

The Learning and Skills Council Guide to Engaging with Young People

Putting Learners in the Driving Seat



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FOREWORD

Many of you will know that, as Chair of the Young People's Learning Committee (YPLC), I am personally committed to ensuring that young people's views are properly represented in the development of our policies, programmes and activities.

About a year ago I asked one of the Committee's members, Alex Williams, Director of Community Affairs at Manchester City Football Club, to help me in this task. Alex established a working group to find out about the extent of the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC's) work in consulting with young people and to see what more, if anything, we could do.

Alex's group has concluded through its research, that there is much good work already being done at local level to take the views of young people – this is clear from the case studies featured in this guidance. We have also done some work at national level; I was particularly pleased to ensure that the views and opinions of young people were included in the YPLC's advice to the Council on the 14 to 19 Green Paper. The working group did conclude, however, that there were not yet satisfactory arrangements in place for utilising all the information gathered from across the organisation so that it could genuinely inform national policy making. The Young People's Learning Committee intends to introduce some practical measures to bridge that gap. These are set out later in this guidance document.

All local offices are strongly encouraged to find ways of involving young people in our work and decision taking and more

importantly to tell us about it. Consultation with young people can be done in a myriad of ways and does not have to be undertaken directly by local LSCs and need not be expensive. It may be that you draw on the good work done by providers or it might be work done in partnership with providers and/or other organisations. It is not necessary for consultation to be duplicated but we do need to ensure that we access the views of young people so we can learn from them. Our providers and partners have a valuable role to play in helping us do that so we can say with confidence that learners are at the heart of our strategy.

In re-affirming this commitment to consultation with young people, Alex's group has also developed, working with The National Youth Agency and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, a practical guide that is intended to assist you in effectively engaging with young people. Please continue to promote young people's involvement in the life of the LSC and support us in making their views and opinions matter. I hope that you will find the guide of use; Alex and I commend it to you.



Chris Banks,
Chair YPLC



Alex Williams,
Member YPLC

POLICY INTO ACTION: SOME PRACTICAL STEPS

In supporting the policy of engaging young people in the decision-making process the Young People's Learning Committee (YPLC) has endorsed the actions set out below as a way of putting policy into practice. The YPLC will:

- ask each local LSC, on a termly basis, to provide it with information on what consultations it has planned and for the outcomes of any consultation that has taken place;
- post on the intranet the summary reports of local consultations that are reported to the YPLC, to allow information sharing and promote best practice between local LSCs;
- review and update its guidance on engaging with young people on a regular basis to ensure that the methods of consultation and the case studies are current;
- ask local LSCs to include young learners as partners within the strategic planning process and provide details of consultation arrangements within their plans;

- share with local LSCs, plans for and outcomes from, any national consultations with young people that it undertakes;
- report on how the outcomes of national and local consultations have been taken account of in its recommendations and decision making; and
- meet on a regular basis with those particular national organisations who have a role in representing the interests of young people.

These represent some low cost, practical actions that we can put in place quickly to ensure that the views of young people at local level can be considered at national level to inform policy development.

This work will be carried out on our behalf through the Young People's Division at the national office in Coventry.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is committed to listening to the voice of the learner in shaping its policies. This document provides information and advice about good practice in consulting young people. This summary gives the key issues and processes to consider when planning and conducting a consultation.

- Consider which groups of learners you wish to consult. These might include learners with difficulties and disabilities; black and ethnic minority groups; and other hard to reach groups. Young people who are disengaged from learning, or who don't generally take part in consultations may be difficult to reach: try using creative approaches to engage them.
- There are a wide range of issues to get young people's views on – the quality of teaching and learning; curriculum; staffing; facilities; access; transport; support; advice and guidance.
- A number of methods can be used to consult young people – events, meetings or advisory groups; formal structures, such as committees; focus groups; satisfaction surveys; community based research; local youth councils and forums; parallel structures; and ICT. Consider which method is most appropriate to the local context and the young people you are consulting. There may be resource implications.
- If young people are taking part in meetings, it is important to ensure that they are well briefed beforehand.
- Consider some of the issues that may arise when planning and organising a consultation – ensuring that the location and environment of a consultation is appropriate; recruiting a representative group of young people; keeping learners involved in a consultation process; and securing adequate resources.
- Consider ways of making the consultation relevant and interesting to young people. This will involve creating the right environment and communicating with young people in a way that is direct and straightforward. Good, open communication and the careful management of expectations are vital.
- Following a consultation, it is important to report on the actions taken and any other plans that have been made to listen to learners. Feedback can be through local newsletters, websites and text messaging. It might be worth developing a communication plan.
- It is important that young people's involvement and contribution to any consultation process is recorded and recognised. This might involve financial reward, such as a CD voucher, or accreditation through curriculum framework and assessment schemes.
- If engagement and consultation with young people is going to be long term and effective rather than through one-off initiatives, the principles and structures should be embedded into day-to-day practice.

INTRODUCTION

The Learning and Skills Council is committed to listening to the voice of the learner in shaping its policies, and the programmes and projects it supports. The LSC believes that it can only secure the best standards of learning and skills if providers and partners take account of the needs, aspirations and circumstances of young people and put their interests first. It is a priority for the LSC to engage young people in a continuing dialogue and ask for their views about the nature and quality of provision. It is also important that young people are informed about ways in which the feedback they have given makes a difference to the service they receive. The LSC, therefore, strongly encourages the establishment of arrangements to ensure the active and effective engagement of young people in influencing policy and provision.



CHAPTER 1: WHY THIS GUIDANCE?

Public policy currently puts learners in the driving seat in relation to the provision of learning. This means it is imperative to consult with learners about the nature and quality of provision based on their experience as users of the services we provide.

In his first remit letter to the LSC dated November 2000, the former secretary of state David Blunkett stated that in its partnership working the LSC needed to:

'... develop its mechanisms for taking account of the views of learners and potential learners.' (Paragraph 11)

'... ensure that the range of opportunities for young people reflects feedback from the young people themselves.' (Paragraph 14)



In section 2.12 of the LSC's *Prospectus* (1999), there is a strong emphasis on flexible provision to meet individual and local needs:

'More of the right kind of learning will be available, in ways that meet the needs of local people, on their own terms and in settings with which they are comfortable.'

The purpose of this guidance is to provide information and advice about good practice in consulting with young people aged 14 to 19, the engaged and hard-to-reach groups. It is divided into sections that outline the key issues that the LSC and its partners might consider when consulting and listening to young people. Case studies and sample activities highlight and illustrate how the principles of effective consultation can be transferred into good practice, with clear benefits for policy makers, practitioners and young people alike.

CHAPTER 2: WHY SHOULD YOU CONSULT?

PRINCIPLES

There are **four principal reasons** for involving young people in discussions and decisions concerning the provision of learning and skills and their transitions, for example, from learning to employment:

- Educational – it provides developmental opportunities for the young people concerned.
- Civic – it promotes active citizenship among young people and has the potential to reduce apathy and improve social capital.

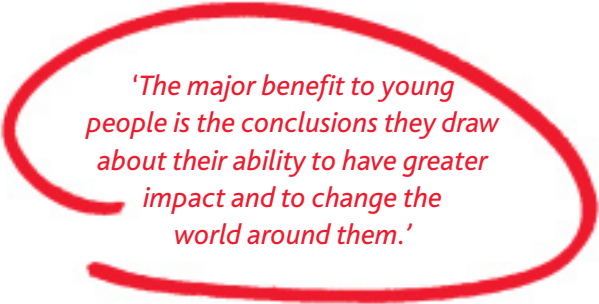
BENEFITS TO PROVIDERS	BENEFITS TO LEARNERS
Better understanding of learners and learning	The opportunity to influence and reap the reward of the outcomes
Improved participation, retention, achievement and quality	Improved motivation and achievement of learning goals
Priorities developed according to needs	Acquiring and developing transferable skills with other learners
Good practice and provision reinforced	Feeling recognised and valued for making a difference

- Business – it is good sense to take an increasingly customer focused approach to services.
- Political – it is current policy to modernise and improve structures by making them more democratic and responsive.

