

What students and staff want: taking account of the curriculum choices that matter to them

To ensure staff and pupils can be true beneficiaries of the learning choices you offer, you need to listen to what they want in the first place. **Glynis Frater** advises on how to gain their views and understand their choices and suggestions, looking at the pros and cons of each method and how to use them

What is the purpose of school? This is a good question to ask when pondering the intrinsic value of giving pupils and their teachers a voice in the decision-making process on the best curriculum offer for all stakeholders, given the freedoms and restrictions of the system.

School exists to educate young people from their local community and sometimes beyond. It is also a sanctuary for some and a prison for others. It is a place that fosters opportunity, dashes dreams and forms the minds of those who learn there, sometimes with creative and positive outcomes sometimes not. Everyone the school touches will be forever changed.

When I was still teaching, we joked about how calm and free of stress the school seemed without the pupils on Inset days or during the holidays. 'School would be great without the kids', some would chuckle. However, the truth is that the school is the students and it is absolutely vital that we give them a voice in their own learning and development and that the curriculum we offer meets their needs, the needs of their local community and equips them for an everchanging society.

The relationship between the learner and the teacher has to be positive and the teacher must work with the learner to develop a menu for learning that motivates, excites and encourages a deep love of learning that will foster success for all.

Giving the learner a voice in the decision-making process will ensure a sense of belonging, of ownership of learning and of the choices they can make. Allowing learners and teachers to work together as part of the process will create a partnership and a bridge where both understand the underlying reasons for the decisions made and how they support deep and profound learning.

Students and their teachers cannot be the only stakeholders who have a say in shaping the curriculum offer and how it is taught. Budget constraints, staffing resources, the available space, the ability and make up of the different learner cohorts in the school and the aspirations of parents, governors and the wider community all play their part. School performance, whether judged by Ofsted or by league table results, will inevitably influence the curriculum on offer. So it is essential to think very carefully about the role of the learner and the classroom practitioner in this process. Asking their opinion and then not taking it into consideration because of a whole range of internal and external barriers that exist will inevitably serve to demotivate and create exactly the opposite outcome to the one that was intended.

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What students value in their learning

- Vocational relevance
- Connections made to real life
- Participatory learning, rather than book based or 'chalk and talk'
- Working together in teams
- Working in collaboration
- The chance to have a say in the curriculum's content and approach
- Working independently
- Teachers who can explain so that they understand
- Teachers who really understand their subject
- Using ICT in a variety of ways
- Variety in teaching and learning approaches
- Work experience

What students want

- More emphasis on skills, and on personal and social development
- More practical work linked to vocation
- A more obvious link with the curriculum and real life
- More connections made across different areas of the curriculum
- A balance between academic subjects and those that are more creative, practical, or vocational
- More choice, especially at Key Stage 4
- A variety of approaches to teaching and learning
- More emphasis given to how they can progress to achieve the next level
- More opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning

What students value

The National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) researched the theme of learner voice between 1989 and 2005 (see Lord, 2005, and www.nfer.ac.uk). The findings suggest that the role of the learner is more about working with their teachers to focus on how the curriculum is taught and how it can be related to their own experiences so that it has meaning as part of their learning rather than when it is associated with an adult's view of the world.

The research found that students' enjoyment of the curriculum is associated with a sense of ease, fun, newness, progression and appropriate challenge. It is apparent within the findings that it is the teaching and learning styles that have a greater impact on the enthusiasm for learning than the content within the subject being taught. The findings also highlighted how whole-school policies, such as 'respect' and 'anti-bullying', where they have a positive impact on behaviour in the school, do help to break down barriers to learning and contribute to positive attitudes to learning.

The research highlights key areas that students value. The list is quite long. The box above lists those wants that relate most closely to the curriculum on offer. Another revealing list is the one that asks pupils to say what they value in their learning – see the box left.

These two lists could provide curriculum managers with a good starting point to work with teachers to gain their agreement that students should be involved in this process and that the fundamental message is that the subject content is not the main focus for the student but how to make the curriculum relevant to their lives

and to their preferred styles of learning.

What is also interesting is how the lists describe, to some extent, what is required in the Ofsted framework in relation to T&L and the emphasis that all teachers focus on the needs of each individual learner ensuring that they can progress using their own preferred learning styles to achieve their full potential.

