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Leading learning and skills

Developing a Learner Involvement Strategy

A handbook for the further education sector

For review

February 2007

Of interest to everyone involved in delivering
LSC-funded provision

◎ For action

Responses are requested by 30 March 2007.

This handbook will be relevant to all providers as
they prepare a learner involvement strategy. It
will be of particular interest to staff who lead on
learner involvement or operate in a student
liaison or similar role, or are newly appointed to
this type of role.

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Foreword by the National Learner Panel

When learners participate in decisions affecting their learning experience, they are likely to play a more active role in the provider's quality improvement processes – a key lever of service improvement.

*Further Education: Raising skills, improving life chance*s (DfES, 2006c)

During the first event held by the National Learner Panel (NLP) in January 2007, its members gave a learner's perspective on the importance of a learner involvement strategy and the issues the NLP might address. That perspective is reproduced below.

The NLP was established by Bill Rammell, Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, in November 2006 to provide the Government with direct access to learners from a wide range of backgrounds, and to ensure that the voice of the learner can influence national policy. The panel members range in age from 17 to 75 and are drawn from further education (FE) colleges, work-based learning (WBL) and personal and community development learning (PCDL).

As the newly established National Learner Panel, we believe passionately in the benefits that learner involvement can bring to many organisations. We are from a broad range of backgrounds and learning environments – some already with well-established mechanisms for learner involvement and others currently without – but we are united in our belief that successful learner involvement can play a key role in helping to drive up quality.

We are therefore hugely supportive of the new requirement for providers to develop their own learner involvement strategy, and we hope that it will help organisations to ensure that their delivery is firmly based on the needs of learners. However, we are wary that it is all too easy for 'learner involvement' to be dismissed as a catchphrase, the latest fad. If it is to work, it has to become an inherent part of a system that feeds back to those who have the power to make a difference, and it needs to have a tangible effect. It needs to become a key driver of every provider's quality improvement system.

Before you read this draft handbook and respond with your comments, we would like to share with you our vision of a provider organisation that has really taken the principles of learner involvement to heart.

It is an organisation in which learner involvement is embedded throughout the organisational culture, learner representation is strong and responsiveness to the needs of the individual has helped to improve provision. Crucially, we would expect to see the following attributes.

- **A dedicated learner liaison officer on the senior management team**, for example a learner involvement co-ordinator, brings credibility to the value of the learner voice. His or her role is linked to quality and curriculum issues, not just pastoral concerns. In smaller organisations, this may not be a full-time post, but having a named person as a focal point for learner involvement activity can nevertheless send out a powerful message.

- **An independent learner committee or student council**, led by the learners and fully supported by dedicated staff, allows us to express our opinions and concerns, and to which the provider is committed to responding.

- **An established mechanism for involving learners in review processes** (or even inspections) exists, which feeds back annually on how our views have helped the organisation to improve.

We certainly support many existing mechanisms for learner representation and involvement, such as student or learner unions, learner surveys and elected student governors. We also agree with the recommendation in the FE White Paper, *Further Education: Raising skills, improving life chances*, that there should be at least two student governors on every governing body, and perhaps, depending on the organisation, learner representation on the board. But sometimes these arrangements don't work as well as they could: learner surveys, for example, will remain credible only if we as learners feel that our input is taken seriously and we can track the impact of our contribution. Similarly, student governors can only do their job properly if they are properly trained and supported.

It's important for us to know that provision is being driven by our needs, and not by the requirements of funding. We need to see the evidence that you understand and are responding to our learning needs. We would like to see one-to-one discussions between learners and teachers or trainers that are non-intimidating, that allow us to define a shared set of expectations and objectives, and represent a genuine learning experience for both parties.

Finally, in addition to the suggestions we've made above, there are some simple things you can do to support learner involvement in principle and in practice. You can ensure that there are clear signposts for how learners can get involved (for example, physical signs as we walk through the door, and visible noticeboards). When we enrol on a course, you can provide us with welcome packs that raise our awareness of the involvement opportunities. You can develop open and honest means of relaying information back to us, for example through a direct address from the principal or chief executive.

All of this would result in better two-way communication, enhanced awareness of the issues that affect us all and a feeling among learners that we are truly part of the organisation.

We are aware that many organisations are already doing some of these things very well, and we acknowledge that different organisations, and the learners they serve, have different needs. We know, for example, that one of the greatest challenges for those in work-based learning is that learners can often feel isolated. This will require the training provider to develop ways that enable the learners to feel part of a wider learning community.

But, whatever type of provider you are, we hope that you will view the introduction of a learner involvement strategy as a positive step. And it might seem obvious, but when you are developing your strategy, we'd suggest that you include your learners in the process and then, once it is in place, ensure that they know how to access it in the future. In the meantime, we urge you to get involved in feeding back your thoughts and comments during this consultation process, using the form at Annex A and the contact details (including email) at paragraph 15. For the benefit of everyone.

The National Learner Panel
February 2007

1 About this Handbook

1 The country's economy and society depend on our education and training system. Colleges and training providers help 6 million learners every year who each deserve an enriching and successful learning experience that gives them the skills and abilities they need to succeed and thrive as individuals, as citizens and at work.

2 The *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2004; DfES, 2006a)) set out five clear priorities for the way ahead. These are:

- closing the gap in educational attainment between those from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers

- at the same time, 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

- closing the skills gap at all levels, from basic literacy and numeracy to postgraduate research, to keep pace with the challenge of globalisation.

3 We can only achieve these aims by reforming the services we deliver to help everyone achieve their goals, whoever they are and wherever they choose to learn. We need to put the needs of the learner and the employer at the centre of service design and delivery.

4 The need to deliver a demand-led system to support the UK in becoming a world leader in skills was highlighted in report of the Leitch Review of Skills, *Prosperity for all in the Global Economy: World class skills* (HM Treasury, 2006).

5 This handbook aims to support providers as they develop their own learner involvement strategies. It includes a framework and questions that will help providers in developing their own mechanisms for engaging with, and responding to, the needs of individuals, alongside examples of approaches that other providers have found helpful.

Who is the handbook for?

6 This handbook is designed for use by all providers delivering provision funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). It aims to address those areas that all providers should consider when developing their learner involvement strategy and to provide a framework that is both practical and sufficiently flexible to accommodate the circumstances of diverse providers. It will be for each provider to determine how it will use this framework in the context of its own circumstances and to develop a learner involvement strategy that is appropriate to the size and the nature of the learning that the provider delivers.

7 The Further Education and Training Bill, which is currently before Parliament, contains a clause that proposes a duty on the governing bodies of FE institutions to have due regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in relation to consulting learners, prospective learners and employers. Governing bodies of FE institutions will want to consider that guidance alongside this document. To keep it simple, governing bodies may wish to include their approach to consulting learners within their overall learner involvement strategy. It will be for each institution to ensure it complies with any statutory duties.

How was the handbook developed?

8 This draft version of the handbook has been developed on the basis of a review of research and discussions with learners and providers, and hearing about good practice across the FE sector. We have drawn on:

- consultation and research conducted during the development of the Framework for Excellence (see http://ffe.lsc.gov.uk/)

- the consultation document *Personalising Further Education: Developing a vision* (DfES, 2006b)

- discussions with managers, staff and learners from across the spectrum of FE provision, that is, in FE colleges, and providers delivering PCDL and WBL

- the expertise of partner organisations such as the National Union of Students, Quality Improvement Agency, Association of Colleges, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education and Centre for Excellence in Leadership.

