

Listening to learners?

Citizenship and learner voice

Training and development activities
with DVD-ROM video clips

Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme



Listening to learners? Citizenship and learner voice is part of a series of support materials produced by the Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme.

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LSIS is the new sector-owned body formed from the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) and the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) to develop excellent and sustainable FE provision across the sector.

The Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme aims to disseminate and support best practice in citizenship across all areas of 16–19 education and training, and improve cohesion and progression from key stage 4 citizenship to the post-16 phase.

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Our ideas for improving learner voice are...



- Show our film about the Course Representative colleges across the country as an example of a system that works!
- Course Representative participation at a national conference to improve learner voice on...



INTRODUCTION

Listening to learners? Citizenship and learner voice

Introduction and background to the pack

The training and development activities

The discussion questions and activities in this pack are designed to accompany the video clips on the enclosed DVD-ROM, 'Listening to learners?'. The materials can be used with members of staff engaged in training and development that is aimed at enriching learner voice through citizenship. They might also be used with young learners, particularly those who have a specific interest in supporting and developing the learner voice within their own organisation.

The video material is presented as a series of clips, each illustrating specific issues, and supported in this booklet by discussion questions and activities for in-depth exploration. There is also one longer introductory section, entitled 'Learner Voice – the challenge and opportunities', which can be used to give an overview of issues relating to learner voice and citizenship.

The video footage has been collected from a number of organisations and events where the further development of the learner voice is recognised as central to organisational improvement. The Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme is extremely grateful to those organisations which have taken part in this project and have shared with us their thinking and their reflections on approaches to encouraging the learner voice (see Acknowledgements on page 45). Members of these organisations all regard improvement as a journey, and none would claim that their current practice has reached a final destination. Some of the clips show reflection on practice as part of the process of improvement. It is hoped that those viewing the clips will be inspired to debate the issues raised, reflect on their own practice and thereby improve their learner voice strategies so that they can contribute to the wider personalisation agenda.

Aims of the pack

Although citizenship encompasses much more, in common with learner voice it emphasises young people's autonomy; the skills of negotiation, advocacy and taking responsible action; an interest in improving things; and an understanding of decision making. This pack of materials therefore aims to:

- promote the link between citizenship education and improved learner involvement strategies
- provide video material and activities to stimulate discussion during staff and learner training
- enable providers to raise the quality of their learner involvement strategies by reflecting on examples of practice and views of other staff and learners.

Citizenship

Citizenship education, which is statutory within the 11–16 curriculum and increasingly incorporated into the 16–19 offer, helps young people to understand how society works. They learn about their rights and responsibilities and also how to take an active part in the democratic processes of their own organisation, of their local communities and of the nation. To be effective, citizenship

education must be underpinned by young people having the skills and knowledge to develop informed opinions, to express their views, to carry out actions to improve situations for themselves and others, and to take part in decision-making.

There are many approaches to citizenship education. It can constitute part of a group tutorial or enrichment programme; it can be offered as a separate subject, whether or not this leads to a qualification; it can be integrated into the curricula of other subjects; or it can take the form of voluntary community activities, involving campaigning and working with local groups. The most successful approaches involve the young people themselves in deciding on the real issues to be tackled and the ways to go about tackling them. Whichever approach is used, learners and facilitators need to be clear about what is to be learned. The 10 QCA learning objectives for post-16 citizenship are:

- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding about citizenship issues
- Show understanding of key citizenship concepts
- Consider the social, moral and ethical issues applying to a particular situation
- Analyse sources of information, identify bias and draw conclusions
- Demonstrate understanding of and respect for diversity and challenge, prejudice and discrimination
- Discuss and debate citizenship issues
- Express and justify a personal opinion to others
- Represent a point of view on behalf of others
- Demonstrate skills of negotiation and participation in community-based activities
- Exercise responsible action towards and on behalf of others

From *Play your part: post-16 citizenship*, QCA, 2004

The knowledge and skills developed through citizenship education support and promote a healthy learner voice within an organisation, since young people gain practice in expressing their views. However, it is also important that their views are listened to, taken seriously and, where appropriate and possible, are acted upon. Both citizenship education and effective strategies for developing the learner voice require an ethos in which all members – staff and learners – are included in decision-making processes and are recognised as partners in organisational improvement.

Learner voice

In June 2007, the Learning and Skills Council published its handbook, *Developing a learner involvement strategy*. This aimed to put into practice the requirement expressed in the FE White Paper, *Further Education: Raising skills, improving life chances* (DfES, 2006), that all providers of further education should develop a strategy to involve learners as part of personalisation of learning and as a way of raising the quality of provision. The handbook lists the benefits for learners and providers, among these being: '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 experiences of industry with future generations of learners.'

The learner involvement initiative provides opportunities to enhance the outcomes described in Every Child Matters and the Green Paper, *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005). It underlined the importance

of giving children and young people a voice and aimed to address four key challenges: how to engage more young people in positive activities and empower them to shape the services they receive; how to encourage more young people to volunteer and become involved in their communities; how to provide better information, advice and guidance to young people to help them make informed choices about their lives; and how to provide better and more personalised intensive support for each young person who has serious problems or gets into trouble.

An evaluation of the impact of the first year of the learner involvement strategy¹ found that 65 per cent of further education providers have a programme of learner involvement ‘fully’ in place, and that both learners and providers reported benefits. The top four benefits mentioned were: ‘improving methods for communication between staff and learners; ability to demonstrate changes in approach that have come about as a result of learner involvement; improving ability to correlate learner involvement with overall quality assurance processes; and that staff members are more confident in how they involve learners.’ However, 5 per cent of providers have no plans to develop a strategy and 40 per cent of providers do not involve learners in developing course content. Staff training is varied and providers ‘recognise that they are at an early stage of strategy development and may welcome advice to further improve strategy depth and quality’.

Revised Ofsted inspections of colleges and providers have a focus on learner engagement. A consultation document² on a new Common Inspection Framework, produced by Ofsted, includes the following paragraph:

‘Inspectors will explore how well colleges and providers engage with users to bring about improvements. This will include:

- **The mechanisms that they use to communicate with users**
- **The actions that are identified**
- **The impact made and the effectiveness of feedback to users**
- **The college or provider’s learner engagement strategy, where appropriate.**

There will be a wider range of inspection activities that involve collecting and using the views of learners, employers and partners. These may include emails, focus groups, on-site interviews and telephone interviews. Other initiatives to be explored during the pilot inspections include the development of a role for learner representatives.’

Recent guidance from the Department for Children, Schools and Families³ promotes the principles underpinning the learner voice for pupils in schools and local authority settings, and provides practical advice. It stresses the importance to inspectors of ways in which the school seeks the views of pupils and how the school responds to pupils’ views. It also reiterates the requirement on local authorities to ‘give due consideration to the views of children and young people before determining what (if any) services to provide where these may impact on children and young people.’ The guidance supports the need for training for both young people and staff, and makes the link between citizenship education and effective learner voice. The checklist on pages 8–9, reprinted from the guidance, is useful for all providers, including post-16.

¹ *Evaluation of the impact of the learner involvement strategy: Year one interim report*, Ekogen/Ipsos Mori/LSC, 2008.

² *A Focus on improvement: Proposals for FE and skills system inspections from September 2009*, Ofsted, November 2008. www.ofsted.gov.uk

³ *Working together: Listening to the voices of children and young people*, DCSF, 2008.

Effective participation – a checklist

Addressing the following questions will help to ensure that both the process and outcomes of children's and young people's participation are positive. This list, which was written for schools but is also suitable for all post-16 settings, is not exhaustive as there are likely to be other considerations linked to the circumstances of a locality or institution and the children and young people they are working with.

Action	Why?
Identify the benefits you want to achieve	By identifying the benefits that you are primarily interested in achieving through children's and young people's participation, you will be able to set clear objectives and success criteria on which to base and evaluate that participation.
Provide a range of opportunities	By offering different kinds of opportunities for participation a local authority or school will help to facilitate and encourage the participation of a wide range of children and young people.
Provide support to develop skills of effective participation	Training for children and young people to enhance their participation skills is crucial. All children and young people should be able to benefit from this training, not just those currently directly involved in offering their views or representing their peers.
Address equal opportunity issues	<p>The children and young people involved in decision-making must be representative – in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, disability, culture, religion, language or the area in which they live.</p> <p>Local authorities and schools should take steps to facilitate and encourage the participation of hard-to-reach groups. They should also consider how to ensure those with special needs are involved on an equal basis. The SEN toolkit (DfES 558/2001) provides detailed advice on this.</p>
Decide who will oversee children's and young people's participation	In some instances it may be appropriate and necessary for an adult alone to be responsible for the process. In other cases adults might work with children and young people, or young people themselves might manage and conduct the process.

