

# Developing a Communication and Branding Strategy

## What do we mean?

Communication and branding surrounding learner voice can include anything from posters displaying the benefits of being a representative to publishing calendars of events for learners to see.

It can be effective in promoting all aspects of learner voice – course representatives (reps), governors, vacancies, events, demonstrating value and impact, and benefits of participating.

A communication strategy should outline how you are going to engage with members – whether they are learners or staff – and should include realistic timescales. Sometimes putting together a calendar can be useful with this. More details on how to start this can be found below.

Branding is about giving learner voice (or a specific part of it) an identity which can tie together different aspects of an overall communication strategy. For example, having a colour scheme or logo for your course representatives and then using this on any promotional material regarding reps can make it easier for students to recognise and engage with them.

A strong communication strategy is vital to maximising participation.

## Why is it good?

A strong communication strategy is vital to maximising participation. It can help to engage students, staff and the institution in learner voice. The benefits of this impacts all groups:

### Students

- Better engagement with course representatives, empowering learners to voice their opinions and make institutional changes
- Course reps can also utilise social media themselves, providing further platforms for effective learner engagement
- Promotion of governors means better representation within decision-making councils.
- Increased participation in surveys gives more representative results

### Staff

- Can better understand and value the impact of learner voice within the institution

- Can more easily disseminate messages through established communication pipelines

### Institution

- More engaged learners provide useful feedback which can be used to make improvements throughout the institution
- Promotion of and participation in enrichment activity opportunities can increase student satisfaction

Without a clear communication strategy, you may struggle to garner interest in your learner voice activities.

### Where to start

There are two main branches to this resource: communication strategy and branding. Although they are closely linked, they will be tackled individually.

Decide exactly what you want to achieve from your communication plan.

### Communication Strategy

The first step is to decide exactly what it is you want to achieve from your communication plan. Your strategy can either be aimed at a specific aspect of learner voice (eg course representatives), or can cover a range of different themes. It is important to set out an aim, or else risk your strategy losing focus and direction.

Once you have your aim, you can establish how you are going to carry it out. There are a number of methods you can use to promote, share and demonstrate what it is you wish to communicate.

Physical comms, such as posters, flyers or leaflets, can be useful if you have an effective outlet. For example, if you have access to poster points in busy areas and the message you are trying to get across can fit neatly and clearly onto a poster, then this would be a sensible first step. If you have keen volunteers, you could recruit them to hand out flyers or leaflets. (Please note, however, that this can be seen as not environmentally friendly, so if you choose this approach, be mindful of how much paper you are using). Physical communication is usually most useful for promoting events, vacancies, campaigns, etc. rather than sharing news or updates. This is more easily achieved through social media.

**Social media, if well developed and utilised, can be an effective way to communicate quickly and easily with your learners.** If you have created physical communications, they can easily be shared over social media as well, in order to make the most of them. You can also create events, videos and be more reactive and interactive with news updates over social media. Some top tips and techniques can be found in appendix 1, along with the advantages and disadvantages of certain social media platforms.

The reps themselves could also utilise social media, so long as it was monitored properly. It can be used to gather information from learners and disseminate results from feedback. The reps would need to be trained in how to conduct themselves online in a more professional capacity, however, to preserve the integrity of the rep system.

Mailing lists and newsletters are more effective at engaging with staff, rather than learners. If you want to demonstrate the impact that learner voice is having on the institution, regular updates through the medium of a newsletter might be beneficial. You should choose how regularly you publish these carefully – too often, and they might be sparse of information, but too irregularly and they can become bulky and indigestible. Striking a balance is important. It is also worth thinking about who will contribute to a newsletter – will it be written by students, staff, or both?

If you have learners who are keen to share their experiences through the medium of a blog (perhaps as Reps or Governors), this might help encourage others to follow in their footsteps. It would be best to recruit several students in order to ensure consistency – regular updates are once again important to a successful communication plan, so if you have several learners on a team, you are more likely to always have relevant content to share.

Involve learners in your communication plan wherever possible – they are the experts when it comes to the learner voice and what will interest their peers. Use this knowledge to help drive your strategy and inform which methods will be most effective and when.

Involve learners in your plan wherever possible.

When you have an idea of how you are going to communicate to your members, you must set out a timeline and stick to it. This can be added to, changed and developed over time once you have more experience implementing your strategy, but it is useful in the first instance for providing structure. It does not necessarily need to be specific – simply setting out that you will publish a newsletter once a term or a poster two weeks before an event is a good start. **Try to set out a plan for a term, then develop it over the year.** Look back over the term and establish what worked and what did not, and try to determine why. Again, bringing learners into the conversation at this point is important.

