AONTAS ALL-ISLAND EDUCATION SUMMIT

BUILDING A NATIONAL LEARNER VOICE NETWORK



Catherine Shipman MBE | Head of Engagement and Development, SERC

South Eastern Regional College

What we will do together

WELCOME	SERC CASESTUDY	DISCUSSION 1	DISCUSSION 2	DISCUSSION 3	CLOSE
Frame the challenge	What evolved over time	Where are we now?	What could change tomorrow?	From consultation to influence	Commitment + caution

Outcome: leave with one realistic action and a clearer route from learner feedback to visible influence.

SERC
INSPIRING. TRANSFORMING. ENRICHING.



4 Main Campuses and 4 smaller campuses throughout South East of Northern Ireland

Approximately 740 expert and professional staff

Approximately 20,000 enrolments per annum

Over 7,000 business clients

Partnering with 22 local schools

35 professional and technical areas

Courses from Entry level 0 through level 6 (BA/BSc) to level 7 (Masters)

Each year around 11,000 students' study with SERC

THE FE LANDSCAPE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The starting point for a learner voice model designed around FE learners and institutions

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6

FE COLLEGES

A distinct sector with diverse learners, campuses, programmes and routes into learning.

The question was not how to replicate an inherited system, but how to make learner voice work in an FE context.

01 **INHERITED STRUCTURE**

Learner voice structures had largely developed from higher education institutions.

02 **UMBRELLA BODY**

NUS-USI provided the wider representative infrastructure.

03 **A CONFUSED LANDSCAPE**

The infrastructure was complicated and did not readily reflect FE institutions or their learners.

SO, WHERE WOULD WE START?

Start with FE learners, FE realities and the spaces where voice could become influence.

Our SERC journey

A supported FE model built from the classroom upwards

CLASS Class representatives gather and communicate views

CAMPUS Local leadership and engagement

COLLEGE Executive Committee and SU Conference

DECISION Structured routes to staff and management

FEEDBACK Report back to peers and close the loop

LEARNER VOICE

FROM CLASSROOM TO COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

A supported, democratic system for students at every level

EVERY STUDENT

All levels
All campuses
All learning routes

03

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Presidents + Student Governor

Provides strategic student leadership • represents learner priorities to senior college leadership and governance

02

ELECTED OFFICERS

Campus-wide representation

Elected by students • connect themes across classes • support campaigns, inclusion and wellbeing • escalate shared priorities

01

CLASS REPRESENTATIVES

The foundation of learner voice

Selected by their own class • gather the collective view • attend Learner Voice Rep Meetings 3 times each year • report outcomes back

LISTEN › SHARE › ACT › REPORT BACK › IMPROVE THE LEARNER EXPERIENCE

OUR LEARNER VOICE JOURNEY

SERC SU

2008–2026

SPACE

Making space for learner voice

Class reps embedded as the foundation

2008

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

VOICE

Staff allies engaged along the way
Planned, yet organic development
Meetings with meaning and an outcome

MEANINGFUL MEETINGS

AUDIENCE

Campus Managers attended the first Class Rep series
Actions agreed and fed back at the next meeting
Reporting expanded across all departments

DEMOCRACY & ALIGNMENT

AMPLIFY

Elections and elected officers
A strengthened constitution
Regional alignment and UK/Ireland best practice

INFLUENCE

Student Governor embedded and DfE funded
Representation on the HE Review Board
and Internal Equality Committee

2026

The four elements are connected. Voice without audience or influence can become consultation without consequence.

OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

SERC SU

01

BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP CULTURE

THE CHALLENGE

Helping the whole college understand the value of student voice and embrace students as partners.

HOW WE RESPONDED

Built trust through engagement and demonstrated students working proactively with staff, not against them.

02

EQUIPPING REPRESENTATIVES

THE CHALLENGE

Ensuring Class Reps and elected officers had the confidence and skills to engage constructively.

HOW WE RESPONDED

Training became essential to prepare representatives to listen, evidence themes, contribute and collaborate.

03

CLOSING THE FEEDBACK LOOP

THE CHALLENGE

Making sure learner voice led to visible action rather than becoming a one-way conversation.

HOW WE RESPONDED

Actions, ownership and feedback to representatives were built into the meeting and reporting process.

04

SCALE, CHANGE AND RESOURCES

THE CHALLENGE

Representing around 11,000 learners each year across a large and changing FE landscape.

HOW WE RESPONDED

The model has had to remain flexible, inclusive and realistic about changing student needs and available resources.

THE CONSTANT THREAD: TRUST • TRAINING • ACTION • ADAPTATION







Students Union







What helped us move forward

My three key principles …

START WHERE YOU ARE

Map what already exists.

Find the spaces where learners already speak.

Identify whose voice is less likely to be heard.

USE WHAT YOU HAVE

Work with existing meetings, classes, networks and relationships.

Connect mechanisms rather than adding another disconnected forum.

DO WHAT YOU CAN

Choose influence that is realistic and visible.

Train and support representatives.

Start small, test and improve.

Discussion 1 –Where are we now?

ONE STRENGTH	ONE GAP
Something already working well	The most important missing or inconsistent element

Most organisations have more learner voice activity than they initially realise.

Table discussion 2: Start where you are

15 minutes | Identify action at three horizons

IF FUNDING WASN'T AVAILABLE, WHAT COULD WE DO DIFFERENTLY TOMORROW?

TOMORROW	THIS YEAR	FUTURE AMBITION
One quick win	**One development**	**One big idea**
Immediate	Within 12 months	Longer term

Ideas to help tables get started

QUICK WINS

- Learner voice as a standing staff-meeting item
- Monthly learner coffee chat
- End-of-class pulse survey
- Digital suggestion wall

MEDIUM-TERM

- Learner forum
- Representative training
- Learner conference
- Student governor pathway

YOUR CONTEXT

- Adult and community learners
- Existing meetings and networks
- Time and staff capacity
- A visible feedback route

Table discussion 3: Building buy-in

15 minutes | The challenge is often influence, not the structure itself

HOW DO WE MOVE LEARNER VOICE FROM CONSULTATION TO INFLUENCE?

LEADERS	EVIDENCE	FEEDBACK	INCLUSION
What makes leaders listen?	What convinces staff?	How do we close the loop?	How do we engage learners least likely to be heard?

Keep time pressure, staff resistance, funding constraints, adult learners, community provision and impact in view.

Your three success factors

What must be true for learner voice to lead to visible influence?

01 SUCCESS FACTOR

What would make this work in practice?

02 SUCCESS FACTOR

What would make this work in practice?

03 SUCCESS FACTOR

What would make this work in practice?

Examples: visible leadership support • simple processes staff can manage • clear action and feedback to learners

Closing reflection

5 minutes | Capture both intention and realism

ONE COMMITMENT

One thing we will take back and try.

ONE CAUTION

One challenge we need to be mindful of.

Capture both on the central board.

START WHERE YOU ARE.

USE WHAT YOU HAVE.

DO WHAT YOU CAN.

Start small • engage authentically • close the feedback loop • act on what learners tell you

Student voice is not a project. It is a culture.

The structures matter, but what matters most is whether learners can see their voice making a difference.

Thank you