

Student Voice in Designing Inclusive First-Year Group Work

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Why use group work in Higher Education?

Pedagogical value

- Promotes *active and deep learning* through discussion, debate and co-construction of knowledge (Entwistle & Waterston, 1988; Dolmans et al., 2001)
- Enhances *critical thinking, problem-solving and conceptual understanding* through peer interaction (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Slavin, 1989)

Skill development and employability

- Develops *transferable skills* such as teamwork, communication and leadership (Davies, 2009; Oakley et al., 2004)
- Aligns with *employer expectations* for collaborative working and real-world problem solving
- Encourages *peer learning and support networks*, contributing to belonging and engagement (Blake et al., 2022)

Learning environment and engagement

- Increases *student motivation, satisfaction and achievement* (Springer et al., 1999; Freeman et al., 2014)
- Facilitates *interaction and community building* within cohorts, especially in large or diverse classes

Challenges of group work in Higher Education

Group dynamics and communication

- Tendency to form homogenous groups if self-selected (all home or all international students)
- Conflicts arising from *different expectations, work ethics and personalities*
- Challenges in *communication, coordination and accountability* among students
- Cultural and language differences impacting collaboration in diverse cohorts

Learning and experience issues

- Students may perceive group work as *time-consuming or inefficient* compared to individual work
- Uneven learning gains if *engagement levels vary across group members*
- Anxiety or dissatisfaction if roles and expectations are unclear

Participation and fairness

- *Free-riding / social loafing* where some students contribute less than others (Davies, 2009; Benning, 2022)
- Perceived *inequity in assessment and workload distribution*

Context

- Cohort of 155 first-year Fashion Business & Technology students
- Balanced demographic: ~50% home and ~50% international
- Two semester one units, one unit has always featured assessed groupwork, the other unit did not typically use group work
- Students assigned to mixed (home/international) groups of 4–6 based on seminar groups.
- Group composition maintained across both units (assessed and non-assessed) to strengthen consistency and peer learning.
- Enable students to develop stronger relationship with their groups due to multiple contact points and having similar timetable.



MATS11701 Management & the Apparel Pipeline

- Assessed group work (30% of the unit)
- Students allocated to mixed (home/international) groups of 4-6 by seminar session
- Groups plan a student social event and produce a video to communicate their ideas (weeks 1 – 8)
- The video is awarded a group mark and then individual marks are calculated using Buddycheck peer assessment



MATS11301 Fashion Buying

- Individual Coursework (100% of the unit)
- Students work in groups in class to conduct initial trend research
- Each student researches and produces a product proposal for Next's SS26 collection
- Students bring their product proposals together to create and present a mini-range for Next (group element is not assessed)



Communicating in groupwork at a global university



**Additional Support from the University Centre for Academic
English – embedded in Canvas**

Student Voice to evaluate impact

Method 1: Student Journey Mapping

Aim: To gather qualitative evidence of student's experience of group work.

Sample: Pilot activity and training session with student reps, followed by student rep led journey mapping with the whole cohort (about 80 to 100 students).

31 Valid responses (assumes approx. 62-93 student voices).

Method 2: Survey

Aim: To test if there was a difference of experiencing group work if assessed or not assessed.

