

LTC09D105

Title: Report of the Meeting of Taught Programmes Policy Group on 17 February 2010

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Agenda: LTC09A005

Status: Open

The Policy Group discussed a number of items as set out below. There are two items arising from the meeting for LTC to consider:

- Guidance on Assessment of Group Work
- Amendments to Instructions to Examiners (all taught awards) in respect of “scaling” of marks
- **Student Surveys**

The Chair reminded members that the National Student Survey 2010 was underway and that the University would be participating in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2010 from April.

The Policy Group also reviewed School responses and action plans arising from NSS 2009 and PTES 2009. This is the first occasion on which Schools have been required to report such information to the Policy Group. Schools had adopted different approaches to the identification of issues and the Policy Group noted that there were opportunities for the sharing of best practice in the consideration of the outcomes of such surveys.

The low response rate for PTES 2009 had hindered Faculties and Schools in considering responses to the survey.

It was suggested that a useful mechanism to demonstrate to students that their views had been listened to was for Schools to adopt an approach in use elsewhere of publishing a list of “You said ..., We did ...” actions on their web pages.

- **Assessment of Group Work**

The Policy Group considered a draft guidance document setting out a framework of issues to be taken into consideration by Module Organisers when devising Group Work activities.

The Policy Group **recommends** the adoption of the guidance note with effect from 2010/11.

- **Delayed Assessment / Provisional Progression**

The Director of Taught Programmes sought the views of the Policy Group on concessionary arrangements which had been put in place for a small number of students in September / October 2009. The Director had granted concessions for students to be permitted to take delayed assessment attempts by a mode other than examination in the autumn rather than requiring them to wait for the next examination series. (The

Examinations and Course Test Review Group had previously given extensive consideration to ways in which the assessment cycle could be adjusted to prevent students having to wait a year to take delayed assessment, but had been unable to identify alternatives). In the case of these concession requests the students had not been permitted to register until they had met the progression rules, but the Policy Group felt that were this route to become more standardised registration on the basis of provisional progression might be more appropriate.

The Policy Group gave strong support in principle to a proposal from the Director to create a standardised concessionary route in the following circumstances:

- Year 1 only;
- only 1 outstanding reassessment, which had been narrowly failed at first sit and which could be set as an alternative non-examined reassessment;
- circumstances affecting August reassessment had clearly been resolved in time to enable unaffected September study.

But recommended that the Learning, Teaching and Quality Office undertake further consideration of the implications of such concessions and of registration on the basis of provisional progression before issuing advice to Schools.

- **Scaling of Marks**

As previously advised to LTC, the Director of Taught Programmes has been charged by the Academic Registrar with considering the rationale behind the scaling of marks and with revising the Regulations and Instructions to Examiners for taught awards to provide clearer guidance on this matter. As part of this work the Director consulted the Policy Group on draft proposals.

In discussion the Policy Group reaffirmed the importance of internal moderation as a mechanism for ensuring the appropriateness of marking standards and agreed that scaling should only be an exceptional activity, whilst recognising that there might be a range of mechanisms available to Boards to address issues that had arisen with the assessment process.

In tandem with discussion of this issue at the Policy Group, the Director had arranged meetings with Chairs of Examiners and others from Schools and Faculties where scaling currently took place to discuss the issues and the proposed way forward.

Proposals for amendments to Instructions to Examiners are **recommended** to LTC for adoption with effect from May 2010 (the upcoming assessment cycle).

- At its next meeting on 24 March the Policy Group intends to review current arrangements for applying mark penalties to work and to give detailed consideration to School plagiarism reports (as charged by LTC).

Guidance Note – Assessing Group Work

This guidance note focuses on the use of Group Work within summative assessment and sets out issues that it would be helpful for Module Organisers and teachers to consider when deciding to use Group Work.

The use of group work as part of the learning process or in formative assessment (where the outcomes do not contribute to a module mark) raise different considerations.

The Learning Enhancement Service produces a Study Guide on Successful Group Projects, which may be of help to students.

