Evaluation of the Impact of the Learner Involvement Strategy:
Year Two: Final Report

A report to LSC National

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# Evaluation of the Impact of the Learner Involvement Strategy: Final Report

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1 INTRODUCTION

Background to Research

1.1 Learner involvement is a key element of the wider personalisation agenda which advocates that services will be improved by putting citizens at the centre of a given service and understanding and acting on their needs. 2007/08 was the first year in which there was an explicit requirement for Further Education providers to develop a Learner Involvement Strategy (LIS). Even where learner involvement activity has already been part of the provider ‘offer’, it is expected that the development of a strategic approach will result in benefits for both the learner and the provider. For example, these benefits might include:

- For the learner, a more engaging and responsive learning environment that enables them to shape their learning experience and helps them achieve improved learning outcomes;
- For the provider, more motivated and expert learners; improved information on which to base decisions about resources and approach; and increased performance in terms of participation, retention, progression and achievement for learners.

1.2 The requirement to develop a Learner Involvement Strategy applies to the wide range of further education providers and as such, different approaches would be likely to suit the various needs of learners and providers. Similarly, the suitability and quality of learner involvement activity will be reviewed as part of the overall self assessment reviews and inspection arrangements being developed as part of the FE Reform programme, including through the Framework for Excellence.

1.3 The LSC therefore commissioned an evaluation to understand the impact of learner involvement strategies on learners’ experience and success across the full range of FE providers. In summary, the objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Evaluate the impact of the Learner Involvement Strategy on the experience of learners in the FE system, in the full range of providers;
- Determine the extent to which providers have implemented a Learner Involvement Strategy;
- Measure the possible impact of Learner Involvement Strategies on teaching and learning, retention and achievement;
- Assess how providers are evaluating the impact of their Learner Involvement Strategies;
- Establish the impact of the Learner Involvement Strategy Handbook (this objective was completed in the Year One report);
- Set out the elements of the Handbook that are most successful and/or commonly occurring and those that are not, with reasons why;
- Evaluate the place of the Learner Involvement Strategy as part of the strategic planning of the provider agencies;
- Analyse the possible impact of Learner Involvement Strategy on diverse groups including young people ‘looked after’;
- Determine any further interdependencies with other policies/strategies including the Framework for Excellence and the Common Inspection Framework.

1.4 The evaluation was undertaken between December 2007 and May 2009. A Year 1 report was published in Spring 2008, reflecting activity in 2007-08. This is the final report which reviews the results of a series of telephone surveys conducted with providers and learners in Autumn/early Winter 2008.

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Further guidance on model Learner involvement strategies is available for WbL and ACL from LSIS via the following links:
- Adult and Community: http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=228873
and 20 further case study visits to providers (including 12 longitudinal visits to Year 1 case studies) as part of the second year of the evaluation.

**Summary of Method**

1.5 The overall approach adopted for the evaluation has been through three phases of work:

- Phase One was a preparatory phase which included scoping work with various stakeholders to ensure that later stages are based on full understanding of the policy and programme context in which the Learner Involvement Strategy is being implemented and that the evaluation specification would be fully met by the research programme.

- Phase Two included the main evaluation activities in **Year One** (2007-2008) and set out to establish the extent to which further education providers have developed Learner Involvement Strategies; levels of awareness and involvement among learners; experiences in developing and implementing Learner Involvement Strategies and emerging good practice.

- Phase Three covers the main evaluation activities in **Year Two** (2008-2009) and explores the extent to which providers have evolved their approach; levels of awareness and involvement among a further new cohort of learners; changes in awareness, involvement and expectation among learners participating in Year One (a longitudinal study); and further experiences among providers in developing and implementing learner involvement strategies and good practice.

1.6 In addition to analysis of Year 1 data for comparison with Year 2 fieldwork, this report presents the findings of the surveys and fieldwork undertaken in Phase Three and is based on:

- A telephone survey of 2,000 learners drawn from the ILR for academic year 2008/09;
- A longitudinal telephone survey of 700 learners that took part in the Year One survey;
- A longitudinal telephone survey of 650 further education providers that took part in the Year One survey; generically categorised as ‘further education’ (FE) or ‘work based learning’ (WBL); and
- A new cohort of 350 providers that were not contacted in Year One, to provide comparison with the longitudinal cohort; and
- 20 case study visits to providers of which 12 were return visits to those interviewed in Year 1.

1.7 Learner and provider samples for the telephone surveys were developed separately so there is no presumed connection between learner and provider responses. Survey Fieldwork took place between late October and early December 2008 and case study fieldwork took place between February and April 2009.

1.8 In the interests of readability, we have not presented detailed statistical values and charts for all commentary. In many of the survey responses, there was no significant difference between Further Education (FE) and Work Based Learning (WBL) providers or within specific sub-groups in cross-tabulation. Where a **significant difference** in the results of two groups is reported, differences are statistically significant at a **95% level** (i.e. significant at 0.05 level) unless otherwise stated in text or footnotes.2

1.9 The responses presented in tables and charts were pre-coded by the research team and asked of all respondents unless otherwise stated in text or footnotes. Statements were rotated to alleviate bias within the sample. Although responses are therefore not fully spontaneous, care was taken not to draw respondents to answer where they had no opinion.

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2 Significance indicates that there is a strong probability that there are real differences between two samples rather than the differences being a reflection of sample size.
1.10 In a small number of cases respondents were asked open ended questions giving rise to spontaneous responses. These responses were later coded by the research team. These cases are clearly highlighted in text or footnotes.

Profile of Respondents

Providers

1.11 A breakdown of providers (FE and WBL) for each of the three samples is shown in Figure 1.1, which shows that WBL providers comprise around two thirds of the sample. Large providers (with over 1000 learners) account for a third of the Year 1 and longitudinal samples and a fifth of the Year 2 sample (Table 1.1). There is a fairly even geographical spread across the samples (Table 1.2).

Figure 1.1 – Provider type

![Provider Type Chart]

Table 1.1 – Number of learners by provider

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of learners</th>
<th>Percentage of providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 50</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 199</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 to 999</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000+</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Stated</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of respondents</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.2 – Regional split of Providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage of providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and Humber</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Stated</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of respondents</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learners

1.12 The Year 1 and Year 2 longitudinal samples comprised 2000 and 700 learners respectively. In both cases 90% were FE learners and 10% WBL learners. The Year 2 cohort comprised 2008 learners, three quarters of whom were FE learners and one quarter WBL learners. The 16 to 18 year old age group accounted for the great number of learners in each sample (around 40%).

1.13 Table 1.3 shows the status of learners at the time they completed the survey. It shows that the greatest percentage of learners, in each sample, was studying on a full time basis. This is followed by those who were studying on a part time basis (one or two days a week).

Table 1.3 – Learner status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Percentage of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying FT</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying PT (1 or 2 days a week)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No longer on training course</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying at ACL centre</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying PT (block release)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying PT (not employed)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of respondents</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Report Structure

1.14 The remainder of the report is presented under the following sections, which reflect the structure of the Year 1 report:

- Benefits for Providers and Learners
- Strategy Development
- Participation Mechanisms
- Influencing Teaching and Learning
- Supporting Learners and Staff
- Conclusions.
2 BENEFITS FOR PROVIDERS AND LEARNERS

Introduction

2.1 This chapter provides an overview of the benefits and impacts that learner involvement programmes can have for both providers and learners.

How do providers benefit from learner involvement?

Overall extent of impact and benefit realised

2.2 Overall, analysis has shown that the implementation of a formal programme of learner involvement has a major impact on the scale of benefits accruing to providers as a result of learner involvement activity. Providers were also asked about impacts such as whether more learners achieved their desired qualifications and the results of these questions are presented in the following sections.

2.3 The cohort surveys in Year 1 and Year 2 highlighted a wide range of results and benefits accruing to providers as a result of their Learner Involvement activities. Over two thirds of providers surveyed for the first time in Year 2 and more than 60% of those surveyed longitudinally report a positive impact in relation to all of the measures considered (Figures 2.1 to 2.4). There do not appear to be any significant variations between FE and WBL providers in the level of benefits accrued through learner involvement activities.

2.4 The longitudinal sample indicates that some FE and WBL providers benefited differently in the early stages of introducing and then stepping up their Learner Involvement activities: for example:

- The ability of providers to demonstrate change in approach and improved understanding of how different groups of learners can take up opportunities was more prevalent among FE providers; and
- The outcome that more learners are achieving their desired qualifications was more frequently cited amongst WBL providers.

Benefits from learner involvement activities

Evidence from provider cohort surveys

2.5 Fifty six percent of the Year 2 cohort respondents had a formal programme of evaluation in place to assess the impact of learner involvement activity (68% of FE and 51% of WBL providers). There is no statistically significant difference between the findings in Year 1 and Year 2.

2.6 Among those surveyed longitudinally, 19% indicated that they had introduced a system to assess impact of their learner involvement programme since they were first interviewed in April 2008.

2.7 For those in the Year 2 cohort who could assess the impact of learner involvement activity (through a formal programme of evaluation), the results and benefits are impressive (Figures 2.1 and 2.2) but also show no significant difference over the Year 1³ cohort.

Figure 2.1 – Year Two cohort: Results and benefits of Learner Involvement (LI) for FE providers

³ Note: low sample size in Figures 2.1 to 2.4 as only those respondents who indicated that they had a programme of evaluation in place to assess the impact of learner involvement activity were asked to comment on the results and benefits accrued as a result.
Results and benefits as a result of learner involvement activity for FE providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results and benefits</th>
<th>Percentage of providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can demonstrate changes in approach as a result of LI</td>
<td>94% Yes, 4% No, 2% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods for communication between staff and learners improving</td>
<td>88% Yes, 6% No, 6% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LI recognised as being embedded in curriculum by staff and learners</td>
<td>97% Yes, 2% No, 1% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners increasingly feel they are partners in learning experience</td>
<td>86% Yes, 7% No, 7% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved ability to correlate LI with overall quality assurance processes</td>
<td>86% Yes, 9% No, 4% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching standards improving as a result of LI processes</td>
<td>87% Yes, 1% No, 2% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More learners achieving desired qualifications</td>
<td>88% Yes, 2% No, 0% Don't know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 69

Figure 2.2 – Year Two cohort: Results and benefits of LI for WBL providers

Results and benefits of learner involvement activity for WBL providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results and benefits</th>
<th>Percentage of providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LI recognised as embedded in curriculum by staff and learners</td>
<td>93% Yes, 3% No, 4% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can demonstrate changes in approach as a result of LI</td>
<td>91% Yes, 4% No, 5% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff more confident in how they can involve trainees</td>
<td>88% Yes, 4% No, 2% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainees increasingly feel they are partners in learning experience</td>
<td>88% Yes, 2% No, 0% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better understanding of how different groups can take up opportunities</td>
<td>87% Yes, 5% No, 2% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved ability to correlate LI with overall quality assurance processes</td>
<td>86% Yes, 5% No, 2% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved ability to collate and analyse information</td>
<td>86% Yes, 2% No, 2% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods for communication between staff and trainees improving</td>
<td>85% Yes, 2% No, 3% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainees reporting increased satisfaction with the processes</td>
<td>85% Yes, 2% No, 3% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching standards improving as a result of LI processes</td>
<td>79% Yes, 14% No, 7% Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More trainees achieving desired qualifications</td>
<td>79% Yes, 19% No, 3% Don't know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 130
2.8 However, the longitudinal responses for the Year 1 cohort show significant differences in two key measures (Figures 2.3 and 2.4):

- Learner involvement is recognised as being embedded in the curriculum by staff and learners (improvement from 48% in Year 1 to 79% in the longitudinal survey); and
- Staff are more confident in how they can involve learners (improvement from 50% in year 1 to 83% in the longitudinal survey).

