

Developing Employability and Critical Thinking through Interdisciplinary Group Work and Peer Review

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Last academic year, we introduced group work in *Managerial Economics I*, a large module with students from diverse degree programmes, including BA Economics and Social Studies, PPE, Modern History and Economics, and IBFE. This module provides an excellent opportunity for interdisciplinary, peer-to-peer learning through group work. The aim of this initiative is to simulate real-world professional environments, promoting employability skills and critical thinking among a diverse cohort of students. This blog post examines the rationale, implementation, student feedback, and future directions of the recently integrated peer review process in the module.

Rationale and Aims. *Managerial Economics I* is designed for a multidisciplinary undergraduate audience, with approximately 350 to 450 students from various programs. Group work was introduced in the academic year 2023/2024 and was very positively received by students. It not only improved their teamwork and soft employability skills but also helped to level the distribution of marks, which had previously been skewed due to varying skill levels among students.

To ensure diversity, groups are formed randomly with members from different disciplines. This approach can be initially challenging for students, as they are unfamiliar with their group members, however, in general, it consistently results in a positive experience. Groups are assigned within the same tutorial sessions to facilitate regular meetings.

In the 2024/25 academic year we introduced a peer-review component to address challenges in group dynamics and further improve learning outcomes. The rationale for this innovation is supported by evidence in educational literature, which highlights that peer feedback improves students' critical thinking and engagement (Alqassab, 2023; Carless et al., 2011).

Implementation and Output. The peer-review process was implemented as a formative step before the final submission of group reports. The session, lasting one hour, was facilitated by the tutors. Students brought draft reports, analysed data, or any notes they had been working on, and each group was paired with another group for the review process. To ensure the session's success, students were required to prepare in advance by reviewing relevant materials. These included a pre-recorded instructional video explaining the session's aims, detailed assessment guidelines, and marking criteria. At the start of the tutorial, tutors also presented an example of a past first-class report, demonstrating how it

was marked and how constructive feedback was provided. During the session, tutors guided students in delivering constructive, rubric-aligned feedback.

Student Reception and Feedback. Preliminary feedback from students was largely positive, highlighting the value of the peer-review process. Survey data, with around 50% of the class responding, revealed that 77% of respondents worked in multidisciplinary groups, and 78% believed that working in such groups improved their final outcomes. Additionally, 56% rated the feedback received during the peer review process as "Helpful" or "Very Helpful," while 52% found the feedback clear and constructive. Over 58% of students expressed satisfaction or high satisfaction with the overall peer review process.

Students generally appreciated working in interdisciplinary groups. Although they initially found it challenging, they emphasised the valuable skills they gained from the experience (see Graph 1). The peer-review session provided an opportunity for students to learn from their peers and gain different perspectives, which many identified as a key advantage (see Graph 2).

Graph 1. Target words from answers on challenges and lessons learnt from working in multidisciplinary groups.



Graph 2. Target words from answers on feedback for the peer review session.



Challenges and Solutions. We have also learned valuable lessons from the process and student feedback. Based on these insights, we plan to improve the sessions in future academic years. One key improvement will be providing clearer guidelines on the materials students should bring to the workshop, aiming to improve the quality of feedback further. Additionally, the pre-session materials will not only provide information but also include a short training session on feedback and marking criteria. This will encourage groups to deliver more consistent and constructive feedback.

Conclusion. Overall, this assessment and peer review process empowers students to critically engage with diverse perspectives, preparing them for the complexities of globalised professional environments. This initiative sets a benchmark for interdisciplinary and employability-focused education.

References

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Carless, D., Salter, D., Yang, M., & Lam, J. (2011). Developing sustainable feedback practices. *Studies in Higher Education*, 36(4), 395-407.