



Learner Voice in Leicester City

Learning Technology Priorities



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Learner Voice in Leicester City: Learning Technology Priorities

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Introduction

by Councillor Vi Dempster, Assistant City Mayor

I am delighted to introduce this report about the views and suggestions by the students in our schools. It is imperative that we listen and respond to what they have to say as these young people are the future, not only of our schools, but also of the City.

Their input will make a huge difference across the city as we incorporate their ideas into our designs for the future.



Councillor Vi Dempster
Assistant City Mayor

Leicester City Council Youth Engagement Project – executive summary

Leicester City Council's Youth Engagement project was a year-long innovative programme of research which involved 400 young people (11-19).

The BSF programme (approximate total programme capital value circa £340 million) represents a once in a life time opportunity for Leicester and will see all of the City's Secondary schools rebuilt or refurbished - including the Special Education Needs and Hospital schools. The Youth Engagement project was designed to ensure that voice, opinions and views of young people are included in the development of the City's Building Schools for the Future Programme. The project focussed on identifying young people's priorities as they relate to the school environment.

Young people in Leicester's top10 priorities for the school environment are:

1. More indoor social spaces
2. Better designed library spaces
3. Comfortable chairs
4. Well-designed interiors – especially use of colour
5. More vegetable `patches/allotments
6. Sustainable features – including use of biofuels and recycling programmes
7. Nicer toilets
8. Larger dining room spaces –flexible seating arrangements and more food choice
9. Flexible classroom spaces
10. Greater variety in teaching methods

The full report lists and expands on Young People's top 15 priorities for the school environment.

Learners were also asked to think about their priorities as they related to technology. Young people in Leicester's top 10 learning technology priorities are:

1. Faster computers
2. More creative uses of technology for learning
3. More student centred and student led use of technology
4. More flexible use/internet access – in schools, the city centre, and in local communities
5. Laptop borrowing schemes for home use
6. More collaboration with young people in other schools & countries
7. Access to local and national decision makers via social media and social networking sites
8. 'Young people only' space in the city centre with computers and internet access
9. Teachers who can help them use social media and social networking services and sites more effectively
10. A say in school filtering & blocking policies

“We are absolutely delighted that our young people are contributing in such a meaningful way to this programme. We are building new centres of learning excellence across the city and some schools are thrilled about the prospect of having completely new buildings, whilst other schools are looking forward to substantial investment which will make a huge difference to the quality of life for students and staff. The schemes now being designed follow on from the new schools already built at Judgemeanow, Fullhurst, Beaumont Leys and Soar Valley and will develop outstanding educational facilities aimed at assisting us to achieve our key targets of raising attendance and attainment, driving personalised learning, ensuring diversity and integration and encouraging community use to build confidence and aspiration amongst our deserving young people.”

