“And likewise, lots of scientific terms that I had no idea about either.”

**PARTICIPANT C**

# Academic & Industry Review Reflections

**The combined feedback from the academic and industry panel and the FFN+ Town Hall event suggested:**

- Collaboration could (and should) be learnt at various life stages from early years right through to professional training
- Different learning modes could be used for educational stages, with challenges arising from different educational contexts.
- There needs to be a clear distinction between this training and existing offers.
- An alignment between ‘learning to collaborate’, the subject (sustainable clothing and textiles), and participants’ other normative disciplinary and career priorities needs to be incorporated.
- The uncertainty over cohort formation and synergy for meeting the learning outcomes is a key challenge.
- Time and cost could be a significant barrier to participation.
- Intellectual Property (IP) was cited as a key challenge for industry participants.
- The difficulty of cohort-forming and immaturity for ‘teamwork’ is a barrier to implementation at school and undergraduate level.
- The unpredictability of the disciplinary ‘recipe’ in course iterations is a major risk factor with some incompatible combinations.

“We have very different day-to-day lives. So, from working in a lab, an office and then working outreach and communities of schools, it was all very different.”

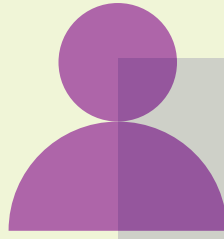
**PARTICIPANT B**

“I’m walking into Participant G’s workspace. I was just blown away by the sheer scale of sock waste from manufacturing. That was something that I hadn’t necessarily considered.”

**PARTICIPANT H**

“We found that this experience really helped us to breakdown those stereotypes. So, I think often design is seen as a more creative subject, whereas science is more factual. However, we found that that that’s not actually always the case.”

**PARTICIPANT C**



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# The Collabor Academy Syllabus



# Core principles

The study reinforced some of our foundational research at Complex Collaborations Hub, where systems thinking, focusing on language and creating space for experiential co-learning have been a central feature. CollaborAcademy allowed us to understand these principles within the context of a 'learning to collaborate' short course. The research also revealed three additional core principles that guide the learning experience.

## Diversity of knowledges

Having a mix of distinct knowledges elevates collaborative learning. Clear differences within the groups makes it easier to define roles, understand position and place within the group. This leads to more productive dialogue and allows the team to identify interesting collaborative opportunities.

## Systemic co-creation of topic knowledge

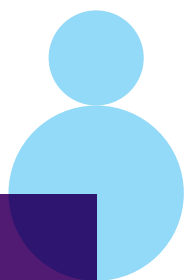
Systems awareness and collaboration are codependent in transformative research. Achieving a better understanding of the system and its complexities improves collaborative literacy and drives people to invest in collaborative work, often involving compromise.

## Experiential co-learning

Hands-on situated experience provides rich and varied reference points for participant discussion. The dialogues that emerge when experiencing an exhibition, a lab, a factory or a studio with someone who has a different viewpoint, surfaces assumptions, position, terminology, parts of the system and opportunities, that would otherwise remain hidden.

## Focus on language

Effective communication is central to achieving good collaboration. When people with different knowledges come together for the first time, the diverse meanings of key terms often lead to misunderstandings. When collaborators are encouraged to pay attention to language, alternative concepts and viewpoints as well as technical values can be revealed and negotiated. Giving license to participants to ask for language clarification is an important starting point for building trust.



## Flexible learning units

‘Learning to collaborate’ is important at all educational levels from primary right through to ‘continual professional development’. While it was beyond the scope of this project to tailor CollaborAcademy to younger learners, the learning approach is sufficiently transferable to make it relevant for a variety of life stages, sectors and contexts. By creating flexible learning units, the syllabus can be more easily adapted to different learning scenarios.

## Individual practice blueprint

CollaborAcademy recognizes the importance of developing an approach to collaborative practice that is appropriate and relevant to individual positionality, discipline, context and culture. The ‘Individual Practice Blueprint’ is the main vehicle for learning, assessment and legacy beyond the short course. The blueprint allows learners to develop their own practice during the course, and continue their practice within their real-world context.