Collected 20 responses in total

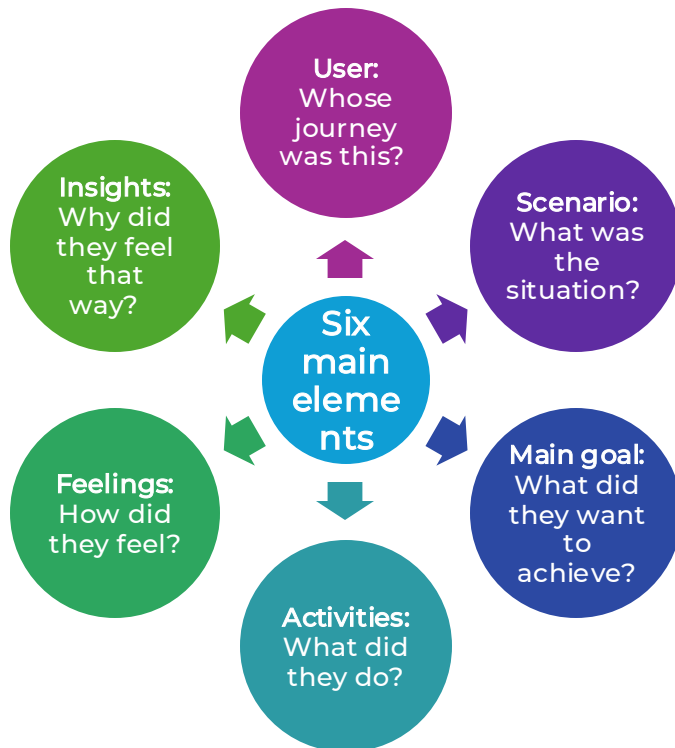
17 valid responses

Sample: 8 home students and 9 international students

Student Journey Mapping

Method 1

Student Journey Mapping



What is a journey map?

A journey map is a tool to map out the steps someone goes through when trying to achieve something. For example, the journey of booking a train ticket, or selecting the units for study.

Student Journey Maps, in our context, show the story of student experience when trying to achieve certain goals in certain periods.

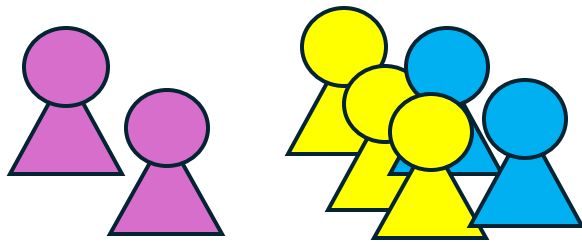
Theme: Group work

 User: Whose journey was this? (Imagined name)	 Scenario - What was the situation? Which unit's groupwork?		 Goal - What did they want to achieve?		
Activities: What did they do? 	Finding out about the assessment and the group	Doing the assessment work	Getting it ready for submission	Submitting the assessment	Progression after feedback (FB to each other or from lecturers)
Feelings: How did they feel? 					
Insights: Why did they feel that way? What might they say? ("add a quotation") 					

Student Journey Mapping Activity – Y1 FBT

Journey mapping training.

22nd Jan.



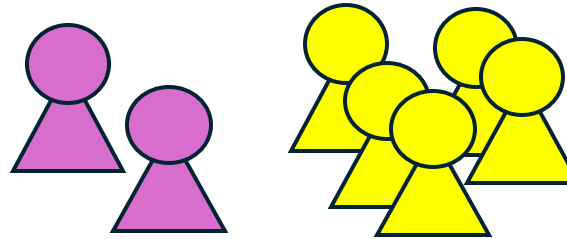
Student
Change Lab

Student Reps &
FBT staff

The Student Change Lab trains student reps, year managers, and Student Voice Committee chair in how to use Journey mapping. Two different scenarios are developed in small groups of student reps and FBT staff

Journey mapping with student reps.

From 23rd Jan. – 1st Feb.



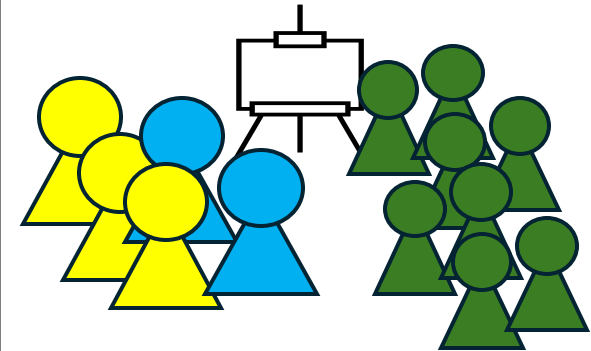
Student
Change Lab

Student Reps

Student Reps work with guidance from the Student Change Lab to develop one of the scenarios (group work) into a journey map. Their journey map is developed into the template for the interactive activity

Journey mapping interactive activity

2nd Feb.

