Guidelines for Group work and its assessment – March 2013

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Group work is widely recognised as providing students with valuable opportunities to enhance the quality and depth of their learning, and provide recognisable employability skills because work is frequently a team game (Gibbs, 2010). It provides students with opportunities to develop their skills of teamwork, negotiation, reflection and metacognition (self-awareness) which are not always part of assessment (Johnson *et al.,* 1991). The assessment of group work can be contentious, affecting the level of student engagement and determining the quality of learning that takes place (Gibbs, 2010; Lejk *et al.,* 1996). Outlined below are a series of recommendations to inform the design and implementation of assessment in group work across all levels of study. These recommendations should be reviewed alongside the University's Assessment Policy and the 7 Steps on Group Work.

Aims of the guidelines
- To promote good practice in the design and implementation of assessed group work;
- To ensure transparency in the assessment of group work;
- To enhance the student experience of assessed group work.

Questions for tutors to consider when planning assessed group work:

What is an appropriate group work and assessment task or activity? Students regularly question the merit or purpose of learning and being assessed as part of a group (Jaques, 2000). It is important that the task and its assessment are appropriate for group work. It should be sufficient in complexity and size so that it cannot be completed individually. It should require the collective effort of the whole group to be successful (Mello, 1993). The rationale for the use of group work should be clear in the module learning outcomes, indicating the skills and attributes that the group work will enhance (Gibbs, 2010). Examples of tasks appropriate for group work and assessment include projects or problems with 'real-life' or 'life-like' contexts.

What is being assessed? Assessment should be aligned with the task as set. Group work can result in a final **product** (i.e. the outcome of the group work) that may represent a group report, presentation etc.

It is also possible to assess the **process** (the group working that lead to the product) as this can make students aware of the wider skills and attributes they may have developed through the group work (ASKe, undated; Gibbs, 1995). This could include criteria relating to attendance and contribution to group meetings, task management, engagement with the task etc. This may be assessed through students producing individual reflective logs or essays on the process of group work, or undertaking peer assessment of individual contributions (Gibbs, 1995).

Students should be **clearly informed** of what will be assessed, the intended mode of assessment, the assessment criteria and the allocation of marks to each aspect of the assessment.

What proportion of a module mark should be allocated to group work?
This is an area widely debated, particularly with respect to managing and motivating engagement with group work and also mitigating against the negative consequences of group work (in case these should arise) (Gibbs, 2010). Group work assessment should be balanced in relation to the other forms of assessment taking place elsewhere in programmes (Gibbs & Dunbar-Goddet, 2007). Equally it needs to be framed with reference to the level of study e.g. with first year students who may be unfamiliar with group work tutors may want to consider using it as a mode of formative assessment, whereas with final year students some writers advocate that group work should not account for more than 40% as this is deemed as sufficient to encourage students to take the task seriously but not to feel that the outcomes of their group assessment could undermine their overall performance (Gibbs, 1995).

What methods of assessment can be employed with group work?
Allocating a single group mark based on assessment of either the product or process of group work has been recognised as insufficient; as such an approach is likely to lead to behaviours such as freeloading and individualism that undermine the potential benefits of group work (Bacon & Stewart, 1999; Gibbs, 2009). Allocating marks based on the assessment of collective and individual contributions to group work is perceived as a fairer and more transparent process, particularly as it allows a number of sources of evidence to be drawn upon (Lejk et al., 1996). Determining an appropriate method of assessment depends on the intended purpose and outcome of the group work, and the contribution the assessment is making to the overall module mark (Jaques, 2000).

Group work lends itself to both:

> Collective assessment – either all or part of the assessment is based on a product produced collectively through group work. Forms of collective assessments may include project reports, group presentations and portfolios. An insight into the process of group work for assessment purposes can be obtained from a tutor reviewing the documents (e.g. meetings), project logs or online spaces (if used) to manage the group work.

> Individual assessment - either all or part of the assessment is based on a sole authored assignment which may relate to the process or the product of group work. Forms of individual assessment suited to assessing the outcomes of group work include an essay, report, presentation or viva that measures the knowledge a student has gained and learning they have engaged with through the group work. A reflective blog or essay can capture what they have learned about the process of group work.

Group work also promotes a range of assessment processes, which do not rely solely on the tutor performing this role. **Peer assessment** can be used with students to allow them to either i) assess the products of their peers group work, or ii) assess the contributions their colleagues have made to their group's activities (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). Students can also **self-assess** their own contributions to group work (Falchokov & Boud, 1989). When employing peer or self-assessment it is recommended that students are involved in making global based on observable 'evidence' (e.g. a presentation) rather than multiple judgements on individuals' behaviour, for example, as such measure can be subjective (Gibbs, 2010). Tutors should also consider the role of **anonymity in peer assessment** as this may overcome worries students have in providing feedback on their colleagues (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000).

Depending on the contribution of the collective or individual assessment, and who undertakes the assessment (tutors / students), a tutor may be required to **moderate the final marks** awarded to both the group and an individual student. It has been observed that overall, the assessment of both the individual and collective contributions to group work can produce a narrower range of marks, compared to work resulting from a sole student (Gibbs, 2010). Hence the need for tutors to consider the proportion of module marks allocated to group work in relation to the extent to which students individual and collective contributions are assessed.

Other considerations tutors should be aware of:

>   **Non-engagement with group work** – tutors may be called upon to intervene in group work if they are experiencing issues with a member not participating (Gibbs, 1995). This may involve the tutor appraising whether this is intentional or accidental through discussions with the group. Evidence of this may be obtained by reviewing documents (e.g. minutes / actions plans / blogs/ emails) students are using to manage their group work. If such incidences are verified tutors should support students to manage the consequences of these in relation to communicating with the student concerned and the repercussions for their group assessment (Gibbs, 1995). Prior to commencing group work students should be briefed of the implications of this and this information should be included in module handbooks.

>   **Collusion / Plagiarism** – This represents an academic offence the occurrence of which needs to be considered in relation to the mode of assessment being employed. Group work promotes the sharing of ideas and information and therefore collusion is expected for collective assignments. Consequently, students may need explicit guidance on how to mitigate this for the individual component of assessed group work. Equally although students may be working on a collective project they may each be responsible for bringing different information sources to the final product, and therefore a tutor may need to discuss

individual and collective responsibilities regarding referencing etc. that are included in the group work.

Mechanism for providing feedback – As with any assessed work, students should receive prompt and timely feedback in accordance to the feedback and assessment policy. This should be made available to all members of the group.

Inclusivity of task – In line with the University's Assessment Policy, the assessment activities associated with group work should be inclusive and equitable to ensure that tasks and procedures do not disadvantage any group or individual. Tutors may find it useful to review these guidelines produced by Oxford Brookes University in relation to Inclusive Group Work: http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/hr/eod/guides/group_work.pdf

Re-sit options– As with any other forms of assessment, tutors need to consider the implications of students not obtaining a pass. The implications and likelihood of this occurring are complex, depending on the proportion of the mark allocated to the individual and/or collective components of the module assessment. An alternative mode of assessment for the re-sit may be required.

Quality Assurance – in line with the Assessment Policy, if the assessed component of the group work is to be summatively assessed by means such as a group presentation, viva, seminar etc. processes of second marking and external examining (capture by video / audio recording) need to be considered.

Module documentation should outline*:

- Process of group formation
- Strategies for non-participation of group members
- Responsibility for management of group (role of tutor)
- Provision for communication / meetings (e.g. timetabled slots / supporting technology)
- Re-sit options

* Further guidance on these points is included in the 7 steps on Group work

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