- David Martin, BSF Programme Director

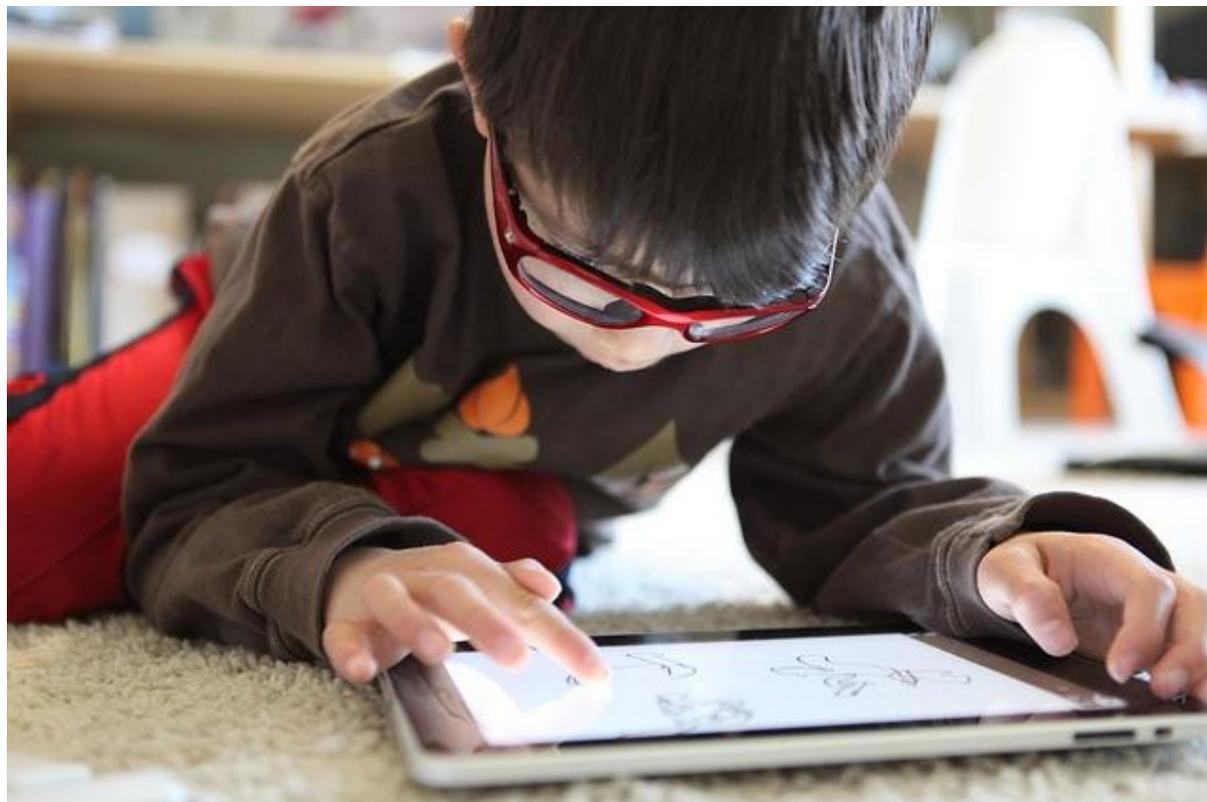
“These findings confirm what those of us working with schools in Leicester know – our young people are passionate and positive about their education, about their communities, and about making a difference. I am delighted to be a part of the BSF Programme team, and to be working with Leicester’s secondary school communities to develop and promote the innovative, effective and world-class use of technology for learning and teaching. We have some amazing examples of practice in Leicester, along with innovative and future-thinking educators, who are committed to doing their best for young people. Ensuring young people have a say in the way we move forward is a critical factor in how successful we will be as a city”.

- Josie Fraser, ICT Strategy Lead (Children’s Capital) for Leicester City Council

“We are delighted to be engaged with the BSF Programme and to be working with Leicester schools where we have provided ICT managed services for the last three years. It is encouraging to see that the findings of this report tie in with our goal of transforming learning through innovative technology. We have indeed been working closely with four schools in Leicester in recent months to address what the report has highlighted as the number one learning technology priority to increase computer speed through delivering faster laptops and PCs. Taking the lead on infrastructure technology, we have introduced wireless networks into these four schools to increase speed, capacity and the flexible use of IT devices in and around the school. As active promoters of the latest technological advancements in education, Northgate are also engaged with sponsoring and supporting innovation events across Leicester to share best practice.”

- Stuart Low, Programme Director, Education, for Northgate Managed Services

Learner Voice in Leicester City: Youth Engagement Project overview



This briefing outlines some of the outcomes of the Leicester City Council Youth Engagement Project, which ran from August 2010 to November 2011. Included in the findings are headline areas of concern and interest raised by young people regarding learning environment and young people's priorities specifically relating to technology for learning.

The project was carried out by three Youth Engagement Officers - Matthew Busko, Halima Girach and Grace Sykes.

The project was designed to engage with young people across Leicester to ensure that their voices, opinions and aspirations were heard in the context of Leicester's Building Schools for the Future Programme – a (circa) £340 million programme which will rebuild and refurbish the whole of the City's Secondary School estate, providing more than 20,000 learner places across a range of mainstream secondary schools, Special Education Needs (SEN) schools, Pupil Referral Units and the Hospital school.

Leicester City Council view this major building programme as a catalyst for positive change and a once in a life time opportunity to improve the educational experience and outcomes for every child in the city, transforming education for generations to come.

Ensuring the voices, opinions, ideas and concerns of young people are heard is critical to the success of the BSF Programme – enabling the Authority to deliver services *with* rather than *for* young people. This is central to realising aspirations and making positive, effective change across the city.