Engaging teachers

Creating a process where teachers and their pupils can work together to shape how the curriculum is delivered, and how the content within different subjects can be interconnected, relate to their own experiences and provide variety, stretch and challenge, will create a learning environment that is exciting, learner centred and relevant to the learner's world. In so doing, it will meet Ofsted criteria and satisfy what learners say they want.

The decision to develop a process that allows this to take place needs to be an integral part of the whole-school improvement strategy and should involve all the staff, both those who teach and those who support the teaching. Teachers need to reflect on their practice and have time to work with others to consider what works well and less well in their approaches to teaching and learning. Focusing on what makes an outstanding teacher by using the text included in the Ofsted framework would make an excellent Inset opportunity and provide teachers with the chance to talk about teaching and learning, reflect on pedagogy and decide on how to create a culture where the learner can have a voice in shaping their own learning.

Using the reflective cycle shown in the box below right can create the scaffolding for teachers to begin to think about their teaching and its impact on the learning that takes place within their teaching space. This could be used alongside talking to learners about their feelings about learning, which could then be included as part of helping teachers to work together to reflect. Another approach is set out in the box above right.

The results of this activity could then form the basis of a cross-curricular focus for an Inset where each department or faculty presents their findings, followed by an opportunity for some dialogue about teaching and learning within specific subjects, leading to a more interconnected approach to delivery of the curriculum.

Assessing staff views

All staff views need to be taken into consideration in any type of change process that is taking place within the school. There is likely to be a range of opinion, from those teachers who are protective of their current practice and style of teaching and who do not see the need for change, to those who embrace change and welcome new innovation and ideas.

Developing a culture that involves both the teacher and the learner in the process of ensuring the curriculum and the learning meets the needs of all learners requires a very good understanding by senior management of the views of all staff. Consultation and reflection leads to a good understanding of where members of staff are coming from, their feelings of resistance to change and their willingness to adopt new practices. Assessing all staff views is important and will

Departmental focus on value of current curriculum and T&L approach

Include a departmental or faculty focus where subject teachers work with their managers to review:

- how they currently deliver the curriculum
- whether their model meets the needs of all their respective learners
- how they might make changes in light of research into learner voice, the Ofsted driver and the need for continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and learning
- what currently works well and how they might build on this.

Starting with a departmental or faculty focus might feel more comfortable

have universal benefit in planning how to ensure that there is a whole-school commitment to bringing about new practice that emerges from this process.

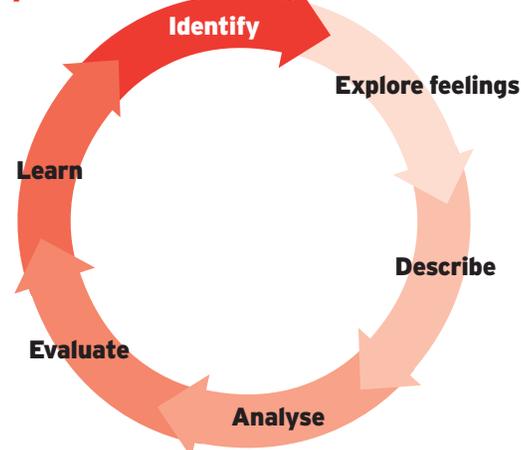
Teachers have opinions, perspective, attitudes, values and beliefs and they have to cope personally as well as professionally in the classroom. The classroom is the domain of the classroom teacher who has a high degree of autonomy for most of the time. Their self-image and the coping strategies they adopt to deal with the challenging situations that exist in all classroom settings are personal and reflect their professional persona. How they develop their own style of teaching is based on a number of external constraints, such as the number of learners in the classroom, the available resources, the age and level of ability of the learners, the curriculum and other internal expectations that exist within the organisation. Being able to create a balance between the personal and the professional, while dealing with these identified constraints that lead to highly effective teaching and learning is what makes an outstanding teacher. Where paradigms are threatened and change is inevitable, some teachers find maintaining this balance difficult. Their own personal agenda may cloud their professional self and lead to feelings of denial and anxiety that do not allow the process to fully develop across the whole organisation.

