

Pulling together – Supporting teamwork assessment more effectively

Department of Life Science

Scott Tompsett (sct13@aber.ac.uk)

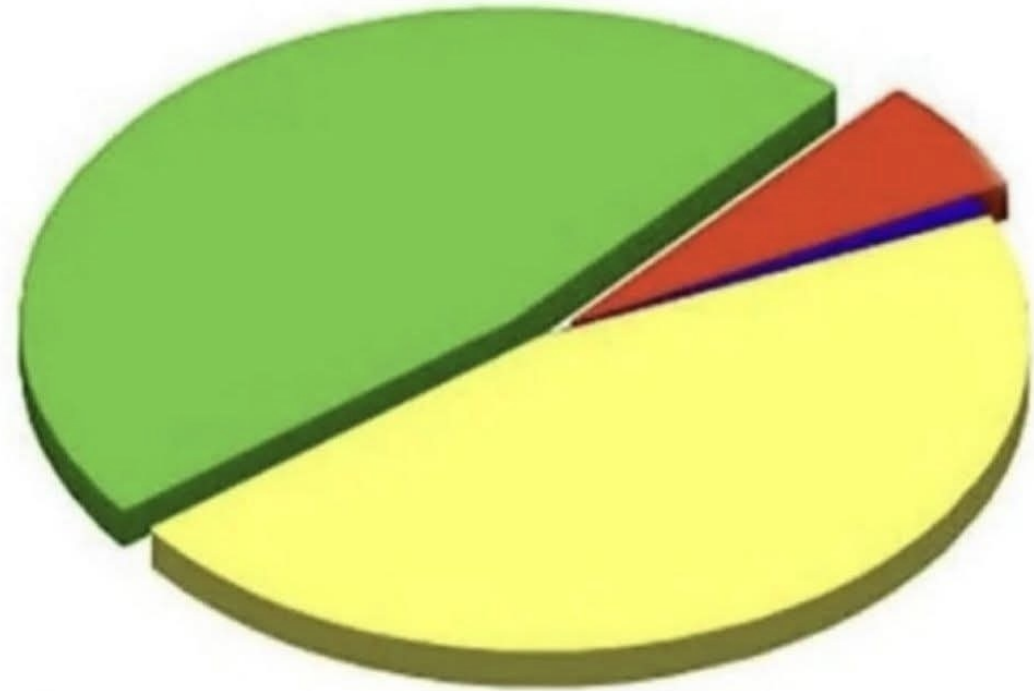
Student accessibility and inclusion

Cal Walters-Davies - (crw15@aber.ac.uk)

Mary Glasser - (eeg@aber.ac.uk)

Caroline White (caw49@aber.ac.uk)

WHAT I LEARN FROM GROUP PROJECTS



-  The information
-  How to work with people
-  How to do entire projects on my own
-  How much I hate people

Student experiences of group work assessment

We don't listen to each other.

We keep repeating arguments instead of moving on.

We constantly interrupt each other.

We just push our own views instead of developing and encouraging other's ideas.

We allow dominant members to dominate.

We put each other down.

We don't recognise that others have feelings about what is happening in the team

No one has initiated communication

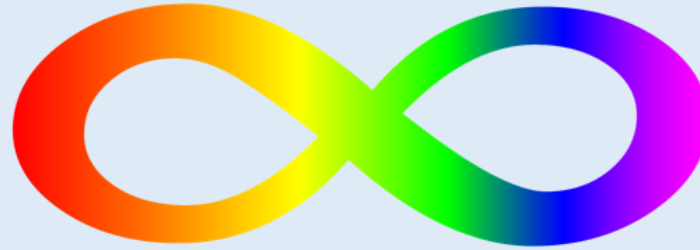
Group members don't respond in timely manner

Arguments develop

Lack of consistency – sub-groups splinter off

CPD for staff

Facilitating Accessible Group Work



Cal Walters-Davies crw15@aber.ac.uk
Kittie Belltree kab23@aber.ac.uk

Mary Glasser eeg@aber.ac.uk
Caroline White caw49@aber.ac.uk

Aim of work:

- Make groupwork more accessible to neurodivergent students
- Identify how we can improve group working skills as part of Royal Society of Biology accreditation and DLS scheme LOs
- Look at ways of harmonising groupwork assignments in DLS
- Develop a suite of resources for students and teaching staff to facilitate better group working
- Roll these out across DLS

