

EAT ERASMUS Case Study Template



Case Study title: **Using EAT to prompt development of a group based assessment**

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Abstract (c.200 words)

What was your focus? What were your aims?

The engagement with group-work tasks within a summative assessment. The aim was to improve the group dynamics and to reduce the requirement for moderation of marks due to student non-engagement. The broader aim was to develop group working as a transferrable skill.

What was the context? (discipline/sample etc.) How did you investigate your focus?

The students were Year 2 Bioscience students studying Cell Biology. The class size varied between c.75-100 over the 11 years of running the assessment. The focus was investigated using student comments at the end-of-module survey, as well as an EAT-wheel evaluation and focus group to determine the main challenges for the assessment. The intervention was to introduce a group-work training activity, and two opportunities for assessor feedback and discussion.

What were your findings about what you did and what you learnt?

Students dislike group work, primarily because it is a negative experience with some students not contributing, and group dynamics being problematic. If you introduce students properly to group work, and support their planning and distribution of tasks, then they are able to manage the group task effectively. Providing the opportunity to receive formative feedback and guidance during the task enabled the students to solve problems as they arose.

What implications are there for assessment and feedback practice and research in higher education?

Group work is a commonly used assessment activity in HE, but is typically not supported as an activity, and students are not introduced to group management, and group dynamics, or planning tasks and allocating roles. We need to support students more in this skill area, and develop their team-working skills.

Reporting on your case study

The aim of ERASMUS EAT is to look at how an integrated assessment framework (EAT) can support enhancements in assessment and feedback by trying to develop staff and student self-regulatory practices. Your case study will benefit from being very clearly focused from the outset and in considering how all the dimensions and sub-dimensions of the EAT Framework need to be attended to in order to address your core issue. Keeping it as simple as possible is a good thing. Engaging with student as much as possible and thinking clearly about the evidence that you would like to collect will help in the design and implementation of your idea.

Designing an Assessment Intervention: What is your assessment focus?		
Prompts	Key questions	Please add some thoughts/experiences/reflections in this column
Focus	What is the key assessment issue you considered?	<p>The assessment is the second assessment in a 40 Credit module, with a 25% weighting for the module mark. The assessment requires the students to work as a group (5-6 students) to develop a 'Learning Resource' to support a core part of the module curriculum. The students are given free-rein to decide what format the resource should be, and what specifics to focus upon. 80% of the mark for the assessment comes from the resource itself. 10% from a group presentation where they present the resource, and discuss the design process, and critical evaluation of the resource and it's use (to an audience of 2-3 other groups, and two members of academic staff). 10% is based on a 'Reflective Production Log', where they record the development process of the resource, how they determined the content to include/exclude, and a summary of the group-working process.</p> <p>For the (80%) mark on the resource, 75% was determined by an evaluation of the depth, breadth and accuracy of the resource. 25% was based on the ease of use of the resource, and the degree of challenge of the medium adopted.</p> <p>The quality of the resources was extremely high, and the students input considerable effort into the process. The most popular media for resources were (in descending order) Prezi, Video, Website/Wiki, and interactive PowerPoint. This meant that the assessment developed digital skills in most cases.</p> <p>The additional benefit of the assignment was that the resources could then be compiled and shared with the whole cohort, for use as revision resources for their end of module examination. The bank of resources developed by successive years was shared with current students after the submission deadline for the task.</p>
Why did you choose this focus?	Why did you focus on this? On the basis of what evidence? Why did it need	<p>Previous iterations of the module had shown (a) that students gained a great deal from the group work activity, but that it was fraught with tensions due to a small number of students not engaging with the task, and group dynamics often falling</p>