How is the handbook structured?

9 Section 2 provides an overview of the proposed learner involvement strategy, and addresses the following questions.

- What is a learner involvement strategy, and why is it important to have one?

- What should be included in a learner involvement strategy?

- What format should a learner involvement strategy take?

- How should a learner involvement strategy be developed?

- How should a learner involvement strategy be monitored and refreshed?

10 Sections 3, 4 and 5 address the three key areas that we suggest every learner involvement strategy should cover:

- involving learners individually, and strengthening teaching and learning and responsiveness to individual need

- involving learners collectively, and strengthening learner participation and representation

- developing the organisation, and creating a culture of learner involvement.

11 Each of these sections contains an overview of the relevant area, along with a set of questions to help you to develop a learner involvement strategy.

12 Section 6 sets out how you might measure and report on the impact of your learner involvement strategy. In *Personalising Further Education* (DfES, 2006b), the DfES set out the intention that the personalisation approach should be measured through the *Common Inspection Framework* (Ofsted, 2005) and the Framework for Excellence. As the Framework for Excellence is developed, we will look to ensure that the measurement of your strategy can be closely aligned with your self-assessment against the learner responsiveness strand of the Framework for Excellence.

Responses

13 Responses are welcomed from organisations on all aspects of this draft handbook. As well as inviting responses using the questions in Annex A to this handbook, we will be arranging interviews with providers to support the consultation.

14 If you would like to be interviewed as part of the consultation, please register your interest by emailing Learnerinvolvementstrategy-consult@lsc.gov.uk (please note that it may not be possible to interview all those who express an interest).

15 If you would like to comment, please send comments in writing or by email to:

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16 Please send any responses and comments by 30 March 2007.

17 The final version of the handbook will also be informed by the outcomes of the DfES consultation (DfES, 2006b) and will be available by the end of April 2007.

18 The handbook is intended to support providers in

developing a learner involvement strategy by September 2007, in line with the requirement in the FE White Paper (DfES, 2006c). We intend to include a resource appendix in the final document. If you would like to recommend any resources for inclusion, please include this in your response.

19 The year 2007/08 is the first in which there will be a requirement to create learner involvement strategies, and we will be looking at ways to evaluate the process nationally. This evaluation will help us share good practice and will guide the development of additional resources and materials to support colleges and providers.

20 As part of the personalisation agenda, the DfES and its partners are developing resources to support your efforts to involve learners individually and collectively. These are described in *Personalising Further Education* (DfES, 2006b).

2 About the Learner Involvement Strategy

What is a learner involvement strategy, and why is it important to have one?

Systematic collection of the views of learners is a rich source of valuable feedback, and when acted on effectively it can influence the shape and availability of services to ensure maximum benefit to the learner.

Further Education: Raising skills, improving life chances (DfES, 2006c)

21 Learner involvement is not a new idea. Across the FE system, we have found examples of providers working hard to engineer greater learner involvement in order to meet learners' needs well and deliver excellent provision for them.

22 For learners, the benefits of such involvement are clear: a more responsive, more engaging, higher quality offer that empowers learners in shaping their own experience, and delivers improved outcomes for more learners, especially those who might otherwise not succeed.

23 For providers, the potential benefits include:

- increased participation, retention, progression and achievement

- learners who are more expert and independent, and who can help to shape learning experiences tailored to meet their needs and objectives in a way that achieves success

- better quality of information about the learners' perspective, which can be used to triangulate other sources of data and drive professional and organisational development and quality improvement

- better decisions about resource allocation and investment

- learners who feel more involved and are motivated to put something back into the organisation, for instance by contributing to the development of

policy or by coming back to share their experience of industry with future generations of learners.

24 Learner involvement covers a wide variety of practices that seek to enable, equip and motivate learners to voice their views and actively shape their learning, as the following examples illustrate.

- Learners can be involved in many different kinds of discussions and decisions. For example, this might cover the learning experience, the support they need, the facilities that are available, or the strategy and direction of the organisation to which they belong.

- Learners can be involved individually or collectively, on their own behalf or as representatives, as customers, partners or experts.

- Learner involvement may be initiated by the provider, as when a provider uses a satisfaction survey to gather data, or it may be initiated by the learner, for instance when learners act collectively through a student association or committee, or individually as expert learners to shape their learning experiences and environment.

25 Each of these approaches can be valuable in its own right. However, people across the sector have told us that realising the full value of learner involvement requires a **co-ordinated approach across the organisation** to tackling barriers as perceived and experienced by learners, and unlocking their potential to help drive improvements. Examples of such an approach include:

- an organisation-wide approach to helping staff rise to the challenge of greater learner involvement, including a clear continuing professional development strategy that prioritises the support that staff need to seek and respond effectively to learner views

- putting in place mechanisms to enable student governors or committee members to be successful, drawing on other governors and committee members to provide mentoring and other support

- setting up a successful system of learner representation, in particular working with learners to consider how to help representatives develop their skills and access the support, facilities and resources they need to do their job

- developing a culture where learners are motivated to give constructive feedback, where they see their feedback is taken seriously, and where teachers have the skills to encourage and respond positively to feedback

- fostering an inclusive culture where no individuals or groups of learners are left out and where the principles of equality and diversity inform all learner involvement activity. This may include how to reach out to disadvantaged groups within a community and to those that may be under-represented or less likely to succeed in their learning.

26 Your learner involvement strategy should help you co-ordinate activity to maximise the benefits of learner involvement for your organisation. It will set out the steps you will take to maintain, enhance and build learner involvement in your organisation, including mechanisms you already have in place.

27 The Framework for Excellence will set out a standard and criteria for capturing and responding to learner views that will apply across the FE sector. Over time, we envisage that your learner involvement strategy will set out what you plan to do to achieve excellence.

What should be included in a learner involvement strategy?

28 Your learner involvement strategy should set out the steps you will take to maintain, enhance and build learner involvement in order to improve the effectiveness of your organisation and provision. The learner involvement strategy outline opposite provides a suggested format for your strategy document.

29 If you do not already have a learner involvement strategy in place, you may want to use the outline as a template. If you already have a strategy, you may want to review it against the outline. There may be aspects that you want to incorporate in the format you have developed for your organisation.

Learner involvement strategy outline

1. Baseline review

It will be important to review and evaluate existing learner involvement arrangements and policies with a view to deciding whether you plan to continue and develop these arrangements.

2. Improvement and implementation

The learner involvement strategy should be forward-looking. It may include the steps you will take to **improve** existing learner involvement mechanisms or policies, as well as any plans you may have to **implement** new ones. For instance, a learner involvement strategy might include a plan to review the questions used in a learner survey, or to pilot a course representative scheme.

Sections 3, 4 and 5 of this draft handbook provide questions and examples under each of the areas to help you develop your learner involvement strategy in order to:

- involve learners individually, and strengthen teaching and learning and responsiveness to individual need

- involve learners collectively, and strengthen learner participation and representation to improve services

- develop the organisation, and create a culture of learner involvement.

