

Learners as research partners

Guidance

Purpose

The purpose of the activity is to set up research groups that will explore how to embed the concept of the expert learner at each stage of the learner journey. The suggested strategy for this is time-limited, experimental projects undertaken with learners as research partners.

Intended audience

This activity is designed for teachers*, managers, Subject Learning Coaches, curriculum teams and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) professionals. If you are convening the initial session, you will benefit from having reviewed the whole resource first. The suggestions for attracting attention are particularly important.

*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

Resources needed

- **Characteristics cards**
- **Stages in the learner journey**

These can be downloaded from the **Learner journey** webpage in **Developing the expert learner** <http://excellence.qia.org.uk>

Suggested approach

Participants will form small research groups and invite learners to join. Initially, there may be just one or two groups. As interest and support grows, more will form.

Each group will undertake a project to research and develop ways of fostering the expert learner at one or more stages of the learner journey. Each project will explore a specific research question.

An alternative would be for the institution to adopt a 'whole organisation' approach and for research projects to run in parallel over a defined time period.

Developing the expert learner

Intended outcomes

After an agreed period of time, the research groups will:

- present their findings and ideas to a wider audience
- draw up and implement an action plan
- monitor the impact of the plan.

Guidelines for the project**1. Attracting attention**

Find ways of raising awareness of the concept of the expert learner. For example:

- publicise the **Developing the expert learner** resource box and website <http://excellence.qia.org.uk>
- run a continuing professional development CPD session using **Introducing the expert learner** and **Expert Learner and the learner journey** which can be downloaded from the **Developing the expert learner** website
- introduce the concept at curriculum planning meetings
- enthuse about it in informal conversations
- talk about it with learners at every opportunity.

2. Getting started

Make a specific request to colleagues and learners to join a session to begin forming research groups.

Ensure that everyone in the groups understands the stages in the learner journey. Provide copies of the **Learner journey handout** as a reminder.

Discuss the concept of expert learner in the parts of the learner journey that interest the groups. If some participants are unfamiliar with the concept of the expert learner use **Characteristics cards** which can be downloaded from the **Learner journey** webpage in **Developing the expert learner** website.

Ensure that each group decides on a research topic. This should be very specific so that:

- everyone in the group is clear about what it means
- it can be explored in depth and lead to action
- it can realistically be researched within the time and with the resources available.

Developing the expert learner

Some examples of specific research topics include:

- How can learners' needs find expression in IAGs?
- How can peer support be embedded in teaching and learning?

Agree a time frame.

You may like to consider using the planning tool **SuccessPlanner** to guide the planning process. It gives groups a way of recording:

- the desired outcomes
- success criteria and key event dates
- the skills people will need in order to complete the project
- the resources (for example, structured interview schedules, data collection, questionnaires) needed to implement the plan.

It also provides a framework for reviewing progress.

The tool would be particularly helpful to learners as a way of learning about project planning.

For an illustration of how **SuccessPlanner** can be used, go to the **Planning toolkit** at <http://excellence.qia.org.uk>

3. Doing the research

Encourage groups to meet periodically to:

- share experiences
- review progress
- revise and update their plans where necessary.

4. Disseminate the results

At the end of the project, encourage groups to be imaginative about attracting people's attention and interesting them in the results. Verbal presentations will reach only a limited audience so the dissemination process should include posters, reports in newsletters, features on the virtual learning environment (VLE) and whatever other channels of communication are available.

5. Next steps

The outcomes of the research projects could:

- feed into the institution's learner involvement and personalisation strategies
- be the starting point for a whole organisation approach to developing expert learner characteristics.

Taking part in this activity can form part of your 30 hour (or pro rata) annual continuing professional development (CPD) requirement. For more ideas on how you can plan CPD go to **Supporting your CPD**.