

Overcoming barriers to communication

Learners may be reluctant to talk for a number of reasons, for example they may not be used to giving their opinions or they may lack in confidence. Learners may have a specific difficulty which acts as a barrier to communication or they may fear the consequences of expressing negative views. We should consider the location for learner meetings carefully. For example, learners may be more relaxed in informal areas rather than a school office for example.

In order to minimise these barriers, inspectors should:

- use language that the learners understand by avoiding jargon and being prepared to explain things clearly
- be aware of any health issues, sensory impairments or of any communication aids the learners may use
- be aware of any specific difficulties which may impede concentration
- consider involving a familiar adult who can support the pupils
- explain the importance and purpose of listening to the learners' views as part of the overall inspection
- say what they would like to discuss and why
- stress that participation is voluntary and that the learner(s) may leave at any time if they do not wish to continue in the meeting
- tell learners that they should not mention individual members of staff by name in the discussion
- explain that their views will be kept confidential (unless they tell the inspector anything that might mean that they are not safe)
- stress that what they tell inspectors will not have any effect on their results in exams or assessments
- reassure them that they will not be named or identified as individuals when the inspectors report their findings
- explain how the inspectors will report on their comments and how they can obtain the final report

When working with a group of learners, it is important to establish the ground rules at the outset so that everyone in the group is able to express their views.

The ground rules may include:

- listening to each other without interruption
- all contributions are voluntary

- asking for an explanation if something is not understood
- that confidentiality must be respected by everyone.