

Supporting Effective Learner Engagement

A Guide for Employers



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Introduction

‘The necessary transformation of health and social care cannot happen without the engagement of healthcare support staff. Traditionally many support staff have had poor experiences of education and training and may not want to engage in learning. However, learning is at the heart of real change and reform and in the search for excellence we need to find new ways to engage and support staff’.¹

Involvement is increasingly recognised as one of the critical levers for change. It is important to ensure that learner ‘involvement’ and ‘engagement’ are a central part of an organisation’s education and development strategy. At an organisational level it is important that learners are supported to be actively engaged in learning; influencing how healthcare education is commissioned (bought), designed, delivered and reviewed.

The Purpose of the Guide

This guide provides a framework for employers to help develop a systematic approach to learner engagement. It has been designed to be used flexibly to support local need, but essentially it aims to help employers:

1. Create a learning culture, turning staff on to learning and supporting them to be able to learn
2. Engage learners in influencing the quality of their learning
3. Measure the impact, aligning learning and engagement with productivity



Together the sections of the guide provide employers with examples of approaches to support the engagement of learners in practice and learning.

There are multiple terms used to describe learner involvement. For this guide we are referring to the broad context of learner engagement and involvement.

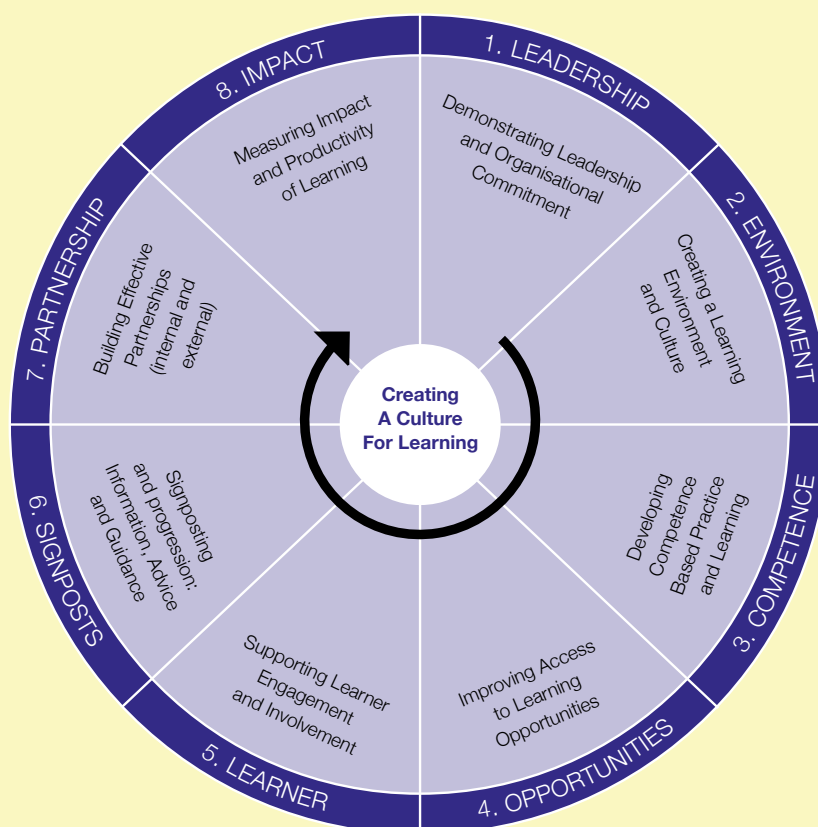
In this short guide we build on research findings and practical health sector experience to draw out the key elements needed to successfully engage learners.

1. Improving Through Learning, A Widening Participation Framework for Action. N. Ireland: Widening Participation Unit (2008)

A Model for Creating a Culture for Learner Engagement

The model below features the systems, processes and approaches that help staff and learners to become excited about learning opportunities and support them towards success in their learning.

Diagram 1: Creating a Culture for Learner Engagement



The model illustrates the key steps that employers need to take to create a culture for effective learner engagement. This begins with leadership and an organisational commitment. The model links to the Circle of Influence described in more detail on page 14.

Applying the Model in Practice

The 8 elements within the **Creating a Culture for Learner Engagement** model are explored below through a series of guiding questions for employers to consider, supported by some suggested approaches, and illustrative examples in practice.

1. Leadership

Demonstrating Leadership and Organisational Commitment

Working at organisational level to lead and guide through example by having a whole organisational approach to valuing and supporting learner engagement.

