

Personal development planning and employability

revised edition



LEARNING and EMPLOYABILITY

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Introduction to new edition

This revised edition builds upon and extends the structure of the first by clearly considering the development of personal development planning (PDP) within a more explicit careers-oriented frame and a modified categorisation for the Case Studies. It also allows us to update the Case Study and institutional material and to place this in a more explicit evaluative context. Finally, we have been able to track the ways in which some at least of the Case Studies have evolved since the previous publication, and this is considered in section 5.

Finding your way around this document

In revising this document, we have aimed to produce a paper that is coherent and sequential, and can therefore profitably be read from cover to cover.

But we recognise that busy colleagues sometimes need to take short cuts. So if you:

- Want to focus upon approaches to relating PDP to the curriculum, you might see Section 2 as the best place to start.
- Want to consider implementation from a practitioner perspective, then Section 3 might be your starting point.
- Want to focus upon an institutional support model, then Section 4 might provide a good way in.
- Are interested in how others are implementing practice at programme, departmental or institutional level, then Section 5 might provide some helpful entry points.
- Want to start with issues of student engagement, then go straight to Section 6.

As with our first edition, this is not a definitive guide to PDP and Employability, more a snapshot of evolving thinking and practice that is intended to help you see the theme in new ways and sharpen up your own practice, as appropriate. We hope you find it useful.

I. Personal Development Planning and Employability

Rob Ward and A.G. Watts

What is PDP?

Personal Development Planning (PDP) is defined in the original *Guidelines on Progress Files* (QAA, 2001) as ‘a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development’. While these *Guidelines* are currently (July 2008) under revision, feedback from the sector has confirmed the ‘fitness for purpose’ of this definition.

The emphasis in the definition is placed on the individual’s ‘ownership’ of the process. But the reference to the process being ‘structured and supported’ means that there is a challenge to, and possibly even an obligation on, higher education institutions to provide the structure and support that is needed.

In practice, PDP has been viewed in higher education as a key part of the implementation of the ‘Progress File’.¹ The Dearing Report (National Commission of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997) recommended that all higher education institutions should introduce a Higher Education Progress File, which should comprise two elements:

- A transcript, provided by the institution, recording an individual’s learning and achievement.
- A means by which students can monitor, build and reflect upon their personal development.

The latter was in turn divided into:

- ‘An individual’s personal *records* of learning and achievements, progress reviews and plans that are used to clarify personal goals and can provide a

¹ Though, within higher education, antecedents of PDP can be found within the Enterprise in Higher Education programme (1987–92) (Watts & Hawthorn, 1992; Hawkins & Winter, 1997), in the Recording Achievement in HE Project (1991–93) from which the Centre for Recording Achievement evolved, in the Bangor GALA project (1994–96, see Fazey & Linford, 1996) and in the suite of projects funded under the Career Management Skills theme (1996–98) (Hustler *et al.*, 1998).

resource from which material is selected to produce personal statements (e.g. CVs etc) for employers, admissions tutors and others’.

- The ‘structured and supported *processes*’ represented in PDP (QAA, 2001).

Following a sector-wide consultation exercise in Autumn 1999, a joint policy statement was published by Universities UK, CoSHEP (now Universities Scotland), SCOP (now GuildHE) and QAA in May 2000. This was approved by the Board of Universities UK and circulated to members (1/00/80) with an invitation to take up the policy recommendations, and to go beyond them if they wished. The policy statement set a target that all universities should implement transcripts by 2002–03, and Personal Development Planning by 2005–06.

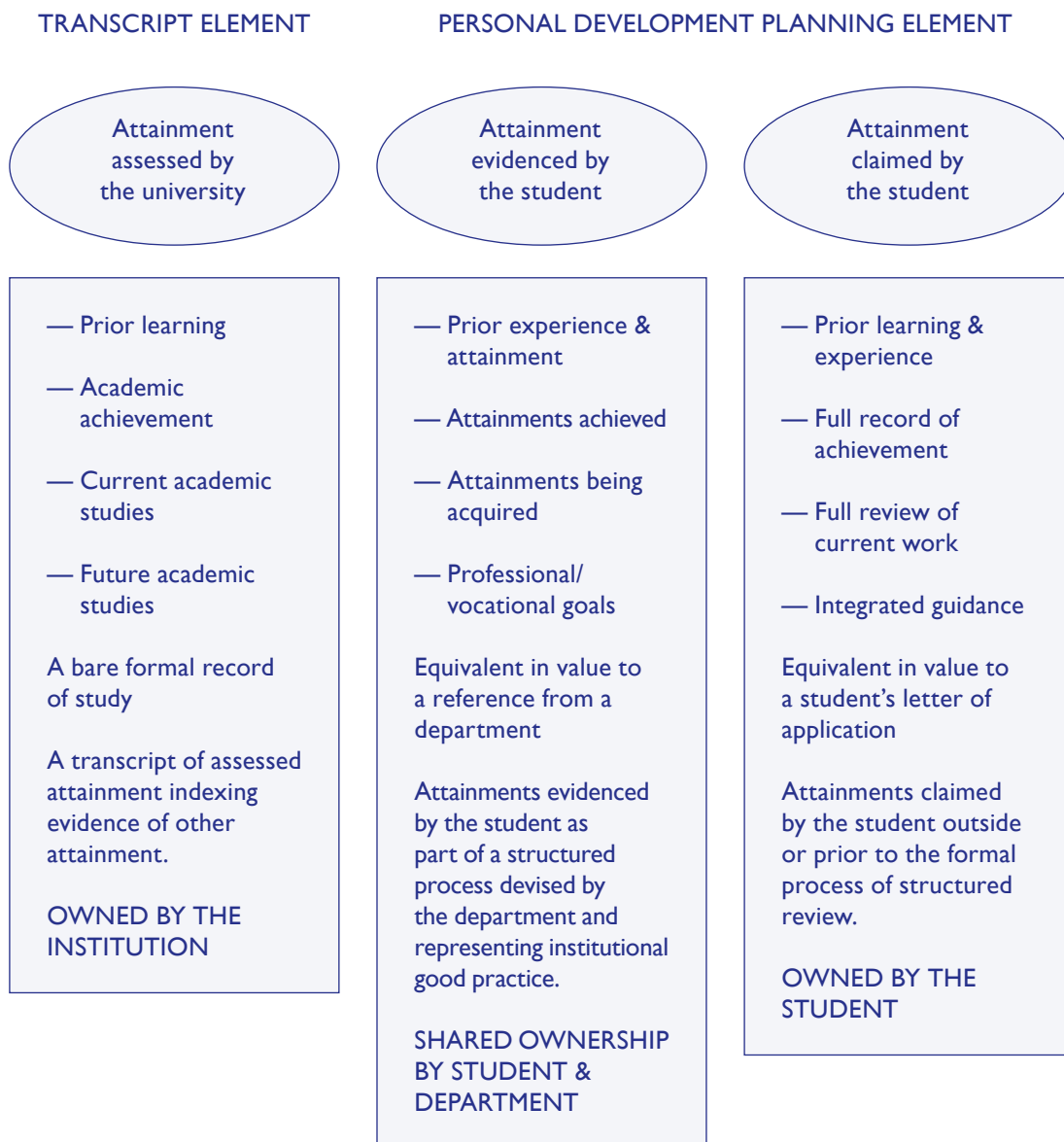
In practice, the two developments have been managed separately from one another in most institutions (Brennan & Shah, 2003; Ward *et al.*, 2005). The Burgess Report (Universities UK, 2007) noted that the academic transcript had been taken up in some form by all higher education institutions, but that PDP and the Progress File itself had been less widely adopted.

Early consideration of the inter-relationship between PDP and the transcript was helpfully represented by the University of Leeds as the ‘Taj Mahal model’ (Figure 1). This indicated who ‘owned’ each strand within the process:

- Students may, *privately*, claim an attainment in the right-hand column.
- This they may evidence in the middle column, through a *shared* process: at its heart it is ‘owned’ by the student, but it is managed through participating in structured and supported processes developed by (in this case) the university department and conforming to institutional good practice.
- Assessed elements may then be included in the left-hand, transcript column, which is a *public* document, ‘owned’ by the university.

In this sense, PDP can be seen as an institutionally supported bridge between private processes and public outcomes.

Figure 1: The Taj Mahal model. Source: Jackson et al. (n.d.)



This point needs, however, to be broken down further:

- In addition to supporting learning, PDP can also be framed to support career development: indeed, the definition cited at the beginning of this section explicitly mentions this.
- In both cases, the process is seen as being owned by the individual, but mediating processes can be provided by higher education institutions to support the individual, in the form of curriculum provision, learning/tutoring

support and career guidance. Moves toward the embedding of practice within the curriculum, the assessment of portfolio materials and the advent of e-pdp and e-portfolio have all further mediated this notion of individual ownership.²

- Similarly, in the case of both learning and career development, the processes may result in outcomes in the public domain. These include:
 - Outcomes for self-presentation purposes, in the form of learning portfolios and curricula vitae respectively³.
 - (In the case of formal learning) the public outcome of the transcript.

The emerging model is outlined in Table I.

Table I: A model for framing PDP strategies

<i>Private process</i>	Learning	Career development
<i>Mediated process</i>	Learning support	Career guidance
<i>Self-managed public outcome</i>	Learning portfolio	Curriculum vitae
<i>Accredited public outcome</i>	Transcript ⁴	

PDP can thus be conceived as bridging:

- Two frames of reference: learning; career.
- Two levels of action: processes; outcomes.
- Two processes: private; mediated.
- Two outcomes: self-managed; (in the case of learning) accredited.

2 As Charlesworth & Home (2004, p.3) have noted in respect of provision delivered or supported electronically: 'In practice, particularly with regard to ePortfolios run within the formal taught education sector ... it is likely to be counterproductive to attempt to operate on the basis of "ownership rights". Indeed, when ePortfolio advocates talk of learners "owning their ePortfolio", they rarely, if ever, mean to base that "ownership" on the legal practicalities – it is rather a rhetorical tool (mis)used to emphasise the centrality of the learner's own experiences to the PDP/ePortfolio process – the learner more accurately has some control over the use of or access to, or has legally exercisable rights over or in, the data in the system. A more appropriate and effective way of looking at the position, in terms of the formal taught education sector, might be to regard the institution's relationship to the data in an ePortfolio as one of "stewardship", where "stewardship" is defined as "the assumption of responsibility for the proper management of learner data".'

3 These can be further viewed as a repository: an evidence bank of information that applicants may draw upon in presenting themselves through the application processes set by employers, often online.

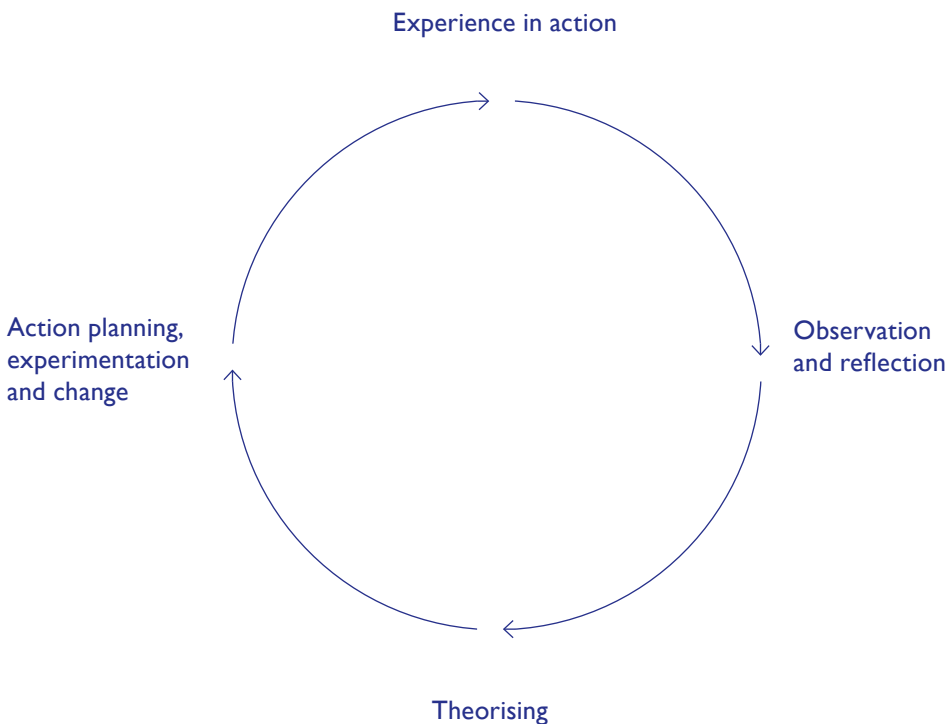
4 At the time of writing, this seems likely to be subsumed into the development of the Higher Education Assessment Record (HEAR). The HEAR should provide stronger opportunities for institutions to recognise outcomes and experiences from non-formal learning, which have been cited as being of particular interest to graduate employers, so potentially linking it more closely to the career frame.

Theoretical bases

These two frames of reference are also reflected in the theoretical bases on which PDP draws.

These bases include learning theories. Particularly influential has been the experiential learning cycle developed by Lewin (1951) and Kolb (1984), which views effective learning as occurring in a four-stage cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Figure 2). PDP strongly supports the 'reflective observation' stage of this cycle.

Figure 2: The experiential learning cycle. Source: Kolb (1984)



More broadly relevant is the self-regulation theory of learning developed by Zimmerman (2000). This emphasises the self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills: 'Learning is viewed as an activity that students do for themselves in a proactive way rather than as a covert event that happens to them in reaction to teaching. Self-regulation refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are oriented to attaining goals' (Zimmerman, 2000, quoted in Zimmerman, 2002). The theory stresses the importance in good learning of reflective self-assessment and self-evaluation, and of metacognition (the

awareness of and knowledge about one's own thinking). Zimmerman relates such proactive approaches not only to success in current learning, but also to optimistic views of the future and to lifelong learning. Schön (1983) similarly has indicated how reflection-in-action is the key to successful professional practice.

Alongside this, the theoretical basis for PDP can be extended to cover the broader area of personal development – which also covers the career frame – through theories of reflexive identity formation. Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) have argued that in the flux of late-modern or post-modern society, reflexivity is linked to the constant need to construct and reinvent the self. This analysis has been supported by a variety of constructionist/constructivist theories of identity formation (e.g. Gergen, 1999). These have had a growing influence in the field of career development (Savickas, 2004), encouraging people to identify constructs and themes within their career narratives and to use these as a basis for future action. PDP can support such processes.

Cross-sectoral context

PDP is not confined to higher education. The Progress File and the processes of planning and managing one's own learning, which it was designed to support, were also introduced in English schools and colleges (Hall & Powney, 2003), many of which maintain practices of these kinds. In Wales, the Careers Wales Online⁵ website, developed as a comprehensive 'one-stop shop' for careers information and guidance, includes an e-Progress File based heavily on the original Progress File materials. In Scotland, Progress File materials are available as a series of downloadable Word documents from the website of the Assessment is for Learning initiative, and work has been undertaken in Personal Learning Plans.⁶

More broadly, moves towards the 'personalising' of learning⁷ 'to enable individuals to maximise their potential through the personalisation of their learning and development' remain highly significant in policy terms (e.g. DCSF, 2007). The *2020 Vision* report of the Gilbert Review (Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group, 2006) emphasises personalising as 'taking a highly structured and responsive approach to each child's and young person's learning, in order that all are able to progress, achieve and participate' (p.6), thereby

5 Available at: www.careerswales.com (accessed 19 September 2008).

6 See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/09/19946/42931 (accessed 19 September 2008) for an evaluation of pilot practice.

7 Personalising offers a more limited and perhaps realistic vision, and explicitly retains the social context for learning alongside the developing individual in learning. For e-portfolio purposes, personalisation also refers to a set of services provided to the learner that can be configured by the learner, sometimes with support, to their personal circumstances. It further emphasises the learner as an active agent in this process.

linking purposes of social justice and moral purpose with raising attainment, particularly among low-attaining pupils.⁸

Additional purposes for Progress-File-style practice highlighted by personalisation are those concerned with learning and transition (or, more specifically in the emerging curriculum structures, progression).⁹ Within a more differentiated and individualised 14-19 curriculum model (with up to 15 diploma 'lines of learning' at three levels planned by 2013), and moves to raise the age of compulsory participation in formal education or training to 18, there are a range of issues associated with how learning will be monitored, supported and integrated. As the Gilbert Review further noted, this requires 'the learner's full involvement in planning, monitoring and evaluating his or her learning'. Such involvement is likely to require, in turn, the development of explicit skills of reflection and analysis.

All of this suggests that students entering higher education will increasingly be familiar with such processes, particularly when delivered electronically. Also of relevance here is exploratory work to allow e-portfolio presentations to be made as part of the UCAS process.¹⁰

In addition, many professional bodies view PDP processes as an essential support for the reflective practitioner and therefore as an important part of continuing professional development (CPD) provision. Employers, too, commonly build elements of PDP into development review and appraisal systems. Accordingly, PDP processes in higher education can be seen as preparing students for institutional processes that they may be required to engage with in their subsequent careers.

More fundamentally, however, PDP processes in higher education should enable students to be able to manage such processes for themselves. This is seen as important in a range of contexts, both where supporting scaffolding is strong (e.g. law)¹¹ and where it is weak (e.g. art, design and media).¹² It can thus support them both in their lifelong learning and in their career development.

8 The Gilbert Review explicitly highlights the importance of 'strategies that enable pupils to see clearly how they are progressing, such as setting and reviewing individual targets in lessons, drawing attention to small steps in learning, and frequent task-based feedback', the latter being strongly linked to a major focus upon assessment for learning and further development (pp.14ff). In addition, the Review places a key emphasis upon processes often associated with Progress File construction, most explicitly in respect of: (a) a more explicit focus upon 'learning how to learn' within the curriculum; (b) regular 'learning conversations' with teachers, so that pupils get into the habit of thinking about their learning and how to make progress; and (c) the allocation of a 'learning guide' – a teacher or classroom assistant to monitor their progress – for all pupils.

9 For example, one of the five key learner outcomes of the e-strategy is 'greater choice and opportunity', and one of the five key system outcomes is 'much better information to support transition'.

10 See: www.portisheadproject.org/ (accessed 7 October 2008).

11 For example, legal education (see: www.ukcle.ac.uk/research/projects/eportfolios.html accessed 19 September 2008).

12 See, for example: www.adm.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/adm-hea-projects/eportfolios-in-art-design-and-media-enhancing-learner-skills-and-employability (accessed 19 September 2008).

