

## **Guidance for Assessed Student Group Working**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The University of Manchester acknowledges the importance of group work activities as an important part of a student's learning experience. Some of the benefits gained from group working are reflected in the attributes of graduates as set out in the '[Manchester Matrix – the Purposes of a Manchester Undergraduate Education](#)'.
- 1.2 This guidance document aims to provide advice regarding group work activities, whilst allowing the flexibility for Schools and Faculties to set standards consistent with best practice within their own areas. The main consideration should be to ensure that students are treated equitably in group working activities and that these activities do not overburden students at the expense of other methods of teaching, learning and assessment. The assessment process "should not be biased according to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion or belief, age, class or disability", (see the [Assessment Principles in the University's Assessment Framework](#)).
- 1.3 Students and staff members should also take note of the University's [Dignity at Work and Study policy](#), which promotes all members of the University community treating each other "in a friendly, courteous and dignified manner".

### **2. Purposes of group working**

- 2.1 Teaching and learning in small groups serves a number of educational purposes including:
  - a. Studying collaboratively has been shown to directly enhance learning as it enables a variety of ideas and resources to be discussed/used, and encourages deep learning and consequently better retention of knowledge;
  - b. Developing the growth of students' inter-personal skills, and skills of reasoning, problem solving and leadership;
  - c. Employers value the particular skills which group work may help develop, such as teamwork, negotiation and communication skills.

### **3. General guidance**

- 3.1 The following points of general guidance are provided, along with more specific details in the appendices which follow.
- 3.2 Schools should ensure that students have the opportunity to take part in group work within their programmes of study where appropriate, to satisfy the requirements of the relevant Programme Specifications and Subject Benchmarks, the Manchester Matrix and any other conditions stated by relevant Professional/Statutory bodies.

- 3.3 Students should be made aware of the educational reasons for assessed group work and how such activities contribute to the intended learning outcomes of a particular unit or programme.
- 3.4 Each student should be aware of their particular task or role within the group, whether assigned by the course tutor or by the group. It should be made clear to students the extent of their responsibilities regarding group working, including what they are expected to do and how they are expected to work with other members of the group.
- 3.5 Preparation is important. It is recommended that time is allocated within classes for group members to get to know each other prior to group work commencing. This could be through, for example, an icebreaker that explores the background and expertise of group members. Enough time should be given to ensure everyone understands the purpose of the group activity.
- 3.6 Students should be made aware of how their work should be submitted or presented; for example, whether a single submission should be made by the group as a whole or whether each student should submit their work individually.
- 3.7 Students less familiar with university group work (for example, some international students or first year students), may appreciate more detailed guidelines about the possible roles and expected contributions of group members to help guide their<sup>1</sup> participation.
- 3.8 Basic ground rules for the conduct of an assessed group work activity should be established at the start of the activity, including the means of any conflict resolution (what students should do if there are disagreements within the group) and what is expected of the group members in terms of treating others with dignity and respect. Minimum levels of collaboration should be identified as part of the group work assessment guidelines.
- 3.9 If a piece of assessed group work is new to a unit or programme, it would be good practice to consult with the External Examiner about the nature and content of the group work activity prior to it going ahead.
- 4.0 The University's Anonymous Mark Handling principles state that work should be marked anonymously wherever possible. However, in cases of group working, it is acknowledged that anonymous marking is not always practical or possible. A group work presentation is one part of a range of assessment types and methods by which students' work is assessed and anonymous marking would normally take place in the majority of other types of assessments.
- 4.1 If one or more of the learning outcomes of a unit is to be assessed by group work activities, it should be identified how the group work component will be assessed if a student has a re-sit opportunity/referral. Reassessment must enable a student to demonstrate the same intended learning outcomes as the first assessment, but may not necessarily be in the same format as the original assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> University's Dignity at Work and Study Policy [www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/equality-and-diversity/policies-and-guidance/dignity-at-work-and-study](http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/equality-and-diversity/policies-and-guidance/dignity-at-work-and-study)

4.2 Feedback for summative and formative group work should be made available to all group members, rather than a single group representative.

## **Appendix 1 - The Assessment Scheme**

- 1 The assessment scheme for a group working activity must be designed to ensure that each individual's performance can be assessed and reflected in an individual mark. As with every course unit, it should be clearly identified to students how marks will be allocated at an early stage of the course unit.
- 2 Depending on the intended learning outcomes of the unit, the assessment scheme should assess "product" (e.g. a presentation, poster or, web page), "process" (e.g. how well the team collaborated, organised themselves or resolved any disputes), or a mixture of both.
- 3 It should be made clear what criteria will be used to assess the particular aspect(s) of group work being assessed (and who will determine this criteria, e.g. the lecturer, students or both).
- 4 It should be made clear to students who will apply the assessment criteria and determine marks (e.g. lecturer, students – peer and/or self-assessment or a combination).
- 5 Students should also be made aware how will marks be distributed (e.g. a shared group mark, an average group mark, individual marks or a combination).

