

Module Four – Personalising the Student Experience

When we run student focus groups as part of our quality review processes, one of the questions we ask students is ‘Do you think your Centre cares about the students?’. You would be surprised what makes students feel cared about. One really common response is that someone makes contact when they’re absent from class. It’s highly likely when someone from a Centre is making that call it’s often more about compliance or process, but it’s the personal contact that makes a difference – someone is noticing them. They aren’t just a student number. So the more personal contact that can be factored into your processes, whether it’s explaining attendance warning letters or staging consultations with at-risk students, the more students are likely to take notice. Not only is face-to-face contact more effective when explaining procedures and monitoring risk, but also how genuine academic or welfare issues are more likely to be identified. We also shouldn’t just think about personal contact when it comes to problems, but also for relaying information and promoting activities. Students always tell us that staff coming to their classes to tell them about activities, enrolment dates and exams is the most effective form of communication.

Now think about how often students complete surveys and give feedback to their Centre – in some cases it might be as often as once a month. How often are they told how their feedback matters? Do they know where their feedback goes? Let’s go back to the complaints about wifi. If continual feedback from students is that the wifi is slow and upgrades will take place in the next holiday period, tell them! This might be through posts on noticeboards, in newsletters or on social media with things like: *Your feedback is important to us. You told us about the slow wifi and we have listened. IT upgrades will take place in the holiday period which will make wifi speeds faster.*

Or if something can’t be fixed immediately, tell them too and explain why. At least it shows you have listened.

Finally, photos of staff and students are a cheap, simple but really effective way of personalization. This might be simply having photos of staff and their positions on a noticeboard or a rolling tv screen in Reception or a prominent place. Some Centres put up pictures of new students that week or that term to help students feel more welcome and encourage introductions. Centres that only have a small number of under-18 students may have their student card pictures in staff rooms so that all teachers are aware and can help to monitor their welfare. Seeing pictures of students involved in different Centre activities will also encourage students to get involved but also helps to create an inclusive environment.