The logic of such cross-sectoral transfer is reflected in the growing interest in the interoperability between e-portfolios across a wide range of contexts. It is government policy for all learners to have a personal online space with the capacity to support an e-portfolio that will build a record of achievement throughout their lifelong learning (DfES, 2005). If such e-portfolios are in any significant sense to be owned by or to travel with the learner, it is essential that they be transferable across different institutions and different sectors (JISC, 2006).

Employability

As noted earlier, PDP can be approached both within a learning and a career frame.

In the policy statements relating to PDP in higher education, there has been a tendency to focus mainly on the learning frame. Thus the QAA (2001) *Guidelines* give as the reason for introducing Progress Files, including PDP:

'The progress file is an important element of the new policy framework being created to help make the outcomes or results of learning in higher education more explicit. In doing so, it is argued, the quality of learning will be improved (because students are clearer about what is expected of them and what they, in turn, might expect), and the basis for academic standards will be clearer.'

The *Guidelines* then went on to place this within the broader context of lifelong learning, including helping individuals to 'plan for their own personal, educational and career development'. However, it was the learning frame that was most fully emphasised (with explicit links to programme specifications, subject benchmarking and qualifications frameworks).

This is also the case in two related agendas to which PDP has more recently become linked:

- The growing policy concern with personalisation of learning, which began as an issue in schools (as noted earlier) but is also seen as an issue for HE, not least in the context of employer and employee engagement (Ward & Richardson, 2007).
- The concern with the limitations of the current honours degree classification. The Burgess Steering Group Report emphasised how this can 'distract and detract from information that conveys a fuller understanding of the skills and knowledge that the student has acquired' (Universities UK, 2007, p.32).

Much the same has been true in the literature addressed to higher education practitioners. Thus a *Guide for Busy Academics* (Higher Education Academy, 2005) emphasises the importance of enabling students to:

- Make links and gain a (holistic) overview of their studies within a modular environment.
- Reflect critically.
- Become more independent.
- Adopt a more proactive stance in their academic study, extra-curricular pursuits and career planning.
- Capitalise on their learning in a variety of contexts.

Only in the fourth of these is there an explicit reference to the career frame.¹³

The last few years have, however, seen increasing concern in higher education with paying more explicit attention to enhancing students' employability. Such attention serves a number of important purposes (Watts, 2006):

- It responds to the motivations of many students for attending higher education.
- It responds to policy concern to maximise the economic and social yield from public investment in higher education.
- Far from undermining wider academic values, it can reinforce such values:
 - By emphasising generic competences rather than direct subject relevance, it can help to resist creeping vocationalism with regard to course content and legitimise the continuing value of traditional academic disciplines.
 - Because the generic competences valued by employers are developed largely through active teaching and learning processes, a constructive alliance can be forged between the employability agenda and pedagogic reform.
 - Because these generic competences can also be developed through active extra-curricular activities, it can reaffirm the value of the wider student experience, including participation in student-organised activities.

The employability agenda has focused in particular on skills, variously framed as 'personal transferable skills', 'key skills', 'core skills', 'generic skills' and 'employability skills'. This focus has more recently been criticised, chiefly on the grounds that 'skills' is too limited a concept to embrace what employability comprises (Bennett *et al.*, 2000; Knight & Yorke, 2003; 2004). An alternative formulation that has been more widely accepted has been the USEM model

¹³ Although all are arguably relevant to employability in the sense that employers claim to value these capabilities, not least by the attention they pay to them in their selection criteria.

(Knight & Yorke, 2004), in which employability is viewed as being influenced by four broad and inter-related components:

- Understanding (viewed as being broader and deeper than ‘knowledge’).
- Skills (or, preferably, ‘skilful practice’, which includes the deployment of skills).
- Efficacy beliefs (including students’ views of themselves and personal qualities).
- Metacognition (including students’ self-awareness regarding, and capacity to reflect on, their learning).

This conceptualisation and the explicit concern to connect support for learning and enhanced employability that marked out the ESECT approach, both emphasise employability as a process rather than a state, and accord a potentially strong role for PDP in relation to it. Thus Knight & Yorke (2004, p.9) argue for the importance of:

- ‘Knowing’ students – they need to know what they are supposed to be learning, how their achievements will be judged and for what purposes.
- Students developing ways of representing (complex) achievements to employers and graduate schools.

PDP is directly relevant to employability in at least three respects:

- It helps students to translate learning experiences into the language of employability.
- It develops skills (reflection, recording, action planning) that can help students to sustain their employability.
- It develops a bank of evidence that students can draw from in presenting themselves to future employers.

Attending to employability in this way effectively extends the learning frame for PDP to embrace significant elements of the career frame. This is particularly the case if the concern is not just with the student’s *immediate* employability – their work readiness, and ability to secure a ‘graduate job’ – but with their *sustainable* employability: the wider range of attributes requires to be successful within jobs and to manage their career development in ways that will sustain their employability throughout their working lives (Watts, 2006).

These points relate to PDP in generic terms. There are also, however, a number of specific respects in which concerns related to employability can be built into the design of PDP processes. These include:

- *Consultative*: involving employers¹⁴ in the design of PDP processes.
- *Contextual*: ensuring that the design of PDP processes includes adequate

14 Or the university careers service or former students, used as proxies for employers.

coverage for work placements or other workplace activities.

- *Anticipatory*: ensuring that, where higher education programmes are linked to specific professions, the design of PDP processes pays attention to links with professional practice.

In turn, the 'anticipatory' category can be broken down into:

- *Preparatory*, through a focus upon PDP-style materials to link with later professional practice.
- *Supportive*, through the use of employer/CPD resources to legitimise the PDP process and catalyse student engagement with it.

Institutional strategies

Institutional PDP strategies tend to be characterised by a number of features (Ward, 2006):

- Aan agreed framework, often based upon minimum standards/entitlements.
- A rationale, aligned to a statement of beliefs/values.
- Flexibility within the framework, recognising that one size will not fit all programmes.
- Opportunities to develop and change practice, on the basis of evaluation.
- Links to other areas of institutional policy.

Such strategies can vary in a number of respects:

- Strong institution-wide framework; weak institution-wide framework; total devolution to teaching departments.
- Compulsory for all students; voluntary.
- Curriculum-based; extra-curriculum oriented.
- Stand-alone (in paper-based or electronic forms); supported by tutors; supported by others.
- Assessed for credits; assessed for separate award; not assessed.
- Learning-oriented; employability-oriented.

Increasingly, technology is being used to support PDP processes. In particular, many institutions now use e-portfolios or other electronic support tools (Strivens, 2007). This can enable institutions to claim access for all students to some minimal unsupported provision. Alternatively, it can significantly enhance the quality of more substantial provision. It can also encourage a stronger institution-wide framework, although still permitting significant customisation by teaching departments.

In relation to the curriculum, Atlay (2006) distinguished five models of curriculum delivery. We have relabelled¹⁵ his original categories here, as follows:

- *Discrete*: where PDP is conceived as additional to, and separate from, the curriculum. Here students tend to be encouraged to engage in PDP, with perhaps some support from tutors, but whether and how they do so is left largely to them.
- *Linked*: where PDP is viewed as being parallel to, but also having explicit links to, the curriculum. These may include personal logs and diaries, or compulsory sessions as part of personal tutoring or skills weeks.
- *Embedded*: where PDP is embedded in specific modules, which provide the main support for PDP; they may also serve to link with material covered in other modules.
- *Integrated*: a whole-curriculum approach where all or most modules involve activities that are aligned with PDP processes. In this model, every module tutor has a responsibility for supporting PDP.
- *Extended*: where PDP processes are included in the curriculum, but also serve explicitly to integrate learning activities outside the curriculum. These may include work placements¹⁶ or other extra-curricular activities.

All of these can be employability-oriented. There may, however, be a tendency for embedded and integrated approaches to be more narrowly learning-oriented, particularly in non-vocational curriculum areas.

There are a number of sources of resistance to PDP. Some are from students who do not see the point of it, particularly if they take an instrumental approach to their studies and PDP offers no credit in these terms. Some are from academic staff¹⁷, who may resist involvement in PDP programmes on a number of grounds:

- The time it consumes.
- That it is not part of their academic role.
- Their general suspicion of educational theories and of extra demands stemming from them.
- Objections on theoretical grounds, based, for example, on concerns about the ideological purposes PDP is seen to serve (e.g. Clegg, 2004).¹⁸

15 Atlay's original labels were, respectively: additional; integrated; modular; embedded; curriculum plus. In this revision (see pp20–5) he follows the categorisation adopted here, using 'embedding' to indicate embedding in an element of the curriculum and 'integration' to indicate the embedding of practice across all areas.

16 Or, in the case of work-based students who are studying part-time or studying full-time (as can be the case with foundation degree programmes), their ongoing experiences of work.

17 Practitioners have often reported that the key to student engagement is staff engagement. For a discussion of staff development strategies to address this, see Section 2 (p.28).

18 This is related, for instance, to an important debate about whether PDP should be concerned with students' ethics and values (Grant, 2006) or whether this permits and encourages excessive intrusion into private spaces (Clegg, 2004).

Where PDP is embedded or integrated into the curriculum, many of these problems may be reduced, and support for the provision can be included within existing units of resource.

Conclusion

PDP is an integral part of strategies designed to enhance students' employability. Conversely, the employability agenda within higher education potentially extends the learning frame for PDP practice to cover a wider career frame. This strengthens the contribution that PDP can make to students' lifelong learning and lifelong career development.

2. Integrating PDP practice in the curriculum

Mark Atlay

Introduction

This section examines some of the different ways in which PDP processes have been structured and supported, and the issues that need to be considered when thinking about introducing PDP into the curriculum whether at the macro (programme) or micro (module¹⁹) level. Such developments can enable PDP to become a core feature of the design of the curriculum – although, as we will explore later in the section, there are a range of curriculum models that have emerged as the result of practice in different institutions and contexts, and reflect different degrees of integration. Given the focus of this publication, the emphasis is on how PDP might be developed within the curriculum in order to support graduate employability.

Why integrate?

The original guidelines developed to support the implementation of the HE Progress File (QAA, 2001²⁰) do not make it a requirement that PDP is integrated with the curriculum: only that students are provided with opportunities for PDP and guidance to support the process. The following points have been put forward in support of adopting a more integrated approach:

- *It supports learning:* PDP prepares students for academic study by emphasising learning processes and skills – therefore it should be an integral part of the curriculum.
- *All students can benefit from PDP:* as academic staff we want all of our students to become ‘more effective, independent and confident self-directed learners’ – integration ensures they all have this opportunity.
- *It supports core curriculum activities:* PDP can provide an effective means of supporting and integrating other elements of some curricula, such as reflective practice, enquiry-based learning and e-portfolios.
- *A common and coherent student experience:* integration holds out the prospect that all students will have experienced similar opportunities, aiding teaching

19 The term ‘module’ is used here to denote a sub-element within a programme of study.

20 As noted in Section 1, the PDP aspects of these *Guidelines* are themselves currently under revision.

and student management.

- *More effective use of resources*: an additional optional process will waste scarce resources (human, written, electronic, etc).
- *Preparation for life beyond university*: PDP processes are widely used in 'professional' life as part of continuing professional development (CPD), and all students need to be prepared for this as well as for life beyond university.
- *Belief*: integration sends a clear message to all those involved (students and staff) that PDP is valued.

Furthermore, integrating PDP can help to support aspects of employability such as work experience (structured or unstructured) and volunteering by providing a process that encourages students to make the link between these experiences and their learning and development.

Where to start?

Whatever the drivers for adopting a more integrated approach, there are two key questions that need to be considered:

- What do I need to get out of linking PDP and the curriculum?
- (Perhaps more importantly) what do my students need to get out of linking PDP and the curriculum?

Three strands to what PDP might deliver can be distinguished and can be used to define more precisely the rationale for integration:

- Strand 1*: PDP is about students' academic learning.
- Strand 2*: PDP is about students' personal development.
- Strand 3*: PDP is about careers and employability.²¹

The different emphasis each of these strands places on aspects of the curriculum is given in Table 2. The term 'emphasis' is important here: as noted in Section 1, the strands are not intended to be mutually exclusive and there is clear overlap between them. For example, a well-designed and implemented academic curriculum that focuses on subject knowledge and understanding, and where PDP supports the development of higher-order cognitive skills, will also support the personal development and employability of students.

21 Both strands 1 and 2 also support employability, although more indirectly.

Table 2: Emphasis given to different characteristics by the three PDP strands ²²

Characteristic	Emphasis is on:		
	Academic strand	Personal strand	Employability strand
Source of experience	Curriculum	Extra-curricular activities	Work experience
Enabling skills and attitudes	Academic skills (essay writing, exam technique etc) and subject-specific skills	Self-management and motivation	Employability skills (team work, presentational and interviewing skills, commercial awareness, etc.)
Higher-order skills	Creativity, problem solving, analysis, critical reflection etc.	Metacognition and self-regulatory skills	Career management skills
Connectivity	Theory and the real-world, and can make connections across modules/levels	Planning route through module choice, balancing wider commitments and study, career choice etc.	Curriculum and real-world 'professional' practice.
Ethical emphasis	Academic conventions and codes of practice	Personal ethics and values	Professional codes
Preparation for ...	Further study/ research	Life	Employment
Most likely to emphasise	PDP and the supportive/anticipatory use of materials	PDP as a process	The context within which PDP is undertaken

The emphasis that you will want to place on PDP will be dependent on your views about the relationship between your curriculum and PDP (an audit tool is provided in the appendix to this section to assist with auditing the curriculum against the above dimensions) and other factors such as:

- Institutional and/or departmental strategies and policies on teaching and learning, employability, etc.
- The nature of the subject discipline.
- Whether there are curriculum elements such as work experience, placements, etc. that need to be included.

²² We include this table again at the end of the section for anyone who might want to copy and use it as part of an auditing and reviewing activity.

- The role of personal tutoring systems in relation to the curriculum.
- Professional body requirements or expectations.
- The typical background of your students (experience, prior educational experience and attainment, ethnicity, self-efficacy, etc).
- The availability of any e-portfolio system or other support mechanism.
- The views of colleagues.
- Your own views on the value of PDP processes in supporting and sustaining student development.

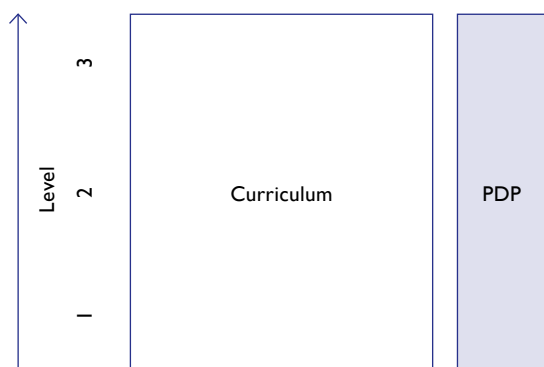
Curriculum models

Once the aims of PDP have been identified, the next question is to consider how PDP can be incorporated into the curriculum and whether to work with the existing curriculum structure (i.e. adopting an evolutionary approach to curriculum development) or opt for a radical redesign (a revolutionary approach). This section gives some indication of the broad strategies that have been adopted in integrating PDP into the curriculum. The approaches are not mutually exclusive, and mixed or intermediate modes are possible: the intention here is to give a flavour of possible curriculum models.

Macro models

The first strategy that can be adopted is to view PDP as an additional and *discrete* part of the student experience. Here students may be provided with opportunities to engage in PDP activities, and encouraged to undertake them, but these activities are optional and additional to the curriculum, and students are left to their own, with minimal support, to decide whether they should engage. This model is represented in Figure 3, and an illustration of such provision is provided in case study A (pp. 50–1).

Figure 3: The discrete model



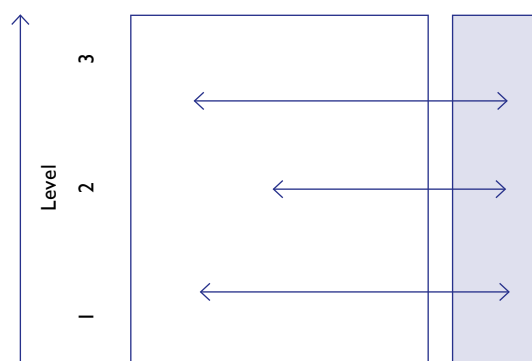
The shaded PDP element runs parallel to the curriculum, but there is limited integration between the two. Students maintain their own portfolio, deciding what to include and undertaking their own analyses and reflections. The institution provides structure, perhaps in the nature of a Progress File (either paper-based or electronic), and support via paper-based materials and optional discussions with tutors or PDP advisers.

Examples of the application of this model include:

- In a positive and proactive way through skills awards, community champions and other initiatives, with encouragement for students to become involved often with support from course teams, the Students' Union, etc.
- Programmes with separate 'skills' checklists providing an opportunity for reflection and the gathering of evidence of PDP as students progress with their studies. The PDP strand here is often similar to an augmented CV, with students providing evidence of their attainment of the required skills and attributes through linking this to evidence drawn from their studies or other activities.
- Where PDP is provided by the institutional virtual learning environment (VLE) or via an e-portfolio as an optional element with no (or limited) links to the curriculum.

The second strategy is to run PDP in parallel with the curriculum but *linked* to it, so that there is an explicit and supported relationship between the two. The linkages may only occur at certain points (related to activities in certain modules) or throughout the course. In this model, the PDP element and the curriculum are distinct (see Figure 4a).

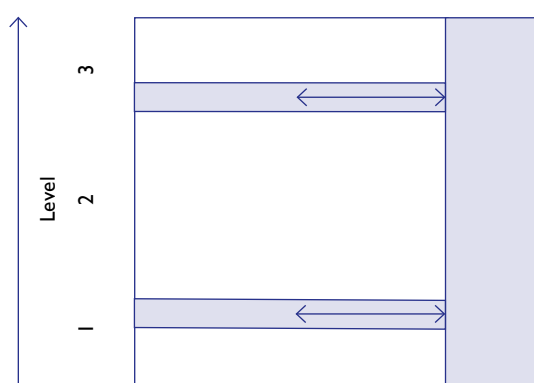
Figure 4a: A linked model



Students are given activities as part of the course that emphasise PDP and link to a Progress File or portfolio that may be either an optional or compulsory part of the curriculum. Examples might include diagnostic assessments, reflections on work experience, and personal logs and diaries.

An alternative strategy is to embed at certain stages activities that have a PDP approach and encourage students to reflect on their progress and development, but are not necessarily linked to any one module or unit (see Figure 4b).

