
Group and Collaborative Projects

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About this policy

1. All Backstage Academy's courses require you to work in groups. Some group work is non-assessed such as some seminar and tutorial preparation. However, some of the group work you undertake forms part of the assessed coursework component. Because of the need to assess skills as well as knowledge, many modules now require you to develop communication, negotiation, debating and organisation skills. These skills can only be developed and assessed through group work.
2. However, Backstage Academy understands that in collaborative and group projects, the contribution of any one student can have either a positive or negative impact on the work of others. Normally this is considered as part of the assessment process, and while Backstage Academy's normal practice is to award the same mark to all members of the group, markers/assessors reserve the right to adjust individual marks to reflect high levels of contribution or lack of engagement or poor performance by individual students.
3. Very occasionally, lack of engagement or poor performance by an individual student may have a significant or negative impact on the learning or assessment of other students. If concerns are raised about your performance, the procedure set out below will be followed.
4. This policy supplements other policy and procedural documents. It relates to students who are either being assessed as a group or on their own contribution to a practical or collaborative group project, or whose engagement supports the learning and assessment of other students working on the same project.
5. Any actions taken in response to this policy will adhere to the rights and statements set out in the Student Attendance and Engagement, Student Complaints and Student Non-academic Disciplinary policies and procedures.

Procedures for resolving groups disagreements

6. The issue should be brought to the attention of a staff members responsible for the project. In the first instance, the issue may be raised by a student or another member of academic staff.
7. The Course or Module leader will arrange a time for a group arbitration meeting and act as a chairperson for the meeting. Attendance at this meeting is compulsory for all group members. If any group member does not attend a meeting and cannot produce admissible medical evidence or present a satisfactory explanation for nonattendance, the Course/Module Leader may take further action outlined in paragraphs 10-13.
8. The Course/Module Leader will act as an arbitrator at this meeting and is not there to take responsibility for resolving group disagreements. Each group member will be asked to present his or her point of view. You will be required to present any written records (emails, group minutes, group contracts) to substantiate any criticisms of other group members.
9. The Course/Module Leader may ask you to prepare a formal set of minutes after the meeting, including any agreed actions to resolve the matter, which should be signed by all group members.

10. If arbitration fails to resolve the matter, or there is continued lack of engagement or poor performance by an individual student, (including failure to attend an arbitration meeting), the student concerned will be asked to attend a meeting with the Course Leader and/or the member of staff responsible for the project to:
 - discuss the concern;
 - outline the action the student is required to take;
 - indicate the timescale for improvement and the consequences if there is no improvement in their performance or engagement.
11. A record will be taken of the meeting and you will receive a written note within **five working days**.
12. In the interests of other students, if there is insufficient improvement in your performance or engagement within the agreed timescale or additional aggravating factors, then the Course Leader may remove you from the group with immediate effect. Markers will undertake to mark the assessment based upon the work completed up to the point you have been removed from the project and this mark will be entered into the student records system for confirmation by the relevant Assessment Board.

Note that module co-ordinators or lecturers will not set additional individual coursework assignments for members removed from groups.
13. If the mark is below the pass mark for the module (i.e. you fail the module) you will be required to re-sit in the usual way.
14. You will be notified in writing within **five working days** of the reasons for your removal from the project.

Mitigating Circumstances

15. If there are circumstance including an undisclosed disability about which staff were not aware in making a decision to remove you from a project, you may apply for mitigation; but as detailed in the policy and procedures for mitigating circumstances, you will be required to provide the relevant documentation with you application.

Your right to appeal

16. You have the right of appeal against any disciplinary action taken in relation to this policy. The procedures are set out in the policy and procedures documentation for *Student Non-academic Disciplinary Action*

Appendix 1 Guidance for Group and Collaborative Work

About this guidance

All Backstage Academy courses require you to work in groups. Some group work is non-assessed such as some seminar and tutorial preparation. However, some of the group work you undertake forms part of the assessed coursework component. This guidance document has been prepared to help manage your expectations of group work, identify your basic responsibilities as a group member, suggest possible ways of dealing with group disagreements or lack of group participation, and to set out a formal policy on the resolution of group conflict and the award of marks for group work.

Why are you asked to work in groups?

Because of the need to assess skills as well as knowledge, many modules now require you to develop communication, negotiation, debating and organisation skills. These skills can only be developed through group work. There are also many practical reasons why business and economic knowledge is most appropriately developed in a group context. The type of job the typical Backstage Academy graduate will enter is an inherently social/technical process, where issues of leadership, power, persuasion and compromise are always present. Students often find that working in groups is hard work, that other members are not pulling their weight, that their own views are continually overlooked by other members. It is important to learn how to deal with these problems. They are present in all management contexts. But group work has lots of benefits as well. If you can manage a group effectively then it can be a constructive and enjoyable experience. Different people have different competencies, skills and interests which means you can learn from, and teach others. Group work also allows you to meet new people and discuss issues in informal social environment.

What makes a good or a bad group?

Contrary to popular belief no group is ever inherently good or bad. All groups are diverse and will contain members with different skills and abilities. One important aspect of group work is making these explicit, with all members identifying their own strengths and weaknesses. Of course, you need to create the right group atmosphere before you can do this. In most cases groups work best when structures and rules are negotiated and agreed upon from the outset.

Don't assume that because you all get on, or all seem reasonable people to start with, that everything will be fine. It sometimes helps to draw up a formal group contract stating what is expected from each group member, what responsibilities group members have towards each other, and the mechanism or process the group will use to resolve conflict and disagreement. All group members should participate in the preparation and contents of the group contract and should preferably sign it.