BENEFITS

Consulting young people makes for a 'win-win' situation. Providers of education stand to benefit from consulting young people, as do the young people themselves. In addition, employers and wider society can derive benefits from consulting young people: it can enable employers to gain a better understanding of the education, training and employment needs of their potential workforce; within society young people will have had the opportunity to develop the skills to enable them to play a more active role in their local communities.

In a recent national survey, one local Learning and Skills Council outlined the main benefit of consulting young people:



'The major benefit to young people is the conclusions they draw about their ability to have greater impact and to change the world around them.'

Another highlighted the central importance of learner consultation:

'You can't deliver what the learners need or want unless you are in constant dialogue with them about the services.'

A college respondent to the survey also shared this view:

'Finding out what our learners need is a central part of college development. It enables the college to fulfil its mission, which is to put learners first.'

Young people that have been involved in consultations have also commented on the benefits to both themselves and providers:

'It helps the people asking the questions to understand us better and to hear what we want or need.'

'The people were interested in what we had to say and it was good to be listened to.'

'I had a lot of fun at the same time.'



'We were able to voice our opinions in a safe environment.'

'We want to be heard not just to make a difference but to have a voice and to be taken seriously so that we can make our own choices and decisions.'

'I learned something new because I felt OK about asking the questions I wanted answered.'

'We enjoyed the process of working through issues alongside other young people from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures.'

'It was fantastic that our views were being heard.'

'It was good to meet new people and find out what they thought about things.'

'It will only work if once they have heard our views some things are done about it.'



CHAPTER 3: WHO SHOULD YOU CONSULT?

Methods used to engage and consult young people should be flexibly applied according to variations in age, ability and attitude. For example, a group of 14-year-olds with limited attention span and fresh from a school with no tradition of learner consultation, is unlikely to respond well to adult-led meetings and formal consultative arrangements. However, they are more likely to take up the opportunity to express their views through a chat-room, a web-based notice board or text messaging. By contrast, a group of more mature students, familiar with the workings of a learning provider and accustomed to being asked their views, may be more likely to participate in meetings and contribute to surveys and other conventional opinion research activities.

It is important not to make assumptions about the willingness of learners to take part in processes by virtue of their age and ability alone. At various points in the maturation process some factors have a disproportionately strong influence. For example, young people who are still in the process of forging their own identities are acutely susceptible to peer pressure. They may be reluctant to draw attention to themselves by appearing 'different' through, for example, getting engaged in the policy-making procedures of a college.

Young people have a valuable, practical contribution to make to the work of the governing bodies of colleges and are entitled to be represented on them. Their presence is also important politically and some providers might wish to review their constitutions to consider whether there might be ways of strengthening such arrangements.

Formal structures include those where professional staff have greater control, such as academic boards, and those where learners exert greater influence, such as student unions. Formal structures are not enough to secure active involvement. Informal ways of consulting with learners might be explored, such as use of the intranet, small group discussions, special events and debates on particular issues. A balance of formal and informal approaches could be tried.

Providers should find ways of involving as many learners as possible in decision making. Existing arrangements might be reviewed to ensure that they adequately attend to matters of diversity, equality and inclusiveness. In particular, it is important to consider the specific needs and circumstances of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities when arranging a consultation, as this group of learners are often hard to reach and may require additional support.



Accessible media, such as e-mail and websites can be a good means of engaging them. Large print should be used for those who have a visual impairment. Young people with learning difficulties and disabilities will need longer run in times for getting involved in events because of existing pressures in balancing their courses and their lives. It is important to take account of any specific additional needs they may have when being asked to participate. 'Valuing People: a new strategy for learning disability for the 21st century' a model for including people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities may prove useful and can be downloaded from the Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk



Where young people take their place on formal structures, it is important to check that the ratio of representatives to those being represented is fitting for the size of the organisation and the remit of the representative structure.

It is also worth checking that a broad cross-section of young people are involved in the formal processes of decision-making and in any specific consultation. In doing so, questions that could be considered include:

- How representative are the young people involved in the consultation process?

- Are there equal opportunities for all learners?
- If learners do take part in consultations through committees and working-parties are they there in reasonable numbers; or is their presence only a token? It is good practice to ensure that at least two learners take part in any meeting, so they are not isolated and can give each other mutual support and encouragement.
- What incentives can you offer young people?

It is important to be clear about who should be consulted. Among existing learners there may be particular groups whose views are particularly relevant. For example:

- learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- black and minority ethnic groups;
- those who are vocationally undecided;
- care-leavers;
- offenders; and
- refugees and asylum-seekers.

An important strategy for widening participation is to try to consult with young people not currently engaged in learning provision and programmes. Creative approaches, rather than tried and tested methods may be needed to engage those young people who do not normally take part in consultations. Allies may need to be found to help in the process, such as the Connexions Service, the local authority youth service, and those voluntary and community organisations that tend to be in closer contact with these young people. It is worth considering young people themselves as peer consultants, who would go out into the community to find out the hopes, fears, expectations and worries of hard to reach groups of young people. Young people can be effective intermediaries and can get a better response than adults.

CHAPTER 4: WHAT SHOULD YOU CONSULT ABOUT?

There are several issues concerning the everyday running of a learning provider or service that young people might be encouraged to discuss and express their views on. These include:

- quality of teaching and learning;
- curriculum;
- staffing;
- facilities;
- access;
- transport;
- support, such as childcare provision and finance;
- information, advice and guidance;
- specific policies, programmes or projects; and
- aspirations with regard to work, further and higher education.

Some providers may already have arrangements in place for this to happen on a regular basis. Others may not. It is important to ensure that within a local area a consistent approach is taken to this, otherwise learners could be randomly disadvantaged by choosing

to take up a programme or course at a provider where there is little opportunity to have a say.

In addition there may be specific policies or initiatives being introduced nationally and locally on which the views of young people would be welcomed; for example, the expansion of education maintenance allowances or the incorporation of key skills in vocational training programmes. More locally, there may be a pilot scheme introduced to provide free transport for learners from low-income families to make it easier to access facilities; or to make a particular learning site more safe and secure.

Whether the issues stem from the normal running of provision or derive from a particular initiative, it makes good sense to canvas the views of those who are directly affected. When consulting some groups of young people, particularly those who are hard to reach, it is important to listen carefully to their views and opinions and if necessary to interpret their responses.

CHAPTER 5: HOW SHOULD YOU CONSULT YOUNG PEOPLE?

Having decided and identified which groups of young people to consult, and what to consult them about, it is important to think carefully about how to plan and conduct the consultation. It may be the case that no single method will be sufficient and that different approaches could be tried.

It is important to consider how much control and power to give to the young people throughout the process, and to be honest with them about any set parameters. This might well depend on the purpose of the activity. It could also depend on whether there are 'rules of engagement' which constrain the terms of the consultation or whether the consultation is completely open, starting with a blank sheet of paper, so to speak. The former would not require as great a transfer of control as the latter.

The Northern Ireland Youth Forum has identified a model for participation, comprising a continuum that locates power with adults at one end and with the young people at the other.

- **Led:** the adults have complete authority.
- **Tokenism:** adults set the agenda and take the decisions, but may consult one or two young people.
- **Consultation:** adults decide what they want to ask, and how much control they want to give the young people. They are still seen as the leaders.
- **Representation:** a number of young people express the views of their peers. It is important to consider which issues are not on the agenda, and how effective this approach is in practice.
- **Participation:** joint decision making, where all parties have some control. All responsibilities are shared.
- **Self-managing:** young people have effective control over the decision making.

It is important to consider where along this continuum to locate the voice of young people for the purpose of the particular event or activity in mind.

A MODEL FOR PARTICIPATION					
Led	Tokenism	Consultation	Representation	Participation	Self-managing
Power of the adults			Power of the young people		

REVIEWING PRACTICE

Before embarking on any consultation strategy, it is worth reviewing what is already in place, to identify the existing arrangements, formal and informal, set up to find out what young people think about provision; and to involve them in discussions and decisions. Rather than make any assumptions about the things that young people may or may not want to be consulted about, it is better to ask them.