## Appendix 2 - Inclusivity

- 1 All students should be able to take full part in the group activity for their unit and the following considerations should be taken into account to ensure that group work is accessible to all students.
- 2 Staff members should be aware that students with certain disabilities may find some aspects of group work challenging or even impossible; in particular, blind, visually impaired, hard of hearing or deaf students, those with severe anxiety or some other mental health difficulties, those with Asperger's syndrome and some students with specific learning difficulties. Staff members are encouraged to contact the [Disability Advisory and Support Service \(DASS\)](#) for strategies and suggestions if they need some tips on setting up group work activities for students with disabilities or if they require advice on alternative forms of assessment.
- 3 In cases where a member of a group has a disability, Schools or programme teams should ensure reasonable adjustments (as previously notified to the School Disability Co-ordinator by the DASS) are made to ensure that the student can actively participate in the group activity. It should be noted, however, that staff members should not reveal details of the disability to other members of the group, unless the student specifically requests it. Information to support disabled students can be requested from the [Disability Advisory and Support Service \(DASS\)](#).
- 4 Consideration may need to be given to whether verbal communication in group work activities has the potential to unfairly disadvantage international students and advantage home students. If English is a second language, group members may have trouble with non-standard English, i.e. accents and local references. Where students have had little or no experience of working in groups, it is good practice to provide support mechanisms such as trained mentors who work with the group or a series of reporting stages between the group members and the tutor in order to pick up any issues or lack of progress (also see Appendix 4, point 4).
- 5 Advance HE (formerly the Higher Education Academy) has [useful resources on group work and international student issues](#) as part of an international student project. The information centres on creating inclusive group work environments for all students and may be a useful resource for Schools/Programmes to refer to when considering group work activities.
- 6 Consideration may need to be given to the timing of meetings. Students with caring responsibilities or religious observance commitments might be restricted to what times they are available to meet outside of timetabled hours.
- 7 Similarly, it is good practice to consider the venues of meetings for group work, as some students' religion may prevent them from meeting at a location that serves alcohol or some buildings may be inaccessible for a student with a disability.
- 8 When setting a task, consideration should be given to possible sensitivities of different members of the group, particularly in relation to culturally sensitive topics. These may include issues such as adoption, sexuality, drug misuse, etc.

### **Appendix 3 - How students will be grouped**

- 1 The course unit outline should make clear how groups will be formed in group work activities; for instance, by students self-selecting the members or by staff members arranging the groups. If groups are selected from among the students themselves, it should be made clear what the minimum and maximum size of the group should be and if there would be any penalties given to groups that fall outside these boundaries. If there are any mechanisms for changing groups, students should be informed about the details and any time deadlines.
- 2 It should be made clear to students what actions will be taken if members drop out of groups or withdraw from the course unit.
- 3 Information should be provided to students regarding how groups will be managed; for instance, whether the group will be student led or led by a tutor or other staff member, etc.

### **Appendix 4 - Consideration of what to do if things go wrong**

- 1 It is important that there are mechanisms in place within the Programme to address potential difficulties which may arise in group work assessment.
- 2 Students should be given guidance at the outset on what to do if things start to go wrong within their group work activity. For example, if a member of the group does not participate, it should be made clear to students what they should do, including the need to keep the tutor informed of any concerns as early as possible.
- 3 Students should be made aware of the consequences of non-participation or non-engagement with the group work activity. The marking scheme should take account of both where a student does not engage fully with the activity and where a student is prevented from fully engaging in cases of mitigating circumstances, for example, long term sickness.
- 4 Ensure that arrangements are made for the group to have regular contact with the tutor, in order to prevent issues building up or so that any problems and lack of progress can be identified at an early stage.

### **Appendix 5 - Collusion**

- 1 The University defines collusion as being when “a student or students permit or condone another student or students, to share a piece of work subject to assessment in order to gain a mark or grade to which they are not entitled. Students who allow another student to copy their work are also committing collusion and both the copier and the provider of the work are liable to be penalised. The methods of collusion may include, but are not limited to, sharing of work, ideas or plans by social media or other electronic communication means, and/or physical sharing of work, ideas or plans. Collusion may happen asynchronously outside of an assessment and/or synchronously within an assessment.” Group working undertaken in accordance with these guidelines does not fall under the heading of collusion.
- 2 It is important to ensure that students understand which aspects of a group work activity require working together and represent joint effort and which aspects (if any) must represent individual effort. Consideration must be given to these issues

particularly in groups where students are from diverse learning backgrounds and may not be aware of the notions of collaborative working and collusion. It may be helpful to provide guidance with regards to the ways in which individual contributions and ideas are acknowledged and recognised.

<b>Document control box</b>	
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Policy owner:	Louise Walmsley, Director of Teaching, Learning and Student Development (TLSD)
Lead contact:	Janine Holdway, Teaching and Learning Manager (Policy), TLSD