Encouraging student voice

Student voice is the active engagement of young people in their education via opportunities for them to share perspectives about their learning. Encouraging student voice helps to promote autonomy and engagement by making sure students are fully engaged in the learning process.
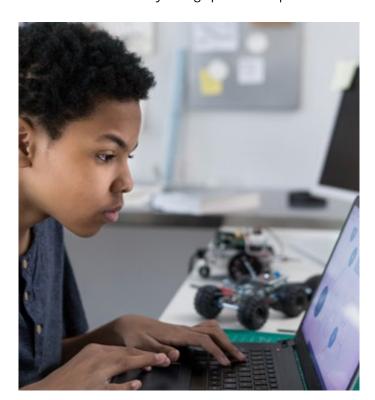
There are many ways we can develop student voice in an online setting.

Encourage communication in the online space you are using

You are the role model here, so you should demonstrate the type of interactions that you want to encourage. Where possible address students by name and provide them with appropriate opportunities to contact you. Contact with your students may take a whole range of formats but should always be welcoming and encouraging of their thoughts and questions. Establishing effective ways for students to share is key to encouraging student voice online.

Recognise the challenges that your students may be facing

Not all your students will have the same experience or expertise related to online learning. Create opportunities for students to share what they do and do not understand about their current situations by asking open-ended questions such as 'How are you feeling about learning biology away from school?' Asking open-ended questions like this avoids any assumptions on your part and allows you to gain valuable feedback. Their responses should help you to gauge the work you are setting and how they are engaging with it.

Be responsive to your students

Do not be afraid to encourage your students to give you feedback on your online teaching. Show that their contributions are valued by making relevant adjustments to how you are teaching and explaining how their feedback informed the changes. Doing this helps students to feel that they have the opportunity to shape their learning environment. Seeing the impact of suggestions from students will motivate others to engage as well as encourage those who already have to continue doing so.

Support your students

In an online setting, students may feel they have fewer opportunities to interact with you and gain direct support. Make sure you provide time and space for them to ask clarifying questions related to the tasks you have set. You could arrange one-to-one follow-up chats or set up discussion groups. The creation of groups gives students the opportunity to offer peer support, and you may want to encourage them to share questions with each other before coming to you. If you monitor these group chats you can use your time effectively by responding to common questions in one place. Their questions should allow you to judge the tasks you have set and alter them if necessary.