Figure 4b: An alternative linked model



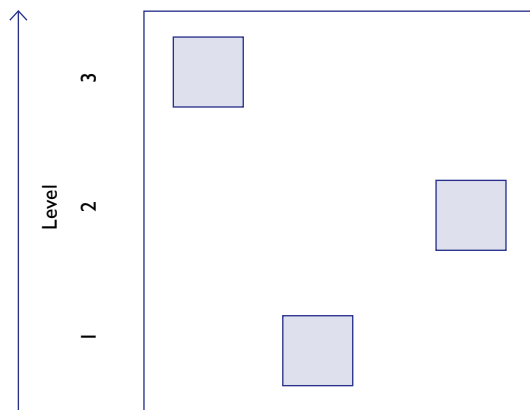
Examples of the linked model in action include:

- The use of induction to introduce PDP and portfolios.
- Compulsory sessions as part of personal tutoring where tutors meet students on a regular basis and help them explore the learning arising from their studies.
- Skills weeks and other optional or compulsory activities designed to take a PDP approach.
- Modules specifically aimed at work experience, placement preparation or extra-curricular activities.
- An additional but compulsory (zero-weighted) approach in which students must complete a portfolio, but it does not count towards their final award or their degree classification.

Examples of linked relationships are provided in case studies B–D (pp. 52–7). It should be noted that just because such activities are provided does not necessarily make them ‘PDP’. To justify their use of this term, they need to be structured and supported and set within a wider context.

The third strategy is to *embed* PDP in certain modules. These modules provide the main support for PDP and may serve to link with material studied in other modules. They will also link to the student's Progress File. Such modules may have a skills and/or a subject focus as well as emphasising PDP processes. There may be any number of such modules within the curriculum (depending on the balance, module size, etc), but they tend to be more likely at HE level 1, with students engaging more independently in PDP at higher levels. A model with such a module at each level is represented in Figure 5. Here the module tutors tend to take primary responsibility for PDP development and support.

Figure 5: The embedded modular model



Examples of the embedded modular model include:

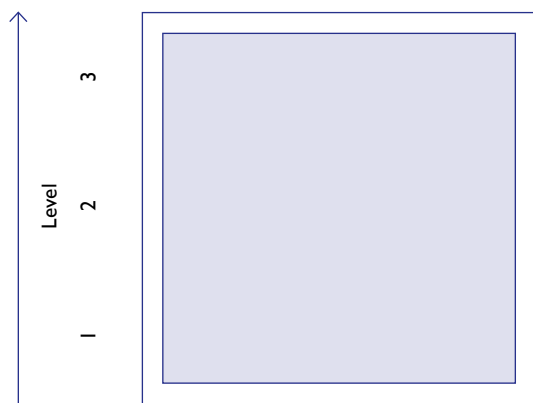
- Modules in preparation for/applying for/supporting placements.
- Long, thin modules supporting students' development across the curriculum.
- 'Capstone' modules at the end to capture and verify activities.
- Optional careers modules.
- Volunteering modules.

This model appears to be the dominant curriculum model in many HEIs. Several examples of this approach are provided in case studies E–K (pp. 58–79).

The fourth strategy can be viewed as a whole-curriculum approach where most modules involve activities that are aligned with PDP processes, so that PDP is fully *integrated* throughout the curriculum. In such a model, reflective approaches underpin the delivery of the curriculum, and the students' Progress File or personal development record/e-portfolio becomes a record of their curriculum activities

and personal development. An example of this model is represented in Figure 6a, within which each module emphasises PDP processes. In this model, PDP and the curriculum are inextricably linked, and every module tutor has a responsibility for supporting PDP.

Figure 6a: The integrated model

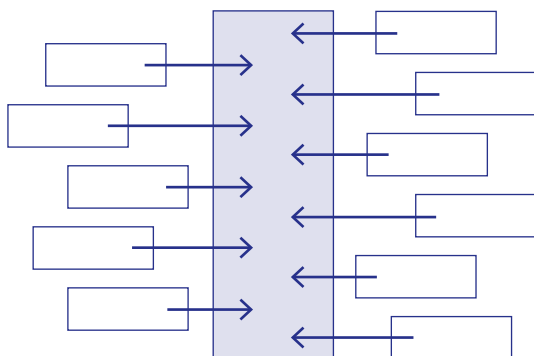


Problem-based curricula where PDP processes are used to explore scenarios particularly lend themselves to this type of approach, as may curricula that are seeking to address vocational issues.

In an alternative configuration of this model (Figure 6b), the PDP element can provide the spine that carries the curriculum, serving to integrate and contextualise what is covered in other parts of the programme and students' development within it. Here PDP is seen not as an adjunct to the curriculum, but as the core component providing coherence to each student's studies. It has a particular value in programmes that have a high degree of flexibility and student choice or negotiation. Some foundation degrees have adopted this type of approach²³, and it may prove valuable as universities respond to policies promoting greater demand-led provision, as signalled by the Leitch report (HM Treasury, 2006).

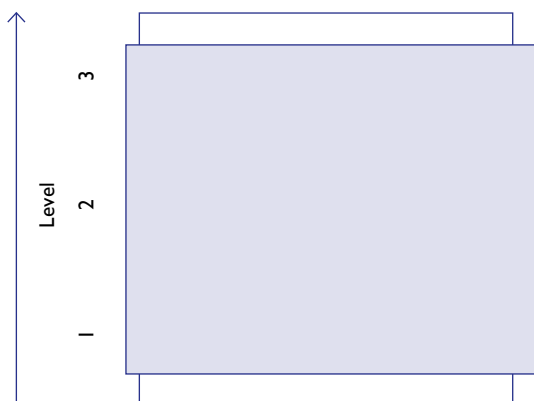
23 See, for example: www.port.ac.uk/departments/studentssupport/foundationdirect (accessed 12 September 2008).

Figure 6b: The integrated spine model



The final model is the *extended* model, where PDP processes are embedded in the curriculum, but also serve consciously to integrate activities that occur outside it. Such a model is most often found where students are working in an area related to the topic they are studying. Here PDP consciously serves to provide the link between the academic curriculum and these wider experiences. This is represented in Figure 7. The model is typically found in professional areas such as social work and nursing, but can also be adapted to other areas and to less formal learning contexts, as case studies L–O demonstrate (see pp80–9 this text).

Figure 7: The extended model



Advantages and disadvantages of the macro models

The possible advantages and disadvantages of these various models are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Advantages and disadvantages of different models of embedding

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Discrete	Simple, places onus on the student, minimal disruption to the existing curriculum, less resource required.	Not all students will engage, students' experience will vary; resource may be wasted.
Linked	Student experience is more controlled, some (but minimal) disruption to the curriculum and can build on existing activities such as induction and tutoring	Students may still choose not to engage and hence impact on student learning and employability for those most likely to gain may be minimal
Embedded modular	All students will experience PDP at some stage. PDP can be controlled and built upon.	Experience may be fragmented, PDP modules may be seen by staff and students as being of low value. Only those teaching the modules know what PDP is about.
Integrated	Becomes part of student and staff thinking in all modules and hence an approach to work and study; PDP helps provide coherence to students' studies	Difficult to get all staff to implement, maybe become so embedded as to be invisible.
Extended	Becomes a holistic way of working, draws in work and life experience.	Activities beyond the curriculum are varied and uncontrollable; learning will be as well (some may see this as a problem – particularly those who like to have clear outcomes).

While examples of the different models can be found in a variety of different contexts, there is a tendency for curricula that emphasise the academic strand to adopt a structure more towards the 'discrete' end of the spectrum (because it involves minimum interruption to existing structures, and requires less understanding of PDP processes by all staff delivering and supporting the curriculum). In areas where students need high levels of support for their learning, the 'embedded modular' model often predominates. Vocational curricula are more likely to be towards the 'integrated' and 'extended' end, because these models support curricula where students have real or simulated work experiences on which to draw.

Micro models

When consciously integrating PDP into the curriculum at the module level, there are a number of issues that need to be considered:

- How the module builds on previous PDP activities – what will the students' expectations be? Will PDP need explaining or will the students already have a good grasp?²⁴
- How the module relates to other activities being undertaken at the time.
- The approach being taken to PDP in the programme as a whole.

A range of different approaches to incorporating PDP into modules can be identified that broadly mirror those outlined above at the macro level. However, if an integrated or extended model is adopted at the programme level, then there is at least an expectation that any module will address PDP issues in a way consonant with that for the programme as a whole.

The next stage is to consider what you want the students to gain from PDP. The audit tool given in the appendix may prove helpful here, but it is important to have your own views about the role of PDP in relation to your students and your curriculum.

Developing deep and meaningful reflective skills is important in underpinning PDP, and two dimensions to this can be identified. The first emphasises *introspection* and the students' ability to reflect on and internalise their personal aims, skills, abilities etc. This reflective element is well documented elsewhere.²⁵ The second emphasises *extrospection* and the ability to make connections between what one is doing now and what one knows, what one has done before or what one has seen others do, and potentially what one might do in the future. Within the curriculum, this means helping students make the links with wider experiences such as employment, volunteering, sports etc and between elements of the curriculum – what they are studying in this module and concurrent or prior learning. Students are often poor at making such connections.

The typical approaches used to support PDP processes include diagnostic assessments and reflective activities such as logs, diaries, blogs and portfolios (see p43 for other examples). However, whatever the means of curriculum delivery (lectures, seminars, tutorials, laboratory work, work experience, e-learning, etc.), activity (case-studies, simulations, critical incident analysis, etc.) or assessment (diagnostic, formative or summative), there is always the possibility of building in PDP by providing a structured activity (and time) for students to consider:

24 There may be a further issue here when students build up different programmes from a menu of modules, so that the connection between PDP and programme is varied.

25 See, for example: www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/id69_guide_for_busy_academics_no4_moon (accessed 12 September 2008).

<i>Before</i>	Planning – what am I going to do, what is the aim of this activity, how does this relate to other things I have done or know about, what am I likely to learn from this?
<i>During</i>	Thoughts and feelings while undertaking activities – while it is often difficult to capture ideas, students can be encouraged to think about these and, perhaps, jot down thoughts for later review.
<i>After</i>	Immediate impressions – what did I do, what happened, what worked or did not work, how did I feel about it?
<i>Later</i>	Considered reflection – what did I learn, how does this relate to academic learning, employment and future activities? Returning to review initial thoughts and experiences helps the embedding of deep learning.

PDP, employability and staff development

Whatever model is adopted to support PDP and employability, it will achieve only limited success unless those teaching and supporting the curriculum understand what the aims are and their role in delivering it. You cannot influence the students if you cannot influence the staff.

Staff resistance can be high, with PDP being seen as a transient ‘fad’ and another imposition that takes time and distracts students from studying their subject. So what strategies can be adopted to help staff gain an understanding of what is intended? This will very much depend on the culture in which you operate and the ‘levers’ you have at your disposal, but suggestions include the following:

- Work in relation to the current state of development (i.e. from where course teams and individuals currently are), since much PDP may already be present in the curriculum: it may be just a case of making it explicit and making connections.
- Call it something other than PDP – it is not the name that matters but the process. This allows for a clear acknowledgement that different terms and rationales might resonate with different subjects of study, and for staff teams to frame the terminology and its meaning in a context that they understand can lead to greater local ownership.
- Link it where possible to professional standards and practices – this gives it some additional external authority.
- Work with staff at both the team and individual levels to ensure the clarity of the approach and consistency of implementation.
- Write it into the quality assurance process and procedures so that it becomes part of the fabric of the institution.
- Make sure that it has the support of senior managers and those key individuals

- who influence staff opinion.
- Do not expect staff to immediately embrace the notion – give them time and space to work with it.
- Evaluate the impact, share good practice and further develop the model.

Good curriculum design assists effective teaching and student learning. The considered use of PDP processes can help to integrate student development and employability, and to embed effective, deep and meaningful learning throughout the student's programme of study.

Appendix: Three steps to auditing and reviewing (your own) practice

Emphasis given to different characteristics by the three PDP strands:

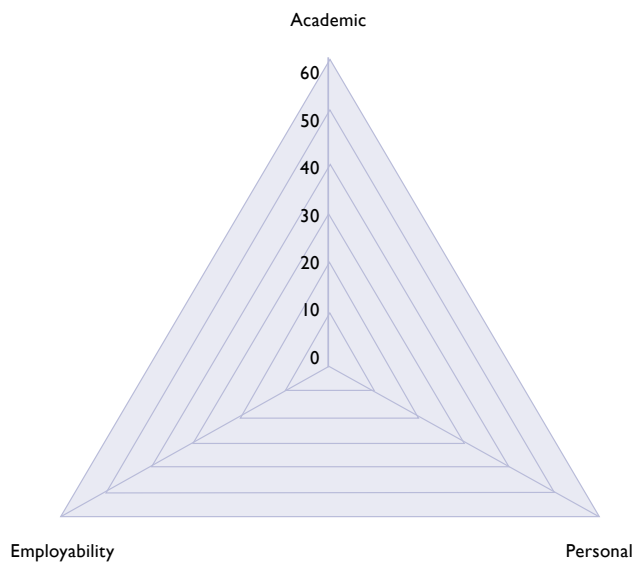
Characteristic	Emphasis is on:		
	Academic strand	Personal strand	Employability strand
Source of experience	Curriculum	Extra-curricular activities	Work experience
Enabling skills and attitudes	Academic skills (essay writing, exam technique etc.) and subject-specific skills	Self-management and motivation	Employability skills (team work, presentational and interviewing skills, commercial awareness, etc.)
Higher-order skills	Creativity, problem solving, analysis, critical reflection etc.	Metacognition and self-regulatory skills	Career management skills
Connectivity	Theory and the real-world, and can make connections across modules/levels	Planning route through module choice, balancing wider commitments and study, career choice etc.	Curriculum and real-world 'professional' practice.
Ethical emphasis	Academic conventions and codes of practice	Personal ethics and values	Professional codes
Preparation for ...	Further study/research	Life	Employment
Most likely to emphasise	PDP and the supportive/anticipatory use of materials	PDP as a process	The context within which PDP is undertaken

The set of characteristics identified in this table can be used to audit the current (or intended) place of PDP with regard to the provider's view of the curriculum. The table provides an indicative tool that can be useful in helping programme teams consider what it is they are trying to achieve.

In order to do this, for each characteristic, distribute ten points across the three strands:

Characteristic	Academic	Personal	Employability	Total
Source of experience				10
Enabling skills and attitudes				10
Higher-order skills				10
Connectivity				10
Ethical emphasis				10
Preparation for ...				10
Total				60

Add up the scores for each strand to give an overall score. The curriculum can then be represented visually using a three-dimensional radar graph:



Is the overall balance between the three dimensions appropriate for:

- the curriculum?
- my students?

If the balance is not what you wish the curriculum to deliver, then go back to your original allocation of points and adjust one or more of the points to gain the correct balance. Then consider how this change of emphasis would need to be incorporated into the curriculum.

3. From the inside: supporting and assessing personal development

Janet Strivens

UK higher education institutions have typically accepted a role in complementing learners' formal education with more general personal development. Depending on institutional cultures and resources, this role may be interpreted in a limited way as providing reactive support when problems arise, or more extensively as aiming to help students to become more autonomous and self-directed and more able to choose, direct, manage and evaluate their learning throughout life. Personal tutoring systems formalise this support, but educational relationships formed within the institution often provide the most important source of support for students' personal development as well as their academic progress.

In the current context, pressure on resources has led to a reduction in both formal and informal support mechanisms.²⁶ This highlights the importance of personal development planning (PDP) as an attempt to systematise and guarantee the availability of such support. If PDP is regarded as an entitlement, and particularly linked in institutional thinking to issues of student employability (see Brennan & Shah, 2003), questions arise about the precise nature of what the system is trying to achieve, and how the support itself can be provided in ways that are effective, efficient and non-discriminatory.

So what is personal development?

'Personal development' is a term that means different things to different people. During 2005 the Centre for Recording Achievement carried out a consultation across the sector to assess progress towards the implementation of PDP (Ward *et al.*, 2005). This consultation confirmed that staff saw the PDP initiative as being essentially about supporting the development of the self-identity of the learner. But what is the 'self-identity' of the learner and how would we know it was developing? Is personal development a process or an outcome? Why does having a strong sense of personal identity seem to be such a desirable quality?

26 This is unsurprising given that Government funding per student halved in real terms and staff-student ratios in some institutions have more than doubled over the last 15 years. See G. Gibbs, 'Why assessment is changing' in C. Bryan & K. Clegg (eds.), *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education* (Routledge, 2006).

Similar questions were asked in a workshop called 'PDP: Back to Basics?' led by Jamie Thompson (University of Northumbria) at the 2005 CRA national residential seminar.²⁷ Participants shared their ideas about the meaning of personal development, and three key elements were identified in their discussions: self-awareness; capacity to change and adapt; and dialogue with and about the self.

Listening to such discussions among practitioners about what they are trying to achieve, it is possible to identify a range of characteristics we want for our students that would seem to be linked to the development of a sense of personal identity. We want our students to:

- Be able to make judgements about their skills and abilities that accurately reflect their performance as we assess it.
- See the relevance of such skills and abilities and be willing to invest effort in developing these skills further.
- Be confident in their ability to learn and to achieve desired goals, but tempered by a realistic self-knowledge that will not lead to disappointment and demoralisation.
- Be motivated to engage with problems and seek solutions rather than ignoring them, whether these are 'troublesome concepts' (Meyer & Land, 2005) in their academic course, difficulties in personal relationships or challenges in the workplace.
- Develop and espouse values that are consonant with society at large, some of which are exemplified in good academic practice, such as truth-seeking and respect for evidence, and others of which may best be acquired in work-based settings, such as tolerance of diversity and respect for the contributions of others to a common effort.
- Be able to work out what values are really important to them, pursue these personal values, recognise when they are under threat, and be prepared to stand by them.

This is an ambitious set of outcomes. They mix skills development, emotional awareness, attitudinal development, values clarification and a degree of moral education. They are also highly consonant with the ESECT definition of employability, elaborating some of the key terms in that definition. There is perhaps more stress on personal values than is usually found in lists of employability attributes. But employers know that we live in a rapidly changing world and that the organisations that adapt and thrive are those that have clear visions of what they are trying to achieve. Arguably, men and women with a strong sense of their

27 In a report on this workshop, Thompson noted the resonances between these discussions and the findings of the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) Project, which pointed to seven characteristics of 'robust' (lifelong) learners: orientation to growth, adaptation and change, capacity to make personal meaning from information, critical curiosity, strategic awareness, resilience and learning relationships.

own values (provided these are tempered with the societal values of reason and tolerance) can make more firmly-based commitments to the organisations they work for, and later provide the leadership those organisations will need.²⁸

Can personal development be taught?