Creating opportunities for teachers to work together to reflect on some of these concerns can alleviate the issue of the personal taking over from the professional that will ultimately impact on what is best for the school. Wherever it occurs, collaborative, reflective discussion capitalises on the social nature of learning for the teacher as well as the learner. This creates opportunities for teachers to engage in a process of motivational and reflective dialogue, where aims can be clarified, experiences shared and where language and concepts for analysing practice are refined, the personal insecurities relating to innovation are reduced, evaluation becomes reciprocal and commitments to make changes are easier to gain.

Deciding on approach

A whole-school drive to ensure learners are involved in the process of how they learn and what their learning consists of in relation to curriculum content and T&L

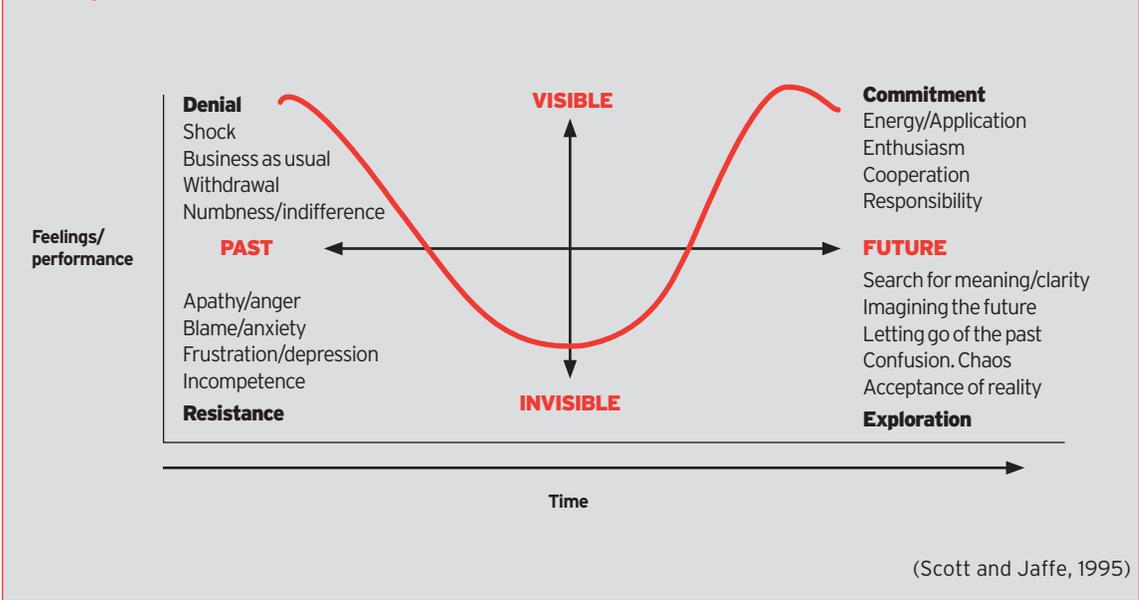
Reflective cycle



Source: amended from Gibbs (1988), and Atkins and Murphy (1994)

Learners need to know why they are being consulted, what the boundaries are within which they can shape their future and what the possibilities are that they can work with

Change model – the transition curve



can have a profound impact on their performance, progression and achievement. However, you may find this is a bridge too far in the first instance, so starting with a departmental or faculty focus might feel more comfortable. It may even feel better to start the process in just one area of the school as a pilot and see how successful it is before rolling it out across the whole school.

A small pilot might be manageable, the impact more measurable and the outcomes reviewed and assessed in order to decide on next steps but, on the downside, it is a slower approach and likely to fall to those who are already practising much of what is required to bring learner voice into decision-making because a particularly effective area of curriculum delivery is used as the testing ground. It could also reinforce the criticism of some learners and many teachers that subjects are still taught in silos and that interconnectivity of learning is not encouraged.

Whatever approach you adopt, involving teachers and learners in shaping the curriculum and how it is taught is a commitment, and everyone within your school needs to be on board.

Time for change

The school management team will have to be prepared to consider a variety of changes to current practice, new curriculum models and different approaches, possibly even timetabling a change to the school day or week. It is not really wise to embark on this process unless there is a definite desire to embrace change and listen to the needs and opinions of both the teacher and the learner. Some examples of changes that have taken place as a

result of this type of consultation are set out in the box top left on page 35.

These are a small sample of many ways that the school may change as a result of listening to the views and needs of stakeholders other than the SMT. However, where change is discussed and possibly implemented, it is important to bear in mind the effect it can have on those involved. In any situation, there will be those individuals who embrace the change and are immediately committed to a different approach that will hopefully enhance their experience and that of their learners. Others will be reluctant and some will be resistant. Managing change is critically important if the ideas and views of others are sought and put into practice.