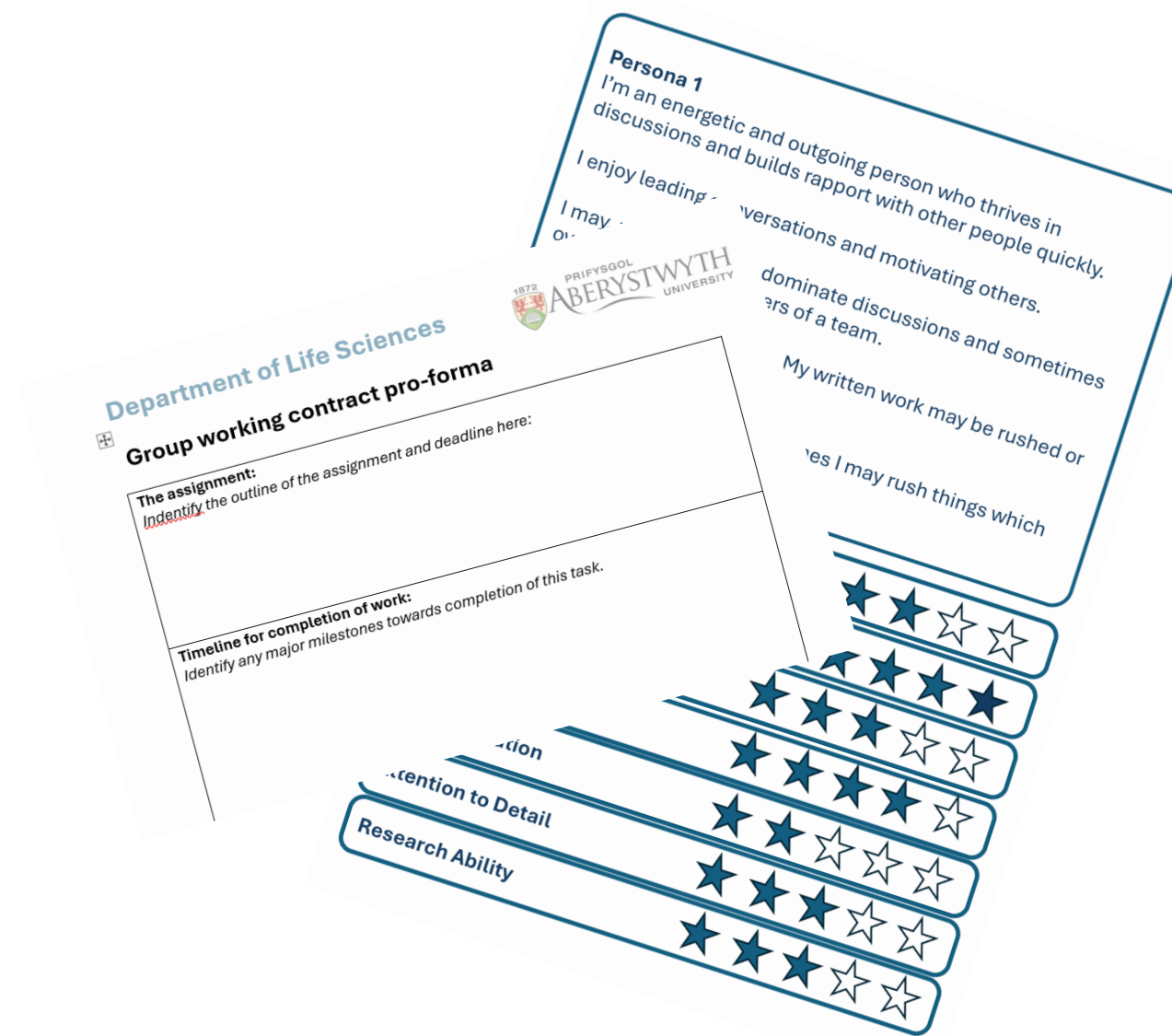


Key issues

- Role allocation
- Methods of communication
- Dealing with lack of engagement
- Equitable marks allocation
- Creating progression of group working skills through a degree scheme

