

Liverpool Community College

Leading on learner voice



Our organisation

[Liverpool Community College](#) is a large further education (FE) college with a student population of 16,000. The college has six main sites across the city offering a broad curriculum that includes academic and vocational routes. In addition to this the college has eleven community DISCs (Drop In Study Centres) at various locations throughout Liverpool.

Our approach

College Start (provision for students with learning difficulties) has struggled to capture the 'student voice' effectively. Evidence for this could be found in internal inspection reports and through observation of teaching and learning. The introduction of cross college questionnaires has meant that students who are unable to access Information Technology were not having their voice heard.

It was viewed as vitally important, by all staff, to introduce bespoke student voice arrangements for College Start students that both captured their voice and acted upon it.

Several meetings were held with Heads of Section for curriculum/student support and tutorial advisers.

At these meetings three main areas to capture student feedback were identified:

- 1) College facilities
- 2) Student support
- 3) Teaching and Learning.

It was also agreed that any activities to capture 'student voice' needed to be informal to help students relax as many were lacking in confidence or unaccustomed to formal meetings.

An idea was then formulated for 'student voice' meetings titled 'Tea, Toast and Talk'. These were to be held at different locations and times of day so all students could

access them. The aim was to provide an informal setting that put students at ease so they could talk about their experiences of college life.

Each of these 'Tea, Toast and Talk' sessions were:

- a) Held in a familiar location to the student i.e. independent living flat or Art room
- b) Conducted by a person known to the student but not their lecturer i.e. tutorial adviser or Head of Section
- c) Advertised throughout the college with posters produced in an easy to read format i.e. 'Widgit'.

Prior to each of the sessions the seating arrangements were organised informally so that students were relaxed. For sessions held in the independent living flat the couches were used for seating.

On entering each of the sessions students were offered a choice of drinks and toast. The facilitators were then able to talk informally to all the students about their experiences of college life.

Having had their toast and drinks each student was given a set of laminated photographs of college facilities which they have accessed during their time at the college. They were then encouraged to rate each of the facilities by placing the photographs in one of 3 large baskets:

- thumbs up
- thumbs sideways
- thumbs down



This gave us immediate feedback on the students overall impressions of these facilities. The results were then recorded on paper by the facilitators and used as a basis for further conversations with the students about how these facilities could be improved.

This whole process was then repeated for support and teaching & learning with statements being printed and laminated for readers and for non readers they were presented in any easy to read format i.e. widget.

All formal and informal results were then recorded by the facilitators and passed to the Main Grade Lecturers, Course Team Leaders, Curriculum Leaders, Head of Section and Head of Faculty. These results then fed in to an action plan written by the Heads of Section and monitored by the cross college 'Support and Challenge' meetings.

The outcome and impact of our work

Students felt their opinions were being listened to and acted upon. They also commented upon how much they enjoyed the informal nature of the sessions. It was also seen as something quite distinct from their usual lessons. All students when asked said they were more than willing to take part in the 'Tea, Toast and Talk' sessions again. It was also mentioned that such sessions should take place at least every term and may be every 6 weeks during the first term.

The college learnt some key lesson through the process too, these are;

- Involve as many areas of the college as possible in both the delivery of 'student voice' sessions and the subsequent action planning.
- Experiment with a range of informal activities which will engage all students.
- Certain activities will be more successful with some groups more than others.
- The more relaxed the session the more likely students will volunteer their views.
- Detailed action planning and monitoring of the plan is vital to ensure the success of the strategy. If students see immediate results they are more likely to engage in other 'student voice' activities.
- A carousel of activities is required to engage with students at different levels i.e. Pre-entry and Entry 1/2 students.

Next steps & future planning

The next phase of learner voice development will involve;

- Roll out the activities to other Entry level students enrolled on college courses.
- Continue to experiment with other activities to engage students with the student voice.
- Add to questions/statements to include a wider range of topics e.g. curriculum visits.

- Record the whole process so students with ASD can then watch a DVD of previous meetings before attending the 'Tea, Toast & Talk' session. This will hopefully remove any anxieties ASD students have about an unfamiliar activity.

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