QUALITY ASSURANCE HANDBOOK

2019 Edition – Part C

Section 1: Learning & Teaching (EXTRACT)

2019

1.6 Group Work Policy

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1.6.1 Policy Overview

This policy document sets out, at a high level, considerations for learner group work and group assessments at DBS. It should be used as a starting point by all stakeholders involved in the development, delivery and assessment of group work within academic and professional programmes. This policy is intended to lay out areas for consideration in group work design and is not intended to be prescriptive in terms of specific assessment design at different levels. Assessment design should be integrated into the overall Programme Assessment Strategy which is developed as part of the construct of a programme and with appropriate consideration of Intended Learning Outcomes at programme and module level.

DBS adheres to the principle that all assessment should be valid, reliable, fair, transparent and authentic.

DBS is committed to ensuring the best possible learning and teaching experience for learners and Faculty, and this policy is intended to encourage and support a consistent and transparent approach,

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[1] https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Quality%20Assuring%20Assessment%20-20Guidelines%20for%20Providers%2C%20Revised%20 2013.pdf

particularly to the assessment of group work. The policy should also be read in conjunction with the DBS Strategy for Learning, Assessment and Teaching Enhancement.

1.6.2 Policy Statement

Group work is widely recognised as providing learners with valuable opportunities to enhance their soft skills, and serves to develop a raft of transferable skills relating to employability. Group work assists in the development of a broad range of skills, including:

- Communication
- Observation
- Leadership
- Problem-solving
- Morale-building
- Self-awareness and self-evaluation
- Time management

As such, group work is seen as a valuable aspect of any programme of study and it is envisaged that all major awards would include some elements of group work as a minimum.

Definition of Group Work

DBS defines group work as follows:

> *Group work is an assessed or non-assessed learning activity that involves learners collaborating on a particular project, assignment, task or assessment. A 'group' may be anything more than a single student (i.e. could involve working in pairs, or larger groups, as appropriate to the task at hand). Group work should always be designed to ensure that learning outcomes can be achieved on an individual level.*

General Principles for Group Work

In setting group work programme teams should ensure the following:

- Assessment tasks are in keeping with the Approved Programme Schedule, Module Descriptor and Programme Assessment Strategy.
- There is an appropriate mix of assessment instruments across the programme.
- The assessment task is clearly defined in terms of:
  - Group size
  - Weighting breakdown, including any individual contribution (typically 10—20% of the assessment, but see below)
  - Whether the assessment is based on output or group process
  - How groups are identified (assigned or voluntary)

- Guidance should be provided regarding what is expected of learners, how the group should work collaboratively together and how final reports should be presented in terms of ownership.
- In the context where remote working is required, clear guidance on the use of technologies and practices to support this should be provided.
  - **Learners should be made aware that common issues and problems that arise in group work may be exacerbated if groups are working remotely, and provided with guidance for managing this.**
- Alternative assessments are provided for students who cannot complete the assessment as part of a group.

Group size and individual components

Group size

- A 'group' may be comprised of a minimum of two learners (i.e. pairs). Group size should allow learning outcomes to be met in an optimal manner. Group sizes are not prescribed at a policy level but must be given detailed consideration in assessment design.

Individual Assessment

- Typically, an individual mark should be awarded for group assessments. As a guide, this may be 10—20% of the assessment, but again should form part of the assessment design.

Managing Group Work and individual learners

Group work can often prove challenging for learners. Assigning individual students to particular groups can also prove a challenge and must be handled sensitively. The method used for assigning students to a specific group must be set out clearly and explained to learners well in advance.

Similarly, where a group leader is to be appointed, the method of selection of the group leader must be clear to all group members in advance of the assessment.

It can be helpful for learners to prepare a protocol, and agree and commit to rules on the management of their group work. This protocol should include agreed rules on how any issues or disagreements will be resolved and/or escalated to a member of Faculty.

Where issues or conflicts do arise, lecturers and module coordinators will often be the 'first responders'. In the event that an issue or conflict within a group should escalate, it is important for lecturers to notify module leaders/ Course Directors at the earliest opportunity to ensure that matters can be resolved speedily.

1.6.3 The assessment of group work

Where a module involves group work, the marking scheme should clearly provide detail on how individual learners' contributions will be assessed and rewarded.

Each assessment must clearly stipulate the particular tasks and skills that are being assessed (e.g. presentation skills, contributions to discussion fora, etc.) and awarded as an individual mark, and what components are being assessed and awarded an overall group mark.

DBS takes the view that a one size fits all percentage is inappropriate. Nonetheless, module/ programme teams are encouraged to award an individual contribution mark within each summative group assessment of between 10 and 20 percentage marks. Individual programme teams will further keep this percentage mark under regular review.

1.6.4 Academic Integrity

Group work by definition involves collaboration. It is important to note that, in the context of individual assessments, collaboration is considered Academic Impropriety, and may lead to disciplinary action. It is therefore important that teaching staff and learners are very clear about assessment requirements and what reporting should look like in the context of group work.

Hints and Tips for Managing Group Work

- Bear in mind that a key purpose of group work is to learn how to manage collective projects – therefore it will not automatically be straightforward, and dealing with this is part of the process and learning.
- Agree an overall protocol/ group charter. Refer to the *DBS Learner Charter* here also (See **Part B, Section 3.1** of the *Quality Assurance Handbook*, for the Learner Charter).
- Identify clear roles within the group – these do not have to be static, i.e. someone appointed as overall group leader, but could rotate.
- Ensure the assignment tasks are clearly assigned across the group with similar workloads/input required.
- Agree a schedule of meetings/working groups as needed.
- Ensure all meetings and tasks are documented. This will in many cases be useful supports or a requirement for the final submission, but is also extremely helpful if there is any difficulty within the group such as a member of the group not fulfilling their tasks.
- If the group is not functioning effectively, take early steps to address it as a team.
- If the group is meeting remotely, i.e. via online meetings, bear in mind that behaviours, feelings and issues can be exacerbated in the online environment. Be aware of this and constantly check your own behaviours.