

## Learner Voice Policy

### Introduction and Context

Learner Voice is an important part of the learners' experience of Ambitious College and requires ongoing support and embedding to ensure it is part of our offer on a daily basis. Our learners are the centre of their own learning journeys and it is crucial we take into account and act upon their wishes, thoughts and feelings at all times. Learners are involved in decisions about their learning, support and future. Their voices and opinions are valued and sought at every possible opportunity.

We continuously invest skills and resources in enabling learner participation in a variety of ways. We have a learner council that inputs into the curriculum, assistive communication technology, learner surveys, termly newsletters, interest assessments, annual reviews, suggestion boxes and a range of dynamic and ongoing practice-based ways in which to receive learner feedback.

Changes can be made resulting from learner input within the college and the curriculum should reflect the aspirations, interests and the supported life journey of our learners. We also recognise the enormous importance of working together with families to ensure that the partnership between college and home, works for the learner to plan for their future.

At Ambitious College we aim to:

- Involve learners in college life, in an adult learning environment and within the wider community
- Make a difference to the lives of the young people we support through learning, skills development and the improvement of their quality of life
- Prepare and support learners for the life they will live when they leave us
- Work in partnership with others to ensure we maximise opportunity. This includes working within a transdisciplinary model.

Many of our learners communicate in non-standard ways. The College is committed to ensuring the voices of our learners are heard and acted upon. There is an acknowledgement in the College that it is essential that we include the voice of our learners, but we also need to avoid tokenistic approaches. By actively involving learners they can have influence over their college experience, learning, local community and desired destinations.

We recognise that, for some learners, we will need to support them to develop their skills set in order to actively engage with us and a personalised approach to learner voice is designed to address this. This is enhanced by our total communication environment.

### Non-Instructed Advocacy

Non-instructed Advocacy recognises a group of people in society who are unable to clearly express their thoughts and wishes to others, this may be due to learning disability or limited interpretable communication. It is a commitment to act in the best interest of those who cannot clearly express themselves.

*'At the heart of advocacy is a commitment to safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable, and non-instructed advocacy is a practical manifestation of that commitment. The challenge is to develop the skills and confidence of advocates to work in this way, and to raise awareness amongst others of the legitimacy of this approach.'*

(Rick Henderson Non-Instructed Advocacy in Focus)

The code of conduct for non-instructed advocacy is based on the principal of 'Putting People First' and ensures that all voices are heard within society and takes on a holistic approach to supporting young people with disabilities. Ambitious College is committed to non-instructed advocacy in listening to the learner and acting on their behalf with their best interest in mind.

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## **A Culture of Listening**

Due to the unique nature of our learners and the barriers to communication brought about by both their Autism and learning disabilities, it is important that our practices are reflective and reactive. Many learners use informal communication styles that are unique to them and they are sometimes heavily reliant upon the people who know and understand them well. Learner's voice in this context can be subtle and non-standard and all staff need to be interpreting learners' behaviour, noises, movements and words and act upon it.

Ambitious College is committed to developing a staff team who are skilled communicators that listen, observe, show interest, pay attention and act on the communicative intent of the young people they are working with.

## **A Range of Learners**

The college has a very wide range of abilities and barriers to communication. It is important therefore that each learner is included in the strategy and our learners loosely fall into the categories below.

### **Pre-intentional**

For learners with complex learning disabilities and working at pre-entry level they will have monitoring checks to ensure we do not miss the voice of the young person. This focuses on looking for subtle changes in physical, emotional, behavioural and communication levels. These will be analysed regularly to not only highlight concerns but to track improvements in their advocacy skills.

### **Decision making**

Many of our learners are able to make a choice or provide an opinion when supported with alternative and/or augmentative communication in the form of symbols, photographs, objects or signs. Learners at this level should be involved in supported decision making to know that their voice has both influence and impact. These learners should be supported to influence their learning, the running of the college, their immediate experience of their home and local community and Ambitious about Autism as an organisation.

### **Advocacy**

Some learners are able to use their voice to influence their own experience of education, home and the local environment but also the wider community, decision makers and be a voice for the young people with Autism within the UK. Some learners may be deemed to have capacity to make significant decisions about their short- and long-term future and demonstrate an understanding of the impact of this choice, the college will work in the statutory guidelines of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 to ensure this is adhered to at all times.

It is not acceptable to state that a person lacks capacity to make all decisions, levels of understanding needed to make decisions, as well as understanding the implications of each of those decisions are significantly different. A person is deemed to have capacity unless assessed otherwise.

## **Partners in Learning**

It is paramount that learners have the opportunity to influence their learning, both now and in the future. Learners should be able to provide daily feedback on their sessions and the support they received so this can be personalised and tailored to their learning needs.

All staff need to be open and flexible to respond to their learners wishes for their learning preferences. Learner voice will thread through the college curriculum and influence the personalised learning experience for all learners. The college will draw on the wider circle of support to ensure we are acting in the best interest of the young person.

