Group work as Assessments: Perspectives from UK Educators

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Students' quotes

- *"The project enabled me to learn how to effectively work in a team, where all members have different schedules and commitments. I was also able to learn new, more effective ways of approaching tasks / problems."*

- *". . . I worked with three other people who were all really engaged and I saw the value in group work."*

- *"Free riding throughout this project was a lot. Members of my group did not communicate and produced low standard work for their sections . . . I spent majority of the days until submission rewriting 90% of the content and formatting in order to have a decent assignment to submit."*

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Why group work?

Advantages:

- Enhances cooperation and/or collaboration [Herrmann, 2013]
- Inculcates transferable skills of communication and negotiation (employability skills) [Hammar Chiriac, 2014]
- Promotes problem-based learning [Biggs et al., 2022]

Challenges:

- Issues of free riding and social loafing [Vita, 2001; Mellor, 2012; Tosuntaş, 2020]
- Pandemic and distance learning [Wildman et al., 2021]
- Type of tasks [Davies, 2009]

Group work as assessment?

- Useful assessment tool [Race, 2001]

- Extrinsic motivation [Watkins, 2004]

  → *"Have it part of the final grade assessment. Like a project work component so everyone will have the incentive to contribute. Having it in the exam (summer) is not sufficient to incentivise some to contribute."* (student's comment) [Jenkins and Chaudhury, 2015]

- AI and alternative methods of assessment

  → *"... limit [ChatGPT's] effectiveness in supporting group work, discussions, and other collaborative activities that are crucial for a well-rounded educational experience."* [Michel-Villarreal et al., 2023]

Pre vs Post pandemic

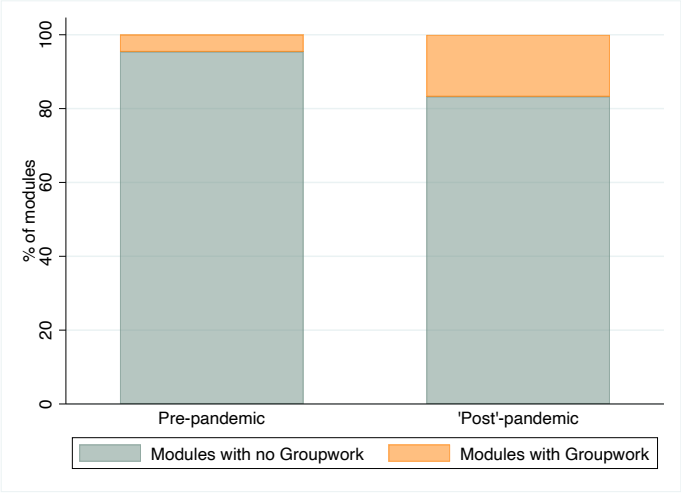


Figure 1: **Proportion of modules with group work pre and post pandemic**

Distribution of group work across modules

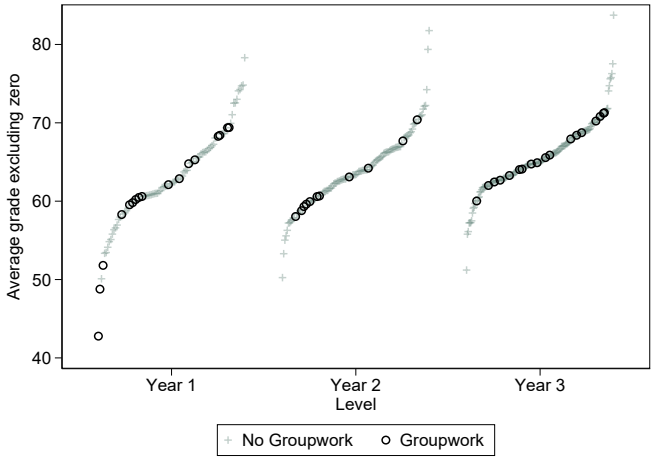


Figure 2: **Modules with and without group work across levels of study**

Grades

Instructors' perspectives

Are economics academics willing to implement group work assessments; in what extend and type of courses?