Over 400 students aged between 11 and 18 contributed to the research project, from 15 mainstream and SEN schools across the city. Additionally, views were gathered through a series of visits to non-school sites, including a youth club, Leicester City's Young People and Children's Councils. Participants of a Community Media Week workshop, held at Phoenix Square, also contributed to the project questions as they relate to technology, through round table discussion.

The findings offer a representative view of the concerns and priorities of young people in Leicester City. An even proportion of girls and boys participated. Leicester City is one of the most ethnically diverse regions in Europe, and the range of ethnic origins of the participating students reflected this.

The project included contributions from learners identified as having social, emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties, and learners with a range of physical disabilities.

Between 2 and 4 workshops were completed with learners at each school, excluding initial and evaluation visits. Workshops (lasting between 45 minutes and 3 hours) were structured around a range of activities, appropriate to the age and abilities of the groups of young people.

Research activities included focus group work; narrative interviewing, game playing (including activities based on board games and the 'Apprentice' television format); and a range of visual, multimedia as well as text based activities – including creating films, posters, mood-boards, and song lyrics. Activities were designed to suit the different needs of participants and to support engagement and contribution.

Next Steps

Leicester City Council continues to engage with and support the active participation of young people within the BSF Programme. The priorities outlined here form an important reference point for the City Council in determining investment priorities and agreeing action plans.

The report itself is an important next step – ensuring that the Council, school leaders, teachers, Governors, parents and the whole school community know what young peoples' priorities are so that we can work together – continuing the conversation, and developing and implementing ideas.

Leicester City Council's ICT Strategy Lead, Josie Fraser, is working in partnership with schools across Leicester to develop action plans, activities and events to ensure schools in Leicester are at the forefront in the use of Information Communications Technology (ICT) for learning. Leicester aspires to be an online, connected learning city, and the BSF Programme is equipping our schools with world class technologies - enabling us to support staff in developing the skills and confidence to match.

Digital Literacy - the capability to live, learn, work and thrive in modern society – is essential for all our young people, and the BSF Programme will help ensure that every

learner can take advantage of the opportunities that effective and innovative use of technology affords. Learners in Leicester will be confident, thoughtful and positive in their use of technology.

Learners' priorities: The school environment

1. More indoor social space

Young people across the city call for more social space within secondary schools. They tell us that social space is essential in terms of recreation and learning. Social spaces provide them with a break from formal learning - important to them in terms of being able to maintain focus and do their best when they are in lessons.

Young people tell us these spaces are important to them in developing social skills and a sense of community - particularly spaces where learners of different ages could meet. They talk about the important role that social spaces play in letting young people listening to and finding out about one another, developing friendships and helping and supporting their friends.

Spaces for specific student activities – for example School Council activities and meetings – are flagged as being very important.

Students say that they would like their 'own' spaces, preferably away from school staff. Ownership in this regard was defined as, ideally, the ability to determine design and furniture, and where this was not possible, room layout and decoration. Students understand the limitations of availability of space and ask that where 'learner owned' space was not possible the flexible use of teaching and other areas should be looked at.

2. Better designed Library space/Learning Resource Centres

Young People identified the school library as an important, unique and valued area within the school. They ask that the BSF Programme look at what the library was for and how it was used.

They want the role of the library to be extended and promoted as a place to relax as well as learn. School libraries are particularly valued as quiet, calm spaces, encouraging and supporting informal learning and learner-directed research.

Library space was identified as supporting both independent individual and group learning, both alongside and outside the taught curriculum.

Most young people take technology in the library space for granted and see spaces as providing both digital and physical resources—they expect computers to be available, and like to have wifi access and support on using technology and web-based resources for research and learning.

3. Comfortable chairs

Many students say that their classroom chairs are too hard and make working more difficult. Young people say uncomfortable chairs make learners feel frustrated, tense and demotivated.

4. Well-designed interiors – especially use of colour

Young people across the city told us how important the selection and use of colour is in creating a positive and welcoming school environment - “brighten colours and you’ll brighten our mood”. Bright colours were regarded as motivating and important to both students and staff – young people suggest that creative use of colour encourages creativity in teaching. Students firmly believe that the improved environment and atmosphere created by good use of colour would improve both behaviour and learning.