An argument often used to dispute the place of PDP within higher education is that personal development is not something that can be taught, like a subject. Looking at the list of outcomes above, the more appropriate question seems to be whether we can set up the conditions within which they can be learned. Conventional higher education settings provide many contexts in which the generic skills of communication, teamwork, problem-solving, project management and so on can be practised and refined, and in Section 2 of this publication Mark Atlay has provided a range of ways in which PDP can be built structurally into (or alongside) the curriculum. In such curricular contexts, students can be given responsibility for tasks and teams, and receive feedback on their performance from multiple perspectives. These experiences will develop their skills, confidence and judgement, all important aspects of our holistic concept of personal development. We can also make use of employer materials for planning and recording, not least by building upon the pioneering work of Pauline Kneale at the University of Leeds.²⁹

What about developing self-knowledge? It is not at all clear that we know the best ways of developing students' abilities to think critically and make judgements within their subject. It is even less clear that having developed these abilities in relation to their subject, students can then apply them to themselves and their personal lives. We all form conceptions of ourselves, our likes and dislikes, our skills and personal qualities, from the ways we are aware of ourselves reacting to life's experiences. Unlike our developing subject-based concepts, however, these are rarely made explicit and compared with others' views of us in a systematic way. Also, developing conceptions about oneself almost inevitably involves feelings, as we are bound up in the experiences we are trying to make sense of.

What does good, sensitive pedagogic support to this process look like? Many of the possible techniques are familiar from other fields. A 'life coach' helps an individual think through personal goals and motivations to plan future actions. The concept of a mentor or 'critical friend' has wide currency, referring to someone who will help one 'debrief' an experience, with regard to standards of performance, actions taken and their consequences, and – crucially – the emotions experienced. There

28 This view of the importance of a clear vision and an understanding of organisational values is demonstrated particularly by some of the larger employers that are household names: see the Co-operative Group statement of principles at: www.co-operative.coop/en/corporate/sustainability/vandptor/ (accessed 12 September 2008) and the KPMG website at: www.kpmg.co.uk/about/csr/index.cfm (accessed 12 September 2008).

29 See: www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/courses/other/performance/pdpindex22_9_03.html (accessed 12 September 2008).

are also some popular tools, in the form of standardised tests that put together responses to questions about past or hypothetical experiences to give a predictive profile. Self-report and self-assessment are balanced by multiple perspectives on an experience from other participants.

These techniques should improve the learner's capacity to judge their own performance, and may also help them in analysing their personal values and goals. Both are important prerequisites for students to develop ways of representing their complex achievements to employers and graduate schools.

This still leaves us with the key issues of motivation and values. It is perhaps less easy to address these in conventional educational contexts. In a highly structured, modularised, credit-based and learning outcomes-driven system, there may be limited incentive for learners to seek out real challenges, and to move outside their 'comfort zone' in tackling new problems and developing new skills for their own sake, especially given their knowledge that they will be assessed only on the stated learning outcomes. The culture of academic departments may not provide fertile ground for conflicts of values and the presentation of significant moral and ethical issues for which there is no obvious institutional solution. We therefore need to turn to different, more naturalistic contexts, and to the use of PDP approaches within environments that provide rich opportunities for what we might term 'direct employability learning'.

Increasingly, students in higher education have the opportunity to learn from the workplace: on clinical placements, work-based learning modules, sandwich years and so on. Here the learning experiences by definition are not carefully selected and paced: on the contrary, the learning environment is rich but unstructured, sometimes chaotic. It depends on the learner noticing things both about the environment and about his or her own reactions, recognising them as significant in some way, analysing them, and comparing them with previously-formulated ideas and beliefs. The quality, depth and pace of learning are therefore hugely dependent on the learner's motivation and values, and not just on their prior skills and knowledge. Workplace supervisors and mentors are in the best position to make learners more aware of this and to encourage their curiosity, initiative and tenacity, but they cannot supply these qualities.

Can personal development be assessed?³⁰

What would count as evidence that the outcomes gathered together above under the heading of personal development had been achieved?

30 Although likely to be more tightly defined, the issue of assessment of student development in HE has some affinity – as noted in Section 1 (p4) – with processes of appraisal and continuing professional development beyond it.

In varying degrees, all the outcomes above need to be evidenced from both the learner's perspective (through self-report) and from what can be inferred by the tutor, mentor or workplace supervisor from observing the learner's behaviour. Certainly how they apply their skills can be observed, including whether they tackle new tasks with enthusiasm or reluctance, and whether the values they claim to espouse are substantiated in their behaviour. A workplace setting provides opportunities for this kind of observational assessment. Ideally there will be multiple perspectives on the learner's behaviour from workplace mentors and colleagues, since one tutor cannot constantly observe the learner.

So it seems that some important outcomes of personal development can be observed (and therefore assessed) by tutors, mentors and supervisors. Others are more difficult: learners have the best access to their own feelings of confidence, their sense of motivation and valuing. Consequently we often look to the learner to gather and present through self-report the core evidence for personal development outcomes. Hence the ubiquity of reflective journals, learning logs and portfolios as assessment tools in work-related (or closer-to-life) settings, from the clinical placement to the language student's 'year abroad'. Here learners are often expected to recognise their own behaviour and responses to situations and relate these through analysis and commentary to explicit skills and values. It is widely assumed in the literature that the process of writing down a record of an event and its analysis helps the learner in building their own understanding of themselves, but for assessment purposes the primary function of the written record is for the tutor to be able to check on the learning that has taken place.

How should self-reported learning be assessed?

Assessing students' reflective writing is still a very live issue, despite our accumulating experience across the HE sector. CRA workshops for staff on the theme of 'Supporting Learning from Reflection' brought practitioners together with samples of their students' work and enabled them to share their judgements about such work with fellow-practitioners. A set of criteria were suggested from which they could choose, or to which they could add their own.³¹ The workshops were structured to help participants reach inductively a clearer understanding of their real purposes in setting reflective writing assignments. It was hoped that this would help them to give clearer, more explicit guidance to their students.

Most participants had little difficulty in selecting the criteria most appropriate to

31 The suggested criteria were: accurate observation; analysis of events/situation; identification of relevant elements of situation; awareness of own feelings/emotions; awareness of own attributes/ strengths/weaknesses; awareness of own learning; making connections between ideas; making connections with prior knowledge/experience; honesty/authenticity; recognition of/planning for next stage; and commitment to improvement/change.

their conception of the task. However, every one of the criteria offered appealed to someone, with more being added that the CRA team had not thought of. Clearly 'reflective' tasks vary enormously with regard to tutors' expectations, and it is often the case that these are not clearly communicated to students. One criterion that caused particular debate was 'authenticity'. Some participants believed that without authenticity, reflective writing was worthless; others felt that it was impossible to assess such authenticity with any degree of reliability. It would be worthwhile to explore further whether this reflects a difference in subject background and corresponding expectations of how much of themselves students ought to bring into the academic task (see Barnett *et al.*, 2001): there were some indications that this might be the case.

Through the 'Achieving our Goals' series of workshops already cited, the model of PDP as defined in the Progress File *Guidelines* (see p4) was developed. Specifically, the model of PDP that received widespread support from practitioners was as a process of:

- Thinking ahead and planning, using both critical rational thinking and imagination.
- Doing something and being more aware of what is being done.
- Recording these observations and perceptions.
- Reviewing /reflecting on actions and their effects.
- Evaluating and making judgements about self and the effects of own actions.
- Engaging in conversation with a teacher/tutor and/or peers in order to discuss/challenge experiences, perceptions and judgements.
- Using this personal knowledge as a resource to inform future actions.

This is an interesting list because it characterises PDP with regard to some very specific student activities. Reflection is there, but only as an expansion on or alternative means of expressing 'reviewing'. Also included are 'critical rational thinking and imagination', 'being more aware' and 'evaluating and making judgements'. Teachers and tutors may well feel more comfortable with this terminology as a familiar part of their landscape. While they are often unconfident about assessing 'reflection', they are more accustomed to making judgements about the quality of critical thinking and evaluation (although 'imagination' might create more problems).

So have we sorted it?

It does seem that there are grounds for claiming that at least some aspects of students' personal development can be fostered by the environments created by their tutors, including the provision of rich feedback opportunities. Also, it seems that this development, to some extent at least, can be 'measured' through different forms of assessment. The real virtue of assessment in whatever form is that it

foregrounds and makes explicit for the learner the process of development and the qualities that are developing. This explicit awareness, a key function of the personal development planning process, is vitally important to the learner at transitions: employers have long complained that young people at interview cannot articulate their qualities/capabilities and cite relevant evidence from their experience. Within conventional academic settings, learning environments can be designed for personal development when tutors are clear about the outcomes they are trying to foster. In work-based settings, which are less easy to control, learners need to be clear about these outcomes and be able to recognise and monitor their own progress.

A final word concerning mature students. It is sometimes easy for academics to fall into a stereotyped view of mature students as both more intrinsically motivated and more emotionally mature than those coming straight from school. Such a view raises the issue of whether there is any need to provide personal development planning opportunities to these students. Certainly mature students are likely to have thought harder about their reasons for entering higher education, and may have acquired responsibilities that give them a greater experience of multi-tasking and prioritising. Because of this, they may be more aware of conflicts of values between the expectations of their programme and their life outside the institution. The process of articulating their personal identity in this new setting needs and deserves support, no less than for the school/college-leaver. Where they bring with them a whole range of qualities – initiative, curiosity, self-discipline, determination – that have already been forged through their life experiences, these should be recognised and celebrated within the academic setting. The ideal setting for this could be within the PDP process.

4. Developing PDP to support employability: an institutional perspective

Jane Stapleford
Liz Beasley
Sue Palmer

The institutional context

The initiative reported here was the result of a collaborative effort between a small group of staff from across Leeds Metropolitan University (Leeds Met) meeting during 2005–06 to share good practice in PDP and employability. It has been updated to take account of more recent developments.

Leeds Met is one of the largest universities in the country, with over 52,000 students and 3,500 staff. As a former polytechnic, it has a wide range of both vocational and applied academic subjects from para-medical professions through to sports sciences, languages, business and the arts. The University's statement of vision and character states that Leeds Met is striving to be a world-class regional university, with worldwide horizons, using all our talents to the full. This vision seeks to combine mass participation with world-class performance. There are many contrasting learning environments, including the traditional setting of a campus in the world-famous sporting area of Headingley, and others intertwined with the business, health, civic and entertainment quarters of Leeds.

Developments for PDP were led at Leeds Met by the Progress Files Working Group sharing good practice in PDP across a wide range of disciplines, with a clear philosophy of respecting the diverse perspectives of the academic and professional courses within the University. The Employability Office supports the design and delivery of employability-related activities and career development learning in the curriculum as an integral aspect of PDP.

Our aspiration – for students to recognise the value of PDP and to then carry it forward into their future employment – can be difficult to achieve within the curriculum. More embedded approaches and practices have been adopted in courses such as nursing, teacher education and social work, where reflection and reflective practice are seen as fundamental to personal and professional development. These perhaps align most closely with the 'contextual' and 'anticipatory' approaches identified in Section I. Some courses, with an identified

placement or work-based component, are structured and delivered in a manner that offers opportunities for students to engage directly in personal development and reflective practice, thus emphasising the 'contextual' approach at this point. Youth and community work, hospitality management, and foundation degrees such as early years education and health-related exercise and fitness, as well as most of the vocational and professionally qualifying courses, come into this grouping. Many of the students are mature students already working within these fields. The course structures provide the framework within which PDP can be linked to the student's experiential learning and development of employability attributes. In many cases (for example, in health professional courses like speech and language therapy) reflective practice is offered as a method for deepening and applying the learning from the practice experience. Students may be required to keep a journal or learning log of their practice and to relate this to their learning in all aspects of the course. The learning in these courses is an active experiential process in which reflection is embedded in the application of solutions to problems as well as in the exploration of new perspectives. Theoretical perspectives can be considered in relation to employability issues; the process is exploratory, and critical thinking is developed.

Through the process of PDP, our experience suggests that students have developed raised self-awareness, self-confidence and self-esteem, and have gained an increased understanding of how they can continue to develop skills in the workplace once they have completed their studies. For example, final-year students on BA (Hons) Playwork submit a reflective review of their time on the course.³² Many such students offer examples that provide evidence of personal growth and awareness. The development of employability skills through PDP is a means to evidence lifelong learning and can be used as a tool for lifelong development. A measure of success in PDP would be that the student continues to maintain and develop it as a personalised and valued tool well beyond university life.

As Janet Strivens suggested in Section 3, PDP can be a powerful medium for exploring ethical issues that may arise in workplace contexts. Emotional intelligence is seen as an increasingly evident aspect of employability that students need to develop. For example, students may have to deal with others in team situations and may need to be able to consider the points of view or feelings of others, using their capacity for empathy. By using some of the reflective tools such as unsent letters or storytelling, students are supported in developing these skills and in dealing with their own emotions in a rational and thoughtful way.

Apart from the types of courses identified above, the notion of personal development planning and reflective practice as focused within the mainstream curriculum in any formal sense is a more recent addition. At Leeds Met, such

32 This approach is echoed in the 'capstone' module in geography described in case study I.

programmes include BSc (Hons) Human Biology, BSc (Hons) Health Studies, BA (Hons) English, and BSc (Hons) Multimedia technology. In our programmes, with regard to the framework set out in Section 2, two significant approaches map on to the 'embedded' (in certain modules) and extended approaches. It is desirable for students to reflect upon the skills they are developing within the course itself, within their work if they are part-time mature students, or within the part-time work they may be undertaking to finance their studies (even if it is just pulling pints in the local pub or staffing the tills in Tesco's), and within work placements, work-related learning activities within the course or voluntary activities. Students can potentially benefit from these work-related activities in the same way as in the professional and vocational courses described above, if offered and guided through opportunities for reflective practice.

Developing students' capacity for reflective practice and encouraging them to apply it in a range of different situations enables them to make the link more effectively between learning in their academic discipline and learning in the workplace. Through reflection, they may be able to identify and appreciate the value of the employability attributes that they are developing.

If real workplace experience is not available, it can be effective to use projects, simulations or case studies embedded with particular modules. Simulations provide opportunities within teaching sessions that can then be the subject of guided or structured activities: for instance, in BA (Hons) Business Studies, students undertake a business simulation module. Students can apply conceptual knowledge to the solution of workplace problems in order to develop a range of employability attributes. Group-based presentations or work exercises offer similar opportunities and can be supported by use of the tools described below. These opportunities can also generate students' insights into their personal values and interests, thus assisting them in planning their careers.

Through a work-related simulation module – as, for example, in BA (Hons) Media and Popular Culture – students can be encouraged to reflect upon their experience via a journal and to collect and record evidence of a range of employability attributes and experiences. This reflection forms the basis of further career development planning: revisiting the skills audits and the students' CVs, exploring career opportunities, and polishing their skills of writing applications and presenting themselves at interviews appropriate for graduate-level employment.

A further valuable example of a context for reflective practice is during 'field week' where first-year students, currently in the Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education, are offered an opportunity to attend a residential outdoor experience. This is normally at the start of the year, and exposes the students and their tutors to a vast range of physically and mentally challenging experiences. There are opportunities to explore issues such as ethics in the context of outdoor activities,

and students have thoughtfully reflected on situations and stories that they have experienced during the week. This real context provides a strong basis for introducing reflection through creative curriculum design, and feedback on assessed reflective work is provided at an early stage of the module.

Supporting implementation through a 'toolkit approach'

Addressing these aspects of the curriculum has been a challenge to many HE staff who may not themselves have been trained in PDP. Furthermore, they have frequently met resistance from students who 'can't see the point of PDP and reflection' and 'came to university to study their subject, not to waste time on this reflection'. Many seem to find the concept of 'reflective thinking' difficult to understand.

An institutional audit of accessible resources carried out by the University's Employability Office in 2004 revealed that there was a wealth of both online and paper-based material available to both staff and students for developing employability skills and attributes, and for career and personal development in general, but a dearth of material to support learning and teaching in the understanding and development of reflection for personal development.

As a result of this audit, a small working group was set up, chaired by the head of the Employability Office, to create resources on reflection and reflective practice for the University intranet, which is available both on and off campus. This cross-university group comprised experienced academic staff from the Faculties of Health, of Arts and Society, and of Sport and Education, plus the International Faculty, as well as learning support staff.

Subsequently, a variety of tools and exercises have been gathered together and developed in order to provide materials for practising reflection and providing a sound base for students to enhance their skills for PDP. These were developed on the basis of criteria including:

- The need for tools to be accessible for students' independent use or to be used as part of a blended learning approach.
- The need for the tools to be in a format that could be easily incorporated into Leeds Met's virtual learning environment (VLE).
- The necessity of complying with the employability and PDP policies at Leeds Met in which delivery and materials can easily be customised for a specific course.
- The rather challenging remit of developing materials that are accessible to level 1 foundation degree students, while still being stimulating for postgraduate, mature and professional students.
- The desire to make the tools meaningful to our international students.

Collectively, these tools form a 'toolkit'³³ – in the form of 'reusable learning objects' – that provides a practical set of activities to support the development of skills and techniques that can be used in the process of reflection. There is a clear steer away from encouraging any single approach. The additional support materials and videos explain how the PDP should reflect the individual, and confirm that a model for a PDP is not prescriptive.

The set of 'learning objects' on the reflection site is introduced by one entitled 'What is reflection?' This gives an introduction to the meaning of the term, what is to be learnt, the reasons why we ask students to reflect (see Knight & Yorke, 2004), and some of the theory underpinning reflection and reflective practice. Another 'learning object', the 'glossary', provides support for understanding some of the educational terminology that can make reflection seem complex or inaccessible. It also allows for links to be made to other online materials, so that the process is not seen as 'stand-alone', but as an integral part of the development of academic and work-related skills.

The 'toolkit' itself currently contains the following activities for developing the capacity to reflect and for enhancing personal development planning and employability:

- Learning journals and diaries.
- Storytelling.
- Portraits.
- Dialogue.
- Sent letters.
- Unsent letters.
- Visualisation.
- Altered points-of-view.

Examples of approaches from the toolkit are presented below.

In order to offer the most flexible blended learning opportunities accessible to the widest possible range of students, both on and off campus, the materials have been developed as 'flexible learning objects', i.e. discrete chunks of learning material provided online that can easily be dropped into VLEs. For example, international students and students on their year abroad can easily access relevant materials.

One approach has been to advise students to use the site after the materials have been introduced at the beginning of the first year, as is being trialled on the BA (Hons) Education Studies course. Currently staff and students involved are engaged in collaborative action research to understand more about the development of

33 The term 'toolkit' may have different meanings and convey a range of understandings. We retain it here as terminology used – and understood by staff and students – within the University.

reflective practice. Another approach is to provide links to online support materials through electronic modules as independent learning activities. This has been particularly worthwhile in the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Education course where modules on the VLE provide direct links to the materials. A cross-faculty Carnegie PDP module has been developed in the Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education that integrates the 'learning objects' as part of the tutorial structure. The learning objects provide a consistent approach to support where the module is being used across a range of provision.