Action	Why?
<p>Ensure provision for participation links to the Citizenship curriculum</p>	<p>Provision for participation should be embedded in the work of a school. This includes having clear links between pupils' participation and the school curriculum so that these components become mutually reinforcing.</p> <p>This is particularly relevant to personalised learning and the need to develop a culture of dialogue between teachers and pupils.</p>
<p>Develop provision that is fun and interesting for children and young people</p>	<p>If children and young people feel they are not being challenged by the process or feel that it is not relevant to them, they are likely to lose trust in its importance.</p>
<p>Think about providing rewards to recognise children's and young people's participation</p>	<p>Show children and young people that their input is valued and help them to understand the potential benefits of their participation – for themselves as well as for their peers or wider community. A local authority or school may wish to recognise children's and young people's efforts formally through awards.</p>
<p>Review the impact that children's and young people's participation is having</p>	<p>It is important to monitor the impact that children's and young people's participation is having, in order to assess the benefits and refine practice. Schools may find it useful to work with partners from other schools or their local authority to assist with this.</p>
<p>Provide feedback to children and young people</p>	<p>Providing feedback to children and young people on how their views have been taken into account, and if not, why not, and on what has changed as a result of their efforts, will prevent them from becoming disillusioned where they feel their input is not making a difference. Feedback needs to be presented in an easy-to-understand format.</p>
<p>Share effective practice with other local authorities and schools</p>	<p>There is some excellent work taking place. As well as making use of published case studies, it is useful to visit other schools to share good practice. This will help local authorities, schools and children and young people to continue to enhance their provision for participation. Schools' partnerships may prove helpful here.</p>

SECTION 1

Introducing learner voice – the challenge and opportunities

This section provides an overview of the issues to be considered when developing and improving a learner voice strategy. The video clip makes use of the voices of staff, learners, managers and academics in order to stimulate discussion and reflection on existing practice.

Clip 1: Learner voice – the challenge and opportunities



>>> Clip length: 17m15s

Purpose and description

This clip brings together the issues dealt with at greater length in separate clips on the enclosed DVD-ROM. It can be used with staff and learners who are relatively new to the discussion of the learner involvement strategy, or with interested stakeholders such as parents, governors, employers or members of the local community.

The questions raised in the video are as follows:

- *What do we mean by 'learner voice' and why is it important to listen to learners?*
- *What do learners gain from being given a voice?*
- *What are the links between citizenship education and learner voice?*
- *How can we ensure that staff and learners have trust in the learner voice strategies?*
- *Which learner voice strategies are the most effective?*
- *What structures and processes need to be put into place to make an impact on the ethos of the organisation?*
- *How can we involve young people in developing the learner involvement strategy?*
- *How do we know that we are succeeding in listening well to learners?*
- *How should we feed back action to learners?*
- *How should organisations reflect on their strategy, and who should be involved in this process?*
- *What is the value of using video for reflection on practice?*

Activities for use with staff and learners

- Show **Clip 1: Learner voice – the challenge and opportunities** asking participants to consider, while watching, what the indicators are of an effective learner voice, and how citizenship can support the development of learner voice. Afterwards, ask participants to work in pairs. They should discuss what they heard and saw and select one new insight to report to the whole group.
- Put participants into four groups for this activity. Each group will need a different coloured felt-tip pen. Give each group one flip-chart sheet, on the top of which has been written one of these questions:
 - *Why is it important to listen to learners?*
 - *What are the links between citizenship education and learner voice?*
 - *Which learner voice strategies are the most effective?*
 - *How can we involve young people in developing the learner involvement strategy?*
- Allow each group a fixed period of time (say five minutes) to discuss their question and write their own reply on the sheet, leaving room for others to write theirs later. When the time is up, clap loudly and ask groups to move the sheet to the next table. Each group then discusses the next question, reads what the previous group has written and adds their own comments. You can allow less time towards the end, since there will be fewer new comments to add to the sheets. Make sure that each group receives the question it started with at the end.
- Facilitate a whole-group discussion on each question, with groups feeding back the main points on their sheet.



SECTION 2

Moving practice forward – four case studies

The four organisations that are featured on Clips 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d are engaged in the development of their learner voice strategy. They are shown discussing their thinking, their current implementation and their reflection on practice, aiming to continuously improve their strategies in partnership with learners.

Clip 2a: A range of opportunities at Oaklands College



>>> Part 1: Introductions – clip length 08m09s

>>> Part 2: Ask the Principal – clip length 09m05s

>>> Part 3: Motivations – clip length 04m25s

>>> Part 4: Video booth – clip length 05m13s

Purpose and description

This clip provides a short case study of the mix of learner voice strategies at Oaklands College in Hertfordshire. The strategies include formal processes of student representation as well as informal processes (including a student website) an 'Open Forum' and a video booth used for collecting learner opinions. The clip consists of four parts: **Part 1: Introductions**, provides an overview of the provision at the college, including formal representative structures and informal processes; **Part 2: Ask the Principal**, looks at a session with the Principal provided for new reps at the start of the academic year; **Part 3: Motivations**, examines incentives for students to become representatives; and **Part 4: Video booth**, shows the implementation and discussion of the use of a recently acquired facility for video feedback of learner views.

Background

Oaklands College has in excess of 200 student reps who are elected from every full-time and part-time course over 180 hours, including courses for students with learning disabilities. These reps elect 22–25 of their members to form the student council, which meets five times a year with members of the senior management team. In turn, the council elects two of its members to attend the monthly meetings of the corporation (governing body) where the strategic direction of the college is discussed and decided. The student reps receive training for their role and meet the Principal face-to-face at an 'Ask the Principal' session.

In addition to this formal representative structure, the college provides a number of facilities for all students to express their views. These include: 'The Box', a student website with a question and answer facility; an 'Open Forum' where any student can meet the Principal and senior staff; a recently acquired video-booth/diary room; and student surveys.

Activities for use with staff and learners



Clip 2a – Part 1: Introductions – clip length 08m09s

- Show the first part of the clip, **Part 1: Introductions**, and ask participants, in pairs, to discuss the range of provision for learner voice and to compare the provision in their own organisations. Consider especially the provision for learners with disabilities.
- In the whole group, discuss the following general question:
 - *What is the ideal mix of provision in an educational organisation to ensure that all learners can be heard?*



Clip 2a – Part 2: Ask the Principal – clip length 09m05s

- Show the second part of the clip, **Part 2: Ask the Principal** to staff or learners. Put participants into groups and give one or two of the following questions to each group. Ask them to provide proposals on their question to feed back to the whole group:
 - *What preparation do young people need in order to become effective reps?*
 - *What skills and qualities are developed by reps?*
 - *What kinds of issues are appropriate for reps to discuss with senior management?*
 - *How can citizenship education provide opportunities to deal with some of the issues raised with the Principal?*
 - *What are your views on the reflection process shown in this clips? How could reflection on practice be built into learner voice strategies?*