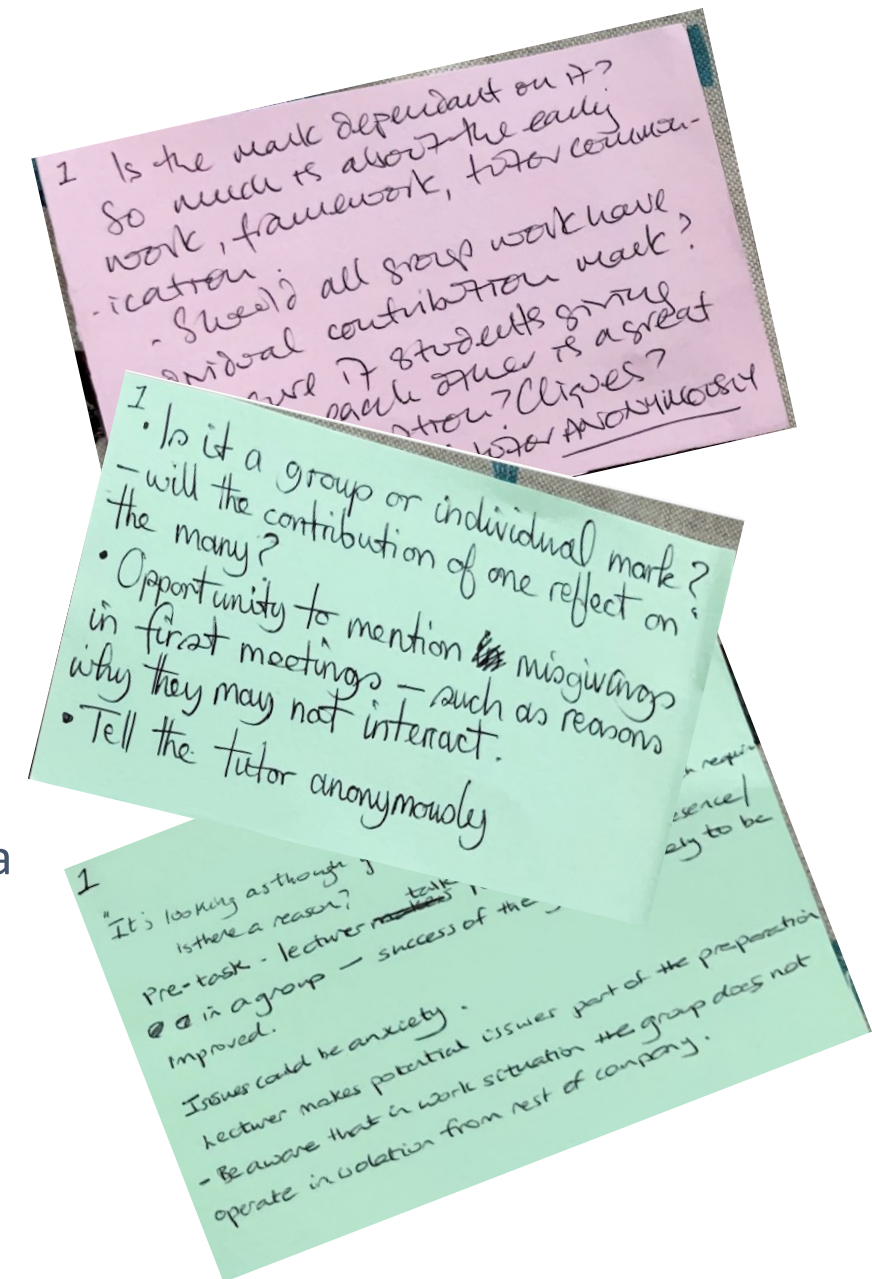


- Groupwork contract
- Personas activity – role allocation
- Minutes pro-forma
- Communication guidelines
- Reflection tool
- Advice for lecturers



Study Skills tutors “What happens if?” focus group

- Need for guidelines on role allocation within groups
- Methods for monitoring group progress and providing support
- Clear pathways for escalating issues if they should arise
- Methods to manage group communications
- Assignment briefs with clear learning outcomes and marking criteria
- Rewarding perceived effort within group working activities



DLS Staff focus group

The need to be clear and consistent about LOs in group work tasks

- Is it the group working element being assessed or the written assignment?
- Rewarding the application of the skill and not the outcome

Could existing networks be used to provide impartial support to group working activities?

- Could peer guides be used in a more strategic manner?



Study Skills tutor workshop (x2)

Development of 'personas' role identification tool for tutorials

- Would ASD students be able to identify objectively with the personas provided?
- What happens if there are a number of similar personas in an allocated group?
- How easy is it for students to equate a persona to a role in a group work activity?