Forms of Group Work

There are various activities which may be described as Group Work, these include

- Small group exercises within scheduled teaching sessions;
- Allocations of a research project or assessment task to a group of students where the group activity informs individual submissions;
- Allocation of a research project or assessment task to a group of students where the group will be assessed as a whole.

Why Use Group Work in Assessment?

- To meet module / course aims and learning objectives where an ability to work with others and an understanding of how such processes work are stated.
- To promote and develop key employability skills (such as working in a team, negotiating and collaborating with a diverse range of people).
- To facilitate deeper learning. Asking students to relate knowledge, theory and practise in group situations can encourage students to apply their learning and defend their own understanding.
- To enable students to participate in producing work which is beyond the capabilities of a single student.
- To give students experience of negotiations and group decision making.
- Promote the confidence of quieter students as they find a role within the group.
- Offers a varied assessment mode, which provides an opportunity for students who have a talent for group work, but who may not excel elsewhere in their studies, to demonstrate achievement.

Issues to be Considered

There is a key principle that dominates a teacher's approach to group work as a form of summative assessment:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A student passing an assessment must have demonstrated personal achievement of the associated learning outcomes. |
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The following will be considered and clearly set out and communicated prior to the assessment task:

- Description of how students will be grouped;
 - Will students be asked to allocate themselves to groups or will they be grouped by the teacher?

- Do students in a group have reasonable opportunities to meet to discuss and undertake the task? (e.g. do members of the group live close to the University or each other? Do members of the group have care responsibilities that limit their availability?)
 - Should the group contain a mix of ages, genders, abilities and experience?
 - Where a class contains students who belong to a minority age, gender, disability or ethnic group within the wider class, particular care may be required to ensure that these students are not excluded and that work groups are balanced
 - Depending upon the way in which groups are allocated, are there mechanisms for changing groups and what are the time limits for doing so?
- The activities the group should undertake;
 - These must enable each student to demonstrate and provide evidence of their ability with respect to the learning objectives.
 - Where practicable, the group task may be divisible into equitable tasks for each student (although the actual way in which the task is divided may form part of the group's decision making).
 - Students might be asked to rotate roles over the period of the group work to give each an opportunity to experience various aspects of the task and demonstrate achievement.
 - What preparation will students be given? For example, do students need guidance on how groups work, how group activities may be organised and managed and how to manage problems? This may be particularly important where students come from a different cultural background.
 - What tasks are students expected to undertake as part of the preparation for the assessment? For example, they may be required to arrange a schedule of meetings, each of which addresses a specified topic; they may be required to maintain a blog of activity; they may be required to undertake specified research activity, field work or laboratory work.
 - The purpose of the exercise (e.g. developing employability skills of team work and negotiation), including the intended learning outcomes.
 - Depending upon the learning objectives and assessment criteria for the task as well as the students' stage in the course it may be appropriate to define or provide guidance on the separate elements to be undertaken or to expect the group to define elements / an action plan for itself.
 - What material will be used to assess achievement of the learning outcomes?
 - Guidance may be necessary on how roles and responsibilities within the group may be agreed by the group.
 - The task set must be realistic, taking into account the number of people in the group, the time and resources required to undertake the task and also for the group to operate (e.g. incorporating time and resources for discussing, negotiating and reporting within the group).
 - Means by which group activities are to be tracked and reported;
 - Students should be given guidance on what to do if things start to go wrong, for example if a member of the group does not participate. This may include initial training in how to manage group work in order to try to resolve the problem themselves as well as reporting mechanisms to the Module Organiser.
 - Students may be asked to draw up and sign a "contract", agreeing to participate in the group activity.
 - Students may report on activities at regular intervals during the task.
 - The group or individual students may be asked to keep minutes of meetings or a reflective log, recording their activities as a group and how the group was operating.
 - What form of support will be given to students during the task?
 - The assessment may be based on a record of the group's activities, such as a blog, notes of group meetings, or record of agreed tasks.