Clip 2a – Part 3: Motivations – clip length 04m25s

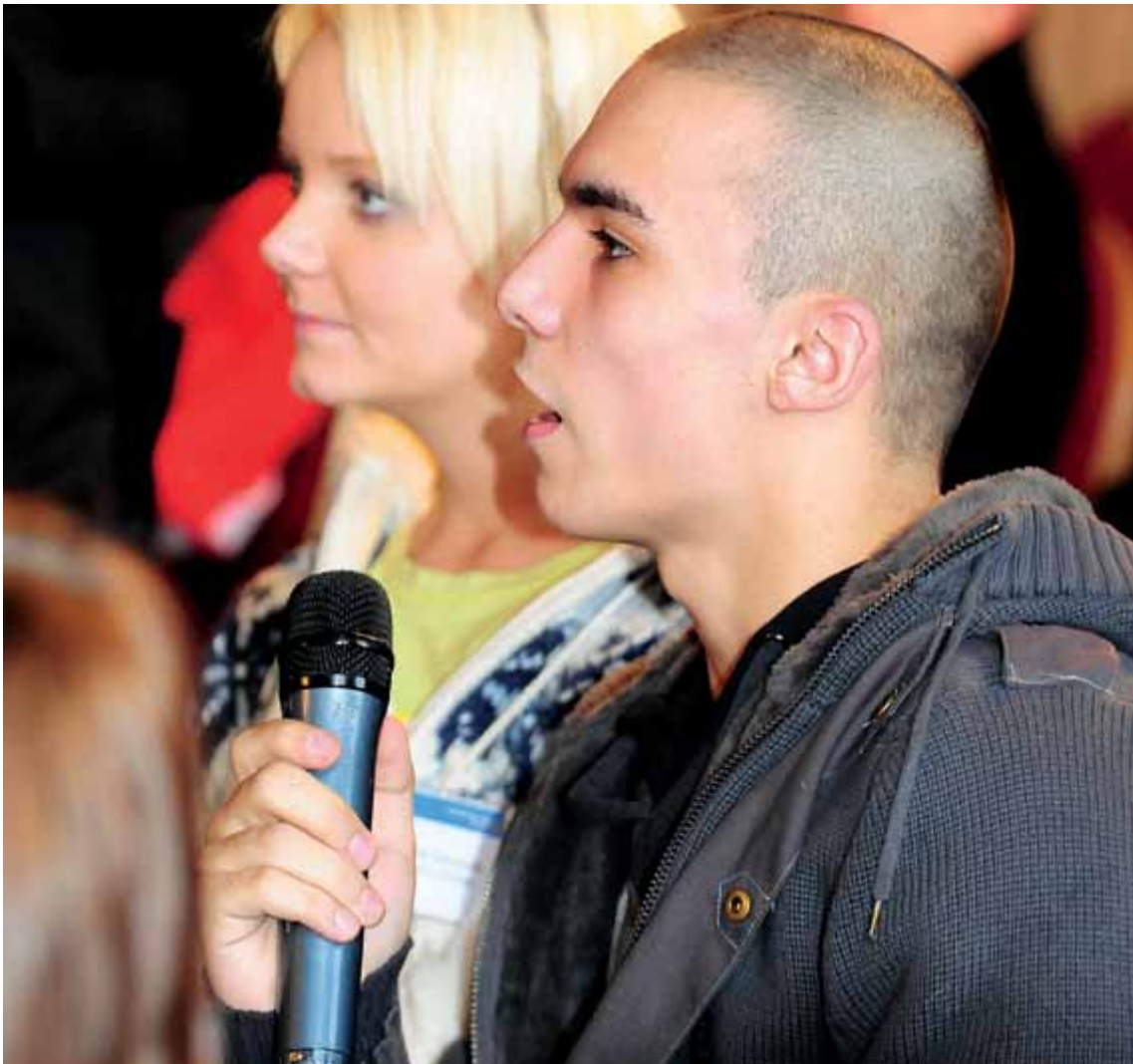
- The next part of the clip, **Part 3: Motivations**, could be used with young people as part of the preparation of reps for their role. Show the clip and discuss the following questions:
 - *What incentives are mentioned in the film? What are your views on incentives for reps?*
 - *What are the most effective feedback mechanisms for students?*
 - *What support do reps need in order to feed back to their peers?*
- Run a discussion carousel, using the **Questions for reps’ discussion carousel** cards on page 16. Arrange enough chairs for all participants in two concentric circles facing each other, so that young people can talk in pairs. Place one discussion question card, copied and cut up from page 16, on each seat in the inner circle, and ask participants to seat themselves on any chair. Enough cards are provided for 24 participants (one per pair). If you need more, add your own in the blank spaces.
- Allow a fixed period of time, say three minutes, for discussion on each question. Then blow a whistle or clap loudly to stop the discussion and move everyone in the outer circle one place to the right. In order to allow everyone to be a questioner, ask pairs to swap seats after the fourth move and then to move to the left instead of the right for the next few moves.
- Debrief by asking questioners to summarise the answers they got to their questions.
- Oaklands College uses a discussion carousel in tutor groups before student rep elections to help students find out about their classmates and to decide who to nominate and vote for. You could ask learners to provide the questions that they would like asked of their peers and use these in the activity.



Clip 2a – Part 4: Video booth – clip length 05m13s

- Before showing the last part, **Part 4: Video booth**, ask participants to work in pairs to discuss the following questions:

- *What informal opportunities could be provided to encourage all young people, not just elected reps, to have a say in their learning organisation?*
- *Choose one of the following, or a suggestion of your own, and consider how this strategy can be made to work effectively: surveys, interactive website, open forum, suggestion box, focus groups, learner-run newsletters and young researchers where learners explore issues of concern and make recommendations about future action.*
- Show **Part 4: Video booth**, and discuss specifically the issues arising from the use of a video-booth or diary room.
 - *What kinds of information need to be communicated to learners about the use of the video booth?*
 - *Where should a video booth be located?*
 - *What should happen to views expressed on video?*
 - *How should feedback be managed?*
 - *Who should manage and oversee the video booth?*
- Discuss ways in which organisations can address the issue of trust, i.e. concerns young people may have about how their views, once written, made public or recorded, may be used.



Questions for reps' discussion carousel



<p>1. What would you do if...</p> <p><i>...lateness was a problem in your group?</i></p>	<p>2. What would you do if...</p> <p><i>...someone complained about a lack of books on his course?</i></p>
<p>3. What would you do if...</p> <p><i>...one fellow learner was having a problem with a member of staff?</i></p>	<p>4. What would you do if...</p> <p><i>...parking was a problem on the site?</i></p>
<p>5. What would you do if...</p> <p><i>...someone alleged that a racist incident had taken place?</i></p>	<p>6. What would you do if...</p> <p><i>...buses or other transport was unsatisfactory?</i></p>
<p>7. What would you do if...</p> <p><i>...someone asked you to raise an issue that you didn't agree with?</i></p>	<p>8. What would you do if...</p> <p><i>...members of your group said they never get feedback from staff?</i></p>
<p>9. What would you do if...</p> <p><i>...other learners complained about the discipline strategy not being consistent?</i></p>	<p>10. What would you do if...</p> <p><i>...a group of learners wanted to take on a community project?</i></p>
<p>11. What would you do if...</p> <p><i>...other learners wanted more say in the organisation's decision-making?</i></p>	<p>12. What would you do if...</p> <p><i>...other learners were completely uninterested in the representative structures?</i></p>
<p>What would you do if...</p>	<p>What would you do if...</p>

Clip 2b: Consultation on the citizenship curriculum at Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School



>>> Clip length: 09m29s

Purpose and description

This clip illustrates consultation on the planning of the sixth form citizenship curriculum with a small focus group of students. The students have access to copies of the **Proposed 6th form citizenship programme** (page 18) and are asked for their views on the content and the teaching and learning strategies. The clip shows students engaged in some of the activities that were discussed during the consultation, and also staff and student reflections on both the consultation process and later impact of the consultations on the curriculum delivery.

Background

At Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School in Hertfordshire citizenship has formed part of the curriculum for the sixth form for a number of years. Year 12 students have two 50-minute periods of citizenship per week and Year 13 students have one period, delivered by a specialist team of humanities staff.

As part of its learner voice strategy, the school has been carrying out student evaluations of courses across all key stages at the end of each module. It was recently decided to extend this strategy to consultation with students on planning the content and also the delivery of the curriculum, starting with the sixth form citizenship programme.

Activities for use with staff or learners

- Show the clip to participants and give out copies of the **Proposed 6th form citizenship programme** consulted on. Ask them to work in pairs to reflect on what they have watched. In the whole group, discuss the following questions:
 - *What preparation might young people need in order to make such consultation effective?*
 - *The focus group was selected by staff. What views do you have on this?*
 - *What impact did the consultation have on the students' attitudes towards the citizenship programme?*
 - *What skills and knowledge did the students gain from their citizenship programme? What impact did the consultation process have?*
 - *The school is planning to develop the feedback mechanisms from the focus group to other students. What issues should it consider?*
 - *What might be the benefits of consulting with students on the curriculum?*
 - *What obstacles might there be and how could they be overcome?*

- Use the **Issues arising card-sort activity** (page 19) to enable staff or learners to explore the issues that might arise if they were to introduce, or improve, their own strategies for consulting with students on curriculum content and teaching/learning methods. Give sets of cards to small groups and ask them to prioritise and discuss issues.



Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School: Proposed 6th form citizenship programme 2008–2009

- **Design a t-shirt** – get to know other members of Year 12 by working in teams, designing a t-shirt with a 'citizenship' message.
- **Millennium Development Goals** – helps you understand that where you happen to be born can determine how long you live, whether you have a home and a job and how extreme poverty deprives people of everything many of us take for granted.
- **Crisis** – a simulation game which places students in the role of decision-makers in a small newly independent country. You work in small groups and govern the country over the course of a year. You have to make decisions each month about a range of difficult problems, and the goal of each team is to maintain political popularity while improving the nation's economy. The simulation raises lots of issues and encourages you to explore issues of democracy.
- **Trading trainers game** – take part in a simulation game that explores the way unfair trade and unstable economies directly affects the lives of ordinary people in developing countries.
- **Sentencing young offenders** – you have the opportunity to work with local magistrates and 'sentence' young offenders. You look at the role of the magistrates and consider more complex cases .
- **Discussing issues with our local MP (Grant Shapp)** – students research issues of interest/concern to them that they wish to raise with their MP. These could be local, national or international issues. The Government and Politics group takes responsibility for organising the event, grouping the questions into topics.
- **GSK** – A visitor comes to the school from GSK and delivers a presentation around the use of animals in medical research leading to a discussion/debate about the issues.
- **Current Affairs – 'Read all about it'** – an opportunity to read a variety of national newspapers and focus on stories/articles you find interesting/controversial/have strong opinions about. You work in pairs and negotiate with the rest of the group who is going to focus on what and then prepare a brief presentation about their story, how it is reported differently depending on the paper, etc. Students can display cuttings from newspapers on a sixth form 'points of view' notice-board – a board designed to encourage discussion and debate.
- **Is there any such thing as a just war?** Working in small groups you research, discuss and debate this question and then open this out to the whole group.
- **Identity** – use the resource booklet 'We all came here from somewhere' in order to raise issues concerning identity in multicultural British society; to encourage discussion of local and national government policies, and to encourage students to consider and express their own identities and discuss suggestions for improvements to make our own society more inclusive.
- **President for a Day** – computer game designed to enable students to participate in informed debate about a number of real-life issues faced by economically less-developed countries.

Issues arising card-sort activity



How can learners have a voice when the content of the curriculum is often determined by qualification specifications, and is not negotiable?

Should views on curriculum content and delivery be obtained from individuals or from groups?

Whose views count when learners have different learning styles and they will not necessarily agree about preferred teaching methods?

If focus groups are used, should members be selected or elected, or should they be volunteers? What impact will this have on the process?

Learners will need preparation before they are consulted, since they are not used to giving their views on the curriculum. How can this be done?

How can the impact of learners' views on the curriculum be made clear to them, so that they know they have been heard?

What happens if some staff do not accept that learners should be consulted on teaching methods and curriculum content?

How can consultation and evaluation be integrated into courses as an on-going feature?

(Write your own)

(Write your own)

Clip 2c: Developing a learner forum at Fareport Training Organisation Ltd.



>>> Clip length: 10m20s

Purpose and description

This clip illustrates the use of a learner forum within a 14–19 training provider. The organisation, which is a phased implementation provider within the Foundation Learning Tier, provides a range of courses at level 1 and below, and has a number of learners on E2E programmes. The forum is open to all learners and operates once a month, rotating between three sites. The forum is chaired by a member of staff, but items are proposed and researched by the learners. The clip shows one of the monthly meetings in addition to comments from the member of staff and the learners present.

Background

Fareport Training Organisation Ltd. is a private training company located in Fareham and Gosport, Hampshire. Citizenship has formed part of the compulsory E2E curriculum for more than five years and is delivered through regular learner-led sessions addressing local and national issues. The work is used to develop literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, which enable learners to gain qualifications in these areas.

The learner forum had been in operation for 18 months at the time of filming. The forum is held every month, rotating around the three sites in order to encourage young people to attend. It is open to everyone, rather than restricted to elected reps, since the organisation runs roll-on/roll-off courses, and some learners attend for a brief period. Staff encourage groups to discuss issues that they would like raised at the forum, and those who do attend pass on the views of their peers and also feed back decisions. The forum is run formally, with agendas and minutes which list action to be taken. It is chaired by the Quality Support Manager. The action points are discussed at 14–19 staff meetings and also with senior management. Issues discussed include a wide variety of topics, including teaching and learning, health and safety, equality issues and discipline.

Activities for use with staff and learners

- Watch the Fareport clip and ask participants to talk in pairs for 10 minutes to reflect on what they have seen. Then, as a whole group, discuss the following questions:
 - *What difficulties might training providers face when planning learner voice strategies?*
 - *What aspects of the learner forum shown address the roll-on/roll-off nature of training provider provision?*
 - *How are the learners involved in the organisation and outcomes of the forum in this example?*
 - *What skills are required by the member of staff facilitating the forum?*

- *What skills do we see being developed by learners who attend the forum?*
- *What steps are taken to encourage learners to attend the forum?*
- Give out copies of **Addressing discipline within the training room** (below), summarising the action taken on the issue of discipline, which was raised at the forum by learners, and ask participants to discuss the following questions:
 - *What do you think about disciplinary practices as an issue for discussion at the forum?*
 - *How viable would classroom observation by learners be in your own organisation? How might staff respond?*
 - *What are your views on the recommendations made by learners?*



Fareport Training Organisation Limited
Learner/staff focus group

Addressing discipline within the training room

At one of the forum meetings, learners raised the issue of discipline in the training rooms. They thought that being sent off site was not regarded as a punishment by some of the learners, and that other sanctions should be looked at. A focus group of nine staff and learners was set up to examine the issue in depth, discussing the possible causes of certain behaviour as well as proposed methods of addressing the issues. The discussion raised the following questions and suggestions:

- What is happening in training rooms? Learners on two of the three sites suggested that they swap sites and observe sessions so that they could get a better idea of discipline strategies across the whole organisation. Reports of the observation were to be fed back to the next focus group meeting.
- Does the strike system work? Learners thought that staff were sometimes too lenient, giving too many chances to disruptive learners. Ideas in writing were requested from the group members.
- What alternatives are there to being sent off site? The suggestion was put that learners who accrue a set number of strikes should have to attend the centre on a Friday, when others do not. This suggestion was strongly supported by a number of learners.
- Are positive incentives needed? Group members thought that the star system could be used to provide an incentive for constructive behaviour. Stars should lead to financial incentives (linked to the EMA bonus) or places on enrichment outings.
- Does the timetable itself cause some of the behaviour in the training room if learners can't see the relevance of courses to them? On one of the sites, the member of staff plans each six-week course with the learners, using post-its and flipcharts. The whole group owns the course and there is very little disruptive behaviour. It was suggested that this approach is considered on other sites.

Clip 2d: A whole-organisation approach at Lewisham College



>>> Clip length 11m32s

Purpose and description

This clip includes explanations of the strategy and practice of learner involvement at Lewisham College, from senior members of staff, student representatives and middle managers. It is adopting a whole-college approach, encompassing the representative structure, student contribution and volunteering opportunities, and possibilities for real changes within the college initiated by students. The clip provides discussion of examples of all of these. It also includes a senior manager talking about an Ofsted inspection which focused on the learner voice. The clip can be used with senior managers, staff or learners to raise questions about the role of learner voice in promoting contribution, inclusion and cohesion within an educational organisation, and to make explicit the links between active citizenship and learner involvement.

Background

Lewisham College in South East London is a double Beacon college. It has over 13,000 students on roll who come from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances. The students reflect the diversity of this part of London, with students from a black or minority ethnic background making up 52 per cent of the college population. The college has well-developed and established formal structures for listening and responding to the learner voice. These include a student charter, course representatives who attend a school of study forum and the college forum, student governors, and a directly-elected student union president and executive. Other processes include learner surveys, comments cards, focus groups and user surveys. Feedback is publicised through 'you said, we did' posters.

However, as part of the development and implementation of personalisation, the college is moving towards an ethos of 'contribution'. They call this 'the breaking voice' and it involves: *'the mobilisation of agency within the learner so that they not only are active participants in their learning but also develop a sense of consequence and contribution – becoming givers as well as takers and importantly helping to provide solutions to problems. Each school has developed a curriculum-based contribution menu in addition to the college Menu of Contribution'*.⁴

⁴ *More than a voice at Lewisham College: the breaking voice – cultivating contribution*, unpublished document, Lewisham College, 2008.