3. Evaluation and reporting

The learner involvement strategy should set out clearly the ways in which its effectiveness will be **measured and reported** and how learners will be informed of the changes made in the light of their comments. This topic is discussed in more detail in Section 6.

The FE White Paper (DfES, 2006c) sets out the expectation that all colleges and providers will publish and monitor strategies for involving learners.

Throughout this handbook we will highlight, in boxes such as this one, other mechanisms set out in the White Paper that providers are expected to include in their learner involvement strategies.

Taken together, these measures form a basic foundation for learner involvement activity, and are an essential part of your learner involvement strategy.

What format should a learner involvement strategy take?

30 There is no set format for a learner involvement strategy. Each provider will have different requirements. For some small providers, the learner involvement strategy may be a short statement of intent and an overview of current and planned mechanisms for learner involvement. For a large college, it may be valuable to include some detail of the way in which involvement arrangements operate, for example setting out how a student committee is constituted and run. The appropriate level of detail is for the organisation to decide.

31 The outline described at paragraph 29 aims to provide a structure that is easy to use in developing a learner involvement strategy, or as a useful check to ensure you have considered each of the main themes.

How should a learner involvement strategy be developed?

32 We recognise that the diversity of the FE sector is one of its great strengths, and that different providers work in different circumstances with different types and numbers of learners. There is no single correct way to involve learners. The learner involvement strategy is your opportunity to create an approach to learner involvement that reflects the:

- nature and number of your learners
- type(s) of programmes or training you provide
- size and remit of your organisation
- work you have already done to involve learners in your organisation that has proved effective in improving the learner experience and success.

33 At the heart of a successful learner involvement strategy will lie your organisation's current priorities for learner involvement. We recognise that different organisations will have different priorities, depending on their size, their remit, their client group and the maturity of their learner involvement arrangements, as the following examples illustrate.

- A provider focusing on 16–19 provision might want to emphasise **citizenship** in its approach to learner involvement.
- A WBL provider might identify as a priority the need to enable and support **dialogue** between teachers or trainers and learners, and within the learner group.
- A large college might want to focus its efforts on improving **representative structures**, using the FE White Paper (DfES, 2006c) requirements as a starting point.
- An organisation working with vulnerable groups might put at the heart of its strategy the development of **expert learners** through better teaching and learning and **pastoral support**.
- A provider offering many different kinds of course to a diverse learner base, and with a learner involvement strategy already in place, might make **inclusion** its priority.
- A provider with established, successful approaches to involving its current learners might want to explore ways of involving **potential learners**, as well as encouraging **past learners** to contribute (for instance by sharing their industry experience) or involving the local **community**.

34 The following checklist may help identify the areas where your organisation could prioritise its activities to:

- give learners more opportunities to get involved
- help learners develop the skills they need to get involved
- give learners the support and confidence they need to get involved
- motivate learners to get involved
- identify and meet the needs of groups of learners who are currently less involved
- ensure staff and managers have the skills, support and confidence they need to involve learners.

35 We recommend that the discussion about involvement priorities in any organisation should be an inclusive one, involving the senior management team, teaching and support staff and, of course, learners themselves.

How should a learner involvement strategy be monitored and refreshed?

36 A learner involvement strategy should be a living document that is reviewed regularly, probably annually, in the light of an evaluation of its effectiveness and the difference that it makes to the learner experience and success rates. A review should draw on feedback from learners and any good practice. The strategy may be drawn up as part of your main business planning cycle, alongside your business plan and self-assessment report.

37 In the future, we envisage that the process of developing, monitoring and refreshing your learner involvement strategy will be driven primarily by your self-assessment and action-planning against the responsiveness to learners strand of the Framework for Excellence and the *Common Inspection Framework* (Ofsted, 2005).

38 We recommend that you involve learners in monitoring and refreshing your strategy.

39 People from across the sector have stressed that **learner involvement is a journey**. Input given by participants at a workshop held in November 2006 offered the following advice: start small, plan carefully, and make sure that existing learner involvement measures are working successfully before implementing new ones.

3 Strengthening Teaching and Learning and Responsiveness to Individual Need

40 Learner involvement starts with the individual learner's involvement in co-creating their learning experience, which, as *Personalising Further Education* (DfES, 2006b) makes clear, depends on negotiation and dialogue with learners. A learner involvement strategy should address how this dialogue will be fostered and personalisation embedded in teaching and learning.

41 For learners to get involved in a dialogue about their learning, they need to become **experts** in understanding their own learning needs and how they learn and evaluating their learning experience. They will also need to develop the **confidence** to take part in the learning dialogue. Current work that will support your efforts in this exciting area of learner involvement includes the work of the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) on the characteristics of the 'expert learner', which will be an important resource for learner involvement strategies in the future (QIA, 2007).

42 Assessment, in particular initial, diagnostic, formative and summative assessment, will also be an important aspect of supporting learners both to become expert and to reach their potential. Learners should be actively engaged in an effective assessment of their needs at the start of their programme, and in their ongoing assessment and support. They need help with developing the language and understanding of the concepts involved in assessment so that they can easily discuss assessment and learning and really use assessments themselves to improve how well they learn. The QIA is reviewing and evaluating existing assessment resources, tools and literature, and will take this work forward to develop more support materials and good practice on assessment models by April 2008.

How can teaching and learning and responsiveness to individual need be strengthened?

43 We discuss below the following approaches to strengthening teaching and learning and responsiveness to individual need:

- involving learners in assessment
- pastoral and other support for learners
- continuing professional development
- involving learners in quality improvement.

Involving learners in assessment

44 A learner-centred, holistic initial assessment process will involve the learner in a variety of experiences designed to yield information that will guide what they will learn, how they will learn and how they might be supported. Many learners will be involved in a screening process to identify levels of literacy and/or numeracy. The process is likely to include the use of assessment tools, with other tools used to diagnose specific literacy and numeracy skills and needs.

45 Learners who understand how they learn best will be able to take a more active role in managing their learning. Learning styles inventories can be used to identify preferred ways of working; structured feedback on this can give learners the confidence needed to engage in discussion about how they learn, at the same time as helping them recognise the support they will need to learn in a range of different ways. It is important to ensure that teachers

and trainers have the time and skills to help learners to develop an understanding of a range of learning styles, a greater awareness of their own learning preferences, and strategies for applying this understanding in a range of learning contexts. This will be an important part of embedding a personalised approach to teaching and learning.

The FE White Paper includes an expectation that learners should have a proper assessment of their needs at the start of their programme, and that they should be supported in developing a range of effective learning styles in order to get the most from their programme and take responsibility for managing their own learning.

46 Involving learners actively in assessment can give them a deeper understanding of their own preferences and needs, and how these differ from those of others. It is important to explain assessment to learners so that they understand why and how they will be assessed, and have an early opportunity to discuss the outcomes of testing and feedback from assessment activities. This discussion can help to shape and structure their learning programme, the ways in which they may want to learn, and the support they will need in order to be effective in that learning.

