Policy and Guidelines for the Conduct and Assessment of Group Work

These guidelines set out the policy relating to the conduct and assessment of group work, to promote good practice in the implementation of assessed group work and ensure transparency for learners in the conduct and assessment of such work.

1.   Setting group work and associated assessment

1.1   There are a range of reasons why it is beneficial for learners to work and be assessed in groups – for example:

- Learners can gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter through sharing and challenging experiences and ideas, applying their learning and defending and reflecting on their own understanding.

- Learners can test their own understanding through explaining to each other: often misunderstandings and confusions are clarified through peer discussion, therefore through this process learners can also learn to give and receive constructive feedback.

- Learners' experience is pooled and valued.

- Groups can stimulate creativity in problem-solving.

- Groups can be given larger / more complex, 'real-world' tasks to tackle than when working as individuals.

- Group work encourages active rather than passive, and deep, rather than surface, learning.

- As well as developing subject specific skills, group work develops / promotes, and enables learners to evidence, transferrable and 'real-world' skills valued by employers (such as planning, time management, negotiation, conflict resolution).

- It can facilitate the development of crucial interpersonal skills.

- It can help learners to feel part of a learning community by enabling them to develop effective working relationships, promoting engagement and thus supporting retention.

- Group assessment may make assessment more efficient for staff, as it can reduce the assessment workload (marking and feedback). However, the management and guidance of group work may require more work than marking individual assessments.

- Summative Group Assessments should align to the University's Assessment Design principles as set out in the Course Design Framework and will be agreed through Course Approval and Modification processes.

1.2   As for any other specifically designed task, staff should have a clear rationale for requiring learners to undertake group work/group assessment.

1.3   How the group work will be assessed, the specifics of what will be assessed, and how marks will be allocated must be considered as an integral aspect of planning the work. The assessment must be seen to be fair by the participating learners. Staff should consider:

- Whether the purpose is to assess specific knowledge/skills, acquisition of specific transferrable skills (e.g., communication) and/or the process of working together as a group (the product of the group work, the process of group work, or both). This will depend

on the learning outcomes of the unit in which the group work takes place. For example, if the learning outcomes specify ability to engage in collaborative work as part of the development of employability skills, process will be important.

- Whether, and if so, how, the relative contribution and learning of individual group members will be evaluated. For example:
  - Learners may submit an individual piece of work based on the group work, where each assignment is marked separately; a single piece of work from all members of the group, or a combination of both group and individual assessments.
  - There may be a single mark for all group members, or a group mark and an individual component (perhaps based on an individual's reflection on how the group worked, or their own contribution to it, or a mark generated from a peer review of each person's contribution, conducted within the group). For any peer marking, clear marking guidelines must be available, and discussed in advance with learners.

1.4 In determining the structure of the assessed group work it must be considered how academic failure, deferrals or exceptional personal circumstances will be handled, so that learners in this position have an appropriate opportunity to be (re)assessed.

1.5 The assessment activities associated with group work should be inclusive to ensure that tasks and procedures do not disadvantage any group or individual (for example, avoiding setting questions which rely on specific cultural knowledge, or may raise cultural sensitivities).

1.6 Assessment/marking criteria must be clear and unambiguous, and must indicate specifically how any mark for the group work process is determined.

1.7 Care must be taken to ensure that activities are feasible to complete in the time given, enabling all group members to be involved. Time may be needed, for example, for individual preparation prior to the group work commencing, so that individuals are not disadvantaged if they work at a slower pace.

2. Organising group work

2.1 The rationale for engaging in group work/assessment and the nature of the task should determine the maximum and minimum number of learners for each group.

2.2 Unit Leaders should determine how groups will be formed:
- self-selection by learners;
- random selection by the Unit Leader;
- allocation by the Unit Leader according to set criteria, e.g., to ensure cross-cultural experiences.

2.3 Arrangements if learners leave the group (i.e., withdraw from the unit) should be considered and made clear to learners.