Activities for staff and learners

- Show the clip and then discuss reactions to the work at Lewisham College, drawing out possible points of comparison with the participants' own organisation.

Discussion points might include:

- *the learner-centred approach*
 - *the impact of learner involvement strategy (for example areas students can influence; levels of student involvement)*
 - *the benefits of learner involvement (for students, staff, and more widely)*
 - *the links between learner voice and learner contribution to the college community*
 - *the role of student representatives and support for them*
 - *the part played by learner voice in the Ofsted inspection.*
- In order to generate ideas about the learning that comes from learner involvement, write this question on a flip chart: **'What knowledge, skills and attitudes do young people develop through learner involvement?'**
 - In small groups, give each group three pads of post-its in three different colours, one for knowledge, one for skills and one for attitudes, and write a reminder on the flip chart of which colour is which. Groups display their ideas under the three headings: **knowledge, skills and attitudes**, and then a final list for each is discussed and agreed.
 - Using the four **Examples of citizenship projects** in Section 3b on page 30, ask groups to discuss the knowledge, skills and attitudes illustrated in each.
 - Facilitate a whole-group discussion on the way in which learner involvement and citizenship activities can help create a climate of 'contribution', as Lewisham College is aiming to do.

SECTION 3

Discussion starters

In this section, Clips 3a and 3b show managers and staff discussing some of the issues raised for the development of learner voice policy and practice. The materials aim to help organisations plan and improve their strategies.

Clip 3a: What managers say



>>> Clip length: 04m46s

Purpose and description

This clip shows three senior managers discussing issues arising from their colleges' learner involvement strategies. They talk about the importance of learners feeling some ownership of the agenda and the types of decisions learners could and should be involved in. They discuss the need for training to ensure that staff have the right skills to encourage learners to participate and the importance of action being taken, where appropriate, on the basis of learners' input. They also talk about the links between the educational organisation and the wider community, and the relationship between learner voice and active citizenship. This clip could be used with staff and senior managers to stimulate discussion on the future direction of the organisation's policy and practice in relation to learner voice.

Activities for use with staff and senior managers

- Introduce the clip by summarising the description above. Show it and ask participants to jot down anything they find particularly insightful or surprising.
- Ask for immediate comments at the end of the clip and then raise the following general questions for discussion:
 - *What kinds of issues should be discussed with young people?*
 - *Are there any issues that should not be discussed with young people?*
 - *What training do staff need to help promote an effective learner voice?*
 - *What innovations are needed to help learners feel genuinely involved in decision-making processes?*
 - *How can links be made between learner voice in the educational organisation and greater community involvement of young people?*
- Use the **Planning tool for improving the learner voice strategy** on page 25 to help staff and managers review their strategy.

Planning tool for improving the learner voice strategy⁵

Critical success factor:	Current practice:	Action required:
<p>Learners' involvement is a visible commitment that is properly resourced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment from senior managers is visible • Participation is built into planning, services, resources and communication • Staff have the opportunity to develop attitudes and skills needed 		
<p>Learners' involvement is valued</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are treated honestly and with respect and contributions are taken seriously • Feedback about their involvement is prompt and clear • Participation is rewarded and celebrated 		
<p>Learners have an equal opportunity to get involved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their participation in making decisions that affect them is seen as a right • They all feel included and not discriminated against on any grounds at all • Extra effort is made to include young people facing additional barriers • Training and support are available for young people • Clear, jargon-free information is available for young people 		
<p>Policies and standards are in place and evaluated and monitored</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outcomes of participation are clear • Young people help evaluate and monitor the policy • There are agreed quality standards and a code of conduct 		

⁵ Adapted from the 'Hear by right' standards. See www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright

Clip 3b: Involving learners – how far do you go?



>>> Clip length: 05m36s

Purpose and description

This clip illustrates one way in which Hart's Ladder of Participation⁶ can be used in a staff or learner training session to encourage discussion about the various degrees of involvement of young people in running projects and in decision-making. The aim is to encourage participants to reflect on whether or not young people have a real role in shaping activities, events and decisions.

Background

The filmed sequence shows part of a national training day on citizenship and learner voice, organised and run by the Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme. Participants came from a wide variety of educational organisations, including schools, colleges, training providers and youth groups. The facilitator used the eight steps on Hart's Ladder of Participation to tease out the different ways in which young people could or should be involved in activities. He provided cards for small groups of participants showing the different 'steps' on the ladder and asked groups to decide where on the ladder each step should go, with a justification.

The resulting discussion throws light on different views on youth participation and the role of adults.

There are other typologies of youth participation in the literature. One recent typology, from the International Association for Public Participation⁷, is provided as a comparison with Hart's. One of the strengths of Hart's ladder is that it draws attention to forms of 'participation' that are less genuine than others. 'Manipulation', 'Decoration' and 'Tokenism' are easy traps to fall into. In the IAPP typology, all levels, as described, allow some positive involvement of young people. Another difference between the two is the role of adults in working in partnership with young people. Hart sees shared decision-making between adults and youth as the highest level of participation, while the IAPP typology sees the highest level as giving complete control and ownership to young people.

⁶ Roger A Hart, *Children's participation: from tokenism to citizenship*, Innocenti Essay 4, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, Italy, 1992.

⁷ Quoted in 'Learner involvement in decision making', John Shuttle, Brighton and Hove City Council Learning Partnership (See www.post16citizenship.org/files/David_Collinson_Leadership_&_LV.pdf)

Activities for use with staff and learners

- Make cards, as shown in the clip and carry out the same activity with participants. Hart's Ladder of Participation is reproduced on page 28 with explanations of each step on page 29.
- Show the clip to participants. Give out copies of **The 'ladder of participation'** and the explanation of each step in **Degrees of participation**. Discuss with them some of the issues raised, for example:
 - *What constitutes real youth participation, even if it does not reach the highest level?*
 - *What might be the dangers of 'manipulation', 'decoration' or 'tokenism'?*
 - *What factors affect the degree of participation that young people can achieve?*
 - *What roles should adults take in youth-led projects?*
- Put participants into four groups and give one of the examples from **Examples of citizenship projects**, copied and cut up from page 30 to each group. Ask them to discuss the degree of youth participation in their case study and decide where they would place this participation on Hart's ladder. Re-structure groups into 'rainbow' groups (consisting of a mix of people from each of the case study groups) and ask them to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each of the case studies before a brief plenary discussion.
- Give out **Spectrum of engagement** on page 31, the alternative typology developed by the International Association for Public Participation, and discuss with participants the differences between this and Hart's ladder.