Using Scott and Jaffe's change curve (Scott and Jaffe, 1995) can be helpful in recognising how people are coping with change and finding out from them how receptive they are to seeing change through. It is based on an original curve linked to coping with bereavement. Scott and Jaffe adapted it as a model for how teachers cope with change in education – see the box above. Using the curve as a starting point for a discussion about change is usually interesting. People recognise where they are on the curve immediately and nearly always see where others might fit on it. A good exercise is to ask your group to write a series of words on Post-It notes relating to how they feel about the change. Put a poster displaying one of the four words 'denial', 'resistance', 'exploration' and 'commitment' in each of the four corners of the room and ask your group to put their words near to the relevant poster. Nobody

Creating the right environment within which to communicate the vision created by teachers, learners and other stakeholders ... will lead to short-term wins that will eventually become an integral part of the way the school is run and ultimately changed

Useful things to know: what SSAT has to say about student voice

'Students are becoming actively involved in school improvement, discussing teaching and learning, whether this be through research in school, observing and feeding back on learning in lessons or working with departments to do a review of the curriculum. Different leadership models are also emerging, with the redesign of student councils and a range of leadership roles for students.

'For students, being more involved helps them to gain essential life skills, including leadership, teamwork and responsibility, on top of raising self-esteem and confidence and much more. Our 'What is student voice?' PowerPoint offers you a range of definitions about student voice, identifies other developments that link to it and gives a brief outline of initiatives we've come across in schools.'

Source: www.ssatrust.org.uk/innovation/studentvoicenetworks/Pages/whatissv.aspx

Examples of changes following student and teacher consultation

- A two-year Key Stage 3 and a three-year Key Stage 4
- A vocational offer for all learners
- A collapsed Friday to allow for project and thematic work to take place
- A thematic curriculum in Year 7, focusing on delivering the national curriculum in a cross-curricular way
- Learners used as part of the performance-management process
- A focus on study skills following options choices in Year 9, in preparation for GCSEs
- The use of mobile phones as learning tools

needs to know who each word is ascribed to. A discussion afterwards about some of the words and how many are in the exploration or commitment corner can help to gauge the mood of your staff or team and how far there is to go to bring everyone along with you.

Overcoming resistance to change

Resistance and denial can come in many forms and for many reasons. Understanding why people might be resistant can be the starting point for how to manage their journey towards exploration and commitment.

Kotter is another expert in the management of change and his eight-stage change process (see: www.kotterinternational.com/KotterPrinciples/ChangeSteps.aspx) can also be useful in managing this process – see the diagram in the box below right. He suggests that the starting point is to establish a sense of urgency and, in this case, that would be creating a much more inclusive curriculum offer that meets the needs and aspirations of both teachers and learners and leads to outcomes that ensure a drive towards excellence and improvement. The powerful coalition is made up of those stakeholders that have signed up to this because they have been involved in the consultation. Creating the right environment within which to communicate the vision created by teachers, learners and other stakeholders, and to empower all those involved to see it through, is essential and will lead to short-term wins that will eventually become an integral part of the way the school is run and ultimately changed.

Consulting with the learner

The next stage in this process is to begin to find ways of consulting with the learner about what they want from their learning. Encouraging learner voice can have a very positive impact on school performance and the behaviour and attitude of learners to their learning, as the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) testifies to – see the box at the bottom of page 34.

Learners may find having a say on their learning difficult. The education they are receiving is the only one they have had, so they have nothing to compare it with when asked to be a part of shaping its future. This could lead to learners simply tampering with the edges of the education they are already receiving. The journey to innovative ideas about their education requires collaboration between the teacher and the learners so that the

teacher can challenge learners to think innovatively and creatively about how and what they learn. Learners need to be steered towards using critical thinking skills to focus on how the curriculum should be taught and what would actually help them to progress and achieve.

Critical thinking

A critical thinker will apply reasoned and disciplined thinking to a subject. Creating the environment where this can happen in relation to how learners might shape their own curriculum and learning processes is essential. The learner needs to have some knowledge to draw on in order to move forward with an argument or debate around this subject. Learners need to know why they are being consulted, what the boundaries are within which they can shape their future and what the possibilities are that they can work with. The process of critical thinking can be seen as a series of steps that lead to conclusions drawn in a structured dialogue. These are set out in the box right.