	looking at?	apart towards the end of the assessment period. This led to frustration on the part of many students, and inhibited the quality of the task.
What was the context? <i>Module / programme</i> <i>Discipline</i> <i>Country</i> <i>Who was involved – staff and students</i>	What is the disciplinary/module/course context in which your assessment work is situated?	<p>The task was part of a Year 2 Bioscience module on Cell Biology. The module is open to all students, but is taken primarily by Biomedical Sciences, Biological Sciences, Biochemistry and Neuroscience students. The module builds on a compulsory Year 1 Cell Biology module, and leads on to an Advanced Cell Biology and Imaging module in Year 3. The module is optional for all degrees, and core for none.</p> <p>The module typically has 75-100 students enrolled on it.</p>
Why is this important? <i>What is your contribution – is it original? Is it confirmatory of previous work? Is it actively taking the field forward by adding new understandings?</i>	Why is what you did important?	<p>The students on our degrees have some elements of group-based coursework through their course in years 1, 2 and 3. However, they are not guided in how to operate in a team, and how group dynamics work. As a result, students universally dislike group work, despite it being the most commonly-requested graduate skill by employers.</p>
How does this work contribute to current understandings we have of assessment and feedback <i>To what extent are you aware of current national and international assessment and feedback higher education debates</i>	How does what you focused on link to current understandings of and priorities in assessment and feedback within your institution and more widely in higher education?	<p>Student experiences of group work are a major focus of research and scholarship in the HE sector. It is widely recognised that group work is important, but problematic, and poorly supported in general. Group work is also a key thread within the 'Transforming Assessment' institutional project.</p>

Implementation: What did you do?

Prompts	Key questions	Please add some thoughts/experiences/reflections in this column
<p><i>The starting situation</i> <i>The project promotes an action research type approach – working with students and staff to implement ideas and then evaluating them.</i> <i>It encourages the use of a mixed methodology and methods – the use of quantitative methods (e.g. survey data) and qualitative approaches (e.g., discussions with colleagues) to investigate practice.</i></p>	<p>How did you investigate your focus? What was the rationale for choosing this aspect?</p> <p>Did you do any pre and post testing of ideas/abilities/ attitudes?</p> <p>When choosing an area of focus, what sources of information did you use to support your decision?</p> <p>Did you use EAT to measure student/staff engagement in assessment pre and post?</p>	<p>How did you investigate your focus? What was the rationale for choosing this aspect? Student feedback on the module for several years indicated that the group work element of this assessment was a major source of dissatisfaction. Yet the assessment itself was extremely popular. There was therefore a need to review the assessment in a holistic way to identify the strengths and limitations of the approach.</p> <p>Did you do any pre and post testing of ideas/abilities/ attitudes? No independent pre- and post- testing was undertaken. However, there were data from end-of-module surveys that were scrutinised for the quantity and nature of comments relating to the group task. An audit of the number and nature of the problems raised by students regarding non-engagement by peers in the task, was taken before and after the intervention. There is a peer-evaluation process for evaluating individual student contributions, to identify (and penalise) any students who failed to contribute, or had a limited contribution, to the task. The pattern and frequency of students penalised for low-engagement was also reviewed.</p> <p>When choosing an area of focus, what sources of information did you use to support your decision? Literature on the limitations of group-based assessments in Higher Education was a basis for the intervention. Also the basis for the assignment in the first place was literature on developing assessment for learning, and the aim was to devise an assessment whose outputs could be used and shared beyond the assessment itself.</p> <p>Did you use EAT to measure student/staff engagement in assessment pre and post? EAT was used to measure student perceptions before the intervention in 2020-21, and compared to a staff use of EAT. There was a staff review after, but no opportunity for a student review using EAT, unfortunately. There was no review using EAT in 2021-22, due to logistical challenges around the time of release of the assessment directions. The outcomes from the EAT analysis indicated that the students were happy with the Assessment Literacy elements of the assessment. In particular the marking criteria were clear, detailed, and understood well. How the assessment fitted in within their overall learning for the module was clear, and the assessment was seen to be aligned to the discipline, as it involved research, writing, presentation, and digital skills. The main other</p>