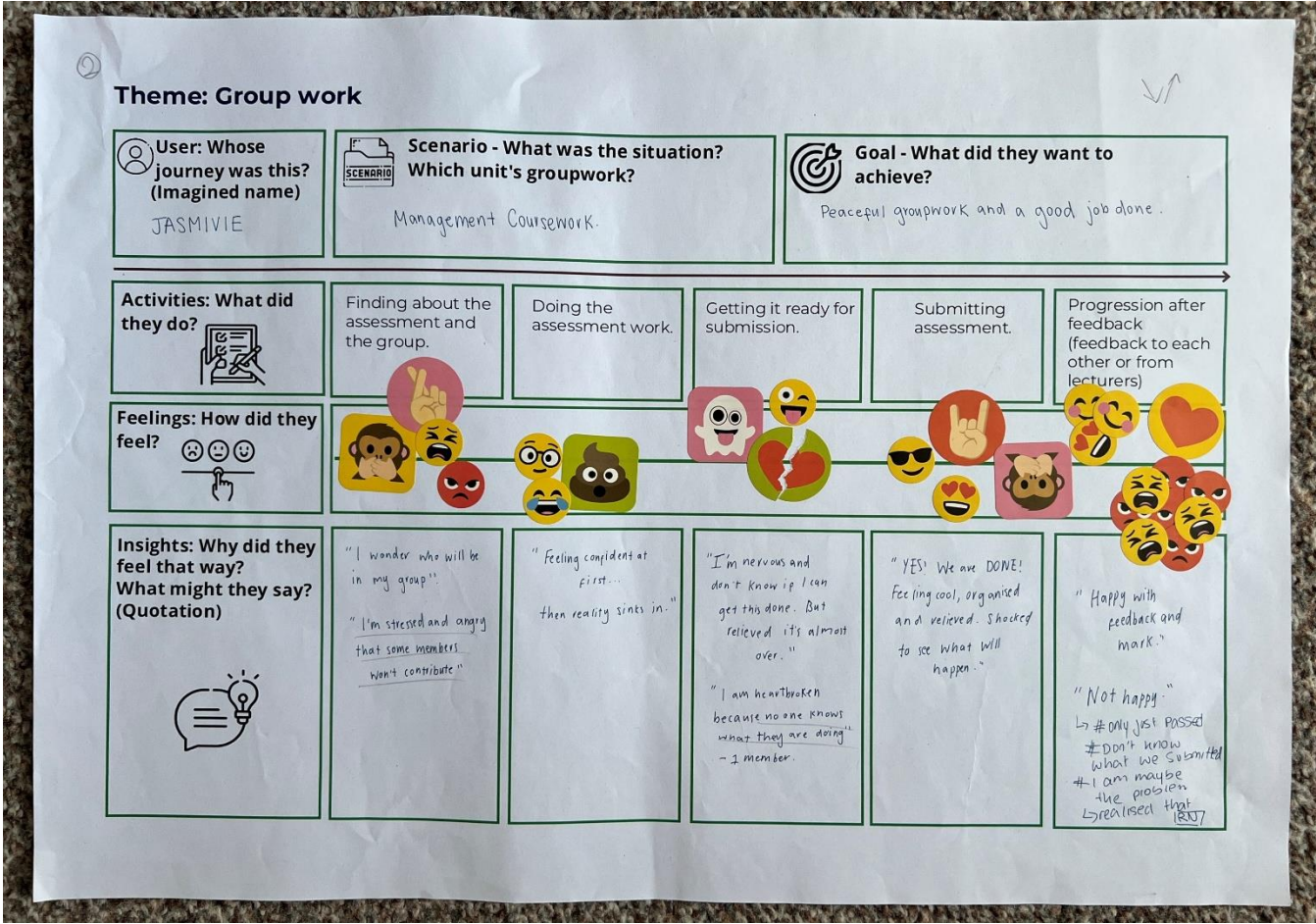


Student Reps &
FBT staff

Students

Session delivered by Student Reps, supported by Year Manager, SVC Chair, Student Change Lab. Journey map templates are distributed to year group. Reps lead students (train) in process of journey mapping. Students complete in pairs or threes.