Groups work best when communication is maintained. All members need to meet regularly, not only when work needs to be done. Members also need to keep in contact with each other. In the age of mobile telephones and email this should not be a problem.

Groups work best when meetings are held at regular intervals. Rather than changing the time and place of your group meeting each time you meet or slipping into the habit of arranging meetings on an ad hoc basis, try and agree on a time and place where you will meet regularly. Even if the meeting is only a quick weekly fifteen minute get together over a coffee after the lecture or seminar. Set the time and place and stick to it. If someone can't make the regular meeting, then they should inform other members as soon as possible and make any arrangements to fulfil group commitments before the next meeting.

Another useful tip for helping to make groups work together effectively is to keep minutes of meetings. Minutes don't have to be verbatim transcriptions of all that was said. A simple bulleted list of issues discussed, actions agreed to be taken and responsibilities for different tasks is fine. You might all agree on a course of action during a meeting only to disagree later about what was agreed, who was assigned responsibilities for different tasks and so on. Simple minutes are the best way of resolving these issues and preventing conflicts from getting out of hand. The responsibility for keeping and taking minutes should not be the responsibility of one member of the group. (See below for an example of a set of minutes). Take turns in preparing minutes. All members need to agree and sign minutes for them to be legitimate records. It is important to get used to these processes. It is how business and management work on a day to day basis.

In summary, groups should:

- i. Create a supportive and relaxed environment where strengths, competencies and weaknesses can be discussed.
- ii. Make explicit group commitments, expectations and responsibilities. A group contract is one way of doing this and most modules require you to agree to such a contract.
- iii. Set up an effective communications structure and keep in regular contact
- iv. Establish and attend regular group meetings.
- v. Keep short minutes where all members sign and agree minutes.

Dealing with group disagreements and group problems

If you follow the above advice you will dramatically reduce the likelihood of group problems. When disagreements and problems do emerge, well organised groups are better able to deal and overcome them quickly than are less well organised groups.

The first and most important issue about group disagreements and problems is to address them quickly. Most problems are easily resolved if dealt with immediately but become impossible to sort out if left unresolved. Problems and disagreements rarely, if ever, 'just go away', although it is easy to convince yourself that they will do. Burying your head in the sand is a bad idea.

The next issue about group disagreements is to try and keep an open mind. You might think that a group member is not pulling their weight, or that you are being expected to do too much of the work because the others are less capable and willing than you. They might be happy with a pass, but you are going for a first class mark in this project right? But if we look at the problem from someone else's point of view in the group we might see a different story emerging. Other members might think that you are always trying to take control, that you always want things done your way. They might think that you are aggressive and selfish. They might feel that others in the group are ganging up against them, that they always get overruled, or that their ideas are not taken seriously. Who is right? Well, everyone is right and wrong, since they each have their own point of view. Of course, there are times when some group members really do fail to make an adequate and fair contribution.

So, what should you do if there is a disagreement in your group or you feel that someone is not contributing? The first thing you should do is call a group meeting. Each member should be given a chance to raise his or her point of view. Group members should refrain from taking sides, being overly critical or aggressive. It is vital that minutes are taken for this meeting. If the problem is serious then tape record the meeting so the written minutes can be verified. Additional information, such as emails or letters relevant to the dispute also need to be kept in a file for reference.

Once everyone has had a chance to raise their disagreements, take a break and come back with the objective of coming up with workable solutions acceptable to all members. Be prepared to give a little ground but only concede what you think is fair, appropriate and in the best interests of the group.

Serious disagreements and issues with individual group members.

If your group has held a meeting and are still unable to resolve the dispute it is time to raise your concerns with the module co-ordinator or lecturer. The module co-ordinator will follow a standard procedure set out in the policy and procedures document for Group and Collaborative Work.

The module co-ordinator or lecturer will act as an arbitrator at this meeting and is not there to take responsibility for resolving group disagreements. Each group member will be asked to present his or her point of view. You will be required to present any written records (emails, group minutes, group contracts) to substantiate your criticisms of other group members. The module co-ordinator or lecturer may ask you to prepare a formal set of minutes after the meeting which should be signed by all group members. You may also be asked to attend a second meeting two or three weeks after this meeting if the module co-ordinator or lecturer feels it is necessary to monitor the working relationship in your group. If any member of the group does not attend further meetings and cannot produce admissible medical evidence or present a satisfactory explanation for non attendance, the module co-ordinator or lecturer may choose to take further action as specified in the points identified above.

Your responsibility for contacting group members

You have a responsibility to meet up with colleagues and form your group by the date specified by the module co-ordinator or lecturer. If you experience difficulties contacting your fellow group members, you should bring it to the attention of the module co-ordinator or lecturer as soon as possible. Failure to alert the module co-ordinator or lecturer to any problems you may be having in terms of getting in contact with fellow group members within a reasonable time period (i.e. before group work preparation begins) may result in you being excluded from the group work component of the course. In this event you will be awarded zero for the group component of the coursework. Module co-ordinators or lecturers will not set additional individual coursework assignments for students who fail to undertake adequate efforts to contact group members and participate fully in group work.

Your group has a responsibility to inform the module co-ordinator or lecturer if you realise that one or more members of your group has failed to make contact with you and has not responded to your group's attempt to make contact. If your group experiences difficulties contacting fellow group members, it should be brought to the attention of the module co-ordinator or lecturer as soon as possible. Failure to alert the module co-ordinator or lecturer to any problems you may be having in terms of getting in contact with fellow group members within a reasonable time period (i.e. before group work preparation begins) may result in your group being penalised or being awarded a lower mark. Module co-ordinators or lecturers will not compensate groups because a group member, or members, has failed to get in contact unless any problems are reported as soon as possible.