

Measuring the Impact of Learner Voice

How do you measure learner voice? NUS believes that the starting point for colleges should be to consider why they support learner voice in the first place. It is easy to share practice and benchmark with others in terms of what you do and how you do it but it's why you do it that will separate your practice from the rest.

Introduction

If an organisation has clarity on why it supports learner voice and believes in the goal they are trying to achieve, then the more likely others are to follow, believe and invest their time in support of what would then become a common goal or shared purpose. If the focus is on what the organisation does and how it does it, then it runs the risk of blending in with the majority by not considering unique opportunities, and by replicating models that might not be appropriate for their setting.

This document will help to separate 'why' organisations support learner voice from the more results and statistical driven aspects of 'how' and 'what'. Of course, 'how' and 'what' are still important considerations as they will provide indicators and results that will support the pursuit of the goal (why).

Why do organisations support learner voice?

Across the FE sector there will be different approaches and mechanisms in place for learner voice practice. Organisations that merely comply with their duties are more likely to focus on 'what they do' and 'how they do it'. That is because they are supporting learner voice in response to an outside influence – The Government. In this scenario the corporation is more likely to focus on things such as 'cost' or 'resources' for learner voice as opposed to focusing on the benefit and impact that learner voice can have within the organisation and the community it serves.

Example statements for why an organisation supports learner voice

Messaging is really important if you want others to believe and invest in the goal the organisation is trying to achieve. Developing a short statement is one way of clarifying this and it is something that could be included on the opening page of a learner involvement strategy, within marketing materials and through training resources that are developed.

Statement 1

The organisation believes that learner voice shapes the strategic direction of the organisation, its educational character and its mission.

Statement 2

The organisation believes that engaging students with its key decision making processes and activities will develop these individuals as citizens.

Statement 3

The organisation believes that students are at the heart of the education system and they should have the opportunity and platform to represent themselves and their peers through democratic processes.

Statement 4

The organisation believes that active learner involvement will help change the learning environment and its community for the better. We have a responsibility to empower, engage and enable students to achieve their potential and develop skills that will improve life chances for all.

Statement 5

The organisation believes that teaching and learning is our core business and that students are our core stakeholders. We will ensure that students are consulted and given every opportunity to shape our offer to the community that we serve.

These statements are just examples and are not intended to be restrictive; they can also be combined easily. It is worth asking the question 'Why do we do student engagement?' directly to your organisation's leadership. However, it is vital to pin down the precise reasons that go beyond responses such as "because it is important" or "because students are why we are here". Whilst both of these answers are valid they can be interpreted by others and do not set out a clear purpose or objective. This is why clarity of message/goal is so important, and not open to interpretation.

Therefore, to effectively measure the impact of learner voice there needs to be an understanding of:

- the scale and type of impact that is desired
- the specific change(s) you are trying to create
- the values that underpin the approach

Once you have established a collective, agreed understanding of this you can then consider how to distribute resources, time and activities in pursuit of the goal.

Example mechanisms for student engagement

Organisations will look to develop key performance indicators (KPIs) and/or a set of standards that need to be observed in relation to student engagement and learner voice. These KPIs and standards will provide an evidence base for colleges to then analyse whether they have achieved their goal, that is if they are aiming towards a specific, time bound agenda. At the very least this evidence should indicate whether they are making meaningful progress towards a bigger vision or goal whilst also identifying gaps and areas for improvement.

Below are some examples for 'how' organisations can measure student engagement, and 'what' these mechanisms can achieve in terms of providing KPI's.

EXAMPLE MECHANISM (HOW)	EXAMPLE RESULTS/KPIs/OUTCOMES (WHAT)
Students' union receives a block grant and has access to funds generated through NUS Extra and other commercial/income streams	Volume of opportunities available in terms of student led activity, for example campaigns, training, democracy and representation.
Democratic elections for ALL student leader positions	Volume of candidates standing, students voting and volunteers involved with the process.
Dedicated staff support for the students' union	Administrative and operational processes delivered and continuity of functions maintained.
College staff development days	Volume of staff receiving information, guidance and tutorials on learner voice, its purpose and aims for the year.
Learner Involvement Strategy	Organisation meets its legal duty in relation to publishing its arrangements for student engagement. Clear purpose, process and practice outlined and easily accessible to all staff and students.
Students' union constitution	Outlines processes and functions that are compliant with the 1994 Education Act and Charity Law as appropriate, to have a constitution it itself is a legal requirement.

