Personal Development Planning for Students - A Guide for Staff

For information on PDP: http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/resources/pdp/index.php
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING
A GUIDE FOR STAFF

What is PDP?

Personal Development Planning (PDP) is “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”. ¹

A continuous cycle of self reflection, recording and action, the purpose of PDP is to encourage students to learn to develop themselves and plan for the future by becoming more aware of their capabilities and the opportunities around them. PDP can be applied in a range of contexts, changing the way students approach their studies, make choices in both their academic and personal life and prioritise their actions.

The PDP process is intrinsic to the basic theory of learning and involves:

- reflecting on achievement
- identifying strengths and areas for development
- setting goals
- identifying skills
- recording reflection
- making connections between learning in all contexts and achievement
- acting to nurture potential and address areas which need development

Engaging in PDP should enable students to become more confident individuals and give them the ability to direct their learning in the future, with a view to becoming independent lifelong learners.

¹ QAA definition of PDP from Policy Statement on a Progress File for Students, May 2000
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressFiles/archive/policystatement/default.asp
Benefits for staff and students

Encouraging students to engage in PDP has clear benefits for both staff and students, developing students to become:

- more motivated
- more interested in their progress
- better learners
- more self aware
- more employable
- able to recognise and fulfil their potential

By developing independent learners with skills for future employability, PDP also fulfils some of the aims of the University’s Learning and Teaching Strategy.

National background to PDP

The original impetus for PDP came from a recommendation from the National Committee of Inquiry in Higher Education (Dearing and Garrick reports) that Universities introduce both formal and informal records of student achievement called progress files. The purpose of progress files is to “help make the outcomes or results of learning more explicit and to encourage individuals to set targets and plan future development”\(^2\). This concept had already been implemented in schools and it was therefore a logical step to extend it to Higher Education, assisting the transition from one phase of education to another and working towards a lifelong record of learning and achievement.

The initiative was taken up the Quality Assurance Agency and universities were asked to implement progress files in two parts

- Transcript: a formal record of student achievement maintained by the university
- Personal Development Planning (PDP): an informal personal record, developmental in nature and maintained by the student.

The QAA left detailed implementation of PDP up to universities. However, a minimum set of requirements, with which Universities had to comply, was stipulated as follows:

- At the start of a programme, students should be introduced to the opportunities for PDP.
- Students should be provided with opportunities for PDP at each stage of their programme.
- The rationale for PDP at different stages of a programme should be explained for the benefit of students (e.g. in student or course handbooks or module/unit guides).
- Students should be provided with information on PDP and ways they can engage with it in programme literature throughout their programme and especially at induction.
- Institutions will be expected to have mechanisms to assure themselves that PDP is being implemented effectively.

Full information on the QAA’s policy and guidelines on PDP can be found at:
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressFiles/guidelines/PDP/

The University’s Approach to PDP

\(^2\) National Committee of Inquiry in Higher Education, 1997
Following a period of consultation and research, the University created a web-based PDP system using SAMIS to record students’ experiences. It fulfilled the criteria set by the QAA and also satisfied the results of the University’s consultation and research but, in line with the experience of other institutions who implemented similar systems, did not have the expected uptake by students.

The University has therefore reconsidered its approach to PDP and is now proposing a way forward which encourages departments to get their students to engage in the PDP process at all levels of their studies rather advocating a system which exists outside their studies. This new approach, agreed by Learning and Teaching Committee:

- seeks to concentrate upon PDP as a process rather than a system;
- aims to be inclusive in supporting a variety of modes of learning and functions of PDP;
- builds upon existing activity and opportunities;
- encourages collaboration with staff and students on the development of new approaches;
- promotes student ownership of PDP, with co-ordinated support at departmental and institutional level;
- encourages initiatives at the level of the discipline in order to develop the relevance of PDP to the academic programme.

Uptake of PDP at other UK universities echoes the University of Bath’s own experience and the approach now being proposed. Since its inception, a number of models of PDP have emerged. The following model features in the QAA guidance published in February 2009 and shows a range of approaches universities might consider taking:

**Discrete** - where PDP is conceived as additional to, and separate from, the curriculum. Here, learners tend to be encouraged to engage in PDP, with perhaps some support from tutors or others, but whether, when and how they do so is left largely to the learners themselves. Because learner motivation is crucial, this approach is generally seen to be more appropriate for higher-level study.

**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 elements of a programme, which provide the main support for PDP. They may also serve to link with material covered elsewhere in the programme.

**Integrated** - a whole-curriculum approach where all or most parts of a programme involve activities which are aligned with PDP processes, including those in the workplace. In this model, every programme tutor has a responsibility for supporting PDP.

**Extended** - where PDP processes are included in the curriculum but also serve explicitly to integrate learning activities (such as volunteering or peer mentoring) outside the curriculum. These may include integrated or voluntary work placements or other extra-curricular activities.

The approach proposed at the University is one of “mixed economy” encompassing the above models, according to the needs of the department or school.

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Engaging students in PDP

To become embedded as a lifelong activity, the motivation and responsibility to do PDP needs to come from the student. Some students take to the concept of PDP naturally. However, experience has shown that many students not only need to see the relevance of what they are being asked to do, but also need to be provided with a context and some impetus to get started.