2.4 Learners should not be permitted to change groups without written permission from the Unit Leader.

2.5 Learners should be provided with clear instructions about the purpose and benefits of the group task and associated assessment in order to promote effective engagement. Briefing should also be provided on how to set the group up (where applicable), how a group works (in terms of the processes that groups go through as a task progresses), and the different kinds of contribution which members can make. Learners from some learning cultures may find group work more difficult and therefore may need additional explanation of the task or the principles of group working. This should be explained at the beginning of the task and reinforced at regular intervals. It may be helpful to begin group work with ice-breaking activities (or encourage each group to do this) that enable learners to start to get to know each other before they begin the work within the group. Unit Leaders may wish to consider inviting Student Services to deliver training in working in groups as an embedded part of the unit, particularly where the process of group working is to be assessed.

2.6　Tutors should be mindful of the skills required to work effectively in a group or team and consider how they can facilitate the development of these skills to maximise the potential for success.

2.7　Learners experiencing particular difficulties with group working (either as individuals or as a group) should be encouraged to seek additional assistance through Student Services.

2.8　The difference between group working/collaboration and the academic offence of collusion should be explained to learners, with reference to the Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct Policy. Depending on the nature of the work being undertaken individual learners may be responsible for writing or preparing particular aspects of the final output, and in this instance the Unit Leader may need also to provide clear guidance about individual and collective responsibilities for appropriate referencing, etc.

2.9　Clear ground rules should be established and spelled out to learners to enable them to function effectively within the group, including:

- The expectation that everyone will participate fully in the task – including appropriate attendance at meetings/scheduled classroom sessions associated with the group work.

- The need to establish clearly defined roles for all group members.

- The need to ensure that practical arrangements are in place, where needed, to enable the group to work together – for example, whether any specific technology is available to assist them.

Within groups learners should, however, be encouraged to set their own ground rules for the group and to discuss potential problems and ways of handling them.

3.　Dealing with groups which are not functioning

3.1　Groups can fail to function appropriately in a range of ways. For example:
- There can be conflicts or other problems in the group which the group cannot resolve themselves.
- Learners failing to participate – for example failing to complete work they have been assigned within the group, not turning up to group meetings, or failing to attend scheduled classroom sessions associated with the group work.
- Some group members may be putting in less effort than they would in an individual piece of work ('social loafing').
- Groups can be failing to focus on the task, misunderstanding what is required in terms of working together as a group, etc.

3.2　The Unit Leader must identify in advance what action will be taken if groups are not functioning appropriately and, bearing in mind the unit learning outcomes, how this may affect the final marks for the assessment. There should be provision for one or more members of a group to draw concerns about group functioning to the attention of the Unit Leader, at the earliest opportunity. It should be emphasised to learners that taking this step is not 'disloyalty' to members of the group, but a positive step towards helping the whole group move forward effectively.

3.3　These arrangements should be made clear to learners in the assessment brief and in verbal briefings to learners at appropriate points.

3.4　Unit Leaders should be mindful that learners exhibiting behaviours which are problematic for the group's functioning may be experiencing personal or other difficulties not directly related to the group work situation. Where the Unit Leader is concerned this may be the case, they should consider encouraging the learner to seek assistance from Student Services.

3.5　Where there are concerns about conflict within the group learners should be reminded of the University's expectations of appropriate behaviours in terms of conduct, equality and harassment, and that disciplinary action may follow for inappropriate behaviour.

4. Assignment Briefs

4.1 Assignment briefs must clearly identify to learners:

- How groups will be formed.

- The process to be undertaken in the event of any major disputes within the group, or if a group has a member who is not contributing/attending.

- Exactly what will be assessed, and how marks will be allocated to the outcome of the group's product(s) (e.g., a group report or presentation) and/or process (e.g., in a group oral presentation, whether learners will be assessed on subject content, presentation skills, group process or all three).

