

Supporting Inclusive Group- work: Advice for leaders of group work

IncSTEM (project funded by OfS)



Embedding and sustaining inclusive STEM practice project

- HEFCE Catalyst Call B ‘Addressing barriers to student success’
- Differential student outcomes producing a disability attainment gap
- Rise in students declaring a disability, particularly mental health issues and specific learning difficulties

Aim: Scaling up *inclusive educational practices* within STEM module design and delivery to benefit all students, while *lowering and removing barriers impeding students with disabilities*



Barriers and challenges in group-work

Participation in group work is a challenge for all students particularly those with:

- mental health issues or Autism Spectrum Disorder where social interaction, or organization of tasks may be challenging;
- specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and dyspraxia where reading, typing into forum discussions and organization can be a barrier;
- visual impairments where the format may be problematic;
- hearing impairments if real time discussion in Adobe Connect or f2f is used;
- and many others



Project approach

- A focus group with OU students with disabilities
- Interviews with STEM staff tutors, module teams and disability support staff
- Discussions with other universities
- Gathering good practice guides from across the sector
- Literature review and analysis of all sources
- Drafting guidance
- Engaging with the Associate Lecturer community at staff development events to review guidance for leaders of group work
- Engagement with module teams to review guidance for module designers



Advice for Leaders of group work

This advice is broken down into 3 sections. Steps to take:

- Before group work
- During group work
- After group work



Before Group-Work



Discuss concerns and needs with students early

- Communicate individually with students with additional needs as early as possible
- Don't make assumptions based on a disability; treat each student as an individual
- Tell the student what happens when
- If appropriate, discuss possible adjustments to help the student
- Be aware that students may choose not to participate (as part of an active conversation)
- Encourage students to consider whether or not they will disclose their needs/disability to the group (consider pros and cons)



Explain why group-work is important/useful

- What is the purpose for this particular group-work in this module?
- How is this group-work authentic in terms of discipline and as a practical employability skill?
- What will they miss out on if they choose not to take part?
- Is group-work an accreditation requirement and why?



Know whether there are alternative activities or roles

- Have the module team given alternatives for students with particular needs or given advice about non-participation?
- Can you offer alternative roles in the group, other ways to participate (e.g. via the AL/disability support)?
- Try to offer a choice of tools for the group to use:
 - live text chat is problematic for some students with dyslexia, audio is better vice versa for students with hearing impairment
- Consider set up of room e.g. layout of chairs or Adobe Connect pods



Discuss (10-15 mins)

Have you had early conversations with your students with disabilities about group work? How did it go?

What else might you do before starting group work?

What advice would you give to other about these types of conversation?



During group-work




Setting off in the right direction

- Model inclusive behaviour: be welcoming and respectful to every learner
- Set expectations about using an inclusive approach
- Point all students to guidance on working in teams/groups
- Is your introductory activity (starter) inclusive?



Help the group to plan their work to be inclusive

- Discuss roles and timelines
- Focus on the strengths of individuals
- Encourage consideration of how each individual is experiencing group-work



Discuss (10 mins)

What have you done to help groups set off in the right direction?

What approaches have you taken to help groups to plan to work effectively and inclusively?



Continuing to support students with additional requirements

- Provide enough time for students to read, write and carry out manual processes
- Provide enough time and space to think: enable students to consider that different people might have different needs
- Modify ways to participate if appropriate
- Proactively engage with students outside of the group regularly – don't wait until they come to you in distress.



As with all group-work

- Monitor/ manage the group whilst encouraging the group to take ownership
- Decide when and how to intervene; sensitively
- Encourage all students, as needed
- Use interim outputs or milestones, and checkpoints as an opportunity for student reflection



Managing non-participation

- Have a plan for what you will do if a student does not participate.
- Do you need a different approach for students with disabilities?
- Manage your own expectations



Discuss (5 mins)

What have you done to effectively manage the needs of students with additional requirements in a group work setting?



Finishing group work

- Acknowledge group success; all of the group felt enabled/ you completed the group task
- Acknowledge personal success; you made it to the end!/you posted a message/ you watched everything/ you made a suggestion;
- Enable/facilitate consolidation of learning in discipline and transferable skills
- Sum up!



After group work



Closing the loop with students with disabilities

- Discuss strategies that worked that can apply to group-work in future modules
- Discuss what could be better and done differently next time
- Support student in completing associated assessment



Debriefing

- Debrief any other facilitators/disability support team and offer feedback to the module team
- Debrief yourself and reflect
- Share good practice ... it will be welcome!

Resources

- <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/staff/educational-development/teaching-toolkit/inclusive-learning-and-teaching/>
- <http://www.autism-uni.org/bestpractice/>
- <https://www.brunel.ac.uk/life/documents/pdf/203993-Dyslexia-Dyspraxia-and-ADHD-Handbook-14pp-v12-150dpi.pdf>
- <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/accessability/information/current/students-with-asperger-syndrome-autism-spectrum-differences/advice-for-new-students-with-as-autism-asd/academic-aspects-of-university-life/lectures-seminars-practicals-and-other-academic-settings/group-work>