

Quality Enhancement and Student Success Student and Learning Services

Group Work Principles

Group work is a very powerful learning approach, which can be hugely beneficial to students when used effectively. It can be used separately from, or in conjunction with, assessment of group working e.g. individual contribution to a group (where each individual is assessed), or group work e.g. a group presentation (where the presentation as a product of the group work is assessed).

The following principles apply to all group activities whether they are assessed or not. They need to be considered in relation to the whole course design, including the required discipline-specific content and the appropriate learning, teaching and assessment strategy for the course. Particular attention should be paid to the assessment variety across each level together with the vertical integration of the assessment programme across levels (e.g. students attempting assessed group work at level 6 should have experienced some form of formative and/or summative group work task earlier on in the course).

Preparation

Whatever the group task, it is vital that the purpose of working as a group and the expected outcomes of this are made clear to the students involved. The points below should be considered in this light.

- The rationale and linked learning outcomes should be clearly articulated to the students before starting, particular care should be given to any assessed group task(s).
- Working in groups involves a number of interpersonal skills which must be embedded in the curriculum and identified prior to, as well as facilitated during the assessed group work. These skills might include:
 - emotional intelligence
 - conflict resolution
 - negotiation
 - giving and receiving feedback.
- Students should have the opportunity to practise their interpersonal skills prior to undertaking a group assessment (e.g. by taking part in non-assessed group activities, engaging in peer feedback).

Design

Group work should be designed with reference to the learning outcomes and should enable students to demonstrate these successfully. This may be through realising the benefits of working together or through the produced outputs of the group.

- The design of group work should equip students with knowledge and understanding of how individual roles contribute to groups at a level appropriate for the specified group work.
- The group task(s) must be both inclusive and accessible by design, taking into account student needs and learning contracts where appropriate.
- The opportunity for self and/or peer assessment/feedback should be built into the curriculum delivery and/or assessment strategy as necessary.
- Individual and/or group reflection on the group process should be included where appropriate.
- Design should include an audit process for monitoring and support (e.g. monitoring of written records/ audio recordings of group meetings on a group wiki).

Support and monitoring

For group work to be a successful learning experience it needs to be supported and this, in turn, requires that there be a system in place to monitor the progress of groups. Monitoring ideally should be integrated into the way a group operates and be student-led.

- Ground rules should be pre-determined and clearly communicated.
- Support must be ongoing throughout the period of the group work with the opportunity for tutor feedback and intervention where necessary.
- Progress must be monitored at set intervals and remedial action taken by the tutor in case of difficulties based on information from the audit process (e.g. chasing/dealing with an absent group member in a timely fashion).

Assessment

Assessed Group work must be carefully planned and the assessment strategy clearly presented to students.

- Assessment of Group work should be conducted in such a way that it provides evidence of individual contribution and achievement in line with QAA precepts on assessment of students.
- Assessment should take into account the process as well as the product of the group work.
- In the assessment of a group work activity no assessment task should consist solely of a flat group mark i.e. a common mark awarded to all participants based on the product of a group activity. Any common mark should be combined with another assessment activity, such as an individual reflective piece, which allows an individual's contribution to be recognised and leads to an individual task mark for each participant. The marks and weighting allocated to the group product and the individual contribution should be clearly specified in the assessment criteria.
- Marking criteria, including tutor and self/peer assessment criteria where appropriate, should be clearly articulated and provided to the group prior to the start of the group task(s). These criteria should indicate what parts of the assessment are marked as a group, and where individual effort is recognised as well as their respective weighting.

Review

Standard institutional quality processes provide a useful mechanism for reviewing the effectiveness of assessed group work activities at both module and course level, on a yearly basis.

- Assessed group work activities should be considered as part of the normal module review process which includes consideration of student performance data, student and staff feedback.
- A consideration of assessed group work activities, as part of an overall assessment strategy for a given course, should be included in annual course reviews.

Approved by Academic Development Committee 8 September 2011