47 Learner induction is an important opportunity to begin this dialogue and ongoing opportunities for learners to discuss their assessment can help them take more responsibility for their learning. Conversations about learning can also benefit from an organisation-wide learning model to help learners understand what to expect from their learning experience, and to help them identify what they need and to discuss this with staff.

At **Chichester College**, learners were invited to review a learning model developed by staff. What emerged was a simpler and more learner-friendly model, based on the question 'Has the penny dropped?' The model, which is now in use throughout the college, offers the following questions for learners to review their learning.

- Was the aim of your lesson explained?

- Was it connected to your previous lesson?

- Were the teaching and activities interesting?

- Did the teacher or trainer check that you understood?

- Did the penny drop? – Yes – I know more than when I came into class.

48 As learners grow in expertise and confidence, they will increasingly be able to co-produce their learning experiences as the balance of responsibility between learner and provider shifts. Confident expert learners may also be involved in peer support, which can be a powerful way of cementing new learning skills and passing them on to other learners, as well as providing a satisfying and rewarding experience for the learners themselves.

At a conference run by the **Centre for Excellence in Leadership** (CEL) in January 2007, learners discussed their motivations for getting involved in their organisations, for instance as representatives. For many of those present, the opportunity to help other learners develop the expertise and confidence to get more out of their learning experience was a significant motivation.

Pastoral and other support for learners

49 Approaches to pastoral support can play a critical role in developing the confidence, motivation and independence of learners. Work so far suggests that the three main components of pastoral support are:

- undoing barriers to learning

- boosting learning and achievement

- motivating and spurring ambition and broadening horizons for future steps after completion of the programme.

50 There is a wealth of research on the benefits of good pastoral support: some providers, for example, are developing ways of offering pastoral support that actively engages learners in self-help and peer support. The abilities of excellent teaching staff to provide appropriate tutorial support are central to efforts to build learners' expertise. Appropriate continuing professional development (CPD) may be an important element of your learner involvement strategy.

> For the senior management team at **Lewisham College**, the drive to give learners more control over their learning, and to encourage staff to step back and allow learners to become more independent, is a priority. The college uses the term 'learner development' to convey a sense of the gradual assumption of self-responsibility. The college's information, advice and guidance framework takes this principle beyond the college: GURU ('Guidance Until you no longer Require Us' is a post-exit service that offers advice and guidance on jobsearch, starting work, university life and what to do if things go wrong.
>
> The college has also established a 'duty of contribution', whereby learners who come to the college make a voluntary contribution to help in the day-to-day running of the organisation, for example by taking the role of peer mentor or green officer. Through measures such as these, the college fosters a culture of learner agency, encouraging its learners to take control of and responsibility for their own lives, and promoting an awareness of the consequences of their life choices.

> The FE White Paper includes an expectation that governing bodies will consider how their pastoral arrangements can best reflect the characteristics of their learner body, including faith (for example, through multi-faith chaplaincy arrangements). Pastoral support will be important for learners wherever they study, and other providers will need to consider the mechanisms they can put in place to ensure that they support their learners in a way that reduces drop-out and maximises attainment.

Continuing professional development

51 The responsibility for developing learners' expertise and confidence lies ultimately with the staff who work directly with those learners, and in particular with teaching and support staff. A critical element of efforts to involve learners in initial and ongoing assessment, therefore, is appropriate CPD, and CPD plans will be an important part of any learner involvement strategy.

52 Senior managers, too, should look for opportunities to improve their skills in, and knowledge of, personalising learning and involving learners. The full range of professional development activities has a role to play here, from formal training across the organisation to coaching arrangements or staff networks. There may be valuable opportunities to involve learners in these development activities, for instance, in developing materials for training sessions or participating in delivery.

> Learners at a conference run by the **CEL** in January 2007 identified appropriate professional development as a critical part of an organisation's approach to learner involvement. Teachers and trainers, they argued, would benefit from the opportunity to build their skills in listening to and negotiating with learners. This could be particularly important for people from an industry background, who might have less experience of working with learners. The learners also commented on the need for senior managers to be skilled at engaging and communicating with learners.

At **Pendleton College**, curriculum managers sought and collated learner views on the question 'What makes an outstanding lesson?' Findings are being used as the basis of staff development exercises.

The FE White Paper includes a commitment to introduce by September 2007 a regulatory CPD requirement, applying to FE colleges and supported by a national CPD framework and guidance. This includes an intention to require teaching staff to maintain a portfolio of CPD that shows evidence of, among other things, the use of learner feedback to improve performance.

Involving learners in quality improvement

53 Learners can also play an active role in quality improvement across the organisation. This may be closely linked to the measures you put in place to strengthen learner participation and representation (see Section 4). For instance, if you have a course rep system, these reps are ideally placed to participate in the quality improvement system. Confident expert learners can bring fresh insights to help quality improvement.

54 Of course, learners can be involved not just as sources of feedback, but also as assessors and evaluators. For instance, appropriately trained and supported learners might play a role in observing teaching.

55 Support for staff in understanding and responding to learner feedback can be critical. Successful efforts to boost the confidence of learners can lead, paradoxically, to a short-term increase in what might be initially perceived as negative or unfocused feedback, or even complaints.

At **Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College**, groups of learners contribute to the development of self-assessment reports (SARs) in June through a meeting with a review team comprising the director of the curriculum area, the principal or deputy principal, the director of quality and a college governor.

Learners are invited to corroborate or challenge the strengths or weaknesses identified in a draft SAR prepared by the review team, and actions required are minuted and fed back to the respective curriculum manager, with feedback covering things that are good as well as things that need to be changed. When the SAR is presented in its final form in November, it is expected that minuted actions will have been addressed. The process is very much appreciated by all parties.

Questions to consider when developing a learner involvement strategy

56 Providers may find the following questions useful as prompts for developing a learner involvement strategy that will strengthen teaching and learning and responsiveness to individual need.

- How will you help learners become expert learners?

- How will you help learners develop the confidence to take part in the learning dialogue?

- How will you embed the learner voice in quality improvement mechanisms?

4 Strengthening Learner Participation and Representation

57 This section considers the following approaches to strengthening learner participation and representation, including:

- gathering learners' views directly from learners using mechanisms such as surveys (including satisfaction surveys), focus groups, consultation events and more informal feedback

- involving learner representatives, including course representatives and student governors as well as offering all learners more informal opportunities to get involved

- setting up new structures such as student committees, student parliaments, learner forums, and student unions or associations.

How can you strengthen learner participation and representation?

Gathering learners' views directly from learners

Surveys

58 One common way of collecting learners' views is through surveys. Surveys are an effective way of gathering standardised responses from a large number of people and they can be enriched by seeking individual responses using open questions. Surveys can be paper-based or online, or can be conducted through structured interviews (face-to-face or by telephone). They may be carried out across the whole organisation, or targeted at specific groups of learners; for example, a teacher or trainer who asks learners to complete an evaluation form is conducting a mini-survey.

Providers are encouraged to use the core questions from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS) (LSC, 2005) within their own surveys, and to benchmark their results against the NLSS using the LSC's research tools website (http://researchtools.lsc.gov.uk/KMSResearchTools). As part of the Framework for Excellence, all providers will be required to include in surveys a core set of questions based on the NLSS questions. Further information regarding this requirement for FE will be available in summer 2007.