Student Journey Mapping Exercise Example



Example of student completed group work journey map from 2nd Feb Journey mapping interactive activity.

Journey Mapping Activity Outcomes

- 5 student reps trained and able to deliver journey mapping activities with fellow students.
- 1 Student rep created group work journey map template.
- 37 Group work journey maps completed by pairs or students in threes.
- Over 75 individual student voices captured.

Next step:

Analyzing the journey maps and combining to create a narrative to present at SVC...

⑫

Theme: Group work

Overall Positive.

User: Whose journey was this? (Imagined name) International Student	Scenario - What was the situation? Which unit's groupwork? Fashion Management of apparel pipeline. MATS 117-1	Goal - What did they want to achieve? High final for Score. ## Communication efficiency.		
Activities: What did they do? Finding about the assessment and the group. A little bit confused what need to do, no ideas.	Doing the assessment work. everyone try their best to finish their own work.	Getting it ready for submission. Check for the grammar and record the presentation video.	Submitting assessment. feel relaxed.	Progression after feedback (feedback to each other or from lecturers)
Feelings: How did they feel? ☹️ 😐 😊	😊	😊	😊	😞
Insights: Why did they feel that way? What might they say? (Quotation) Not very confidence to communicate in the beginning.	Much better discuss. No conflict at jobwork division. Everyone is very positive to choose to work.	Each part done successfully and quickly.	everything done and feel relieved.	Final Score is not in my expectations. We all did great job & do our best. But the final score is not good.

Example of student completed group work journey map from 2nd Feb Journey mapping interactive activity.