Longitudinal sample

Figure 2.3 – Longitudinal sample: Results and benefits of LI for FE providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results and benefits of LI for FE providers</th>
<th>Percentage of providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methods for communication between staff and learners improving</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can demonstrate change in approach as a result of LI</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better understanding of how different groups can take up opportunities</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff more confident in how they can involve learners</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners increasingly feel they are partners in learning experience</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LI recognised as embedded in curriculum</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching standards improving as result of LI processes</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More learners achieving desired qualifications</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 227

4 Figures presented here are combined for FE and WBL respondents
When the longitudinal sample were asked about the single most important benefit of learner involvement activity (Figure 2.5):

- 32% of FE providers and 23% of WBL providers selected ‘learners increasingly feel that they are part of the learning experience’;
- a further 23% of WBL providers and 14% of FE providers selected ‘impact on the number of learners achieving their desired qualifications’; and
- 12% of FE providers and 9% of WBL providers selected ‘teaching standards improving as result of Learner Involvement processes’ as the single most important benefit.
Figure 2.5 - Longitudinal sample: Single most important benefit to providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>FE</th>
<th>WBL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners increasingly feel that they are partners in the learning experience</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More learners achieving desired qualifications</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching standards improving as a result of LI processes</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can demonstrate changes in approach as a result of LI</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods for communication between staff and learners improving</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner involvement recognised as being embedded in curriculum</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better understanding of how different groups can take up opportunities</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff more confident in how they can involve learners</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case study evidence

2.10 Differences in approach: where there appear to be differences in impact between FE and WBL providers case study evidence suggests that these are linked to overall patterns of delivery. For example:

- feedback and consultation through learner representatives identified a problem - and solution – the overuse of College PCs for social networking at peak times;
- an idea raised through WBL one to one feedback sessions led to an e-learning option for geographically dispersed learners and improved success rates.

2.11 An observation from an independent provider, working mainly with on-site learners, sums up the incremental impact that learner feedback can have:

“Learner feedback is subtle in the short term and substantial over time – for example changing resources, health and safety – it’s a constant up-skilling.”

2.12 It is also clear that managing learner involvement so that learners can see that their views are valued, generates a virtuous circle which benefits all the key stakeholders (learners, staff and the organisation as a whole).

2.13 Case study evidence from the Year 1 and Year 2 cohorts of providers highlighted their views on benefits for learners, in particular the importance of learners understanding and taking ownership of the way that they learn. A key benefit for learners from a good programme of involvement is that the learners have a better knowledge of how they learn and have the confidence to apply this in future. Learners taking ownership of their own learning also show greater motivation, leading to better results (success and retention rates):

“Learner feedback invariably leads to an improved learner journey and learning environment.”
2.14 Providers in Year 1 and Year 2 observed benefits for staff in three main areas: being able to develop and manage the curriculum; improving their own motivation and satisfaction; and improved management relationships. Key observations are:

- good learner involvement helped to sharpen the curriculum and make it more responsive, as feedback helped tutors to understand their learners better and how to tailor their approach to meet individual needs;
- involvement activity that increases the motivation of learners helps increase learner success rates, giving trainers and assessors greater job satisfaction;
- learner involvement offers staff the opportunity to talk and develop relationships with learners, which helps staff relate better to learners, understand their issues and communicate with them more effectively;

“...broadening staff horizons by helping them to re-focus on the learner rather than just on skills and the curriculum.”

2.15 Providers in Year 1 and Year 2 recognised benefits to the organisation through the improved focus on curriculum and decision making processes for responding to feedback, endorsed by managers. Providers also recognise the need to respond to learner feedback in terms of ‘repeat business’, recommendations and new opportunities. For example:

- User-group feedback from literacy students at a community based provider led to the introduction of a combined childcare and literacy course, resulting in increased take up, retention and success rates in gaining vocational skills and qualifications.

2.16 More focused and individualised learning also satisfies employers. However, as a WBL provider pointed out in Year 2:

“There is work to be done in convincing employers of the benefits of releasing learners for involvement activities. In the current economic climate this is even more difficult.”

Impact of a formal Learner Involvement Strategy

Year Two Cohort

2.17 The research explored the extent to which having a formal Learner Involvement Strategy (LIS) (to guide the development and implementation of learner involvement activity) impacts on the nature and extent of benefits accruing to providers.

2.18 Among the Year 2 cohort, 237 providers (67%) indicated that they had a formal LIS in place to guide their learner involvement activity. Eighty three providers (23%) did not have a LIS in place, although some have plans to develop one.

2.19 Figure 2.6 illustrates the difference in the results and benefits accruing to providers with a formal LIS in place as compared to those without. It is clear that providers with a formal Learner Involvement Strategy significantly outperform those with informal processes across all the measures explored. The most frequently reported results and benefits are:

- The ability of providers to demonstrate changes in approach that have come about as a result of learner involvement activity;
- Learner involvement being recognised as embedded in the curriculum by staff and learners;
- Improved ability among providers to collate and analyse information collected; and
- Improved staff confidence around how they can involve learners.

2.20 A formal Learner Involvement Strategy appears to legitimise activity, giving a coherent structure to be engrained within the day to day workings of the organisation.
How do learners benefit from involvement?

2.21 This section considers the responses given by learners in both the Year 2 and longitudinal cohort surveys and in contributions to the case study visits.

Satisfaction with teaching and learning

2.22 Figure 2.7 illustrates learners’ satisfaction with their training provider or college and with the quality of teaching they have received. It shows that:

- 70% of Year 2 and longitudinal respondents are extremely or very happy with the quality of teaching they have received; and
- Almost 66% are extremely or very happy with their learning experience overall.
Figure 2.7 – Year Two cohort/longitudinal sample: Learner perspective on satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction with training provider/college</th>
<th>Year 2 cohort</th>
<th>Longitudinal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of learners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely satisfied</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents (longitudinal): 700
Number of respondents (year two cohort): 2008
Note: Results for ‘Fairly Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied and Extremely Dissatisfied’ have been combined

Benefits of involvement

Year Two cohort

2.23 Respondents who were able to state the nature of their involvement in learner involvement activities were asked to comment on any personal benefits that had resulted from their college or training provider seeking and responding to their views (Figure 2.8). The responses indicate that, although benefits vary from learner to learner, they perceive a noticeable impact on the quality of teaching, learning and facilities within both FE and WBL and on their overall experience.
Figure 2.8 – Year Two cohort: Top ten personal benefits to learners as a result of their involvement in shaping their learning experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal benefits</th>
<th>Percentage of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teaching has improved</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my overall learning experience has improved</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The facilities are better</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am happier with my course/training</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am now taking a more active part in decisions about my learning</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have more confidence generally</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more confident about achieving my qualification</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learning is more interesting</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer help/support if/when you have problems</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more motivated</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.9 – Longitudinal sample: Learner perspective on becoming involved

Longitudinal sample

2.24 Respondents surveyed longitudinally were also asked to comment on the impact of being 'involved' in shaping their learning experience (Figure 2.9). The great majority consider their involvement to have been enjoyable and beneficial.
2.25 Figure 2.10 lists the ten most frequently cited benefits accruing to learners in the longitudinal sample. There is no significant difference between FE and WBL learners in relation to the benefits resulting from their involvement.

**Figure 2.10 – Longitudinal Survey: Top ten personal benefits to learners as a result of their involvement in shaping their learning experience**

![Graph showing the top ten personal benefits](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal benefit</th>
<th>Percentage of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I felt my overall learning experience has improved</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had more confidence generally</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was more confident about achieving my qualification</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt I was taking a more active part in decisions about my learning</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was happier with my course/training</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teaching had improved</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities provided by college/training provider became better</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My communication skills had improved</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learning became more interesting</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helped me make choices about my future career</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I knew the staff better</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 600

2.26 Practitioners may be able to use these findings to illustrate and promote, to both learners and colleagues, the benefits of learner involvement.

**Case study evidence**

2.27 Feedback from learners in Year 1 and Year 2 supported the view that learners find a proactive learner involvement programme helps them to feel more comfortable in speaking to staff and talking about their views. Learners appreciate that their views are taken seriously and the support available to help them express those views. Learners report that training in skills such as formulating and presenting ideas is transferable and can be included on CVs.

2.28 A group of learners interviewed in Year 2 spoke of how they have seen their own confidence improve through taking part in the formal structures in place for Learner Involvement at their college. All agreed that they felt part of the college and comfortable with their learning environment. It was also clear that their views were listened to and have an impact. For example, the improvements in timetabling and facilities that they proposed have made their time at college more focused on their learning.

2.29 The following quotes illustrate some of the benefits expressed by learners across a range of types of provider:

“I really like it here. We get treated like adults and everyone [the staff in the college] respects us. Being listened to has really helped me with my confidence.”

“The experience has definitely changed my perceptions towards learning – I really feel part of something here...”
2.30 Case study participants in Year 1 and Year 2 confirmed that the process of being asked for their views helps them to understand more about how they learn.

“Learners are allowed to take control of their learning and they know what they can gain from it.”

“Being asked questions about what works best for you makes you think more about your learning style, and helps you to develop your own set of learning techniques.”

2.31 These observations reinforce the survey findings that involvement can help boost confidence and impressions of the learning environment.

Opportunities and aspirations resulting from their learning experience

Year Two cohort

2.32 Respondents in the Year 2 cohort were asked to comment on their aspirations following completion of their current course. The five most frequently cited responses are shown in Figure 2.11. The largest percentage of learners stated that they intended to go on to complete further education and training courses at higher education or FE institutions. Around a fifth of learners intend to move into employment. Less than 5% of respondents were unsure of their career path following completion of their current course.

Figure 2.11 – Year Two cohort:
Top five intended destinations following completion of the current course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended destination</th>
<th>Percentage of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Go on to higher education such as university</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do further FE courses</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get a job</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay in the same job with my employer</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get a better job</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 2008

Longitudinal survey

2.33 Learners who were interviewed longitudinally, and who were still completing their course at the time of the second interview (441 learners) were asked about their subsequent intentions. Results are comparable with the Year 2 cohort and are shown in Figure 2.12.

- The largest percentage of learners intended to go on to study at a higher education institution (32%) or to study for another FE course (27%);
23% intended to get a job; 
8% intended to stay in the same job with their employer; and 
4% expected to get a better job but very few anticipated a promotion (0.5%) or change of career direction (1.7%).

2.34 It is not a surprise that WBL students are significantly more likely than FE students to have a job they intend to stay on in following completion of their course. This is true for 36% of WBL learners but only for 5% of FE learners. Conversely, 35% of FE learners reported that they planned to go on to higher education compared to 7% of work based learners.

Figure 2.12 – Longitudinal sample: 
Top five intended destinations following completion of current course

Number of respondents: 441

Summary

2.35 Feedback from learners in Year 1 and Year 2 supported the view that their views are taken seriously and that a proactive learner involvement programme helps them to feel more comfortable in speaking to staff and talking about their views. Learners report that training in skills such as formulating and presenting ideas is transferable and can be included on CVs.

2.36 Responses from learners in Year 2 indicate that, although personal benefits vary from learner to learner, they have seen a noticeable impact on the quality of teaching, learning and facilities within both FE and WBL. Learners interviewed in Year 2 spoke of how they have seen their own confidence improve through taking part in the formal structures in place and that their views have an impact. Case study participants in Year 1 and Year 2 confirmed that the process of being asked for their views helps them to understand more about how they learn.

2.37 Providers reporting the impact of learner involvement activity show improvements between Year 1 and Year 2 in two key measures:

- Learner involvement is recognised as being embedded in the curriculum by staff and learners; and
- Staff are more confident in how they can involve learners.
2.38 The longitudinal sample provides evidence that some FE and WBL providers benefitted differently in the early stages of introducing and then stepping up their Learner Involvement activities in relation to:

- The ability of providers to demonstrate changes in approach and improved understanding of how different groups of learners can take up opportunities (more prevalent among FE providers); and
- More learners achieving their desired qualifications (more frequently cited amongst WBL providers).

2.39 The surveys highlighted a wide range of results and benefits accruing to providers as a result of their Learner Involvement activities. The implementation of a formal programme of learner involvement has a significant impact on the scale of benefits as a result of learner involvement activity. The most frequently reported results and benefits are:

- The ability of providers to demonstrate changes in approach that have come about as a result of learner involvement activity;
- Learner involvement being recognised as embedded in the curriculum by staff and learners;
- Improved ability among providers to collate and analyse information collected; and
- Improved staff confidence around how they can involve learners.

2.40 Those with a formal strategy in place are significantly more likely to report that “more learners are achieving their desired qualification”. There is no difference between year 1 and year 2 cohorts in this respect.

2.41 Case study evidence from the Year 1 and Year 2 cohorts of providers highlights benefits for learners, in particular the importance of learners understanding and taking ownership of the way that they learn. A key benefit for learners from a good programme of involvement is that the learners have a better knowledge of how they learn and have the confidence to apply this in future. Learners taking ownership of their own learning also show greater motivation, leading to better results (success and retention rates).