During the development of the module delivery, students in a focus group were asked about their experience as learners. The students stressed the importance of providing a course context for the cross-faculty generic 'learning objects', so that they were directly built into course activity relevant to their planned future. The materials can be supported through a blend of face-to-face and online learning. It is important to include tutor feedback in the online activity.

Using a range of tools: the story so far

The three 'reflection learning objects' were launched in 2006 at two staff development Employability Learning Lunches. They received very positive feedback and assurances that the materials would be extremely useful. The materials were demonstrated and suggestions were sought about how they might be used by staff and students across the University. The suggestions varied greatly, depending on the nature of the module being delivered and the blend of learning that is adopted. It would seem that the materials can be used in any blend of learning and within most subject areas in a supportive and enhancing way, although there is clearly a need for a creative practitioner to consider additional aspects such as reflective practice and portfolio development.

A very popular staff development workshop entitled 'Teaching students to reflect' was offered on a regular basis and aimed to explore techniques and ideas for staff to support their students with the demands of reflection, including the use of the tools described in this section. The Employability Office supported course teams to discuss reflective practice and PDP, and produced guidelines and handbooks for a consistent approach along with the 'toolkit'.

A 'Reflection Learning Objects Editorial Forum' was also established, with a range of academic staff invited to pilot the materials with their students and to feed back their own and their students' views via an evaluation questionnaire and focus groups. The group included staff from physiotherapy, business (including the MBA), information technology, teacher education and sport.

Student and staff feedback comments and suggestions include:

What is reflection?

'I particularly liked the section on "structuring your reflection" and the activities provided to stimulate reflective thoughts that may already have been within us without our conscious recognition.'

Reflective toolkit

'I think this section is very well put together, user-friendly and relevant; I particularly like the inclusion of "unsent letters" as an indication of reflective thinking.'

'This is what I have been looking for – thank you!'

'I suggest rather than using the conventional meaning of "Dialogue" if we adopt David Bohm's idea of dialogue as a thought system and a means of "generating meaning" it would give us a powerful tool for reflection.'

Examples from the toolkit

Learning diaries and journals

Perhaps the most commonly used tool for reflection is the diary. This can be easily misunderstood due to the everyday reference to diaries that students may have kept in the past. Students are encouraged to work towards a form of diary that enables an active learning cycle to take place in an attempt to make sense of experiences. The process is supported by video guidance on the value of a diary and how it might relate to events as well as suggestions for further reading. There is a significant amount of current literature available to guide students towards particular approaches, so there is no need to include any particular template or model; rather what is required is an encouragement to develop a personal style.

Unsent letters

The unsent letter is presented as a tool for exploring emotional conflict or communication issues. Within the toolkit the unsent letter is explored and illustrated with a student letter to a tutor explaining why everything has gone wrong and work has not gone quite as expected. The example also includes a reply that the student has written as if from the tutor where, through empathy, there is a realisation that there is a need to take personal responsibility and control over actions.

The illustration would be familiar to many and allows staff to open up a discussion about personal responsibility and taking control or planning for work with students. It allows for discussion to take place about developing organisational skills and emotional awareness, and encourages students to practise the skills through exercises. By expressing emotions through an unsent letter, they can become more apparent and be responded to in a controlled manner. This is a skill that is vital in employment, as reactions need to be considered and personal responsibility needs to be taken.

Storytelling

Storytelling is a useful tool for exploring complex situations where there are several things happening at once. This is often the case in a work-based experience, and students can find it difficult to understand why or how an outcome happened. The example used in the Leeds Met toolkit is a story about confusion caused by lack of effective communication. The story concerns Sam who arrives late for work only to find that the manager of the company has decided to cancel an event that Sam was leading that day, leading to misunderstanding and frustration.

Another story might be about a student team project, where John tells how he seemed to do all the work and others did very little. The issues explored might again be related to communication and the importance of planning as a team and understanding roles. This type of story could be used to explore effective communication and the importance of customer care. This activity encourages students to tell the story from the perspective of someone else, and so encourages empathy and increased self-awareness as well as supporting group work.

It is important that the student considers actions for improvement as a result of the process. Using this technique in small groups has been particularly effective, as it allows for exploration of issues in a community of learning and deepens the process of learning through shared reflection.

Portraits

Examples can be drawn from a number of sources including biographies of real or fictional people. Portraits can be used to explore the characteristics of professionals, or of famous or successful individuals in a given field of work or even an idealised view of a manager, solicitor, web designer or film-maker. Within the toolkit a photograph and description of Maxine is used to encourage the students to understand others in the workplace and consider the attributes of successful people or those that the student would aspire to be. This can promote valuable learning in relation to personal development and potential promotion.

Portraits can be used to prepare for and visualise difficult or complex situations by asking ‘How would s/he respond in this situation?’ The use of portraits can support a greater understanding of the complexity of roles in the workplace and the importance of personal presentation. Looking at the example with a group or creating a fantasy future self would open up discussion about such important employability issues.

Further reading

Descriptions of how to use these various approaches can be found in Brockbank & McGill (1998), McDrury & Alterio (2003), Moon (1999) and Rainer (2004).

Conclusion

A key aim of the development of materials has been to facilitate students’ recognition of employability attributes through self-reflection and to support students in making the most of the experiences they have in and beyond the classroom in a range of work-related activities.

Greater enthusiasm and a reduced resistance to engaging in the process of reflection have occurred as the use of the tools has expanded across all faculties. Both staff and students have developed enhanced confidence in the use of reflective practice as a key component of employability and lifelong learning.

The development team continue to receive appreciative comments from both internal and external colleagues who have found the materials valuable, in particular from those who are in the early stages of grasping the essential elements of supporting their students with reflective practice. Staff and students at all levels find the materials easy both to use and to understand. They have been used creatively within many blends of learning and teaching approaches, and it is anticipated that they will continue to evolve and thus play a significant role in the future development of PDP and employability.

5. Learning from practice

Rob Ward and colleagues

Introduction

In Sections 1–2 we offered means of considering different ways of thinking about how PDP practice might be linked to student employability. We suggested specific respects in which concerns related to employability can be built into the design of PDP processes, whether by involving others in design, in relation to context for practice (through the use of PDP approaches within locations such as employer’s premises, which are seen to be rich environments for what we might term ‘direct employability learning’), or via the anticipation of future practice. The latter might be through a focus upon PDP-style materials to link with later professional practice, or through the supportive use of employer/CPD resources to legitimise the PDP process and catalyse student engagement.

Mark Atlay identified five potential relationships between PDP and the curriculum, relabelled on p.15 as follows:

- *Discrete*: where PDP is conceived as additional to, and separate from, the curriculum. Here students tend to be encouraged to engage in PDP, with perhaps some support from tutors, but whether and how they do so is left largely to them.
- *Linked*: where PDP is viewed as being parallel to, but also having explicit links to, the curriculum. These may include personal logs and diaries, or compulsory sessions as part of personal tutoring or skills weeks.
- *Embedded*: where PDP is embedded in specific modules, which provide the main support for PDP; they may also serve to link with material covered in other modules.
- *Integrated*: a whole-curriculum approach where all or most modules involve activities that are aligned with PDP processes. In this model, every module tutor has a responsibility for supporting PDP.
- *Extended*: where PDP processes are included in the curriculum but also serve explicitly to integrate learning activities outside the curriculum. These may include work placements³⁴ or other extra-curricular activities.

34 Or, in the case of work-based students who are studying part-time or studying full-time (as can be the case with foundation degree programmes), their ongoing experiences of work.

Here, drawing upon updated accounts of case studies contained within the first edition of this publication, we make use of this thinking as a means of categorising practice, and chart the recent development/evolution of such practice.

As with the first edition of this publication, each vignette has been categorised by its authors using these options as a means of helping readers to access practice that may be of relevance to them. Of the 17 vignettes contained within the first edition, we have been able to secure updates for 13; two further illustrations have been added.

This is – inevitably – a small ‘opportunity sample’ and changes must therefore be interpreted with caution. While a spectrum of practice is presented, most falls within the ‘linked’ or ‘embedded’ categories. However, practice is also – as we indicated in the first edition and in Sections 1 and 2 here – more complex and less categorical than our frameworks, with several vignettes reporting a ‘blended’ approach or approaches. In the case of one, for example:

‘Currently it is embedded – though as we integrate it across the course, it will move to being integrated. Also, with the new development work to incorporate it into our flexible CPD provision ‘Pathways’, it will be more linked as it will be used to encourage students to look at the range of CPD provision on offer and choose those modules that are most appropriate to them. We are also developing provision where PDP could be viewed as extended, using individualised learning modules. All of this illustrates that we will adapt PDP to different provision to ensure it is effective and really contributing to the student experience.’

In a second:

‘We are doing lots of great things that all interconnect and the sum of the whole says an awful lot more than the individual bits.’

This reflects a recognition that:

‘One size doesn’t fit all and therefore we are doing lots of sizes and even bespoke tailoring.’

Within this context:

Some practice continues to reflect different emphases at different points in the ‘student life cycle’ (as in case studies H, I and L), with an emphasis upon PDP as an integrative mechanism for drawing learning together with an eye to the future (I, M and N).

Given the ‘personal curriculum’ of postgraduate research students, the linked model remains the most appropriate to describe such practice, though this does not do justice to the complexity of the research context (as in case study D). As one respondent indicated:

'Our PDP offering (for research students) is difficult to categorise with the framework you've provided, as there is no "curriculum" for all research students other than the Joint Skills Statement and the guidance and policy issued by the QAA.'

With regard to changes to earlier provision, some case studies, such as A, D and F suggest minimal updates. Those in respect of the York Award and for postgraduate research students at the University of Manchester, for example, present only updated weblinks, suggesting that these schemes might have attained a 'steady state' level of functioning.

Some, such as the University of Ulster (B), directly reflect the outcomes of the survey quoted earlier in the text (Strivens, 2007) in respect of moves toward e-enabled practice; the use of e-portfolio and e-pdp practice to demonstrate and better understand the learning undertaken by practice-based learners (for example, PGCE students). Work at the Universities of Brighton (G) and Salford (F) extends this to the use of social networking and blogging software respectively.

Moves towards an electronic environment are also features of the University of Worcester illustration (case study I), which in addition has evolved a clearer and more explicit role professional role for specialist colleagues in delivery and assessment.³⁵ Thus:

'A member of the Careers Team at the university was invited to be part of the "panel" that interviewed the student for their final "mock interview" assignment. This has proved extremely positive as the careers person has been able to provide an important extra perspective on the student interview performance, with their comments incorporated into the feedback given to students. Equally, they have been able to look through student CVs, which are a formative part of the assessment, and provide general feedback to students on layout and content. Also, a session on geography and enterprise – developed in collaboration with the University's Business Partnerships Office, which is responsible for encouraging student enterprise activities and in developing employer links – has been added to the module, prompted by the emerging enterprise agenda in HE more widely.'

Elsewhere, in Preston College (case study E) the shift in emphasis has been towards provision based within the academic team rather than from a central unit, a process confirming the importance of embedding practice within the study of the discipline. Case study C emphasises a mix of responsibilities, with core material developed centrally and tailored appropriately for local use. Others (case studies K and L) reinforce this, and E and K both highlight the importance of assessment as an important element in getting students to pay attention to PDP (see the next section).

Finally, one case study in particular (K) suggests PDP and Employability are structurally and strategically important as part of a redesign of curriculum structures.

35 Notwithstanding our focus on PDP and Employability, the involvement of employers in designing the curriculum is limited, although they are somewhat more involved in curriculum delivery.

Case study A: a discrete approach

The York Award at the University of York

The practice

The York Award is a voluntary programme of skills and personal development, which contributes to the University's objective to prepare students exceptionally well to lead successful future lives. Launched in 1998, the planning of the programme predates the outcome of the Dearing inquiry and the subsequent campaign to embed personal development planning within HE practice.

The York Award provides structured training in a variety of work-related skills within a supportive framework for planning and reflection, and provides recognition for doing so in the form of a university certificate. It encourages students to adopt a more holistic view of their learning and personal development, drawing on experience from academic, work-related and social activities.

A programme of short 'courses', supported and self-directed reflection and planning culminate in a final-year assessment process, which is both formative and summative.

In the final assessment, students are asked to reflect critically on their experiences both in writing and orally, identifying ways in which their formal and informal learning has prepared them for work and life. The written assessment is modelled on a graduate application form, while the oral assessment takes the form of a ten-minute interview. Assessment involves both academic staff and representative employers and is moderated by the York Award team.

Evolution

It has proved difficult to articulate fully the York Award with related provision in academic departments. The growth in participation in the York Award, together with the implementation of PDP, through the supervisory system, presents an opportunity to complete the integrative process. The challenge will be to ensure that the York Award continues to distinguish students who have genuinely added value to their degree.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

Feedback indicates that students use the York Award to help them evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and pursue an active programme of personal development. They find the assessment process appropriately challenging and good preparation for presenting their achievements to future employers. Many also find it useful in clarifying their thoughts about career direction.

Longitudinal analysis shows that former York Award participants carry their experience of the programme forward with them into their working lives. For example, one alumnus reported that: 'I thoroughly enjoyed the York Award and feel it really developed me as a person and an employee.'

Further details and resources

www.york.ac.uk/services/careers/skills.cfm

Contact

Heather Richardson
hr6@york.ac.uk

Case study B: a linked approach

PDP supporting work- and practice-based learning at the University of Ulster

The practice

The University of Ulster has a strong ethos of both work-based learning and practice-based learning, with students from many backgrounds undertaking external placements in order to develop skills and professionalism that improves employability.

PDP is strongly embedded in the preparation for placement, work undertaken on placement and reflection post-placement. Staff guide and facilitate this, directly in class time or by directed work. Staff also visit students on placement and assess reports or portfolios created while on placement. Much of this work uses the University's bespoke PDP implementation tool, the PDSystem, and the integrated OPUS (Online Placement University System) to support and assess students concerning their placement.

Before placement, students are encouraged to perform skills audits both to inform them of skill gaps and, if required, to aid the creation of CVs. These audits are student-driven, but guided by staff. In some cases, students are placed by staff into specific jobs that match their skill gaps, in others, students use CVs in competitive applications for industrial placement.

On placement, students assess their progress by a variety of means depending on their programme. In some cases reports of progress and log books are submitted to staff, who assess them in order to guide professional development. On other programmes, students formally and continuously review their skills, submitting evidence of improvement in electronic portfolios, and/or electronic journals that are assessed by staff.

After placement, students are required to reflect upon their placement experience and the effect it has had upon them.

PDP is also to be found in practice-based learning, with PGCE students and first-year teachers in Northern Ireland, using the PDSystem and its portfolio functions to help them evidence their professional development.

Evolution

We are continuing to improve support facilities and systems that support the diverse practices used in the University, as well as working to disseminate good practice within and outside the University.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

Students learn how to apply their skills in real situations, and equally, how to acquire new skills and communicate their acquisition. The sharing and assessment of progress while on placement provides an opportunity for academic staff to identify problems early and take remedial action as required. The use of e-portfolios has allowed students to deepen their appreciation of their own learning, and better demonstrate it to others.

The practice has encouraged students towards more autonomous and reflective learning, which are essential elements for professional education and continuous professional development.

Further details and resources

Information about the use of PDP in the University of Ulster can be found at: www.ulster.ac.uk/pdp.

The online PDSsystem that supports much of this activity can be found at: <http://pds.ulster.ac.uk>, and OPUS at: <http://opus.ulster.ac.uk/opus/>.

Both applications are free and open source software. More information, and the applications themselves, can be found at <http://foss.ulster.ac.uk/projects/pdsystem> and <http://foss.ulster.ac.uk/projects/opus> respectively.

Contact

Dr Colin Turner
028 9036 8084
c.turner@ulster.ac.uk

Room 5F09
University of Ulster at Jordanstown
Newtownabbey BT37 0QB

Case study C: a linked approach

The 'Foundation Direct' approach to PDP, University of Portsmouth.

The practice

Foundation Direct is a HEFCE funded Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning that builds on the University of Portsmouth's innovative practice developed in student support, career management skills and work-based learning. Foundation Direct is developing a new way to achieve PDP via a structured and supported process to enable an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and professional career development. The PDP project team consists of practitioners from a variety of departments, thus expertise from across the institution is brought in to inform the development of the unit. The PDP unit was piloted in 2005–06 with the FdA Early Years Care and Education, and was subsequently adopted by the FdA Education Administration in 2006–07. New foundation degrees, such as the FdA Government adopted the framework of the PDP unit and modified it to reflect interest and issues relevant to the subject area.

PDP is delivered in a variety of ways depending upon the course leaders' preference and the weighting that they consider it merits. For some it is a 40-credit unit, delivered totally online and supported through the online environment's communication tools, for others as a 20-credit unit (over two years) using a blended learning approach, i.e. combining an online learning environment with traditional face-to-face tutorial sessions. The online environment also supports and encourages discussion between students at the various locations at which the programme is available. Online core PDP topics are being enhanced by programme-specific resources, and existing career management skills materials will be developed to accommodate the professional, employability and work-based needs of foundation degree students. These materials will be presented either as generic core topics or they will be 'layered': i.e. integrated into other core topics. In addition, there will be materials tailored to specific subject needs and work situations following 'just-in-time' principles.

Evolution

The PDP unit endeavours to meet the different learning and employability needs of foundation degree students who are learning to appreciate the relevance of academic study and their own values/experiences in relation to workplace practice. The PDP unit is helpful in assisting students to understand and build on the skills they develop throughout their studies, and the purpose of the careers support site will be to make students aware of how, why and when they should develop these skills. Making students

more self-aware and reflective will ultimately influence their future employability. The PDP unit has recently been reviewed and redesigned with regard to content, structure and linkage in order to develop 'reflective practitioners' who are able to apply and demonstrate lifelong learning and professional development strategies. The aim of the review was to restructure the content of the PDP unit to create a stand-alone reusable learning object in the University's VLE, which can subsequently be customised for purpose. The PDP unit now acts as a narrative, linking topics under the themes of 'reflection', 'critical thinking', and 'professionalism'. It is also now based on modular activities so that it can be timetabled into the academic year.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

To ensure that materials are appropriate and relevant, interim evaluations are conducted by a project researcher. Practice is developed through the adoption and modification of the PDP unit materials by other foundation degrees. Informal feedback is also provided by tutors delivering the PDP materials and moderating the online discussions, and this feedback reflects a positive and encouraging attitude from students. A careers support site is also currently being researched and developed that will address the lack of careers specific support offered to foundation degree students. This will link with the PDP materials to help students to understand the connection between personal and academic skills development, and careers management and planning.

Further details and resources

Currently the materials are not on open access, but a promotional demo site of the PDP unit is under development. See: www.port.ac.uk/foundationdirect.

