

Briefing paper for Academic Tutors

This briefing is designed to offer academic tutors a quick introduction and guidance to WebPA, an online peer assessment tool.

For further information, please refer to the WebPA Resource Pack or visit the WebPA website at <http://www.webpa.ac.uk>

The use of group work is becoming common practice within higher education. As student numbers increase, a trend has emerged towards the use of group work as a means of assessment. In addition, it is recognised that group work encourages students to develop transferable skills, highly prized by employers, such as team-working, communication and problem solving.

Assessment of group work can be difficult, with much of the process often being conducted outside normal contact time. As a result academics often award each student a summative 'group' mark which does not take into consideration individual performance. Consequently, summative marking can be seen as inherently unfair by students as both high performers and 'free-riders' get the same treatment.

Peer moderated marking can help to address this disparity. WebPA enables each student to assess their own contribution to a group-based project or activity as well as that of their fellow team members. WebPA can be used either summatively or formatively.

Through using WebPA each student within a group or project team can receive an adjusted mark reflecting their individual contribution.

What is WebPA?

WebPA is an online peer assessment tool that can be used by any higher education institution. It can support any academic tutor who is using, or wishes to introduce, group work within their teaching practice. WebPA enables academic tutors to set specific criteria for the peer assessment of group work.

WebPA offers a number of benefits to the academic tutors who choose to use it, not least the opportunity of offering their students a fair means of assessing group work activity.

"WebPA is simple to use and affords me a unique insight into the operations of my groups. It eliminates the bickering that my old 'paper' method used to promote – and the students like it."

Professor Rob Parkin, Head of the Wolfson School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering, Loughborough University



WebPA®



Originally developed over ten years ago at Loughborough University, WebPA has been further enhanced through a JISC funded project involving collaboration between Loughborough University, the University of Hull and the Higher Education Academy Subject Centres for Engineering and Physical Sciences.

As a result of this project, the WebPA tool is now available to all higher education institutions through an open source licence.

Since the first open source release of the WebPA tool in 2007, 17 higher education institutions have adopted WebPA and are using it with their students. A thriving community of users is rapidly developing.

In 2008, the WebPA tool gained international recognition for learning impact by the IMS Global Learning Consortium. At the same time it was also named '**Best Assessment Support Tool**'.

"WebPA is now embedded in our first year and will be for the next five years. Typically 180-200 students will be subjected to [WebPA] every year."

Dr Bob Cherry, Senior Lecturer,
Manchester Metropolitan University

Is WebPA right for you?

In the first instance, take a look at the demonstrator available online at <http://webpaos.lboro.ac.uk/>
Then consider the following questions:

- Does the group work theory on which WebPA is founded align with your current/intended practice?
- What current practice will you need to change in order to use WebPA?
- Can you gain the necessary support from your institution to install and support the introduction of WebPA?

What do I do next?

If you are confident that WebPA is for you, and that your institution is able and willing to support its adoption, then these are the next steps to follow:

- plan ahead - it will take time to get WebPA up and running
- identify key personnel (senior managers, learning technologists, educational developers, systems administrators etc.) who can help you to introduce WebPA successfully
- in order to gain support, explain your reasons and the benefits you anticipate,
- make any revisions to your practice necessary to accommodate WebPA
- talk to other WebPA users for advice and support and become part of the user community
- start with a pilot implementation
- brief students and other staff involved in the pilot
- evaluate your use of WebPA.

Where can I find further information?

For further support, advice, guidance, case studies and a range of handouts, refer to the WebPA Resource Pack, available as hardcopy or online at <http://www.webpa.ac.uk>