2.42 The majority of learners value and have enjoyed the opportunities for involvement that they have been given. A key benefit reported by learners is that teaching has improved; others stated that their ‘overall learning experience has improved’ and that ‘facilities have improved’; and a number also stated that they are now ‘happier with their course/training’ and that they are now ‘taking a more active part in decisions about their learning’.

2.43 It is of note that learners involved in the longitudinal survey were significantly more likely to recognise many of these benefits. The processes of being involved in feedback, review and decision making through learner involvement activities also contribute to a general improvement in their confidence and in their ability to achieve their desired qualification; others also mentioned improved communication skills and making more informed choices about their future career.

2.44 Providers in Year 1 and Year 2 observed benefits for staff in three main areas: being able to develop and manage the curriculum; improving their own motivation and satisfaction; and improved management relationships. Key observations include that:

- good learner involvement helped to sharpen the curriculum and make it more responsive, as feedback helped tutors to understand their learners better and how to tailor their approach to meet individual needs;
- involvement activity that increases the motivation of learners helps increase learner success rates, giving trainers and assessors greater job satisfaction; and
- learner involvement offers staff the opportunity to talk and develop relationships with learners, which helps staff relate better to learners, understand their issues and communicate with them more effectively.
2.45 Providers in Year 1 and Year 2 recognised **benefits to the organisation** through the improved focus on curriculum and decision making processes for responding to feedback endorsed by managers. Providers also recognise the need to respond to learner feedback in terms of ‘repeat business’, recommendations and new opportunities.
3 STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

3.1 This chapter discusses the extent to which providers have learner involvement programmes in place including whether these are reflected in more formal strategies, and the extent to which learners feel that their views are sought and responded to in developing and directing these learner involvement programmes.

Learner Involvement programmes - Provider Perspective

Evidence from the Year 1 and Year 2 provider cohorts

3.2 The Year 1 and Year 2 surveys indicated that the majority of providers had a programme of learner involvement in place. This was cited by over 95% of providers in Year 1 and 69% in Year 2, with a further 24% of Year 2 providers indicating that their programme of learner involvement is in place ‘to some extent’.

3.3 For those providers in the Year 2 cohort with a programme of learner involvement in place (330 providers), just over half (52%) said that their programme of activity was well established, having been in place for more than three years (Figure 3.1). However, one third of providers had put their programme in place within the last 2 years, i.e. broadly in line with the introduction of the obligation to have a learner involvement strategy.

Figure 3.1 – Year Two cohort: Length of time Learner Involvement Programme has been in place

Longitudinal data

3.4 Of the 646 FE and WBL providers surveyed in both years, it was found that:

- 94% with a programme of learner involvement in place in April 2008 had retained that programme by the time of the second survey;
• 2% had a programme of learner involvement in April 2008 which has now ceased. The main reasons for this include a lack of funding and a lack of learners;

• 2% of providers who did not have a programme of learner involvement in place in April 2008 have since introduced such a programme;

• 2% of providers who did not have a programme of learner involvement in April 2008 indicated that they have still not introduced a programme of activity.

3.5 Overall, the prevalence and longevity of learner involvement programmes are encouraging.

Evidence from case studies

3.6 Analysis of the case studies from the 2009 cohort identified the range of ways in which learner involvement has been introduced.

• One provider specialising in security, CCTV and care industry standard courses indicated that the learner involvement activities undertaken by the organisation have always been in place. It has not been necessary to introduce new systems, processes or procedures to allow learner involvement to take place.

• A college from the 2009 cohort highlighted that learner involvement activity was always present in the college, but has become much more central since the requirement to implement learner involvement was introduced. Activity was previously overseen by Student Services but is now much more formal.

• One provider specialising in professional business coaching stated that their learners have a group based session at the start of the course to explain clearly what the training is about and to get buy-in: “The majority of our customers have never undertaken accredited training before so this kind of introduction is important.”

3.7 Although a small number of providers from the longitudinal cohort indicated that they did not have a programme of learner involvement in place, when asked whether or not specific activities take place within the college/training provider, all providers could demonstrate a degree of learner involvement activity.

3.8 Reflecting on the problems in involving some learners in planning and managing provision, one provider from the longitudinal cohort commented that “our learner group would struggle if given too much responsibility. They are often from unstable and unsupportive backgrounds and have a number of personal issues so everything has to be geared to developing confidence in an unthreatening and supportive way”.

3.9 The following examples of how activity has developed are drawn from the longitudinal case studies:

• One education and training college commented that the learner involvement programme has been developed from what was in place before. The main addition has been a Student Parliament which allows students to speak more freely and is seen as a good forum for students to meet with senior management, to express themselves and articulate their views.

• One college who specialises in vocational learning highlighted a more structured approach to learner involvement. College Governors are aware of student contribution through Learner Voice reports and students are now involved in the recruitment of staff. Other mechanisms for learner involvement which have led to increased transparency include ‘hot seat’ events where student representatives may ask the Principal and Vice Principal of the college questions.
Learner Involvement Strategies – Provider Perspective

Evidence from the Year 1 and Year 2 provider cohorts

3.10 The Year 2 cohort survey found that in the majority of cases (72%), programmes of learner involvement activity are directed through a formal learner involvement strategy (Figure 3.2). Compared with the Year 1 cohort, where there was no significant difference in the extent to which FE and WBL providers had formal Learner Involvement Strategies (LIS) in place, there was a significant difference between provider types in the Year 2 cohort (84% FE compared to 67% WBL) reflecting a trend for more formal strategies within FE Colleges.

Figure 3.2 – Year Two cohort:
Extent to which learner involvement is directed through a formal LIS

3.11 Taking the respondents as a whole, there is also a significant overall difference between the Year 1 and Year 2 cohorts with regard to whether they have a formal strategy in place or are planning to develop one. The Year 2 cohort is marginally, but statistically significantly, less likely either to have a formal LI strategy in place or to be planning to develop one. The reasons why this is the case are not clear from the survey: however it may be that the ‘currency’ of learner involvement in the provider network is not as high as when the first survey was conducted, for example shortly after the launch of the LIS Handbook. Table 3.1 shows the responses for the Year 1 and Year 2 cohorts in relation to whether learner involvement activity is directed through a formal strategy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1: Is Learner Involvement activity directed through a formal strategy?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2 cohort</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: yr 1 = 956; N: yr 2 = 330
Awareness of guidance: – Provider Perspective

Evidence from the Year 1 and Year 2 provider cohorts

3.12 Analysis of the Year 2 cohort shows that 58% of providers were aware of the requirement to have a formal Learner Involvement Strategy from September 2007, compared to 65% from the Year 1 cohort. There was a higher level of awareness among FE providers (76% FE, 51% WBL). This mirrors the findings from Year 1 (82% FE compared with 55% WBL).

3.13 Among the providers who were aware of the September 2007 requirement, 56% indicated that their approach to learner involvement had changed as a result of this obligation.

3.14 The Year 2 survey also found that 52% of providers were aware of the guidance published by DIUS for FE providers on consultation with learners and employers. A significantly higher percentage of FE providers were aware of this guidance than WBL providers (72% as compared to 45%).

Learner involvement in developing the LIS – Provider Perspective

Evidence from the Year 1 and Year 2 provider cohorts

3.15 Providers surveyed as part of the Year 2 cohort and who indicated that they had a learner involvement strategy in place (237 providers) were asked about the extent to which learners were involved in drafting strategy. Figure 3.3 shows that overall, 51% of providers from the Year 2 cohort involved their learners when drafting the Learner Involvement Strategy; 46% of providers did not involve their learners when drafting the LIS; and 4% didn’t know whether or not learners were involved in drafting the strategy. There are no significant differences between these findings and the Year 1 survey.

3.16 Responses from both the Year 1 and Year 2 surveys indicate that FE providers are more likely to involve learners in drafting the LIS (70 % in Year 1 and 65% in Year 2) than WBL providers (36% in Year 1, 44% in Year 2).
Figure 3.3 – Year Two cohort: Extent to which learners were involved in drafting LIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of provider</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBL</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents 237

Changes since April 2008 – Provider Perspective

Longitudinal data

3.17 Of the 646 providers surveyed longitudinally, 93% had a programme of learner involvement in place in April 2008 that was still operational in six months later. **35% of these providers indicated that they had made changes to their programme during this time.** Further analysis showed a statistically significant difference between FE and WBL providers with 29% of WBL providers reporting changes made to their programme of learner involvement activity since April 2008, compared to 46% of FE providers (Figure 3.4).
Figure 3.4 – Longitudinal survey: Changes to LI activity since April 2008

![Bar chart showing changes to LI activity since April 2008]

What kinds of changes have been made to Learner Involvement programmes?

**Longitudinal data**

3.18 Figure 3.5 below illustrates the ten most frequently cited changes that providers have made to their learner involvement programme since April 2008.

Figure 3.5 – Longitudinal sample: Top ten changes to programme of LI since April 2008

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5 These responses are the result of an ‘open ended’ question. The responses were later coded by the research team.
Top ten changes to programme of LI since April 2008

- Wider representation/More involvement of learners: 23%
- Introduction of new/updated programmes: 12%
- Modifications/improvements making it simpler/more effective: 11%
- Improved communication/consultations/regular bulletins: 9%
- More feedback from learners: 8%
- Reviewed the whole LI process/strategy: 8%
- Changes to the survey questionnaire: 7%
- Offer more training/support/development: 7%
- Expanded/extended activity: 6%
- Changes to the Governing Body: 6%

Percentage of providers

Number of respondents: 214
3.19 The most common changes introduced by providers are:

- Wider representation and increased involvement of learners, cited by 23% of providers;
- The introduction of new programmes and updating of existing programmes, cited by 12% of providers; and
- Modifications and improvements to the programme to make it simpler and more effective, cited by 11% of providers.

3.20 Other changes made by providers surveyed as part of the longitudinal sample include:

- Introduction of learner involvement programmes with Apprenticeships (4%);
- Train to Gain Initiatives (3%);
- Appointment of a staff/student liaison person (2%); and
- More funding for learner involvement activity made available (2%).

3.21 Analysis of the longitudinal survey of providers shows that FE providers are more likely to have widened representation and increased the involvement of learners (36% FE, 12% WBL); reviewed their learner involvement process/strategy (14% as compared to 2%); or to have made changes to the Governing Body (11% compared to 0.9%).

3.22 In contrast, WBL providers are more likely than FE providers to have introduced learner involvement programmes with Apprentices in the period since April 2008 – an opportunity taken to respond quickly to supporting a high profile group of learners. No FE providers made reference to a particular focus on Apprentices.

**Involvement opportunities offered to learners - Learner perspective**

**Evidence from the Year 1 and Year 2 provider cohorts**

3.23 Learners surveyed as part of the Year 2 cohort were asked to comment on the extent to which their college or training provider seeks and responds to their views. The results for FE and WBL learners are presented in Figures 3.6 (seeking) and 3.7 (responding).

**Figure 3.6 – Year Two cohort:**
**Extent to which providers actively seek the views of learners**
Figure 3.7 – Year Two cohort: Extent to which providers respond to the views of learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Providers type</th>
<th>Percentage of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WBL (n=448)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They always respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They sometimes respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They rarely respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They never respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FE (n=1370)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They always respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They sometimes respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They rarely respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They never respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.24 As displayed, WBL learners are more likely to believe that their providers ‘always’ seek and respond to their views in comparison to their FE counterparts. This finding is consistent in both Year 1 and Year 2 surveys, indicating consistent receptiveness to the learner voice.

3.25 A notable correlation is that learners who believe that their provider seeks their views are also more likely to report satisfaction overall with their provider (Figure 3.8); whereas those who reported that their provider never seeks their views are more likely to be dissatisfied with their provider. Although the percentages should be treated with caution, as relatively few learners within the sample are dissatisfied, 20% of learners who reported their provider rarely responded to their views and 40% of those who reported their provider rarely responded to their views were also dissatisfied with provision.
3.26 Learners who believe that their provider responds to their views are more likely to report overall satisfaction with their provider (Figure 3.9). Less than 1% of learners from the Year 2 survey who reported that their provider always or sometimes responds to their views were dissatisfied with provision. Although the percentages should be treated with caution, as relatively few learners within the sample are dissatisfied, 30% of learners who reported their provider rarely or never responded to their views were also dissatisfied with provision.
3.27 To explore the opportunities for involvement that are open to learners and the take up of these opportunities, respondents were asked a series of questions to determine how actively their provider/college seeks their views and what aspects of the ‘learning experience’ they feel able to influence (Figure 3.10).

