

Quick Guide to Peer Study Groups

The *LSE 2030 Strategy* (LSE, 2019) identifies peer study groups as a means by which the institution can foster a strong sense of community and belonging. This purpose provides initial guidance on how to establish peer study groups in order to:

- Encourage group interaction and support
- Ease the transition period of students joining LSE

Guidelines at a glance

There are many ways of setting up peer study groups, but the following guidelines might be helpful:

- Tell incoming students that from the very beginning of their studies they will be working in Peer Study Groups between classes, explaining why this will help them thrive at the LSE (see notes below).
- At (or before) the start of the year/course, divide the students administratively into mixed groups of 5 or 6, and give them information about how to contact their fellow group members.
- If possible, use an induction meeting or very early lecture/class to give students time to meet their peers face to face and check they all have the right contact details and an agreed means of contacting one another. This can form part of the 'getting to know you' induction phase.
- Let all students know, through succinct instructions, what they need to do during each 'between class' time period. For example, they may be asked to undertake some reading or a set problem, discuss key questions and formulate some responses/solutions which are then uploaded to Moodle.
- Ensure that each student peer group sees that what they produce is valued, for example by discussing their outputs briefly in a subsequent class and/or through an online discussion forum. Feedback from other peer groups, online or in class, can be very helpful.
- Peer group tasks may be set weekly or perhaps over a two-three week period – the timings will need to suit the rhythm of the teaching. However, the time periods should not be too long as it's helpful to create a culture of regular meetings.
- Peer study group meetings should be face to face wherever possible. The challenge of agreeing on where to meet is part of the task. However, virtual meetings can be encouraged where these are needed to maximise access and inclusion.
- Depending on circumstances, the timings of peer study groups may be informally timetabled, or left flexible. The challenge of agreeing on where and when to meet is then part of the task.
- If the course has small group formative or summative asks (e.g. presentations, policy papers, podcasts or videos), you can use the same peer groups for this purpose. The between-class tasks then become collaborative preparation for those assignments.
- Consider starting the whole peer study group process by introducing a distinctive project with outputs, such as [Meet the Researcher](#) or the [Economics First Year Challenge](#). This gets things off to a very purposeful start.
- Make sure that students on combined degrees are able to work with their fellow students in such a way that they feel fully included in the life of each of the contributing departments.
- Advise students on the importance of working in a group effectively and managing time with colleagues, and give them opportunities to evaluate that experience as part of their ongoing activities.
- Direct the groups to LSE LIFE for additional advice and resources to help them make the most of their experiences of collaborating, and remind them how important team skills are for their future lives and employment.
- Keep students informed, in class and through online communications, about the importance of these ongoing tasks to their learning overall – they should feel part of the intellectual narrative of the whole degree.

- Where possible, showcase some of the work produced - for example online, or through poster displays in the department/common rooms.

What are the benefits of a peer study group?

Researchers point to the benefits of working in groups as addressing the psychological, social and emotional aspects of academic life, as well as educational. In particular, they can:

- provide a secure support system which cannot be obtained when working individually (Lavy, 2017)
- support the development of a range of skills such as negotiation, communication, respect, empathy and collaboration (Mamas, 2018)
- lead to more diversified social networks, particularly amongst students from different countries (Rienties et al, 2013).

Although a peer study group can be formed at any time, it can be particularly important for students arriving at University, many of whom will not know each other and may come from a very different educational tradition. Building diverse, supportive social relationships early on has been found to positively impact the overall student transition experience (Mittelmeier et al, 2018; Pennington et al 2017).

Students may find it useful to collaborate on some activities at a distance rather than on-campus. In order to facilitate this contact you can:

- ensure that students know how to set up their [own Zoom meeting rooms](#) (see question 10 onwards)
- provide students with guidance of [how to use the Office 365 apps](#) to work collaboratively
- use the [blended learning scenarios](#) to reflect on how you can adjust teaching and learning to incorporate more opportunities for collaborative working.

References

Lavy, S. (2017). Who benefits from group work in higher education? An attachment theory perspective, *Higher Education*, 73, 175-187.

Mamas, C. (2018). Exploring peer relationships, friendships and group work dynamics in higher education: applying social network analysis, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 42(5), 662-677.

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Pennington, R., Bates, E., Kaye, L. and Bolam, L. (2018). Transitioning in Higher Education: An exploration of psychological and contextual factors affecting student satisfaction, *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 42(5), 596-607.

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