



## Inclusive Group Work

Group work can be an excellent learning experience, and give students opportunities to collaborate and build relationships with each other. However, group work can also present barriers in terms of access and inclusion.

Taking positive steps to ensure that group work is inclusive helps to ensure students can fully participate, and are not inadvertently excluded by group tasks. It also supports us to meet our anticipatory duty to make adjustments under the Equality Act 2010.

### Teaching group work skills

- UAL has a diverse student population, who join our University with varying experiences of group work.
- It is important not to assume students have had experience of group work in the past.
- Offer group work skills sessions.
- Be prepared to provide additional structure or scaffolding for group work at the beginning of the course.
- If presentations will be included as part of the group work, this skill needs to be taught too.

### Contracting and ground rules

- Supporting students to set ground rules can minimise the risk of conflict.
- Students may not be familiar with contracting, or may not consider how to ensure their ground rules are fully inclusive.
- Model contracting and setting ground rules in the early part of the course.
- Consider having shared ground rules, which students can build on (e.g. to positively value different forms of participation).
- Actively encourage students to demonstrate flexibility, and ensure all members of the group are included.

### Group size and structure

- Avoid group sizes that are larger than 5 students. Larger groups may present barriers to communication.
- Carefully consider how to group students. Working with entirely new people can present a barrier for some students, while others may feel excluded if students choose their own groups.

### Clear defined tasks, deadline and outcomes

- Ensure briefs provide clear tasks, using unambiguous language and plain English.
- Provide briefs in advance of introducing the group work task, so students have time to formulate questions.
- Indicative content, learning outcomes and deadlines should be clear and explicit.
- If students will be assessed on their participation in the group, make it clear how 'participation' will be measured.

### Environment

- Consider whether students will have access to accessible environments in which to work together.
- Busy, noisy environments may present a barrier to students.

### Communication

- Encourage students to use communication channels which are accessible for the whole group.
- Social media and WhatsApp can be helpful - but remember that not all students use them.

## Support for students and dealing with conflict

- Even with careful contracting and ground rules, conflict can arise.
- Ensure that students know how to seek help if necessary.
- Be prepared to step-in to mediate, or support the group to re-establish ground rules.
- Have a plan for alternative tasks or arrangements if a group dynamic breaks down, or there are concerns about bullying.

## Accommodated assessment

Accommodated assessment is any adjustment to an assessment which removes barriers, and allows students to meet the learning outcomes. Examples of accommodated assessment for group work include:

- Students choosing their own group.
- Students allocated a specific role in the group.
- Smaller group or pair work.
- Working independently.
- An alternative task which allows a student to meet the same learning outcomes.

Any adjustment should ensure that the student is still able to meet the same learning outcomes. For this reason, we recommend avoiding learning outcomes that may present a barrier to some students (e.g. specifying a verbal presentation may exclude students who do not communicate verbally).

If a student requires accommodated assessment, this is usually included in their Individual Support Agreement. If you need advice about how to implement adjustments for group work, please contact the relevant Disability Adviser.

## Case study 1

Ji Woo is a first year, and due to start her first group project. Travelling into college presents a barrier to Ji Woo, and she is initially anxious about how this might be perceived in a group task. When introducing the group task, her tutor encourages a flexible approach, and valuing different types of participation. Ji Woo feels empowered to tell her group that Skype is sometimes the most effective way for her to participate. Ji Woo is able to participate equally to her colleagues.

## Case study 2

Mark, Elena and Imran are working together on a collaborative project. The brief provides clear indicative content, which includes research, a presentation, and a design project. Mark finds verbal presentations inaccessible, and is confident in research and referencing. Elena and Imran agree that Mark can lead on organising the research and referencing, and they will deliver the presentation. This allows all students to contribute.

## Case study 3

Nick has an Individual Support Agreement, which says that adjustments to group work should be considered. Nick meets with their tutor, and explains that they communicate better in writing, as this gives them time to formulate responses. The learning outcomes says students should demonstrate “Evidence of understanding of the importance of studentship through engagement and participation with the course and your student colleagues”. Nick sets up a blog about the course, and answers student questions on the blog. This allows Nick to meet the learning outcomes, and build relationships with their peers.

Ensuring group work is accessible supports UAL to meet its duty to make anticipatory adjustments under the Equality Act 2010. It also supports inclusion for all students, irrespective of whether they have disclosed that they are disabled or not.

The Disability Service can provide training and consultancy about inclusive group work. Please contact the Disability Service on 020 7514 6156 or email [disability@arts.ac.uk](mailto:disability@arts.ac.uk) to discuss further.

## References

University of Leicester (2019) Supporting autistic students to work with their peers: 10 Good Practice Principles.

Oxford Brookes University (2019) Inclusive small group work.

### Disability Service

Inclusive, individual, empowering

[disability@arts.ac.uk](mailto:disability@arts.ac.uk) 020 7514 6156

Search for ‘Disability’ at [arts.ac.uk](https://arts.ac.uk)

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