3.28 The Year 2 cohort survey highlighted an overall perception among learners that their providers offer a reasonable number of opportunities for learners to be involved. Less than a quarter of all respondents disagreed with statements asking if providers consulted them on ways to improve courses, teaching and facilities. This echoes the findings from the Year 1 cohort where both providers and learners were positive about the value of learner involvement.

3.29 Learners appear to value the fact that they are asked for their opinions. The Year 2 survey indicates that 76% of respondents ‘strongly agreed’ that they are treated with respect by staff from the training provider; this finding is consistent with the Year 1 survey. If FE and WBL learners from the Year 2 cohort are considered separately it is apparent that a higher percentage of WBL learners ‘strongly agree’ that their provider asks their opinion on ways to improve courses, teaching and facilities.
3.30 Opportunities for involvement were separated into three categories to consider the extent to which learners feel their provider seeks their views on decisions around:

- **Strategy** – giving feedback on the quality of teaching; the courses and qualifications on offer; and arrangements for coursework and exams;

- **Facilities** – access to IT facilities; library services (FE only); and the kind of facilities that are available to learners (canteen, lockers, parking, sports facilities etc); and

- **Learner support** – help for learners to understand the subject they are studying; advice on future options; available financial support; and the kind of support available to learners with disabilities or learning difficulties.

3.31 Further analysis, (Figure 3.11) shows that the areas where learners have the greatest opportunities to be involved in decision making are around the support that is available to them to help them understand the subject they are studying; opportunities to give feedback on the quality of teaching; the advice and support they receive when considering their future options and the IT facilities that are available for their use.
3.32 There is a statistically significant difference between the perception of FE and WBL learners around the decision making opportunities available to them in a number of cases, the most striking of which concern the perception of learner involvement processes. For example, WBL learners are more likely than FE learners to believe that their providers involve learners in decisions around the courses/qualifications that are available to learners and arrangements for exams (51% FE, 69% WBL) and the completion of their coursework (46% FE, 64% WBL).

3.33 Figure 3.12 illustrates the take up of opportunities to influence decision making among FE and WBL learners. WBL learners tended to have been more proactive in taking up opportunities to influence decision making in key areas:

- 69% of WBL learners have been involved in influencing decisions about support available to them to understand the subject they are studying compared to 49% of FE learners;
- 49% of WBL learners have been involved in influencing decisions about the courses and qualifications that are available to them compared to 29% of FE; and
- 49% of WBL learners have been involved in influencing decisions about arrangements for exams and coursework compared to 32% of FE.
Figure 3.12 – Year Two cohort: Opportunities taken up by learners to be involved in decisions around learner support, facilities and strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities for learners</th>
<th>FE (n=1508)</th>
<th>WBL (n=500)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving feedback on quality of teaching</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrangements for exams/coursework</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses/ qualifications on offer</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to IT</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available facilities</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help to understand the subject they study</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice on future options</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available financial support</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for learners with disabilities/ learning difficulties</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.34 These responses may also relate to the overall relationship between WBL learners, their employers and tutor/assessors where there tends to be a higher emphasis on direct one to one contact than for general FE courses.

3.35 Learners surveyed as part of the Year 2 cohort who indicated that they have not taken part in any of the learner involvement activities considered in the survey (11%; 166 learners) were asked what had prevented them from becoming involved. Figure 3.13 illustrates the perceived barriers to involvement among FE and WBL learners. It shows that 22% of learners stated that they were not involved because they were ‘not interested in becoming involved’.

3.36 For comparison, in the Year 1 survey, 12% of learners had not taken part in any learner involvement activities and the following were the ‘top 5’ perceived barriers they reported:

- 20% felt they were ‘generally too busy’;
- 19% said the provider did not ask;
- 12% were not interested in being involved;
- 11% felt the timing of the activity was not suitable; and
- 3% felt it was ‘not for people like me’.

3.37 16% of learners from the Year 2 cohort said that they had not become involved in any learner involvement activities because their college or training provider had not asked them to. It is also interesting to note that no learners felt that their lack of involvement was as a result of ‘a lack of confidence’ over their ability to be involved or ‘lack of support from their employer to becoming involved’. This is consistent with the Year 1 learner survey (1% reporting lack of confidence) and suggests that confidence is not a perceived barrier to participation – although improved confidence is known to be a benefit (see paragraph 2.36).
Figure 3.13 – Year Two cohort: Top five barriers to involvement among learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to involvement</th>
<th>Percentage of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I'm not interested</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My provider did not ask me</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am too busy generally</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The timing of the activities is unsuitable for me</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 166

Longitudinal data

3.38 Learners surveyed longitudinally were also asked to comment on opportunities to shape provision offered by their providers (Figure 3.14).

Figure 3.14 – Longitudinal sample: Opportunities for learners to shape provision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas where learners can shape provision</th>
<th>Opportunities for learners to shape provision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WBL</td>
<td>Tend to agree 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>Tend to agree 39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBL</td>
<td>Tend to agree 45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>Tend to agree 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBL</td>
<td>Tend to agree 49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>Tend to agree 48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 700
3.39 80% of learners ‘strongly agreed’ that they were treated with respect by their providers (not shown in chart) and the survey highlighted a general perception among learners that their providers offer significant opportunities for learners to be involved, particularly in relation to courses and teaching. It would appear that providers are slightly less likely to consult learners widely on issues around improving facilities. These findings are in line with those of the Year 2 cohort, which highlighted similar levels of agreement. There is no significant difference between FE and WBL learners’ responses.

3.40 Learners who indicated that they had been involved in specific learner involvement activities (600 learners) were asked if they have become involved in some or all of these activities in the six months following their completion of the first survey in April 2008. 18% of these learners said that they had become involved since April 2008. When asked why they decided to become involved since April 2008, the largest percentage (33%) stated that they were only recently approached by their provider and asked to become involved. A small number of respondents indicated that they were given more opportunities to become involved since April 2008 or that they now felt more comfortable with their provider and wanted to become involved (Figure 3.15). There is no significant difference between FE and WBL learners.

**Figure 3.15 – Longitudinal sample:**

**Reasons for becoming involved in LI activities since April 2008**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for becoming involved</th>
<th>Percentage of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was recently asked to become involved</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are now more opportunities to become involved</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find out more/ask questions/get feedback</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I now feel more comfortable at my provider and want to be involved</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.41 Among those learners surveyed longitudinally, 14% said that they had not been involved in any of the learner involvement activities considered in the survey. To examine the possible barriers to involvement, these learners were asked to comment on why they had not taken part in learner involvement activities to date (Figure 3.16). Analysis found an almost even split between those who felt their lack of involvement was a personal choice and those who felt that their provider had not promoted these opportunities to them. The survey showed:

- 28% of this group of learners stated that their provider did not ask them to get involved and 11% that the college/training provider did not help learners to do this;
- 18% indicated that they were not interested in becoming involved, 15% that they were too busy to become involved and 2% felt that involvement was ‘not for people like them’.
Figure 3.16 – Longitudinal sample: Perceived barriers to involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to involvement</th>
<th>Percentage of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My provider did not ask me to become involved</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was not interested</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was too busy generally</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The college/training provider didn’t help learners to do this</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was not for people like me</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 100

Summary

Provider Perspective

3.42 The majority of providers had a programme of learner involvement in place. For those Year 2 cohort providers with a programme of learner involvement in place, just over half said that their programme of activity was well established, having been in place for more than three years. Of the providers who were surveyed in both years, it was found that 94% with a programme of learner involvement place in April 2008 had retained that programme by the time of the second survey.

3.43 All providers from the Year 2 cohort could demonstrate some degree of learner involvement activity, although not all providers had formalised this into an official programme. The Year 2 cohort survey found that in over 70% of cases programmes of learner involvement activity are directed through a formal learner involvement strategy. Formal Learner Involvement Strategies are more prevalent among FE providers than providers of WBL (84% compared to 67%).

3.44 The requirement for a Learner Involvement Strategy had a tangible influence on the approach of providers. Among the providers who were aware of the September 2007 requirement to have a Strategy, 56% indicated that their approach to learner involvement had changed as a result of this obligation. When FE and WBL providers are considered separately, FE providers appear significantly more likely to involve learners in drafting the LIS than WBL providers. In terms of the longitudinal cohort, 35% indicated that they had made changes to their programme since the previous survey.

3.45 In terms of levels of awareness, the Year 2 survey found that 52% of providers were aware of the guidance published by DIUS for FE providers on consultation with learners and employers. A significantly higher percentage of FE providers were aware of this guidance than WBL providers.
Learner perspective

3.46 **WBL learners are significantly more likely to believe that their learning providers ‘always’ seek and respond to their views.** For FE colleges and for WBL providers, this analysis showed a strong, significant association between learners stating that the provider seeks their views and whether learners have the opportunity to be involved in decisions relating to learner support, facilities and course.

3.47 **Learners who believe that their provider responds to their views are more likely to report overall satisfaction.** Learners appear to value the fact that they are asked for their opinions on such matters: 95% of respondents ‘agreed’ or strongly agreed’ that they are treated with respect by staff from the training provider. It is apparent that a higher percentage of WBL learners ‘strongly agree’ that their provider asks their opinion on ways to improve courses, teaching and facilities.

3.48 **There is a statistically significant difference between the perception of FE and WBL learners around the decision making opportunities available to them.** WBL learners are significantly more likely than FE learners to believe that their providers involve learners in decisions around the courses/ qualifications that are available to learners and arrangements for exams and the completion of course work.

3.49 **To summarise, while formal strategies are more likely to be found amongst FE providers, learners at WBL organisations show a strong sense of participation and ability to contribute.**
4 PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS

Introduction
4.1 This chapter discusses the various approaches used by learning providers to involving learners and the extent to which learners feel they are able to participate and benefit from these mechanisms. The chapter also highlights differences in approach through use of active mechanisms such as engaging learners as mentors, and more passive measures such as use of surveys and questionnaires.

Approaches used and effectiveness: Provider perspective
4.2 The Year 2 survey split respondents into FE and WBL providers to examine the participation mechanisms in place to encourage learner involvement; and the perceived effectiveness of these. Analysis shows that a range of mechanisms are currently used, or would be considered by providers, to encourage learner involvement. It would appear that there is a prevalence of both active (mentoring, etc) and passive (surveys etc) measures in use.

4.3 FE and WBL providers make wide use of:
- Surveys and questionnaires; used by 99% of FE and 98% of WBL providers respectively;
- Learners acting as mentors or offering peer support; used by 88% and 96% of FE and WBL providers respectively;
- Communication through regular newsletters; used by 77% of FE and 70% of WBL providers respectively; and
- Just under two thirds of providers promote learner involvement through learner parliaments or learner forums (65% FE and 63% WBL).

4.4 In addition, the survey also shows that:
- 78% of FE providers use course representatives to promote learner involvement;
- 70% of FE providers use learner governors to promote learner involvement;
- 66% of FE providers support Student Unions to promote learner involvement; and
- 17% of WBL providers use Learner Board Members to promote learner involvement.

4.5 These findings are consistent with responses to the survey in Year 1 and illustrate that ‘governance’ structures are used to facilitate learner involvement.
Use of mechanisms for learner involvement by FE and WBL providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism for learner involvement</th>
<th>Percentage of Providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learner representatives</td>
<td>FE (n=102) WBL (n=253)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting e-forums and websites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to encourage discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing learner voice agenda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>item in committees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner conferences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner/ SMT liaison committee/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner Advocate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing a learner affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>committee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site/ learning area councils</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 355.
NB: Only those methods where there is a statistically significant difference between FE and WBL are shown.

4.6 Analysis of the survey responses highlighted the greater variety of methods employed by FE providers with a statistically significant difference between the two groups detected in a number of cases. These are illustrated in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.2 – Year Two cohort:
Means of learner involvement activity considered particularly effective by providers

Number of respondents: 355

4.7 Providers in the Year 2 cohort were asked to comment on which method(s) of involvement they believe to be most effective (Figure 4.2). The relatively ‘passive’ approach of ‘use of surveys and questionnaires to get feedback from learners’ is considered the most effective means of promoting...
learner involvement among both FE and WBL providers. This is unsurprising given that this is the most widespread form of learner involvement activity.

