Consulting parents effectively

Overview

The consequences of the pandemic have meant that different settings have had to find new ways to effectively communicate and consult with parents. This includes finding out what parents need from careers support and evaluating the impact of the current careers offer. Finding out whether an activity has met its objectives is key to designing a meaningful intervention – visit CEC's Making it meaningful page for more guidance on achieving this. Being able to demonstrate impact also helps with internal accountability (e.g. proving value to SLT and governors) and external accountability (e.g. OFSTED).

The following advice from Careers Leaders offers ideas for ways you can collect and analyse evidence on the effectiveness of your setting's careers provision.

Approaches to consulting parents effectively

It is crucial to obtain feedback from parents on your setting's careers provision since they have such an instrumental role in their child's next steps. Below are some platforms and approaches that Careers Leaders and Advisers have used successfully during lockdown to achieve quality feedback.

Planning your approach

You can start by consulting with parents to generally find out what they need from your careers provision. Gathering insights at the start and end of an academic year or term allows you to see the impact of your whole approach over time. Sharing the results back with parents can be a useful engagement technique.

> *"I feel doing a whole school approach with this would work well, I would also need to ensure there was time allocated afterwards to process the results and draw up an action plan, and share this back with parents so that they can see what we are doing with the information. It is important to use it and not just do it as a tick box exercise."* **Careers Leader in an Academy School, Oxfordshire.**

Alternatively, you may be seeking feedback on a specific activity – think about measuring:

➢ Reach (how many parents attended, which groups they were from)

➢ Engagement (how they responded to the activity)
➢ Outcomes (what was learnt)
➢ Improvements (what would participants want to know more about)

Some of this data can be collected without parents' input (e.g. number of attendees). There are lots of quick and easy ways to get immediate reactions from parents on a virtual activity.

For example, you could ask key questions during the event and encourage feedback to be given at the time. Try use online polls during or after the session, using the reaction functionalities, take a quick read out or ask parents to leave feedback in the chat function before they leave.

Methods for gathering feedback

➢ **Google Forms/Microsoft Forms and Survey Monkey**

Getting disengaged parents involved in survey participation can be challenging especially when considering some parents' low tech-skills. It is important to engage parents in channels and platforms that are simple to navigate, easy to access and quick to use.

Microsoft Forms is highly recommended by Careers Leaders and Advisers thanks to how user friendly it is in addition to how clearly the platform collates all data for evaluation.

➢ **Going via the student: emails and letters home**

An effective measure to improve engagement is to provide students with a survey (e.g. Microsoft Forms or paper form) to run with their parents. This will also develop students' questioning skills in addition to increasing awareness of your setting's careers provision at home. Research has shown the older the student is the more likely their parent is to rely on them to provide information about next steps (as opposed to using the institution's website), therefore this approach could be particularly effective with older students.

This method could have greater impact if used in conjunction with a briefing session for students about the intentions of the survey. This briefing could take place over your setting's messaging platform or in-person assembly.

> *"Microsoft forms is perfect for this type of communication and a great tool to gain feedback. Quick and easy to put together by the school and complete by the parent. Data received is collated nicely. A benefit of remote learning has been a clear upskilling of students and parents IT-wise so we are getting far more engagement than we have done previously."* **Ben Jennings, Careers Leader, William Perkin C of E High School, Middlesex.**

➢ **Embedding feedback into the work of tutors during welfare calls**

Incorporting elements of survey questions into welfare calls made by tutors can have a positive impact. These members of staff will be known to parents and can encourage quality answers to questions regarding careers provision.

> *"Obtaining feedback from parents via surveys has been very useful in my school: it was as a result of this feedback that initiatives such as our careers newsletters, careers Twitter account and enhanced careers offering were carried out."* **Sweta Thakrar, Careers Leader, Dr Challoner's High School, Buckinghamshire.**

Further resources

You can find other resources about engaging parents in careers guidance on the CEC Resource Directory, in particular, their example evaluations can help you to measure impact.