These are essentially higher level skills for all learning. Encouraging learners to use and develop these skills can have an impact on learning and progression generally. It also creates a ladder for the teacher to focus on the ability of each learner to be a critical thinker, allowing each learner to develop their own thoughts and ideas and providing them with the opportunity to be much more independent in the process of learning.

Effective questioning

Effective questioning is also critical and requires a partnership approach, a two-way process. We use questioning to elicit information that will feed into the next steps, and help to drive the dialogue forward and keep it on track. The right questions help learners to reflect on their experiences and to reinforce their motivation to consider the changes they would like.

Process of critical thinking

Process – finding out as much as possible about the subject

Comprehension – understanding the key points, assumptions and arguments presented
Analysis – how do the information, ideas and innovations that might be a part of the process fit together and relate to each other?

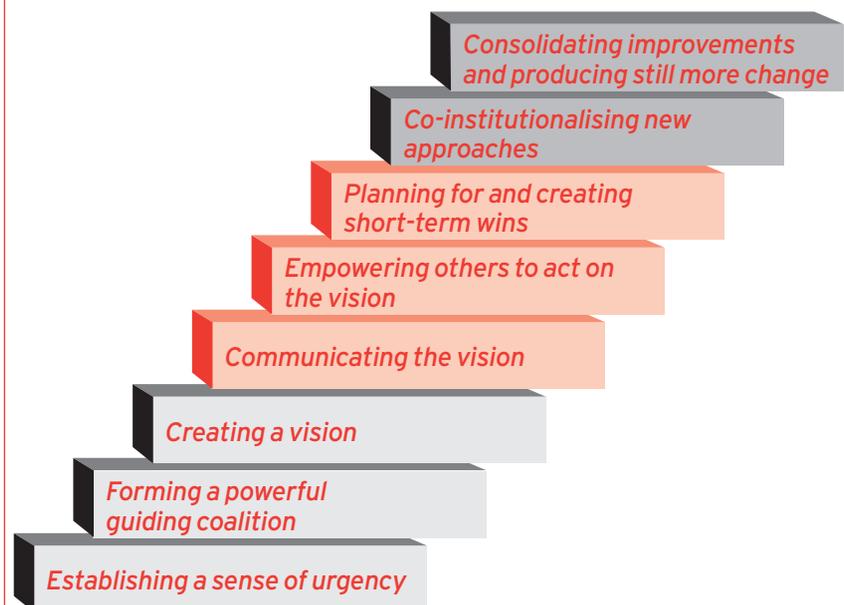
Comparisons – how would change make a difference, what would stay the same?

Synthesise – drawing together the arguments, forming thoughts and creating a logical shape with which to frame their suggestions

Evaluation – how well would the ideas work in practice, are the ideas being discussed relevant, constructive and worth pursuing?

Justification – clear articulation of the arguments, ability to draw conclusions and identify implications

Kotter's eight-stage change process diagram



You can find out more by reading John Kotter's books *Leading change* (Kotter, 1995) and the follow-up *The heart of change* (Kotter, 2002)

Case example: setting priorities for change at Rivington and Blackrod High School

The areas of school improvement the students and teachers decided on were:

- the school day, timetable and curriculum
- how we want to learn
- being happy at school
- rewards and sanctions
- citizenship and charity work
- the environment and safety
- technology and enterprise
- enrichment and out-of-school activity
- inclusion.

Examining the difference between open-ended questions that begin with 'why', 'what', 'when', 'who' and 'how' and when to use them, and closed questions that elicit a yes or no answer and when these can be useful, will help learners. It is likely that they are not aware of the potency of questioning techniques.

A question-and-answer session needs to be collaborative rather than prescriptive. It must reflect the learner's autonomy and encourage self-direction; it should foster a climate where there is a genuine interest in the learner's experience and point of view.

To create the right structure of an effective question-and-answer session, you should consider the following aspects, either working in pairs or in triads (groups of three where the third person acts as observer):

- the group has a common understanding of required outcomes from the discussion
- there is a climate of openness and trust
- participants are encouraged to be honest and forthright in their views
- the participants take pride in the opportunity to be a part of the process
- creativity and risk are encouraged
- there is a sense that the participants are learning from each other
- issues are raised and discussed to clarify where there is lack of understanding
- decisions are supported and made together
- there is a collective agreement at the end of the process and the results collated and acted on.

