# Part B
## A list of things that can influence the functioning of groups



This is a reference list, for use with these scenarios or in your real-life experiences of groups. None of the factors listed below automatically causes problems. They can all be overcome and some of the influences can be positive. For example adverse external pressures can encourage development of coherence in a group. There is plenty of overlapping in the list below.

## To do with individuals in the group

the person who does not turn up

the person who is always late

the unreliable person (eg not getting agreed tasks done)

the person who does not pull her weight

the negative person

the disgruntled person

the individual who talks too much

the domineer

the academically weak person (or one perceived to be weak)

the person who declares boredom or disinterest

the silent or non contributing person

the joker or person who does not know 'when to stop'

the person who has 'done it all before' and wants to tell others

the person who constantly wants to get help from the tutor

the person who wants simply to be told what to do

a person with rigid views as to the task or processes involved in the task

status-seeking individuals

the person who relentlessly tries to get group to follow her ideas

the chatty person who keeps the group interaction at superficial levels

## To do with subgroups within the group

disability and difference (eg dyslexia, speech problems)

formations of subgroups that tend to communicate within themselves (eg friendships, housemates etc)

the group comes to rely too much on one person (formal or informal leader at that time)

competitiveness within the group

scapegoating when things go wrong (blaming a person within the group)

the group atmosphere is sour and members form subgroups for comfort

some group members are not familiar with working in groups

there is envy of and there are challenges to the leader

group members want to work at different paces and get frustrated with rate of progress

flirtations between group members that get in the way of the group task

long-standing animosities between two or more members

some members of the group are less able to understand what is going on (eg language problems)

## Factors that influence progress on the task for worse but sometimes for the better

location and surroundings of group meetings

seating in group working sessions

disagreement on the task – that the group cannot resolve (eg opposing ideas)

peer assessment systems that set up suspicion of unfairness within the group

rebellion against an agreed or informal leader

the group is distracted by something that is not relevant

the group is bored with the task

the group does not have the expertise for the task and drifts with members unsatisfied

the group blames/scapegoats something outside the group for its lack of progress

the group cannot sort out leadership or role or decision-making issues

general sense of upset or frustration in the group

the tutor keeps interfering when the group members know what they are doing

roles are agreed, but are not working out (eg leader)

unhelpful competitiveness with other groups

stress from time constraints for the task

## General problems to do with group functioning

lack of openness – a sense of some holding on to information or ideas

a sense that there are hidden agendas among group members

a group member is jealous of others and inhibits/manipulates expression of ideas

jealousies that cause 'put downs' and unjustified criticism of each other

critical group members, who will not contribute constructive alternatives

silent and non contributing factions in the group

a tendency for the group to talk in general or abstract terms and not focus on the task

distraction because of too many good ideas

competitiveness within a group

## Some pressures that affect the functioning of groups (for better or worse)

assessment pressures

assessment in which one mark is given for the work of the whole of the group

the involvement of peer assessment in which each has to assess how much her peers have contributed

whether or not participants choose to be in a group together or are allocated to a group

whether group members are friends or are initially unknown to each other

whether group members feel comfortable with each other or not

issues of diversity or difference such as racial, cultural or gender (eg one female: five males) or disablement issues

where this work fits in a degree programme – with different consequences for the valuing of the mark that is attributed

Ref: (Adapted from : Moon, J. (2009) *Making groups work: improving group work through the principles of academic assertiveness in higher education and professional development*, ESCALATE, Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Education)