		<p>negative was the perception that the resource took a disproportionately high amount of time to produce.</p> <p>Assessment feedback scores were low in the pre-test, possibly because they had not experienced feedback on that assignment before.</p> <p>The Assessment Design sub-dimensions were generally seen as high, especially AD1 (the process was reported as being explained clearly in the assessment guide), AD2 (the assessment was seen as useful, authentic and meaningful), and AD3 (the optionality and student choice of medium was valued). AD4 was low.</p>
<p>What did you do? <i>Describe what your approach involved. What did you do to enhance a self-regulatory approach to assessment and feedback practice What roles did students and educators play? See Moore et al (2015) Process diagram to help you describe the elements of what you did?</i></p>	<p>What were the key things you did and with whom? What student and staff groups did you engage with and how? Who approved ethical consent? (Institution?) Over what time scale did you conduct this project? Did it involve 1 or several iterations of change initiatives? What information did you collect? What tools/resources did you use?</p>	<p>What were the key things you did and with whom?</p> <p>Activity 1. A workshop was introduced (face-to-face on both years, although social distancing limited the amount of interactivity in both years) to introduce core concepts of group working, discussing and allocating roles and agreed behaviours for the group, and planning the timing of key deliverables for the resource development. In the workshop, the students operated in their teams. The aims were a) to ensure that all student groups met up as soon as possible and could share contact details; b) that key issues regarding group tasks (differential allocation of roles, conflict resolution, agreed procedures and behaviours) could be highlighted to students; c) students were shown how to plan a team task using GANNT chart approach; d) to explain the parameters of the assessment, and to clarify the expectations of the 'reflective production log' (something unfamiliar to them); e) to provide an opportunity to discuss questions with the assessment lead.</p> <p>Activity 2. The students were given the opportunity to sign up for two short (15 minute) successive online (zoom) meetings with the assessment lead. The first meeting, 2 weeks after the release of, the assessment, was to discuss the choice of format/medium for the learning resource, and to review the progress of, the assignment GANNT chart deliverables. This meeting provided an opportunity to share and initial problems/concerns, and for the assessment lead to provide guidance on the choice of medium/focus, and offer proactive advice. The second meeting (2 weeks before submission) focused on the progress of the resource, and also on the upcoming oral presentation of the resource by the group. Both of the meetings provided an opportunity to proactively surface any issues with the group dynamics, and to address any students who were not engaging, before their lack of engagement became an issue.</p> <p>What student and staff groups did you engage with and how?</p>

		<p>All students on the module for the 2020-21 pre-test, and end of module respondents usually accounted for 30% of the cohort. Student engagement data were evaluated for 11 years worth of the assignment. The only member of Staff engaged with was the assessment lead. A student focus group of 6 students was used to discuss the pre-intervention EAT responses in 2020-21.</p> <p>Who approved ethical consent? (Institution?) As this was a practice enhancement activity, ethical approval was not required.</p> <p>Over what time scale did you conduct this project? Over 2 academic years (2020-21, 2021-22). In 2022-23, a new module leader decided to adopt a different assessment regime for the module, and this assignment was lost.</p> <p>Did it involve 1 or several iterations of change initiatives? Two iterations of the change approach were undertaken before the assessment regime for the module was changed and this assessment discontinued.</p> <p>What information did you collect? Student comments in module surveys. An audit of the number and nature of the problems raised by students regarding non-engagement by peers in the task, was taken before and after the intervention. There is a peer-evaluation process for evaluating individual student contributions, to identify (and penalise) any students who failed to contribute, or had a limited contribution, to the task. The pattern and frequency of students penalised for low-engagement was also reviewed.</p> <p>What tools/resources did you use? Online meetings and a tutorial workshop.</p>
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How was what you did aligned to the EAT concepts (FIDELITY) See check list below?

- **Inclusive** – do all students have equal access to learning and equal chances to do well?
 - **Shared beliefs and values** –
have these been discussed and agreed between staff and students? Is there agreement on the key self-regulatory skills that need to be focused on?
 - **Student-staff partnership** –
how genuine is this? To what extent are students encouraged to participate in all assessment decisions?
 - **Sensitive to context – how have you adapted assessment to suit your context?** *nuances of your discipline and course, situated within your faculty and institution; and nature of student intake – what is specific about your course/subject demands and types of students you have?*
 - **Holistic** – *the whole experience of the student*
 - **Integrative** – *how all aspects of assessment are interrelated and impact one another*
 - **Agentic** – *allows students and lecturers to take control of their learning/teaching*
 - **Engagement in meaningful learning experiences – relevant**
 - **Sustainable** – *means manageable for all; also enabling students to manage their own learning themselves*
- *so extent to which they are able to accurately assess the quality of their own work.*

How did you incorporate EAT concepts into your design?

If relevant, how did you support colleagues to understand how to apply these concepts?