Focus groups

59 Research shows that learners are growing less tolerant of the closed questions that are typical of surveys. One alternative is the use of focus groups, which make room for more learner-initiated comment, although this to some extent relies on the person facilitating the group having the required skills.

60 Focus groups can also be an effective way of involving learners in innovating (developing new solutions) as well as evaluating (giving views on existing provision). Many providers supplement their surveys with focus groups to probe more deeply the issues that the survey has brought to the surface. The LSC has produced materials on running participatory design workshops, which are an effective way of involving learners in innovation (*Unlocking Learner Motivation: Report on the LSC Learner Engagement Programme* (LSC, 2006)).

As the UK's largest online training provider, **learndirect** recognises that the views of its 2 million learners are crucial for continuous improvement. Focus groups are a critical element of the organisation's learner involvement strategy, alongside a quarterly online learner questionnaire, consultation via the organisation's network of 770 centres, and other mechanisms. Focus groups are designed to allow learners to raise issues and to feed back on the learning experience and, through this process, contribute to the improvement of the service.

Sessions are arranged in accessible locations over lunch periods, with travel expenses paid, to break down potential barriers to attendance. Minutes are reported back in a 'You said this – we did this' format so that the learners involved can see the impact of their voices. Learners at learndirect are also involved in working groups such as the marketing working group, where learners' views have led to a better understanding of the learning experiences of target audiences.

Telephone interviews and online solutions to gathering feedback

61 Where it is difficult to set up focus groups (because learners might be physically distributed across many different locations), telephone interviews can be an effective way of gathering more detailed input. There are also online options which can be highly effective with learners who are comfortable in an online environment – examples include discussion boards, blogs and online consultations. Where online methods are used, it is important to monitor responses and to check that learners who are less e-literate are not being excluded.

ProCo NW Ltd, a work-based learning provider, found that learners were just ticking boxes on their written questionnaires. Now the management information system is used to identify a sample of learners from each department who are interviewed by the quality manager about key processes such as recruitment and initial assessment, induction, individual learning plans and progress reviews, off-the-job training, support and on-the-job training.

The quality manager reviews the learners' files before the interviews in order to highlight areas to ask about, but the interviews are not limited to the prompts used by the quality manager. They provide an open opportunity to discuss any issues the learner wants to raise. A summary of the questions and answers goes to the management team.

Consultation events

62 When more time is available, effectively run consultation events can have a big impact, not just because of the quality of the information generated, but also because they create an opportunity for larger numbers of learners and staff to work alongside each other to exchange views. It can be an opportunity to bring people together and share experiences across sites.

63 In deciding which methods you should use to gather learners' views, it may be useful to ask yourself the following questions.

● How will you use the information you gather? Examples of use include identifying issues for further investigation, generating new ideas, evaluating options and make a choice, or measuring performance or progress.

● What kind of information do you need to gather? Decide whether you need responses from as large a sample as possible or a smaller sample of in-depth insights into learners' views. Are you looking for innovative ideas or the insights of specific groups of learners?

● What practical constraints are there on the methods you choose, and how might you overcome them? You need to consider the time that is available, the facilitation experience and skills of staff conducting the consultation event, any practical arrangements such as venue and cost, and possible barriers presented by learners' lack of confidence or trust.

• How will you involve learners in designing and evaluating methods for gathering their views? Consider involving learners in devising the questionnaires, focus groups or consultation events and any design review arrangements. Input from learner representatives will be useful here.

64 Other feedback that learners give outside these formal planned approaches, for instance through complaints procedures or informal conversations with teaching staff, may also form part of a learner involvement strategy. These approaches can be effective and valuable where issues and complaints are followed up and responded to swiftly so that learners see that their input has resulted in a response or a change.

For **Manchester Adult Education Service** (MAES), a low-tech approach has proved an effective way to engage learners in giving their views. Posters in prominent locations in each of MAES's 14 centres ask for feedback, with the headings 'What do we do well?', 'Where do we need to improve?' and 'What would you be interested in us doing in the future?' Passers-by are provided with Post-it notes and pens to log their ideas, and comments from one person will often trigger responses from others. 'You said – we did' feedback is posted in centres to let people know how the feedback has been used.

65 Whatever approaches you take to gathering learners' views, it is important that you think about how you will include all learners, in particular those who may be especially 'hard to reach' or with particular needs. You may want to run focus groups comprising specific categories of learner, for example Bangladeshi women or looked-after children, to understand their perceptions fully and decide what improvements would help their experience of, and success in, their studies.

66 In designing a survey, it is very important to take steps to ensure that learners can respond. For instance, certain learner groups, such as those with English as a second language (ESOL), may require additional support or adapted questions. The choice between paper, online and telephone surveys should also be based on an understanding of learner preferences. Providing more than one way of responding to a survey is often a good strategy.

At **Dewsbury College**, staff from areas such as ESOL, learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, Entry Level and franchised provision have worked to ensure that the wording of questionnaires reflects the needs of their client groups. A standard questionnaire has been created, which can be further adapted to specific groups where necessary.

Runshaw College was also concerned that some learners might be disadvantaged by the terminology used in its standard survey. Entry Level learners now receive help to fill in the online survey from a facilitator who is used to working with this client group but not directly connected with the individual learner.

One teacher at **Orchard Hall College** developed a 'scrapbook challenge' approach to gathering feedback from adults with profound and multiple learning difficulties. The teacher and learners together review a collection of photos and video footage of activities undertaken by learners over the week. The teacher gauges learners' reactions to judge whether they enjoyed the activity or not.

The Green Paper *Care Matters* (DfES, 2006d) points out that FE colleges and WBL providers offer an excellent route towards education, training and employment to young people in care aged 16 and older, within institutions experienced in offering personalised education packages. The Green Paper includes a requirement for each FE provider to have in place a learner involvement strategy that includes the views of young people in care and care-leavers.

67 An important part of the learner involvement strategy will be the measures that are in place to monitor the inclusivity of arrangements (including less formal mechanisms) and the specific steps taken to ensure that different groups, especially those least likely to succeed, are heard and responded to.

Involving learner representatives

68 Learner representatives can help in gathering learners' views indirectly, and supplementing the information gathered through other means: for instance, a representative may pass on the views of a learner regarding the quality of a particular course.

69 A strong learner involvement strategy will consider how to encourage less confident learners in engaging in learner representation. This may include 'buddying' arrangements for those who would like to get involved but may lack the confidence to take on a course representative role straightaway, or shadowing of existing course representatives for a period before taking up the role themselves. Such approaches can help widen learner representation at all levels.

> At **Peter Symonds College**, a scheduled course review takes place at the end of the autumn term. Learners first identify up to six good or bad things about their course individually, and then work in pairs and fours to identify common issues to take forward. The process concludes with a course meeting attended by subject staff and a learner representative from each class, who is also responsible for reporting to peers on the outcomes of the meeting.

Course representatives

70 Using course representatives can be a useful way for learners to feed issues through to student governors or other learner representatives working with management.

> At **City College Norwich**, all courses elect course representatives, who attend school (curriculum area) councils along with heads of schools and other staff. Course representatives raise issues of concern, including issues about the content and delivery of courses. These meetings are held at least three times a year, and in some cases monthly. Course representatives also attend a twice-termly student parliament that is attended by members of senior management and student union officers.