- Do we have a whole organisational approach and commitment to learners at all levels?
- Is senior management support clear and explicit and known to staff at all levels?
- Have we made the strong link between widening participation in learning and our organisational business plan objectives to Managers at all levels?
- Are roles and responsibilities in supporting learners clear?
- Have we made the commitment for all staff to have protected time to learn to help create reflective practitioners?
- Are we promoting a principle of supporting Continuous Personal and Professional Development for all staff (CPD)?
- Have we signalled our understanding and acknowledgement of lifelong learning?

2. Environment

Creating a Learning Environment and Culture

Developing and supporting learner involvement by creating a culture that 'turns staff on to learning' and helps to give people confidence to learn.

- Do we emphasise 'releasing talent and realising potential' rather than 'skills deficit'?
- Is engagement in learning seen as a way to support service improvement in our organisation?
- Are we equipping people to work effectively within the context of service development and change?
- Do we promote blended approaches to learning and engagement to meet a potential learner's needs?
- Do we involve learners in designing and commissioning learning?
- Are we involving and working with external partners such as Union Learning Representatives in all aspects of the learning agenda?



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Applying the Model in Practice for Leadership and Creating a Learning Environment and Culture

Suggested Approaches Include:

- Involve past and present learners in the development of learning programmes and experience
- Reflect and draw on people's experiences of their learning and development
- Find ways to demonstrate to learners that their views and participation are having an impact
- Build on learner(s) prior experiences of work and motivations
- Have a strategy to work with awarding bodies, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) etc. where possible have in-house developed training programmes, accredited for learners to use towards progression to other qualifications
- Have strategies in place at Board level to support and develop education/training and development that support the organisation's business plan for high quality commissioning and service development and delivery
- Use internal HR processes and staff appraisal systems, to engage with and market learning opportunities and career progression for all staff
- Invite and work with a range of partners such as Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) to discuss stimulating bottom up demand for learning
- Celebrate learner's achievements and success

Examples of Learner Engagement in Practice:

- Three HCAs who attended a joint ULRs, Training Department Adult Learners' Week event participated in an Indian head massage taster. After looking around the stalls, they were also encouraged to sign up to take GCSE English and Maths and the following year all three felt confident enough to take on Assistant Practitioner training, something none of them had ever considered. The women now wish to train as (ULRs) to help others to engage with their Trusts' Union Learning and development opportunities ²

Work within the SfH North West Academy in respect of evaluating pre employment programmes identified a number of factors influencing learner engagement which included:

- Identifying individuals at the right 'stage of change' and who consider themselves ready to move into employment. Clear advice from Jobcentre Plus advisers, counsellors or other staff can help to crystallise this thinking toward a particular goal, through emphasising the confidence-building nature of pre-employment programmes and explaining the possible financial implications (and more intensive support where necessary)
- Where potential participants are aware of their skill levels, the qualifications offered by pre-employment programmes can sometimes be a strong pull factor that attracts people to a programme (this seemed to be a particular case with NVQs) ³

2. Quote from UNISON Regional Learning and Development Organiser

3. Pre-employment Programmes within the North West Health Sector: evaluation of the outcomes for participants (April 2009)

Applying the Model in Practice

3. Competence

Developing Competence Based Practice and Learning

Building capacity, competence and confidence to work in the health sector and understand NHS Values.

- Are we helping equip people to be able to learn and develop a set of learning foundations using a competence based approach?
- Do we promote and ensure evidence of individual staff competence against the core Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) dimensions where appropriate?
- Is our appraisal system used to identify and support staff learning needs as part of progression?
- Do we engage the help and support of ULRs to support colleagues prepare for Reviews and Appraisals in addition for the NHS to support the Knowledge and Skills Framework?



4. Opportunities

Improving Access to Learning Opportunities

Supporting and identifying learning opportunities through having a clear education and development strategy that aims to raise awareness of and access to life long learning for all staff.

- How do we raise awareness of opportunities within our organisations, for example open days and career events?
- Are we working in partnership with external partners, internal staff and specialist staff, for example ULRs who will often run learning road shows, Adult Learners' Week and Skill for Life events?
- Do we promote and take steps to ensure literacy; language and numeracy are embedded in all learning?
- Do our HR processes align with involvement and engagement of staff/learners?
- Are we making use of social marketing techniques to encourage learners to access learning?
- Do we provide learners at pre-delivery and post programme effective support and supervision/mentorship?
- Are effective blended learning approaches used in our organisation?
- How do we ensure that appropriate resources are available, e.g. access to ICT to support learning?