Framework for change

Creating a framework that learners and their teachers can work with is essential if this is going to work. At Rivington and Blackrod High School near Bolton, they embraced this process by focusing on key areas of school improvement. Teachers and learners were involved in deciding what these priorities were and they provided the impetus for change. The nine priority areas they decided on are set out in the box above.

The process was managed and developed over a period of time and the concept of 'learner voice' was extended to ensure that all stakeholders, including parents, support staff, senior managers and governors, were involved in the decision-making process. Simply empowering the learner clashes with a more ambitious approach to creating an empowered learning organisa-

Students' enjoyment of the curriculum is associated with a sense of ease, fun, newness, progression and appropriate challenge

tion where all those with a voice are working together to create a truly inclusive learning environment.

Inclusivity has its limits and learners in particular need to know the boundaries within which their voice can be a part of the process of change. Evidence suggests that learners are quite conservative in their desire for change or for innovation. They have limited experience to draw on and will mainly want to tweak the particular learning experience they are receiving. The key to success is to make this process ongoing, so that the learners and all other participants create change that has a measurable impact. This 'short-term win' can then form the basis of the next stage so that, over time, the opportunity to create 'a truly inclusive learning organisation' becomes a reality. Learners also need to be fully involved in consultations and discussions; managers and teachers need to be very clear as to the boundaries within which all participants in this process have to work. This is about system leadership that brings teams of both learners and adults together to co-construct a learning environment that meets the needs of all those involved in the learning process.

However, the learners at Rivington and Blackrod High School were a driving force in ensuring that change did take place. When they felt things were not moving fast enough, they consulted with senior managers and offered solutions to some of the problems they felt were holding them back. A formal meeting structure was in place, where managers and learners met to discuss issues that were emerging. The learners were encouraged to come up with their own solutions to problems and, in nearly all cases, these were taken on board. Some of these are set out in the box below.

Using thinking hats

In a small project called 'circling the square', a team from the Learning Sciences Research Institute (LSRI) at the University of Nottingham (see: www.lsri.nottingham.ac.uk) developed a set of techniques to prompt teachers and learners to think about their past and present experiences, and their hopes for the future of their school. The project looked at three aspects of school life: roles and relationships in schools, the use of space and time, and ideas for technology design. The themes were secondary to the main intention, which was to generate useful conversations between the participants and leave them with techniques they could continue to use in their schools.

Those taking part in this activity were asked to put

Encouraging learner voice can have a very positive impact on school performance and the behaviour and attitude of learners to their learning

Case example: pupils identifying problems and offering solutions

Problem	Solution
All staff were not on board	Staff forum/student forums to meet at least once a term
All students were not part of the process	Highlight achievements using all available means including use of ICT
No regular links with governors	Student forum item on every full governor's meeting
Talk but not much action	Set achievable aims
Linking everything together	Communicating achievements and successes

ideas on to Post-It notes about what they thought was good about school and what was not so good. They were then given a series of photos taken in schools and asked to say what they liked and disliked about what they saw. One of the photographs was of two boys in a school using a mobile phone to capture evidence for their e-portfolio. It was difficult for the learners to relate to the fact that this was in any way about learning as they were not allowed mobile phones. But it did provide an opportunity to discuss how mobile phones could aid learning and led to a deeper conversation about the nature of learning and about trust. If mobile phones are to be used as part of learning, it is essential that the teacher can trust the learner not to abuse the privilege of having their mobile phone with them in class and that the learner rises to the challenge.

One school used large pieces of coloured card to represent the colours of the six thinking hats (see the diagram in the box right, and de Bono, 1992) to encourage structured thinking about a series of questions they were given related to their school experience and so they could begin to think about how they would like to see it change.

The white hat requires a focus on facts; the red on feelings; the yellow on benefits; and the black on concerns. The green hat represents creativity using tools such as brainstorming, while blue-hat thinking involves reflection and metacognition.

