

Aspect A: strategy and planning for implementation

An institution's commitment to implementing PDP for its students will be reflected in strategy and planning documents and embedded in policies and procedures. Support for PDP activities is required from senior academic and administrative management. The need for adequate staff time and funding to support and maintain PDP activities should be recognised.

Self-assessment questions

Key strategic questions are highlighted.

PDP policy/strategy

- A1 How and where is the institution's strategy and/or policy statement on PDP outlined, and is this easily accessible to staff and students?
- A2 What does the institution define as PDP activity?
- A3 In what ways does the PDP policy reflect the institutional ethos in respect of delegation of organisational responsibility (for example, is the PDP framework organised centrally, or delegated to faculties/colleges or departments/schools or to specific degree programmes)?
- A4 How are the needs of all groups of undergraduate and postgraduate students differentiated within PDP strategy/policy and practice? [See also Aspect N: engaging postgraduate students and postdoctoral staff, page 66.]
- A5 What is the relationship between the PDP strategy and the model for delivery (for example, do faculties/colleges have the freedom to design their own PDP framework in entirety or do they have limited flexibility within an overarching structure)? [See also Aspect B: model, design and branding, page 16.]
- A6 How have the differing requirements of professional and statutory bodies (PSBs) in relation to PDP activity been taken into account?
- A7 In what ways are other strategies 'joined up' to the PDP strategy (for example, those related to learning and teaching, e-learning, employability, career planning)?

Management of implementation

- A8 What constructive alignment is there between the different aspects of PDP: the strategy, policy, design, delivery and outcomes?
- A9 How does the institution review PDP implementation (for example, via a 'PDP management group' or equivalent)? [See also Aspect C: evaluation, review and quality enhancement, page 20.]

- A10 If a risk analysis has been carried out in relation to delivery of the PDP framework, either at institutional or sub-unit level, what were the results (for example, are PDP activities appropriately staffed and funded)?
- A11 What is the nature of support for creating, developing and maintaining the infrastructure required for the PDP framework (for example, software and server support for IT-based frameworks)?
- A12 If software and servers used in PDP frameworks fulfil multiple needs (for example, if these also support e-learning), how will the needs of the PDP framework be taken into account when these are reviewed and/or upgraded?
- A13 In what ways do student representatives take part in the management of the PDP framework (for example, through representation on a steering group)?
- A14 What steps have been taken to ensure that the implementation of the PDP framework meets the institution's legal obligations, for example in areas such as accessibility, equal opportunities and data protection?
- A15 How does policy support decision-making to allocate resources and time in workload models to help staff fully support PDP activities?

Commentary

From the outset, it has been apparent that strategy and planning are vital components of successful PDP implementation. Thus, an early phase in the development of the PDP framework(s) for some institutions was the creation of a PDP policy which clarified responsibilities and provided the impetus to adopt PDP as a student activity. The resulting prioritisation of staff effort and other resourcing meant that the necessary support infrastructure could be created (see Jackson, 2003).

The definitive QAA *Personal development planning: guidance for institutional policy and practice* (2009) lays out the following principle of effective practice in relation to strategy, policy and quality enhancement:

Institutions [should] have a strategy and policy framework for the implementation, monitoring and quality enhancement of PDP provision. Such a framework establishes and develops:

- the nature of institutional opportunities for PDP for all learners at all levels
- any appropriate institutional recording and support systems
- the scope for customised practice across programme provision
- the flexibility of policy requirements when extended to students in partner institutions
- appropriate staff development opportunities to support PDP implementation

Factors influencing centralised and devolved policy-making

Many PSBs can point to a long-standing interest in PDP-like reflective practice on the part of students. In some cases, accreditation has been a forceful

'driver' of PDP policy and implementation. This has resulted in faster adoption in certain disciplines (on occasion predating the Dearing and Garrick reports) that needed to be taken into account when developing policies to suit both early and late adopters. This, with other discipline-specific needs (see, for example, Croot, 2001), conflated with the general acceptance of the value of embedding PDP activities in the curriculum (Aspect G: embedding PDP and the discipline context, page 37), has favoured delegation of responsibility to discipline units.

On the other hand, institutions with a history of a 'top-down' management approach, or whose curricula favour cross-unit module choices by students, can be expected to prefer a more holistic approach to PDP. Relevant also is the mode of delivery, which may require substantial institutional investment in bespoke PDP software or e-portfolio systems requiring tailoring by learning technologists. In such cases, policy and decision-making is generally required for 'top-slicing' the funds to pay for centralised software, IT infrastructure and support. This may encourage a unified approach.

Accordingly, two contrasting styles of PDP policy have emerged, with hybrid approaches between: one supporting the development of a centralised PDP 'framework' followed by most or all subunits within the HEI, the other fostering devolvement of responsibility to the discipline subunits for design and implementation of several relatively independent frameworks.

Factors influencing policy to support student engagement and effective learning

As PDP framework(s) have matured, the focus of policy has tended to move towards schemes for embedding PDP to encourage student use. At a QAA Scotland/CRA/HEA workshop held in 2007, participants were asked to rank strategy and policy factors in importance in relation to student engagement with PDP, leading to the results shown in table 3. This can be taken to indicate that, given general acceptance of the Dearing and Garrick recommendations, 'local' policy decisions are considered to be more important for this aspect of PDP than institutional or national factors.

Rank	Factor
1	Policy for embedding PDP within a programme
2	College/faculty/school/departmental PDP or learning and teaching strategy and policy
3	University PDP implementation policy, including mechanism of delivery
4	Other policy factors impinging on student decisions to engage with PDP
5	University learning and teaching strategy
6=	University quality assurance procedures
	External policy decisions and review procedures

Table 3: workshop participant rankings of different policy and strategy factors impacting on student engagement with PDP. Low ranking numbers imply high impact. See Weyers (2007) for full details.

The same workshop group identified further factors that are influential in PDP engagement, all requiring strategy and policy decisions:

- policies that promote student involvement in the initial design and review of the PDP scheme
- the level of study at which PDP was first introduced and how well students engaged at that stage
- whether a personal tutor scheme existed and could support PDP
- the quality of the PDP delivery mechanism (often an e-portfolio tool)
- degrees of security and privacy for students
- employability and/or career planning strategies 'joined up' to PDP
- whether staff valued PDP and whether staff were expected to carry out PDP themselves
- workload issues for students and staff
- relevance to the degree pathway and requirements of accrediting bodies (successful PDP schemes were often present in vocational degree programmes because of links to later CPD schemes within professions).

In tandem with moves to consider these topics, the sector has also been considering how PDP policy can promote effective learning. In this regard, it should be noted that the QAA Scotland-sponsored Effective Learning Framework (ELF) initiative was 'designed to help institutions think about how their own PDP strategies might be developed and help the sector as a whole start to think about what effective learning for students might mean as PDP evolves in the future climate of the enhancement of the student learning experience' (QAA, 2007). This work continues to be developed by the QAA Scotland/CRA/HEA Scottish PDP Forum.