Applying the Model in Practice for Developing Competences and Improving Access to Learning Opportunities

Suggested Approaches Include:

- Include the learners' perceptions of their own learning experience through obtaining ongoing feedback during and after the learning
- Have an organisational education, training and development strategy that links to appraisal for all staff
- Support managers with identifying staff learning needs and have available a range of learning opportunities that staff and their manager can access that link with (for the NHS only) the KSF competences and the organisation operational and service development plans
- Involve external partners in undertaking skills audits and to support the development of education linked to service priorities and patient needs
- Develop educational groups and forums that include learner representation to bring the learner voice to developing and providing education that meets staff/learner and organisational needs
- Use effective learner feedback to develop learning experiences that support high quality education delivery
- Develop and use a range of evaluation methods and make the result available to learners and the wider organisation to support future development of high quality education and learning, to encourage and support learner engagement in learning
- Build evaluation into the design of learning programmes

Examples of Learner Engagement in Practice:

- A Mental Health Trust has already reaped benefits of involving ULRs in their discussion about delivery of Skills for Life. ULRs helped generate interest in a Skills for Life event by using informal networks with colleagues. They conducted confidential surveys and used these to identify courses and skills sought by staff in bands 1-4. The partnership work has extended to events offering taster sessions and responding to staff interests ⁴
- The importance of regular and constructive feedback was highlighted. Where this did not happen candidates felt anxious about how they were doing and where it did they reported higher levels of improvement in confidence and motivation ⁵

4. Quote from UNISON Regional Learning and Development Organiser

5. Sector Employability Toolkit: a best practice study and evaluation report, Skills for Health (2009)

Applying the Model in Practice

5. Learner

Supporting Learner Engagement and Involvement

Putting into place an effective organisational support structure that can support and meet the individual needs of all staff and learners to help them to engage in and influence their learning.

- Do we provide learners/staff with reasons to become engaged?
- Is the support network in place that will build their confidence, help influence change and developments, and provide/receive constructive feedback?
- Does the organisation support managers to gain capability, capacity and confidence to supervise and support learners/others in widening participation in learning?
- Have we taken steps to develop good mentoring and coaching as a vehicle for supporting involvement and engagement in learning and development (formal and informal), for example Peer Mentoring, Patients as Mentors, Buddying Schemes etc?
- Are strong partnerships with relevant external partners being developed? (for example Train to Gain, Union Learning Representatives, local education partnerships, HEI and FE sectors and other education providers)
- Do we make suitable arrangements to provide cover for staff whilst on training?

6. Signposts

Signposting and progression: Information, Advice and Guidance

Developing an all inclusive approach that includes working internally and with key external partners to provide effective learning and career progression pathways.

- Are we developing access for learners via providing progression opportunities that ensure flexible pathways for learning and accreditation?
- Are strong partnerships and positive information exchange with relevant external partners being developed? (for example Train to Gain, Union Learning Representatives, local education partnerships, Higher Education Institutions and Further Education sectors and other education providers)
- Do we provide time and space for staff to meet with internal staff and external organisation (eg those listed above) to discuss and support their learning needs and aspirations?
- Do we make it clear that we support life long learning for all?
- Do we provide IAG to signpost opportunities and to actively support learner progression?

Applying the Model in Practice for Supporting Learner Engagement, Signposting and Progression

Suggested Approaches Include:

- Involve service users and learners (as peers) in the assessment of work and in learners' performance in both practice and academic settings
- Get learners to 'shadow' service users, carers and their families in order to observe and learn directly about their lives, issues and needs
- Give learners the opportunity to review and develop staff job descriptions and short-listing criteria before advertisement
- Use learner feedback and evaluation of their experiences of a programme in future developments
- Support managers to provide and recognise protected time for learners to study and undertake workbased learning and skill development

Examples of Learner Engagement in Practice:

- "My manager has helped me a lot. She encourages me to do the course and always asks if I am ok. When the ward is quiet she lets me do some study, she makes me think how and why you do the job, you can see how learning relates to patient care." Health Care Assistant (HCA. level 3 Elderly Rehabilitation Unit) ⁶
- "Working with all the PCT's local GP practice areas we have recently redeveloped our staff induction programme to be available on-line. This new on-line staff induction programme has been developed through the local practice managers working together to identify what is needed for staff working within the GP practices. The GP practice managers have also undertaken the completed programme so they can act as the mentors for their new staff to support them while they undertaking the induction programme. Through this new staff can be well supported, while undertaking their induction, and thus motivated to become more involved and engaged in take on the learning within a well supported learning environment." – GP Staff Training Manager ⁷
- "Learning Advisors support and give guidance to many staff within the Facilities Directorate. This support contributes to personal development and progression of the individual, giving them the confidence and self esteem to take charge of their own learning." - Training and Quality Manager in the Facilities Directorate ⁸