Journey Mapping Activity Outcomes

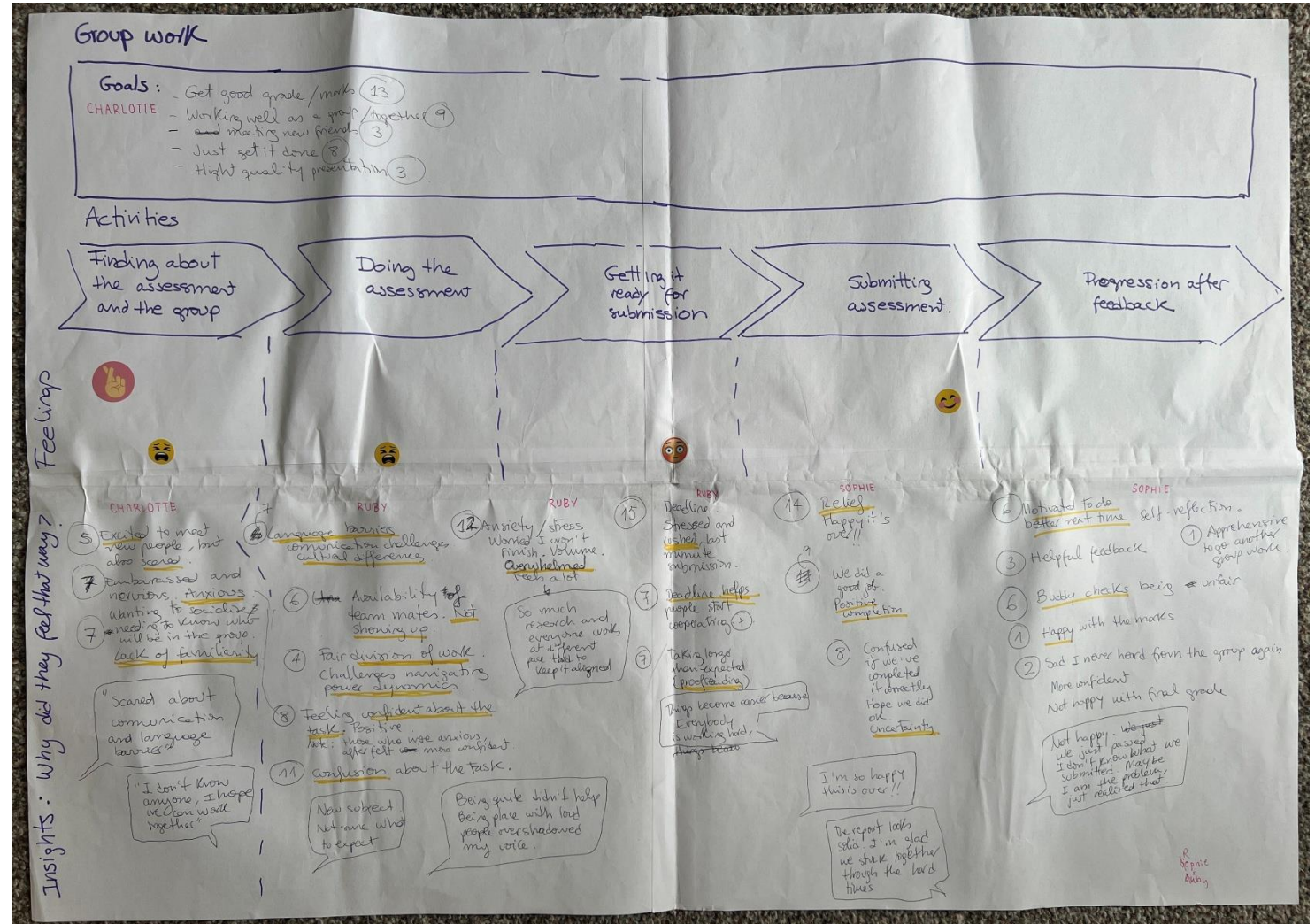
What we learnt from the student's voices:

GOALS

- They are highly motivated by grades BUT also by working well together.

INSIGHTS

- They share feelings of excitement and anxiousness of being in a group.
- They want to meet new people - the social aspect is important to them.
- They both worry about, and seek to overcome language barriers and cultural differences.
- Confusion about the assessment task or lack of confidence in ability are both very common.
- Deadlines are both stressful and motivating. Can help with division of work, team dynamics, and cooperation.



