

## Developing the expert learner: Background summary

Personalisation is a theme that runs through public sector reform. In the further education (FE) system it is about putting all learners, regardless of where they are on their learning journey, at the heart of the service by enabling them to have their say in the design and improvement of the organisations that serve them, and by tailoring education to their individual needs, interests and aptitude.

Personalised learning has the potential to be a powerful driver for achieving the government's key targets and strategies for further education: 14-19 reform; Skills; and a reformed FE system with a strong economic mission. In The Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners: Maintaining the Excellent Progress (2006), the Secretary of State for Education and Skills set out five priorities for the way ahead:

- Closing the gap in educational attainment between those from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers.
- Continuing to raise standards for all across the education system.
- Increasing the proportion of young people staying on in education or training beyond the age of 16.
- Reducing the number of young people on a path to failure in adult life by closing the skills gap at all levels – from basic literacy and numeracy to postgraduate research – to keep pace with the challenge of globalisation.

In many ways, personalisation is already part of the existing fabric and identity of the FE system. This is recognised in The White Paper: Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances (March 2006), but this does not mean there is a universally shared understanding of what personalisation means nor is it the unifying driver that shapes the learner experience. Implementing a unified approach to personalisation throughout the FE system is one of the aims of QIAs' National Improvement Strategy.

We can structure the way we think about personalisation in the FE system under three broad headings:

- Initial advice, information and guidance.
- Excellent teaching and learning and the concept of the expert learner.
- The 'learner voice' – the learner as a partner who helps shape the way that the provider organises learning.

Many teachers\* are excited by the benefits that personalised approaches can bring but a frequent comment or observation is 'we are already doing it' and it is certainly true that there are effective practices to build upon. However there is a firm belief that personalisation, as a single term, brings together the range of disparate practices into a single, unified and powerful approach and that, in combination, these have the potential to become more than a sum of the parts.

\*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.

## **The expert learner**

“Learners should...be supported ....in order to get the most from their programme and to take responsibility for managing their own learning.”  
(White Paper, 2006)

QIA, working with other agencies, is charged in the White Paper with developing the concept of the expert learner. Because the widest range of learners are encompassed in the FE system, it has been particularly interesting and challenging to consider what these characteristics are and how they might be demonstrated by different learners.

The DfES consultation, *Personalising Further Education: Developing a Vision* (2007) summarised the challenges of personalising the learning journey at every stage so that the learner develops:

“the skills to be a protagonist in that journey. This is a second journey, to become an expert learner with the skills to negotiate and challenge all elements of the learning experience, to be an active, motivated partner and not a passive, disengaged recipient. Learners need to understand and be able to fulfil their responsibilities as active participants, and colleges and providers need to enable learners in this more active, involved role.”

In **Developing the expert learner** we focus mainly on the teaching and learning experience, on the concept of the expert learner and the characteristics that may be displayed at various stages of the learning journey.

In addition to these resources QIA is leading or supporting a range of projects to support personalisation of the learner journey. These include:

- the development of the **Toolkit for learner representatives**
- the **Supporting learners to succeed** project
- the **Focus on Progression** booklet
- a practitioner guide
- an organisational guide.

## Background reading

Users of this resource may wish to consider a number of other documents which support the policy background within which this resource has been developed. Subject Learning Coaches (SLCs) may also wish to participate in the discussion threads related to personalisation and the expert learner within QIA's subject learning coach portal.

The White Paper: Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances, March 2006 ([www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm67/6768/6768.pdf](http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm67/6768/6768.pdf))

Quality Improvement Strategy, QIA website  
([www.qia.org.uk/pursuingexcellence/index.html](http://www.qia.org.uk/pursuingexcellence/index.html))

Personalising Further Education: Developing a Vision; DfES, 2006  
([www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/DfES%20Personalisation.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/DfES%20Personalisation.pdf))

Learning and Skills Council (2007) Developing a Learner Involvement Strategy: A handbook for the further education sector,  
([www.lsc.gov.uk/publications/recommended/Developing-a-Learner-Involvement-Strategy--a-handbook-for-the-FE-Sector.htm](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/publications/recommended/Developing-a-Learner-Involvement-Strategy--a-handbook-for-the-FE-Sector.htm))

BECTA (2007), draft discussion paper, Personalising learning: the opportunities offered by technology (<http://feandskills.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=31571>)

Christine Gilbert (Chair) (2006) 2020 Vision: Report of the Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group, DfES.  
(<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-04255-2006>)

Also:

Personalisation Lewisham CD-Rom – an example of one college's implementation of Personalisation. CD-Rom available from Lewisham College Tel: 020 869 43250 or email: [jayne.morgan@lewisham.ac.uk](mailto:jayne.morgan@lewisham.ac.uk)