- Why may instructors not be willing to implement group work?
  - lack of information
  - workload: time investment
  - experience
  - class size
  - . . .

Survey Design

- Anonymous survey aimed to understand the use of group work as summative assessment in undergraduate economics courses
- 145 Respondents: UK based academics (including PhD students)
- Incentives to participate: random draw of 20 respondents each of whom received a £50 amazon voucher (funded by WIHEA, University of Warwick and University of Bristol)
- The survey is pre-registered and was ran in Qualtrics.

Survey design

- Hypothetical scenario: teaching in two different large UG courses; one quantitative and one mixed ▸ Scenario
- Participants were randomly allocated into three groups seeing the same questions, but for different levels of study (first, second, third year courses)
- Between comparison: level of study, within comparison: type of course
- Main questions on willingness to implement group work as summative assessment and if yes, what percentage of the total assessment
- Salience of benefits of group work ▸ More
- Questions on the ideal group size, the allocation between oral and written group work, peer assessment, attitudes towards group work, workload perceptions, student skills, and personal characteristics

Details on data

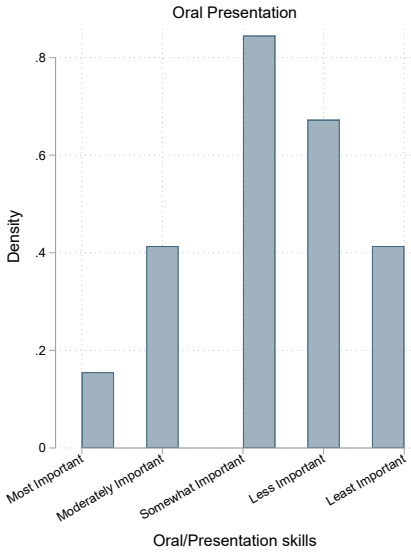
- 290 observations: each instructor answered for two courses
- Research focused versus teaching focused (69 vs. 66 participants)
- 77 males, 59 females Details
- Majority of respondents teaches large and small group classes, primarily mixed and quantitative courses Details

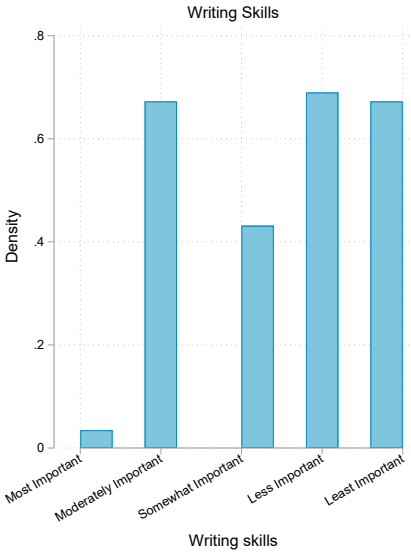
Introduction of group work

Descriptive More

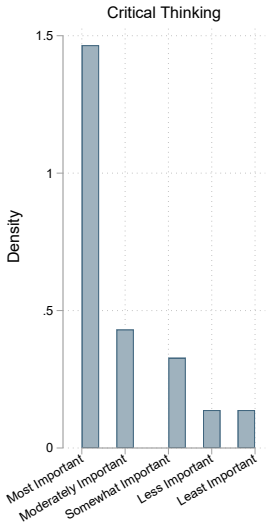
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Level of study (base: Year 1)					
Year 2	0.18**	0.18**	-0.05	-0.06	-0.08
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Year 3	-0.09	-0.09	-0.08	-0.07	-0.08
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Quantitative module		−0.30***	−0.44***	−0.44***	−0.44***
		(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Year 2 × Quantitative module			0.46***	0.46***	0.46***
			(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
Year 3 × Quantitative module			-0.03	-0.03	-0.02
			(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Female				0.06	0.07
				(0.06)	(0.06)
Specific module experience					0.05
					(0.06)
Workload increase perception					-0.01
					(0.07)
Career track (base: E&R)					
E&S					0.07
					(0.06)
No distinction					-0.04
					(0.12)
Experience (base: up to 3 years)					
3-7 years					-0.06
					(0.12)
7 years & above					-0.18
					(0.11)
Weekly teaching hours (base: up to 3 hours)					
3-5 hours					−0.24***
					(0.09)
6-8 hours					0.09
					(0.09)
Above 8 hours					−0.17*
					(0.10)
α	0.52***	0.67***	0.74***	0.71***	0.90***
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.12)
Observations	290	290	290	290	290
R-squared	0.05	0.14	0.19	0.19	0.29
Adjusted R-squared	0.04	0.13	0.18	0.18	0.25