71 There are different ways of organising course representation depending on the needs of your organisation and learners. A formal system of representatives elected by learners to serve for a period of time may be difficult to implement in a small organisation. Inviting a number of learners selected at random to take part in course review processes can add significant value.

72 Whatever your approach to course representation, it is important to ensure that representatives are equipped with the skills they need to fulfil their role. Research suggests that, without appropriate support, many course representatives find it easier to talk about issues that are not related to teaching and learning such as facilities or transport. Learner representatives may also need practical support in order to fulfil the role, such as access to computer facilities, an email address or support with childcare.

> At **Leicester College**, there is a strong recognition of the need to put resources behind the course representative system. The student liaison officer offers training, support and guidance to course representatives throughout their course representative experience, with training tailored to different groups of learners. There are specific programmes for ESOL learners and learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Course representatives can work for bronze, silver or gold awards, depending upon the degree of involvement they choose to have.
>
> Course representatives provide feedback on improvements to be made, support fellow learners in working with staff to achieve a learning experience personalised to their needs, provide learners' perspectives on cross-college issues and on groups such as the equal opportunities committee, and participate in high-profile meetings and events.

Student governors and learner committee members

73 Student governors and other learner representatives on key committees or groups also have a vital role to play in ensuring that learners are at the heart of the organisation. Like course representatives, student governors need appropriate support to succeed in their role. Student governors in particular may need assistance from the chair and from other governors to play a full part. For instance, preparatory meetings with learner representatives can help them to get clarification on any papers required and to decide in advance where and how they want to contribute.

The FE White Paper includes an expectation that learners will play a key role in institutional governance and states that there should be at least two learners on governing bodies. The CEL has developed training to support learners in leadership roles, and runs an accredited programme for student governors with the NUS and the Association of Colleges (AoC).

With a management team of just two people, **Breaking Through The Barriers** (BTTB) has wrestled with the challenge of finding approaches to learner representation appropriate to a small provider. The organisation's aspiration is to develop a board that will include learner representation. In the meantime, learners from programmes are invited to the Annual General Meeting (AGM) to talk about their experiences and achievements.

Ongoing evaluation of all courses seeks views from learners and contracting organisations' experiences of BTTB services. This less formal representation is highly rewarding for learners, contracting organisations and the directors of BTTB alike, and ensures that learners' voices are heard.

The organisation sees its grass-roots approach to learner involvement, with the aim being to enable learners to focus on the things they care about, as a significant factor in achieving 98 per cent retention rates (including accredited courses).

Other types of representation

74 There are many other ways in which learner representatives can play a part in the life of the organisation over and above formal representation on committees or in processes.

At **Liverpool Community College**, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities volunteer their time to carry out access audits on new college buildings and fittings. In one case, visually impaired learners were asked to advise on colour schemes. Their advice led to the use of a standard colour coding of floors in seven buildings, enabling visually impaired learners to work out which floor they were on more easily.

At **Bromley Adult Education College**, learners with disabilities are invited to act as mystery shoppers to test and give feedback on the equality and diversity policy and procedures.

At **Luton Sixth Form College**, a student ambassador programme through which learners play a role in promoting equality and diversity is one of many elements in the college's student voice policy, which confirms its commitment to involving learners in decision-making and operational management processes. The college is also exploring the feasibility of training learners to evaluate teaching and learning in the classroom.

At **Pendleton College**, learners' views are sought when new teaching staff are being interviewed. Learners review 'micro-lessons' taught by applicants. This has been found to be useful for shortlisting, and learners appreciate the opportunity to comment, even if they are coming to the end of their time at the college and may never be taught by the applicant.

75 In creating a scheme to engage learners as representatives, it may be useful to ask the following questions.

- How formal will the representative role be?

- How will the representative be selected?

- What will motivate learners to become representatives? The motivation may be a sense of achievement and making a contribution, acquiring new skills and experience, remuneration, or just fun.

Formal structures of representation

76 Learner representatives can play a key role in a wide range of existing committees, processes and projects across an organisation. It may also be worth developing new structures to involve learners in your organisation.

Student committees

77 Student committees or similar bodies can play a powerful role in bringing learner and management representatives together to work as a team. It is very important to ensure that bodies such as these are not just 'talking shops', and that they are fully integrated with other decision-making and governance structures in the organisation. It is also important to ensure that these bodies are not limited in their remit to issues such as facilities, and that they address core issues such as quality. Learners should have a role in determining the agenda of student committees and similar bodies.

The FE White Paper includes an expectation that all colleges will set up a student committee, and other providers are expected to have mechanisms for engaging learners collectively.

Herefordshire Group Training Association holds three meetings a year that are attended by elected learner representatives, staff, the LSC contract manager, and representatives of Connexions and employers. Part of the meeting is used to report on feedback from learner surveys and action taken as a result. The process has now reached the stage where few comments are received about problems, since these matters will already have been resolved. The balance has instead tilted towards positive comments about how things can be maintained or further improved.

Arden College currently has 49 residential and 26 day learners aged 16–25, with levels of need ranging from those with autism who may be able to communicate only through pictorial representations to those with Williams syndrome, who may also have emotional and behavioural problems. The college has a student council, which meets every month and for which nominations were invited and members chosen to represent both day and residential learners. Learners help to set the agenda and can raise any issues via this forum. Issues considered include personal relationships, bullying, the facilities and the programmes that learners would like to pursue.

The student liaison committee at **Leicester College** has a membership consisting of several course representatives, seven college governors (including the principal), two student governors and other senior staff. The committee advises the governing body on issues relating to recruitment and enrolment processes, guidance and support, programmes of study, careers guidance, student facilities and the college environment.

Course representatives bring forward a range of issues for discussion following consultation with other course members. All issues raised by course representatives, both positive and negative, are acknowledged and any negative issues raised are fully investigated, with the process overseen personally by the director of quality and student services. The outcome of investigations and actions taken by the college are fed back to the student liaison committee at its next meeting. The students' union also presents an update on its activities, including an outline of activities undertaken with learners at the college, and on contact with the NUS.

Student parliaments or learner forums

78 Student parliaments and forums give learners the opportunity to come together to share views, identify issues and develop a common agenda. Learners may use these structures to feed issues and views to the learner representatives on other bodies, such as student committees, or directly to the organisation's management. A few staff attending a learner-led meeting to hear learner views can gather perspectives that learner representatives attending staff meetings may find hard to raise.

It is important for colleges to bear in mind that student parliaments, learner forums, committees, councils, associations or unions may fall within the definition of 'students' union' in the Education Act 1994 (the Act). In this case, the provisions of the Act, which include holding elections and having a written constitution, will apply by law.

79 For learner forums to be successful, they require appropriate resources and staff support. They also need to address the barriers to attendance that some learners may face, such as access to transport or childcare. In addition, simple steps such as including lunch can help to motivate learners to attend.

At **Worcester College of Technology**, all learners with a disability and/or learning difficulty are invited to attend an 'open doors' group, which provides an opportunity to raise issues, make suggestions or to praise what is already happening, as well as being a social gathering. The college considers the success of these groups can be attributed to the agreement of the senior management team to take seriously, and to act on, the issues raised.