4.8 There is a statistically significant difference in the perception of how effective this method is in the Year 2 cohort (49% WBL compared to 34% FE). Further evidence in relation to this emerged during case study visits as outlined in paragraph 4.10 below.

4.9 Across the 2 years and across both main provider types, providers are consistent in their high ranking of use of surveys and of their perceived effectiveness.

4.10 Similarly, there is a significant difference in the percentage of providers in the Year 2 cohort who feel that the more ‘active’ approach of ‘engaging learners as mentors or as providers of peer support’ is among the most important means of achieving effective learner involvement (34% WBL, 21% FE providers). Variations were also observed in the value placed on use of some approaches (such as newsletters and e-forums) between FE and WBL providers in Year 1.

4.11 Across the 2 years and across both main provider types, however, providers are consistent in their rankings of use of mentoring, newsletters and forums.

Longitudinal Data

4.12 Providers in the longitudinal sample were also asked to comment on the range of involvement mechanisms employed by their organisation:

- Surveys and questionnaires to get feedback from learners are used consistently by FE providers and WBL providers in all 3 survey groups (Year 1, Year 2 and longitudinal);
- ‘Learners acting as mentors offering peer support’ was ranked consistently by both FE and WBL providers in the Year 1 and Year 2 cohort surveys (around 86%); however, this approach was scored significantly less highly by providers in the longitudinal survey, which may indicate that this aspect has been difficult to sustain or is not realising anticipated benefits.

4.13 The longitudinal survey also showed that:

- 71% of FE providers use course representatives to promote learner involvement;
- 70% of FE providers use learner governors to promote learner involvement;
- 60% of FE providers use Student Unions to promote learner involvement; and
- 6% of WBL providers use Learner Board Members to promote learner involvement.

4.14 Figure 4.3 below illustrates those mechanisms where there are key differences in use between FE and WBL providers.
4.15 **One to one contact** and wider communication (through both ‘passive’ means such as surveys and questionnaires and more ‘active’ means such as ‘learners acting as mentors and offering peer-support’) are the most widely used approach to learner involvement, used by almost 100% of providers in both samples and mentioned most often by learners during focus groups (Figure 4.4).
Evidence from Case Studies

4.16 The continued popularity of surveys and questionnaires may be as a result of the developing mechanisms in place since the Year 1 survey, for example as providers become familiar with Framework for Excellence and Self Assessment Review processes. One FE provider commented on the introduction of online survey software to be used for student questionnaires that is able to aggregate data by class, course and faculty as required, making it much more useful and convenient for providers.

4.17 A number of case study providers from the cohort cited the importance of learner forums in improving learning involvement. Various examples were mentioned including learner/student councils, student forums and thematic student involvement groups. One provider mentioned the use of ‘Principal’s Surgeries’ where learner representatives are invited to give feedback directly to the College Principal:

“This has happened for years but the process has been made much more formal this year and it works very well. The students feel empowered by meeting the Principal and they take their roles very seriously.”

Progress since April 2008

4.18 Providers in the longitudinal sample were asked about progress that had been made in the development and implementation of their learner involvement activity since April 2008. Both FE and WBL providers reported significant development – one of the key findings of this review. (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5 – Longitudinal cohort: changes in the range and scale of LI activity since April 2008

4.19 The most significant difference between provider types is seen in relation to ‘increasing the range and depth of involvement opportunities available to learners’. This is not surprising as WBL providers have reported high levels of use of one to one contact and, from our case study discussions, can tend to have less scope to increase the range and depth of involvement as they are limited by employer concerns relating to the time and cost associated with learning.
4.20 That said, over half of WBL providers indicated that they have increased the range and depth of opportunities since April 2008 indicating that, within these parameters, WBL providers are continuing to seek to diversify the opportunities on offer to learners. WBL providers may need further encouragement to develop additional ‘collective’ arrangements to build on strong one to one relationships.

Awareness and participation: learner perspective
Evidence from Year One and Year Two Provider Cohorts

4.21 There is fairly widespread awareness among learners of the mechanisms used by their current training providers to promote learner involvement. Learners most frequently mentioned discussions with staff as well as the use of surveys. They could also recognise where their contribution had had some effect and had been able to observe changes. Learners also indicated a general preference to be involved in the ‘hands on’ issues and stressed that the smaller issues were important as they affected the short term experiences learners had.

4.22 Over 70% of FE and WBL learners in the Year 2 cohort were able to comment on some specific mechanisms employed by their college or training provider. As Figure 4.6 shows, the mechanisms most commonly cited by both FE and WBL learners are discussions with staff; completion of surveys about the course and completion of surveys about the college/provider.

Figure 4.6 – Year Two cohort: learner awareness of activities used by their provider

4.23 Compared with intended provision reported by providers, learners mentioned other learner involvement mechanisms which indicate differences in learner and provider perceptions:

- A small number of FE learners (less than 1%) made reference to the use of one to one sessions; the student council; open days and tutorials within their college.
- A small number of WBL learners (less than 1%) said that their providers used inductions, visits and workshops to promote learner involvement.

4.24 5% of FE and 8% of WBL learners said that they were not aware of their provider employing any of the learner involvement methods considered in the survey: this is consistent with responses in Year 1.
4.25 Assuming that knowledge of opportunities is similar among FE and WBL learners, it would appear that FE providers tend to offer a wider range of involvement activities to their learners. It is possible that this reflects a more streamlined approach to learner involvement applied by WBL providers, with fewer methods being used and on fewer occasions. This assertion is reinforced by data from providers which also showed that FE providers tend to employ a wider range of learner involvement mechanisms.

4.26 Learners surveyed in the Year 2 cohort were asked about the learner involvement activities that they have taken part in. Figure 4.7 illustrates take up of learner involvement opportunities among FE and WBL learners as a percentage of those who indicated that they were aware the opportunity was available to them and shows that:

- 88% of FE learners have taken up opportunities to complete surveys about the college and 87% have completed surveys about their course;
- WBL learners were more likely to have taken up other opportunities where on offer. These included participating in learner discussion groups to give feedback, having learner representatives, having a student/learner committee, having representation on a committee that includes staff and having representation on the board of governors.

![Figure 4.7 – Year Two cohort: take up of LI opportunities among FE and WBL learners](image)

Note: This figure shows the percentage of learners who have taken up opportunities that they are aware are available.

4.27 Take up of ‘representative’ approaches appears to be considerably higher among WBL learners who are aware that these opportunities are available to them. This is interesting given previously cited findings (from the survey of providers) suggesting that ‘representation’ and ‘consultative methods’ are more frequently employed by FE providers and may suggest that activity such as informal or ad hoc discussions with the provider can be considered as involvement opportunities by learners in WBL provision.

4.28 Overall, considering both Year 1 and Year 2 cohorts (FE and WBL respondents combined), several key differences emerged:

- Compared with the Year 1 cohort, learners in Year 2 were significantly more likely to report awareness of opportunities to be involved by:
✓ Completing surveys about the provider
✓ Being invited to give feedback through learner discussion groups
✓ Taking part in a student/learner committee (and committees with staff also attending), and
✓ Representation on the Board of Governors.

- Compared with the Year 1 cohort, learners in Year 2 were significantly more likely to report having been involved in:
  ✓ Completing surveys about their course
  ✓ Completing surveys about the provider, and
  ✓ Giving feedback through learner discussion groups.

4.29 Although the learner and provider samples were separate, this may reflect the increased learner involvement activities reported by many providers, as discussed earlier.

Longitudinal Data

4.30 37% of learners surveyed longitudinally indicated that they had been personally involved in decisions around how their provider could improve the learning experience (Figure 4.8). Analysis found no significant difference between WBL and FE learners.

Figure 4.8 – Longitudinal cohort: learners’ personal involvement in shaping decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Respondents: 700

4.31 Learners were separated by FE and WBL to consider in greater detail the nature of their involvement with their learning provider (Figure 4.9).

4.32 WBL and FE learners shared the three most common means of participation FE learners most frequently cited ‘discussions with staff’. Most WBL learners said they had been involved through completion of surveys about their learning or training (61%) and 58% said they had been involved through ‘discussions with staff’.

4.33 Fourteen percent of FE learners and 17% of WBL indicated they have not been involved in any of the activities considered in the survey.
Using Learner Involvement Data (monitoring and evaluation)

Evidence from Year One and Year Two Provider Cohorts

4.34 Providers were asked if they had a formal programme of evaluation in place to assess the impact of learner involvement activity. Among the Year 2 cohort it was found that the majority of providers (56%) have an evaluation programme in place to monitor progress and impact (Figure 4.10).
Figure 4.10 – Year Two cohort: providers with a programme of evaluation in place

Number of respondents: 355

4.35 If FE and WBL providers are considered separately, it is apparent that formal processes of monitoring and evaluation are more prevalent among FE providers (68% compared to 51% of WBL) in the Year 2 cohort. However, this finding is different to Year 1 when no significant difference was found (approx 60% of both types).

Longitudinal Survey

4.36 Seventy percent of providers in the longitudinal sample indicated that they had a formal system of evaluation in place to monitor the impact of learner involvement activity, suggesting significant progress when compared with Year 1 cohort responses. Analysis shows that in just over half of cases this system was implemented prior to April 2008 (Figure 4.11) and 19% of providers had put systems in place since April 2008. 75% of providers stated that they had collected evidence to assess impact.
Figure 4.11 - Longitudinal cohort: Progress in implementing a system for evaluating the impact of Learner Involvement activity

![Pie chart showing progress in implementing a system for evaluating the impact of LI activity](chart.png)

- Evaluation system prior to April 2008: 51%
- Evaluation system since April 2008: 26%
- No evaluation system: 19%
- Don't know: 3%

Number of respondents: 619

4.37 Respondents who had collected evidence to assess the impact of learner involvement activity were asked to comment on any changes that they have made to their programme as a result of this evidence. The results are presented in Figure 4.12. The most frequently cited changes among FE and WBL providers include:

- Improving the accessibility of involvement opportunities;
- Ensuring learners have the support they require to be effective; and
- Improving individual aspects of the learner involvement programme.
4.38 A significant difference between FE and WBL providers was found in relation to developments to ‘ensure that all learners are represented’. Earlier analysis has shown that mechanisms of learner involvement that are focused on representation appear to be used to a lesser extent within the WBL sector. One fifth of FE providers indicated that this is something that they have attempted to achieve, compared to 9% of WBL providers.

**Comparison between longitudinal and Year 2 cohorts**

4.39 We have noted above that a significantly higher number of providers surveyed as part of the longitudinal sample indicated that they had a formal programme of evaluation in place to monitor the impact of their learner involvement activity (70% longitudinal compared to 56% overall). Respondent bias from survey participation in Year 1 aside, reasons for this change may be linked to the adoption of more formal evaluation procedures over time. Wider implementation experience may have triggered a greater appreciation of evaluation procedures in refining existing learner involvement systems.

4.40 Analysis of the longitudinal sample found no statistically significant differences between FE and WBL providers in relation to having a formal system of evaluation in place or the likelihood that they will have collected data to assess the impact of activity.

**Summary**

4.41 Feedback from learners and providers highlighted that a wide range of strategies were used to encourage learner participation in involvement activities. Among FE and WBL providers these included the use of surveys and questionnaires; learners acting as mentors or offering peer support; communication through regular newsletters; and just under two thirds of providers promote learner involvement through learner parliaments or learner forums. In addition:

- 78% of FE providers use course representatives to promote learner involvement;
- 70% of FE providers use learner governors to promote learner involvement;
- 66% of FE providers use Student Unions to promote learner involvement; and
- 17% of WBL providers use Learner Board Members to promote learner involvement.
4.42 Analysis of the survey responses highlighted the wider variety of both active and passive methods employed by FE providers with a statistically significant difference between the two groups in a number of cases. For example, there is a significant difference in the percentage of providers who feel that engaging learners as mentors or as providers of peer support is among the most important means of achieving effective learner involvement (34% of WBL and 21% FE providers). These findings may reflect a narrower range of learner involvement activities practiced among providers of WBL.

4.43 Leaving aside the use of surveys, one to one contact (for instance, through learners acting as mentors and offering peer-support) is the most widely used active approach to learner involvement, used by providers in both samples and mentioned often by learners during focus groups. The three most common active means of participation (one to one contact, wider communication and governance) among WBL learners were the same as those recorded for FE learners.