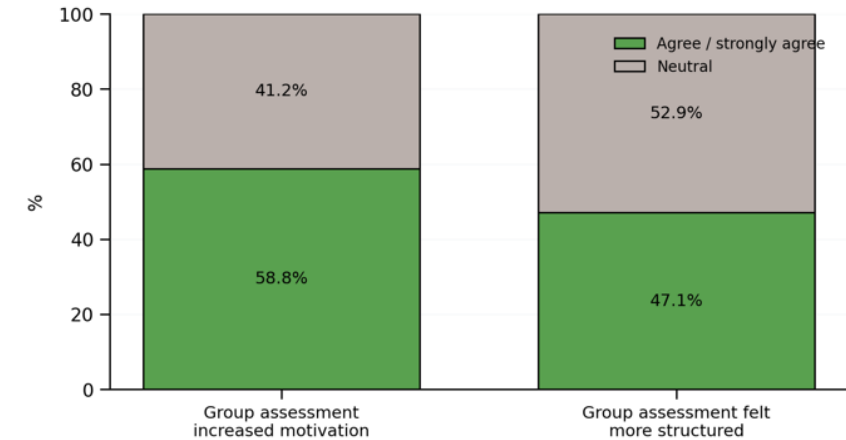
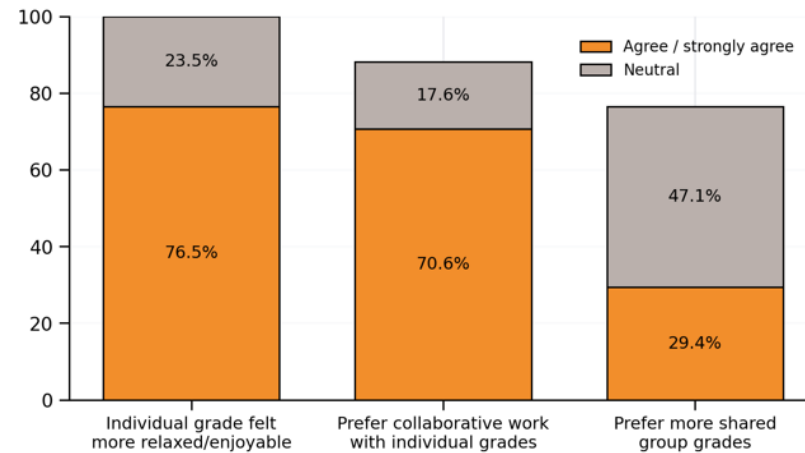
Analysis activity used to develop the narratives presented by the reps at the FBT UG SVC.
25th February 2026

Survey

Method 2

Assessed vs Non-Assessed Group work

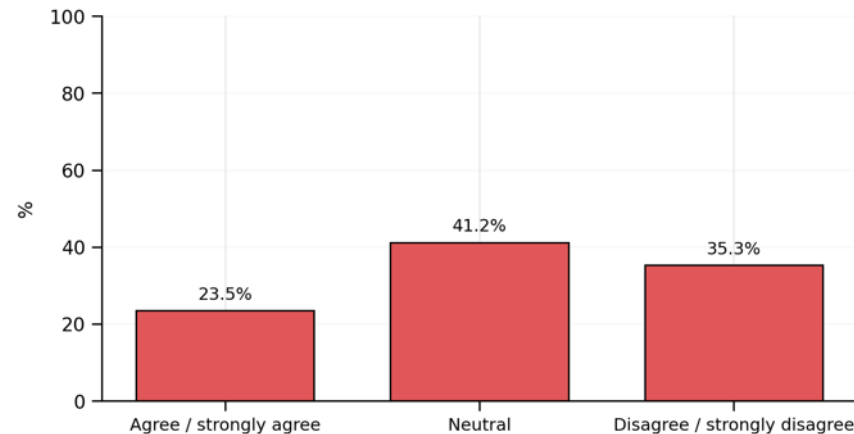
- Individual grading appeared to support more positive group experience
- Assessed group output gave structure but not always stronger enthusiasm
- The absence of group assessment did not clearly reduce participation
- Same level of equity challenges



Key findings

- Shows collaboration still worked without shared grades
- Shows **not either/or, but both have complementary roles**