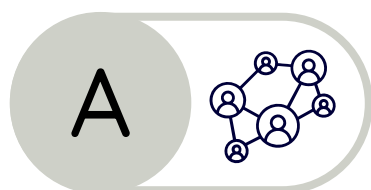


# Learning Units

The CollaborAcademy study involved two main learning stages: ‘learning to collaborate’ (including an introduction to systems and collaboration theory and practice) and ‘the field trip’. Participants confirmed that these two stages were important in developing their collaboration.

However, the study also revealed additional areas of support that participants think are important to catalyse learning and ensure it is useful in their individual contexts of research and practice. We defined three further stages of the learning journey: subject understanding, project application and mentoring to support project delivery.

**Together these stages form the five learning units of CollaborAcademy.**



## Systems + Collaboration

Providing learners with the opportunity to position themselves within the system they want to change, helps them to understand the importance of collaborating with other actors.

This unit is proposed as either the first step in a learning course, or as a free online introductory session of 1-2 hours that can cater to those who are interested, but not yet committed, to the course. This unit could also be offered as part of free training platforms such as ERIC that cater to younger learners and make learning more accessible.



## Subject Deep-dive

Gaining a deeper understanding of the subject area is a key benefit of the CollaborAcademy approach, where learners from different positions are brought together and encouraged to explore their different perspectives.

In this unit, learners can draw on one another's knowledge to co-create a unique collaborative knowledge of the subject that wouldn't be possible to achieve individually. This approach reinforces the value of collaboration and its relevance to the interests and priorities of the learners. Visual mapping techniques help learners to build a unique picture of their collaborative knowledge in a half day online or in-person workshop.



## Field Trip

The field trip is central to the CollaborAcademy methodology and gives learners the opportunity to build collaborative language skills and practices by experiencing something together. In the study, two types of field trip were particularly successful:

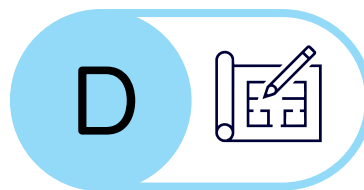
- Visiting a central exhibition related to the subject
- Visiting one another's' workspaces (when these are quite distinct, such as a science lab and a design studio)

Learners are provided with a toolkit to help them prepare and reflect during the field trip, this is included at the end of the report.



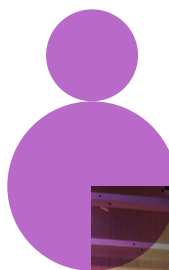
## Project Launch

Not all CollaborAcademy journeys will continue to a real project, but for those that do, this unit provides ongoing guidance and support to collaborators to start their project in the best way to keep the collaboration alive. This involves mentoring CollaborAcademy alumni as they apply their learning for the first time in a real project, which inevitably will involve their transition from learner to teacher-facilitator as they bring people together to prepare for collaboration on their project.



## Project Build

In some scenarios the field trip may lead to learners to identify opportunities that they would like to develop further in their current team, or in an expanded team. This unit aims to provide the support and facilitation for the team to understand how they can take an opportunity and turn it into a collaborative research project, based in academia, within a community, in industry or a combination. This includes how to maintain and expand the collaboration to ensure the project succeeds.



# Six Learning Scenarios

Learning to collaborate is important at all educational levels from primary right through to ‘continual professional development’ and there are many contexts where the CollaborAcademy syllabus can be applied. As a means to ‘test’ the proposed syllabus and develop further detail, we defined six ‘draft’ scenarios. These serve as a starting point for determining next steps, possible partners and opportunities to pilot CollaborAcademy.

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## 1: Introduction to Systemic Collaboration

Units **A** 

Free online ‘taster’ for entry-level understanding of how systems-thinking and collaboration are interconnected, how collaboration can benefit from a systems-view and visa-versa.

FREE 1-2 hours online. For everyone age 16+.

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## 2: Doctoral Training

Units **A**  **B**  **C** 

Training for PhD Researchers in approaches to interdisciplinary collaboration. Delivered through a partnership between several academic institutions who benefit from complimentary disciplinary expertise to a common topic (such as environmental sustainability of textiles and fashion).

12 months online & in-person. Research funding. Through a formal inter-institutional partnership.