Overall, it is clear there are a number of opportunities to engage with your learners through different forms of communication – utilise whichever work best for you, and **do not be afraid to seek new and exciting ways of sharing your ideas.**

### Branding

Developing a brand can create an identity which provides continuity across all your communication avenues. Your brand can either reflect learner voice as a whole, or a specific branch of it (eg course representatives, societies).

If it is an overarching brand aiming to bring together all aspects of learner voice, you need to think about general themes. Colours and fonts that you can use consistently throughout all your communications, a logo, and style (including both stylistic image and the style of writing).

This consistency means if you see those colours or that logo, the reader can immediately identify where it has come from and therefore relate to it. This is what you are trying to achieve through creating a brand. Keep this in mind when developing it – what is it you want your members to think when they see your brand? Do you want it to be professional, fun, neat, quirky? Try to keep it simple and eye-catching, and easily recognisable.

Choosing a brand is not as simple as plucking a colour out of a Dulux paint chart, however – **you need to consider what you want to represent**, and how that can be portrayed through your brand. Look beyond just a logo, and aim to show the values of your learner voice. This is not something you should decide in a day. It will take time to propose ideas, develop them, and test them.

**You should also consider its sustainability.** Do not link your branding to any short-term campaigns or events. Instead, see the bigger picture of what you want to bring together as part of learner voice, and create a brand which represents all its key elements.

If you are developing a brand for a more specific aspect of learner voice, such as the course rep system, then you need to think about how it can fit in with the brand of your institution, or with that of learner voice (if you have one).

Once again, this is a perfect opportunity to involve learners. You could do something as simple as run a competition to design a logo, or you could get learners involved in branding focus groups to discover what it is they think learner voice means, and what they think of any branding ideas you have developed. **Getting learners involved from the very beginning of your branding strategy will mean they will be more invested in the future.**

## Social Media

### Top 5 Tips for utilising Social Media

1. **Use it consistently** – a stagnant presence on social media reduces engagement both from the students and also from the algorithms built into the platforms themselves. However, be careful not to overwhelm your learners – balance is key.
2. **Utilise your brand** – if you have established branding either for your learner voice as a whole, or for specific initiatives, use them!
3. **Be bilingual** – ensure your brand, pages, posts and publications are in both English and Welsh.

4. **Be engaging** – use language and media that will appeal to your audience. This seems obvious, but it is always useful to consider this every time you are writing a post, tweet, or newsletter.
5. **Be informative** – get your message across clearly and concisely, without overwhelming your audience. It is important to capture the interest of those reading or watching, to ensure they engage fully with your message.

## Different platforms for different purposes

There are a range of social media platforms, and each has their own benefits and drawbacks, which have been outlined below. Looking at this should help you to decide which platforms will allow you to engage more effectively with your learners, and which will not be helpful and therefore not worth investing time into.

Platform	Advantages	Disadvantages
Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large outreach potential</li> <li>• Can easily interact with other groups (retweeting)</li> <li>• Can easily interact with members using hashtags</li> <li>• Can communicate directly with learners through messages</li> <li>• Can create polls to gather feedback quickly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can lose impact if not updated regularly</li> <li>• Cannot create 'events'</li> <li>• Posts can get lost in news feeds</li> </ul>
Facebook (page)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large outreach potential</li> <li>• Can create events and invite members</li> <li>• Can communicate directly with learners through messages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can lose impact if not updated regularly</li> <li>• Posts can get lost in news feeds (combated by sponsoring, if you have the resources to do so)</li> </ul>
Facebook (group)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can aim communications at specific groups of learners (eg course representatives)</li> <li>• Can create events and invite members of the group</li> <li>• Can create polls to gather feedback quickly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must be managed by an individual, meaning sharing personal profiles (unless an alternative one is created)</li> </ul>
Instagram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More visual way of communicating</li> <li>• Can easily interact with members using hashtags</li> <li>• Can utilise the 'story' feature for reactive updates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can lose impact if not updated regularly</li> <li>• Limited to photo communications</li> <li>• Cannot create 'events'</li> </ul>
Snapchat & TikTok	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More visual way of communicating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can lose impact if not updated regularly</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can utilise the 'story' feature for reactive updates</li><li>• Can utilise the 'filter' feature to promote events or campaigns</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More one-way than other platforms</li><li>• Cannot create 'events'</li></ul>
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### Summary

Communication and branding can make a big difference to the success of your projects, initiatives and events. Take some time to plan through a term or a year, and evaluate the results to help develop a longer-term strategy. Starting small and working towards a larger project is a good tactic.

When you are happy with your overall brand, be sure to write some guidelines so that anyone in the institution likely to be using elements of the brand understand what it is you have created. Include the logo in different formats (eg black and white), the fonts you have used, and also a brief outline of what your brand is aiming to achieve.