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## Having Influence

Ambitious College will facilitate a learner council who meet regularly to discuss issues which affect their immediate college experience and influence the wider community. Learners will also be given the opportunity to be where possible involved in events and activities including staff interviews and prospective learner open days.

Ambitious about Autism aim to train, educate and influence the wider community to ensure young people with Autism have an opportunity to be included and accepted into society. The learner voice is powerful in providing first-hand experience of living with Autism and how it affects their daily life. The college will support learners to influence their local facilities to ensure access and acceptance.

## Learner Council

Learner Council will:

- Be regular and ongoing.
- Be a positive forum.
- Provide an opportunity for learners to be heard.
- Provide a forum for the leadership of the college to listen to learners knowledge and opinions.
- Aid communication throughout the college.
- Build the learners confidence and self-esteem.
- Encourage the learners to be active citizens.
- Provide the learners with a forum model.

Learner Council will also be used to assist the college with its self-evaluation procedures and enable the college to be more accountable to the whole college community.

## Annual Reviews

Learner voice is crucial to our annual review process and where possible we actively encourage learners to attend and be part of the process. This begins before the annual review with learners preparing a presentation about themselves to share with those present and learners working with Key workers to ensure that they gather as much information from the learner as possible.

The key areas learners are encouraged to share information about are:

- What is important for/to me?
- What does good support look like?
- What are my aspirations for the future?
- How can I be part of the community?

They also show, visually, the learning activities that they are engaged in throughout their journey at Ambitious College.

## Learner De-Brief

To support our learners to reflect on the challenges around them, the college has developed a debrief process for learners across the college with a variety of communication needs. This ranges from recognition of emotional challenges to detailed consideration of the processes of challenges and the impact that this has on them.

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## Trans Disciplinary Team and Learner Voice

### Our Transdisciplinary Team



### Behaviour Analysts

Throughout the work of behaviour analysts across the college with a person-centred approach, the learner and their voice is key to supporting their ongoing behavioural needs individualising learning support plans based on preferences and learner outcome. This can be through preference exploration with learners, offering of choices and working with a range of stakeholders to collect shared views from the learner. This also includes tailored provision depending on learner preferences and feedback. With all behaviour being seen to serve a purpose and function, it is our behaviour analysts who translate and advocate for this throughout the work they do.

### Occupational Therapist

Occupation Health intervention allows us to explore the learners' world and support them to develop and support the college, to design a person centred provision.

Occupational Therapists carry out assessments for those with provision on their EHCP and beyond, and obtaining information from parents and the teaching staff. Appropriate formal (standardised) assessments may be used.

The occupational therapy input that encompasses learner voice may be provided in the form of:

- Individual person-centred therapy sessions.
- Groups run in class.
- Sessions run with other professionals working in the college (ie, speech and language therapist, etc).
- Classroom programmes, delivered by the class team, training for individuals to support understanding of the learner.
- Provision of assistive equipment dependent on preference, where appropriate.
- Setting up programmes that may be taken home if the learner requires it.
- Liaison and monitoring with school staff.
- Training for school staff and parents.

### Speech and Language

Our SaLT professionals work together across the college to support the communication needs of our learners through the creation, monitoring and development of a range of tools to allow our learners to share their voice. These are bespoke and targeted to the needs of the learner and often give insight into the wants, thoughts and needs of our learners. These can include but are not

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exclusive to talking mats, assistive technology, resources and direct provision. It is fundamental to the work that the college does that every effort is made to capture the voices of our learners and our SaLT team are central to this.

### **MultiMe**

Built into our curriculum is a tool to support learners' self-reflection and recognition of the work they do whilst at college. The college uses MultiMe to allow learners to log and communicate their successes throughout the week. MultiMe is a secure social platform and online person-centred planning toolkit created for learners and their Circles of Support.

The MultiMe secure social network helps individuals and families build their own Circles of Support online. It enables the communication, co-operation and joined-up support of the individual involving family, friends, professionals and community circles. The MultiMe toolkit provides a range of accessible and multimedia based social applications designed to support people with learning disabilities with their self-advocacy, self-determination and independence.

MultiMe can help to build learners' self-esteem through building their self-advocacy with multi-media, exploring their gifts and talents and nurturing their strengths through collaborative working with peers, families and outside agencies.

- MultiMe gives learners access to their information at home or in class
- It supports engagement with curriculum activities, multi-media as an alternative, fun and creative approach to learning
- MultiMe is a live up-to-date process that creates a life-long showcase of who the person is, what they have done and their aspirations for the future
- MultiMe builds community presence and creates opportunities for building friendships and meaningful relationships with the wider community, and promotes a positive image of individual learners aiming to assist in living a 21st century life

To keep the learner and their voice at the centre of their learning there are also tutorials in place for learners at the beginning of the day to support reflection and the sharing of their voice through specific and targeted activities intended to allow learners to reflect on their learning journeys.

### **Summary**

Ambitious college is committed to continue to develop and expand the role of learner voice in our offer. This includes continuing to develop creative listening throughout the college. Further to staff will continue to be trained, attend appropriate conferences and explore ways in which to ensure we give our learners the best opportunities to have their voices heard.

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