In setting up the review, it is worth asking the following questions:

- What has been done so far?
- How will learners be engaged in the process?
- Will the review be comprehensive and impartial?
- How will judgments be made about what works and what does not?

When considering the existing structures and procedures it is important to ask:

- Are learners represented on the important policy-making groups and committees, such as the governing body of the provider or advisory groups?
- Is there a students' charter? And if so, what difference does it make to how students feel about the provider and their place in it? How is the charter reviewed and how are the views of particular groups represented?



There are a number of **successful methods** that can be used to directly engage young people:

- Arrange **events, meetings or advisory groups** to find out what young people think about particular issues. An example might be how key skills are best taught and learned ... and make clear how you will use the findings.
- Ensure learners are properly represented on **formal structures, such as committees** ... and make sure meetings are conducted in ways that help them contribute to them.
- Set up **focus groups** to sound out reactions to ideas ... and make sure they are skilfully managed.
- Conduct **satisfaction surveys** of learner opinion using questionnaires, intranet polls, face-to-face interviews or discussions ... and try to ensure a good response rate.
- Carry out **community-based research** ... and find ways of using young people as peer researchers.
- Establish **forums/local youth councils** ... and ensure that they are run by young people for young people. If such bodies already exist, it may be appropriate to make links with them. Organisations such as the local authority youth service, or local voluntary networks may be able to provide you with contact information.
- Set up **parallel structures** to run alongside established decision-making structures to provide advice or to act as a sounding board ... and indicate how you intend to take account of their advice.
- Use **ICT** as an alternative to written and spoken word, because it can be a successful way of engaging young people, through websites, online surveys, discussion groups, e-mail questionnaires, text messaging and video production ... and make sure that the young people have input into the look, style and content of the material.

However, it is important to remember:

- there is no right or wrong method for conducting a consultation. It is important to consider the local context, the issue being considered and which method is most appropriate;
- when you have decided which consultation method to use, promotion and publicity are key aspects in ensuring the effectiveness of the consultation;
- there may be resource implications in ensuring that the consultation works. Recognise that some methods may require more resources than others; and
- it may be particularly useful to make use of existing structures, such as the role of local strategic partnerships.

If young people take part in meetings it is important to make sure that they are well briefed beforehand about important matters that will be coming up. It will not be productive if they come to a meeting poorly prepared and informed. Somebody should be given responsibility for the briefing. Good preparation is necessary if active involvement is to work. This includes training young people in the skills needed for some of the tasks that might be involved, such as appointing staff. Young people cannot be expected to make a valuable contribution to a selection process, without having in advance, sight of the key information.

FORUMS

The purpose of local forums is to share experience, information and ideas, gain confidence from doing so, and perhaps campaign on a wider front to ensure the best service possible is provided. Local offices may need to consider the resource implications of setting up forums, eg travel expenses and attendance allowances.

Local networks are essential to find out what is going on, to give and receive support, to organise, plan and campaign, to be effective. It is important to build on the work done within individual schools, colleges and training agencies; and local LSC area wide forums are one way to do this.

EMERGING ISSUES

The application of the methods identified earlier in this report could result in a set of emerging issues that might usefully be addressed in any attempt to involve learners in decision making.

- **Location:** in order to create the right atmosphere, it is important to ensure that the location and environment are appropriate to the local context and to the young people involved in the consultation.
- **Recruitment:** while it is important to recruit young people who have genuine interest and enthusiasm in getting involved, the canvassing of views should be on-going to ensure those consulted are fully representative.
- **Representation:** it is important to achieve a balanced and appropriate ratio of representation, one learner cannot 'represent' 10,000 others. The ratio should be appropriate for the representative structure being used.
- **Equality and diversity:** it is important to be inclusive and ensure equality of opportunity and diverse representation, including gender, ethnicity and disability.
- **Retention:** difficulties in keeping learners involved are often caused by external pressures, such as lack of time or support, or moving on to different levels and stages of education.
- **Recognition:** it is important that young people receive proper recognition for the contribution that they make.

- **Flexibility:** consultation should take account of and accommodate young people's preferred life styles, which may be very different to those who are undertaking the consultation. For example, meetings scheduled to take place first thing in the morning may not be a good idea.
- **Communication:** formal procedures and the use of technical language and jargon need to be avoided.
- **Feedback:** if young people's engagement in a consultation process is to be sustained, feedback needs to be well planned, timely and comprehensive.
- **Tokenism:** young people want to be treated as partners in the process and not patronised. Recognise any constraints that you might be working under, and let the young people know.
- **Training and support:** this needs to be provided if young people are to gain the most from their experience.
- **Attitudes:** throughout the organisation attitudes may need to change to recognise and value young people's contribution.
- **Resources:** adequate funding must be allocated to any consultation process/model adopted.
- **Time:** all those involved must be aware of the time it takes to establish such procedures effectively. This cannot be overstated.
- **Change:** local offices and providers may need to be willing to introduce changes to their policies and practices based on the feedback from the consultations they conduct.

Cross-organisational issues are likely to prove a particular challenge. As local LSCs do not directly deliver learning to young people, consultation of learners is more commonly undertaken by providers. Of the issues highlighted above, recruitment, communication and recognition are more likely to be tackled through effective planning, briefing of providers, and the timely

provision of clear and concise information. It will be important for local LSCs to ensure that providers share a clear understanding of the purpose, benefits and challenges associated with consulting young people, and have a key role to play in creating local structures for consulting young people about their learning.

Another challenge facing providers, local LSCs and others is **finding the resources** – in particular the **time** – to enable the voice of the learner to be heard and responded to. It is difficult sometimes to enable staff to recognise the value of this policy and invest time and effort in it. Another challenge is finding learners who are prepared to invest their time and commitment in the process, especially when some of them are only with a provider or on a programme for a year or less, or study on a part-time basis. Moreover, young people have many other demands on their time, not least the requirement to study and, in many cases, part-time paid employment. Those undertaking consultation should not necessarily expect young people to get involved only in their own time. It is worth exploring the possibility of negotiating for time off from their timetabled classes to take part.

In a previous study, providers pointed out the importance of explaining to learners why things do not always work out in the ways they want and expect them to, and that other competing views and priorities also have to be considered in discussions and decisions. If learners do not 'get a result' they can easily be disappointed and become disillusioned with the process. However, it is important that those undertaking consultation do not agree to do something if they are not able to do it. Young people understand that power may not be shared equally, but believe that respect should be. Therefore, **good, open communication and the careful management of expectations are vital.**

COORDINATE TO AVOID CONSULTATION OVERLOAD

Quite properly, all providers of services, or those with responsibilities to young people, are being encouraged to consult with them to make sure that what is provided meets their needs, hopes and expectations. The danger is that young people will get consultation fatigue. Investigate existing consultation projects with local partners to identify other local efforts to consult with users of public services. This coordination will help to ensure that learners do not feel bombarded by consultations.

It is also vital to make sure that consultation is timed to ensure that the feedback that emerges can genuinely influence policy or practice. People become highly sceptical when they find that decisions have already been made and the consultation is merely a cosmetic activity that allows the organisation to demonstrate that it has 'consulted'. If people feel they are simply being asked to rubber-stamp a 'fait accompli', they will be reluctant to take part. So it is important to get the consultation in early if the young people are to believe there is any value in getting involved.

MAKE IT RELEVANT

If young people are to contribute effectively they will want the consultation process to be of interest to them. They prefer sessions to be kept fairly short – not longer than a couple of hours – and a range of different techniques to be used, including working in small groups and in pairs. Icebreaker sessions are a useful way of creating a relaxed environment and enabling young people to feel at ease with each other and with the facilitators. It

is also good practice to invite young people to be involved in planning the consultation process; and to comment on how it worked in practice. This helps to improve future consultations.



Appendix 1 provides an example of a programme for a consultation event organised by a local LSC to find out what young people think about their experience of learning in the post-16 sector. Also included is a set of questions designed to stimulate thinking and discussion, some examples of icebreakers that could be used at the start of the session and some questions designed to get feedback from the young people about the process itself.