6. Quote from Skills Academy for Health: Continuous Professional Development Bands one to Four (May 2000)

7. Quote from Sue Timmins Kent & Medway GP Staff Training Manager

8. Quote from Salisbury case study for Skills for Health Promote access to different approaches to learning for a range of groups in Bands 1-4 (2010)

Applying the Model in Practice

7. Partnerships

Building Effective Partnerships (internal and external)

Having an effective local network of internal and external partners to support, develop and provide education, training and development to meet the needs of staff/learners, ensuring high quality local healthcare services.

- Do we have a programme to make available and publicise to staff, learners and the public what is available to support engagement in learning?
- Are we working at developing Social Partnerships to support learner involvement and engagement?
- Are we trying to ensure effective alignment of internal systems and processes that support involvement and engagement, e.g. HR, Involvement and Diversity Leads?
- Do we have a network of internal and external partners/experts we can work with to support education training and development to meet local service needs?
- Are we involving specialist staff, such as our Union Learning representatives, to work with us or alongside us? Do we also have contact with Union Project Workers to support us?

8. Impact

Measuring Impact and Productivity

Ensuring that hard and soft outcomes are recorded and used effectively to promote the value of learning at individual and organisational level.

- Do we formally assess and publish learning outcomes?
- Is our published assessment in a format understood by a wide variety of stakeholders?
- Will learners recognise their input in the assessments of learning success?
- Have we attempted to quantify the cost savings arising from staff training?
- Have we identified success measures that relate to our wider business objectives (e.g. drug errors, complaints)?
- Do we bring learners together, with Trust and stakeholder involvement, to celebrate success?
- How do we quantify the impact that word of mouth has on contributing to cultural change?
- Do we speak with learners about their confidence levels in performing certain tasks, pre and post learning?

Applying the Model in Practice for Building Effective Partnerships and Measuring Impact and Productivity

Suggested Approaches Include:

- Review and develop the existing strategy to cover all aspects for the involvement of learners
- Make learner evaluations of their learning experiences part of key evidence when making judgements and recommendations about the quality of provision and commissioning education
- Include in the outcomes of reviews and evaluations the impact on service delivery and make these available e.g. as a report on a website
- Include the views and feedback from a wide range of partners and learners, e.g. education commissioners, providers, staff, learners and as appropriate service users on the learning and service delivery
- Support staff and learners to contribute to conferences and seminars that promote partnership working around learning both internally and externally

Examples of Learner Engagement in Practice:

- “I canvassed my fellow students’ opinions on course improvements, presenting these at management meetings and have seen most of these incorporated into future programmes-quality assurance in action”⁹
- The ability of ‘all partners to fit in around participants’ support needs is important to their continued engagement¹⁰
- We know that when learners participate in decisions affecting their learning experience, they are likely to play a more active role in the provider’s quality improvement processes - a key lever of service improvement¹¹
- “Networking between employers helps to share good practice in working with Unions on the learning agenda”¹²

9. Student Nurse quoted in Skills for Health, QA News Issues 16/May 2008 Article: ‘Your Voice Counts’ Influencing Education pg 4-6)

10. Pre-employment Programmes within the North West Health Sector: evaluation of the outcomes for participants (April 2009)

11. DFES - Further Education: Raising Skills Improving Life Chances (2006 pg 36)

12. Quote from UNISON Regional Learning and Development Organiser



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The Learner Role in Assuring the Quality of Health Care Education and Training

Learners are key to assuring the quality of healthcare education so that it matches the expectations of the learners, staff, the employers and the wider public.

The various stages of the quality assurance process are illustrated by the Circle of Influence model jointly created by learners, members of the public and Skills for Health. The circle, which features in the Your Voice Counts ¹³ resource, starts with commissioning and moves through design and approval, development and delivery, ongoing evaluation, periodic review and back to commissioning. Each part of the circle is designed to inform, influence and interact with all the other parts.

It's important to have many types of input into ongoing evaluation. Learners might have an experience which could enhance healthcare education too. Where lots of people provide feedback, especially if they highlight a similar issue, that input can lead to effective change.

The diagram on the next page shows the key elements of the Circle of Influence and provides some suggested approaches to encouraging learner engagement.