There are many points in the student lifecycle – at induction, in study skills units, on placement – where the process of PDP may already embedded. By engaging fully in the process as part of the curriculum, students are made aware of the benefits PDP, and might be encouraged to continue the practice throughout their studies and beyond their time at University.

Students benefit from being introduced to a range of approaches and opportunities to undertake PDP. Modes of reflecting and recording can be straightforward – using a paper-based approach – or more sophisticated – making use of online journals and blogs. Some students may prefer to work alone; others may benefit from activities in groups. Involving students in the design of activities can also contribute to their success. By the same token, staff who can demonstrate that PDP works for them may in turn encourage their students to take it up.

There are many examples of ways in which PDP and aspects of PDP are already used across the University, which may help your students to become familiar with the process. Some of these activities may not be branded as PDP. However, they clearly use PDP processes. The key thing is to make students aware of the connection to PDP and of ways in which they can expand and continue these activities.

At induction
At the start of their studies, it is clearly important to introduce students to the concept of PDP. Students will be more receptive to the concept, and less geared towards getting marks which contribute to their final degree, at this stage in their programme. The notion needs to be embedded early on, continuing any record of achievement which they may have started at school.

Study Skills Units
Study skills units provide a good opportunity for students to reflect on what skills they may need to acquire in order to progress, not only in their studies, but also, in order to find employment at the end of their degree. Students need to be made aware that the generic skills required to complete their programme will help them to organise their lives and plan for their future careers.

Work-based learning
Personal Development Planning is integral to most programmes involving work-based learning. Professional Doctorates require the student to undertake some kind of Learning Needs Analysis and ongoing process of reflection. Foundation Degrees include compulsory units on the subject of work-based learning where students’ personal development plans are assessed.

Professional Requirements
Students working towards professional qualifications are often required to complete records of their professional experience and development which reflect on achievements. Self assessment may also form a key part of their work.

Placements
In considering their placement options and to help them to make informed decisions students have the perfect opportunity to employ PDP processes. A number of departments use formal methods to encourage their students to think about their options by asking students to complete a form indicating their preferences and/or holding a formal meeting.

Students who have been doing PDP will find that compiling their CV will be much easier than starting from scratch. For students who haven’t been involved in PDP, drawing up their CV will be a good opportunity for them to start to reflect on their achievements and think about their future. Some departments also make pre-placement preparation sessions available to students who are not planning to go on placement as the activities on offer will be relevant to them in thinking about their future.

There is an expectation from most departments that students will reflect on and record their achievements and experiences whilst on placement. Mechanisms for recording reflections vary according to the programme and range from informal journals and logs to formal reports. Whatever the mechanism, these activities contribute to PDP and students may be encouraged to continue the practice to inform future decisions.

**Journals and blogging**
Journals and blogging can be used alongside a number of tasks and clearly encourage students to be reflective. One of the best ways of getting students involved in PDP is to show them that you consider it worth doing yourself. If you keep a blog of your own consider giving your students access.

**Working in Groups**
Getting students to work in groups, observing and assessing the work of their peers, is a very good way to encourage them to reflect on their own skills and behaviour.

**Personal tutorials**
Personal tutorials are a good opportunity to introduce PDP to students. Some departments use formal means to track the progress of students, using personal tutorial record forms to log information about students including whether they undertake PDP.

**Generic Skills Training**
For postgraduate research students, PDP is fundamental to completing a training needs analysis identifying what generic skills training may be needed. For further information on generic skills training visit [http://www.bath.ac.uk/research/pgskills/](http://www.bath.ac.uk/research/pgskills/).

**The Bath Award**
In the pilot stage in 2008/09, the Bath Award is an initiative spearheaded by the Students Union to get recognition for the extra curricula work which students do. The principles of PDP are applied to compile a portfolio of experience which is then assessed and accredited.

**Career development**
Careers advisors use reflective processes to get students to become more self-aware and aware of opportunities available to them. This process helps students to make decisions about their future and also to think about what steps they might need to take to achieve their goals. Further information on the work of the Careers Advisory Service is available at [http://www.bath.ac.uk/careers/student.html](http://www.bath.ac.uk/careers/student.html).
Getting started

Internal resources

To help you get started there are a number of resources available internally on the PDP website hosted by the LTEO at http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/resources/pdp/.

- Guide for students: this document, written by a University of Bath student, provides an introduction to PDP for students. Please feel free to adapt this to meet the needs of your discipline.
- Quick start PDP: this is a very simple word template which you may like to provide to your students to get them started.
- The University’s web-based PDP: a structured approach to assessing skills, action planning and recording achievements.
- Blogs: some students may be encouraged to do PDP through setting up their own blog. Information on blogs and wikis is available at http://www.bath.ac.uk/bucs/tools/wikisandblogs/

The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office is building up a bank of examples and resources for departments to share and use. If you would like to contribute to this resource, please contact: Georgina Eggleston at G.Eggleston@bath.ac.uk.

External Resources

- Centre for Recording Achievement (http://www.recordingachievement.org/), a national network organisation and a registered educational charity. It seeks to ‘promote the awareness of recording achievement and action planning processes as an important element in improving learning and progression throughout the world of education, training and employment’.
- The Keynote Project (http://www.leeds.ac.uk/textiles/keynote/) hosted by the University Leeds offers downloadable customisable materials for PDP.
- UKGrad programme (http://www.vitae.ac.uk/) has a database of case studies of the use of PDP among doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers.