

Work-related learning

What do learners see as the benefits?

As we showed on the previous page, gathering learners' views can provide insights into how we might engage them in learning more effectively. One study explored learners' perspectives on the benefits of their work-related learning (WRL) programmes. The study explored the key levers as well as the barriers to securing the benefits. Fifty Year 10 and 11 learners from three comprehensive schools and one FE college were consulted. What did they say?

The benefits

The learners said that they felt bored with formal schooling by KS4, but accessing a different curriculum for part of the week at a college helped them re-engage with learning. Learners found BTEC qualifications, incorporating both the practical and academic study of subjects, were more 'user-friendly' and gave them a 'head start'. They had also gained in confidence.

The levers

The study found six areas that helped re-engage learners and secured the benefits of WRL:

- **regime** – the college regime was seen as being fairer and friendlier than school
- **teaching style** – congeniality, humour and mutual respect were all factors that made for effective teaching in the learners' eyes
- **interest** – particularly the opportunity to make a fresh start and to learn practical skills that were, they felt, relevant to real world contexts
- **qualifications** – the course had a direct link to job choices and they thought the WRL qualifications would give them more choice post-16
- **time** – learners appreciated the generous allocation of time on the WRL course, yet sessions appeared to go quickly. Most learners also felt they managed their in-school time better than before, and
- **facilities** – all learners enjoyed the workshops, kitchen and salons. Together with professional equipment and small teaching groups these made the WRL experience very attractive.

The barriers

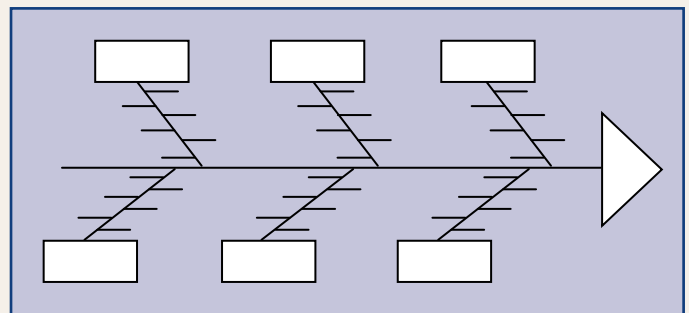
The researcher found several potential barriers to securing the potential benefits of WRL. Travel was an issue, particularly for those in rural areas. Some only managed to attend because their parents took them or paid their bus fares.

Timetabling was also an issue because the learners often had less time to complete GCSE coursework and sometimes missed lessons, particularly in core subjects. Some learners expressed a fear of falling behind their peers because of the amount of time they spent at college.

How might you gather your own learner voice data?

Transcripts of interviews with learners can be difficult to analyse. Disaffected and marginalised learners, who provide an important perspective, can also be the most difficult to consult. This study succeeded in overcoming both problems by making use of an innovative form of group interview that involved using an 'Ishikawa' or fishbone tool.

All that's needed is flip chart paper marked out with a fishbone like the one pictured and some marker pens for the learners. The problem, question or issue to be investigated is recorded in the triangular shaped head of the fish. During the course of the group interviews, major factors that learners consider as problems are placed at the end of each line (bone) by either the researcher or learners and other factors that contributed to the major factors are plotted along the bone.



In this study, the researcher used three 'fish bones' to collect data around three questions:

- why are some placements better than others?
- why does having time out of school help with school work?
- what are you learning on the programme?

The researcher then analysed the composite fish bones in terms of the benefits of WRL, the levers that can secure these benefits, and the barriers that needed to be overcome.

If you try this fishbone technique yourself, we'd love to hear how you got on.

Take action

Could you:

- ask someone to observe a session to analyse the classroom climate you create (in terms of congeniality, humour and mutual respect)
- investigate the funding that is available in your area for travel to the WRL programme, or
- gather your own learner voice data?

Evidence source

Hopkins, E. A. (2008) Work-related learning: hearing students' voices. *Educational Action Research*, 16 (2), pp.209-219.

Focus group data were collected using an analytic Ishikawa tool from 50 Year 10 & 11 students (15-16 year olds) across three 11-18 comprehensive schools located in urban and rural areas.