

Sense College - Operational Strategy

Learner Involvement Information



Outcomes

In order to ensure an effective process of learner voice, the purpose and aims of learner involvement within college needs to be clear:

- To work to the principles of the SEND Code of Practice (2014);
- To work to the principles of the Mental Capacity Act (2005);
- To work to the principles of the Equality Act (2010);
- To develop learners through high quality teaching, learning and pastoral support;
- To develop the informed decision-making skills of learners;
- To ensure that learners are involved in decision-making;
- To ensure that staff have the skills required to seek and respond effectively to the views of all learners;
- To ensure that when learners' voice opinions, they are responded to;
- To provide information about how learners' voices can be heard;
- To ensure the views of learners inform quality improvement;
- To monitor effectiveness of the avenues for learners' voice.

For the college learner involvement strategy to be effective, it is important that staff are clear about its purposes and understand the processes, protocols and outcomes; and above all, perceive it as an effective and supportive mechanism for raising standards and learner experiences. Staff will monitor the effectiveness of the strategy and contribute to its development through the team meetings and the college's quality assurance systems.



Who is this strategy for?

This strategy is for Sense College staff working with learners funded by the ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency), in addition to:

- The Individuals¹ Sense supports
- All College Staff and Volunteers, including Executive Principal, Head of College and College Senior Management Team
- Parents
- Governors
- Stakeholders

What is this strategy about?

Sense College regards the process of learner involvement as an essential strand in our commitment to personalisation and is all about:

- The perspectives and ideas of learners;
- Respecting what everyone has to say;
- Taking informed risks;
- Sharing and listening;
- Engaging and working together in partnership;

One of the Sense College's fundamental beliefs is that everyone accessing the college has a voice to be heard and that the opportunity to share and express opinions and views, is at the core of the holistic learning experience.

¹ • The individuals that Sense supports: Adults with deafblindness in receipt of an Educational Programme, in this document are referred to simply as 'learners'.



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Principles

Underpinning Philosophy:

Sense College is committed to providing an outstanding learning environment which ensures all our learners have an opportunity to be involved and have a voice in the college community.

Our provision is designed to support learners with sensory impairment, complex communication needs and additional disabilities to develop confidence and skills that will be relevant and useful to them in their everyday lives.

The college views learner voice as a means to promote true empowerment and engagement that will encourage learners to become active members of their learning community.

Sense College will do this by developing a culture where learners are:

- Motivated to give constructive feedback;
- See their feedback is taken seriously;
- See that staff have the skills to encourage and respond positively to feedback.

Principles:

Our strategy and processes are based on the following guiding principles, incorporating the college's mental capacity policy:

- Everyone is assumed to have capacity unless it is proved otherwise;



- Staff must give all appropriate help before concluding that a learner cannot make their own decisions;
- Staff must accept that people have the right to make what might be seen as eccentric or unwise decisions;
- Any actions taken on behalf of a person who is deemed to lack capacity must always act in that person's best interest;
- The college's decision making process is driven by assessing the impact on the learner;
- The college curriculum is relevant and connects to young people's lives;
- Empower and enable learners to contribute to decision making processes wherever possible, as it impacts on their learning experience.



Practice

Part One: Methods of Involvement

To ensure information is shared and learners' views are captured, nurtured and shared, a broad range of involvement methods are made available and encouraged. These fall into the following categories:

- **INFORM** – Staff regularly inform learners about their rights and ways of participating within the college. This is a vital first step on the ladder of developing learner voice. It opens the door for wider learner participation.
- **CONSULT** – Taking a consultation approach encourages greater learner involvement than passing on information. It involves the college seeking the views of learners and providing feedback on any action taken.
- **INVOLVE** – Involving learners means that they contribute throughout the decision-making process. Staff and learners work closely together to ensure all views are taken into account.
- **EMPOWER** – When learners are empowered they can set the agenda for change. They work together, organise themselves and have responsibility for decisions that affect themselves and their peers.

Part Two: Inform

In order to embed learner involvement the first category method includes:

- **Notice Boards**
Notice and display boards in centres not only provide information to visitors and celebrate



achievement, they also are an avenue to demonstrate learner voice and provide opportunities to use graphics, larger font, audio and tactile information to inform learners and staff about college life and processes.

