

Matching the style of communication to the learners' needs

It is important to take account of the fact that the developmental age of some learners may not match their chronological age and phase of education. This is most likely to occur in learners with special educational needs, those who require extra support or those who have recently returned to learning. It is important in these cases that questions are still age appropriate. The way they are presented should be differentiated, for example, avoiding the use of jargon, and the use of visual symbols can be helpful in recording preferences and making choices. The use of smiley or sad faces, Makaton symbols, traffic light symbols, ticks and crosses, access to IT or the support of the individuals chosen support worker can all support listening to learners. Makaton is a method of communication using signs and symbols and is often used as a communication process for those with learning difficulties.

Some learners will be able to communicate their own views once they have had thinking time. Planned formative discussion can build in time for forming and expressing their views. For identified learners, plenty of advance warning and time to prepare will help them to contribute meaningfully. For others, the involvement of their preferred communicator may be required. A distraction free environment, with questions asked over a number of short sessions would be of benefit in some circumstances.

The following table indicates how the context and style of communication can be adapted to match the learners' age and stage of development.

Phase	Settings	Methods	Age-related characteristics
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Foundation Phase (under 5s)	Familiar setting including indoors, outdoors, at snack time and at lunchtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • talk, taking care to draw in the quieter children and to match vocabulary to understanding • observation of how children behave • draw pictures • share a book • join in with children's play 	Usually happy with visiting adults in familiar setting. Limited vocabulary so interpret behaviour as well. Will only just be learning how to express their feelings verbally. May respond to questions with what they think you want to hear. May talk about current or most recent experiences when asked 'What do you like doing best?'
Foundation Phase (5 to 7-year-olds)	In the classroom both indoors and outdoors, the playground or at lunchtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • talk, taking care to draw in the quieter children and to match vocabulary to understanding • share books and hear readers • talk to individuals whilst looking at their work in class • join circle time 	Usually happy to talk to visitors in provider. May understand that inspection is important to the provider and to their teacher.
KS2	In the classroom, the playground or at lunchtime. Small groups could meet in the library or in a quiet meeting room.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scenarios, such as: 'design an ideal school. Is this one like it?' • structured discussion on a range of topics drawn from the inspection framework • talk to individuals whilst looking at work in class and hearing readers • observe in class and at playtime • join at lunchtime 	Likely to understand importance of inspection. Might be worried about expressing negative views. Likely to be comfortable and more forthcoming in small group out of classroom.

<p>KS3 and KS4</p>	<p>In classrooms. Small groups could meet in the provider library or in a meeting room. Provider council/Eco schools/focus group meeting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structured discussion on a range of topics drawn from the lines of enquiry • talk to individuals whilst looking at work in class • read minutes of provider council/eco committee/focus groups etc • talk to provider council/focus group representatives and ask how they consult with peers and what their impact on the provider has been • the input the learners have had into • self-evaluation report 	<p>Will understand importance of inspection.</p> <p>A few may lack confidence and be reluctant to talk in a large group.</p> <p>Many will be confident at being consulted and may need to be encouraged to listen to the views of others.</p> <p>Likely to be comfortable and more forthcoming in small group out of classroom.</p>
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<p>16 to 19-year-olds and adults</p>	<p>Usual work place, student common rooms, youth clubs, youth projects, meeting rooms, students union, community learning centre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structured discussion on a range of topics drawn from the lines of enquiry • use simple questions that deal with one issue at a time • talk to individuals whilst looking at work, either in the work-based learning setting or in class • read minutes of student union /eco committee/focus groups / adult learners council, etc • talk to students union reps/focus group representatives and ask how they consult with peers and what impact they have seen, and what issues emerge • analyse student perception questionnaires in FE institutions, work-based learning, careers companies, and local authority youth and adult provision • ask learners about the feedback they have had from questionnaires • talk about the input the learners have had into the self-evaluation report • ask if any changes have taken place as a result of their views being heard 	<p>Learners may not always be confident to speak in a large group and a few learners may need help in structuring their replies.</p> <p>Vulnerable groups and those who have returned to learning after a long gap may need more support, otherwise communication at the chronological age of the learners will be effective.</p>
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Glossary

special educational needs

It is a long established fact that a reader will be distracted by the readable content of a page when looking at its layout.

References

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