Students repeatedly stated a preference for natural light, clean modern design and furnishings.

Students across the city agreed that neglected buildings imply a lack of care about and interest in the school community and in learners. They believe that there is a clear link between aspiration and engagement and the standard of the school buildings and environment.

5. Vegetable patch/allotments

Young people across the city are very enthusiastic about the opportunity to grow plants. They talk about how vegetable patches could provide a range of valuable opportunities for learning. They say being able to grow their own food and understand how it is produced is important to them. Learners impressed us with their passion for sustainability and their interest in locally grown produce and self-sufficiency.

Students link community gardening to the development of team work, leadership, interpersonal skills, and confidence building. Students would like large allotments which allow them to grow a wide range of produce. They are interested in opportunities to both cook and sell produce – to develop culinary and entrepreneurial skills.

6. Sustainable features

Most students have a basic knowledge of sustainability issues and nearly all of the young people participating are eager to learn more. Young people want their school to take a central, leading role in sustainability in their local community - championing and demonstrating energy efficiency.

Use of environmental technologies and alternative fuel sources – including solar panels and biomass fuels - are raised as something schools should be supporting.

7. Nicer toilets

A common complaint was that toilets are dull, dirty and smelly. Students want modern and bright facilities, and talk about access to air freshener, decent bins, soft toilet roll, and good quality soap. Mirrors are considered especially important to many pupils. There were requests from boys for mirrors in their toilets – they want to be able to check their appearance and style their hair.

8. Canteen

The general consensus across schools is that canteens must be bigger with more choice. Students hope for more influence choosing the foods and hope that the canteen

can have enough seats to allow them to chat with friends while they digest their meal rather than being rushed out of the room. Students also want the flexibility to sit with friends – in many schools students buying hot meals and those bringing in packed lunches cannot sit together.

9. Flexible classroom furniture/learning space

Furniture flexibility was considered as vital in supporting effective learning and to support a range of different lesson formats. Students do not like the fact that moving furniture took up time or prohibited different lesson styles – for example, debates. ‘Furniture with wheels’ or ‘classrooms with sliding doors’ are seen as potential solutions to moving and rearranging furniture faster, expanding or changing classroom space as required.

10. Variety of teaching methods

Students do not want to be taught in the same lesson format or with the same learning and teaching methods all the time. They want change and variety within and between lessons, rather than a standardised format. Learners tell us different approaches help keep them involved and maintain concentration. Lessons where information and instruction are followed up with independent activities such as collaborative work, debating, games, research, and resource creation, problem solving and innovative lessons –those that used drama and role play – are all popular with many students. Students are enthusiastic about the creative use of technology, although it was also noted that technology could be used in repetitive ways. Students want to be inspired by lessons and learning activities. They believe learning is most effective when it is challenging, interesting and fun.

11. More student input on everything

Learners want Student Councils to be involved more in decision making, especially in decisions that have a lot of impact on their schools. Some students feel Councils were in place to ‘tick a box’ rather than to support and develop the role of learner voice in the school. They tell us it is important that they feel their opinions are valued and included.

They are interested in looking at ways learners could be supported in feeding into the decision making process outside School Council membership, and in ensuring more young people can be involved in generating ideas and making decisions.

They understand that not all suggestions made by learners and by student organisations can be put in place, and they want more feedback on why suggestions aren’t practical or acted on.

Students want more reassurance that their opinions are being taken seriously.

12. More flexible use of ICT/Technology

Students want better integration of ICT into all classrooms and other spaces within the school. Rather than having to travel to a separate room to use ICT, students want to be able to use computers and mobile devices wherever learning could take place.

Young people told us that they want to use devices and technology themselves – not just watch teachers use equipment, or copy what teachers were doing. Students want to

be supported and trusted to work with technology more independently and feel confident that they had the skills to do so, or would be able to work out solutions between themselves.

Students want to see more innovative uses of technology within lessons, and for extracurricular activities. Examples included the use of web-based video conferencing to talk to learners from other schools across the city and across the world. Learners are very interested in collaborating and learning with others, sharing information, problem solving, and finding out more about how other people viewed the world. They think electronic whiteboards could be used for a range of creative approaches, for example, interactive games, or for learners to present multimedia reports. Learners report interactive white boards are most often used by teachers to talk through presentation slide decks. Learners would like to see more interactive and multimedia elements included in presentations.