4.44 Although passive in nature, the use of surveys and questionnaires to get feedback from learners is considered to be the most effective means of involving learners among both FE and WBL providers. There is, however, a statistically significant difference in the perception of how effective this method is between provider types with 49% of WBL providers stating that it is among the most important methods as compared to 34% of FE providers.

4.45 Representation and more consultative methods (arguably more active measures) emerge as the least widely used approaches among both samples. A statistically significant difference between FE and WBL providers was found in relation to ‘ensuring that all learners are represented’. One fifth of FE providers indicated that this is something that they have attempted to achieve, compared to 9% of WBL providers. That said, from a learner perspective, 37% of learners surveyed longitudinally indicated that they had been personally involved in decisions around how their provider could improve the learning experience. Analysis found no significant difference between WBL and FE learners.

4.46 Over half of all providers in the longitudinal group have made changes in the development and implementation of their learner involvement programme since April 2008, although FE providers were even more likely to report such progress. This may highlight the need for additional encouragement for WBL providers, to raise awareness of the range of learner involvement activities available to them and to enable them to tailor the approaches to suit their business needs and structures.

4.47 Among the Year 2 cohort it was found that the majority of providers (56%) have an evaluation programme in place to monitor progress and impact. If FE and WBL providers are considered separately, it is apparent that formal processes of monitoring and evaluation are more prevalent among FE providers, 68% of which indicated that they had procedures in place to monitor the impact of their activity, compared to 51% of WBL providers. However, this is not consistent with the Year 1 cohort where there was no difference between WBL and FE activity. Significantly, 70% of providers in the longitudinal group reported having these arrangements in place.

4.48 Respondents who had collected evidence to assess the impact of learner involvement activity were asked to comment on any changes that they have made to their programme as a result of this evidence. The most frequently cited changes among FE and WBL providers include:

- Improving the accessibility of involvement opportunities;
- Ensuring learners have the support they require to be effective; and
- Improving individual aspects of the learner involvement programme.
5  INFLUENCING TEACHING AND LEARNING

Introduction

5.1 This chapter considers the extent to which learner involvement programmes can influence the approach taken to teaching practice among providers, for example whether learners can influence the content of courses, choice of qualifications or the overall approach taken to teaching practice.

Influencing Teaching and Learning

5.2 60% of providers - both FE and WBL - reported that they involved learners in developing course content and there were no significant variations among different groups of providers reporting this situation. Providers with the longest established programmes of learner involvement were most likely to support this form of involvement and there was a strong correlation between providers involving learners in developing course content and those involving learners in wider strategy and direction.

5.3 To influence teaching and learning, providers consider the most important means of learner involvement to be the use of feedback for evaluation, including telling learners about the actions taken. FE providers were more likely to state that they would inform learners of actions that were taken than WBL providers.

5.4 WBL providers were significantly less likely to involve learners in shaping the wider direction and strategy of the organisation than FE providers. Overall, providers that had a strategy in place and those that had a programme of learner involvement for more than three years were more likely to involve their learners in strategic decision making.

Shaping Learning Content

Evidence from the Year 1 and Year 2 provider cohorts

5.5 The Year 2 cohort survey found that 57% of providers involve learners in some way in the development of course content. Over half of providers (52%) also indicated that they involve learners in shaping the overall strategy and direction of the organisation. This is consistent with findings in Year 1.

5.6 Some interesting differences emerged when the use and effectiveness of the various methods used to support the evaluation of teaching and learning reported in Year 1 and Year 2 are considered. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 show the responses for the Year 2 cohort including whether there is a significant difference in approach/effectiveness between FE and WBL providers.
Table 5.1 – Year Two cohort: activities to support evaluation of teaching and learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation mechanism</th>
<th>Percentage of providers who use this mechanism</th>
<th>Significant difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FE</td>
<td>WBL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using learner feedback to review and evaluate their courses</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking learners to evaluate their courses</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>98.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling learners about the actions taken</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>87.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full surveys of learners undertaken regularly</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>88.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disseminating the results of surveys to learners</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training learners in order to enable them to evaluate their courses</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training learners in order to enable them to evaluate their courses</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 – Year Two cohort: effectiveness of activities to allow the evaluation of teaching and learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation mechanism</th>
<th>Percentage of providers who think it is among the most effective</th>
<th>Significant difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FE</td>
<td>WBL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using learner feedback to review and evaluate their courses</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking learners to evaluate their courses</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling learners about the actions taken</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full surveys of learners undertaken regularly</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disseminating the results of surveys to learners</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training learners in order to enable them to evaluate their courses</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training learners in order to enable them to evaluate their courses</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.7 Learner feedback is widely used in evaluating courses and is seen as effective. Given the opportunity to collect individual feedback as part of one to one assessment, WBL providers particularly favour this method.

5.8 ‘Telling learners about actions taken’ is particularly valued by FE providers (32% highlighted this as most effective), and ‘disseminating the results of surveys to learners’ is carried out by 92% of FE providers and 70% of WBL providers. Case studies suggest there is a subtle difference in overall approach between the two main provider types: a more directive/reporting stance from FE providers and an arguably more consultative position taken by WBL providers, mainly through the one to one review processes in use.

5.9 Comparing these findings about reported activity with the Year 1 responses, analysis shows that:

- WBL providers have increased their use of regular surveys;
- FE providers have increased their use of learner observation of lessons/sessions; and
- FE providers have increased their training of learners to evaluate courses.
5.10 Comparison with the Year 1 responses shows no significant changes in reported effectiveness of the approaches discussed in Table 5.2.

5.11 These findings echo the previous discussion in Chapter 4 around mechanisms for learner involvement. The greater use of representation, governance and wider methods for consulting learners such as learner conferences, learner affairs committees and peer advocacy – particularly among FE providers – is introducing more and diverse means of involving learners in the evaluation of teaching.

5.12 Telling learners about the actions taken is considered valuable as:

- It lets learners know that their comments are valued and taken seriously;
- It is important that providers respond to the issues raised by learners and communicate changes clearly;
- It can encourage further participation and involvement by learners; and
- It allows students to take ownership of their own learning plans.

5.13 There is less engagement in more consultative/innovative approaches to involvement (Figure 5.1). For example, less than half of the providers indicated that they have provided training for learners to enable them to better evaluate their courses; and just over a third of providers allow lesson/training sessions to be observed by learners as part of the evaluation process. In broad terms, with the exception of ‘telling learners about the actions taken’, there were no statistically significant differences in the use of these engagement methods between FE and WBL providers.

Figure 5.1 – Longitudinal sample: prevalence of activities to engage learners

![Prevalence of activities to engage learners](image)

Number of respondents: 646

Case study evidence

5.14 Proactive support for learners to get involved in formal involvement structures such as student councils is seen as crucial to their success. Various tactics have been adopted. For example one college has offered learners a bus pass to attend meetings held at a different site – another has introduced area based councils for different sites. Another college has noted that getting learners involved early is key – preferably within the first six weeks before a pattern of non-involvement sets in:
“If learners are not engaged by the Christmas break then the chance of involving them afterwards is limited.”

5.15 There is also recognition that students may be more likely to get involved in collective or representative opportunities for ‘learner voice’ to be heard if they feel that the process itself resonates with their aspirations:

“It’s been easier to get media and arts students involved in the Students Union as the skills you gain are more directly relevant to the those you need in those types of work and good for the CV.”

5.16 ESOL students may need more time for their confidence and language skills to develop. A community based provider for part time adult learners noted:

“ESOL students are more reluctant to come along to the user group when they are new to the centre and their English is not great. They are more likely to come along later when their English has improved.”

5.17 Training in involvement processes is noted as a success factor – for example through plans to train Student Council members to contribute to the college SAR through learner focus groups. Evidence from learners also shows how their understanding of involvement processes impacts on success:

“To gather the opinions of people on your course to report back to the Student Council you need to get people when they aren’t busy with course commitments.”

5.18 Most WBL providers already have well established processes for one to one reviews built into their assessment arrangements. There is also evidence that group and individual tutorial sessions are being introduced more widely in college settings:

“As part of the learner voice agenda we have negotiated an extra hour for students to have a group tutorial. The tutorial programme has proved very successful and topics discussed are wide ranging. Training (for tutors) in learner voice was provided by an external consultant to help them understand, explain and promote the different roles and responsibilities of learner/course and council representatives. Training is also provided for learners.”

5.19 It would appear that CPD activity can play an important role in helping to promote and embed learner involvement. This is covered in more detail in Chapter 6.

**Reasons why providers value different learner involvement methods**

5.20 Providers in the Year 2 cohort were asked to comment on the reasons why various aspects of learner involvement support are important to their organisation. Figure 5.2 shows why providers value the processes of asking for - and using - learner feedback and telling learners about the results. The reasons given indicate providers’ awareness of the importance of two way dialogues with learners rather than one way consultation. The responses shown here are similar to the responses in Year 1.

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6 These responses are the result of an ‘open ended’ question. The responses were later coded by the research team.
5.21 Providers value ‘using learner feedback to review and evaluate courses’ and ‘asking learners to evaluate their courses’ because:

- Feedback can be used to make improvements in the content and delivery of courses;
- Providers can gain the learners perspective;
- Providers can better tailor courses to suit the needs of learners;
- Learners can provide direct feedback on their experiences of the course and the learning they gained; and
- It allows providers to understand what learners want and need from their course.

5.22 ‘Telling learners about the actions taken’ is considered valuable as:

- It lets learners know that their comments are valued and taken seriously;
- It is important that providers respond to the issues raised by learners and communicate changes clearly;
- It can encourage further participation and involvement by learners; and
- It allows students to take ownership of their own learning plans.

5.23 Many of these activities could be described as retrospective in nature because they ask learners to review their experience rather than propose changes for the future. However, from the case studies (see 5.24) we know that many providers also include questions about what would make provision better in the future.

Case study evidence

5.24 Case study evidence suggests that mechanisms for involving learners in developing or reviewing policies vary widely. As one WBL provider said:

“All learners can be hard to reach! We use a range of methods and find one to one communication with learners helps to avoid difficulties in getting feedback form certain groups.”
5.25 Several providers emphasised the value of learner involvement in contributing directly to the annual SAR and key questions in the Common Inspection Framework:

- How effective are teaching, training and learning?
- How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?
- How well are learners guided and supported?

5.26 A feature of learner involvement strategies is the rich mix of methods and activities deployed – there is no common or standard approach.

### Shaping Overall Strategy and Direction

#### Overall management procedures and processes

**Longitudinal sample**

5.27 Respondents in the longitudinal sample were asked about the degree of integration between their learner involvement activities and wider quality management procedures and processes. Over 80% of providers reported that their learner involvement activity was explicitly linked to wider quality management processes – with no significant difference between the responses of FE and WBL providers.

**Case study evidence**

5.28 Case study evidence suggests that in general the larger the provider, the greater the emphasis on promoting detailed polices and procedures to maintain consistency in provision and to acknowledge the need for differences in approach in relation to different types of learners. For example, one college observed that their Learner Involvement Policy sits alongside their Young People’s Plan, Communications Strategy, Learner Support Policy, and their Equality and Diversity Policies.

5.29 WBL providers are particularly aware of the need to persuade and convince employers to buy into learner involvement processes alongside their commitment to training. Although this helps in building relationships with clients and learners, it can mean tailoring a bespoke involvement approach for each employer:

“*Our programme is constantly reviewed – something that may work for this company may not work for that one we were with yesterday.*”

5.30 Adapting policy and practice to the circumstances for work based learners is happening in colleges too: employers can help to actively promote learner involvement activities:

“*With work based learners, particularly those that do not come onto site, we tend to use more surveys to get learners’ views and we have to emphasise to employers that they have a responsibility to support their learners and to seek their views.*”

### Specific links to Equality and Diversity

**Longitudinal sample**

5.31 In Year 2, FE and WBL providers in the longitudinal sample were asked about the extent to which learner involvement activity is integrated into their Equality and Diversity Policy. Figures 5.3 and 5.4 show their responses.
Figure 5.3 - Longitudinal cohort: link between learner involvement activity and equality and diversity policy (FE providers)

Almost half of WBL providers stated that their learner involvement activity is fully integrated with their Equality and Diversity policy, compared to 40% of FE providers (a significant difference). However, FE providers are significantly more likely than WBL providers to have involved learners in the process of developing their Equality and Diversity strategy (60% compared to 33%).

