

Aspect D: promotion and introduction

Student handbooks, whether PDP-specific or general, are useful vehicles to provide relevant information on PDP frameworks. Pre-entry information can be used to set the context for PDP and may act as an incentive to confirm an application to a specific institution as part of the post-application process. Once students are enrolled, induction to the PDP framework helps to ensure students understand the ethos and systems in use, the intended learning outcomes from PDP-related activities and where and how PDP-related activities might be assessed.

Self-assessment questions

Key strategic questions are highlighted.

Promotion and marketing

- D1 How is the PDP framework advertised or marketed (for example, institutionally or by sub-units, involving posters, handouts, and so on)? [See also Aspect B: model, design and branding, page 16.]
- D2 How is the personal development plan and the personal development planning process differentiated when explaining PDP?
- D3 In what way is the personal/professional development planning process referred to in your institution? For example, how meaningful might the acronym 'PDP' be to students and staff in your department/school? Is 'doing PDP' regarded as a helpful or unhelpful phrase?
- D4 What information is provided to students prior to arrival at the institution (for example, in a prospectus or information pack for potential applicants or confirmed entrants)?

Induction

- D5 How does the institution introduce students to its PDP framework(s) (for example, through pre-entry materials, an induction event, or sessions integrated into the curriculum)?
- D6 What support is available for students (for example, a specific PDP handbook and/or online support)?
- D7 How is PDP covered in institutional documentation, especially that provided to students (for example, module and programme handbooks; module or programme specifications) so that they can gain an impression of how PDP activities will form part of their learning activities?
- D8 What is the rationale for deciding who delivers the PDP induction scheme?

- D9 Which staff are involved in inducting students in PDP (for example, academic, support services, personal tutors) and what support are they given (for example, a centrally produced 'induction script')?
- D10 How is the induction event supported (for example, via literature and websites)?
- D11 Where articulation occurs (for example, entry into advanced levels of programmes), how are students prepared for entry into the PDP framework?

Embedding and support

- D12 How do programme and module learning outcomes reflect the expected engagement with PDP (for example, is the ability to plan and reflect regarded as an important graduate attribute)? [See also Aspect H: assessing PDP, page 42.]
- D13 How are embedded PDP-related activities mapped to the syllabus?
- D14 How are students provided with support for ongoing engagement with the PDP framework (for example, via dedicated staff, a central helpdesk, online communication channels, information within the PDP resource itself, written or web-based literature)?

Commentary

It is essential that students and staff have a clear and coherent means of understanding what PDP means for them as individuals, within their discipline context and institutional framework. A consistent approach to the depiction of PDP, integrated into existing effective means of communication, whether paper-based or electronic, can be crucial for effective engagement. A well-designed induction process is also crucial.

Diversity of understanding

A strength and a weakness of the generic definition of PDP, as stated in the *Guidelines for HE Progress Files* (QAA, 2001), is that it is interpreted differently within and between institutions. Other sectors (school, further education and professional employment) may also have different interpretations or similar concepts (SQA, 2004; Robertson, 2005). This diversity of interpretation can aid engagement by allowing individual HEIs to make PDP relevant to their situation; alternatively, it can convey mixed messages about purpose, process and outcomes (Miller et al, 2008).

Process and product

A survey of PDP practice in UK HEIs (Strivens, 2007) found that 83 per cent had implemented PDP in their institution and 75 per cent of those appeared to be using an electronic means to support the process. Confusion can result from the difference between engaging in the process of PDP and recording the outcome (product) via an e-portfolio. (A Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) paper (2005) refers to the importance of taking an inclusive position in the context of e-portfolios). When implementing PDP, differentiating the process from the product may benefit understanding.

Transition issues

Information overload can be an issue on arriving in HE (Harvey and Drew, 2006) and so it is important that any induction to PDP is factored in at an appropriate point and put into a meaningful context. This might include being part of a module, a programme-wide induction to a personal tutor system or built into IT induction on e-portfolios.

Pre-entry is a key stage for effective transition support and PDP has the potential to bridge the gap in a personalised and structured way. On this issue, Whittaker (2008) commented:

Transition support should be predicated on an enhancement rather than a deficit model, which recognises and builds on the strengths, skills and prior experience of students entering the first year...PDP is clearly an effective means of promoting this approach.

Aspect F: engaging undergraduate students (page 33) also covers related issues.

Promotion - branding and embedding

Practice shows that, even in institution-wide PDP schemes, it is important to allow local customisation or branding for schools/departments to reflect their different approaches. This can enhance ownership by both staff and students, as well as providing a shared means of understanding. A visual representation of the PDP process (a Google search of images [+pdp +personal development planning +ac] gives a selection of samples) can also help understanding, as well as promotion. Communicating the 'brand' to students and staff may be achieved through curriculum mapping (See Aspect G: embedding PDP and the discipline context, page 37).

Support

Miller et al (2008) identified three specific areas of student support needs arising from PDP implementation:

- personal - in relation to appropriate boundaries in terms of personal disclosures
- educational - in relation to specific skills, such as reflection
- technological - in relation to IT literacy.

These needs ought to be strategically considered, with staff available and adequately prepared for induction and ongoing support. Delivering support through partnerships, such as co-delivery for PDP between academic and careers service or employability staff, is one model that could be considered, as conducted at the University of Dundee (CRA, 2007):

Student induction is provided via tailored didactic sessions delivered jointly by the careers service and academic staff and supported via an eight-page booklet. All the university's colleges have incorporated student PDP activities within the curriculum and aspects of these are increasingly being assessed via shared access to student eportfolio content.

A number of other practical proposals which could be relevant to PDP induction were outlined in the outcomes to QAA Scotland's Enhancement Theme *Responding to Student Needs* (Saich, 2005). For instance, in her chapter on 'Approaches to Integrating Student Support', Saich suggests:

- considering front-loading support to focus on first-year undergraduates
- delivering support through partnerships such as co-delivery and contribution to academic programmes - for example, by integrating study skills, time management and PDP into the curriculum
- considering establishing consultative fora through which students can provide suggestions and feedback on support provision
- developing institutional approaches that can be tailored to local needs, rather than a proliferation of local solutions that may exacerbate existing 'silos' and potentially result in a more complex student experience (particularly where institutions have a flexible, modular structure).