To what extent were staff able to engage students in co-design? (see Appendix F)

INCLUSIVE

The assessment provides an opportunity for students to pick a medium for the learning resource, which is appropriate to them, and their interests/abilities. With the introduction of training in group work, and planning and distribution of roles within the group, there was the opportunity for students With different preferences and specialities to do well, and contribute to an aspect which suited them.

SHARED BELIEFS AND VALUES

The importance of group work, and the significance of planning and distribution of activities, was a key thing that was discussed between students and staff. It was possible to relay how these are important in a real life in life situation, and what needs to be considered, when dealing with group dynamics. The opportunity to discuss the other elements of the assignment, the group presentation, and the reflective log, meant that the importance of these could be emphasised to the students. This was particularly important regarding the reflective log, as it was emphasised to students that this was an example of the reflective process that one undergoes when planning and executing a project.

STUDENT-STAFF PARTNERSHIP

There was a limited student-staff partnership in this activity, however, there was the opportunity to engage and discuss issues with students, and to support their needs on an ad hoc basis. Students were empowered to make decisions regarding their choices within the development of the learning resource. However, more active student – staff partnership would have been a benefit. The students were shown how their feedback led to improved support, however.

SENSITIVE TO CONTEXT

This intervention was highly sensitive to context, as group work activities are fundamental for the life sciences. The development of creativity and digital skills, it's also majorly important for both the discipline, and higher education generally. In particular, the students involved had experienced group work before, but without any support or instruction on how to proceed effectively in teams. The intervention was therefore supporting a specific identified need for these students.

HOLISTIC

The intervention address to series of different issues that were linked together. The most substantive of these being importance of peer interaction, and group activities. In addition, however, the intervention supported the development of self-evaluation, and understanding of the parameters of an assessment (AL1). The students were able to see

		<p>how the skills were important for professional graduate activity, and had the opportunity to refine their assessment outputs before the submission date for the assessment.</p> <p>INTEGRATIVE The support for peer interactions, and the highlighting of what was expected from the assessment, had other impacts on assessment design (meaningful assessment, and inclusivity), as well as reactive use of early feedback. The approach reiterated to the students that guidance and feedback and the methodical charting of each of these, is important in professional activity.</p> <p>AGENTIC The students were able to decide on the format and focus of the learning resource, even before the intervention. But the intervention provided was the opportunity for students to determine roles that are appropriate to each other within the group, without having roles superimposed upon them. It also gave the opportunity for the groups to problem solve Any group dynamic issues early, with support from the assessment lead. Understanding the potential pros and cons of their learning resource, enable the students to demonstrate a deep understanding of learning, and how education works.</p> <p>ENGAGEMENT IN MEANINGFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCES The intervention meant that the students were being trained in a fundamental employability skill. This was highly relevant to their future. Careers. In addition, the approach of planning a timeline for an assignment, and distributing roles between colleagues within the team, fundamental activities to any professional employment.</p> <p>SUSTAINABLE This approach is highly sustainable. It required some outlay of time on the part of the member of staff, to run the tutorials and drop-in sessions. However, this thing led to significant if you were issues in managing and solving group problems, or having to penalise students for non-engagement. So overall, there was a net reduction in workload.</p>
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See Assessment and Feedback Principles Appendix A and Student Engagement in Assessment templates

To what extent were you able to implement the EAT assessment and feedback principles?

What *barriers and facilitators* were there to implementation?

The following principles were developed in this assessment:

1. *Clarify what the assessment is and how it is organised. Explain the principles underpinning the design of assessment so that students can understand the relevance and value of it.* The rationale of the use of group work was explained, and reinforced.
2. *Provide explicit guidance to students on the requirements of each assessment (e.g. clarification of assessment criteria; learning outcomes; good academic practice).* This was undertaken, to explain what was expected of the groups when working as a team.
3. *Clarify with students the different forms, sources, and timings of feedback available including e-learning opportunities.* The students were given a timetable for formative feedback sessions with the assessment lead.
6. *Ensure that the curriculum design enables sufficient time for students to apply the lessons learnt from formative feedback in their summative assessments.* This was one of the main aims of the intervention – to provide students with opportunities for feedback and discussion of their progress with the assessment lead.
7. *Give clear and focused feedback on how students can improve their work including signposting the most important areas to address (what was good; what could be improved; and most importantly, how to improve).* This was discussed within the two ‘progress monitoring and feedback’ sessions. The aim of these was to give students formative guidance on their plans, and to suggest ways they might like to focus their time on improvement.
8. *Ensure that formative feedback precedes summative assessment; that the links between formative feedback and the requirements of summative assessment are clear.* It was clear what the formative opportunities were, and how they should be used to support the summative outcome.