13. Skills for Health Your Voice Counts - How patients and the public can influence education and training to improve health and health care

The Learner Role in Assuring the Quality of Health Care Education and Training

Diagram 2. Key Elements of the ‘Circle of Influence’ Making Links to Learner Engagement

Key Element	Suggested approaches to encourage learner engagement
Commissioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner evaluations are embedded in the commissioning cycle and the development of future educational programmes • Learner experiences inform commissioning that demonstrates the impact of the learning on productivity and return on investment
Design, Approval and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite current and previous learners to be part of the group that designs and develops the course • Formally consider student evaluations • Reflect and draw on experiences
Development and Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve service users and learners (as peers) in the assessment of work and in learners’ performance in both practice and academic settings • Get learners to ‘shadow’ service users, carers and their families in order to observe and learn directly about their lives, issues and needs • Give learners the opportunity to review and develop staff job descriptions and short-listing criteria before advertisement
Ongoing Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require education committees and forums to have learners and service users as members • Ensure learner evaluations are considered and the outcomes reported back to learners • Make sure that evaluation methods and results are presented in a range of formats to make these more accessible to a wider audience
Periodic Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and develop the existing strategy for the involvement of learners. • Ensure clarity about who is involved with what activity, the expected outcomes and the main areas of development • Agree that learner evaluation is treated as essential evidence which must be looked at when making judgements about the quality of provision • Make the outcomes of the review publicly available e.g. as a report on a website

The illustrative examples highlighted, provided above, were identified through the learner and public engagement workstream in the development of EQuIP.¹⁴

For further information and guides this section of the guide should be used in conjunction with: Skills for Health, Your Voice Counts - How patients and the public can influence education and training to improve health and health care: www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/workforce-design-development/workforce-strategy/national-regional-context/key-national-policies/~/_/media/Resource-Library/PDF/Your-Voice-Counts.ashx

14. Skills for Health: Healthcare Education QA framework. (2007)



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Additional Information and Resources

There are a range of practical guidance, tools and resources that can help you shown below:

Practical Tools and Resources

- Skills for Health Your Voice Counts - How patients and the public can influence education and training to improve health and health care
www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/workforce-design-development/workforce-strategy/national-regional-context/key-national-policies/~//media/Resource-Library/PDF/Your-Voice-Counts.ashx
- Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) – National Occupational Standards: Learner involvement standard: Learning Involvement Occupational Standards
www.lluk.org/national-occupational-standards-new-learner-involvement-standards.htm

Literature and Reports

- Skills for Health QA News for everybody involved in Healthcare Education: Article: ‘Your Voice counts’, Influencing Healthcare Education (pages 4-6) Issue 16/May 2008 <http://www.suht.nhs.uk/Media/suhtideal/CommonUnitsLinks/QANews-Issue16-May2008.pdf>
- DfES - Further Education: Raising Skills Improving Life Chances (2006)
www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm67/6768/6768.pdf
- Skills for Health National Occupational Standards
www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/competences.asp
- Pre-employment Programmes within the North West Health Sector: evaluation of the outcomes for participants (April 2009) <http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/~//media/Resource-Library/PDF/Final-Pre-employment-research-digest.ashx>

- Skills for Health Sector Employability Toolkit for Health (October 2009)
www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/careers-individual-skills-development/developing-my-skills/literacy-language-and-numeracy/Employability/Sector-Employability-Toolkit.aspx
- Continuous Professional/Personal Development Bands One to Four, Published by The Skills Academy for Health in conjunction with Progress South Central (May 2009) http://www.skillsacademyforhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/SAfH_CPD_Framework_Bands_1-4_Report.pdf
- Skills for Health: Healthcare Education QA framework. (2007) http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/~//media/Resource-Library/PDF/EQUIP_QA_framework.ashx
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development “Trade union learning Representatives”
www.cipd.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/CCB6485B-7894-4230-8E8D-BF58DB4F1DE0/0/2898catradeunionlearnreps.pdf
- unionlearn - unionlearn representatives
www.unionlearn.org.uk/
- Improving Through Learning, A Widening Participation Framework for Action. N. Ireland: Widening Participation Unit (2008)
www.beeches.hscni.net
- Delivering High Quality Care Through Effective Widening Participation – a Learning and Productivity Demonstrator. N. Ireland: Widening Participation Unit (2009)
www.beeches.hscni.net



Skills for Health (Head Office)
Goldsmiths House
Broad Plain
Bristol
BS2 0JP

Tel: 0117 922 1155
Fax: 0117 925 1800
Email: office@skillsforhealth.org.uk
www.skillsforhealth.org.uk