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## 3: Partnership-building for Emerging Researchers

Units **A**  **B**  **C**  **D** 

Focusing on collaboration as a means to understand how to build and sustain partnerships for inter- or trans-disciplinary research funding bids.

6 months online & in-person. From within one or more universities who commission the training to support CPD, (i.e. Concordat or HREiR accreditation in the UK).

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## 4: Intra-Institutional Training (academia)



Training to support inter- and trans- disciplinary collaborative skills and culture within an academic institution.

3-6 months online & in-person. Institution internal funding. Commissioned and recruited by the institution to support their KE, Impact and fundraising capacity.

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## 5: Industry-Academic Partnerships



Focused on supporting established KE partnerships between an academic institution and an industrial / community partner.

3+ months online & in-person. Research / KE / industry funding. Commissioned and recruited by the institution or industry partner to support their KE and impact activity, to help identify new collaborative opportunities.

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## 6: Advanced Tailored Partnerships



Tailored collaboration to support specific needs of a multistakeholder project, idea or research for local councils, policy makers, industry and academic institution.

Research / KE / industry funding. Commissioned and recruited via multiple channels of the institution, industry partner, local councils, government and policy makers.



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# Remaining questions and further work

The CollaborAcademy study took a participatory approach to developing a syllabus for 'learning to collaborate' and has provided valuable insights embedded within the Core Principles, Learning Units and Learning Scenarios.

**The study also highlighted some challenges that need to be taken into consideration:**

- 1. Diversity of Knowledges:** Recruiting a cohort of learners around a topic, such as sustainable clothing and textiles, that fulfils the core principle may be difficult to achieve in practice.
- 2. Time:** It may be difficult for learners to commit to a collaborative skills course that includes an in-person field trip unless a strong case can be made for how it contributes to other more pressing priorities, such as career progression, competitiveness or compliance.
- 3. Funding:** How an experience-based training will be resourced needs to be carefully considered for each scenario and learner group. Marketing the course to research funders (i.e. as part of doctoral networks) or academic institutions would require a different approach to industry partnerships, charities or local government.
- 4. Gendered work:** Although the gender dimension of collaboration was not a focus of the study, it is worth noting that all but one of the participant applicants for the study was female. As the topic area 'textiles and clothing' already has a gender bias it isn't possible to draw conclusions, but the gender dimension of collaborative work would benefit from further study.
- 5. Limitations of the study:** The participants of this study wanted to take part because they are interested in collaboration. Therefore a question remains about how effective this approach may be in more challenging circumstances, for example where learners have a more closed outlook, are sceptical of the benefits or approaches of collaboration, or have less compatible communication styles.

Further work will confront these remaining questions and continue to build pedagogic theory and practice

insights to support collaborative skills development in the next generation of researchers and practitioners.

The next step for CollaborAcademy will be to pilot the Learning Units within the identified Learning Scenarios to validate the approach so that it can be scaled.

The CollaborAcademy team welcomes the opportunity to test the model with a range of interdisciplinary topics, such as health or food systems. Please contact the research team if you are interested in a partnership.





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# Appendix

# Appendix A: Draft Syllabus

The draft syllabus was generated with the participants and presented to the Academic and Industry Panel to elicit formative feedback. Although the syllabus will require further refinement, it brings together the participants' views about what is important to include, and so provides a useful reference point for further work in this area.

# COLLABORACADEMY SYLLABUS

## VISION

To foster effective collaborative practices needed for a sustainable textile and clothing system. To develop mindsets and approaches for effective collaborative partnerships and leadership.