- How grades will be awarded.
 - Students should be informed of the consequences of non-participation or non-engagement with the group work activity. (For example, a mark of zero for the assessment or for the group work element of the assessment may be recorded for non-participation.)
 - The marking scheme should take account of both situations where a student does not engage fully with the task and where a student is prevented from fully engaging because of extenuating circumstances.
 - Any boundaries between group work and collusions should be discussed.
 - Does the marking framework recognise that individual students may contribute to the group in different ways, that students have differing abilities and strengths and that students may contribute different volumes of work?
 - Is the ability to work in a group itself being marked or the outcome of the group's activity?
 - The marking criteria should make clear which aspects of the task are assessed and which are part of the learning process.
 - Students should feel confident that their marks would not suffer as a result of a group work assessment and have confidence that all members of the group would participate / contribute equally. (Mechanisms for achieving this should be considered when devising the group work assessment criteria.)
 - Will a mark be allocated to the group's work, which is then recorded against the assessment for each member of the group? (It may be appropriate to assess the group with reference to the agreement of allocation of tasks negotiated by students or to require a presentation in which all members of the group participate.)
 - The mark may be derived from two components, part of the mark from the outcomes for the group as a whole and part of the mark for individual achievement.
 - The group could be asked to negotiate the allocation of marks awarded by the Marker according to the group's evaluation of members' contributions or agree a group participation mark through peer assessment or self-assessment.
 - Where appropriate, the group task may be divided into separate component tasks, with each student taking responsibility for and marked on their individual contribution and submission.
 - Students work as a group, but make individual submissions which are separately marked.
 - Additional guidance may be needed where the assessment is based on a presentation or poster where this mode of assessment is unfamiliar to students.

- How students will be reassessed (as a group or individually).
 - Where students are being assessed on individual submissions this will be more straightforward (provided that the underpinning group work activity has taken place satisfactorily).
 - Reassessment must enable a student to demonstrate the same learning outcomes as the first assessment.

- Mechanisms for taking account of authorised student absence and other extenuating circumstances.
 - Consideration will need to be given to the extent to which a student has been able to participate in the group activity.
 - Is the weighting of the group work component such that the Board of Examiners is in a position to exercise discretion for a student who is unable to complete a group work task due to extenuating circumstances or is a delayed assessment attempt more appropriate?
 - For students with a delayed assessment, can learning objectives be achieved via another assessment task that does not involve group work?
 - Do students need to be given guidance on how to manage issues with participation within the group and are they aware how to seek advice and support?

- Will the group be able to complete the task set if one member is prevented from fully participating or will adjustments be necessary if such circumstances emerge?
- Can mechanisms be put in place to compensate a group for the loss of a member?
- Inclusivity. All students must be able to take full part in the group activity and no student should be disadvantaged by assessment through group work.
 - The task must enable students with physical disabilities or specific learning difficulties to fully participate.
 - Does the cohort contain students with care responsibilities or who live a distance from the University and who may, therefore, have barriers to be taken into consideration when groups arrange meetings or joint activities?
 - Where a group is particularly diverse does the proposed group work enable minority students to participate fully?
 - Is guidance explicit about appropriate academic methodology and expectations? Is help signposted or available for students who feel uncertain about this?
- How will Feedback on the assessment task be given?
 - Depending on the nature of the assessment task, will feedback be individual or to the group as a whole?

Collusion and Group Work

The University defines collusion as unauthorised co-operation between at least two people, with the intent to deceive. Collaborative assessment undertaken in accordance with published requirements does not fall under the heading of collusion.

Clarity is therefore essential when setting group work based assessments to ensure that students understand which aspects of the task require working together and represent joint effort and which aspects (if any) must represent individual effort. Particular thought must be given to these issues in groups where students are from diverse learning backgrounds. Guidance may be helpful in respect of the ways in which individual contributions and ideas are acknowledged and recognised.

It is more likely that greater care will be required where students work together informally and provide each other with formative feedback on draft individual assessments.