The questions that were used were:

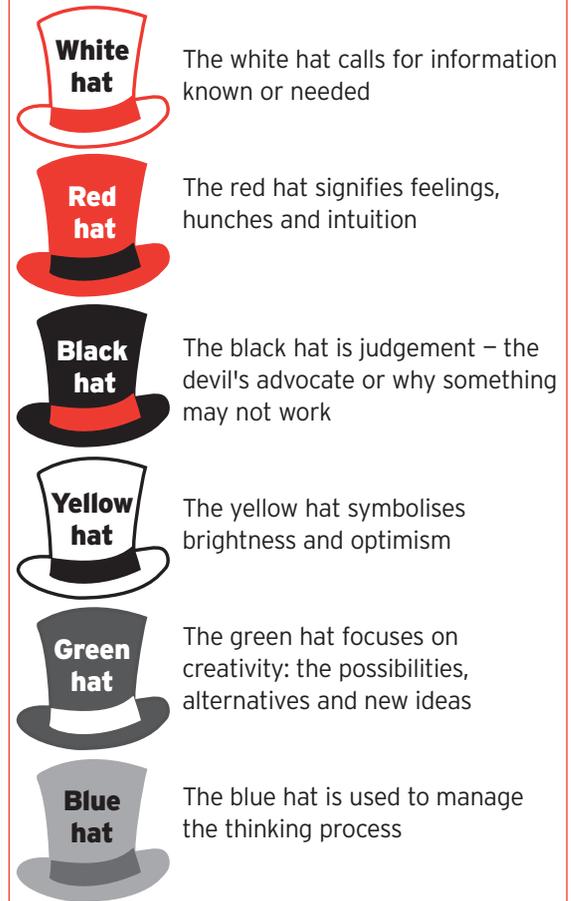
- How long should the school day last?
- What would the curriculum look like if pupils wrote it?
- Where do you learn best?

The participants were encouraged to use the thinking hats to shape their thinking so that they were focusing on how they were thinking and how arguments are shaped and decisions made using a variety of thinking approaches. The use of the hats meant they had to create a framework for their responses that helped to shape the arguments. It also helped them to focus on the real issues and how sensible and meaningful suggestions and ideas carefully thought through will be taken seriously and may bring about change.

Consultation and reflection leads to a good understanding of where members of staff are coming from, their feelings of resistance to change and their willingness to adopt new practices

Assessing all staff views is important and will have universal benefit in planning how to ensure that there is a whole-school commitment to bringing about new practice that emerges from this process

De Bono's six thinking hats



For more information, visit Edward De Bono's web-site: www.debonothinkingsystems.com/tools/6hats.htm

Learning competence

Creating opportunities for learners to shape their own learning and understand how they learn is starkly highlighted in the 2020 vision document (Ofsted, 2006) written by Christine Gilbert, the then Chief Executive of Ofsted, as she describes developing a 21st century curriculum. Learning competence is at the heart of the thinking and suggests that an appreciation of 'how' learners learn is at least as important as 'what' they

Acting on consultation results: plan of action

Approach	Issues to consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Come up with a list of themes that emerge and link them to the broader organisational aims 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Creating a list of priorities that emerge is likely to be the best way of making sure that the list is realistic and that the actions can be carried out to the benefit of the whole school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consider the organisational impact on the school of each theme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Think about the direct and indirect costs to the organisation, the roles and responsibilities of those involved in delivering actions relating to the relevant themes and what physical and other resources, such as time and money, will be needed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consider the impact that each particular theme might have on performance and achievement for learner, teacher and the school as a whole 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The themes that emerge will be different for each school. It is important to consider who is likely to be directly affected by the change and how best to ensure that change is positive and underpinned by high-quality training, coaching and communication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Weigh up the cost and resources needed to achieve the change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Are there any hidden costs? Consider how the impact of the change might save money as well as incur costs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Think about whether you have the resources to put the change into practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Do people have the expertise? Is there space within the timetable or physically in the school?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify who will form a guiding coalition to ensure that, if adopted, it will happen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use people who are dynamic, innovative and full of energy to drive forward change processes, and create opportunities for 'short-term wins'.

An active learner-voice programme is essential if a competence-based approach is to work

learn. This also links closely to the Every Child Matters agenda (DfES, 2003), which includes enjoyment and engagement with learning as a key outcome.

