

“Accessible Small Group Work: What you need to know and what you need to do”

Case Study 2

Group Assignments

As part of a particular course, students are set an assignment to work on in small groups, over a period of 6 weeks. At the end of the assignment, each group will present the outcome of their work and will be assessed both by their peers and by a panel of staff members.

- How might group work tasks be described in course literature?
- Would attendance be compulsory? Would participation be compulsory?
- How would the parameters of the group work be defined?

From the Disability Office, the lecturer becomes aware that, out of a class of 40 students, there will be 3 who require copies of notes and extra time for tasks, which involve reading or writing. There is also 1 student who needs a note-taker, 1 student who is unable to give oral presentations and 1 who has communication difficulties and difficulties with interaction with others. The latter student, John, has told the lecturer that he has Asperger’s Syndrome but has said that he does not wish this information to be passed to the other students.

- How should one decide who goes into which group? (random allocation? Student choice? Staff choice?)
- What are the potential consequences of the selection procedure for the disabled students

- mentioned above? What are the potential consequences for the non-disabled students?
- Should the needs of disabled students be disclosed to the rest of the group? What are the potential consequences of disclosure/non-disclosure?
- How can one facilitate the interaction of the group (e.g. the assignment of tasks within the group)?

Two weeks into the project, Michaella, one of the students who requires extra time for reading and writing activities, tells the lecturer that she believes she is being discriminated against within the group. She explains that the group insists on preparing materials the night before each deadline, which she is unable to cope with due to the rapid reading that is then required at that meeting. She has explained her requirements to the group but they have not changed their behaviour.

- What action might the lecturer take?

The student who needs a note-taker is refusing to do any of the background reading and claims that this is due to disability-related reasons. The Disability Adviser informs the lecturer that there is no evidence to support this.

- What action might the lecturer take?

John's group complains to the lecturer that he is slowing down their progress. They are unaware of his requirements or that he has Asperger's, as he did not wish any information to be passed to them.

- What action might the lecturer take?

Assessments:

- If group presentations are peer-assessed, what would be the best way of ensuring that particular requirements of a disabled student are accounted for?
- If an individual student is not able to contribute to the presentation for disability-related reasons, what would be the best way of ensuring that appropriate marks are awarded of 'invisible' contributions?