Barriers: The major barriers were firstly that the students had no training in groupwork activity in Year 1 of their course; and the general lack of time outside of the core curriculum for skills training in areas such as this.

Facilitators: The opportunity for online meetings afforded by the adoption of Zoom in the Covid-29 Pandemic made meeting groups for formative feedback much easier to schedule. A relatively small cohort size for the module was also beneficial.

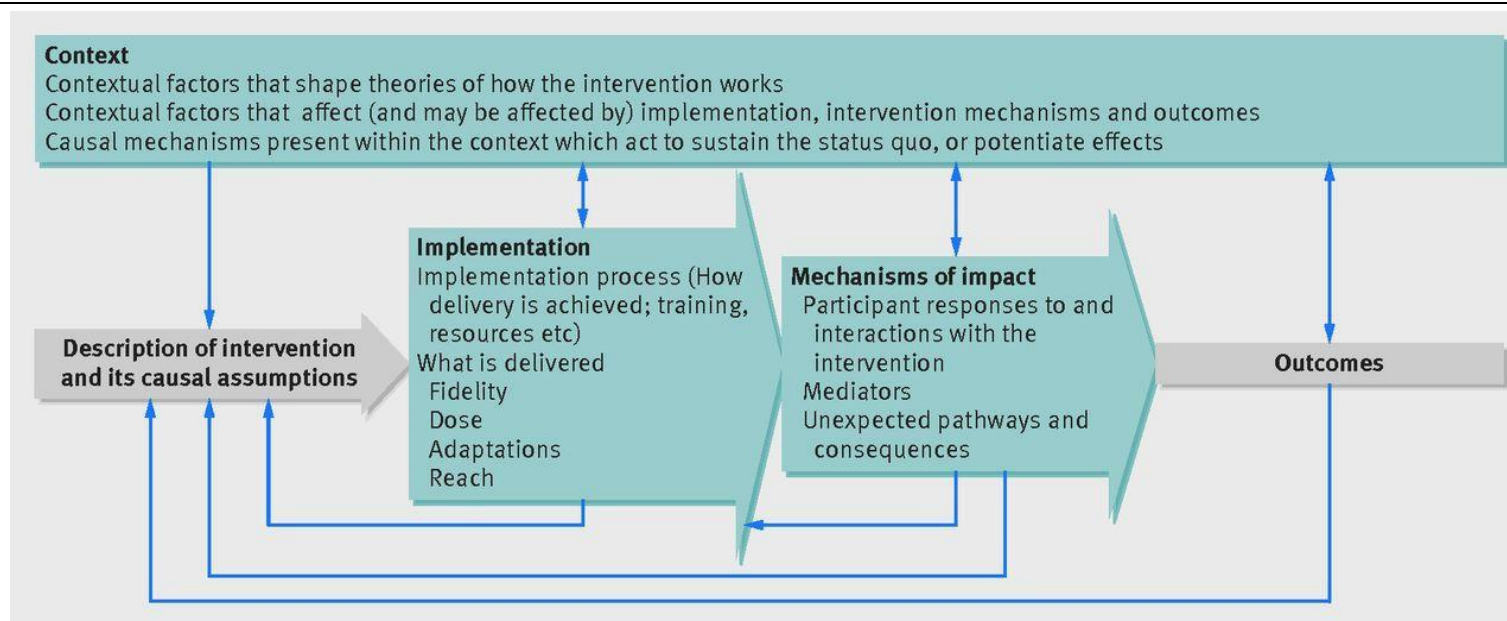


Figure 1: Moore, G. M., Audrey, S., Barker, M., Bond, L., Bonell, C., Hardeman, W., Moore, L., O’Cathain, A., Tinati, T., Wight, D., & Baird, J. (2015). Process evaluation of complex interventions: Medical Research Council Guidance. *BMJ* 2015; 3350:h1258