When facilitating consultation events it is important to define any phrases or initiatives that young people may not be familiar with, such as 'apprenticeships', 'work-based learning' and qualifications and levels such as 'NVQ' and 'level 2'. It is also important to explain the role and function of organisations such as the local Learning and Skills Council. If a consultation method is chosen that is not face to face, such as a postal survey, text messaging or a web-based questionnaire, it would be useful to provide an introduction that explains these issues.

CREATE THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

The location of any consultation event and the atmosphere that is created are crucial if young people are to feel relaxed and able to express their views openly.

Limited funds may be a constraint, but if affordable it is worthwhile considering venues which are 'young-people friendly', such as leisure centres, youth clubs and football grounds. Think about providing lunch at a suitable venue that is likely to appeal to lots of young people, and will provide a welcome break from the usual type of venue used for consultation. The young people that were consulted about the production of this guidance said emphatically that they do not like meeting in offices with 'suits'.

When planning the event it is important to consider the factors that enable young people to feel comfortable, such as the provision of refreshments that will appeal to them; giving time in the programme for them to get to know each other; keeping the sessions interesting and short.



Putting Learners in the Driving Seat

FIND THE RIGHT LANGUAGE

It may sound obvious but in consulting young people it is important to avoid using jargon on the one hand and being patronising on the other. Young people want adults to be straightforward and direct in what you have to say. And whether the communication is written or spoken, finding the right tone of voice is important in convincing young people that their views are genuinely valued.

Local Learning and Skills Councils might consider providing suitable versions of their key policy documents, such as strategic plans, in clear and jargon-free language so that young people can more easily get to grips with them and influence discussions and decisions about them. They might also wish to consider providing documents in different languages and formats.

CHAPTER 6: WHAT SHOULD YOU DO WITH THE FINDINGS?

It is important to report on the actions taken and other plans made to listen to learners. Annual reports and strategic/development plans could be used to explain.

The trouble with clichés is that they are based on fact: actions do speak louder than words. When decisions have to be taken following consultation, learners should be told about them. Feedback should be fair and fast, short and simple. Depending upon the type of consultation method used and the number of young people involved, the feedback may need to be given to individual young people, or to the overall group.

It is good practice to ask young people how they would like to receive feedback. If feedback is given too long after the

consultation people will have forgotten about it or may have lost interest. And if it is no more than rhetoric, learners will become disenchanted and sceptical. Feedback can be communicated at an appropriate time through a range of sources, including local newsletters, websites, text messaging, meetings and through student representatives.

Investing time in developing a **communication plan** is an effective way of deciding how and when to convey the key messages and outcomes of any consultation. It enables responsibility to be allocated for specific tasks and helps to ensure that feedback is comprehensive and well planned.

Any communication plan should comprise the following elements:

- **Audience:** who are you trying to reach?
- **Message:** what are the important things you want to say?
- **Method:** what is the most effective way to get your message across?
- **Timing:** when is it most likely to have the greatest impact?
- **People:** who is to be responsible for implementing this plan?



CHAPTER 7: HOW MIGHT YOU RECOGNISE AND REWARD THOSE WHO TAKE PART?



It is important that young people's involvement and contribution in any consultation process is recorded and recognised, so that they can demonstrate to others what they have achieved and contributed to the learning community.

The least that can be done is to pay travel expenses for the young people who come to meetings and take part in events on behalf of their peers. Ways might be found of enabling those young people with limited funds, or those who do not have bank accounts, to have access to some of these events. They cannot always pay for their own travel expenses up front and then be reimbursed, so payment of expenses in arrears may be a strong disincentive. Local LSCs, with their partners, may consider developing a simple, auditable system for advance payment of expenses, or a cash float. Attendance allowances might also be paid because that gives an important signal that the young people concerned are valued for their

contribution. Staff get paid for attending; why should not learners who are also giving up their time for the greater good?

For some, financial reward may be less important than other forms of recognition. For example, some of the skills used in expressing the voice of young people correspond closely to key skills: communication, working with others, problem solving.

Young people develop important interpersonal, communication and influencing skills through their active involvement. These might be recorded in Progress Files and learners can be given the option of having this learning accredited. For example, there are curriculum framework and assessment schemes such as *Getting Involved and Influential* (GI2) being developed by the NIACE/NYA Young Adult Learners Partnership, or other programmes accredited by local Open College Networks. It is good practice to issue young people with a certificate to recognise the contribution that they make to a process, specifying what they were consulted about and the skills they used.

Young people were consulted about the publication of this Guidance. Each young person was given a £20 Virgin Megastore voucher and a certificate in recognition of their contribution. In November 2001, the London Central Learning and Skills Council consulted a group of young people about various aspects of their education and training. All of the young people were issued with a certificate confirming their attendance and thanking them for their valuable contribution.

CHAPTER 8: HOW DO YOU MAKE ENGAGEMENT SUSTAINABLE?

Consultation is just one part of engagement. If engagement through consultation with young people is going to be long term and effective rather than one-off initiatives, the principles and structures should be embedded into day-to-day practice. In order to achieve sustainable engagement it is important to establish structures that are simple and functional.

Effective consultation takes time, effort and skill. If it is done in haste by staff who have neither the time, commitment nor skills it will be a waste and the whole process will become devalued. Some staff are better at this than others. They may believe in it more and have good communication skills. They may be on the right wavelength for attentive listening. If staff do not have the skills to effectively listen to young people and value their opinions, then it may be worthwhile investing in training programmes so they can develop them. It is also important to ensure that the commitment and resources are available to implement any changes to be made as a result of consultation.

There are further practical steps that can be taken to ensure that young people are genuinely and properly consulted about their learning.

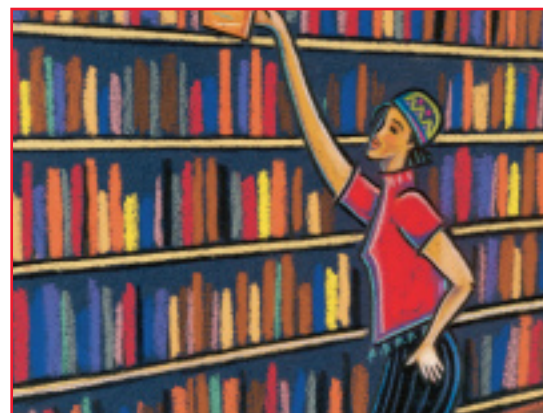
- Use annual reports and development plans to report on progress in consulting with learners. Evidence culled from consultations with learners could contribute to the annual self-assessment report made by providers.
- Find the most effective and efficient approaches to consultation. In doing so, the local LSC and providers are encouraged to collaborate with each other and with other agencies seeking to engage with young people in discussion and decisions on service plans and programmes.
- One option for local Learning and Skills Councils (with local partners) is to facilitate partnership-wide residential training programmes, that bring staff and young people together to explore relevant skills, structures and evidence-based practice – what works and what does not work.
- An innovation fund could be established to support and encourage young people to take part in projects intended to improve their citizenship and influencing skills. A young people's forum might decide on the criteria for allocating the money and those projects to which it should be awarded. In some cases, if action is only linked to short term funding it may be more appropriate to consider alternatives.

APPENDIX 1: RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

You may find the following publications useful:

PUBLICATIONS

- Advisory Centre for Education (1995), *Research into Student Participation in Decision Making*.
- Baker, J. (1996) *The Fourth Partner: Participant or consumer?* Leicester: Youth Work Press, London: DFEE.
- Bentley, T. and Oakley, K. et al. (1999) *The Real Deal*. London: Demos et al.
- British Youth Council (1999) Various copies of *Youth Agenda*. London: BYC.
- Chambers, R. (1997) *Whose Reality Counts?* Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Cohen, J. and Emanuel, J. (1998) *Positive Participation: Consulting and involving young people in health-related work: a planning and resource pack*. London: HEA.
- Connexions Service (2001) *The Active Involvement of Young People in the Connexions Service: Managers' guide and practitioners guide*. DfES Publications.
- Connexions Service (2002) *Good Practice Guide on Involving Young People in the Governance of Connexions as Decision Makers*. DfES Publications.
- Combe, V. (2002) *Up for It: Getting young people involved in local Government*. Leicester: National Youth Agency.
- CYPU (2001) *Learning to Listen: Core principles for the involvement of children and young people*. Crown.