	Outlines the practice and processes the students' union will undertake in order to effectively achieve its aims and objectives.
Allocation of space (both office and social)	A vibrant place where students can meet to discuss issues. A space where elected officers and representatives can work on issues, plan campaigns and use facilities to communicate with college staff, management and the outside world.
A full time paid student officer	Additional time to communicate with students; represent them internally and externally whilst also having additional capacity to carry out other office holder related tasks.
Memorandum of Understanding for student engagement	A clear outline of responsibilities, boundaries and partnership between a student led students' union and the college corporation.
A senior manager with specific responsibility for student engagement / students' union liaison / experience etc	Direct point of contact for students within the college management team. Embedding the responsibility of student engagement work within the college management team.
Pledge Cards from all departments	Specific commitment to learner voice from key individuals and groups from across the college, using their expertise to benefit and support the agenda. For example, budgeting, marketing, accessibility etc.
National and internal student surveys	Data in relation to the student experience and all matters affecting students. Identification of issues and areas for further analysis, achieving minimum response targets as appropriate.
Open and transparent research	Qualitative and quantitative data and information that can be used to inform strategy, campaigns and objectives.
Complaints Procedure	Analysis and use of complaints data to identify collective issues affecting students.
Student representation on college committees	A minimum of one student governor on the corporation as a legal requirement. Volume of student representation across all academic, operational and other relevant college committees. Publication of how the organisation (and students) has/intends to act upon issues that have arisen at these meetings.

External representation	Volume of students involved on external committees regionally, nationally and within the local community. Reports on how the issues raised by the college students/officers have been taken forward and acted upon where appropriate.
External training and network opportunities	Volume of students trained. Number of partnerships/links developed regionally and nationally through networks. Reports on the learning that has taken place and the dissemination of this to other students at the college.
A programme of activities on citizenship, democracy and activism for all students in the college	A calendar of events and opportunities that all students can access. Volume of students accessing these opportunities with participation monitored. Analytical report detailing 'need' and 'demand' in terms of what students will have access to.
Signposting services (in person and/or online)	Volume of students accessing services and cross reference this against issues raised and issues resolved.
A class representative system	A structure for student representation embedded throughout all levels of the college structure. Student feedback generated, monitored and acted upon. Data on participation and issues specific to teaching and learning. Volume of students standing for the position of class representative. Volume of students electing class representatives.
A Student Council / Forum / Parliament (They all serve the same purpose!)	Democratic decisions taken by students, informing a student-led action plan / campaigns. You Said, We Did, You Did document outlining key issues that the college and students will address. Data on attendance levels.
Focus groups	Specific activity, data and research on issues and areas of interest to students. Participation monitored, and the volume of student involvement recorded.
Campaigns	Campaign plans and objectives produced. Impact assessment carried out upon completion. Participation monitored, analysed and

	reported on to student council and the college corporation.
Student led clubs and societies	Number of clubs and societies in operation. Volume of students involved with clubs and societies. Budget for clubs and societies.
5 Year Students' Union Development Plan	Clear objectives and strategy in place that is developed and agreed by students. A clear direction for the students' union that is articulated to, and agreed by the college corporation.

Headline Outcomes

For Students

- Increased motivation and self-efficiency, leading to greater achievements
- An enriched, more rounded student experience for all students
- Active involvement in designing the curriculum
- Greater sense of ownership over their learning outcomes
- The development of personal, social, organisational and active learning skills which can be used in their future careers
- Improved relationships with peers and educators
- Development of citizenship skills
- Experience of leading an autonomous organisation
- Career pathways into leadership roles and politics

For Organisations

- Increased participation, retention, achievement and progression rates
- Shaping a generation of learners who will actively work with staff to enhance quality assurance, improving the overall quality of learning
- Identify elements for organisational improvement and implementation of policies and initiatives
- Make the organisation more appealing to prospective students
- Demonstrate how students actively serve and respond to the needs of the local community (and the wider communities that the college serves)

All of the above mechanisms, through student participation, enable those involved to gain new skills but whilst also allowing others to fine tune, develop skills that they already have. This can often be linked to a course that a student is on by providing them with additional opportunities to learn, or perhaps a personal interest that they may have outside of the organisation.

These factors should also be considered against the overall offer in terms of opportunities that student engagement can create for individuals, perhaps informing some of the reasons as to 'why' organisations believe in student engagement.