- How, if at all, individual contributions will be assessed and how these individual contributions will be derived.

- How work will be submitted – e.g., a single submission on behalf of a group or individual submission.

- Where applicable, the timing and expectations of any interim points by which groups (either as a whole or as individual members) should have produced specific elements of the final work.

- The practical arrangements for group work – e.g., whether work will be conducted in timetabled sessions, or if learners need to make their own arrangements, and whether there will be access to specific technology/software to facilitate the work.

The above requirements should also be clearly spelled out to learners in verbal instructions and reinforced at key intervals.

5. Learners with declared disabilities

5.1 Learners who have declared any disability to the University will have had this recorded on the Student Record System (SRS). Where this means specific adjustments are required Unit Leaders will be advised of this by Registry, to enable required adjustments to be made. Unit Leaders are not permitted to share any such information with other learners on the unit without the express permission of the learner concerned.

5.2 Where this applies, the Unit Leader is recommended to meet with the learner in advance to discuss how to support them with the group work – for example, whether the learner is happy for their group to be told about their disability, and if so how this would best be done. If required, and the learner wishes, the Unit Leader may consider meeting with their group to support the learner in informing the group about the learner's disability and what the group can do to support the learner, e.g., if the learner has a hearing impairment, working with the learner to provide guidance that the group may need, such as facing the learner when speaking and taking turns to speak. Advice may be sought from Student Services.

5.3 In instances where learners are supported by a Study Assistant, e.g., a facilitator, notetaker, or personal assistant, the role of the Study Assistant is to support the learner and not to participate in the group work.

5.4 In cases where, even with additional support, the learner would be unable to interact appropriately with other learners and contribute to the group task (particularly where this might have an adverse impact on their own performance and/or the performance of other learners), consideration of alternative means of meeting the learning outcomes may be required.

6. Resources

Higher Education Academy UK – Group Work, The Higher Education Academy, 2014
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/group_work.pdf (accessed 25 March 2019)

Version	1.2
Approved by	Academic Board
Originator/Author	Assistant registrar (Quality Assurance)
Owner	Head of Teaching and Learning
Reference source	Equivalent documents from Universities of Durham, Newcastle, Liverpool, Plymouth, Reading, Suffolk. HEA as above.
Date approved	26 July 2024
Effective from	September 2024
Review date	2024/25
Target	All staff
Policy location	Public Website. Internal
Equality analysis	No specific impact; provision made for reasonable adjustments as required

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Group Work Guide for Students

1   Why group work?

Learning and working effectively as part of a team or group is an extremely important skill, and one that you will refine and use throughout your working life.

As well as developing subject specific skills it helps you develop and evidence important group-based and 'real-world' skills. In most professions people are required to work in multidisciplinary project teams or teams with a responsibility for a specific task. Many employers stress the importance of interpersonal (between people) and group skills, such as communication, negotiation, problem solving, and teamwork. These skills can be as important as your subject knowledge in enabling you to be an effective professional in your chosen employment field. Advantages of working in groups include:

- Allowing you to undertake a task which is larger than could be completed individually.
- Exploring issues together fosters creativity and learning. You can gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter through sharing and challenging experiences and ideas, and defending and reflecting on your own understanding.
- Opportunities to test your own understanding through explaining to each other: often misunderstandings and confusions are clarified through discussion, therefore through this process you can learn to give and receive constructive feedback.
- Helping you to feel part of a learning community by enabling you to develop effective working relationships in the group setting.

2   Know what's required

Make sure you read and listen to the instructions provided about the nature of the task, what is expected from all participants, and how any associated assessment is structured, should be submitted and will be marked.

All the key information you need about the assessment will be in the assignment brief. If in any doubt you should discuss this with the Unit Leader.