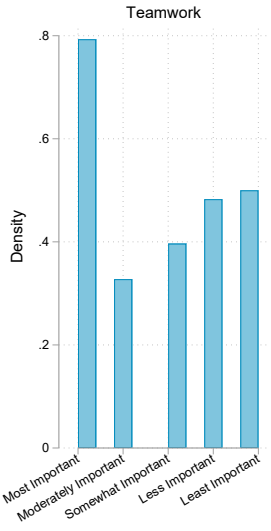
Oral and Written Skills

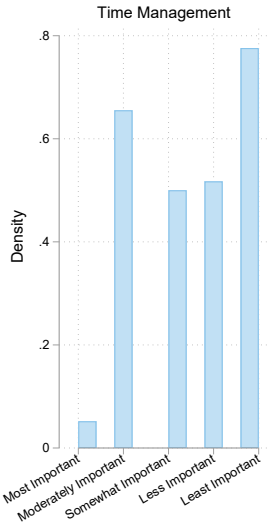




Other Skills







Do skills affect introduction of group work?

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Quantitative module	−0.22***	−0.33***	−0.39***	−0.25***	−0.31***
	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Female	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Specific module experience	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.05	0.06
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Workload increase perception	0.00	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
E&S	0.03	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.05
	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
No distinction	-0.07	-0.02	-0.06	-0.04	-0.07
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.13)
Experience (base: up to 3 years)					
3-7 years	-0.04	-0.05	-0.05	-0.06	-0.05
	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)
7 years & above	-0.17	-0.17	-0.18	-0.18	-0.17
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Weekly teaching hours (base: up to 3 hours)					
3-5 hours	−0.23***	−0.24***	−0.24***	−0.25***	−0.24***
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)
6-8 hours	0.08	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.08
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Above 8 hours	−0.17*	−0.17*	−0.18*	−0.17*	−0.18*
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Team Skill: High	0.27***				
	(0.07)				
Team Skill: High × Quantitative module	−0.16*				
	(0.09)				
Time Skill: High		-0.14			
		(0.09)			
Time Skill: High × Quantitative module		0.15			
		(0.10)			
Critical Skill: High			-0.11		
			(0.09)		
Critical Skill: High × Quantitative module			0.13		
			(0.10)		
Oral Skill: High				0.06	
				(0.09)	
Oral Skill: High × Quantitative module				-0.17	
				(0.11)	
Writing Skill: High					-0.13
					(0.10)
Writing Skill: High × Quantitative module					0.08
					(0.11)
α	0.70***	0.85***	0.91***	0.81***	0.86***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Observations	290	290	290	290	290
R-squared	0.28	0.25	0.24	0.25	0.25
Adjusted R-squared	0.24	0.21	0.20	0.20	0.21

