

# Stepping up and Stepping Forward

## Learning Insight 2

We need to listen to, and understand better, the views of all learners; they have a right to a say in decisions that affect them



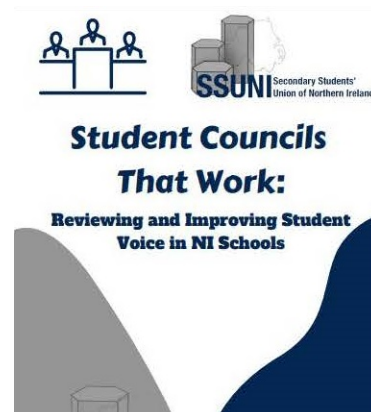
### What do we know?

The effective use of first-hand evidence, including the views of key stakeholders, particularly the learners, is crucial in underpinning effective practice, improving decision-making and contributing to wider professional discourse.

Learner participation contributes to greater engagement and motivation in the learning process and contributes richly to organisational improvement. Participation is a fundamental right that all young people should enjoy. The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UN, 1989) and Article 12 in particular, grants every child and young person under the age of 18 the right to express their views on all matters affecting them and have those views listened to and given due weight. Schools and other organisations have a duty to pro-actively seek out the views of their learners, facilitate their expression, and provide feedback on how the learners' views have been acted upon. Many schools and organisations already solicit the views of their learners and use them successfully to inform aspects of learning and teaching and broader decision-making.



A key mechanism for engaging with children and young people is the school council. While many schools have these structures in place, pupils feel that the quality of these forums could be improved and made more meaningful. A recent [report](#) by the Secondary Students' Union of Northern Ireland highlighted the need for more effective councils and greater participation by children and young people.



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## What have we learned?

Inspectors reported that as the pandemic progressed, schools became more confident in using both well-established and innovative ways of seeking out the views of learners and their parents and carers. Leaders and teachers understood more clearly what their learners were experiencing and were able to plan to meet their needs more effectively. Engaging in ongoing, meaningful conversations with young people and their parents helped organisations understand their views on: accessing and participating in online learning; how well they were coping with the range of challenges; and, how the organisation might support them further.

The ETI pupil remote learning survey (2021) asked pupils about their experiences during the January - March 2021 lockdown to understand better what worked well for these learners. The majority of the 28,790 pupils who responded said that they appreciated the opportunity to engage in live lessons, access recorded lessons and receive good quality teacher feedback. They valued the opportunities they were given to meet and interact with their friends online and renew friendships.

## What will help us move forward constructively?

Competing priorities and limited resources will mean that organisations will have to make difficult choices; these decisions must be informed by the views of the learners, their parents and carers, and the community the organisation serves. Effective organisations have always consulted widely with their stakeholders. Robust self-evaluation and the use of reliable first-hand evidence, taking on board the views of the learners, is key to ensuring that the right choices are made.

At this stage in the pandemic, none of us know fully the extent of the harm that Covid-19 has caused to learning and progression, therefore it is important for organisations to continue to engage with all learners and all other stakeholders in order to monitor the evolving impact of the pandemic on learning and wellbeing. This will help organisations to meet better the needs of their learners.

ETI promotes the importance of seeking the views of learners. ETI is committed to listening to the voices of children and young people through the continuing development of our learner questionnaires and focus group discussions. We will also continue to work to identify and disseminate effective and innovative practice in accessing the views of learners and their parents or carers.