> **All the key information you need about the assessment will be in the assignment brief on the VLE so make sure you read this carefully**

3   Setting and changing groups

The Unit Leader will tell you how groups will be formed – whether you may choose your own group or if you will be allocated to a group. Whichever method is used **you are not permitted to change groups without written permission from the Unit Leader.**

4   What is expected of you in group work?

A group will not work to its best effect unless everyone gets involved. You personally won't learn as much as you should unless you get fully involved, and the group won't benefit from all the insights you can contribute.

Be committed – turn up on time; do any work you have promised to do, to the best of your ability; persevere with the group even if there are problems and seek to resolve any problems proactively.

> **Make sure you are fully committed to making the group work well – this includes attending all scheduled activities associated with the group work/assessment**

If you are personally finding if difficult working within the group, you may like to consult either the Unit Leader or Student Services for advice on how to manage the situation.

5   Manage your technology

When you are working in a group it is particularly important that you keep back-up copies of work and have all items in more than one place. If technical problems occur, such as losing or corruption of a hard disk, you need to have alternative methods of accessing your work.

6   Making the group work

Get organised: agree on some basic organisation and how the group will work and communicate. Be clear what the group expects everyone to do, by when and to what standard. Define roles and agree on specific targets, set some ground rules, and ensure that all members have a shared understanding of what's required and how to go about it. Ensure that you share your contact details with your group. Make full use of specific class time scheduled for group activities and plan extra meetings as appropriate for the workload required. Monitor progress and stick to deadlines. When preparing a group assignment remember that you all share responsibility for linking individual sections into the whole piece of work - check that all your contributions connect in a logical, clear fashion.

Ensure everyone contributes: find something you can contribute, play your part by turning up and doing what you promise to do; help all group members to feel involved; be proactive in encouraging quieter members to share their views.

Develop your communication skills: Good group work depends on good listening skills; keep the discussion flowing; pay attention to people's body language; give constructive feedback. Build consensus.

Keep good records: The assessment brief will describe what forms of records you need to be keeping during the group work. In addition, it is a good idea to keep a personal log of your contributions to the exercise. This is good practice and useful professional development, but may also be useful in the event of any group disputes.

7   Standards of behaviour

When working in groups disagreements and conflicts may arise. This is a natural and positive part of the group work process. But conflict is harmful when it becomes personal and aggressive. In all your dealings within the group you should maintain professional standards of behaviour and treat all members of the group with the same courtesy and respect you would wish to receive from others. You are required to act appropriately in terms of equality and harassment and disciplinary action may follow for proven instances of inappropriate behaviour.

8   What happens if things go wrong?

Groups can fail to function appropriately in a range of ways. For example:

- There can be conflicts or other problems in the group which the group cannot resolve themselves.

- Some members might fail to participate – they may not complete work they have been assigned within the group, not turn up to group meetings, or fail to attend scheduled classroom sessions associated with the group work. (This may be because they are experiencing problems not directly related to their academic work. If you think this may be the case, consider encouraging them to seek advice from Student Services or through the Student Union).

> **If you are concerned that a member is not participating or that the group has problems that you cannot resolve yourselves, speak to the Unit Leader at the earliest opportunity**

- Some group members may be putting in less effort than they would in an individual piece of work.

- Groups can fail to focus on the task, misunderstanding what is required in terms of working together as a group, etc.

The Unit Leader will make clear in advance what you should do if these situations occur and what action will be taken if groups aren't functioning appropriately. If you have concerns about how the group is functioning you should highlight this to the Unit Leader at an early opportunity, by sending an email or requesting a meeting with them. Taking this step should not be seen as 'disloyalty' to members of the group, but rather as a positive step towards helping the whole group move forward effectively.

9   Further advice

You can seek assistance with study skills for group work from Student Services.
There are also electronic resources available – for example *Making Groupwork Work*, booklet prepared by the Learnhigher CETL at the University of Bradford
http://archive.learnhigher.ac.uk/resources/files/Group%20work/groupwork_booklet_200109.pdf (accessed 28 March 2019)