Contact

Dr Sue Wilkinson, Senior Developer and Learning Support Tutor
023 9284 5898
sue.wilkinson@port.ac.uk

Maxine Wesley, Learning Technologist
023 9284 3864
maxine.wesley@port.ac.uk

Foundation Direct
University of Portsmouth
University Library
Cambridge Road PO1 2ST

Case study D: a linked approach

Development Needs Analysis - improving the employability of postgraduate research students at the University of Manchester

The practice

A key aspect of successful PDP is the ability to self-assess effectively to support reflection. Undergraduates have many formal assessments, comparison with peers engaged in similar activity is easier, and in many cases career paths are clear, all helping the reflection process. For research degrees it is harder! Formal assessment is usually on an annual basis, all 'projects' are different, students are isolated, and career paths are often less defined. Engineering and physical sciences has developed a self-assessment tool for research students that helps address these challenges; the Development Needs Analysis (DNA).

In recent years, research degree programmes have targeted the development of the broader range of skills required by employers. In 2001 the Research Councils produced a Joint Skills Statement (JSS), which defined a broad range of skills for PhD students. We have combined the JSS with competence model theory to produce an effective self-assessment tool (the DNA). For each skill in the JSS, a 'behavioural indicator' is provided indicating types of behaviour apparent in an experienced research student. The 'behavioural indicator' is level three on a four-point scale. PhD students need to be at, or to reach, level 3. Students now have something more tangible to compare themselves against and self-assess on a scale running between 1 and 4. After completing the DNA, students discuss the outcome with their supervisors as a moderator, and plan their development.

Evolution

The next stage in improving practice will be looking at a more sophisticated software package that provides greater linking into supporting resources direct from the DNA.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

The practice provides students with a more realistic view of where they need to be towards the end of their research degree. The DNA is part of an online PDP, so can be completed multiple times, allowing students to see a progression in their skills development. For practitioners, the DNA addresses over- and

under-confidence in research students, allowing them to be more realistic about themselves and clearer about the level of skills required by employers. As an online tool, it allows the practitioner to gain an excellent overview of the skills in a cohort. We have been able to focus the development of skills training opportunities in direct response to the outcomes of the DNA. The DNA technique may well have generic application for assessing the skill level in any cohort.

Further details and resources

The online DNA has secure access; however, details can be found on the UKGRAD database of practice (www.grad.ac.uk) or within the Graduate Resource Book on the EPS Graduate Development Scheme website (www.graduatedevelopment.manchester.ac.uk/graddev/research/resbook/index.html).

Contact

Dr Tony Bromley
Dr Jim Boran

Graduate Development Scheme
Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences
Sackville Street Building
University of Manchester
Manchester M60 1QD

Case study E: linked and embedded approaches

PDP at Preston College

The practice

Currently, different models of PDP are delivered on different Foundation Degree programmes. Catherine Elliott delivers PDP as part of an assessed module to foundation degree sports students, while Tracey Pratchett delivers PDP to Foundation Degree engineering students as an add-on to their course.

The Foundation Degree in Sports Coaching has a 'personal development' module which is assessed formally and incorporates PDP. The subject has been taught through a variety of workshops and lecture sessions, and assessed by a reflective essay and portfolio. Attendance at sessions has been good and the students could see the benefit of looking at PDP. As a result of the PDP part of this module, several students are changing jobs in order to ensure that their experience is relevant and are looking at how voluntary work can expand their skills.

The group studying for a Foundation Degree in Engineering attend timetabled sessions, where assessment is undertaken informally. A scheme of work was developed incorporating reflection, employability, communication and presentation skills. The sessions are delivered in the Learning Centre via a range of workshops and taught sessions. At the start of the year attendance was good, although one learner disappeared when told that he would be expected to prepare and deliver a presentation! Although it was explained that PDP would enhance their existing learning, students found it difficult to engage with PDP itself.

Evolution

There have been a number of changes to the delivery of PDP since the last edition of this publication. PDP is still delivered to sports students as an embedded module; however, responsibility for the teaching of this unit has been given back to the Sport Academy rather than through the HE Learning Centre. PDP is no longer delivered to engineering students. The discrete provision provided to these students was unsuccessful on the whole, due to the informal assessment methods. The students also found it difficult to engage with PDP. It was felt that without a formal module within the foundation degree, students would not engage fully.

On the other hand, PDP has now been embedded in both years of the sports coaching Foundation Degree in a 'personal and academic development' module

which is formally assessed during the first year, and in an 'experiential learning' module in the second year. Catherine Elliott teaches both of these modules as part of the Sport Academy now.

There are further plans to embed PDP into other modules of the Foundation Degree in sports coaching for 2008/09. Employability skills especially seem to be important to the students and in addition to the 'personal and academic development' module, students will look at volunteering and leadership development to gain skills and experience which can be used after graduation. Students will have to include 20 hours' voluntary work as part of the assessment and then reflect on the experience and look at skills gained. The assessment for this will be a reflective essay. The students will then carry on this practice of experience and reflection in the second-year 'experiential learning' module, where 120 hours' work experience will need to be completed. A skills analysis is updated and a reflective essay is the culmination of all three modules: students need to look back at their foundation degree and all work experience in order to draw conclusions about/for their futures.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

Although both classes were delivered in the same environment using similar resources, student responses have been very different. By nature, the sports coaching course embeds reflection, whilst the engineering course does not. This is the first year that PDP has been integrated into the engineering course, unlike the sport students who undertake PDP during an assessed module. The lack of formal assessment for the engineering students meant that they could not see the purpose of attending classes which appeared (to them) to bear no relevance to their chosen studies.

The sports students continue to embrace PDP fully and can see the benefits. All students now gain experience with relevant sporting bodies during the second year and then reflect on their journey since the first year. Lessons are taught in a classroom environment using the HE centre as a useful study resource. The Personal and Academic module uses 'The Windmills Programme' (www.windmillsprogramme.co.uk/whywindmills/index.asp) as a guide. The students use a number of methods to look at 'Where am I now? Where do I want to go? How am I going to get there?' The assessment methods are report, presentation and the submission of a career plan. Students go on to top-up their foundation degree, and all have experience and skills gained through the embedding of PDP.

Experience has demonstrated that the embedded approach works best with students at Preston College. However, in the future it is becoming more apparent

that an integrated approach would work well on the foundation degree for sports coaching and could easily be linked into other modules such as event management and sport club development.

Further details and resources

Currently, resources used for PDP are held in print and electronic formats by the learning centre staff. A course has been installed on the College's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and will be further developed to provide cross-college access to resources. Resources are kept in both the Learning Centre and the Academy and on the College VLE to which students have full access.

Contact

Catherine Elliott, Lecturer in Sport
01772 225457
celliott@preston.ac.uk

Preston College
Fulwood
Preston PR2 8UR

Case study F: an embedded approach

Incorporating PDP into a level 1 business skills module at the University of Salford

The practice

The business skills module is undertaken by first-year students in their first semester in the University. Teams of five to six students from a range of backgrounds select a company within an allocated industry sector and are required to work together to find out more about industry trends, the company and two significant competitors. Sources of information used include keynote reports, newspaper websites and the FAME database. During the project, teams are required to produce minutes of their meetings outlining their progress. At the end of the module they are required to produce a presentation and group report that makes recommendations on whether they would advise their clients to invest in the company. Presentations are assessed by academic staff and representatives from local business. This helps to motivate students and creates a clear link between the programme of study and the development of skills required for employability.

Students are also required to submit a short position paper that reflects on their experiences during the first semester, both on this module and other aspects of the programme of study. This paper is based on a Personal Development Journal (PDJ), which they complete over the ten-week project period. The PDJ includes a study skills audit (conducted at the start and end of the project period), a learning styles audit, reflection on teamwork and team roles and the requirement to identify and reflect on one critical incident each week over the ten-week period.

Throughout the module, members of academic staff provide support on business and skills-related issues such as use of ICT, group work, presentations and report writing as part of a supporting programme of timetabled workshops, tutorials and lectures. The module also provides an opportunity for students to build a relationship with their personal tutor.

Evolution

For 2008–09 no major changes are proposed. However, the programme team is currently working on development of two new management development modules that will form a core aspect of the first and second year of all Business School undergraduate programmes. These will build on the experiences gained so far and will be used to embed PDP more effectively into the student's learning experience.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

Evaluation carried out in December 2006 and again in December 2007 indicated that the project has been a useful way of developing some of the generic skills that students will need to succeed in HE and in employment. In particular, students report that it has taught them about how to work effectively as part of a team; how to find information on a company and business sector; and how to write minutes and business reports. They also report that the project had increased their confidence about giving presentations.

From a staff perspective, it is evident that students can develop a range of useful generic study and employability-related skills from activity-based learning of this type, but can find it difficult to reflect on their experiences. Changes made to replace a project log with a requirement to identify and reflect on critical incidents, the production of a reflective position paper and provision of marking criteria for the position paper have resulted in an improvement in the quality of reflection and improved student feedback on this element of the module; however, we still need to do more to encourage students to identify opportunities for self improvement.

Further details and resources

Copies of the resources are no longer available on the internet, but can be made available on request to Steve Angold.

Contact

Simon Ireland
s.ireland@salford.ac.uk

Steven Angold
s.j.angold@salford.ac.uk

Salford Business School
University of Salford
Maxwell Building
The Crescent
Salford M5 4WT

Case study G: an embedded approach

Undergraduate business courses in the Business School at the University of Brighton

The practice

Level 1 undergraduates study either a single, or in most cases a double, 'professional and academic skills' module (the name of the modules changed from 'personal' to 'professional' as part of the 2007 undergraduate revalidation process, to reflect the emphasis on professional development). The modules are credit-bearing, and assessed through end-of-semester coursework assignments, including a literature review, personal SWOT analysis, learning logs, self-assessment and attendance sheets. The modules incorporate the mentoring of year 1 students by final-year students who are taking a 'managing people' module. Implicit in the module content is provision for personal development planning.

These modules are delivered through a series of interactive workshop sessions with the aim of developing the students' affective abilities and improving employability. They are supported by online material collected under the heading *studentprofile*.

The mentoring process forms the basis of the final-year student's assignment for the second semester of their 'managing people' module. Here the final-year student is responsible for mentoring the first-year student through a series of meetings in support of their second-semester assignment, the 'job search portfolio'. We have found that there has been an increased use of technology (Facebook, MSM, texting and emails) to support this process; this is something we are going to review. Final-year mentors then go on to form self-selected groups in order to set up assessment centres to which their mentees are invited. The mentors expose the mentees to typical assessment-centre activities. Thus over the period of their course, the student is given the experience of being both mentor and mentee, and of both attending and running assessment centres.

As a result of the revalidation process in the second year of their courses, business students participate in a new credit-bearing module 'research methods and business case study'. In addition to the subject study, students have the opportunity to critically analyse the processes within their group and its dynamic workings: a crucial requirement of employers. Students are at the same time identifying industrial placement opportunities (if applicable).

Evolution

The first-year programme is subject to constant improvement. In 2006 we changed a part of the assignment to include a personal SWOT analysis. We are making more use of technology with links to online resources including psychometric testing and *studentprofile* for all years. In 2007 a section was included in the first-year workshop handouts making explicit links to subject study modules and preparing for placement and graduation. In the academic year 2008–09 we are providing a workbook during induction, replacing the weekly handouts.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

The students receive direct feedback on a range of key interpersonal skills relevant to employment, teamwork, communication, leadership, organisational skills, etc from both their tutors and in the form of a written feedback report from their mentor. They also have the opportunity to participate in an assessment centre, which provides valuable preparation for placement or graduate selection. Students create and update CVs and practise completing application forms. Students also participate in personal development planning in the context of continuing professional development.

Large placement employers such as American Express, Xerox, Bosch and IBM regularly take our students as they feel they are well prepared. Smaller companies such as Mango and The Priory Partnership also come back year after year. We are directly aware that students obtain employment by either describing the activities outlined above or showing potential employers the work produced. The work, especially the assessment centre design and implementation project, directly influences career progression, e.g. a student who now works for American Express was able to use her portfolio to support the design for the assessment of new recruits.

From the most recent available data 81% of Brighton business students who graduated in 2006 were in full-time employment after six months. According to the 2007 final satisfaction survey (NSS) an impressive 95% of students were very satisfied with the personal development provision throughout our courses.

Further details and resources

The majority of resources are available on our student intranet *studentcentral*; however, they can only be viewed by registered students or staff. Guest access may be possible. Bob Smale and Julie Fowlie have also written a book *How to Succeed at University*, which is due to be published by Sage in February 2009.

Contact

Julie Fowlie
01273 642144
j.fowlie@brighton.ac.uk

University of Brighton Business School
Mithras House
Lewes Road BN2 4AT

Case study H: an embedded approach

Developing employability throughout a computing-related course using a self-reflective PDP process to support self- and career-management self-efficacy beliefs at London Metropolitan University

The practice

In this post-1992 university, and in the course in question, employability is embedded in the undergraduate core curriculum through three PDP-supporting modules, one in each of the three years of study.

In the first year, the emphasis of the module is orienting to HE study within the subject context where, with the aid of reflective writing, students review their learning and other achievements, identify strengths and weaknesses, and produce a first draft of a 'personal development action plan'.

In the second year, the PDP-supporting module focuses on raising awareness of professional contexts as well as the skills, subject knowledge, personal attributes and experience needed to operate in a work/professional context. Building on their first-year reflective writing analysis, students develop a preliminary 'career development action plan'.

In the final year, project module students have the opportunity to develop and evidence relevant skills, subject knowledge, and personal attributes that they have identified in the employability module as being important for their career and/or own personal and academic development.

The career service department, and an employer from the IT industry, have inputs into the first and second year respectively, and in the final-year project module students work with a real client.

Evolution

We are developing better use of blended learning delivery and electronic portfolio services to support the PDP process. These are being piloted across the University.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

A key feature of the approach adopted in the first and second year is the use of low-stakes formative assessment for both group and individual assignment elements and, as part of the latter, a student-centred PDP-related assessment that focuses on planning and managing self-development.

Students' feedback on, and tutors' impressions of, the assessment process in earlier pilots, indicate that it was effective in enhancing student employability by focusing on personal development planning for self-development (see references below). After the first cohort had gone through the second year of this new scheme (rather than pilots), there was the opportunity for a more systematic analysis of pre- and post-module student self-assessments including career decision-making self-efficacy ratings.

In addition to the focus on PDP, the module now includes additional features:

1. Students carry out research on the type of jobs they might apply for on completion of their degree, and (based on job-adverts, etc) analyse the specific technical and non-technical skills that would equip them for the work (non-assessed – feeds into 2).
2. As part of the group coursework, students analyse the non-subject-specific skills they have used in producing their technical systems development report (teamwork, communication, etc) and produce an annexe to the report discussing these (assessed).

Further details and resources

Two articles on linking pilot work have appeared in the house journal of London Metropolitan University:

Wilson-Medhurst, S. (2005) Using assessment to support employability awareness and development. *Investigations in University Teaching and Learning*. 3 (1), Autumn, pp.72–9.

Wilson-Medhurst, S. (2005) Supporting student development using reflective writing. *Investigations in University Teaching and Learning*. 2 (2), Spring, pp.89–92.

These are accessible from: www.londonmet.ac.uk/capd/in-house-journal-investigations/.

Two recent papers on the results of the cross-university pilots have been published:

Identifying the key issues that will persuade staff and students to engage with ePortfolios: the results of nine pilot modules. Paper presented at the *Telling ePortfolio Stories: The Road to Stickiness Conference*, 5/6/08, University of Wolverhampton. (Available at: <http://studweb.north.londonmet.ac.uk/~chalkp/res/wlv-workshop-may08-pchalk.ppt>)

Introducing an electronic portfolio: results of a one semester pilot. London Metropolitan University PDP Group Report (Available at: <http://studweb.north.londonmet.ac.uk/~chalkp/res/pdp-pilot-paper-pchalk.doc>).

Contact

Peter Chalk
020 7133 2394
p.chalk@londonmet.ac.uk

Undergraduate Centre TB2
London Metropolitan University
Holloway Road
London N7 8DB

Case study I: an embedded approach

PDP and employability activities within the geography curriculum at the University of Worcester

The practice

Policies developed at the University of Worcester aim to ensure that all programmes provide structured opportunities for students to engage in forms of PDP activity within their courses. Geography programmes at Worcester have achieved this by providing a range of PDP and employability activities within a spine of core modules that all major and single honours geography students take. While opportunities to engage in reflective practice exist in other parts of the geography curriculum, such as in key introductory modules, fieldwork and laboratory-based modules and work-placement options, this spine provides a clear framework for engaging students in PDP and in helping them to think about 'graduateness' and employability.

PDP and employability activities are included in core modules at all levels of the undergraduate geography programme, each activity building on those of the previous level. During the induction week, students undertake an initial skills audit and also have the opportunity to attend a session, run by geography tutors, introducing the topic of PDP and employability and the opportunities to engage with it on the course. Students also have an initial meeting with their personal tutor in that week, where the role of the personal tutor in supporting the student's PDP activity is discussed. Following on from this, in their first year, students are introduced to PDP within their geography skills module 'practising geography'. While core skills are being introduced and developed, students are encouraged to reflect on their skills development and to begin charting their skills acquisition within a portfolio. In addition, personnel from the University Careers Service provide an introductory careers session. This involves a general presentation about careers open to geography students, the skills they should be developing on the course, what skills employers are looking for, and other activities they can be engaging in throughout the course to make themselves more employable. This is then followed by a trip to the careers centre, and a quiz to get them to use the materials.

In the second year of study, students develop their PDP skills within their residential field course module to the Scottish Highlands. The emphasis here

is on the application of skills acquired in year one to the investigation of 'real-world problems' in the field. As part of their assessment for the module, students are asked to write a short reflective piece considering how they have applied skills previously acquired and how their skills portfolio is developing. Personnel from the University Careers Service provide further sessions reflecting on skills and how these link to the job market. Students look at job vacancies to see what transferable skills employers are looking for. Students then make action plans addressing how they can work towards employment, e.g. specific skills development, work experience, etc.

In their final year, all major or single honours geography students take a 'capstone' module 'applying geography'. This module is designed to enable students to reflect, with tutors and their peers, on their undergraduate geography career and to consider the range of the knowledge, skills and competencies they have acquired and the usefulness of these to their future in the world beyond their university degree course. The module develops students' independence in reflection and planning. While tutors provide a broad framework for the module, much of the discussion, and the topic focus for the assessment tasks, are shaped by the reflective input from students. Another key aspect of the module is the input from former students who come in and talk to current students about the work they are now doing and about how PDP and employability practices have been useful to them in their careers. This has been particularly valuable in demonstrating the benefits of the process of PDP to current students. The final part of the assessment for the module takes the form of a 'mock' job interview. Students choose a career, prepare their curriculum vitae and then undertake a short 'interview' for the post, which asks about the nature of the post, the skills and knowledge they bring with them to the job and how they would apply this knowledge. The interview is led by two tutors from the geography team, but also includes personnel from the Careers Service. Preparation for this assignment is facilitated by in-class discussion with tutors and former students and by a specific careers session, organised by the Careers Service, which focuses on a full review of skills acquired and how students can present themselves in a curriculum vitae and at interview.

