

Embedding Learner Voice

Croyden College and Warwickshire College (GFE) Traditional structures used innovatively



Background

When learners are empowered to engage with and change their learning environment, and when organisations know how to listen to feedback and embrace student involvement, there is great potential for cross-organisational change.

The role of learner representatives is to gather the views and opinions of their peers and then engage with the learning organisation to act on this feedback to facilitate developments and change where possible – and this is most effective when Learner Reps are able to communicate and work with decision makers directly. This section provides examples of how organisations have created and supported channels of communication between learners and the learning organisation to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of co-produced learning.

About Croyden College and Warwickshire College

Croyden College is an educational institution with 8,000 students, made up of a Further Education College and a University Centre. It is located in East Croyden, within the London Borough of Croyden.

Warwickshire College is one of the largest further and higher education colleges in the UK – with six centres across Warwickshire and Worcestershire. It provides a broad range of National Curriculum and vocational courses to students aged 16 and over.

Their Story: What has Happened and How

Croydon College have established a “pyramid structure” for learner representation, creating representative roles at classroom, faculty and senior management levels. This mirrors the college’s own tiered structure, to ensure learner representation is present at every decision making level of the college.

Each class elects at least one representative and these representatives form a Faculty Council that deals with issues within their own curriculum area – focusing on practical suggestions and

developments, working directly with the Head of Faculty. From within these councils, learner reps then elect students to represent student views at a cross college meeting, known as the College Council. This representative group focus on cross college issues, working directly with College Senior Managers and the Head of Student Life and Pastoral Care. The Students' Union are also members of the College Council.

Differentiated training and support is offered to learner reps to ensure they are skilled and confident to engage and contribute to different levels of decision making.

Warwickshire College operate a similar structure over six campuses, with campus-based course rep councils, coordinated by the students' union which is led by an elected, full time sabbatical officer. The campus-based course rep councils agree their own agenda and invite staff to their councils as they feel appropriate. In addition to this, Warwickshire College also have Academy Reps, who focus on teaching and learning within their site or academy, meeting regularly with managers responsible for teaching staff.

Impact, Successes and Ideas for Action

With the support of the college and students' union, learner representation can be supported throughout all levels of college decision making. It is important that appropriate training is delivered to ensure learner reps are skilled and confident to participate in discussions at every level. It is also important to consider where learners can effectively contribute to decision making, and review how learner representation structures will work effectively to support this.