VALUES	AIMS	SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE & CAPABILITIES DEVELOPMENT	LEARNING OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Curiosity</li> <li>Trust</li> <li>Sharing knowledge</li> <li>Transparency</li> <li>Respectful collaboration</li> <li>Openness (sharing)</li> <li>Acceptance</li> <li>Commitment</li> <li>Interdisciplinarity</li> <li>Problem-solving</li> <li>Generosity</li> <li>Open mindset (learning)</li> <li>Acceptance</li> </ul>	<p>To facilitate transdisciplinary dialogue, and an awareness of the relationship between a systemic approach and the need for collaboration.</p> <p><b>To support students in developing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skills, approaches and capabilities for equitable collaborative working</li> <li>Self-learning and learning about others within the context of a collaboration</li> <li>An understanding of their emerging collaborative practice (evidenced)</li> <li>A personalised toolkit for collaborative working</li> <li>A set of actionable resources they can confidently apply within their context</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fundamentals of collaboration</li> <li>Comfort with uncertainty</li> <li>Curiosity</li> <li>Creativity</li> <li>Divergent thinking</li> <li>Different approaches and methods to visual research / communication / data collection &amp; processing</li> <li>Integration of multiple perspectives</li> <li>Systemic literacy</li> <li>collaborative literacy</li> <li>Technical and practice languages</li> <li>Relational approaches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding of and appreciation for how the differences (disciplines / values / cultures) between partners manifests within a collaboration</li> <li>Understanding of and appreciation for key collaborative skills such as negotiation style, preparing to collaborate, communication</li> <li>Understanding of and appreciation for key collaborative tools, such as those within the CA toolkit, synchronous and asynchronous tools (See tools and resources)</li> <li>Awareness of how a systemic approach relates to and informs collaborative work</li> <li>A broader understanding of sustainable clothing and textiles through alternative perspectives</li> <li>An understanding of their individual collaborative practice (tools / methods / approaches) and how to apply this within the specific research or practice context</li> <li>How to communicate their learning, it's relevance and application, to others in their team</li> </ul>
STRUCTURE	ACTIVITIES	ASSESSMENT	TOOLS OR RESOURCES
<p><b>Structure:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online delivery and preparation</li> <li>In-person field trip/s (should these be planned by us for ease, or is 'planning field trips' an important learning moment?)</li> <li>Online reflection / tutorials / peer-learning</li> <li>Independent learning</li> <li>Flexibility to accommodate busy schedules</li> </ul> <p><b>Legacy:</b> CollaborAcademy accreditation Alumni Community of practice</p> <p><b>Time commitment:</b> 1hrs per week independent + 3 hrs every 2 weeks online + 2-4 days in-person field trip/s</p> <p><b>Timescale:</b> 3-6 months</p> <p><b>Cost:</b> ??</p>	<p><b>Suggested Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial 'baseline' independent reflection</li> <li>Glossary-building</li> <li>Scenario-building and prototyping to apply / test skills &amp; thinking</li> <li>Group discussions</li> <li>Expert talks</li> <li>'A day in the life' methods and practices exploration</li> <li>Field trips</li> </ul> <p><b>Field Trip:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As diverse as possible</li> <li>One neutral location</li> </ul> <p><b>OR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visiting one another's place of work</li> </ul> <p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborative workshops to explore differences and creative methods</li> <li>Celebration event + networking</li> </ul>	<p><b>Formative:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tutorials</li> <li>Peer feedback</li> <li>'Group Crits' via interim presentation</li> </ul> <p><b>Summative:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual blueprint of collaborative practice and application to specific context</li> <li>Reflective journal / portfolio of learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CollaborAcademy Toolkit (Cards / Manifesto / Glossary / Reflective Diary)</li> <li>Day in the life canvases</li> <li>Adaptive strategies</li> <li>collaborative working tools - G-Drive / MIRO /</li> <li>Communication tools: Canva / biorender</li> <li>Case Studies</li> <li>Address book (network-building and access)</li> <li>Further reading</li> <li>Lecture materials</li> <li>Mentors</li> <li>Community of practice 'space'</li> </ul>



# Appendix B: Tools

These tools were developed or adapted to support participants learning before, during and after the Field Trip.

The **Activity Planner** was used to guide online group practical conversations about the Field Trip, helping them to define the location, their roles and expectations.

**Our Collaborative Manifesto** is an agreement tool for setting out how the collaboration will proceed, defining what is important and surfacing differences so that the group start out with a good understanding of one another's expectations, ways of working and mindset. The manifesto is used with the **Collaboration Cards** which provide prompts for discussion within each of the ten themes.

The **Reflective Diary** provides space for group and independent reflections before, during and after the Field Trip, helping participants to share and capture their learning, as well as build insights for their practice.

**Our Glossary** helps participants to focus on tricky terms and understand different perspectives on key concepts or technical understandings.

