

## Group work 1: Making a positive start

### Introduction

Group work is an essential part of learning for most students at university. It can be challenging, but as with any challenge, this is often where the best learning happens. With group work, we not only get a chance to develop our planning, communication, collaborative and digital skills, we also get to learn a lot about ourselves and how we work within a team. Starting well is key to success. Here are some useful tips to help with this.

### Establish an online group space

Make the most of the digital tools available to you. Set up a Team for your group and explore the range of tools within Microsoft Teams for supporting group work.

### Get to know each other before starting on the task

Use an icebreaker to share information about yourself. List names and contact details. Learn the names of all team members and check how they are pronounced.

### Check understanding, clarify aims and purpose

Make sure each person in the group understands the wording of the brief and precisely what is required in terms of commitment to the group. Check that everyone is aware of the deadline and what the group need to produce before then. Any issues with understanding the task that cannot be resolved in the group should be referred immediately to the tutor.

### Plan carefully, assign individual roles and tasks

Work out how to divide up the tasks, how the work will be done and when the group will meet. Create some interim deadlines to help you plan. Be aware different time zones and be inclusive of team members who have family, caring or work commitments. Consider how to assign roles and be careful to avoid making assumptions about people's role preferences based on their behaviour in the first meeting. Find a way to ensure everyone has a voice and can express their role choices. Consider using a rota so that group members can share roles and try out chairing, note making, etc. Write a short summary and list of individual tasks for everyone to check and agree.

### Create and agree ground rules

Ground rules are crucial, as they will help you to work well together. They could include:

- expectations around punctuality and attendance;
- arrangements for when you can't make a meeting;
- expectations around contributing in meetings (use of video and turn taking);
- expectations around sharing the work equally;
- how to make decisions and include everyone in discussions;
- how to choose a leader of the group and assign roles;
- recording and note making in meetings;
- confidentiality;
- how to deal with any issues.

### Keep communication channels open

Make sure there is plenty of regular updating on progress through a channel agreed by the group. This way, issues can be resolved quickly when they arise. Be inclusive with your choice of communication channels – make sure all group members can access and use the method you choose.