

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

0128

Team and Group Work: A Student Perspective of Assessment and Management.

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**Research Domain:** Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

**Abstract:** Group work within academic programmes is often seen as a key component for the development of essential transferable skills. However, many students often suggest that assessments that involve group work are unfair. This study sought to obtain a student perspective on a range of group work examples undertaken across the university to inform best practice. A student focus group representing a cross section of programmes and level of study was established to identify what they believed were key priorities for group work. They identified four main areas for consideration, preparation, allocation to group, ongoing support and assessment. For each of the main areas they suggested how these should be operationalised. From these findings a questionnaire will be developed to gain a wider student and staff perspective.

**Paper:**

Group and team work is an integral part of degree programme delivery at many universities. It is however an area which attracts negative comment from student feedback surveys with students stressing perceived unfairness in the assessment of coursework. The inclusion of group working is done to develop social and thinking skills, transferable skill of cooperation, conflict resolution, but also to facilitate both individual and shared learning. The ability to work in teams is also one of the skills employers require graduates to have (Universities UK, 2016). Depending on year and programme of study students are exposed to a variety of examples of group work. There is increasing emphasis in higher education on students who are key stakeholders being consulted about curriculum developments (HEA, 2011). This study aimed through consultation with undergraduate students to harness perspectives of group work with the purpose of using this to improve practice in the assessment and management of group work across the university. This paper represents the first phase of this study.

A university wide call for student volunteers was emailed to all undergraduates outlining the study and its requirements. Students interested in taking part in the study were asked to reply outlining why they were interested and to give a brief outline of their own experience of group work they had been involved in. The research team independently shortlisted the applicants before meeting together to decide which students would be asked to participate. The second part ensured that the students represented each school and a variety of level of study. The study was approved by the university Teaching Learning Enhancement initiative to receive a small amount of funding. This allowed for the participating students to receive a small payment for their time and to be provided with lunch when meetings were held.

Prior to meeting with students the research team who represented all four academic schools of the university, collated examples of group work being undertaken across the university. From these a cross section of examples was identified to represent a diverse range of practice within the university. These were grouped under different titles and isolated statements and shown to the student focus group. Over the course of three meetings the students were asked to identify both the factors they preferred and least favoured statements of practice. From these discussions, four main aspects of practice were identified as important to ensure a positive experience of group work. To reflect its importance in the minds of the students the aspect of assessment/grading was further refined to cover three aspects. In the final meetings students were asked to identify how these factors should be developed, supported or assessed when group work is undertaken. From this they provided suggestions as to how this could be operationalised. A summary of the findings can be seen in table 1.

Table 1

The outcome from the focus group demonstrated that the students valued group work and understood the purpose of it in their modules but preferred that there was level of moderation in how this is operationalised. When students were expected to work with people, they did not know they wanted time allocated to enable members of the group to get to know each other. The structure of groups and how these function have been found to be a source of stress for students undertaking collaborative tasks and projects (MCKinney, 2018). It may be for this reason that the focus group also prioritised the need for ongoing support across the semester. This is emphasized by Mellor (2012) as a necessary platform for facilitating a positive student experience of group work. The students were cognisant of the need to assess the group work but believed that this should include both individual and group components. There was also a belief that there should be an assessment not related to group work and that this should have the largest percentage of module grade allocated to this. This is not unexpected as the appearance of unfair allocation of grades has been frequently cited in module feedback and previous research (Hassanien, 2006).

This current paper represents the first phase of larger project. The intention of the research team is to extend consultation to the wider student body through a questionnaire based on the outcomes from this initial study.

#### **References:**

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HEA, (2011). Inclusive curriculum design in higher education: Consideration for effective practice across and within subject areas. The Higher Education Academy, York. [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/introduction\\_and\\_overview.pdf](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/introduction_and_overview.pdf)

McKinney, P.A., (2018). Student conceptions of group work: visual research into LIS student group work using the draw-and-write technique. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 59 (4), 206-227.

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Universities UK, (2016). Higher Education in England: Provision, Skills and Graduates. Universities UK, London. <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2016/higher-education-in-england-provision-skills-and-graduates.pdf>

Table 1

Preferred Practice	How operationalised.
Initial preparation and training for group work.	Icebreaker activities in the first session, team develops own marking criteria.
Support for the group task	Timetabled time for both group task and production of the artefact. Lecturer facilitates the discussion in class time (6hr of tutorial and 20hr of lab time) but groups are expected to meet outside class time as well
Percentage of module mark associated with teamwork	30-40%
Group Allocation	Self-selected but based on selected project topics, i.e. students that select the same project topics work together (in contrast to building a group first and then selecting a topic).

Assessment of product	Final product includes sections produced by the group and individual sections (as well as individual artefacts) so each student will be awarded a grade from the common sections (group grade) and the individual sections (own grade).
Evaluation of individual effort and contribution	Peer marking and team marking. Staff discussion to moderate peer-marking provided by student
Assessment of the teamwork process	Presentation (30%) + team moderation. 70% individual portfolio, contribution to the team + peer review included.