13. Choice and variety of subject

Students feel that sometimes GCSE categories and timetabling narrow the choice of subjects they are able to take. Students talk about Photography, a wider range of Modern Languages, Sociology, and Film Studies as examples of subjects they are interested in.

Students tell us that they like the information evenings some schools offered, but that they want more information about each subject before making their choice - what would the GCSE involve? What topics would be covered? What would the qualification allow them to do next?

14. Outdoor shelter and classrooms

Young People think outdoor areas are important and want more of a say in the planning, design and use of external space. They tell us that external space design is often boring and unimaginative. They are interested in different types of shelter, and covered and uncovered 'outdoor rooms'. Students suggest these could be places to relax and socialise during lunch and break times, and could be used as alternative learning and teaching spaces. They could also be used for independent or small group learning. Learners are very interested in the future use of external areas and want to be able to feed into and influence designs.

15. More and better careers guidance

Students would like more creative advice on careers options and opportunities. They would like to see dedicated careers space within the schools and have access to advisors. They want to see more workshops, talks or mentoring sessions during which people working in a range of fields could offer real life insight into careers. Young people valued being able to talk to and ask questions, and to find out how people really made life choices and overcame setbacks.

Students appreciate the services they have currently but want more detail about what they need to consider and what the requirements are to pursue individual careers. For example, when they were considering vocational or academic options, they need to know what these would qualify them to do next, or what options they might not be able to pursue as a consequence.

Work experience was extremely popular and all students wish there were more opportunities to find out about different jobs and work places. They value work experience as an opportunity to help them make decisions about their future careers.

Young People's Learning Technology priorities

1. Faster computers

There are many reasons why computers might run slowly. Devices might not have enough memory or disk space. The hard drive may be fragmented, or the computer may have a virus. The problem may be with the internet connection – which may not be able to manage the number of people trying to connect at any one time. There may be wireless network signal interference. There might be a network equipment failure – for example a faulty modem, router or cable. There might also be a fault with the Internet Service Provider, or with an online site or service.

Slow running computers – whatever the reason – are frustrating for everyone. Young people's number one learning technology priority is for consistently fast, reliable computers and network access. They told us slow computers make them feel frustrated, waste class time and hold up learning. Problems with computers running programmes or connecting to the internet slowly also make teachers less likely to want to use them with learners within lessons.

Many young people are used to accessing fast connections at home and on their mobile phones. They would like to have a similar experience of speed at school – whether computers are fixed or mobile. They would like fast reliable devices that allowed technology to be used briefly to support learning.

2. More creative uses of technology for learning

Young People tell us that while they enjoy using a wide range of technologies, and would like to see ICT used more often in schools, they didn't see the point of using it for its own sake.

Students want to see a wide range of computer, gaming and mobile technologies used to support lessons and learning, but stress that appropriate and interesting use is equally important.

Even the most interesting uses of technology became boring if teachers used them in the same way all the time. Students told us that their experience of technology used to support learning was too frequently the same – a teacher delivering a Power Point presentation to the class, or being taken through tasks as a whole class on a fixed computer.

Students want more variety and more interaction. They want to be able to work at their own pace and have more opportunity to direct their own learning.

3. More student centred and student led use of technology

Most students we talked to said they were very confident in their use of technology. They want opportunities to use technology in school more independently. They made it clear that they prefer not to have to share computers and laptops within pairs or groups, but

like to have 1:1 access. They point out that if they were working on a collaborative document, they could work faster in pairs or in small groups with individual devices and that it ensures everyone got to practise their skills and contribute.

Students are full of good ideas for using technology for teaching and learning, and want to share these with their teachers. Many suggest that mobile phones - particularly phone cameras, with picture, sound and film recording capabilities and GPS - could be used. They mentioned Art, Drama, Geography and PE as examples of subjects that could particularly benefit from using mobile phones, but believe most areas could be supported.

Young People talked to us about the ways in which they work together on social networking services, particularly for revision and homework. They want more opportunities to use technology to support their peers and potentially other learners – younger pupils as well as teachers, parents, carers and governors.