Figure 5.4 - Longitudinal cohort: link between learner involvement activity and equality and diversity policy (WBL providers)
Case study evidence

5.33 Several providers were able to give examples of actions to support equality of access, provision and support for learners. Examples of proactive approaches in relation to disability were the most commonly reported. Actions range from holding an equalities conference, to setting up a disability involvement group and setting in place recognised procedures for responding to concerns from individual learners.

5.34 Opportunities for raising issues through group discussions are valued particularly in relation to group dynamics. An inner city WBL provider offering a wide range of IT courses commented on the impact of mutual support:

“…when groups come together for discussion, equality and diversity is often raised by learners. They often speak about how different issues affect different people in the workplace and how they can support each other - there is a lot of learner involvement in this respect on an ad hoc basis – it happens naturally.”

5.35 Using learners ‘to spread the word’ is also recognised as effective: one example was cited where 42 learners attending a college based Equalities Conference have drawn in support from three times as many other learners.

Underrepresented groups

Longitudinal sample

5.36 Providers within the longitudinal sample were asked to comment on the characteristics of groups of learners that they perceive to be under represented within their learner involvement programme. The results are illustrated in Figure 5.5:

Figure 5.4 – Longitudinal cohort: learners considered to be under represented

5.37 While the longitudinal survey found that over half of providers (54%) consider that no groups are under represented, a small group (just under 13%) felt that ethnic minorities and/or learners with a disability are under represented. Some providers also feel that males (7% of providers) and females (6%) are under represented in their learner involvement programme, but without more information, for
example concerning the type of learning provided, it is not possible to speculate as to why this may be the case.

5.38 If we consider FE and WBL providers individually, there is a statistically significant difference between providers who feel that under represented learners may include:

- Ethnic minorities: 4% of FE providers and 12% of WBL providers feel that ethnic minorities are under represented;
- Females: 1% of FE providers and 9% of WBL providers feel that females are under represented. This may reflect the sector specific nature of learning supplied by these providers; and
- Part time learners: 8% of FE providers and 0.2% of WBL providers feel that part time learners may be under represented.

5.39 These findings suggest that the nature of learner involvement activity offered by the provider may also be an important factor. For example, the time and commitment required to be involved in the very wide range of activity offered by some (mainly FE) providers may draw in full time students effectively but may also limit the proportional or representative involvement of part time learners. On the other hand, providers with an approach focused on one to one feedback – for example tailored to off site learners involved in WBL – may have greater success in involving all part time learners.

Case study evidence

5.40 None of the providers we spoke to mentioned formal targets for ensuring involvement from particular learner groups. But as one WBL provider said:

“All learners can be hard to reach! We use a range of methods and find one to one communication with learners helps to avoid difficulties in getting feedback from certain groups.”

Summary

Shaping Learning Content

5.41 The Year 2 cohort survey found that 56% of providers involve learners, in some way, in the development of course content. Over half of providers (51%) also indicated that they involve learners in shaping the overall strategy and direction of the organisation. The survey found that FE providers are significantly more likely to inform learners about the actions they are taking than WBL providers (97% compared to 87%). There is also a significant difference in the proportion of FE and WBL providers who disseminate the results of surveys to learners, with FE providers significantly more likely to do this.

5.42 Use of learner feedback to review and evaluate courses and asking learners to evaluate their courses are considered valuable as this feedback can be used to make improvements in the content and delivery of courses and to ensure that the learners’ perspective is included. This allows providers to understand what learners want and need from their course and helps providers to tailor courses better to suit the needs of learners.

5.43 Ensuring that learners are told about the actions taken is also considered valuable. This reinforces the sense of involvement as it lets learners know that their comments are valued and taken seriously, while demonstrating that providers respond to the issues raised by learners and communicate changes clearly. This completion of the communication loop can encourage further participation and involvement by learners and allows students to take ownership of their own learning plans as they see the results of their contribution.

5.44 However, among the longitudinal sample, less than half of the providers surveyed indicated that they have provided training for learners to enable them to better evaluate their courses; and just over a third of providers allow lesson/training sessions to be observed by learners as part of the evaluation process. With the exception of ‘telling learners about the actions taken’, there were no statistically significant differences in the use of the various engagement methods between FE and WBL providers. FE providers are more likely to tell learners about the actions taken.
Shaping Overall Strategy and Direction

5.45 While the longitudinal survey found that over half of providers (54%) consider that no groups are under represented, a small group (just under 10%) felt that ethnic minorities and/or learners with a disability are under represented. Some providers also feel that males (7% of providers) and females (6%) are under represented in their learner involvement programme, but without more information, for example concerning the type of learning provided, it is not possible to speculate as to why this may be the case.

5.46 There is a statistically significant difference between the percentage of providers who feel that under represented learners may include:

- Ethnic minorities: 4% of FE providers and 12% of WBL providers feel that ethnic minorities are under represented.
- Females: 1% of FE providers and 9% of WBL providers feel that females are under represented. This may reflect the sector specific nature of learning supplied by these providers; and
- Part time learners: 8% of FE providers and 0.2% of WBL providers feel that part time learners may be under represented.

5.47 There is a statistically significant difference between FE and WBL providers in respect of the extent to which learner involvement activity is integrated into the Equality and Diversity Policies (longitudinal sample). Almost half of WBL providers stated that their learner involvement activity is fully integrated with their Equality and Diversity policy, compared to 40% of FE providers.

5.48 The survey highlighted a statistically significant difference between FE and WBL providers in relation to the development of Equality and Diversity policy, with FE providers significantly more likely to have involved learners in this process. Respondents also indicated that there was a high degree of integration between their learner involvement activities and wider quality management procedures and processes, with over 80% stating that their learner involvement activity was explicitly linked to wider quality management processes.
6 SUPPORTING LEARNERS AND STAFF

Introduction
6.1 This chapter reviews the support offered to learners and the staff working in provider organisations to facilitate learner involvement and support learner participation.

Supporting Learner Participation – Provider Perspective
Year 2 cohort
6.2 Responses from providers surveyed in the Year 2 cohort (Figure 6.1) illustrate the types of support provided to learners to enable them to provide feedback on their experiences. While the majority of providers feel that they help learners with difficulties to participate and provide sufficient time and resources for learners to be involved, the survey found that less than a third of respondents provide formal training for learners to enable them to be actively involved.

Figure 6.1 - Year Two cohort: Support provided to learners to enable them to provide feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support provided to learners to enable them to provide feedback</th>
<th>Percentage of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We train learners to be representatives or advocates</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We raise awareness among learners of the role of learner representatives</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We provide resources including IT facilities and space for discussion</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We provide sufficient time for learners to be involved</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We help learners with difficulties to participate</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 355

6.3 Looking across the responses to surveys for Year 1 and Year 2 cohorts and the longitudinal group, only one criterion demonstrates a significant difference in response – namely ‘provision of resources including IT facilities/space for discussion’. Although significant, this is the only area of difference and may be anomalous. Table 6.1 shows the overall responses across the surveys:
6.4 When FE and WBL providers from the Year 2 cohort are considered separately some differing approaches for involving learners are illustrated through their responses. For example FE providers are more likely than WBL providers to include learner representation within their LIS:

- 82% of FE providers actively work to raise awareness among learners of the role of learner representatives. Only 40% of WBL providers do so.
- 59% of FE providers train learners to be representatives or advocates. Only 21% of WBL providers do so.

Longitudinal sample

6.5 Figure 6.2 shows the type of support provided to learners by FE and WBL providers within the longitudinal sample.

**Figure 6.2 – Longitudinal sample:**
**Support provided to learners to enable them to provide feedback**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support provided to learners to enable feedback</th>
<th>FE n=227</th>
<th>WBL n=418</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help learners with difficulties to participate</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide sufficient time for learners to be involved</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide resources, including IT facilities and space for discussions</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise awareness among learners of the role of learner representatives</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train learners to be representatives or advocates</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.6 Responses illustrate the greater emphasis amongst FE providers than WBL providers on learner representation. This finding is consistent with a greater reliance amongst WBL providers on one to one feedback and training for learners to make good uses of such processes. The difference between the two groups in relation to providing resources, including IT facilities and space for discussions is also significant.

6.7 When asked about any changes in levels of support over the past six months, over 50% of the FE providers and nearly 40% of WBL providers had increased the amount of support available to learners to assist them in feeding back on their experiences (Figure 6.3).

**Figure 6.3 – Longitudinal sample: support to learners over the last six months**

![Bar chart showing support levels]

**Percentage of providers**

- **Increased overall amount of support**: 39.2% (WBL), 52.7% (FE)
- **Maintained overall amount of support**: 60.1% (WBL), 46.9% (FE)
- **Decreased overall amount of support**: 0.7% (WBL), 0.4% (FE)

**Case study evidence**

6.8 From the case studies it is clear that providers of all kinds are exploring and implementing a range of opportunities for extending the range and depth of learner voice. For example, one college (in this case a sixth form college) has used tutorial time firstly to introduce independent learning plans and then to make these available on-line to learner and tutor as part of the on-going updating process. In this way the strengths of existing opportunities for focused but informal dialogue about the whole of the learning experience have been exploited as the basis for formal processes for communication and review.

6.9 This response from a WBL provider who was asked about the relative use of processes for involving learners (individually, collectively or both) illustrates the arguments for using a mixture of approaches:

> “An individual approach means you get to know the candidate on a one to one level. This helps to develop the relationship and learner motivation. However where there is a group that is either slightly reluctant or unsure, a group environment helps them to see that they are all in it together.”

6.10 A WBL provider in the leisure sector, that has recently improved substantially the way that it keeps in touch with and supports individual learners, notes:

> “The next stage of development will be to get formalised input and feedback from groups of learners [over and above one to one input] and giving increased and consistent feedback to learners on actions.”
Supporting Learner Participation – Learner Perspective

Longitudinal Sample

6.11 57% of learners received support from a fellow student or learners and 38% from student services or student liaison team staff. Seventy percent of learners viewed access to facilities of the college/training provider as a significant factor in facilitating their involvement (Fig 6.5). Less than half of learners surveyed longitudinally had received training from their provider to support their participation in learner involvement activity and less than 20% had received training from an outside agency.

Figure 6.5 – Longitudinal sample: support for learners to be effectively involved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Percentage of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support from a tutor/teaching staff</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to facilities</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from a fellow student/learner</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training provided within the college/ training provider</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources (to run events, conduct surveys etc)</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from Student Services/Student Liaison team staff</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training provided by an outside organisation</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 600

Staff Support and Capability

Year 2 cohort

6.12 When asked to comment on how teachers and tutors are supported in learner involvement activities, most providers in the Year 2 cohort had provided some form of training for their staff and in accordance with available guidance (Figure 6.6).

- Around 80% (88% of WBL providers and 77% of FE providers) use appropriate guidance such as that provided by the Institute of Learning; and

- Around two thirds (77% of WBL providers and 60% of FE providers) provide training for new staff on learner involvement as part of their induction programme.
6.13  Within the Year 2 cohort 66% of providers offer dedicated liaison or support staff as part of their programme of learner involvement.

6.14  There were no significant differences between the Year 1 and Year 2 cohorts in their responses to these questions; however comparison between the Year 1 cohort and the longitudinal responses shows significant differences in response to two areas: this would suggest a growing, explicit expectation among these providers that teaching staff will consistently engage learners (Table 6.2). This is discussed further below.

Table 6.2 – Support for staff to engage in Learner Involvement: all survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support for staff</th>
<th>Percentage of providers</th>
<th>Year 1 Cohort</th>
<th>Year 2 Longitudinal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An expectation that liaison staff will work to occupational standards</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An expectation that teaching staff will use appropriate guidance such as provided by the Institute for Learning</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for staff when new procedures affecting learner involvement are introduced</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An explicit duty on teaching staff to engage learners as partners in the learning experience</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training on learner involvement as part of ongoing CPD programmes for existing staff</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for new staff on learner involvement as part of their induction programme</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of respondents</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>645</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Longitudinal Sample

6.15  Providers surveyed longitudinally were asked to comment on the approach they have taken to engaging their staff in learner involvement activities and to ensuring that teachers and tutors are...
capable and confident in supporting learner involvement (Figure 6.7). In line with the findings from the Year 2 cohort the most widely used methods are ‘informal’ in nature, but with particular emphasis on the provision of training for staff when ‘new procedures which affect learner involvement’ are introduced. In 88% of providers support is available to teaching and non-teaching support staff.