- **Personal and Social Development (PSD) Sessions**
Sessions focussing on personal and social development provide opportunities to inform learners about a range of topics and strategies that can be used to help them develop as an individual and building their confidence, independence and keeping safe skills.
- **Personal Tutorials and/or meetings with Education Coordinator (EC)**
Each learner has access to a personal tutor/EC who is identified during the transition stage. At these meetings information will be shared with the learner about college events, progress made and advice on next steps.
- **Newsletters**
Centre and college wide newsletters not only share the celebration of achievement and participation, but also provide information on education topics, upcoming events and further opportunities to engage with college life.

Part Three: Consult

The second category of methods to involve learners includes:

- **Meetings with Personal Tutor / Education Coordinator**
While it is the responsibility of all staff to capture learners' views, the personal tutor/EC will collate and analyse them and ensure they are shared with key education staff, circles of support and incorporated into the learner Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for future development opportunity. These meetings will provide learners with a forum to discuss any issues, concerns or feedback on their learning experience and to include the learning in planning the next steps.



- Learner Questionnaires and Surveys

The college has three main areas of survey. The '*Transition In*' questionnaire which is done during the first term of a learners placement at Sense to ensure that the transition process was successful and the learning journey at the college has been planned right. An *annual survey* is undertaken every year (around June) to provide the opportunity for learners to feedback on how they feel about college and to raise any comments on their placement at college. Learner surveys are a good source of information to help with college improvements and as evidence in our annual Self-Assessment Report (SAR) which reviews all we do. *Bespoke or themed surveys* can happen at any time and are usually part of a project or particular subject for improvement. Surveys and comments received are collated and used to impact the strategic planning and college processes.

- Focus Groups

Learners have the opportunity to engage in discussions about certain topics and projects via focus groups. These groups may meet to discuss centre specific issues – such as planning enrichment events or changes to rooms, or they may evolve around college wide issues to inform college processes.

- Webinars

Currently under development, but will hopefully be a way of communicating and sharing information in the future.

Part Four: **Involve**

The third category of methods to involve learners includes:

- Transition

Learners are involved in induction and transition planning via initial meetings with the Education Transition and Reviewing Officer (ETRO) and/or the centre Education Services Manager (ESM), by completing the Transition Planning form with staff, by attending the



Transition In review meeting along with the Transition In questionnaire and completing the Transition Out process with staff.

- **Assessment**

Learners are encouraged to take an active part in any assessment activity, including sharing their own thoughts and feelings. The college sees assessment as a collaborative information gathering exercise, rather than just a proficiency test.

- **Person Centred Reviews (including PCPs, ILPs, EHCPs)**

Learners are central to the review process. Prior to the review meeting, discussions will be held with the personal tutor/EC to determine what the learner wants to cover in the meeting and who to invite, as well as a review of the learner's progress, what is working well, what changes may need to be made and planning for the next step. Learners are supported to produce their own presentation for use at the meeting, in a style and communication method appropriate for them.

- **Learner Voice**

Learner voice and feedback is encouraged across the college. For learners unable to feedback using formal communication staff are encouraged to record anything that could be perceived as learners commenting on the services the college delivers. Each centre collates this information and it is discussed at staff meetings where learner voice is a standing agenda item, as well as being sent to the college Senior Management Team (SMT) at the end of each month for analysis and review of processes where appropriate. Learner voice activity may also be reported to the governing body.

- **Learner Forums**

The purpose of the learner forum is to give learners a platform from which they can have a voice about any issue that affects their time at the college. The agenda is learner-led. Learners who are unable to speak for themselves are represented by their advocates or personal tutors. There are two types of learner forum – one is centre specific to where the



learner attends and the other is a college wide forum where a representative from each centre is nominated to attend on behalf of centre learners. See **Appendix 1** for the **cross college learner forum poster**.

- **Learner Involvement with Governing Body**
The college invites a learner from the college to sit on the college's Governing Body. The Governing Body are responsible for the governance of the college and meet three times a year. The learner representative will be supported by staff at the meetings.
- **Learner Involvement with Staff Recruitment**
The college encourages learner input to staff recruitment by means of a meet, question and answer session as part of the interview process. Learners are able to ask and answer questions with a candidate as well as feedback their views to staff.

Part Five: Empower

The final category of methods to involve learners includes:

- **Person Centred Planning and Reviews**
All learners are involved with their own planning and development. All needs, likes, dislikes and areas of personal development, are captured and appropriately recorded/actioned on the Individual Learner Plan (ILP) and Person Centred Plan (PCP). These are regarded as 'live' documents where learner views are rigorously monitored and any changes notified and actioned. Learners' views are monitored throughout their learning programmes where achievement is formally recorded and fed into the processes. An evaluation of learner progress and achievement is undertaken every month and regular opportunities to capture learner views in the lead up to evaluation are recorded and fed into this process.