Percentage of group work

Regression

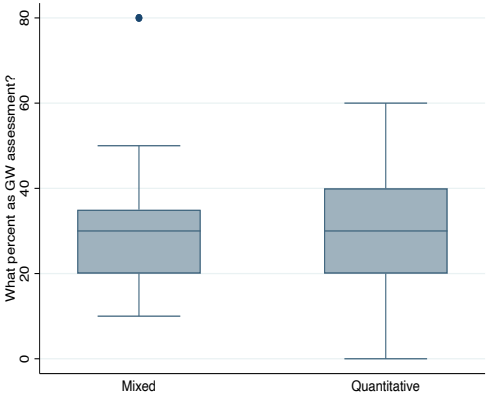


Figure 3: Across types of courses

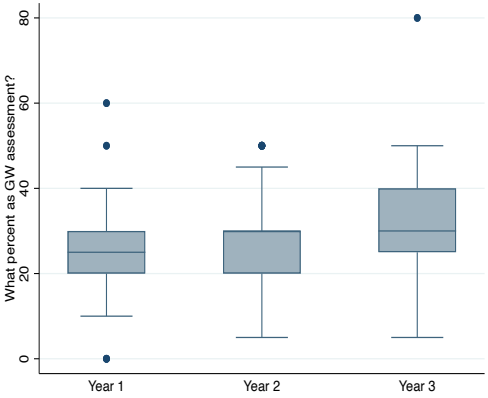


Figure 4: Across years of study

Oral or written?

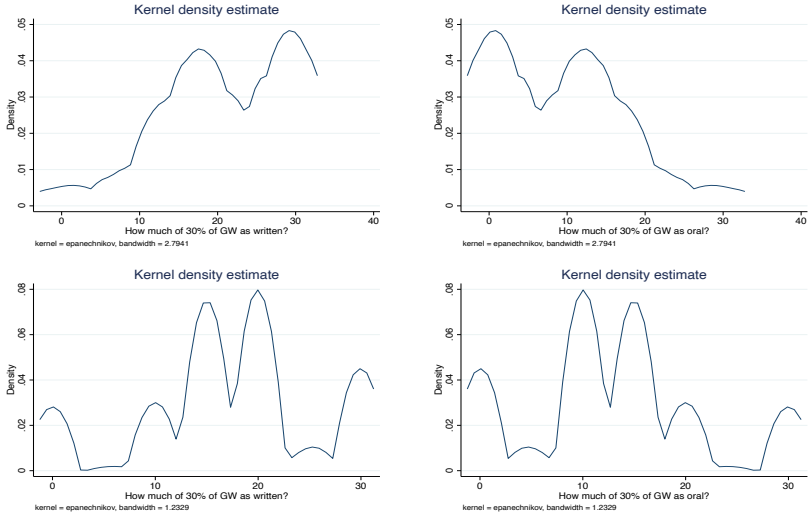


Figure 5: Quantitative (upper panels) and Mixed modules (lower panels): percentage of written and oral components

Benefits of group work

- *“Introduces **collective responsibility, collaboration, working with unknown people**.”*
- *“To help students develop **teamwork skills** and **diversify** their **assessment** experience.”*
- *”**Efficiency** gains. If group work **minimises my marking time** per student, while delivering what it is supposed to deliver, then I would be in it.*

More

Benefits of group work contd.

Skills & Employability	Team work
Presentation	Peer learning
Creativity	Collaboration
Critical thinking	Peer exchanging
Communication, Leadership	Work together/Coordinate
Time management	Learning from each other
Technical, Interpersonal, Writing	Collective responsibility, Cohesion, Diversity
Assessment	**Student Experience**
In-depth	Student-centred
Complex issues/Research	Deep-learning
Challenging	Learning experience
Authenticity	Active learning
Complementarity to individual assessments	Sense of belonging, common ground
	Engagement, fun (maybe not in Maths)

Concerns about group work

- *"Unless designed carefully, group assignments may lead to **large-scale collusion**. Another concern is **unequal contribution** of group members."*
- *"**Workload** for administration and **free riding**."*
- *"Some students really **dislike** it and having part of their mark depending on the effort (or lack thereof) of students. Some students also have **social anxiety** issues. Potential for one student who cares the most doing most of the work... "*

More

Concerns regarding group work contd.