Evolution

The PDP structure within the UW geography programme, and the capstone module in particular, have demonstrated the benefits of embedding PDP and employability in the curriculum. Future development of the geography curriculum needs to reflect on how this spine of PDP and employability activity links to, and supports, other parts of the geography programme, so that students are supported in reflecting on the whole of their academic development. Even by embedding activities within a core 'spine' of modules,

there remains a danger that activities become ghettoised and removed from other parts of the curriculum. One further planned development will be the introduction of an e-portfolio system, 'Pebblepad', which will provide students with a powerful medium for recording PDP activities and achievements and reflecting on these, so building up a portfolio. An initial briefing on the 'Pebblepad' system will be provided as part of the first year student induction week. Another possible development will be to link more firmly the role of the personal tutor in supporting PDP to the geography curriculum. Departmental colleagues in biology have recently begun using evidence of personal tutor discussions around PDP and course planning as part of the assessment for particular core modules. This has led to greater student engagement with personal tutors and PDP. Finally, there is also a need to review these PDP and employability activities with regard to the developing student enterprise agenda within higher education. Initial exercises within the capstone module designed to introduce enterprise and entrepreneurialism, developed in conjunction with the University's Business Partnerships Office, have met with a mixed reaction from students, ranging from the interested to the outright hostile! From this, it is clear that there is more work to be undertaken into how enterprise can be more fully integrated into the geography curriculum at UW. Linked to this, there is further work to be undertaken in engaging employers in the process, involving them in the development of the curriculum and in providing student support and opportunities for workplace knowledge and experiences.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

In feedback obtained from students, it is evident that they initially found consideration of the ideas and themes of PDP and employability irrelevant and were merely eager to get on with 'doing geography'. However, by explicitly linking consideration of PDP and employability with the core curriculum, students begin to appreciate the relevance of these ideas to them and to their personal and academic development and future employability. In particular, feedback from students on the 'capstone' module has been extremely positive. Equally, students have engaged enthusiastically with the assignments and frequently achieve higher grades than for assignments in their other modules.

Students welcome the opportunity to look back on their geography programme and to 'make sense of' what they have undertaken and achieved. It provides an important confidence boost for students, in helping them to recognise the high-order skills that they possess, and to demonstrate the desirability of these skills within a wider context. Students find it particularly useful as they are often in the process of applying for jobs at the time the module is running (semester two of their final year). Student enthusiasm for the module has also been demonstrated by the support provided by former geography students in giving up time to come

back and talk to current students about the work they are now doing. This has been particularly valuable in demonstrating the benefits of the process of PDP to current students. These reflective sessions have also been useful for staff tutoring the module, enabling them to reflect on their own teaching and research in discussion with students, and frequently prompting further curriculum and research developments.

Further details and resources

No formal resources available.

Contact

Heather Barrett, Senior Lecturer in Geography, Course Tutor for the Applying Geography Capstone Module

h.barrett@worc.ac.uk

University of Worcester

Case study J: an embedded approach

The reflective practitioner: PDP for professional Masters students who study part-time by e-learning for continuing professional development at Sheffield Hallam University

The practice

PDP is introduced in the first study module, which is designed to ease the transition into Masters level study. Reflective and group activities help students to align their academic, personal and professional goals. At the end of the module they produce a Personal Action Plan (PAP), and complete a module evaluation survey: this encourages reflection on learning as well as providing us with valuable feedback about the student learning experience. PDP is formative and does not carry marks, though students do receive feedback. Students are encouraged to produce a PAP that does not just concentrate on the current modules but will help them with the rest of their studies and on a longer-term basis.

All study modules integrate theory and practice, with case studies and work-based assignments; a few include a reflective diary to help students identify their learning and think about how they will apply it to their professional practice.

Evolution

Looking to the future, and having introduced PDP in the first module, we want to continue the 'reflective practitioner' process via PDP. We are incorporating reflective questions in the evaluation survey at the end of each module. Private 'blogs' within each module Blackboard site might encourage reflective diaries.

We will incorporate PDP activities into the dissertation preparation process. For our students this is the second important transition point; they have to make important decisions about their project (normally carried out in the workplace). Linking to PDP at this point should help students to reflect on what they have learnt so far, what they want to achieve from the project, how it relates to their professional development, etc. Again, a reflective diary will be encouraged.

Our e-learning system provides wikis and blogs, and we are encouraging students to make use of these to continue their reflective process throughout the course. Several students are now maintaining blogs as they progress through the course, and it is interesting to note the very different styles of reflection and action planning that these each possess.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

All students engage with the activities and we have changed the module assessment so that the PAP is a required element of the module. It does not carry any marks, but students must complete it in order to pass the module. Students sometimes find it difficult to produce a PAP, particularly those from a very technical background. To help them, we have produced a series of resources including very simple templates that they can use as a basis for their PAP and a set of questions and activities to help them think about their PAP. We encourage them to develop a PAP in a format that suits them, but the template approach helps those that are finding it difficult to get started.

Feedback from students who have engaged has been very good. Most found the activities and the reflection process useful; some said they had never been encouraged to reflect in this way before and had learnt new things about themselves. In one extreme example, a student realised he had never really thought through what he wanted to do; as a result of this reflective process, he gave up both his job and his studies, and embarked on a completely new career.

We believe this introduction to PDP and reflection proves effective for most students, but needs to be continued through the rest of their course.

Further details and resources

No specific resources are available. However more information on this and associated projects can be found on the Sheffield Hallam CETL website at: www.shu.ac.uk/cetl/ and the team would be happy to discuss their approach with any interested party.

Contact

Dr Rebecca Strachan, Head of Postgraduate
0114 2253155
r.strachan@shu.ac.uk

Faculty of Arts, Computing, Engineering and Sciences
Sheffield Hallam University
SI IWB

Case study K: an embedded/integrated approach

PDP at Birmingham City University

1. The practice

Strategic considerations

The University is undergoing a complete redesign of all its curricula as it moves to a 15-credit module structure. This process, known internally as Redesign of the Learning Experience (RoLEx), has put employability, PDP and employer engagement as a priority for all courses to consider as part of the redesign. Many of Birmingham City University's courses are vocational, and content is recognised and/or specified by professional or statutory regulatory bodies, but the RoLEx project is expecting local employers as well as professional bodies to be consulted to ensure that a permanent relationship and valuable two-way dialogue is established. 70% of the graduates from the University will be employed in the West Midlands, so maintaining and enhancing good connections with the local labour market and economy is crucial.

In 2007-08 the University appointed a University Learning and Teaching Fellow for Employability. This post, and that of Tutor for PDP and Employability, which reports to it, moved into the Educational Staff Development Unit (ESDU) in the Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT). ESDU works pan-university supporting academic staff to enhance their academic programmes. Moving these posts from the Careers Service to CELT indicates the increasing importance the University has given to PDP and employability in the academic curriculum.

Practical dissemination

Central resources for students. The University has created a university-wide Central PDP, delivered through the University's virtual learning environment (Moodle software). The Central PDP is designed and maintained by the PDP Co-ordinator, and contains a wide range of interactive learning materials based on Kolb's theory of experiential learning, and comprised five 'courses':

- Self-awareness.
- Action planning.
- Reflection.
- Career management.
- Self-employment.

In addition to the resources and support provided by CELT for personal development planning, the Careers Service supports students to develop skills and

qualities specifically identified as enhancing their employability. Support is offered through both careers advisors and development materials available to students online.

Influencing the curriculum. Experience and research show that students are particularly influenced by, and motivated to engage with, assessed aspects of the curriculum. The Teaching Fellow for Employability and the Tutor for PDP design and deliver workshops for academic staff to enable them to enhance the PDP and employability provision in their curriculum. Resources used might be ones designed in-house: for example, the 'Embedding Employability and PDP' materials available at: www.bcu.ac.uk/studentsservices/careers/staffinfo_employabilityembed.html.

Staff in CELT will also support curriculum design by working as consultants with course teams and individual staff to integrate PDP, employability and employer engagement into the academic curriculum.

To provide further opportunity for students to develop their employability skills through their studies, and to complement the resources provided by CELT and support provided by the Careers Service, the University is undertaking a project jointly funded by the Higher Education Academy on 'Creating future-proof graduates'. This is a two-year initiative, led by ESDU, aimed at producing training and education resources in consultation with employers – to help graduates apply their skills and knowledge in the workplace. The project is developing teaching resources, such as case studies and scenarios, using a mixture of audiovisual materials being delivered in the classrooms or over the Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle). The scenarios are developed in consultation with employers. These demonstrate common workplace critical situations. The scenarios attempt to represent the complexity of real-life situations shown from the point of view of an employee. The activities around the critical incident aim at prompting students to reflect on how they would deal with the problem presented to them. The critical incidents are used and adapted in several disciplines, attempting to show their generic applicability. These resources will form a staff development tool for lecturers across the whole FE and HE sector, who can then pass them on to students. They will be equally useful for students in any discipline. For more information, see www.moodle.bcu.ac.uk > Staff Courses > Creating Future-Proof Graduates.

The Teaching Fellow for Employability and Tutor for PDP also run workshops for academic and learning support staff:

- I. Workshops as part of other staff courses. Embedding PDP is a session delivered on the PG Cert in Learning & Teaching in HE every year. It is also a core aspect of the MA Education module 'Enhancing the quality of academic programmes' (which many academic staff take subsequent to their PG Cert to top up to MA).

2. Stand-alone workshops. These sessions look at both broad and specific elements of PDP and how to integrate them into academic programmes, including discussions and guidance on assessing different elements.
3. Other sessions. As well as workshops relating to specific elements of PDP, e.g. 'Enhancing your students' self-awareness', other sessions have been planned to support the RoLEx project to offer assistance in incorporating PDP, employability and employer engagement into the redesign of all modules.

Evolution

Until now, very little formal analysis of impact has been undertaken, although this is changing with several research/evaluation initiatives.

National Action Research Project. The University is one of the partners in this three-year National Teaching Fellowship project, which began in 2007. The PDP Co-ordinator's research proposal is to investigate the staff and student perceptions of what PDP is and its value.

e-Portfolio Special Interest Group. An interest group has been established, led by academic staff from three faculties and supported by CELT, to look at the different uses for ePortfolios and Portfolios across the University. It is hoped that this will lead to the group supporting an investigation into the university-wide choice of ePortfolio and leading its eventual roll-out.

Expectations of PDP. This is a research project led by two senior Learning Support staff investigating student expectation of PDP across our two largest faculties: Health and Business. The project is funded by CELT.

Reflection group. A research project has been funded by CELT as part of the RoLEx project for an academic within the Business School to investigate a methodology to aid and enhance student reflection. This will be a university-wide project, and it has garnered interest from every faculty and a number of central services.

All of the projects above are looking at not only what is 'best' practice as identified by national and international research, but also the 'good' practice within our own institution. One example of this that is currently being disseminated by the PDP Co-ordinator is:

10-step reflective feedback session. Within BIAD (Birmingham Institute of Art and Design), two senior academic staff design and deliver a one-hour structured session that allows the students to reflect on the previous seven weeks of the module and learn from their experiences. This reflective session has now been adopted as a

model for every module on that degree programme at every level, and has been shared with other staff across the University; it will be adapted and implemented for many courses in 2008–09.

The initiatives outlined will lead to an evidence base from which to base future decisions. Anecdotally, those who have integrated employability and PDP elements into their curriculum have seen positive changes, but we are keen to have more internal (and national) research to back up the ‘champions’. One reason for confidence in the proposals is that – as reported above – much of the interest is coming from lecturers themselves.

Evaluation

Developing and improving practice is inherent in all of the above – indeed, the fact that there are so many initiatives is evidence of a determination to truly integrate effective and efficient PDP and employability elements in all appropriate curricula. All of the projects mentioned have review and evaluation built in. Where practice has been present for many years, e.g. employability initiatives, there is a formal annual cycle of evaluation, review and reporting. Central PDP resources have been provided since 2003–04 and have changed considerably in that time, both to meet the needs of both students and academic staff, and to make use of the best practice and resources as they are developed or identified.

We are seeking to evaluate and improve our practice through two pieces of research:

1. The ‘Evaluating PDP’ Research questionnaire, which we are using with academic staff as we meet them in workshops (and we have ethics permission to expand this to a ‘global’ email cohort – but we have not planned this yet). The first section, completed at the start of the workshop, is designed to establish what they know about, and their opinion of, PDP. They then complete a second section at the end of the workshop to determine whether their knowledge/opinion has changed. We also intend to email out a follow-up approximately four months later to see if knowledge/opinion has continued to change. From this we hope to be able better to market PDP to staff and improve on the effectiveness of our workshops
2. The second research project is still at the design stage, but is likely to use the PDP Priorities outlined in ‘Skills for Success’.³⁶ It is planned to adapt this so that we can ascertain what aspects of PDP students want and when they want it. Academic staff will also be asked to contribute to the research so that we

36 Cottrell, S. (2003) *Skills for Success: The Personal Development Handbook*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

can see if there are gaps in perception or timings and so on. Graduates will also be questioned (what would they have wanted and when). It is planned to pilot this with small numbers in Autumn 2008 with a view to obtaining 300–400 student responses primarily from the University's two largest faculties, Health and Business, by Spring 2009.

[Further details and resources](#)

Where appropriate, links have been included in the content above. Some resources are licensed and therefore restricted to use via the University intranet.

[Contact](#)

Ruth Lawton, University Learning and Teaching Fellow for Employability
0121 331 5126
ruth.lawton@bcu.ac.uk

Jo Powell, Tutor for PDP and Employability
0121 331 6412
jo.powell@bcu.ac.uk

Educational Staff Development Unit
Centre for Enhancement of Learning & Teaching
Edge Building
Birmingham City University
City North Campus
Perry Barr
Birmingham B42 2SU

Case study L: an embedded/extended approach

Embedding PDP and employability into modular degree programmes at Edge Hill University

The practice

Since a one-size-fits-all approach to PDP was considered to be inappropriate for the modular degree programme, each department appointed a 'champion' to move PDP and employability forward and embed it into the curriculum. It was decided that all PDPs should include as a minimum entitlement: at level 1 – skills auditing, skills development and action plan, academic literacy, numeracy and ITC; at level 2 – CV development, career planning and work/volunteering opportunities/research, and reflection; at level 3 – employment research, CV enhancement, interview skills, reflection on skills gained while at university in relation to industry, and 'becoming more employable'. PDP is delivered through the medium of subject-specific materials, so that students can see the relevance of it to their future career.

Some departments use PDP as a level 2 and 3 'personal and professional development' module, as part of an accredited part of the degree programme. Other departments have embedded it into every module. Personal tutors are involved in the marking of the PDP programme.

Within the Sports department one full-time member of academic staff is employed to co-ordinate, plan and implement PDP over all three years.

Evolution

One department validated seven new degrees four years ago. All programmes have a generic first year, with specialist routes in year 2 and year 3.

All year 1 students have a PDP module on 'developing academic skills'. Four degree programmes have specific PDP modules on 'personal and professional development' in years 2 and 3. Two programmes use PDP in work-based placements in year 3. One programme has embedded the PDP into its other modules, in which students are encouraged to work towards the standards required for Qualified Teacher Status. Evaluation takes place annually in order that improvements can be made to making the process relevant to employability requirements.

Within the Sports department, PDPlans are electronically submitted; other departments are still using paper submission.

The institution has carried out pilot studies with Pebblepad from the University of Wolverhampton. The Business School is in the process of using this resource. The preferred method of introducing electronic VLE is Blackboard, which is was rolled out institution-wide during the Summer of 2008.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

Until PDP became an accredited and integral part of the personal tutorial system, staff and students did not fully engage with it. There is still some resistance from some members of staff across some departments, and this can lead to further resistance by the students to engage in the process. The assessment process can be a benefiting factor in the participative process: if students feel they are getting something from it towards their degree, they do engage. There is still no consistency across the institution in the delivery of the PDP modules, and this leads to some students benefiting from the process more than others. However, there is some excellent work being carried out with the students within some departments, which still needs to be shared.

Further details and resources

Further details, resources, evidence checklists and subject-specific materials can be made available by contacting Angela Hepworth (details below).

Contact

Angela Hepworth, Senior Lecturer, Personal and Professional Development
01695 584638
hepworta@edgehill.ac.uk

Sport and Physical Activity Department
Edge Hill University
St Helens Road
Ormskirk L39 4QP

Case study M: an embedded (extended) approach

The University of Chester Communication Studies programme: Employer File

The practice

Students develop a portfolio (called the Employer File), which is assessed at regular intervals and linked to the skills modules taught at all three levels. The File will be shown to future/potential employers as evidence of the skills students have developed in relation to the communication industry. The files assess the achievement of learning outcomes, which include skills evidencing, reflection and evaluation, and compulsory formative, self-assessment and critical reflection sections completed by the student. At the end of the final year the File includes all previously assessed work if the students wish to showcase it. The File is highly individual, and the student can play to their strengths, making this a successful form of assessment in diverse teaching groups, in keeping with retention and progression targets, and in encouraging PDP through the compulsory e-portfolio evidencing.

The new Public Relations programme being delivered from our Warrington campus (and written by the Communication Studies team) also uses the Employer File, but is more prescriptive in the requirement for compulsory items such as the inclusion of a press release.

Evolution

We are constantly re-evaluating all elements of the File. The University has restructured into year-long 20-credit modules. This has created some challenges for the number and the frequency of hand-ins in order to retain a high enough word-count to enable the students to achieve learning outcomes, yet avoiding bunching of assessment towards the end of the module. This is especially pertinent at level 3, where the skills module is single. The proposal, based upon student feedback is to reduce the number of hand-ins from three to two in 2008–09.

The Counselling Skills programme introduced a portfolio form of assessment, which has used the Employer File as an influence.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

We conduct research each year at each level, tracking understanding and awareness of this form of assessment. In the third year, this research is linked directly to

employability and whether the students have already used it, or anticipate using it, in the job search as such, and/or whether the skills that have developed as a result of doing the File have increased levels of confidence etc. Subsequently, students contact us after graduation, and in many cases tell us that the File was crucial in the interview process. With so many graduates seeking employment, the employers with whom the teaching team are in contact confirm the value of this form of skills evidencing.

The File is regularly singled out as best practice by external examiners and this continues to be the case.