Students want to be supported in using online platforms and sites to develop their school councils and other student organised initiatives such as internet radio shows, online magazines and blog sites.

They are keen on using technology for both learning and for community projects. Young people use mobile, internet-based and gaming technologies every day. The message to us is that they would like schools to look at how using the same kinds of technologies can positively support learning.

Students also want all homework assignments to be available online – however they recognise not everyone has a computer at home, or an internet connection, and stress homework schedules should still be available in hard copy. They want to be able to choose if they handed in homework electronically or on paper, but they tell us that having all homework assignments in one place, accessible from their phone or computer, would help them be better organised.

4. More flexible use/internet access – in schools, the city centre, and in local communities

Students want to be able to use technology and connect to the school network and internet from anywhere in their school. They tell us they do not like only being able to use computers in ICT suites. They want to see greater use of mobile devices – laptops, netbooks, tablets and phones.

They also want to be able to work and learn in locations outside their school. Many already have mobiles and computers, but not all.

Young people like having school computer and internet access outside the school day and at lunchtimes. They also value being able to use computers in their local libraries.

They want to see more access to both devices and the internet in community spaces, including homes, and in the city centre.

5. Access to computers at home

Young people told us that going online and working collaboratively with their friends via their mobiles and computers was really helpful, and they did not think it was fair that

some young people didn't have good access so could not develop the skills to use technology effectively. They understand that not every family can afford computers and internet access, and that when money was very tight these would not be seen as priorities.

They also say that computer and internet access at home is really important to them to research and complete homework, and to talk to other people about lessons and exams. Home access is also an important way that they keep in touch with their friends and develop these friendships.

They tell us that even when families did have a computer, other adults and siblings want to use computers for their work, school, social life or pastimes, which often means that young people don't always get access when they need to or would like to.

They suggest schools implement computer borrowing schemes, for evenings, at weekends and over the holidays, for example as a reward for good behaviour. Laptop lending would enable those without computer access to get to grips with technology at their own pace.

The majority of students are extremely confident in their independent use of technology but recognise that not every young person is and think that there should be support for those that are not.

6. More collaboration with young people in other schools & countries

Young people enjoy and want to see the increased use of webcams and web based video conferencing to connect to and work with schools across the city and internationally.

Young people tell us about their positive experience of talking to students online from other countries, and learning about other cultures and ways of thinking about the world.

7. Access to local and national decision makers via social media and social networking sites

Young people tell us they want more opportunities to have a say in how decisions are made in schools, across the city and at national level. They would like to be able to use social media sites to talk about the issues that concern them with decision makers.

8. 'Young people only' space in the city centre with computers and internet access

Young People would like 'young-people only' access and space, where they can feel safe and not have to compete with adults for use of technology, in the city centre. They would like a space that they could meet friends and drop in to use a range of technologies, learn new skills and work on either their school work or their own interests. They would like access to support but space to do things in their own time and at their own pace.

9. Teachers who can help them improve their use of social media and social networking services and sites

Nearly all of the young people we talked to have social networking profiles and use social networks or social media sites. Many of them have friends who have been bullied online, or have been bullied themselves. Young people recognise that technology can be used in negative ways and would like support in dealing with online bullying. They would like more information and support in managing their online privacy.

They would also like advice on building positive online identities, and using social network services effectively – for example to create online showcases for their work or interests.

They would like more information about using popular tools and sites – for example Google and Wikipedia – to help them with their school work.

Most young people tell us that social networking and social media sites are currently blocked at their schools.

10. A say in school filtering & blocking policies

Students tell us that they would like to see fewer restrictions on accessing sites in their schools. They feel that many sites that would be useful for learning are currently blocked. They also want to be able to access games and social media sites in break times.

Young People made it clear to us that they understood there should be blocks on inappropriate sites. They are frustrated at sometimes not being able to access sites they believe would be useful to them for school work, and do not understand why some sites were blocked.

Students feel that social networking sites could be made accessible outside lesson times – for example at lunch times. They recognise that schools were blocking these because they believe they would cause bullying or behaviour incidents but do not think that just blocking sites they used at home and connected to via their mobile networks made sense. Young people think a better approach would be to support them in looking after themselves online.

They would like to know more about why some sites are blocked and others not, and they would like to be able to suggest sites that are useful to them are unblocked.

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