Instructor experience	Student experience
Fairness & Accountability	Free-riding
Complaints	Group conflicts
Workload (time, admin)	Student frustration
ILOs (less creativity, less cohesion)	Incentives
Assessment (limited re-assessment, allocation issues)	Reliance on others
Misconduct, AI	Feedback issues
Marking criteria, Masking low ability	

Summary

- Attempt to systematically explore and provide evidence on (Economics) instructors' perspectives about group work
- Propensity to introduce group work is lower in quantitative courses contrary to the ones combining economic reasoning with mathematical skills.
- Need to have course-type specific structured guidance for group work assessments to enhance student employability skills, and help deliver course learning outcomes
- Sample likely (definitely?) includes selected educators, who are interested and enthusiastic about teaching.

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Gender and track of survey respondents

	Track							
Gender	**E & R**		**E & S**		**Does not exist**		**Total**	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Female	25	36.2	30	45.5	4	40.0	59	40.7
Male	42	60.9	32	48.5	3	30.0	77	53.1
Non-binary	0	0.0	1	1.5	0	0.0	1	0.7
Prefer not to say	2	2.9	3	4.5	3	30.0	8	5.5
Total	69	100.0	66	100.0	10	100.0	145	100.0

Table 1: **Respondents across gender and track**

Back

Type of courses and classes of survey respondents

	Type of classes							
Type of courses	**Both**		**Lectures**		**Seminars**		**Total**	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Discursive	6	5.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	4.1
Mixed	64	58.2	14	73.7	8	50.0	86	59.3
Quantitative	33	30.0	5	26.3	7	43.8	45	31.0
Other	7	6.4	0	0.0	1	6.2	8	5.5
Total	110	100.0	19	100.0	16	100.0	145	100.0

Table 2: **Respondents according to the type of courses and teaching responsibilities**

Experience and hours of work of survey respondents

Hours	How many years of teaching experience do you have?							
	3-7 years		7 years and above		Less than 3 years		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Less than 3 hours	8	18.2	19	21.6	4	30.8	31	21.4
3-5 hours	14	31.8	28	31.8	6	46.2	48	33.1
6-8 hours	10	22.7	19	21.6	2	15.4	31	21.4
Above 8 hours	12	27.3	22	25.0	1	7.7	35	24.1
Total	44	100.0	88	100.0	13	100.0	145	100.0

Table 3: **Respondents according to experience and hours of work**

Back

Scenario

Suppose you are teaching two large first year undergraduate modules (one in each term with approximately 150 students in each): Introductory Economics and Mathematics for Economists.

The University is encouraging the use of group work as part of summative assessments starting next academic year. Currently, there are no definitive guidelines on the amount or structure of group work. You are solely responsible for deciding the module assessment structure.

Back

Salience

”Groupwork is [...] claimed to be an authentic form of assessment in terms of a student’s later employability, as working in groups is an essential part of an individual’s career, and recruiters often ask students about their experience working in group settings.”

(Davies, W. M., 2009. Groupwork as a form of assessment: Common problems and recommended solutions. Higher Education, 58, 563-584.) Back

No module grouping

Back

	(1)	(2)
Types of courses (base: Econometrics (UG2))		
Advanced Maths (UG3)	−0.52***	−0.53***
	(0.09)	(0.09)
Advanced topic in Micro/Macro (UG3)	-0.05	-0.06
	(0.10)	(0.10)
Intermediate Micro/Macro (UG2)	-0.02	-0.06
	(0.08)	(0.08)
Economics (UG1)	0.03	0.01
	(0.09)	(0.09)
Maths for Economics (UG1)	−0.41***	−0.42***
	(0.09)	(0.09)
Female		0.08
		(0.06)
Specific module experience		0.08
		(0.06)
Workload increase perception		-0.01
		(0.06)
Career track (base: E&R)		
E&S		0.04
		(0.06)
No distinction		0.01
		(0.11)
Experience (base: up to 3 years)		
3-7 years		0.05
		(0.11)
7 years & above		-0.08
		(0.10)
Weekly teaching hours (base: up to 3 hours)		
3-5 hours		−0.24***
		(0.09)
6-8 hours		0.10
		(0.09)
Above 8 hours		−0.19*
		(0.10)
α	0.71***	0.77***
	(0.07)	(0.13)
Observations	290	272
R-squared	0.19	0.31
Adjusted R-squared	0.18	0.27