Further details and resources

At the moment, material is available only to the students registered for the skills modules. These include question and answer sheets about the File, packs of exercises for use in the File, and the formative, self-assessment and critical reflection sheets. The course team works closely with other areas of the University such as the Careers Service, Student Support and Guidance and Work-Based Learning, where there is a synergy with this form of employment-gearred reflective work. The aim is to include it in the University's Shared Practice Database: a themed collection of learning, teaching and assessment materials for dissemination across the University community and moderated by our Learning and Teaching Institute.

Contact

Meriel Pritchard, Deputy Head of Department, Social & Communication Studies
01244 511000
m.pritchard@chester.ac.uk

Nicci Banks, Research & Development Officer, Student Support and Guidance
01244 511000
n.banks@chester.ac.uk

Case study N: an extended approach

Embedding PDP in the postgraduate Urban and Regional Planning curriculum at Heriot Watt University

The practice

Induction. At the half-day induction before classes start, the postgraduate programme co-ordinator introduces the concept of PDP to multi-disciplinary students within the programme, promotes its usefulness, and hands out the standard PDP template developed by the School. The first part of this includes open questions about why a student has chosen to come on the course and what they hope to achieve, including career aspirations. The students fill in the open questions, which are collected in and read by the course leaders to help them get to know the students. By the end of induction, students have therefore started their PDPlans and are encouraged to keep them up-to-date throughout the course.

Modules. There are certain modules throughout the course in which PDP is highlighted, building on the introduction at induction. These include a first-term module on the nature of planning and qualities expected of planners, and specialist options in the second term.

Planning management module. PDP forms the basis in a third-term module on 'planning management'. This is the main module that includes professional and career issues, consolidating learning towards the end of the year as students are thinking about making applications for employment. Students are given a wide range of options for completing their PDP, including the standard skills/knowledge/values matrix, mind maps, SWOT analysis, 'medicine wheel', Sigmoid Curve (see Handy, 1995), and collage/graphic representation. These are explained in class, and students are also invited to think of any other ways of completing the PDP, thereby encouraging creative thinking and recognising that different students have different learning styles. The brief and assessment criteria are clearly spelled out. It is emphasised that PDPs will help students explicitly with job applications and career development. A series of outside speakers cements this, including a university careers adviser and practising planners from a variety of sectors.

PDP encourages students to see themselves as whole persons, integrating work experience, transferable and technical skills and outside activities. Students also peer-review each other's PDP one week in advance of the hand-in date, to suggest improvements and further promote learning.

This particular group of students includes many part-time mature students who have been working for some time. The great majority of these mature students take the opportunity to use PDP effectively to assess where they have come from and where they are going in career, and sometimes in more personal terms. It is fair to say that some of the most creative forms of PDP have come from this group. However, as with younger students, there is a small percentage that does not take advantage of what PDP offers. The only two fails have been in mature students who handed in something too brief and ill thought out when compared to the assessment criteria to merit a pass.

Evolution

PDP has been an assessed part of this course for several years and a detailed student evaluation is analysed every year to guide changes in subsequent years. The introduction of more creative forms of PDP occurred recently, inspired by participation in the Creative University Project (see Baillie, 2004). It is hoped that the success of this approach can be rolled out across the School more widely.

It is heartening to note that when the main staff member involved went abroad on a year's sabbatical, the practices outlined above were well enough embedded in the programme to not suffer any disruption. The sabbatical was at the School of Architecture and Planning, University of Auckland, New Zealand, where she introduced practices similar to those above: reflective open questions about career aspirations as part of postgraduate induction, and a portfolio of skills development and experience as the assessment for a new management module, with employers invited to speak about its importance.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

Student feedback was very positive, even from those who admitted they were sceptical at the beginning. Students found that PDP helped them reflect about and plan their learning, prepare for job applications and interviews, and develop skills required by the Royal Town Planning Institute (who require PDPlans for their Assessment of Professional Competence in the route to Chartered Membership and subsequent continuous professional development). It was clear that different forms of PDPlan appealed to different students and many were extremely creative. Students were happy for the plans to be assessed.

Staff also said that PDP helped them get to know students; many plans were truly 'inspiring' and, when read across the cohort, gave useful pointers about curriculum development.

Further details and resources

See Centre for Education in the Built Environment website for more details, including templates for using these techniques: www.cebe.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/edg/edg04/higgins.php.

Contact

Marilyn Higgins
0131 451 3465
m.g.higgins@sbe.hw.ac.uk

Case study O: an extended approach

Connecting volunteering to the curriculum at the University of Northampton

The practice

The volunteering year 1 elective (20 credits), taken by students from social science and health science majors, examines the role of the voluntary sector in social welfare provision, and offers practical and professional skills development via work placements in the sector. Students are required to undertake 100 hours volunteering, and produce a reflective journal, a project report, and a CV, all of which are assessed. Formal workshops cover topics such as understanding the voluntary sector, working with different user groups, legal and social policy aspects, in addition to preparation and planning sessions for placements, which are facilitated by the community volunteering specialist. The value of personal development planning with regard to increased self-awareness, interpersonal sensitivity and reflective professional practice, is emphasised throughout.

Three dedicated workshops encourage understanding of the benefits of PDP, both for success in the reflective assessments, and for long-term employability and professional development. They include practice in keeping workplace diaries, reflective writing techniques, and translating experiences into CV 'language' for future self-presentation. The three are:

- Session 1: Improving chances – audit of wider life/work experiences, identifying and describing skills, actions for improvement, ways to develop skills and attributes that employers value.
- Session 2: Reflective writing – placement diary, setting objectives, evaluating achievements, learning points, the benefits of reflection in learning, features of reflective accounts, strategies and practice in writing reflectively.
- Session 3: Action planning – SMART goals, career-related action planning, evaluating options, filling skills/experience gaps, CV refinement and self-presentation, translating experiences into a self-marketing tool.

Evolution

This module has been continually refined over the last four years with the module leader and Community Volunteering Manager working closely together to ensure maximum benefit is gained from the practical placement and insights into issues in

social welfare. The sessions delivered by the PDP Co-ordinator specifically support the reflective assessments, and strong linkages are made on the VLE with additional resources to encourage reflective practice.

In 2008–09 a more limited number of selected voluntary placements will be offered and will be undertaken by several students, thus adding a team-working aspect to the students' experiences, and allowing discussion of the insights and benefits gained.

It is also planned in 2008–09 to promote the use of e-portfolio for ongoing reflective logs of the placement activity and as a space for group discussion. Material has been produced to help students grasp the scope of e-portfolio with regard to increased self-awareness, pulling together their wider life-learning, and the importance of drawing upon/reworking e-portfolio material for presentation to external audiences such as employers.

Evaluation (what did you learn from it; what did the students learn from it)?

Now in its fifth year, this module is specifically designed to develop students' employability skills. Survey data collected in Autumn 2006 (27 students) show more positive findings than those from wider institutional returns (N = 246):

- Over 90% understood the nature and benefits of PDP and also how it links with developing employability skills.
- 48% did feel that PDP took up too much time, especially noting the pressures of academic work; but 40% disagreed. Asked if anything would prevent them spending time on PDP, seven of the group of 27 recognised PDP as a priority, not expecting anything to get in the way of engaging with the activities.
- All but one student highlighted the relevance of PDP processes to CV building, and all saw volunteering experience as key to improving their chances.

Benefits highlighted in comments emphasised the following: identifying strengths and weaknesses, tracking progress, keeping focused, improving practice through reflection, demonstrating skills for selection processes, organisation and time management.

More specific module review data was collected in May 2007 (N = 27) and was used with that of the 2008 cohort (N = 25) in assessing the impact of the support provided for the assignments and in encouraging habits of PDP. Around 80% of both cohorts stated the sessions to be very or quite useful both in supporting the assignments and in understanding the importance of expressing and recording their developing skills. All students felt they were helped to maximise the benefits from volunteering to some extent, while 90% felt their reflective skills had improved and were being used in other study/work activities. Comments included:

'... extremely valuable in giving the opportunity to gain the necessary practical skills expected in a working environment.'

'Fantastic module – a great idea to improve CVs etc and make us more employable.'

Can the resources/approach be viewed by others? If so where/how?

See below for a presentation and abstract presented at our recent Learning and Teaching Conference: Creating Contemporary Student Learning Environments:

www2.northampton.ac.uk/portal/page/portal/4D95FC7359591022E0440003BA7723F7
www2.northampton.ac.uk/learningteaching/conference/abstracts/abstracts-013

Contact

Andrea Duncan, PDP Co-ordinator
andrea.duncan@northampton.ac.uk

Office of Learning and Teaching
University of Northampton
Boughton Green Road
Northampton
NN2 7AL

6. Getting students to take PDP seriously

Since the first issue of this publication student concerns with later employment, and the potential of PDP to contribute to this, have become much more evident. As Wes Streeting, now NUS President, noted:

*'We know – and employers value – the enormous range of transferable skills that increase students' employability and wider educational experience. Graduates want and need the ability to communicate these skills and experiences to their future employers or place of study in a way that is transparent, consistent and fair ... If we can get PDP right across the myriad of courses, programmes and institutions that make up our increasingly diverse sector we will have made significant steps forward for students, employers and institutions alike.'*³⁷

The original *Guidelines* for PDP³⁸, in highlighting what was anticipated to be effective and successful practice, provided a number of pointers to supporting student engagement with PDP. These emphasised the importance of:

- PDP as an *academic* activity, linked to the learning objectives/outcomes of programmes, thereby helping to locate it with the primary purpose(s) of university study³⁹.
- Introducing students to PDP, its purposes, obligations and anticipated benefits, at an early point in their HE experience.
- Staff themselves valuing the approach, by being involved in similar processes, e.g. through appraisal and development policies or portfolio-building linked to professional accreditation or CPD requirements.
- Involving students in the design and development of documents and processes where applicable.
- Ensuring that students have appropriate and regular access to a named individual who will support (and challenge) them through the PDP process.
- Ensuring that PDP is integrated into the opportunities that are provided for careers advice and planning.
- Gaining feedback from students on the effectiveness of their PDP practices and involving them in any formal review of policy.

Project work, for example at the University of Leeds (Jackson *et al.*, n.d.) also provides pointers to key factors in student involvement. Student comments here

37 Taken from Streeting, W. (2007) PDP and Beyond; a perspective from the student world. *PDP-UK Newsletter*. Issue 10. Available at www.recordingachievement.org/pdpuk/newsletter/Issue10.pdf (accessed 18 September 2008).

38 At www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressFiles/guidelines/progfile2001.asp (accessed 18 September 2008).

39 Many examples in the previous section take such a position.

generally broke down into three groups:

1. Students who were starting to make use of the document *strategically*: 'I use it to establish myself as a student and to compare what I am now to what I was six months ago.' 'I have been able to see where I have been and where I am going, with more clarity.' 'I didn't really think it was much use at first, but after 18 months I can see that the notes we made at the end of the first exams were useful.' 'I was surprised, it seemed to be a waste of time at first, but I now realise what a help doing some planning can be.' 'Recording helped me realise what I have learnt this year.'
2. Those who recognised the *positive potential* of the approach: 'If I took time to read the Portfolio, I am sure I would find it very valuable in aiming for the future.' 'It reminds you what you should be doing.' 'Maybe I would use it at the end of the year to reflect upon the whole year's work.' 'I know I should be using it more, I am not good at this sort of thing, so having to do it for my tutor would be useful.'
3. Those who were *dismissive of the recording process* in particular: 'I assess what I am doing myself; I don't need a book to help me.' 'I don't need to write down experiences and achievements, I think I can remember.' 'It's too early to plan ahead; I don't know what I am doing next week.'

There was, however, an important caveat that emerged in both written and focus group comments, and reinforces the centrality of staff engagement referred to in the Progress File *Guidelines*: 'I think (this type of) support is good, but talking to someone on a regular basis is better and more productive than writing it down' (Jackson *et al.* n.d.). Related to this, where the process was linked to tutorial provision, the response of the tutor was a significant 'driver' (or non-response a significant 'inhibitor') in relation to student engagement. Without such tutor engagement, the production of policy statements and investment in materials may provide a limited return.

As part of a National Teaching Fellowship, John Peters asked a sample of 185 students from six institutions (two pre-92, two post-92 and two college-sector institutions) to complete an open-ended questionnaire about their experience of PDP. Initial analysis of the outcomes from this work indicates that:

- 47% suggested they were engaged with PDP for purely intrinsic reasons, while 17% reported involvement for purely extrinsic reasons.
- Written data provided clear evidence of the complexity of student attitudes. Some gave moving statements of the value of PDP to their lives; others rejected the whole concept as 'useless paperwork'. There were clear relationships between seeing PDP as a process to be engaged with or as a bureaucratic tool to be avoided.
- Those who valued PDP variously described it as being about personal growth, development as a learner, self-assessment, the development of skills, or

underpinning professional practice. While some acknowledged that they only engaged with PDP because it was a requirement of their programme of study, many among these stated they had nonetheless found it useful.

- Those who engaged in PDP were more likely to cite its value to them or to claim it as a natural personal attribute: 'PDP for me is a way of life.' Those who did not engage were much more likely to blame their environment – lack of information, lack of support, lack of time, over-complex systems. Elsewhere, others have cited 'I didn't know what to write' as the single biggest problem, closely followed by 'I didn't know how much to write'.
- Just as before, staff and students recognised that the value placed on PDP by subject staff influenced student engagement.
- Time constraints were seen by both groups as the most important perceived barrier to engagement.

To get students to take PDP practice seriously these findings suggest that we need to:

- Connect PDP practice to core academic activity (a point that is helpfully congruent with the ESECT stress on connecting good learning and employability).
- Recognise the value of presenting PDP to students as a process looking forward to what they will be undertaking in employment⁴⁰ rather than looking back to what they did in school (and some at least hoped they would never have to do again). Negative comments along the lines of 'I don't need to be monitored, I'm an adult' are not uncommon (and staff comments reflect this too). So stressing appraisal/performance review/professional development processes in business and industry can be helpful.
- Provide 'models' for getting started, and a much stronger framing of the task initially, at least until it feels familiar.
- Emphasise the process of PDP rather than the bureaucracy.
- Encourage students to consider the benefits of engagement with PDP for them (and recognise that, in the context of a diverse student population, these could themselves be diverse).
- Support staff in ensuring that they understand the benefits of engagement for students (and indeed for staff themselves⁴¹). In several evaluations the primary complaint from students is about their personal tutor being unknown/uncontactable/not interested rather than anything to do with the system (whether electronic or paper).

These points of course, are not mutually exclusive, and will in all probability never be achieved with all students – or all staff. The evidence from the illustrations presented in the previous section is, however, that it can be done!

40 And in life generally, particularly for mature students.

41 Both for their own professional development and with regard to the development of more self-directed and self managed learners. See also Young (2005, para. 2.8).

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Biographies

Rob Ward

Rob Ward is the Director of the Centre for Recording Achievement, which is a national network organisation, a registered educational charity, and an Associate Centre of the Higher Education Academy. With over 50 HE members, the CRA provides a unique national cross-sectoral network committed to maximising the benefits of personal development planning and related processes for individuals and the organisations to which they belong. A 'lapsed historian', Rob previously worked as a careers adviser, a senior lecturer on in-service training programmes in careers education and guidance, and a curriculum adviser within health care programmes in HE.

Mark Atlay

Mark Atlay is Director of the University of Bedfordshire's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, which focuses on employability and PDP (see www.beds.ac.uk/bridgescetl). Mark spent seven years lecturing in chemistry at the University of Glamorgan before moving on to work on the development of distance learning materials at the Open University in the UK. At the University of Bedfordshire, he has worked in a number of areas including quality assurance, staff development, quality enhancement and educational development. He has co-ordinated the development and implementation of the University's curriculum model, involving a revised approach to skills development linked to Progress Files and personal development planning (PDP). He has also led a HEFCE Good Management Practice project (GMP201) on effecting change in higher education.

Janet Strivens

Janet Strivens has taught in various universities in the UK for over 30 years and is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. She is the Senior Associate Director of the Centre for Recording Achievement and is also an Educational Developer at the University of Liverpool. She was a member of the team that developed the Liverpool University Student Interactive Database (LUSID), one of the first electronic tools to support personal development planning. Since then she has been involved in a number of JISC projects concerned with e-portfolios and/or assessment, and has acted as a consultant on behalf of the CRA/Higher Education Academy to Welsh HEIs in relation to personal development planning (PDP) and e-portfolio developments. Her particular interests are in PDP, e-portfolio use and electronic support for PDP, assessment for learning and the development of autonomy in learning.

Jane Stapleford

Jane Stapleford is a chartered occupational psychologist. As Head of the Employability Office at Leeds Metropolitan University, she led the strategic development and implementation of employability and PDP in the curriculum across the University. She chaired the University Progress Files Group and the Reflection and Reflective Practice Resource Group, delivered extensive staff development for PDP and created online resources for employability and personal and career development. She was a member of the Careers Education Benchmark Steering Group and AGCAS Careers Education Task Group and is a Trustee of the CRA. Jane is now an independent educational consultant and continues to contribute to national and international conferences on integrating employability, PDP and work-related learning in the HE curriculum.

Liz Beasley

Liz Beasley is the Director of Scholarship, Assessment, Learning and Teaching in the Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education within Leeds Metropolitan University. Liz has over 22 years' experience in teaching across primary schools, initial teacher training and CPD for teachers and trainers, as well as a wide range of staff development within HE. Reflective practice is a central core element of all her teaching approaches, and her personal and professional enthusiasm has been influential in developments within and beyond the University, both nationally and internationally. Liz is planning to move to the USA and establish herself as an educational consultant in Northern Michigan during 2008–09.

Sue Palmer

Sue Palmer is Associate Dean and Head of School in the Faculty of Arts and Society at Leeds Metropolitan University. Her interest in reflective practice developed from her work with children in playwork settings, her work teaching on and leading the Playwork degree and her memberships of the Progress Files Group and the Reflection and Reflective Practice Resource Group within the university. Her publications include 'Playwork as reflective practice' in Brown (2003) *Playwork Theory and Practice* (Buckingham: Open University Press).

A.G. Watts

Tony Watts is a Founding Fellow and Life President of the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling, and a Visiting Professor at the University of Derby and at Canterbury Christ Church University. He was formerly Director of NICEC, and subsequently worked at OECD in Paris. He is author of many books and articles on career development and related topics, including the Higher Education Academy report on *Career Development Learning and Employability*. He was awarded an OBE in the 1994 Queen's Birthday Honours List for his services to education.

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The Higher Education Academy
Innovation Way
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Tel: +44 (0)1904 717500
Fax: +44 (0)1904 717505
enquiries@heacademy.ac.uk
www.heacademy.ac.uk

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