Persona 1
I'm an energetic and outgoing person who thrives in discussions and builds rapport with other people quickly. I enjoy leading conversations and motivating others. I may, unintentionally, dominate discussions and sometimes overlook quieter members of a team. I prefer speaking to writing. My written work may be rushed or less detailed than it could be. I'm pretty organised but sometimes I may rush things which reduces the precision of my work.

Timekeeping	Verbal Communication	Written Communication	Organisation	Procrastination	Attention to Detail	Research Ability
★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Supported student focus group

Personas activity

- Positive response for role allocation, if more exemplar descriptions of characteristics added
- Concerns about exposing “weaknesses”
- Difficult if more than one with similar personality in a group

Groupwork contract

- Overwhelming support for contract
- Especially for role allocation, agreeing communication methods and agreement on how and where to meet
- Needs information on how to escalate grievances



Supported student focus group

Group communications

- Strongly opposed to using WhatsApp or equivalents
- Strongly in favour of using Teams channels to allow transparency and oversight of communications and file sharing

Marks Allocation

- Most favour high percentage weightings for relative contributions
- Marking should be aligned with tasks agreed in original contract document

Creating a Channel in MS Teams for collaborative working



SSCC student focus group

Group communications

- Preferred the idea of using Teams for communication – based on idea that it is more professional and an employability skill

Positive about a groupwork contract

Felt that a contract provides a useful tool to identify team members' engagement

Creating a Channel in MS Teams for collaborative working



Progress in DLS - Students

Role allocation

Methods of communication

Lack of engagement

Integration into first year skills modules

- Work on empathetic group working
- Time to complete role allocation activity

Embedded in tutorial system

- Time to complete contract
- Create an MS Teams channel for group/staff communications and appraisal of engagement

Revised reflection assessment



Skills for Biologists (AB1 2025-26)

BR16820_AB1_2025-26

Course Content



Module Information

Visible to students ▼



Assessment and Feedback

Visible to students ▼

Progress in DLS - Students

Equitable marks allocation

Marking group working skills and not engagement

Ongoing discussion regarding marking of groupwork assignments – Credit group skills rather than output

Crediting positive engagement

Using indicators of positive engagement to allocate a meaningful proportion of marks to an assignment



Coursework Brief	
Module Code	BR16820 / BG16820
Module Title	Skills for Biologists / Sgiliau ar gyfer Bio
Module Coordinator	Dave Whitworth
Member of Staff Setting the Coursework	Personal Tutors
Coursework Title	Group Presentation
Weighting in module	35 %
Submission Deadline	10:00 am, Wed 26/11/2025
Submission information	Online, via TurnItIn. Please note the submission is hidden until tutorial group start of term.
Word/length limit	A group presentation, during which each minutes. Each individual submission also slide (see below)
Learning Outcomes to be addressed by the coursework:	
- Communicate information and ideas in the form of oral and written presentation - Develop a reasoned argument and challenge assumptions.	

Progress in DLS - Students

Creating progression of group working skills through our degree schemes

Access to group working materials

- Resources now being embedded in 2nd/3rd year modules

Core skill in redeveloped Skills Portfolio

- Students will need to demonstrate progression of this skill through their degree with evidence
- Broader look at how we can provide opportunities for group working across all degree schemes in DLS.



Core Skills for Biologists

Visible to students ▼
This folder contains resources
There are videos and activities
at any time and they link to a
the academic year.



Skills Portfolio

Student name	
Degree Scheme	
Personal Tutor Yr 1	
Personal Tutor Yr 2	
Dissertation Tutor Yr 3	

Progress across DLS – Staff Engagement

Engagement with Academic Forum

Outcomes of project communicated at DLS academic forum

Group working guidelines document provided to all staff

- Resources
- Group allocation and managing conflict
- Communication
- Marking criteria
- Dealing with conflict

Broader impact across University

Closer collaboration with Accessibility and Inclusion Team

Broken down barriers in communication and understanding

Has given different perspectives on how to move the project forward

Engagement with AberSkills team

Working with Non Jones from Library and Digital Services Team to develop generic materials for AberSkills

Contact and interest from other departments

Acknowledgements

Learning and Student Experience awards team for funding this project

Students who took part in focus group activities

Staff across Accessibility and Inclusion / DLS who contributed to focus groups/trials of resources

Staff in all departments who contributed through informal interviews at beginning of project, including Emma Sheppard and Mark Whitehead

Library and Digital Services team



Resources

Please use this QR code to view resources developed to date

Please note – Most are now bilingual but there are a couple that are still in translation and will be posted shortly.