Benefits of group work

Back

Concerns about group work

Back

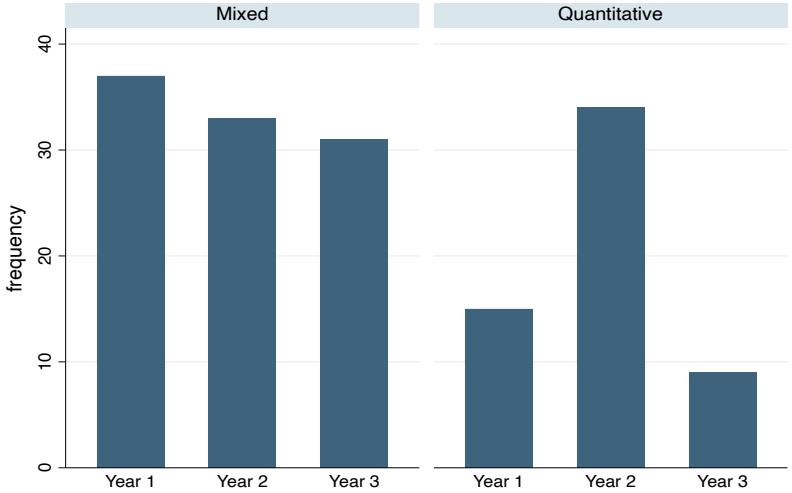
Group work and grades

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Group work	-1.7969*	-1.6238*	-1.6473*
	(0.9273)	(0.8621)	(0.8725)
Year 2		0.5230	0.5327
		(0.8302)	(0.8334)
Year 3		2.4632***	2.5298***
		(0.7763)	(0.7912)
Mixed			-1.0814
			(1.3763)
Quantitative			-0.8205
			(1.5261)
Constant	64.5312***	63.2952***	64.2126***
	(0.3147)	(0.6698)	(1.4406)
Key Variable	Groupwork	Groupwork	Groupwork
Controls	No	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R-squared	0.01	0.05	0.05
Observations	279	279	279

Table 4: **Overall average grades: Module level data**

Back

Introduction of group work



Back

Percentage of group work

Back

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Level of study (base: Year 1)					
Year 2	1.44	1.68	-0.06	0.05	-0.21
	(2.43)	(2.58)	(2.29)	(2.28)	(2.19)
Year 3	5.01	4.94	4.18	4.40	3.90
	(3.09)	(3.07)	(2.94)	(2.93)	(2.77)
Quantitative module		-1.12	-3.91	-4.11	-2.84
		(1.56)	(3.45)	(3.40)	(3.13)
Year 2 × Quantitative module			4.64	4.65	3.22
			(3.77)	(3.77)	(3.47)
Year 3 × Quantitative module			2.60	3.22	2.98
			(5.47)	(5.37)	(4.84)
Female				1.74	2.83
				(2.08)	(1.94)
Specific module experience					-1.04
					(1.87)
Workload increase perception					−7.17***
					(2.34)
Career track (base: E&R)					
E&S					-1.40
					(2.45)
No distinction					13.13**
					(5.23)
					(4.45)
Experience (base: up to 3 years)					
3-7 years					-0.29
					(4.03)
7 years & above					-0.60
					(3.45)
Weekly teaching hours (base: up to 3 hours)					
3-5 hours					-1.18
					(3.31)
6-8 hours					-0.34
					(3.09)
Above 8 hours					-0.20
					(3.51)
α	27.12***	27.44***	28.24***	27.40***	30.38***
	(1.86)	(1.70)	(1.41)	(1.74)	(3.62)
Observations	159	159	159	159	159
R-squared	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.22
Adjusted R-squared	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.14