Assessing the Impact of your Intervention: Key findings

Prompts	Key questions	Please add some thoughts/experiences/reflections in this column
<p>How successful was the approach? <i>Did it engage the students and staff you wanted it to?</i></p>	<p>To what extent did your intervention reach your intended audience of staff and students? Was it manageable? Are there plans to test it more widely?</p>	<p>The approach was extremely successful. Student feedback praised the approach, and there was only one case (over 2 years) of a student being penalised for non-engagement. This compared to typically 4-5 each year who received some penalty for poor/non-engagement. More importantly, the students commented that they felt more empowered in the group work process, and better equipped to address the challenges of working as a team. They also could see the value and importance of group work as an educational approach.</p>
<p>What was the impact on students? <i>Note any reported impacts on students: Did those who did engage do better than those who did not? Did it narrow gaps in attainment between more and less advantaged students? Student beliefs about their role in assessment Student confidence Student learning outcomes Student engagement in assessment Student satisfaction Assessment Literacy Ability to use, seek and give feedback Contribution to assessment resources and valuable outputs</i></p>	<p>What were the impacts on students? Did all students benefit equally? What specific changes resulted if any? Any unexpected outcomes?</p>	<p>The major impact was in training the students in how to work collaboratively in a team, and the various issues and factors associated with that activity. The students were able to begin their work earlier, deal with intra-group issues better. The students were able to manage their work, and also receive informal feedback from the assessment lead, which helped them prepare for the summative submission of the assessment. There were no complaints about this assessment being a group task, in end-of-module surveys. Instead, there were many positive comments about it being a useful experience. Previously, student feedback had been vocal, substantial and wholly negative about the group activities. This negativity masked the potential learning gain of working in teams. With the teamwork being a positive experience, this then completely reversed that trend.</p>
<p>What was the impact on staff? <i>Impact on staff engagement in training Did it impact staff conceptions of assessment and the role of students in the process? Did it make assessment more efficient? Staff competency Staff confidence Staff collaboration Staff assessment literacy Better assessment design? Did it lead to better curriculum design</i></p>	<p>What were the impacts on staff? Do staff have a better understanding of assessment? Was assessment design improved as a consequence of what you did?</p>	<p>The impact on staff was the removal of the need to intervene in dysfunctional groups, and/or penalize students for poor/non-engagement with the group activities. It enabled students who were struggling to engage with the task early on and provide appropriate support. The feedback sessions were a good way of keeping in touch with all teams, and to identify problems before they became bigger problems.</p>
<p>How sustainable do you think these changes can be? <i>Are changes embedded within</i></p>	<p>Sustainability: any longer term gains from the project? Has what you implemented become part of business</p>	<p>The overall time spent in these activities was reduced overall. By being proactive, and solving issues with students in advance of them being substantive, meant that less time was spent fire-fighting and answering</p>

<p><i>curriculum? Any longer term gains?</i> <i>Development of effective assessment networks</i> <i>Changes in attitudes?</i> <i>Upskilling of staff</i> <i>More efficient use of resource</i> <i>Impacts on policy?</i></p>	<p>as usual – will it be maintained?</p>	<p>emails from distressed students.</p>
<p>What did YOU gain from this experience?</p> <p><i>What personal learning do you take away from the project?</i> <i>(Use reflective templates to support evaluative activities)</i></p>	<p>What was the impact on those colleagues and students leading the case studies? What were the key learning points for you? What would you have done differently in retrospect? How could you improve your design?</p>	<p>I gained the clear understanding that we desperately, as a sector, need to support student training and orientation in group-work and group-based activities. It is the most cited skill requirement by our employers, and we set many group assignments, but rarely – if ever – guide the students in how to work in this way. As a result, they typically detest any group activity.</p>
<p>Any general thoughts or advice about using the EAT framework?</p> <p><i>What are the key messages that would be useful for others trying to do this?</i></p>	<p>Transferability Were there any subject specific findings that have relevance to the sector? How can learning be adapted and utilized elsewhere? What are the key messages/learning from this work?</p>	<p>In tis case, EAT provided a good means of reflecting on the assessment, and prompted thinking of alternatives to the key problem areas, and produced a more positive learning experience for students, and teaching experience for staff.</p> <p>These insights about groupwork are fundamental to all disciplines within the sector.</p>