- Dungey, J. (1999) *Spotlight on Best Value*. Community Consultation. LGIU.
- DfEE/York Consulting (2000) *Consultative Forums: Good practice for learning*. Work Press.
- DfEE/Department of Psychology, Queens University Belfast (2000) *A Review of Approaches to Involving Young People in a Public Service*. DfEE.
- Department of Health (2000/01) *Quality Protects Research Briefings*. A series of research briefings to help front line managers and practitioners to base their work with children and families in need on reliable evidence.
- Frost, R. (ed) (2000) *Voices Unheard: Young people at the beginning of the 21st century*. Leicester: Youth Work Press: Carnegie YPI.
- Hart, R. (1992) *Child's Participation: From tokenism to citizenship*. London: UNICEF International Child Development Centre.

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- Johnson, V. et al. *Stepping Forward: Children and young people's participation in the development process*.
- Kitchin, H. (ed) (2000) *Taking Part: Promoting children and young people's participation for safer communities*. London: LGIU.
- NCVY (1999) *NCVYS Position Paper and Youth Participation Strategy*. London: NCVYS.
- National Union of Students (2001) *General Principles of Consultation*.
- National Youth Agency/Local Government Association (2001) *Hear by Right*.
- Oldfield, C. (Spring 2000) 'Mapping Youth Consultation'. In *Youth Action*, no. 69, pp.14–15.
- Save the Children (1997) *Empowering Children and Young People Training Manual*. London: Save the Children.
- Taylor, M. (1999) *Preparing for the Future: Involving users in the running of voluntary organisations*. London: ACENVO.
- Treseder, P. (1996) *Empowering Children and Young People: Promoting involvement in decision making*. London: SCF and Children's Rights Office.
- Willow, C. (1997) *Hear! Hear! Promoting Children's and Young People's Democratic Participation in Local Government*. London: Local Government Information Unit and Children's Rights Office.



ORGANISATIONS

These organisations are experienced in consulting with young people. They may be able to provide further information and resources:

British Youth Council

2 Plough Yard
Shoreditch High Street
London EC2A 3LP
Tel: 020 7422 8640
E-mail: mail@byc.org.uk
Website: www.byc.org.uk

The NIACE/NYA Young Adult Learners Partnership

21 De Montfort Street
Leicester LE1 7GE
Tel: 0116 204 4200
E-mail: Nicola@niace.org.uk
Website: www.niace.org.uk/research/YALP/

The National Youth Agency

17–23 Albion Street
Leicester LE1 6GD
Tel: 0116 285 3700
E-mail: info@nya.org.uk
Website: www.nya.org.uk

NIACE

21 De Montfort Street
Leicester LE1 7GE
Tel: 0116 204 4200
Website: www.niace.org.uk

National Union of Students

Nelson Mandela House
461 Holloway Road
London N7 6LJ
Tel: 020 7272 8900
Website: www.nus.org.uk

School Councils UK

Lawford House
5 Albert Place
Finchley
London N3 1QB
Tel: 020 8349 2459
Website: www.schoolcouncils.org.uk

Carnegie Young People's Initiative

Elizabeth House
39 York Road
London SE1 7NQ
Tel: 020 7401 5460
Website: www.carnegie-youth.org.uk

Save the Children

17 Grove Lane
London SE5 8RD
Tel: 020 7703 5400
Fax: 020 7703 2278
Website: www.savethechildren.org.uk



The Children's Society

Edward Rudolf House
Margery Street
London WC1X 0JL
Tel: 020 7841 4400
Website: www.the-childrens-society.org.uk

National Children's Bureau

8 Wakley Street
London EC1V 7QE
Tel: 020 7843 6000
Fax: 020 7278 9512
Website: www.ncb.org.uk

UK Youth Parliament

Suite 3, Bennetts Business Centre
Pontesbury
Shropshire SY5 0RT
Tel: 01743 792335
Fax: 01743 790652
Website: www.ukyouthparliament.com

Connexions Service National Unit

Department for Education and Skills
Moorfoot
Sheffield S1 4PQ
Tel: 0114 259 1104
Website: www.connexions.gov.uk



APPENDIX 2: CONSULTING YOUNG PEOPLE – CHECKLIST

TASK	COMPLETE	TASK	COMPLETE
Decide which groups of young people you wish to consult: – all learners – engaged or hard to reach groups – specific groups – specific age groups		Consider whether it is appropriate to involve local partners: – Connexions – youth service – voluntary organisations – training providers – colleges	
Decide and be clear about the issues you wish to consult on: – quality of teaching and learning – curriculum – staffing – facilities – access – support – advice and guidance – specific policies		Think about the timing of the consultation process and whether it can be combined with any others.	
Decide who will conduct the consultation, and if any staff training is needed.		If you are holding a consultation event, think about how you will create a relaxed and comfortable environment: – venue – programme – activities – refreshments/lunch	
Think about how much power and control you want to give to young people through the consultation process.		Consider the language you use: check any papers to avoid jargon and be sure to define any unfamiliar concepts.	
Decide which consultation method(s) are most appropriate to use: – events – committees – focus groups – surveys – peer research – youth forums/ councils /MYPs (youth parliament) – ICT		Decide how you will recognise and reward those who take part in the consultation: – accredited schemes – vouchers – certificates	
Consider any challenges and issues that might be encountered and how they could be overcome.		Decide how to feed back the findings of the consultation and any subsequent actions that will be taken.	
Ensure that adequate resources are allocated to the consultation process.		Think about how the consultation can be sustained as part of an ongoing strategy.	

APPENDIX 3: FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is a national organisation responsible for planning and funding all post-16 education and training (except universities) for people over 16. The LSC has 47 local offices throughout England.

An important part of the LSC's work is to ensure that schools, colleges and training providers listen to what their students have to say about their learning; what they want; whether it is good and how it can be improved.

This information is to tell **YOU** how **YOU** can comment on **YOUR** learning:

Why are you being asked for your views?

In order to provide an effective service for you, it is crucial that teachers, trainers and tutors consult with you and get feedback when planning and shaping learning provision. It is also important that you get feedback on exactly what will change and how, based on any comments that you make.

THIS IS A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE YOUR SAY.

But don't just take our word for it. See what other young people have to say ...

'I had a lot of fun at the same time.'

'The people were interested in what we had to say and it was good to be listened to.'

'It helps the people asking the questions to understand us better and to hear what we want or need.'

'We were able to voice our opinions in a safe environment.'

*'We want to be heard
not just to make a difference
but to have a voice and to be taken
seriously so that we can make
our own choices and
decisions.'*

*'It was good to meet new
people and find out what
they thought about things.'*

*'It was fantastic that our
views were being heard.'*



*'I learned something new
because I felt OK about
asking the questions I
wanted answered.'*

*'We enjoyed the
process of working through
issues alongside other young
people from a wide range of
backgrounds and
cultures.'*

*'It will only work if once
they have heard our
views some things are
done about it.'*

So how might this help you?

- You can have your say and get your voice heard.
- You can meet others of the same age and talk about your experiences.
- You can find out what it is like to be involved; you might want to do more or encourage others to get involved.
- You can influence changes that might take place on your programme and improvements in facilities.
- You can develop influencing skills that will help you now and in the future.

**What to do next?**

If you are interested in getting involved in local consultations then talk to your teacher, tutor trainer, youth worker or personal adviser about how you can get involved.

APPENDIX 4: SAMPLE PROGRAMME AND CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Programme

1.00pm	Arrival and lunch
1.30pm	General introduction to the project, what will happen today and who everybody is Icebreakers Think about your current learning What is good about it? What is not so good about it? How could it be improved?
1.45pm	Introduction/background to the LSC and the project
1.55pm	Groups of young people to address the consultations questions
2.30pm	Comfort break
2.40pm	Groups to continue working through questions
3.10pm	Feedback
3.25pm	Final comments, questions and what will happen next

These are the questions that you will be asked to think about

About your experience

- 1 Why have you chosen the course/programme that you are doing?
- 2 What do you think you will gain and how will you benefit from learning?
- 3 What kind of learning do you want to be involved in from age 19 and throughout your life?