The **Identifying Opportunities** worksheet, provides space for groups to capture collaborative ideas as they emerge through the Field Trip.

# BEFORE YOUR FIELD TRIP

OUR COLLABORATIVE IDEAS

YOUR PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

# DURING YOUR FIELD TRIP

## OUR COLLABORATIVE OBSERVATIONS & NOTES

## YOUR PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

I feel, I noticed, I saw...

# AFTER YOUR FIELD TRIP

MAKING SENSE OF WHAT HAPPENED

MAKING SENSE OF WHAT HAPPENED



# ACTIVITY PLANNER

Field location:

## WHAT IS OUR LONG-TERM VISION?

How might this activity help us achieve this?

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## WHAT ARE OUR SHORT-TERM GOALS?

What are our roles during the field trip?

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What materials/equipment do each of us need to prepare?

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Which of our skills are most important beforehand and on the day?

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How much time do we need to allocate for travel and at the field location?

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What will our mode of communication be during the field trip?

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How will we co-explore our field location, will we need special equipment/tools/methods?

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# OUR COLLABORATIVE MANIFESTO

The agreements that we make at the beginning of a collaboration help to keep things running smoothly. They establish how we are going to work together and what we expect from one another in the process. Without these agreements in place, it can be difficult to align our expectations and outputs, but when we create the space for open communication and establish some collaborative agreements, we also create a foundation for collaboration upon which we can build our work.

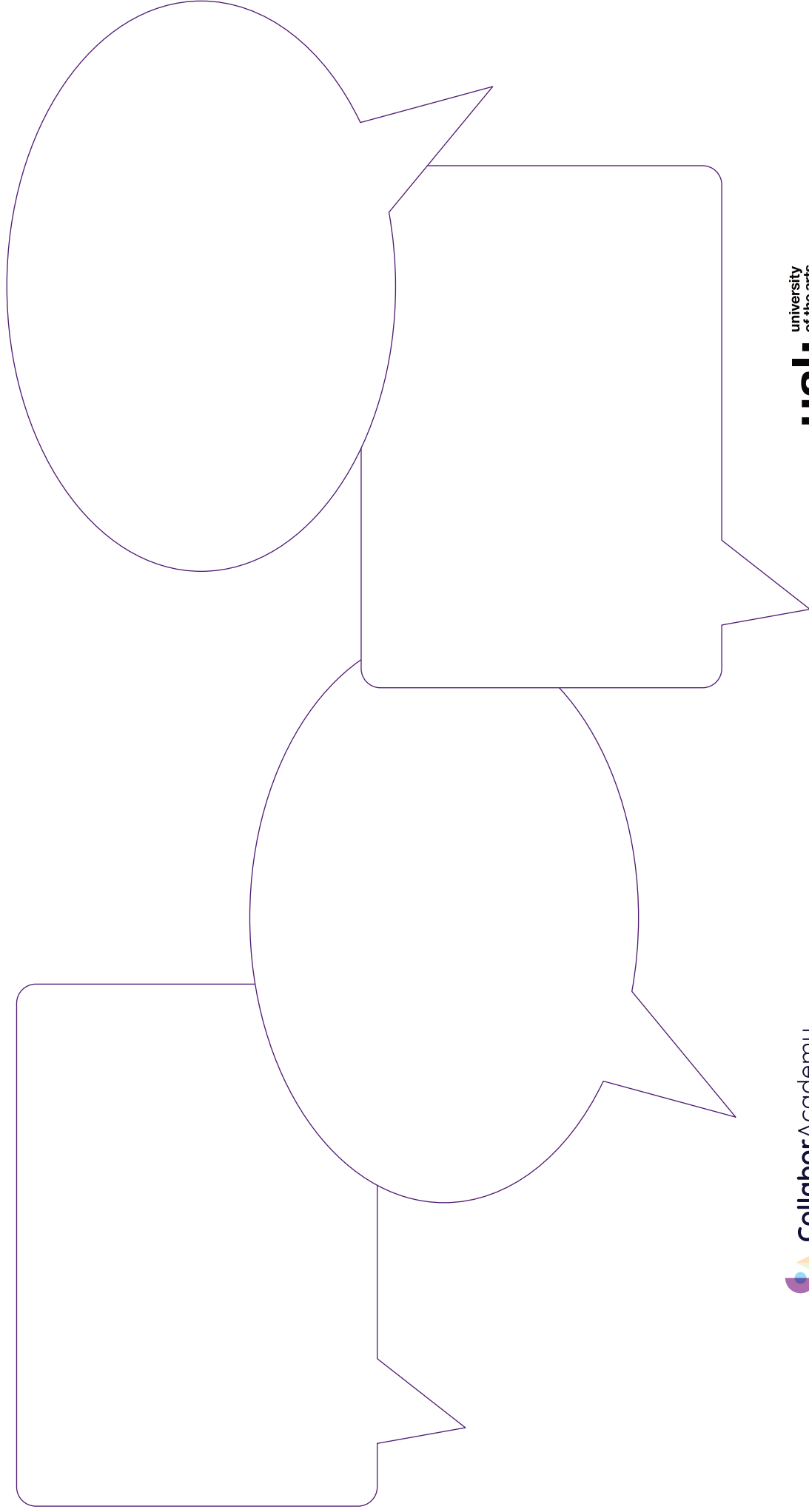
At the start of your collaboration, it can be helpful to host a discussion and develop a shared understanding or 'manifesto' to hold your team's agreements. Using the **Collaboration Card** questions, discuss your expectations about how you would like to work together.