Student associations or unions

80 Learners may take on leadership roles and specific responsibilities in the organisation through the establishment of student associations or unions. Research suggests, however, that many work-based learners may not see themselves as 'learners' but rather as 'employees'. Models that draw on the language of works councils and trades unions may be more appropriate and more successful in enlisting the involvement of these learners.

81 Student-led associations or unions can be a critical element of a learner involvement strategy, but they will not be appropriate for all providers. A successful student-led body depends not just on the energy and enthusiasm of learners, but also on senior management support and resources.

At **Cornwall College**, a project is under way to launch a students' union to serve the college's 45,000 learners, spread across 7 main sites up to 60 miles apart. A full-time officer has been appointed to lead the project, whose first step was to spend time listening to learners and staff across the college to understand the issues and problems they faced.

Involving learners in the development of the students' union is seen as critical to building motivation and participation, as is involving staff. Other critical success factors have been strong support from senior managers and governors, appropriate funding, and the personality of the full-time officer.

Getting learners motivated to take part is seen as a critical challenge, and participation will be a key measure of success. Several engagement approaches are planned. The students' union will blend services with representative functions to draw learners in: for instance, the planned website will include information about searching for jobs as well as mechanisms for raising issues. A participation and democracy officer will join students' union staff with responsibility for supporting learner representation across the college. Learners will also be involved on the basis of their courses, so for example, learners on journalism courses will be involved in creating the students' union newspaper.

82 In creating new learner involvement structures, it may be useful to ask yourself the following questions.

- What is the remit of the new structures?

- How learner-led are the new structures?

- How formal are the new structures?

Questions to consider when developing a learner involvement strategy

83 Providers may find the following questions useful as prompts for developing a learner involvement strategy that will strengthen learner participation and representation.

- What areas and issues will you involve learners in?

- What approaches will you take to engaging with learners collectively?

- How will you actively support learner participation and representation at all levels?

5 Creating a Culture of Learner Involvement

84 Learner involvement is as much about the culture and values of an organisation as it is about procedures and responsibilities. Providers who have achieved in this area have stressed how critical senior leadership has been to the success of their learner involvement activities.

85 This section considers the following approaches to creating a culture of learner involvement, including:

- communicating and demonstrating your commitment to learner involvement

- structuring the organisation around learner involvement (including the role of student liaison officers or similar)

- involving everyone across the whole organisation.

86 You will need to consider how to embed learner involvement throughout your business planning. This will also involve looking at the structure of your organisation and seeing where lead responsibility for your learner involvement strategy will sit within it.

How can you create a culture of learner involvement?

Communicating and demonstrating your commitment to learner involvement

87 A clear statement of the vision and priorities for the organisation might be an important starting point for leading a culture of learner involvement across the organisation. This vision statement for learner involvement could be included in the learner involvement strategy. The values of learner involvement will need to be reflected in the day-to-day contact that learners have with teachers, trainers and support staff. It will be important to use CPD and other training opportunities to raise awareness among staff of the value of learner involvement for helping to improve provision and services. Effective communication of the impact of learners' views back to learners is critical (see Section 4).

At **Chichester College**, a co-ordinated approach to learner involvement across the organisation has developed from the idea of an inverted pyramid. Rather than being at the 'top' of the organisation, the senior management team sees itself as providing support to teaching and support staff, from whom learners in turn draw the support and resources they need to engage in their learning. To turn this vision into a reality, the college has implemented a raft of measures to ensure that learners are able, skilled, supported and motivated to get involved, and to ensure that staff, too, are able to respond.

88 Simple measures such as putting standing items on the agenda of key committees to discuss learner involvement and views, or ensuring that senior managers themselves spend time meeting learners – for instance through a principal's or chief executive's question time – can be very effective ways of demonstrating your organisation's commitment to learner involvement. All the actions you take as part of your learner involvement strategy, and the energy and resources you invest in them, can help to communicate your commitment, as will the publication of the strategy itself, and your subsequent reporting on it (see Section 6).

At **Bridgwater College**, as part of the college's 'A day in the life' scheme, senior managers spend a day shadowing a learner as a way of sampling the learner experience. This approach has provided wide-ranging information to managers on issues such as the type of learning activities, amount of homework, transport and catering.

89 It is particularly important to find ways to demonstrate to learners that their views and participation are having an impact. You can do this with something as simple as a poster or newsletter, using the 'What you said – what we did' format. In some instances it may not be possible to act on learners' views, for example if the ideas are not affordable, but in these cases, it is still important to report back to learners, and explain why action has not been taken.

Governing bodies and boards have an opportunity to show leadership in the area of learner involvement. Clause 21 of the Further Education and Training Bill proposes a requirement for governing bodies of organisations in the FE system to have regard to guidance about consultation with learners or future learners.

Structuring the organisation around learner involvement and the role of student liaison officers

90 A member of staff with specific responsibilities for liaising with learners can play a pivotal role in learner involvement. The student liaison officer (SLO) role needs to have the capabilities and enthusiasm to engage learners and staff as well as the wisdom to step back at the right moment to let learners themselves take the lead.

A capable, enthusiastic SLO, working at middle-management level with full senior management support, is considered to have been critical to the delivery of **Chichester College's** learner involvement strategy. Success has helped the college tap into the creativity of learners themselves, who are now fully involved in refreshing and delivering the strategy. For instance, learner representatives play a key role in getting first year students involved and building a 'pipeline' of talent and enthusiasm.

In the last year, learner representatives have taken particular steps to engage adult and part-time learners by attending tutor groups and introducing themselves. Student councils have also been changed to take place on different days of the week, so that learners with other commitments can attend at least some. Notes of meetings are emailed to part-time representatives who cannot attend.

Learners also created a learner-friendly version of a learning model developed by staff, which is now used across the college, and which emphasises the aspiration that, on leaving the room, both learners and teachers or trainers should be able to say that the objectives of the lesson were achieved. The college is now considering the possibility of building on this success by involving learners in classroom observation.

Participants in a workshop in November 2006 identified that having a single named person with dedicated learner involvement responsibilities is a critical success factor in a learner involvement strategy. They also stressed the need for this role to be defined in a way that helped to make learner involvement everyone's responsibility.

91 Making the SLO role work is not just a matter of recruiting or selecting the right person. It is also important to think about where the SLO fits in your organisation. The following questions may prove helpful.

- Do you have a dedicated lead person or are these functions part of a larger remit?

- Where does the SLO sit in the structure?

- Is the post integrated within your main quality team or alongside your quality manager?

- How senior is the SLO in the organisation?

- Who does the SLO report to?

- What committees or groups is the SLO part of?

- Does the SLO attend senior management team meetings?

92 A strong SLO role is important, but learner involvement should not become an organisational silo. Responsibility for involving learners may be distributed across the organisation's structure, and especially in areas such as quality and curriculum development. Overall, your approach should seek to embed learner involvement in all aspects of the organisation, but with a key focus on improving the overall learning experience and outcomes for learners.