Cramlington School in Northumberland has achieved national recognition for its curriculum innovation and competence-based approach to learning in Year 7, which has had a remarkable impact on learner achievement. Cramlington recognised that developing an active learner-voice programme is essential if a competence-based approach is to work and develop learners' ability to think for themselves and take responsibility for their own learning. It creates a culture where the learner is working harder than the teacher and helps to develop the motivation, self-discipline and self-awareness to become successful higher level learners, employees and happier and more participatory citizens.

Assessing pupil views

The learner is the recipient of the learning, and teaching can only be regarded as successful if the learners are learning. For this to be realised, the learners have to be motivated and achieve a sense of self-fulfilment through the work they do in the classroom and beyond. They have to be involved in the process of learning and they have to appreciate that the effort required of them is worthwhile. It is a valuable exercise to find out from learners how they feel about the classroom activities they are asked to take part in; it gives a valuable insight into what motivates them to learn. It is important to compare attitudes across different curriculum areas. Gathering such information provides an insight into their engagement with different subjects, activities and processes.

Another important aspect of assessing learners' perspective is their views on those who teach them. This can help to assess the quality of relationships and education within the different classroom settings. Research consistently shows that learners like teachers who are supportive, consistent, efficient and organised, patient, fair and have a sense of humour. Where a teacher knows about how learners feel about their learning experience and focuses through reflection on how to make the learning a positive experience for the learner, this will undoubtedly impact on motivation, achievement and the self-esteem of the learner.

It is absolutely vital that we give them a voice in their own learning and development and that the curriculum we offer meets their needs, the needs of their local community and equips them for an ever-changing society

What to do with consultation results

Listening to learner and staff voice and ascertaining their views on the choices they want in the way they learn and the curriculum they learn from is the easy part; acting on the results is not so easy.

The first issue is to decide on priorities. These should ideally mirror the aims and objectives set out in the school strategy document. Establishing where there are similarities with what teachers and learners want with the vision that the school senior management team has decided on is an important starting point. It is likely that there will be themes that emerge as a result of consultation and it is a good idea to identify these and then prioritise them in relation to the broader organisational plan. An example of a plan to follow is set out in the box at the bottom of page 37. Useful resources are given in the box below.

Following a plan such as this will help you to shape which themes might be right to start with and that can be acted on immediately, which of the other themes may need longer to plan and which of the others may need to be shelved or discarded because they could not be achieved in the shorter term or would not succeed due to identified constraints.

Those themes likely to have universal benefit for staff, learners and the wider school community are the ones that should be adopted in the first place. Where everyone can see how change has had a positive impact on their school experience, there is likely to be more enthusiasm for continuing with this approach to strategic planning. This could be linked to the length of the school day, changes to the timetable or the curriculum or a change of policy related to uniform, the use of mobile phones or greater access to computers. The wider the impact, the more successful the outcome is likely to be.

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Learning Cultures offers bespoke and public training and development to managers and teachers that focuses on developing excellence and improvement in teaching and learning using a variety of coaching models and principles – see: www.learningcultures.org You can contact Glynis via email: info@learningcultures.org or tel: 01746 765076

Useful things to know: resources

- www.cramlingtonlv.co.uk/Students/StudentVoice.php – what student voice means to Cramlington Learning Village.
- <http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/forum.2001.43.2.1> – an article by Michael Fielding (2001) 'Beyond the rhetoric of student voice: new departures or new constraints in the transformation of 21st century schooling?', *Forum*, vol 43, no 2, pp100-112.
- www.teachingexpertise.com/topic/student-voice – a website with some interesting case studies about how different schools developed learner voice opportunities.
- www.teachingexpertise.com/articles/student-voices-year-7-pupils-leading-the-plenary-3013 – an article about how helping learners to understand the concept of the plenary led to some groundbreaking work on learner voice.
- www.newporthigh.co.uk/student-voice – Newport High School has an interesting page on its website about its approach to learner voice.
- www.excellencegateway.org.uk – this is predominantly aimed at the further education market but there are some interesting areas that translate well into mainstream education. Search for 'motivational dialogue' where there is good advice on listening to learners. There is also a section devoted to learner voice. Another good resource included on the Excellence Gateway is 'Developing the expert learner', which focuses on how teachers can help learners to take control of their own learning.
- www.ssatrust.org.uk/innovation/studentvoicenetworks – the SSAT website has quite a lot to say on learner/student voice. The Student Voice Networks are by students for students. There are some good case-study examples from around the country on how different schools are developing learner-voice activity.