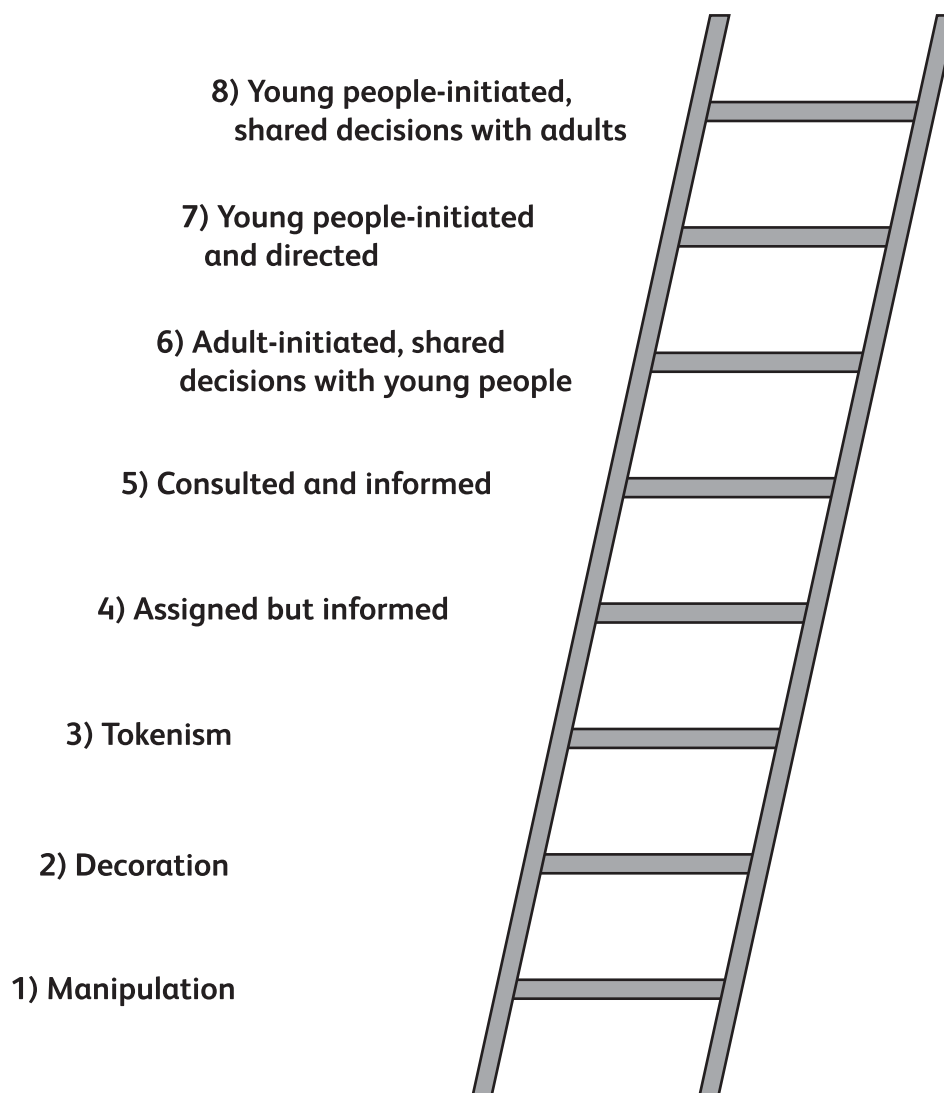


The 'ladder of participation'

Roger Hart devised the 'ladder of participation' to show the different ways in which adults and young people can work together.

The bottom of the ladder illustrates a situation in which young people are involved, but have no significant input into the event. This situation usually occurs when adults want to create an illusion of youth involvement.

The aim is to move up the ladder as appropriate, although it is in the interests of the event and the young people if their involvement reflects participation at level four and upwards.



Degrees of participation

8) Young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults

This happens when projects or programs are initiated by young people and decision-making is shared between young people and adults. These projects empower young people while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults.

7) Young people-initiated and directed

This step is when young people initiate and direct a project or programme. Adults are involved only in a supportive role. Young people have less opportunity to learn from adults' experience.

6) Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people

This occurs when projects or programmes are initiated by adults but the decision-making is shared with the young people.

5) Consulted and informed

In this situation, the young people are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults. Sometimes young people give advice on projects or programmes designed and run by adults.

4) Assigned but informed

This is where young people are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved.

3) Tokenism

Sometimes young people appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate.

2) Decoration

This happens when young people are used to help or 'bolster' a cause in a relatively indirect way, although adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by young people.

1) Manipulation

In this situation, adults use young people to support causes and pretend that the causes are inspired by young people.



Example of citizenship projects

1

A district council wishes to consult young people on a new community plan. Members of a youth group work with council officials to plan a programme of consultation events for young people in the area. They create a series of 'vox pop' clips on the views of young people on a series of local issues to stimulate discussion at the events. The events are fronted by the youth group members, who facilitate voting on aspects of the community plan. Council members and officials attend the event and receive a report from the young organisers. This is included in material that influences decision making.

Example of citizenship projects

2

A college is hosting a visit from some education officials from overseas who are interested in looking at learner involvement strategies. The senior managers are keen to show off the best practice. Six students are selected from the college parliament to meet the visitors and talk to them about college strategies for involving them in decision-making. The students are given a list of questions that they may be asked and encouraged to practice their answers. When the visitors arrive, the students meet them and take them to the meeting room, where they talk to the visitors without staff being present.

Example of citizenship projects

3

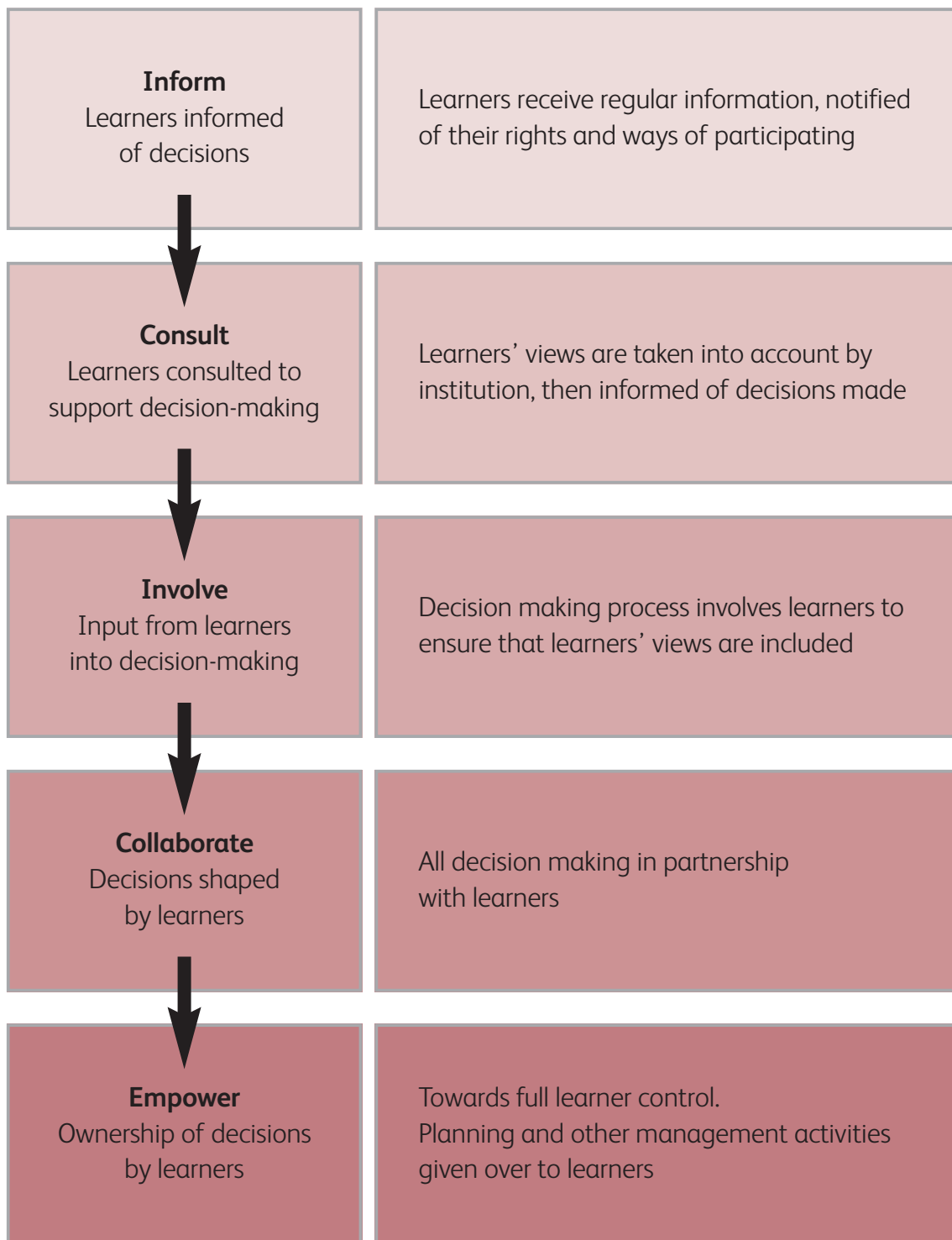
A group of young people have heard about an earthquake which has caused huge damage in an Asian country. They are upset that the disaster appears to be getting little media attention, and so they decide to organise a fund-raising event in the college. After getting permission from the college principal, they plan, organise and run a talent contest after college hours. The contest is publicised around the college. Contestants and audience pay a fee to attend and local businesses donate prizes for winners. Staff attend to help out with crowd management and security. The event is a great success and raises £500 to donate to charities involved in the rescue and rebuilding work following the earthquake.

Example of citizenship projects

4

A group of learners take part in a citizenship project that has been set up by staff. It involves students in carrying out research into local views on CCTV cameras in the town centre. The learners visit the CCTV control centre and talk to the officials there. They also interview local police officers, councillors and residents, using a questionnaire provided. Later the college hosts a 'Question Time' at which other learners can ask a panel of councillors, police and politicians about the use of CCTV in the area. The panel has been organised by staff, but chaired by a student and the learners in the audience prepare their own questions.