4) The absence of group assessment did not clearly reduce participation



Communication was **“difficult at times”**

Needed to **“encourage people”** to participate

Frustration when decisions were **“ignored”**

Some prefer **individual work**

or self-selected groups

Belonging and Skills Development

Belonging

52.9%: same group across both units helped build stronger connections

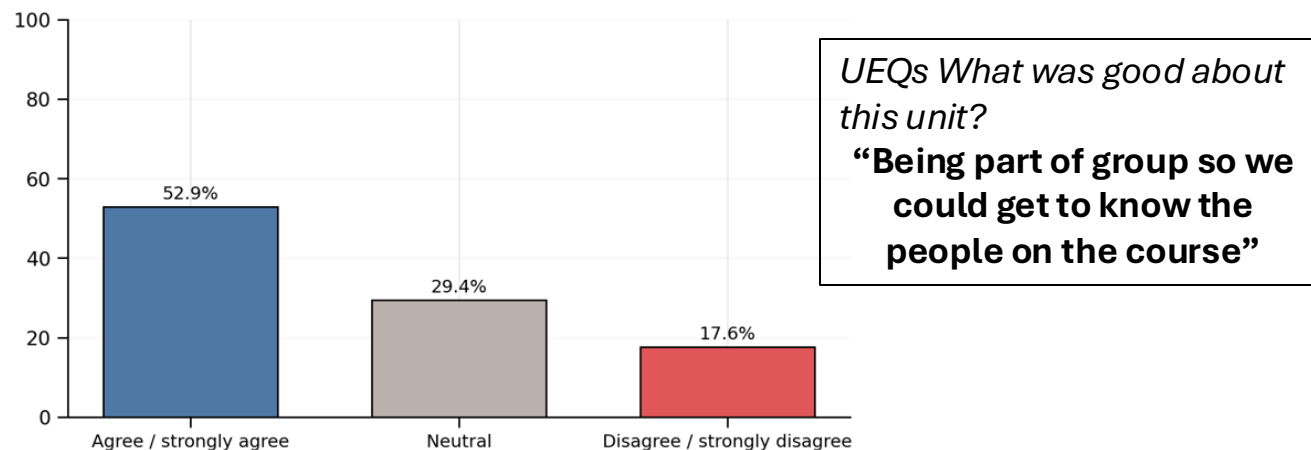
64.7%: groupwork helped students feel more connected to the class community

64.7%: felt comfortable working with their assigned group

Key findings

- Directly evidences **belonging + peer connection**
- Supports transition (first-year adjustment)

