Framework for Excellence 2009/10 Learner Views Survey

1 October 2009 – 12 February 2010

Gathering learners’ views over time

Using this option
The survey gives the option of ticking a box that says these views have been gathered over time; this is not the same as allowing the learner to go back to their own survey on a number of occasions, an option which is available to all learners.

It provides an option for working with learners over a period of time to gather their views when they are not able to respond in more conventional ways to the questions being asked. These learners might include those who would find it difficult to engage with sitting in front of a computer to complete the survey; those who need very long periods of time to communicate a response and those whose views are primarily elicited through observation. This approach will not be suitable for those learners who are unable to make simple choices; the assessment grid available in the supported completion protocols guidance notes will help to determine if any learners fall into this category.

It is important that the same rigour outlined in the supported completion protocols is applied to this process, so that the views gathered are a genuine reflection of what each learner thinks. In particular, staff must not influence the learner’s response or make their own value judgments about the survey questions. Staff who collect views in this way should participate in the general training on the protocols and should then have further discussion to ensure they are clear about the parameters for this approach.

Approaches to gathering views over time could include:

1. Gathering responses during tutorial sessions
2. Gathering responses through student logs/diaries
3. Gathering responses through observation

These options are described in more detail below.

Preparing for the survey
The protocols and the supporting guidance allow for some initial discussion and preparation prior to completing the survey and this is equally appropriate
if you are going to gather views over time. The survey includes language and concepts which may need clarifying.

Many colleges use their induction period to talk to students about the importance of expressing their views and about college ‘codes of conduct’, so this time can also be used to discuss some aspects of the learner survey. For example, one large General Further Education College began last academic year with a college wide initiative on respect and what it means in the college context. When students with learning difficulties or disabilities completed the learner survey, due to the initiative at their college, they were clear about what the term “respect” meant.

Most colleges have a learner council/student forum or equivalent, where students are encouraged and supported to express their views. This is a good, secure setting for students to learn that they can say what they think and for staff to get used to supporting them to do so. It would be appropriate for the questions in the learner views survey to be part of these discussions.

**Gathering views through tutorials**

Tutorials provide a regular opportunity to develop a good understanding of an individual learner and their views about the college. It is a secure setting for the learner, in which they can feel confident to express a view. Tutors will choose the best approach for each learner, based on their knowledge of the specific support they require; this could include working on one question per session over a number of weeks (possibly linked into any preparation taking place in other forums). Discussion about the specific survey questions should be integrated into more general discussions, in order to reduce possible stress for the learner. Tutors will need to feel confident that they have understood the learner’s view and should check this out with them. Similar phased approaches to those outlined in the Guidance Notes can be used in the tutorial setting.

**Gathering views using student diaries/logs/profiles**

Many colleges have a system of keeping a diary or other kind of on-going profile of a learner, usually completed by those who know the learner well in conjunction with the learner. They may be paper or technology based and may include summative versions, such as the In-folio web based portfolio. Clearly a great deal of information is contained in these records, which can help to build up a clear picture of the learner’s views about many aspects of college life. Staff using these records to ascertain learner’s views will need to ensure there is a good match between the information they use from them and the survey questions.

**Inputting the responses**

It is almost certain that where views have been gathered over time, a member of staff will input the responses onto the survey website. Wherever appropriate, this should be done with the learner present, even if it just a case of them being in the same room, so that they are aware of what is being stated on their behalf. If it would not be too stressful for the learner, responses can be checked out a final time.