Spectrum of engagement (International Association for Public Participation)



SECTION 4

Learners' views on learner voice

In this section, a series of clips present the views of some learners. Clips 4a and 4b show young people talking about whether they should have a voice, how this voice could be heard, the role of representatives and support required by them. Clips 4c, 4d, 4e and 4f are short videos, made by young people who were the winners and runners-up in a competition requiring them to say how their voices could be better heard.

Clip 4a: Some learner perceptions



>>> Clip length: 06m15s

Purpose and description

In this clip, a group of learners uses some statements on cards as a stimulus to a discussion on their views on learner voice: why they should have one, ways in which opportunities could be provided and what works best. The statements on the cards are deliberately provocative and present arguments that are often advanced as reasons why learners should not have a voice, or for them having a restricted voice, within a learning organisation.

Staff could use the clip as a basis for considering whether these learners' views are held within their own organisation and the extent to which they agree with the views expressed.

Activities for use with staff

- Show the DVD-ROM clip and ask participants to discuss their views on learners' comments in pairs. In the whole group, discuss the following general questions:
 - *How far should learners be involved in the decision-making processes in an educational organisation?*
 - *What are the strengths and weaknesses of representative structures?*
 - *What additional opportunities are needed to ensure that everyone's voice is heard?*
 - *How can informal opportunities for learner voice be made effective?*

- The cards used in the clip to stimulate learners' discussions can be used in a different way in staff training, where participants are encouraged to consider the arguments against each statement. Ask participants to work in threes and give each small group a set of **Argument cards** photocopied and cut up from page 34. Tell them they are going to play three roles in rotation:

A. Putting forward an argument or opinion

B. Presenting a counter-argument or alternative viewpoint

C. Observer.

The set of cards is placed face-down on the table and **A** turns over the top card. He/she puts the argument on the card and **B** responds quickly with an opposing point plus a reason. **C** awards marks: 1 for a relevant point and 2 if a reason is also given. Participants change role after two cards. They could then write two additional arguments on the blank cards.

- Staff concerns about learner voice are illustrated in the article, ***Union: pupil voice is used to target teachers***, on page 35. Give out copies of the article, ask participants for comments and discuss what educational organisations need to do if such fears are to be reduced.



Argument cards



Young people are not mature enough, and do not have enough experience, to make decisions on issues such as staff appointments.

If learners are consulted on their education, they may just criticise staff who have given them low marks in the past or have challenged them.

Learner councils will always be dominated by articulate, high-achieving young people. This will further alienate those students who are less confident.

Young people are not interested in having a say in college life. They just want to get their qualifications, have a good time and leave.

Much of the business of college committees involves confidential matters which students cannot be trusted to know about.

Staff are often not consulted about college decisions. Let's get them involved before we worry about student involvement.

(Add your own argument)

(Add your own argument)

Union: pupil voice is used to target teachers⁸

NASUWT flags up danger of management exploitation of children's views

Some heads are manipulating the increasing number of pupil-voice initiatives in schools to bully teachers and promote their own interests, a teachers' union has warned. A sharp rise over the past two years in queries from members about pupils having a greater say in schools has led the NASUWT to draw up new guidance.

The document – seen by *The TES* – says the union is: “concerned that student-voice activities might be exploited to reflect the concerns and interests of school managers to the exclusion or detriment of other members of staff”. It gives the example of pupils being asked about teaching quality. “The way in which students' views are sought or used by the school could be for management rather than educational purposes and to legitimise the management perspective,” the guidance says.

Chris Keates, the union's general secretary, said some headteachers had already used requests for pupils' views to bully teachers inappropriately. “Student questionnaires have been framed in such a way that you are bound to get comments on individual teachers because they are the only ones teaching that lesson,” she said. “They have then been asked to see the head, who has told them that pupils say their lessons are boring on the basis of a very simplistic questionnaire.”

Pupil voice is becoming increasingly prevalent in schools. In November, Parliament passed a law that will require schools to consult pupils

on everything, from the way they are taught, to behaviour.

The union says it has no problem with the principle of pupil voice as long as it is not abused. But it opposes pupils making formal lesson observations and participating in staff recruitment interview panels. “Meaningful lesson observation can only be undertaken by individuals who are suitably qualified,” the guidance says. “Formal student observation of teachers' practice can risk undermining key elements of the relationship between teachers and pupils by legitimising criticism of teachers.”

On interviews, the union says it is important that newly recruited teachers feel confident and not set up to fail. “Part of that confidence will be contingent on being able to establish an appropriate level of rapport with pupils and to feel empowered to act with authority,” the guidance reads.

The union cites the case of a pupil on an interview panel who said she believed a candidate was inappropriate for the job. When asked why, she said it was because of her red shoes.

The NASUWT is also concerned about pupils who are associate school governors, pointing out that they can be excluded from talks about appointments, pay and discipline, but it is not compulsory to do so.

⁸ ‘Union: pupil voice is used to target teachers’, William Stuart, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 16 January 2009.

Clip 4b: Learner reps talking



>>> Clip length: 03m30s

Purpose and description

This short clip shows reps from a range of organisations talking about their role. They cover some of the requirements to do the job well and they talk about the benefits of a good system of learner representation for other students, staff and the organisation. The clip concludes with learner reps talking about what they have learned from the experience. The clip can be used with staff or learners. It would be particularly useful as part of a training programme for learner reps.

Activities for use with learner reps and staff

Discussion activities for learner reps:

- Show the clip, asking participants to look out for young people's views on what makes the job effective and what the benefits of an effective system are for all concerned.
- Put reps into pairs and ask them to discuss which of the statements in the clip they agree with, and which they disagree with. Could they add any views of their own about the role of rep that were not expressed in the clip?
- Many of the reps say that some learners do not know that they are reps, or do not approach them with issues they want raised. The **Course rep checklist** handout on page 38 is from the *Toolkit for course representatives*⁹. Give out copies to pairs and ask them to add TWO suggestions to the checklist that would help to publicise the role of rep and encourage more learners to take an interest in the representative structures.
- The reps in the clip mention many personal benefits from their experience of being a rep. Ask young people to list the benefits they have gained and consider a strategy for encouraging others to take on the role.
- Use the **Questions for reps' discussion carousel** that appears in Section 2a (page 16) to help trainee reps consider how they would deal with some of the issues they are likely to encounter.

⁹ *Toolkit for course representatives*, LSIS, <http://excellence.qia.org.uk/reps/tools.html>

Discussion activities for staff:

- Show the clip, asking participants to look out for young people’s views on what makes the job effective and what the benefits of an effective system are for all concerned.
- Discuss the following questions with the whole group:
 - *What skills do reps say they need to do the job?*
 - *What are the main obstacles to doing the job well?*
 - *What are the benefits for all members of the organisation if the system works effectively?*
 - *What do reps say they learn from the experience of being a rep?*
- Put participants into groups and ask them to do a SWOT analysis on their current rep system, using flip-chart paper. You could use the traditional words, or adapt them, as follows:

Strengths what is currently good?	Weaknesses what is currently less good?
Opportunities what could happen to improve things?	Threats what might stop improvement?

- Ask each group to feed back from a different part of the chart and ask for comments on each group’s feedback. Decide on the priorities for action to improve the learner rep system in your organisation.

Course rep checklist

You really must:

- tell everybody in your class that you are their course rep
- pin up a list of events and course review meetings on your class notice board
- attend course review meetings
- get onto any mailing lists that are in place for course reps (these might be run by your college, your department or your student union)
- attend student rep meetings.

It would be good if you:

- arranged a social event for your course
- found out who the other course reps within your department are, and who is involved in the other systems of learner representation (such as the student parliament or students union)
- wrote handover notes for the next course rep and arranged for your course tutor to hand over your folder of notes to them.

It would be amazing if you:

- arranged for the candidates in the student union or student parliament election to come and speak to your class. Remember that you are the base of all the systems of learner representation in your college and it's important that you get involved in influencing others.

'Look at it this way' Citizenship short film competition Winners and runners-up



Clips 4c, 4d, 4e, 4f: The winners and runners-up videos

>>> Clip 4c: Guildford College winning video – length 03m25s



>>> Clip 4d: Hinwick Hall College of Further Education runner-up video – length 03m03s



>>> Clip 4e: Notre Dame Catholic Sixth Form College runner-up video – length 02m53s



>>> Clip 4f: Walsall College runner-up video – length 03m05s



Background

The competition was promoted by the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) with support from the Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It aimed to uncover the views of young people, in post-16 education and training on one of the key objectives of citizenship, that is how to give all learners a louder and more effective voice, using the medium of video. They were set the task of making a three-minute video that completed the statement, '**Our ideas for improving learner voice are...**'.