**Figure 6.7- Longitudinal cohort:**
Support for staff to promote their engagement in learner involvement

![Chart showing support for staff to promote their engagement in learner involvement](chart.png)

6.16 From the longitudinal sample of providers, it is also clear that training for staff has been increasing. Over the last six months (Figure 6.8):

- 48% of providers indicated that they had increased the overall amount of support available for staff to promote engagement in learner involvement activities;
- 45% have increased the number of teaching staff engaged in learner involvement; and
- 40% have increased the number of support staff involved.
6.17 In contrast to the findings for the Year 2 cohort, the FE providers in the longitudinal sample were significantly more likely than WBL providers to have dedicated liaison or support staff in place to support and promote learner involvement. Analysis shows that 65% of FE providers had dedicated support staff in post prior to April 2008, with a further 10% having appointed staff in the period since April 2008 (Figure 6.4). This shift and the apparent difference between types of providers seems linked to differences in resource levels and flexibility to redeploy staff to address awareness of changing priorities (see case study evidence below).
Case study evidence

6.18 From the case studies it seems that as learner involvement becomes embedded in teaching and training, providers are becoming more aware of the benefits of support for staff in making the most effective use of learner involvement processes. For example one college - in its first full year of having its LIS in place - emphasises further training for staff and learners as key opportunities for the future; in particular:

- Further staff training to ensure they promote and secure willing participation of learners; and
- Further development of the contribution of learners that sit on committees.

6.19 There is evidence that providers are seeking ways to realign roles and responsibilities to accommodate new approaches or greater emphasis on formal learner involvement processes. For example, a WBL provider offering a range of types of training across the IT field has recently taken on a Student Support Officer to complement their Employer Support Officer – this has cost implications not just for the post but in responding to learner needs identified.

6.20 Providers are also seeking to accommodate a mix of one to one and group opportunities for learner feedback. Where learners undertaking WBL have regular contact with their assessor as an opportunity for one to one feedback and review, opportunities for group discussion usually have to be built in to group training sessions. Where these aren’t already established, this means negotiating with employers who may be reluctant to agree to time off for this. In another example, a college (in this case a sixth form college) is using its management and review processes to ensure that staff are fully involved in responding to aggregated data from learner surveys – with data fed directly back into staff appraisals and course action plans.

Summary

Supporting learner participation – provider perspective

6.21 Evidence from the surveys reflects the reality that providers come to learner involvement from a variety of perspectives. For example some providers (more likely to be FE rather than WBL providers) include learner representation within their LIS and then actively work to raise awareness among learners of the role of learner representatives and provider training for this. Other providers place greater reliance on one to one feedback and some provide training for learners to make good uses of such processes.

6.22 From the case studies it is clear that providers of all kinds are exploring and implementing a range of opportunities for extending the range and depth of learner voice. Responses from WBL providers illustrate why individual and collective approaches are necessary for building relationships; motivation; confidence and learner voice.

6.23 When the Year 2 cohort of providers were asked to comment on how teachers and tutors are supported in learner involvement activities, 77% of providers reported training in learner involvement processes for tutors/teachers as part of their on-going professional development programme. Most providers (88% of the longitudinal cohort) provide training for teaching and non-teaching staff. Many providers (66% of the Year 2 cohort) also provide dedicated liaison or support staff as part of their programme of learner involvement.

6.24 Fewer providers (45%) offered formal involvement training to their learners, although more than a third of the longitudinal sample had increased such support in the past six months. Less than half of learners surveyed longitudinally had received training from their provider in learner involvement processes and less than 20% had received training from an outside agency – although 57% had received support to get involved or make their voice heard from another learner and 38% from student services or student liaison team staff.
6.25 Data from the longitudinal sample of providers shows that support and training for staff is increasing. Over the last six months

- 48% of providers indicated that they had increased the overall amount of support available for staff to promote engagement in learner involvement activities;
- 45% have increased the number of teaching staff engaged in learner involvement; and
- 40% have increased the number of support staff involved.

6.26 From the case studies it seems that providers are becoming more aware of the benefits of support for staff and learners in making the most effective use of learner involvement processes. For example a college that emphasises further staff training to promote and secure willing participation of learners is also developing support for learners that sit on committees. Other WBL providers are seeking ways to introduce group discussions, for example as elements of group training sessions, to complement regular one to one contact with assessors.

6.27 The case studies also show how some providers are adapting practice to accommodate new approaches or developments. For example a WBL provider offering a range of types of training across the IT field has recently taken on a Student Support Officer to complement their Employer Support Officer. In another example, a sixth form college is feeding aggregated data from learner surveys directly back into staff appraisals and course action plans as part of its management and review processes.
7 CONCLUSIONS

“Learner feedback is subtle in the short term and substantial over time”

Outcomes and Benefits

7.1 Overall, Learner Involvement results in benefits to both providers and learners. These benefits are enhanced for those providers that have a formal programme of learner involvement in place. The most frequently reported results arising from having a formal learner involvement strategy relate to improved staff confidence about involving learners, ability to collate and analyse information about learner involvement activity and to demonstrate changes that have come about as a result of learner involvement activity.

7.2 Learners reported effects from their involvement that related to improved teaching and facilities as well as recognition that they were taking a more active part in decisions about their learning. Learners appear to find it difficult to articulate how or why their involvement has been beneficial to them; however the majority of learners report that they value and enjoy the opportunities for involvement that they have been given, describing benefits relating to an improved overall learning experience, improved confidence and improved ability to make informed choices.

Strategy Development

7.3 There are indications that the encouragement of a strategic approach to learner involvement is having some effect. All providers taking part in the surveys could demonstrate some level of learner involvement activity and 94% of providers in the longitudinal cohort had maintained their programme between surveys. 56% of those aware of the requirement to have a strategy felt that their approach to learner involvement had changed as a result of this obligation. Over half were also aware of the recent guidance from DIUS on consultation with learners and employers. Both FE and WBL providers engage learners in drafting learner involvement strategies, although FE providers are more likely than WBL providers to involve learners in this activity and to be aware of the recent guidance on consultation.

7.4 35% of providers in the longitudinal study reported changes in approach between our research surveys, including modifications and improvements to their programmes to make them simpler and more effective; and also to widen representation and increase involvement of learners. This suggests that many providers are managing and refining their learner involvement programme actively. However, FE providers were more likely than WBL providers to have taken steps to widen representation and also more likely to have reviewed their overall learner involvement process or strategy.

7.5 Learners appear to value that they are asked their opinions and 95% agreed that they are treated with respect by their provider. There is a strong association in both FE and WBL between learners who can describe opportunities to be involved in decisions relating to learner support, facilities and courses and their statement that the provider seeks their views. WBL learners are more likely to believe that their learning providers always seek and respond to their views: a higher proportion of WBL learners ‘strongly agreed’ that their provider asks their opinion on how to improve courses, teaching and facilities.

Participation Mechanisms

7.6 Although the use of surveys and questionnaires remains the most widely recognised means of learner involvement, almost two thirds of providers reported offering learner parliaments or forums; and involvement of learners as peer support or as mentors was also widely encouraged. In other words, over time a mix of both active and passive measures has been prevalent. FE providers appear to use a greater range of learner involvement methods than WBL providers. Both FE and WBL providers mostly felt that the use of surveys/questionnaires was effective, with 49% of WBL providers and 34% of FE providers taking this view.
7.7 Compared with FE providers, WBL providers were more likely to consider the engagement of learners as mentors to be important. Representation and other active approaches emerge as the least used approaches among both samples.

7.8 Both main types of providers reported changes and progress with their learner involvement programmes, and although more FE providers reported changes in approaches to increasing the range and depth of involvement opportunities available to learners, more than half of WBL providers indicated that they had made such changes.

7.9 Over 70% of learners in the Year 2 cohort were able to comment on some specific involvement mechanisms employed by their provider, and 37% of the longitudinal cohort indicated that they had been personally involved in discussion about how the provider could improve the learning experience. It is worth noting that for a significant number of respondents these mechanisms included active approaches such as discussions with staff as well as completion of surveys.

7.10 In terms of arrangements for evaluation of learner involvement, formal processes are common among FE providers (68%) and WBL (51%). While over 70% of providers reported that they had evaluation methods in place, almost 20% had put these arrangements in place since April 2008 – this could be a further indication that the requirement for a more strategic approach is having effect on the approach of providers.

7.11 Positive outcomes were reported where evaluation structures are in place. FE and WBL providers both reported that collection of evidence had led to changes to improve accessibility of involvement methods; ensure that support is provided for learners to be effective; and improve individual aspects of their learner involvement programme.

7.12 Overall, across the provider network there is a mix of active and passive approaches, the use of collective and individual involvement mechanisms and varying degrees to which informal and formal structures are in place. Providers that had more formal structures have been seen to be better able to observe benefits from their learner involvement programmes.

Influencing Teaching and Learning

7.13 Over half of providers report that they involve learners in development of course content and influencing the strategy/direction of the organisation. Most providers reported disseminating the results of surveys and informing learners about the actions they are taking (although FE providers are more likely to do this). While over half of providers feel that no groups are under-represented in learner involvement activity, a considerable proportion (7-9%) reported that ethnic minority groups or those with a disability are under-represented.

7.14 Most providers reported that they consider it to be valuable to tell learners about actions taken. In addition to the importance of letting learners know that their views have been taken seriously, providers felt that this communication was likely to encourage further participation and involvement by learners and to allow students to take ownership of their learning plans.

7.15 However, less than half of providers reported that they have provided training for learners to be able to evaluate their courses; and fewer allow learners to observe learning/training sessions as part of an evaluation process.

7.16 Over 80% of providers report that learner involvement activity is closely integrated with wider management processes. The longitudinal survey found that half of WBL providers and 40% of FE providers integrate learner involvement activity with their Equality and Diversity policy, although FE providers were more likely than WBL providers to involve learners in the development of their E&D policy.

Supporting Learners and Staff

7.17 The majority of providers are confident that they help learners with difficulties to participate and that they provide sufficient time and resources for learners to be involved.
7.18 Less than one third of providers in the Year 2 cohort provide training for learners for them to be actively involved, for example as a learner representative. Possibly associated with the extent to which this mechanism is used, fewer WBL providers reported that they actively work to raise awareness of the role of learner representatives or provide training for learners to take on this role (59% of FE providers and 21% of WBL).

7.19 Many providers feel that they have increased the amount of support available to learners to assist them in feeding back on their experiences since April 2008 (50% of FE, 40% of WBL providers). This may be a further indication that the development of more formal learner involvement strategies is increasing focus on this area and increasing the resources committed to learner involvement. The longitudinal survey also found that FE providers are currently more likely to have dedicated staff in place to support and promote learner involvement.

7.20 A large percentage of learners indicated that support from staff and peers had helped them become involved. Interestingly, WBL learners reported significantly higher levels of support through training to help them become involved, which contrasts with the providers’ reported offer of training. This may reflect the nature of engagement between WBL learners and their tutors/assessors or the nature of learner forums or other mechanisms used by WBL providers.

7.21 Most training for staff on learner involvement appears to be informal, including that staff are made aware of an expectation on them to promote learner involvement in accordance with available guidance. Against a high overall level of activity, WBL providers were more likely than FE providers to report this approach. WBL providers were also more likely to include training for new staff on learner involvement as part of their staff induction or when new procedures that affect learner involvement are introduced.

**Concluding observation**

7.22 The longitudinal cohort in particular illustrates that there are clear benefits from learner involvement that improve the learners’ experience, build staff confidence about involving learners and enable the organisation to gather evidence and demonstrate the changes that have been made more effectively. Providers have noted benefits for their learners, for staff and for the organisation as a whole. A formal strategy provides a more coherent framework on which to build activity and a mechanism to embed and manage learner involvement objectives. This is not to say that an informal programme does not have benefits, but it providers with a clear structure were able to articulate their activities and benefits more clearly.

7.23 The research uncovered a rich mix of learner activity including both active and passive measures. Collective and individual approaches and both formal and more informal structures were observed to be in place across the provider network. A combination of these measures appears to provide a comprehensive set of results, particularly where staff are encouraged and trained to be more confident in how they can support learners.

7.24 The providers that have seen impact from their learner involvement programmes have shown that embedding learner involvement activities in a strategic manner requires a range of carefully tailored mechanisms to meet the needs of the individual learner, the teaching and support staff working in providers and the organisation as a whole, and that the investment.

“Learner feedback invariably leads to an improved learner journey and learning environment.”