

# Briefing paper for Senior Managers

*This briefing is designed to offer senior managers 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 reducing 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 work 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 high performers and 'free-riders' get the same treatment.

Peer moderated marking can help to address this disparity. WebPA can enable 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.

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, WebPA is now available to all higher education institutions through an open source licence. Since the first open source release of the tool in 2007, a further 17 HEIs have adopted it, and are using it with their students.

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**'.

## Benefits of WebPA

WebPA is based on sound pedagogical research and users have identified many benefits from using WebPA for both the academic and student.



**WebPA**®



A few key ones are listed below:

- academics save time and reduce their workload
- academics are able to assess hard-to-measure outcomes such as group working and leadership
- students have an opportunity to reflect upon the group work process
- students develop a better understanding of the assessment process and criteria
- it can have a positive influence on student behaviour
- complaints about the assessment process being unfair are reduced.

There are also a number of benefits to the department and, ultimately, the institution:

- the potential to improve results relating to feedback on national student surveys
- evidence shows that the majority of students are happy to use the WebPA tool and perceive the grades received as fair
- records of assessment are stored centrally rather than on disparate PCs/systems
- the use of WebPA can contribute positively towards quality assurance procedures
- WebPA can be used to support a variety of assessment processes, summatively or formatively
- WebPA can be offered across the entire institution and can influence assessment practice and policy.

### How can I support the adoption of WebPA by my department/institution?

Senior management support is always important when implementing a new

teaching tool within a department or institution. Introduction of WebPA will require input from various staff including academics, educationalists or learning technologists and IT support. It may also require funding if a new server needs to be bought or the time of IT staff has to be paid for. Support from senior managers can help the implementation phase go more quickly and smoothly.

### How long will it take to implement WebPA?

The time frame for the adoption of the WebPA tool will be dependent on a number of factors including availability of staff to support the tool and the point in the year that the academic tutor wants to use the tool.

It is advisable that anything up to a six month lead time needs to be considered, particularly if the work and support is being provided in addition to staff members' existing roles. Following evaluation of a successful pilot, the roll out of the tool across a department or institution will be very dependent on its support at an institutional level and its championing at an academic level.

### Where can I find further information?

For further information, including case studies of effective implementation, please refer to the WebPA resource pack, available at

<http://www.webpa.ac.uk>