

The Green Paper Project: Support and aspiration

Blackpool and Fylde College- Student forums



This case study outlines the structure supporting promoting and supporting learner voice across the college. The document also outlines the representation that the student forum has, some of the changes they have introduced and the ways in which they shape college provision.

Our organisation

Blackpool & The Fylde College is a general FE college and within that College there is the School of Access & Continuing Education. The School provides a learning environment for students 16-18 years old with additional learning needs. The School also caters for students aged 19+ with additional learning needs and in addition, learners with mental health challenges and learners for who English is a second language (ESOL).

This case study looks at learner voice at Blackpool & The Fylde College and how the college aims to listen to learners ideas, suggestions and comments to improve their experience at the college

Blackpool and The Fylde College have departments known as 'schools' and each school houses a specific vocational or academic course e.g. School of Construction, A-level academy etc . Within each school area are various levels of course and each course aims to have 2 learner representatives – 'student reps'. These form the basic cohort of learner voice and drive the learner voice forward in various strategic ways with other members of the college.

Our approach

The aim has been to further develop the learner voice (especially relevant as Blackpool & the Fylde College commit to "put the learner at the heart of all we do") which provides a platform for learners to bring their concerns, ideas and feedback, which are discussed at termly student forums.

This learner voice initiative is now under the remit of Blackpool & The Fylde College's newly instated FE Director for 14 – 19. Learner voice encompasses student

representation and also the Student Union body that are active in formulating these forums.

At the beginning of term each course nominates 2 representatives, one main rep and a deputy rep. The Student Union also campaign for various role members that attend the student forum meetings. The student forum meetings are held termly over a 2 hour lunchtime period with lunch provided.

Prior to the Student Forum meeting the Student Rep meets with course peers and collates comments and feedback to bring to the Forum meeting.

The Student Forum is chaired by the Vice Principal responsible for curriculum. The first hour is designated for the reps to discuss issues between themselves as a body, to work collaboratively and record any issues to be discussed later. This is overseen (in the background and available to advise if required) by the Student Liaison Officer.

The second hour is chaired with the Vice Principal (VP) and attended by senior managers from corporate and academic areas along with the student reps. The VP feedbacks along with representation from the Student Union in the format of: 'This is what you asked for....this is what we have done...'

The reps then discuss with staff other issues, concerns and feedback of what has worked well etc. Immediate feedback is given if possible from the Academic and Corporate staff however any issues that need consultation feedback is provided at the next meeting.

The initiative works in the same way for both FE and HE learners.

The outcome and impact of the work

In summary: This involves 120 student course reps, Student Union reps including: Presidents for FE and HE, FE Student Governor, FE Vice President, Communications Officer for FE and HE, Events Officer for FE, Equality and Diversity Officer for FE and HE, Lesbian, Gay, Bi – sexual and Trans sexual (LBGT) Officer for FE and Education Officer for HE. It also involves senior management for both academic and corporate areas and appropriate middle managers and tutors. The Principle also attends as she perceives this forum to be crucial to learner autonomy and voice.

Impact:

- The forum provides an opportunity to work collaboratively as a multi sited college and air views and ideas in a positive, respectful manner.
- College is made aware of arising issues that can be acted upon in a timely manner.
- It enables College to know what it is doing well
- Learners know that they have an investment in what is going on, happening in college, be part of it and take a pride in college.

The possibility of becoming a student rep is open to all learners.

Class reps and Student Union reps are chosen by their peers after prior guidance is given by personal tutors as to what makes an efficient rep.

Training is given as to what makes a good rep/what duties are involved.

For student Union rep roles various training has been offered and includes: Safeguarding, NUS training including attending a residential, Equality issues, secretarial skills i.e. minute taking skills, and marketing experience. The aim being to provide opportunities for reps to gain vital skills to enable greater employability opportunities.

As a result of learner voice a series of developments have been undertaken across college, these include;

'Listening posts' being investigated – an initiative led by student representation and works around a designated public area for people that require audible information about locations in college and information from the public information screens.

College now has cashback facilities in canteen areas.

Organic and healthy food options have been integrated.

Music and chat areas along with quiet areas have been organised in the Learning Resource Centres.

Car share scheme is up and running along with the bike scheme as a 'go green' initiative.

Next steps and future plans

Changes that are being discussed for Student Union reps include having a president in place ready for the following academic year. Campaigning will start in March so a handover period can follow including training ready for a September start.

Changes to the student forum meeting have included not having staff involved in the first hour to give greater credence to learner autonomy.

The student forums will continue to evolve as learner voice dictates.

Ideas to work 'SMARTer' in training reps and initiatives to reward them for performing their duties.

Blackpool & The Fylde College is constantly working towards learner involvement and has set the college values to reflect this. The student rep meetings link up the college values that include:

Value 1: Placing the learner at the heart of all we do

Value2: Showing fairness, courtesy and mutual respect

Value3: Teaching and learning as the key to our success

Value4: Aspiring to excellence: quality is everyone's responsibility

Value5: Working together to get the best results

Value6: Empowering others to achieve their full potential

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