About the LSC and learning for young people in general

- 4 How can we help young people to achieve their best in education/learning at age 16?
- 5 What actions should we take to help young people continue to achieve in learning up to age 19?
- 6 What kinds of things would encourage more young people to take up apprenticeships and work-based training?

About consultation with young people

- 7 How should colleges, schools and training providers involve young people in making decisions about the services they provide?
- 8 If the local LSC wanted to set up a forum for young people to discuss learning issues, then how should we go about setting this up? What would attract young people to serve on such a forum? How should young people be chosen? How should we ensure that the group reflects the diversity of young people in the community?

APPENDIX 5: EXAMPLES OF ICEBREAKER EXERCISES

1 NAME AND ADJECTIVE

This game helps participants learn names quickly by association. Gather the group into a circle facing inwards, then tell them that each person will introduce themselves by using their first name preceded by an adjective that starts with the same letter, for instance Jumping Julie or Howling Hanif.

Nominate one person to start off. This person steps into the circle, says their name and steps back. Going clockwise, the next person steps forward, says their name and also the previous name before stepping back. The following person steps forward, says their name and the previous two names, and so on until everyone has stepped into the circle, given their name and all the previous names. This will get harder as the game goes on.

The game can be adapted so that names are accompanied by parts of the body, for example, Michelle Muscle, Anne Artery or Harry Hand.

2 SHARKS

Gather the group into a circle facing inwards. Hand a sheet of newspaper to each person and tell the group to follow your movements carefully so as not to get lost, then rip your sheet of

paper into two, stand on one half, violently screw up the other half and throw it into the middle of the circle.

You now have a lagoon of shark infested water and everybody is living on their own little island. This is an ordered society and everybody must live in alphabetical order, so tell the group where A starts and ask them to rearrange themselves by moving from island to island without falling into the shark infested waters.

The group must devise an effective way of finding out each other's names and moving to their places.

3 GUESS WHO?

Prepare a sheet of five to ten questions and hand out a copy to each member of the group. The questions should include things like, 'what was the first CD you ever bought?' or 'what was the most embarrassing moment in your life?' Individuals have ten minutes to fill in the sheet and should not show it to anyone else. All the sheets are collected by the worker then read out at random and the rest of the group has to guess whose sheet it is by the answers given.

A word of warning. Young people are sometimes a little too honest and it may be worth looking through the sheets first in case any of the stories are too embarrassing to be read out.

APPENDIX 6: THANK YOU LETTER

This needs to be sent to participants as quickly as possible after the consultation

Dear

Thank you for taking part in this consultation exercise. Your views will be fed back to the Learning and Skills Council by the end of April, and they will then be used by the Department for Education and Skills to change and hopefully improve the learning that is available for young people between the ages of 14 to 19.

- Do you have any comments that you would like to make about the way we consulted you?
- Do you think that the information we provided you with and the questions we asked were clear enough and easy to understand?
- What else do you think we could have done in order to help you to get your views across?
- Would you like to make any other comments?

Once again, thank you for taking part. Please find enclosed with this letter a copy of the notes from the consultation and a music voucher in recognition of your contribution.

Please return any comments in the pre-paid envelope provided.

Yours sincerely



APPENDIX 7: PRACTICAL TIPS AND ACTIVITIES

When conducting consultations with groups of young people it is important to allow them to express themselves freely in ways that they are most comfortable. Bearing this in mind, you should avoid being too prescriptive. It is important that you are clear from the beginning what you are consulting them about. Here are some ideas and suggestions that might help:

BE CREATIVE

The use of different **coloured paper and pens** is often effective. Write questions, keywords or statements on flipchart paper and allow the young people to freely discuss or write their comments, concerns or questions. Ink colour could symbolise different comments, for example, questions could be in green, positive comments in blue and negative comments in red.

Some young people may prefer to express their views more dramatically. **Role-play** can be an effective way of allowing them to speak freely and openly. For example, if you are consulting young people about the desired skills and qualities of a tutor or a personal adviser, you could ask one group to devise a role-play dramatising a really good tutor/PA, and the other group to dramatise a really bad PA/tutor. This will allow them and you to identify the essential skills and qualities that matter to young people.

Devising and performing **songs, raps or poetry** may appeal to many young people as interesting and fun ways of expressing their views.

The use of **ICT**, through web pages and **video cameras** can also be effective. Part of a consultation event could involve one group of young people interviewing and video recording the views of other young people. The whole group could then be involved in discussing the interviews and editing the tape to ensure that the key messages are conveyed.

Web pages can be a successful way of recording feedback from young people. This flexible format allows for cartoons and digital photos to enhance interesting fonts, etc. There is also scope for inserting sound and video files. Young people are generally very enthusiastic about this medium, they are happy to write up their own materials and have a finished product that looks exciting.

TIPS FOR HOLDING A RESIDENTIAL EVENT

1 Administrative arrangements

- It is important to arrange parental permission for the young people to participate so that you can act 'in loco parentis'. Ensure that you have emergency contact telephone numbers and medical details. Local authority procedures may vary, it is important to check requirements and other procedures, such as health and safety and child protection.
- Ensure that you notify the youth participation workers and young people that a proper health and safety risk assessment has been carried out.

- Ensure that the accommodation booking and any venue arrangements are confirmed in writing.
- Ensure information about young people's individual needs, such as access and dietary requirements, are received well in advance of the event.
- For a residential event, youth participation workers should be given two months' notice, and young people one months'. For any other consultation event, youth participation workers need one months' notice, and young people two weeks'.
- Ensure that information (including non-negotiable ground rules and guidelines) is sent out at least one week before the event. Ask the young people how and where they want the information to be sent. It is also helpful to send a copy to the relevant adults, such as parents/carers, youth workers, or personal advisers. Any instructions or directions should be clear and easy to follow.

2 Planning

- Allow sufficient time to thoroughly plan and prepare for an event, allow three to six months for a large-scale event. It may be helpful to use a timeline for this to indicate what action needs to be taken and by when. This might provide opportunities for young people to run some of the sessions. It may also allow harder to reach young people to be involved.
- Undertake a risk assessment for the event and the different types of activities.
- Consider establishing any non-negotiable ground rules and advise the young people of them before the event.
- Build in contingency plans regarding the venue, transport, late arrivals or early departures. Where possible provide transport to the venue, or at the least build transport costs into the budget.

- The event might need to be held at a weekend to fit in with young people's study or part-time employment, which often takes place during evenings.
- For optimum group dynamics the number recommended is from 15 to 20 with a maximum of 30 young people. It is also important to consider staff ratios.

3 Venue

- Young people need to be accommodated in a good hotel, or good hostel-type facilities. Ensure that the hotel or hostel is able to provide the appropriate facilities and is happy and willing to accommodate groups of young people.
- The accommodation manager needs to be briefed to serve food young people like. This means more than just burgers and might include pasta, pizza and chips. Drinks at breaks could include cola, water and orange juice, in addition to tea and coffee.
- Ask the hotel to block videos and external phone calls and confirm in writing for rooms allocated.
- An out-of-town hotel not only gives better value accommodation but also gives fewer options for late night revelry. It is impracticable to forbid young people to leave the hotel.
- Some young people prefer to share rooms, particularly young women. It is good to offer young people the choice.
- The working rooms in the hotel should be as informal as possible. This includes the set up of round tables and background music chosen by the young people. A formal layout can work as long as the environment feels comfortable and relaxed. Stick flipcharts on walls (with the hotel's consent).

