
Developing the expert learner

Learner voice

About the concept

Learner voice initiatives are about:

- listening to learners' concerns, interests and needs
- responding to what learners say by involving them as partners, contributors and agents of change in areas that affect them
- reforming the FE system **with** and not **for** learners.

Such initiatives empower learners by giving them opportunities to exercise the same levels of social responsibility and personal freedom that they have in many other areas of their lives.

In the context of developing the expert learner, learner voice is about moving from a teacher-focused* to a learner-focused model of learning. This means learners having a significant input into defining what, where, when and how they learn.

*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.

Putting it into practice

Ways of implementing the concept of learner voice are many and varied. Some build on existing practice whilst others take a more radical view. Examples include:

- learner representatives in forums at every level of the provider's activities
- classes planning how they would like a scheme of work to be delivered
- learners trained to observe lessons
- prospective members of staff being interviewed by learners.

Whilst there may be some initial doubts on the part of both teachers and learners, experience suggests that:

- most learners behave in a pragmatic and mature manner when they believe that their views are being valued
- teachers are willing to engage with learners' concerns
- there are numerous benefits in the form of a more personalised FE system and enhanced self-esteem and personal development for both teachers and learners.