DIFFERENCE	EXPECTATIONS	ROLES	LEARNING	CARE & EQUITY
EMERGENCE	COMMUNICATION	RELATIONSHIPS & TRUST	PREPARATION MONITORING REFLECTION	DECISION-MAKING

# IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES HAVE EMERGED FROM YOUR FIELD VISIT?

New partnerships, for research, for stakeholder engagement, for policy, for prototyping...?



The form consists of two large, empty speech bubble outlines. The first bubble is on the left and has a rectangular tail pointing to the left. The second bubble is on the right and has a rectangular tail pointing to the right. Both bubbles are designed for handwritten notes.



## WHAT IS COLLABORATION?

What does  
collaboration  
mean to you  
and your team?



## WHY COLLABORATE?

Why is collaboration  
important for the  
research or practice  
of you and your  
team?



## DIFFERENCE

What are some of the important differences between you?

How do you think about, understand and value things differently?

What might be some of the differences in the ways you work?



## EMERGENCE

How will you make space for ideas to emerge through your collaboration?

What methods might you use to allow the team to dream together?

When might it be appropriate to work independently and in-depth before reconvening?



## EXPECTATIONS

What are your hopes for the project?

What are your expectations of  
behaviour during the collaboration?

How will you support one another when  
tasks are difficult or don't go to plan?



## COMMUNICATION

How might your team approach  
the challenge of interdisciplinary  
communication?

What languages do you each prefer –  
numeric, visual, tactile, performance, text?

What tools do you prefer to support  
effective communication?



## CARE & EQUITY

How might you bring care and equity into your partnership?

How can you ensure everyone in the team feels appreciated?

What could you do to ensure the collaboration is inclusive?



## RELATIONSHIPS & TRUST

Why are relationships important for your collaboration?

What could you experience together as a team to foster your relationships?

How might you build trust within your team?



## ROLES

What roles might be helpful  
within our team?

How could you ensure strengths are  
identified and aligned with roles?

What are the weaknesses in your team  
and how might you overcome these?



## LEARNING

How might you maximise the  
opportunity for co-learning during  
your collaboration?

Can you create reflective moments  
to learn about yourself and others?

How can you maintain the dialogue  
to deepen learning?

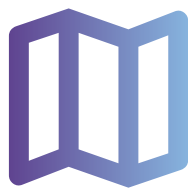


## PREPARATION MONITORING REFLECTION

What tools or activities might help you prepare for collaboration?

How will you monitor the progress of your collaboration, unearthing tensions as well as celebrating success?

How could you foster the practice of group and independent reflection?



## DECISION - MAKING

How will you facilitate effective decision-making within the team?

Which decisions can be made by individuals within their assigned roles and tasks?

Which will need to be made by the group, for example by voting?

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