4 Programme

- It is important to discuss ground rules at the beginning of an event and to be clear about what can be negotiated by the young people. Discuss likely outcomes of not following the ground rules.
- Ensure that icebreakers are included in the programme if the young people do not know each other.
- On the first evening it is a good idea to arrange evening entertainment for the young people together as a way of getting to know each other. This could be ten-pin bowling or another activity that could be arranged by the young people themselves. Book a coach if the venue is far away. Remember that some of the young participants may have had long journeys.
- Provide resources that can enhance young people's creative ideas, eg publisher/music packages on laptops and coloured paper.
- The most serious, concentrated work is best done early on Saturday afternoon. The Sunday morning needs more active, participative sessions. All the sessions should be creative, dynamic and fun.
- The session after lunch on Sunday is useful as a concluding focus for the weekend. Local officials may be invited to attend to hear the young people's views on the agreed topics. It is usually preferable to avoid adults hanging around during the earlier sessions without a role.
- Collect evaluation sheets to gauge young people's views on the event or undertake a verbal evaluation/feedback session. Ensure sufficient time is built into the programme for this.



APPENDIX 8: CONSULTATION EVENT CHECKLIST

	Involve young people? Y/N	Informal suggestions schemes	Canvas opinion surveys	Consultation focus groups	Consultation creative approaches	Consultation use of new technology – website, mobile phone	Membership of decision making bodies
Planning and organising Identification of needs of local young people Investigation of current provision Definition of critical success factors for the service Development of strategy, activities, objectives, plans Development of organisation Definition of quality dimensions and standards Design of specific involvement activity Staff recruitment							
Delivering and doing Facilitation of access and outreach work Information services Advisory/guidance services Tutoring services Mentoring							
Checking Gathering information on performance and impact Measuring achievement against objectives Staff appraisal							
Reviewing and learning Evaluation of performance and outcomes Accounting to various stakeholders Identification of learning points							

APPENDIX 9: CASE STUDIES

The following case studies are intended to highlight examples of existing good practice in consulting young people.

CASE STUDY 1

Berkshire LSC contracted a research consultant to undertake a postal survey of trainees on the WBL (Work Based Learning) programmes. The survey targeted trainees currently in training and leavers during the operational year, both those who had achieved their qualifications and those who were non-completing leavers. The fieldwork was undertaken in March 2002.

The aims of the research were to:

- measure and evaluate levels of satisfaction with the WBLFYP programme overall, and with specific aspects of it;
- explore trainees' views on quality related issues such as key skills; and
- enable analysis of factors which promote retention and completion.

Key findings

- 1 The average satisfaction score was 8.2 (out of 10).
- 2 50 per cent of the trainees ranked their job or work placement as most important to their overall level of satisfaction. Dissatisfaction with the job or work placement was one of the most cited reasons for non-completion rather than training related (54 per cent versus 36 per cent).

- 3 There was a clear relationship between overall satisfaction levels and trainees' reported levels of support from their employers. Where employers were less supportive, trainees were less satisfied with one-to-one tutor time and materials provided.
- 4 Trainees' views at the start of the programme (awareness of programme requirements and confidence that they will successfully complete) were a significant factor in overall levels of satisfaction. Early leavers were more likely to have joined WBL from employment than from education, had lower awareness and confidence levels than completers, and 25 per cent of non-completers were reactive/resistant learners.
- 5 Attitudes to learning and learner motivation influenced levels of satisfaction and were also a factor in non-completion. Enthusiastic learners were significantly more satisfied.
- 6 Only 44 per cent of trainees remained with the same employer once training was completed. 83 per cent were very likely to continue in learning after completing the WBL.
- 7 Non-completers were less satisfied than trainees as a whole on all the measures (listed at 1 above). Those who went to an external training centre rather than learning at the place of work were less likely to leave early.

Actions arising from the research

- 1 The results are being presented to all Work Based Learning Providers with full copies of the report. Discussions are taking place about whether to repeat the research.

- 2 Further analysis is being undertaken to identify the characteristics of trainees most at risk of not completing their qualification. This will be used to profile individual provider's early-leavers statistics against both a sector norm and the Berkshire LSC norm.
- 3 Work with the Berkshire Training Provider Network (BTPN) is taking place to trial a system of analysing learner's motivation, awareness and confidence on entry and on an on-going basis, to see if it can act as an 'early warning system' and reduce non-completion levels. This might also test whether those entering from employment are more at risk of not completing
- 4 It is hoped to develop a system that aggregates the data from provider satisfaction surveys to get a Berkshire LSC result on an ongoing basis

Contact details

Sue Beasley,
Berkshire LSC, Pacific House,
Imperial Way, Reading,
Berkshire RG2 0TF.
Tel: 0845 019 4147



Photo: Picture House Centre for Photography Ltd

CASE STUDY 2

The local Learning and Skills Council and the Connexions Service in Cornwall share targets relating to young people's engagement in learning. The two organisations linked with representatives of providers, for example, 6th forms, FE colleges, work based learning (WBL) providers, employers and the voluntary sector to establish innovative ways of encouraging young people aged 16 to 19 to stay in learning or of re-engaging those who have dropped out.

A review of the literature (both national and local) regarding participation and withdrawal from learning post-16 was carried out and provided some clear reasons why young people choose not to engage in learning and why they might drop out. The review informed the development of some possible 'interventions', the aim being to maximise the number of young people retained in learning. The validity and usefulness of these interventions needed to be tested with the client group. Thus, primary research was carried out with young people to determine:

- whether the 'interventions' suggested might impact on engagement and retention in learning;
- the extent to which these 'interventions' need to be modified to encourage engagement and retention; and
- which other (new) elements need to be considered to influence engagement and retention.

Over 150 young people were invited to take part and only four refused. This excellent response rate demonstrated young people's willingness to express their views and influence their futures.

A group of 18 young people who were disengaged from learning were identified. Consultations were carried out with them at their

homes and each interview lasted for over an hour. This enabled the researcher to gather substantive qualitative information. Albeit small, the sample ensured that there was an adequate balance of age groups, gender, rural/urban residence and employed/unemployed.

The findings from the consultations resulted in ten recommendations and shaped the direction of a pilot project currently being set up in Plymouth. The pilot has brought together six secondary schools, two FE colleges, private training providers and the Plymouth Learning Partnership, with the aim of retaining young people in learning. The pilot is focusing on transition management, that is, the successful progression from compulsory to post compulsory education, which young people identified as being key to engagement and retention. Activities are planned to commence in September/October 2002, they include staff development activities to review and develop practice in relation to engagement and retention issues, and further work with young people.

The pilot will be run over a period of three years and is being pump-primed with funding from the Learning and Skills Council Devon and Cornwall. The evaluation for the pilot will consider not only the intended improved engagement and retention rates but also the perceptions of young people themselves.

Contact details

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Wilson Way Pool,
Cornwall TR15 3RS.
Tel: 01209 313753.

CASE STUDY 3

Engaging Young People in Connexions – DfES

Connexions, as the gateway and guidance service for 13 to 19-year-olds, has engaged young people in its development from the outset. For example:

- In late 1999 there was national consultation of a total of 600 young people aged between 12 and 22 in small groups all over England.
- During 2000 the Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU) consulted around 60 young people on the quality standards for the Connexions Service.
- Around 50 young people from black and minority ethnic groups have been consulted on the quality standards.
- During spring 2000 The National Youth Agency ran events for DfEE staff on how to involve young people in the process of developing Connexions Service policy.
- During autumn 2000 the Connexions Service National Unit sponsored 4 training events for over 200 staff from Connexions partnerships on how to involve young people in the Connexions Service.
- In January 2001, the British Youth Council was commissioned to collect young people's opinions on the business plans drafted by the first round of Connexions Partnerships. Of the 13 plans, four were rejected on the basis that the partnerships

did not truly involve young people in the design and delivery of the service.

The CSNU actively used the feedback from young people to change policy in key areas such as the personal qualities of personal advisers, the range of support services which young people needed to access, choice of personal advisers and the importance of continuing to build in the views of young people as Connexions continues.

In the Cornwall and Devon Pilot young people were involved in discussions in the Plymouth and Torbay local management committee/partnership meetings about the local pilot projects, and future planning to ensure that the Connexions Service met local needs. Young people have been involved in shaping the role of personal advisers and in the process of selecting them. A youth pocket handbook *Sorted*, which covers youth issues has been designed with the help of young people.