The winner of the competition was Guildford College, and the runners-up were Hinwick Hall College of Further Education, Wellingborough; Notre Dame Catholic Sixth Form College, Leeds; and Walsall College. The four videos make interesting viewing in that they present the point of view of learners. The topics of the entries included investigating perceptions of learner voice, the importance of hearing views from learners of all abilities, the role of student representatives and the benefits of having a student senate. The entries from Guildford College and Notre Dame Sixth Form College deal with issues relating to learner voice in mainstream colleges. The entries from Walsall College and Hinwick Hall College give the viewpoints of learners with disabilities.

Activities for use with staff and learners

After watching the video clips, staff and learners could discuss the following question:
‘What would a three-minute video clip on learner voice in our organisation look like?’
Learners could be encouraged to make their own video.

For participants with a particular interest in provision of learner voice for young people with disabilities, the views of the students are summarised on the Hinwick Hall entry form:

‘To make their voices heard they feel that people need to be patient, listen and spend time with them. This applies to the whole of society as well as the local organisation, including family, general public and the support services that will play a key part in assisting with planning their futures.’

The case study from the National Star College on pages 42–43 provides a stimulus to further discussion. It describes the learner voice and citizenship opportunities in an independent specialist college, working with learners who have physical disabilities and associated learning difficulties.



Case study

National Star College, a residential college for 160 students with disabilities

National Star College provides specialist education in a residential setting for young people with severe disabilities. There is a strong focus on learners developing the skills they need to take control of their lives and prepare for adulthood. Citizenship is prominent within the curriculum of the College, and learner involvement is seen as a crucial mechanism for strengthening the learners' capacity to engage as active citizens.

Key features to support this include:

- **Course and Residential Reps structures.** Each course and residential area elects a representative. Reps gather views from their peers during group/area meetings and take issues forward to the Student Union Executive, Student Parliament or other body as appropriate, feeding back on outcomes via the same routes. Training is provided for Course and Residential Reps to develop and support them in their roles. They are also encouraged to choose a particular issue of interest to them and their peers which they can develop further or campaign upon.
- **Student Union Executive.** Executive Members are elected by the whole student body by a secret ballot. Each Executive Member has a particular area of responsibility.
- **Student Parliament.** This new body brings together the Course and Residential Reps with the Student Union Executive to provide a more powerful, coherent, over-arching structure of elected representatives. In addition to regular Parliament meetings, the Parliament meets half-termly with the SMT, having selected 2–3 key issues to explore and seek further action upon. The Parliament also meets directly with the wider student body once a term, so that there is direct contact and feedback between the electorate and representatives.
- **Taught citizenship programme.** All learners were invited to participate in a survey to evaluate the citizenship programme. The response rate was high, at 70–75 per cent. The evaluation resulted in significant changes to reflect learners' preferences, especially in terms of learner voice: a new optional module of 'voting in elections' has been introduced and there is greater emphasis on 'real life' examples of voice/representation. Classroom activities, including facilitated reflection and discussion, help develop the learning from the many learner involvement activities at the college.

- **Community opportunities.** Promoting integration into the wider community via citizenship and learner voice activities is a key strand for the college. The programme of external events and opportunities includes active participation in local authority ‘Youth Links’ programmes to meet with councillors and learn about local democracy, and participation in a democracy week, finding out how councillors operate. There are also strong links with local disability forums where learners participate in Q&A sessions and meet figures from the local and national disability community. Learners are also actively encouraged to stand for the local Youth Parliament and several have done so.
- **Envoys programme.** As part of the citizenship programme, up to 12 learners a year take part in a one-term ‘envoy’ training programme where they are trained in how to be effective participants in meeting/working parties, etc. This is part personal development, part ‘active citizenship’ training and includes how to present oneself in meetings, how to avoid being intimidated and communicate with confidence. External speakers present on various aspects. Envoys are then encouraged to join working parties in areas of interest to use the skills in ‘real life’.
- **Personalised learning mentors.** These are separate from the tutorial system. Tutor–mentors work with smaller groups of 10–12 to give as much individualised support to learners as possible. The groups are another means of gathering learner views in a relatively informal setting.

Results and further progress:

All learners have opportunities to improve their understanding of how to use their voice effectively, through both the tutorial and citizenship programmes and the learner involvement activities themselves. Regular meetings with Course and Residential Reps, with the Student Union Executive and with the Student Parliament mean there are many opportunities for learners to raise issues of concern directly with their representatives and to receive feedback on outcomes. As a result, learners have been able to influence decisions on a range of issues from course content (such as the taught citizenship programme) to facilities. For example, in response to learners’ requests, facilities at the Student Union office have been expanded, accessibility in the foyer areas has been improved, and Sky TV has been installed in residential areas. Staff have noted a growth in individuals’ confidence and self-esteem as a result of their participation in learner-involvement activity.

Now that the representative structures at the college are well established, the college plans to encourage both Reps and other learners to become more proactive in how they make use of them, internally and externally, particularly by developing and delivering their own action plans and campaigns. Staff are also keen to continue to develop partnerships with the community as this has proved a very effective way of helping learners develop the ‘real life’ skills and knowledge they need for life beyond the college.

Further reading

- Children's participation: from tokenism to citizenship*, Roger A Hart, Innocenti Essay 4, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, Italy, 1992
- Developing a learner involvement strategy: a handbook for the further education sector*, LSC, 2007
- Evaluation of the impact of the learner involvement strategy: Year one interim report*, Ekogen/Ipsos Mori/LSC, 2008
- A focus on improvement: proposals for FE and skills system inspections from September 2009*, Ofsted, November 2008
- Leading the learner voice: dissemination of effective practice*, LSIS, January 2009
- 'Learner involvement in decision making', John Shuttle, Brighton and Hove City Council Learning Partnership, in *Leadership and the learner voice*, Collinson, D., Centre for Excellence in Leadership, 2007
- Learner voice*, Futurelab, 2006
- National survey of post-16 providers: gathering and using learner views in LSC-funded provision*, Aitken, G. et al, LSC, 2006
- Raising Skills, improving life chances: Giving learners and employers a say*, DIUS, September 2008
- Six approaches to post-16 citizenship: 1. Citizenship through learner voice and representation*, QIA, 2007
- Toolkit for course representatives*, QIA, 2006, <http://excellence.qia.org.uk/rep/index.html>
- Working Together: Listening to the voices of children and young people*, DCSF, 2008
- Agree to disagree: citizenship and controversial issues*, QIA, 2005
- For the sake of argument: discussion and debating skills in citizenship*, QIA, 2006
- Getting the show on the road: skills for planning and running citizenship events*, QIA, 2006
- Citizenship Staff Development Quick Steps: 4. Learner voice*, LSIS, 2008

For the full range of free Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme resources go to:
www.post16citizenship.org/publications

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Using the DVD-ROM

Please note this disc is designed to be used with your DVD-ROM drive. It is not designed to play in a DVD Player.

Loading instructions (PC)

Insert disc into DVD-ROM drive. The program should start automatically. If it doesn't start automatically, please click on the Listening to Learners icon found in My Computer or follow the steps below:

1. Select **Start**
2. Select **Run**
3. In the box type **D:\listeningtolearners.html**
(where **D**, or some other letter, is the name of your DVD drive)
4. Select **OK**

System minimum requirements (PC)

CPU: Pentium III 550 MHz. RAM: 256 Mb. DVD drive: 16x Speed. Sound card (16 bit). Speakers or headphones. SVGA Graphics card, 16 bit colour. Keyboard and mouse. Operating System: Minimum Windows 2000; Recommended Windows XP SP2 and above. Browsers: IE 6.0 and Firefox 2.0

Additional software requirements

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To view PDF files **Adobe Acrobat Reader** (Version 9.0 recommended) must be installed. This is included on the DVD-ROM. Information on installing **Adobe Acrobat Reader 9** is contained in the Help File.

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To view video or listen to audio **QuickTime Player** (Version 7 recommended) or **Windows Media Player** must be installed. These players may already be installed on your computer or can be downloaded from the internet.

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