

Exploring learner progression activity: Guidance notes on using the discussion cards

Audience

This tool is aimed at managers at all levels in provider organisations. As managers, you may also want to encourage teachers* to use the tool, so that they can contribute to discussions within your organisation and inform strategic decisions about critical factors for learner progression.

*We use 'teaching and learning' and 'teacher' as generic terms to include:

- teaching, training and learning
- teachers, tutors, trainers, lecturers and instructors in the further education (FE) system.

Aims

The tool aims to:

- encourage managers and other professionals to engage with key issues around learner progression
- support managers in developing or reviewing their strategy for learner progression as part of their overall quality improvement strategy
- stimulate thinking by encouraging interaction and discussion
- encourage teams to focus on where their organisation is and where it needs to be
- through interaction, develop managers' insights and skills in relation to coaching.

Approach

The tool encourages a coaching approach by providing prompt questions, then asking you to formulate your own more detailed questions. Wherever possible these should be open questions that encourage further exploration before agreeing on actions. When formulating your questions, you are encouraged to identify what is working well in your organisation that you could build on. Further notes on coaching are given below.

How to use the tool

There are two 'ways in' to the tool (see 'Using the cards'). You can focus on cards 1, 2 and 3, that relate to specific aspects, such as how teaching and learning can support learner engagement, persistence and progression. These

cards prompt you to think about each of the components in the context of your subject or curriculum team.

Or you can start from the broader strategic questions presented on cards 4, 5 and 6. These cards prompt you to think about whole-organisational and partnership approaches to support learner progression and you can then drill down to specifics. You can, of course, mix or cover both approaches. For example, one approach might be to work through cards 1, 2 and 3 first, then work through the remaining cards – or a selection of them – using your earlier thinking to inform your responses. You may also decide you want to identify additional strategic issues that are particular to your organisation and devise associated lead questions. There are blank cards available for this in the downloadable version.

Before undertaking the activity consider the different contributions colleagues can make and how you want to involve them. For example, the activity could be carried out by:

- an individual senior manager as far as Step 5 below, at which point they present a set of questions to colleagues for discussion
- a team of managers as far as Step 8
- a mixed team of managers and practitioners as far as Step 8
- teams of managers and practitioners working independently up to Step 5, then drawing their ideas together for Steps 6, 7 and 8.

This is an activity that could be run over time, perhaps in regular sessions or with slightly different groups, focusing on one key issue or specific question on each occasion and building up to a whole picture.

Step 8 involves a review of the process. You may want to consider the following questions.

- How did you find having to ask questions first, rather than going straight to solutions – helpful, challenging, liberating, or frustrating?
- How did the process affect the nature and quality of the outcomes of the activity? Were these different from what you might have expected? In what way?
- What were the advantages and limitations of the approach?
- What (new) skills or insights have you developed?
- Where might you use this approach again?

Using the cards

Step 1 – Place the ‘strategic issue’ cards with their associated ‘lead’ question cards on the table (making sure the darker side of the ‘lead’ question cards is face up).

Step 2 – Look at the ‘strategic issue’ statements. You can choose to focus on the lead questions, which relate specifically to teaching and learning, or open discussion at the broader strategic level, depending on the group. Or you can select your own combination of issues. You do not need to cover all the issues.

Decide an order of priority for looking at the issues you have selected.

Step 3 – Select the three ‘lead’ question cards that relate to the first strategic issue you have prioritised. Put these in order of priority for you.

Step 4 – Take each ‘lead’ question one at a time and think of up to five sub-questions you could ask to help you to ‘unpack’ the ‘lead’ question.

Step 5 – Turn over the relevant ‘lead’ question card and compare your answers with the discussion prompts on the back. The suggested list is only indicative. Revise your list, adding sub-questions if appropriate.

Step 6 – Use the questions you have formulated as a basis for discussion. You may find the case studies and supporting videos from the Supporting learner progression website useful in focusing the discussion.

Step 7 – Agree actions you will take individually and as a team, including timescales.

Step 8 – Review and reflect on the process.

You can find an interactive version of this activity on this website. It provides you with another way to work through this discussion activity either on your own or as a group with colleagues. The interactive version provides a cut down version of the discussion prompts

A coaching approach

Coaching is about helping people to find their own solutions. It depends on asking questions rather than providing answers or proposing solutions. The questions in the card activity mostly begin with How? What? Which? or Who? These types of coaching questions open up the discussion and encourage the

participants to explore solutions.

You may also want to consider how the structure of the questioning illustrates the GROW model of coaching (although the instrument has not been designed specifically to illustrate this model).

G – Goal
R – Reality
O – Options
W – Will

Generally speaking the 'lead' questions are goal-oriented. The discussion prompts allow participants to take a reality check and consider further options. When moving to Step 7 you could explore some more 'options' questions then focus on 'will do' questions that lead to agreed actions.

You can find further information on coaching and the GROW model at <http://www.subjectlearningcoach.net/>

ULN and MIAP

The activity cards mention the [unique learner number](#) (ULN) and [Managing Information Across Partners](#). For up-to-date information on both of these areas, use these embedded links and also refer to the [Focus on Progression](#) booklet.

Five strategic issues – each with three lead questions: an overview

Strategic issue 1: Exploring the idea of progression

- Lead question 1.1: What does the term 'progression' mean to you?
- Lead question 1.2: Why is progression important:
 - a) to individual learners
 - b) to your organisation
 - c) nationally?
- Lead question 1.3: What are the barriers to progression for your learners?

Strategic issue 2: Developing learners and teachers to enhance progression

- Lead question 2.1: How can we use teaching and learning approaches to support learner progression?
- Lead question 2.2: How can we build learner motivation and persistence?
- Lead question 2.3: How can we support and develop inter-professional teams

and individual teachers in order to enhance progression for all learners?

Strategic issue 3: A curriculum that supports progression

- Lead question 3.1: How do we enhance progression opportunities for all learners?
- Lead question 3.2: How do we ensure progression is an integral part of all stages and all aspects of the learner journey?
- Lead question 3.3: How do we develop flexible provision that can enable all learners to progress?

Strategic issue 4: Data to support and evidence progression

- Lead question 4.1: What national developments are there in data collection and analysis to support progression?
- Lead question 4.2: What data and information do we or should we collect relating to progression and how might we improve data collection?
- Lead question 4.3: How can we use the information and data to support and evidence progression?

Strategic issue 5: Partnership approaches to support progression

- Lead question 5.1: Who are our progression partners?
- Lead question 5.2: How can we establish a shared ethos and approach to progression?
- Lead question 5.3: What practical steps can we take with partners to enhance learners' progression opportunities and outcomes?

Strategic issue 6: Strategic action to support learner progression

- Lead question 6.1: What do we need to do next?
- Lead question 6.2: Who needs to be involved?
- Lead question 6.3: What resources do we need?

You and your colleagues may wish to generate other discussion issues and questions for this activity that suit the nature of your own organisation.

Next steps

There are further activities you and your team can explore in the Supporting learner progression resources. Use the thoughts you have developed during this activity to move on to discussions around the learner journey and to completing the Progression check tool. This tool will enable you to use the information from

this activity to identify areas of strength and weakness and to start the development of a whole organisation approach to improving progression for your learners.