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CASE STUDY 4

Essex LSC undertook a local telephone survey of 1,400 16 to 18-year-olds in their area in the winter/spring of 2001–02. This was undertaken in parallel with the Post-16 Learning Survey, a survey of 2,800 Essex residents aged 16 and over, and both surveys explored the learning behaviour and patterns of the two cohorts. The issues covered in the 16 to 18 Learning Survey were current and past learning behaviour and achievement, preferred types of provision and mode of delivery, learning plans, barriers to learning, incentives to learning, information advice and guidance, influences upon learning decisions, and a whole range of other issues.

The next stage is to take the results from the survey and identify headline figures/key issues that can be explored further. It is anticipated that detailed learner/potential learner feedback work will heavily involve local partners, particularly local learning partnerships.

Challenges and difficulties

The challenges and difficulties of this work include obtaining reliable and robust data and translating the results of research into action. Some of the implications of the findings are within their control, but not all, and long-term strategies are required to reverse negative attitudes towards learning.

Surveys should only be one tool in a set of tools employed in trying to capture the voice of the learner and potential learner. Each of the different methods has advantages and disadvantages.

Impact of the work

In the short-term the results of the survey has helped the local LSC to re-examine its marketing strategy and that of their partners.

They are currently producing area profiles by pulling together the results of this survey, other surveys and the findings from their analysis of various data sets. It is hoped that this will help local providers to shape their recruitment and marketing strategies and influence their planned provision.

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CASE STUDY 5

Background

In 1995 Slough Borough Council commissioned Freeform Arts Trust to undertake research with 16 to 25-year-olds to support a bid for an SRB grant. Coordinated by the Nai Roshni Partnership, Slough instigated some of the projects that came from the Freeform research, one of which is its flagship – a centre for young people run by young people. Slough Young People's Centre and its participants undertook further research into youth forums and councils, and were integral in its activation.

A full-time research worker was recruited to identify the priority issues – transport, housing, drugs, sexual health and parenting, safety, leisure and arts facilities, as well as support for financial and career choices. Young adults were asked to design programmes of activity that they felt would engage their peers in communicating with others, including agencies, partnerships and employers.

The Youth Forum Project has since developed two programmes of activity for 16-year-olds.

Used Youth Focus Programme (16 to 25)

This consists of single-issue focus groups targeting young adults in hostels, supported and emergency accommodation identified by consultation throughout the year. Representatives working in the field are invited to participate in the focus groups to answer questions and help inform attendees of the realities, practicalities, possibilities and priorities in Slough.

Following the Drugs and Young People focus group, the Used Youth set up a working group consisting of five young adults and DAT

(Drug Action Team) partners to advise, consult, design and deliver services as well as information about services.

See What I'm Sayin'

This was the idea of a youth forum participant who felt that the method of expression could reinforce the message, and engage young people who have difficulty communicating and participating. It is a flexible programme of activity designed to target disadvantaged or disaffected young adults aged 16 to 25. It uses art, photography, graffiti, music, lyrics, creative writing and physical expression to explore feelings, thoughts, wants and needs. It perpetuates the peer-centred ethos of the Youth Forum Project encouraging young adults previously involved to facilitate sessions. It is free to all participants, and resources and expenses are negotiated with facilitators.

Outcomes

- Development of communication and social skills.
- Assisting young people to identify needs and express thoughts.
- Building and increasing confidence.
- Development of presentation and negotiation skills.
- Helps return young adults into formal, regular activity.

All of the Forum project's initiatives owe some success of engaging young people to the supportive environment of a well resourced centre run by young people themselves. It is also this peer centred approach that the Youth Forum Project perpetuates.

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CASE STUDY 6

The West of England LSC, along with its partners, the Bristol Local Education Authority, local schools, colleges and Connexions, is currently preparing a response to a recent local area inspection of 16 to 19 education and training provision within Bristol. The document will focus on plans to improve local provision and it was, therefore, considered important to understand the views of young people in relation to the choices available to them after Year 11. Since changes implemented as a result of the Area Plan are likely to take effect within the next year or two, it would appear that pupils currently in year 10 (ie aged 15) are the ones most likely to benefit.

Consequently, Mindset Research were commissioned to conduct a programme of qualitative research designed to provide a comprehensive picture of the views and expectations of this group of pupils, thereby ensuring that there is a match between what is proposed and what pupils feel they need. The programme also included inputs from Connexions advisers and careers coordinators (within schools). Research was conducted throughout May and early June 2002.

Research objectives

The programme of research addressed the following questions in relation to Year 10 pupils:

- What do they want to do after year 11 and why?
- What do they expect to be able to do after year 11 and why? (Are there any major differences between young people's wants and expectations?)
- What are the key influences on this decision making?
- What are their opinions of the various educational and training

providers available to them and why?

- If they are staying on in education and training, how important is 'ease of travel' to their choice of provider? How would they plan to travel to the provider of their choice?
- How satisfied are they with the information, advice and guidance they have received on post-16 choices?
- If they are planning to leave education and training, what if anything, would encourage them to stay?

Additionally, the views were sought of Connexions advisers and careers coordinators, with the objective of understanding their perceptions of the above through their contact with pupils and with their responsibility for post-16 planning, support, information and advice.

The programme of research was qualitative in nature and consisted of:

- nine representational focus groups of eight to ten Year 10 pupils in schools in Bristol;
- one focus group with Connexions advisers (mix of careers and intensive advisers); and
- one focus group and one in-depth interview with careers coordinators.

The research raised many issues. However, there was agreement regarding the three issues that should be treated as priority:

- 1 The post-16 planning process must begin at an earlier date – some careers teaching can be delivered at a very early stage but structured programmes should begin no later than Year 8.
- 2 Students and possibly parents are currently confused by the range of post-16 options on offer. This is compounded by the lack of an integrated overview of options and routes.

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- 3 Post-16 options must be presented and discussed in a way that engages pupils. Students often admitted that they are unlikely to be proactive in seeking out information for themselves so everything possible must be done to encourage them to make use of the resources available to them.

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CASE STUDY 7

The Central London Connexions Partnership has a Youth Involvement Group (YIG) comprising youth service managers across the seven boroughs of the Partnership (Camden, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Southwark, Wandsworth and Westminster). In summer 2001 they commissioned a researcher to find out what young people wanted the Connexions Service to deliver. This survey included:

- Questionnaires to young people via youth groups and organisations – quantitative research.
- Questionnaires and focus groups – qualitative research by **peer researchers**.
- A video to promote the views of the young people.

The quantitative research focused on the personal adviser role, asking:

- What type of advice and support do young people want from a personal adviser?
- What skills and qualities should personal advisers have?
- How and where would young people want to access them?

Eight peer researchers were recruited. They were all aged 16 to 18, and they represented young people from different ethnic backgrounds. They received a day's training on communication skills, body language, interview and facilitation skills, and the use of video cameras. Other peer researchers from east London that had been involved in similar work advised and supported the group.

Seven focus groups were held with a range of young people in well-known settings in each of the boroughs. The average



attendance at each was 12, and the peer researchers conducted the one-to-one interviews and facilitated the group. The youth coordinator and researcher provided support.

A 15-minute video, featuring the views of young people was produced and featured at a Connexions conference in December 2001. A companion report, *Successful Young People, Successful Communities*, provided further detail.

The benefits for the young people included improved confidence, and skills in interviewing, listening, facilitating, video making. They also learned to be more diplomatic and non-judgmental, and came to a better understanding of Connexions and the youth service.

The Connexions Service was able to raise its profile; find out **directly what young people want and expect** from it; and how the service could be developed and improved.

What were the factors that made for success?

- A flexible approach.
- The commitment of the peer researchers.
- Interviews and focus groups facilitated by young people.
- The experience of the video/research company.
- The training for the peer researchers.
- The youth coordinator was a young person.

Outcomes

One of the most positive outcomes from this process was that young people were involved in the selection panel to appoint a range of staff, including the Partnership's chief executive. In some cases the young people chaired the panel. The peer researchers are also to be involved in drafting a youth charter.

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