Same group across two units helped some students build relationships



Skills development

70.6%: improved communication skills

64.7%: improved problem-solving

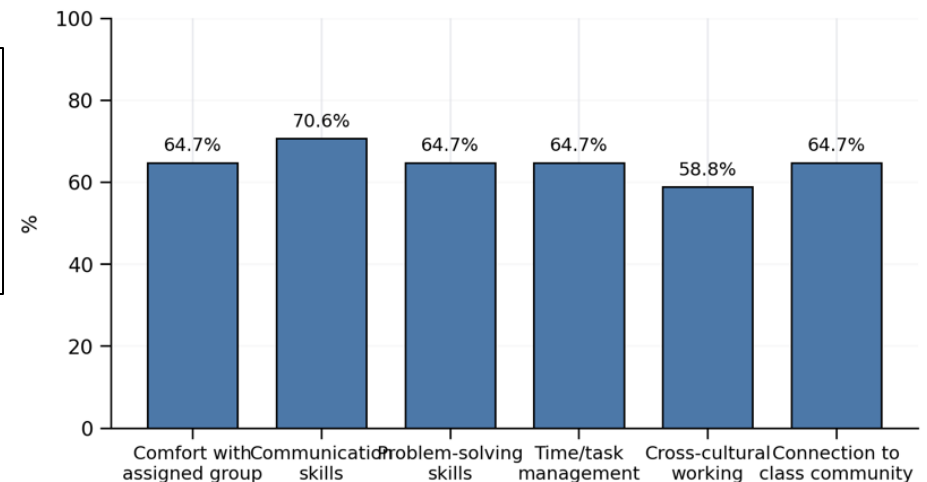
64.7%: improved time/task management

58.8%: improved ability to work across cultures

Key findings

- Employability intervention never too early
- Support Graduate outcomes

1) Students were broadly positive about collaborative learning



Inclusion and cross-cultural experience

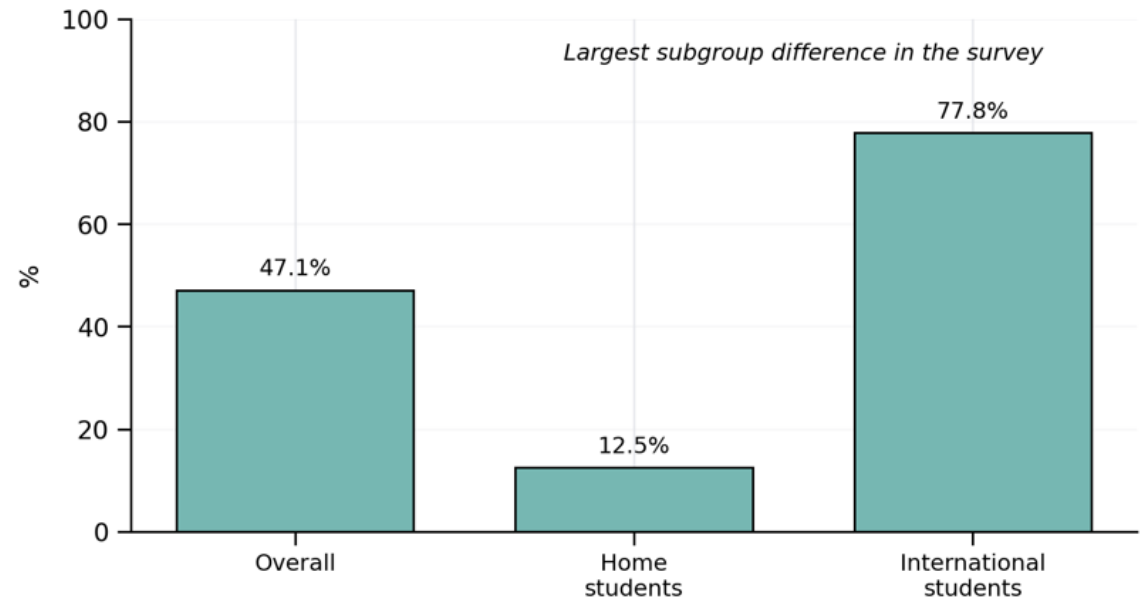
Overall: **47.1%** felt mixed groups enriched learning **BUT:**

- **77.8% international students** agreed
- **12.5% home students** agreed

Why these matter

- Shows **value + tension**
- **Inclusive design is experienced unevenly.**

5) Mixed home/international grouping was valued, but not evenly by all



Impact

- **Challenging start for MATS11701:** Students missed the first two weeks of seminars (out of eight) due to staff illness.
- **Strong recovery:** Because groups were already established in MATS11301, the disruption had minimal impact on assessment.
- **Performance maintained:** Marks for the group assessment were consistent with previous years; no extensions required.
- **Cohort cohesion:** The year group demonstrated good collaboration and community spirit, bonding more strongly than usual.
- **Positive student feedback:** UEQ scores for both units improved from the previous year.
- **Piloting of Student journey mapping:** it worked very well, an engaging method to gather feedback, collaborative method, where all students feel they can contribute.

UEQ Analysis

			Overall, I would rate this unit as being excellent	I have acquired intellectual and practical skills which will be useful in further study and employment	The course unit provided opportunities for participation and discussion
MATS11301	Fashion Buying	2024/25	4.06	4.35	4.15
		2025/26	4.13	4.48	4.13
MATS11701	Management & the Apparel Pipeline	2024/25	3.58	4.02	4.07
		2025/26	3.86	4.14	4.14

What's next?

- **Maintain continuity:** Continue using the same student groups across both Semester 1 units.
- **Build momentum:** Explore opportunities to extend group work into Semester 2 units to strengthen collaboration. **Next year: interdisciplinary brief with Oxfam** – shared between both units
- **Enhance support:** Develop clearer scaffolding and guidance for effective group work.
- **Refine peer assessment:** Review how peer evaluation is introduced, explained, and implemented to ensure fairness and confidence.
- **Journey mapping:** first year and third year reps to be trained, to extend this method to all year groups for better quality feedback to feed into Student Voice Committees.
- **Further dissemination:** University group work guidelines, RAISE online conference

Thank you for listening!

Do not hesitate to reach out if you would like to find out more.



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