- Peer Support / Advocates

Advocates are individuals (could be another learner, member of staff or external buddy) who speak on behalf of the learner whose communication skills may not be formal or advanced. Advocates sometimes notice things that the learner themselves may not, such as through observation and can voice this on behalf of the learner.

- Delegated Decision Making

The college actively seeks learners' views and ideas on topics that affect them. Wherever possible, opportunities for learners to make decisions will be delegated to them via centre or cross-college forums in the first instance, or via focus groups where relevant.

- Feedback – Compliments, Complaints and Ideas

Learners are encouraged to feedback any compliments and ideas they have to staff, so that good practice can be identified and learner's input captured for development. Sense also has a complaints procedure which provides a valuable tool for people who wish to raise any complaints or issues.

Part Six: Communication

Sense College promotes an active communication environment. The college is very successful in helping learners to develop their active communication skills in addition to exercising choice and expressing their opinions in all aspects of their study programme.

The key elements that need to be in place to create and sustain an active communication environment include:

- A conception of communication as dialogue – i.e. a social interaction which aims to reach an understanding;



- Expertise in the development of different communication strategies and interactive approaches; including sign language, picture communication systems, minimal spoken language, electronic communication aids and objects of reference;
- Empathy with learners springing from an insight into the challenges associated with those communication difficulties, including autism and sensory impairment;
- Staff understanding of the connection between communication and behaviour;
- Staff ability to use the relevant communication strategies skilfully for each learner;
- Regular review of communication processes and strategies for individual learners;
- Planned space and opportunity within the learning programme to promote active communication skills and to apply these in a range of settings;
- Embedded monitoring of the quality of support for active communication within the observation process, as well as for improving teaching and learning;
- A problem-solving approach for identifying and sourcing assistive technology tools to facilitate active communication;
- Ongoing comprehensive training and development (including specialist teaching and support qualifications) and a programme that continues to develop the understanding and specialist skills of learning support staff.

A full range of learning resources and communication strategies are utilised to capture the learner involvement, which may include:

- Photographic evidence
- Picture cards
- ILT, ICT and symbols software
- Braille
- Sign Language
- Video/DVD
- TACPAC, Communication through touch



- Intensive Interaction
- Raising issues and concerns
- Learner questionnaires and surveys
- Personal Tutor / EC meetings
- Moon
- Text
- Learner Forums
- Sequencing boards

Staff at the college also recognise the importance of identifying communication and learner involvement through:

- Body language (for example if a learner covers their face with their hands, it may mean that they have a problem);
- Facial expressions;
- Challenging behaviour (for example if a learner throws something, it may mean that they have a problem with something that they are doing);
- Withdrawal from an activity.

Key documentation to support the communication process is embedded across the curriculum and will feature in the:

- Communication Guidelines
- Individual Learner Plans (ILPs) / Study Programmes
- Lesson Plans
- Review Reports Documentation
- Forum Meeting Minutes
- Learner Surveys/Questionnaires



- Complaint Forms
- Achievement Forms
- Learner Voice Forms
- Learner Response to Activity Forms

All staff have the responsibility to ensure that every opportunity is given to promote learner voice and involvement and to use the full range of teaching and learning strategies at their disposal.

Learner involvement will be on the agenda of Core Education Team meetings. Staff meetings are held regularly to ensure the policy is being followed, the policy's principles are being promoted and it is remaining effective.

Part Seven: Impact and Benefits

The impact of learner involvement and engagement creates a more responsive, more engaging, higher quality offer that empowers learners in shaping their own experience.

Learner involvement is central to providing outstanding learning experiences and college continuous improvement.

