Group Work

Appendix 1: Checklist for effective group work

Planning Stage

- Teachers design tasks that require pupils to work together to complete them.
- Teachers are explicit about the quality of group work that they want the pupils to achieve.
- Teachers explicitly teach the group work skills they need, such as listening, framing questions, and turn-taking.
- Teachers supply or ask groups to agree a checklist, either in the form of success criteria or ground rules, and the groups keep it in sight during the activity.
- If necessary, teachers build safety requirements into the ground rules (for example, if using equipment or tools as part of the group activity).
- Teachers encourage pupils to discuss rules and criteria relating to good quality talk which go beyond established protocols such as not speaking all at once.
- Teachers consider how to choose groups to promote exploratory talk, for example, individuals in friendship groups might not readily challenge one another.
- Teachers set deadlines and time limits for the task.

Doing Stage

When a group is working well pupils:

- are willing to join in and contribute to the group task;
- position themselves so that they can see each other;
- listen actively, turning to face whoever is talking;
- allow only one person at a time to speak during discussions;
- are ready to share, take turns and cooperate with others;
- show respect for others' feelings and ideas (for example, through the appropriate use of language);
- offer each other constructive feedback;
- engage critically but constructively when challenging each other's ideas, extending the thinking and learning through talk and debate, giving reasons, offering alternatives and building on others' ideas as they try to reach agreement;
- remind each other if they break the rules;
- are motivated towards achieving their goal;
- offer to help others if they complete the activity early; and
- contribute equally to tasks such as looking after resources, clearing up, and so on.

When a group is working well teachers:

- make spot checks, and ask learners to carry out spot checks to monitor the quality of their work in progress;
- regularly check on the progress groups are making over the course of a learning sequence, including at the end of each class; and
- update targets for group activities as work develops over time.

Group Work

Reviewing Stage

If group work isn't going well, check that:

- the group understands what it is they are supposed to be doing;
- there are clearly defined success criteria for the group activity;
- you have allocated time for the pupils to agree on certain ground rules for group work and clarify the expectations for behaviour within groups;
- there is a designated group leader or chair, and that the responsibilities of this role move around the group over time;
- there is a designated person to report back or act as the channel of communication between the group and the teacher or the rest of the class, and that the responsibilities of this role move around the group over time;
- the group has made a plan which they have all agreed on;
- the group has procedures in place for making decisions and solving problems, such as listing pros and cons and considering alternatives; and
- on longer tasks, pupils keep notes of who should be doing what and by when, in keeping with the group's plan for their task and associated deadlines.

Troubleshooting

If problems persist, check:

- **The classroom layout** – is the classroom set up to support group work? Is the furniture arrangement appropriate for group work?
- **Resources** – are there appropriate resources for the task readily available? For example, is the written material pitched at a readability level appropriate to the age and experience of the pupils?
- **Time** – have you invested enough time in setting up the task effectively, or is the activity maybe too vague so that some pupils lose focus and drift off-task?
- **Activities** – have you designed and structured tasks for group work so that they can't be done by an individual?
- **Ground Rules** – are the ground rules right? Do the pupils need to revisit them, or even completely revise them?