93 We recognise that smaller organisations may be unable to maintain a single dedicated SLO, but it is still important to establish who has what responsibility for learner involvement in the organisation. In these cases, the SLO role may be made part of a larger role, for example, by designating a manager to act as a contact point for learners or take charge of the key learner involvement processes, or by clearly distributing SLO-type responsibilities.

Involving everyone in the organisation

94 Some learners will face barriers to involvement, and will need appropriate help or support to overcome them. The needs of the different learners in your organisation such as distance learners, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or mental health issues, young people in care or care-leavers, learners with care responsibilities, and learners of different ethnicities, genders, sexualities or faiths all need to be taken into account over time as your approaches to learner involvement mature and develop.

95 It is important to be clear about how you will assess the impact of your learner involvement strategy on equality and diversity issues as the basis for continuous improvement.

96 Enhancing learner involvement in your organisation is about helping learners to become partners and co-creators of their learning experiences, and for many learners this will involve acquiring confidence and expertise, taking on new roles and trying out new behaviour. The same will be true, however, for others too: staff, managers, governors and board members.

97 The journey towards greater learner involvement will for many organisations involve subtle changes in culture as the shift in the balance of responsibility identified in *Personalising Further Education* (DfES, 2006b) takes place. Organisational development activities that involve staff and others in shaping that new culture and that give them the skills and confidence to succeed in it will be a critical element of a learner involvement strategy.

Questions to consider when developing a learner involvement strategy

98 Providers may find the following questions useful as prompts when developing a learner involvement strategy that will create a culture of learner involvement.

- How will you communicate your commitment to learner involvement?

- How will you embed learner involvement in your organisation's structure and processes?

- What will you do to support your staff?

- How will you ensure that everyone has a stake in your learner involvement strategy?

6 Measuring and Reporting on the Impact of your Learner Involvement Strategy

99   Several ways of measuring learner involvement and success already exist in the sector and are widely used and understood, in particular success rates, the *Common Inspection Framework* (CIF) and the LSC's National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS). As an overarching approach, the LSC is developing the Framework for Excellence. Through a balanced scorecard, the Framework for Excellence aims to measure success and excellence in responsiveness to learners and employers. The evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of your learner involvement strategy should form an integral part of your self-assessment.

100   As with any strategy, it is important to be clear about how you will measure the impact of your learner involvement strategy. We suggest that you consider two types of measure: outcome measures and process measures.

- Outcome measures, which may be hard or soft, are measures of the wider impact of learner involvement: are learners' views and involvement actually making a difference? Outcome measures may cover a wide range of issues, from marketing and recruitment to learner satisfaction and success rates. Indicators of success are best established at the outset so they can be used to measure progress.

- Process measures, which may also be hard or soft, are measures of whether or not you are successfully involving learners, and might cover topics such as:

  – participation and involvement – are learners actually taking up opportunities provided, and how many?

  – inclusion – are diverse groups of learners taking up opportunities equally?

  – reporting back – is the impact of learners' views and involvement being communicated to learners?

  – satisfaction with process – are learners themselves satisfied with the processes by which they are being involved?

101   It is likely that the data and other evidence for both your outcome and process measures will come from evidence you collect for your self-assessment using the CIF. This should also cover evidence collected for your judgements for the Framework for Excellence, particularly that for the responsiveness to learners strand. In this way, measuring and reporting on the impact of your learner involvement strategy will be consistent with the two formal quality frameworks in use by the sector. Some examples of measurable outcomes of the learner involvement strategy are:

- high levels of learner engagement across all learner groups and evidence that learner views are taken seriously and have triggered improvements

- learner representatives report very high satisfaction with the impact their roles are having

- self-assessment content and performance improvement actions can be directly linked to documented learner views

- learner involvement activities lead to clear and well-publicised lists of actions that are then implemented

- the provider places a very high value on learner views and demonstrates how learner feedback is used to identify and spread effective practice

- learner surveys consistently give very high levels of overall learner satisfaction

- evidence of learners as experts and their active involvement in teaching and learning processes, evidenced for example through lesson observations.

102 In implementing a process for measuring and reporting on your learner involvement strategy, the following questions may prove helpful.

- How will you integrate your learner involvement strategy with your annual business plan, and embed measurement and reporting within your main business cycle?

- How will you effectively monitor sources of information such as complaints, feedback from learners and feedback from staff?

- How will you evaluate the different approaches and actions set out in your learner involvement strategy, and develop and refresh the strategy in the light of that evaluation?

- How will you publicise the actions you have taken to involve learners, and to respond to their views (for example, by including a statement of the impact of your learner involvement strategy in your annual report)?

- How will you ensure learners are fully involved in evaluating the effectiveness and impact of your learner involvement strategy, and in developing it and refreshing it in future years?

- How will you report back to and celebrate with learners themselves the changes you have made in response to their views?

Annex A:

Consultation Questions

Please send responses by 30 March 2007 to:

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Learner involvement strategy handbook consultation
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Coventry CV1 2WT
Email: learnerinvolvementstrategy-consult@lsc.gov.uk

1. Have we explained the **purpose and value** of a learner involvement strategy in a way that makes sense for your organisation?

   Yes, very well ☐

   Yes, reasonably well ☐

   No, needs improving ☐

   What would you suggest adding?

2. Will the suggested outline help you to **develop or review** your learner involvement strategy?

   Yes, very usefully ☐

   Yes, a bit ☐

   No, not at all ☐

   What would make it more useful for you?

3. How will the **approaches and questions** help you to develop your strategy to:

   (a) strengthen teaching and learning and responsiveness to individual need;

   (b) strengthen learner participation and representation; and

   (c) create a culture of learner involvement?

4. What **other approaches** should we include?

5. What **materials or resources** would you recommend to other providers?

6. What **examples and experiences** would you like to share with other providers about your own successful efforts to achieve (a), (b) and (c) in question 3 above?

7. What other **measures of success** would you recommend other providers consider when drawing up their learner involvement strategies?

8. What **further information** would be valuable in linking your learner involvement strategy to self-assessment, the *Common Inspection Framework* and the Framework for Excellence?

9. Are there **other important questions** to think about when putting in place a process for measuring and reporting on your learner involvement strategy?

10. Is the draft handbook structured in a way that makes sense for you?

Yes, the structure makes complete sense ☐

Yes, the structure mostly makes sense ☐

No, the structure makes no sense ☐

How could the structure be improved?

11. What further information, support or resources would help you to involve learners in your organisation?

12. What ideas do you have about how you will publish your learner involvement strategy?

Other comments

The information that you provide in your response will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations, which allow public access to information. This does not necessarily mean that your response can be made available to the public, as there are exemptions relating to information provided in confidence and information to which the Data Protection Act 1998 applies. You may request confidentiality by ticking the box provided, but you should note that neither this, nor an automatically generated email confidentiality statement, will necessarily exclude the public right of access.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential. Otherwise, please use the boxes below to provide your contact details. ☐

Name

Organisation
(if applicable)

Address

Annex B:
References

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QIA (2007) *Pursuing Excellence: the National Improvement Strategy for the further education system*, Coventry: QIA. Available at: www.qia.org.uk/pursuingexcellence

Useful websites

Framework for Excellence: http://ffe.lsc.gov.uk

LSC research tools: http://researchtools.lsc.gov.uk/KMSResearchTools

Notes