Learner Benefits:

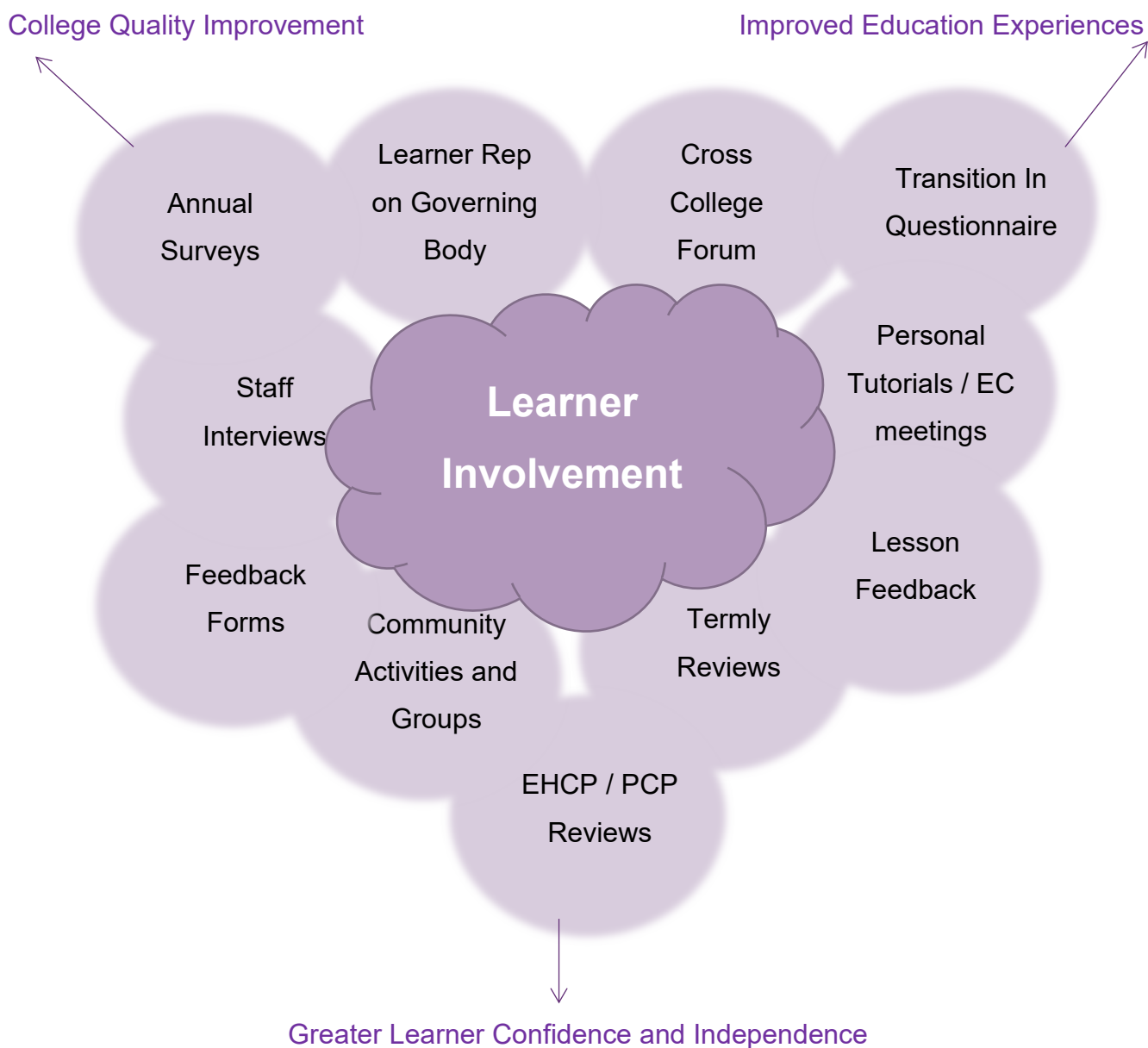
- Increased participation in lessons and the college community;
- Increased progression and achievement;
- Greater resilience, confidence and independence;
- Learners can help to shape learning experiences for current as well as future learners.



College Benefits:

- Better quality of information about learners' perspectives, which can be used with other data, to improve quality;
- Better decisions about resource allocation and investment;
- Increased participation, retention, progression and achievement for all.

Part Eight: Learner Involvement Diagram





Quality Assurance

The Learner Involvement Strategy and processes follow various elements of quality assurance to ensure consistency, fairness, accuracy, sharing of good practice and overall development to ensure learner voice is embedded, as well as overall college improvement.

This strategy will be reviewed:

- As the need arises;
- Following feedback on the documentation;
- Annually.

Conclusion

Sense College believes that an effective system of embedding learner voice and involvement can significantly enhance the quality of provision by raising standards, increasing learner confidence, independence and achievements, as well as supporting staff to develop and improve their practice.

For Quality Assurance Use only:

<i>Policy/Procedure:</i>	Sense College Learner Involvement Strategy V04
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