

Aspect E: engaging academic staff

The success of a PDP framework depends on the engagement of and the essential value brought to the process by academic staff combined with management support. This could involve the tailoring of PDP activities to a specific discipline context. Often, key features of design and implementation will necessarily be carried out by (central) specialists. However, appropriate student engagement, whether supported by induction, embedding and assessment, or as part of a personal tutor scheme, is likely to require input from lecturing staff. Good practice can be achieved when academic staff are convinced of the potential merits of PDP activities which inevitably vie for curriculum space with other discipline-related content and learning outcomes and fully align their teaching and academic support with the aims of PDP in their institutional context.

Self-assessment questions:

Key strategic questions are highlighted.

Staff responsibilities

- E1 How do you know if relevant staff understand their role and responsibilities in relation to PDP implementation for students?
- E2 How are staff supported in dealing with personal and academic boundaries, in relation to PDP implementation for students (for example, students sharing personal information)?
- E3 In what ways are academic staff involved in the review and evaluation of PDP? [See also Aspect C: evaluation, review and quality enhancement, page 20.]

Staff engagement

- E4 How are staff engaged in a discussion about what PDP can help students achieve, for example, during staff development sessions? [See also Aspect C: evaluation, review and quality enhancement, page 20, and Aspect K: benefits for students, page 55.]
- E5 What are the 'trigger points' for staff engagement? For example, is this a gradual process or does it occur after specific events?
- E6 How is good practice in PDP pedagogy showcased within the institution? For example, in what ways are staff made aware of different models of PDP use within the institution, that they might think about adopting or modifying?
- E7 How are staff able to evidence their own PDP activities to students, for example, by creating or even demonstrating their own plan as part of their CPD activities?
- E8 How much is the terminology surrounding 'PDP' a barrier to potential engagement in your institution?

Institutional support

- E9 Is the mechanism of delivery of the PDP and associated portfolios convenient for staff to use, and if 'barriers' exist, how are these addressed?
- E10 Where appropriate, how are staff supported in relation to IT skills required for creating PDP portfolios?
- E11 How are staff supported in acquiring knowledge, vocabulary and understanding associated with concepts related to PDP, for example, reflection? [See also Aspect I: support for reflection and action planning, page 47.]
- E12 Who is responsible for promoting and supporting PDP engagement among staff?
- E13 Should staff engagement in PDP potentially be recognised via reward and promotion schemes and staff workload models? If so, how?

Support at school/discipline and programme levels

- E14 How are staff supported in creating materials that tailor PDP activities to suit the needs of their students and discipline, for example, by learning technologists, or staff experienced in assessing reflective practice or through the relevant PSB?
- E15 How does the institutional PDP framework allow staff flexibility to tailor PDP activities to suit the needs of their students and discipline?
- E16 How are staff supported in inducting students to PDP?

Commentary

To support learner engagement with PDP, staff need to be fully aware, informed and engaged with both the concept and process. Without this, students can be sent or can receive conflicting messages about the value and importance of PDP, resulting from misinformation or a lack of understanding disseminated by staff members.

Staff awareness and understanding

Effective information transfer within all complex organisations like HEIs poses a routine challenge on any topic. New staff, in particular, will need opportunities to learn about the PDP system that is in place at their institution, and its underpinning rationale. PDP as a concept may be completely new to them, or it may 'look and feel' very different from processes they have previously encountered. Opportunities for 'hands-on' experience of the process and to talk with students who are currently using PDP are key to raising awareness and understanding.

Programmes for teaching in HE provide a good way to introduce PDP to new staff. In addition, they give time to discuss the opportunities and challenges provided by this particular approach to supporting learning and planning. PDP can also be used as a tool within teaching in HE programmes. This can provide new (and more experienced) members of staff with an opportunity to experience PDP from the learner's point of view and to both engage with it and evaluate its potential from their perspective as students on the programme. Not only can this provide experience of and insight into PDP but it

also lends credibility to staff who then move on to engaging their own students with PDP. According to Jackson (2001a):

PDP will help academic staff:

- by helping students to be more independent/autonomous learners
- improve the quality of experience for tutors and tutees when it is linked to personal tutoring systems
- make more effective use of off-campus opportunities for learning like work placements or study abroad
- by creating a mechanism through which career-related skills and capabilities can be recorded
- by improving their understanding of the development of individual students and their ability to provide more meaningful employment references on their behalf.

Staff can find out about, and keep up-to-date with, discussion and new developments in PDP via a range of networked national organisations. A good place for them to start is the HEA which provides a web portal for this area (HEA, 2009a). An excellent national overview of the picture in Scotland, with associated resources including a Scottish HE PDP mailing list, is available via the Scottish PDP Forum (HEA, 2009b). Regular desktop updates are also available from the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA), which produces the *PDP and e-Portfolio UK Newsletter* (CRA, 2009a).

The CRA website also includes a specific area for higher education where staff can access resources and also search for case studies within their discipline area. Connecting with staff through their subject speciality can be a very good way to engage their interest, particularly as discipline-related materials and resources ground PDP within the individual's area of practice, making it more directly relevant for them. The HEA Subject Centres provide a good way into this. For example, the Subject Centre for English provides a useful case study on integration of PDP in the first-year curriculum, including a student perspective on this process (HEA, 2009c).

Informing staff

Quinton and Smallbone (2008) suggested that:

...successful implementation requires a blend of the following five areas of good practice: the effective and appropriate use of technology; internal staff champions; support for all staff involved in delivering PDP; clear and meaningful communication with students; and the capture of the institution's cumulative experience over time. Good practice within the conceptual aspects of PDP would include a clear vision of where responsibility lies for PDP within a university, a shared understanding of the purpose of PDP and the promotion of a PDP culture which engages both students and staff.

Staff at all levels need to be kept informed and up-to-date with regard to the PDP framework in place at their institution or teaching unit and particularly with regard to any changes or enhancements to the design or usability of the process.

Staff also need to know more than the 'nuts and bolts' of the PDP and to be aware of the underpinning rationale and values associated with PDP at their institution. Taking this a step further, colleagues also need to be involved in the ongoing discussions around those value sets and to feel that they can contribute to those discussions and thus to feel ownership of the process. Without this, it will be very difficult for them to communicate with conviction any sense of the PDP to their students. Workshops which focus on reflecting on the PDP process, delivered and available to all staff groups, can be a valuable way of keeping staff informed of changes and developments and also in supporting them in reflecting on what PDP could mean for them and their students within their particular discipline area. An example of such a general workshop is provided in the Appendix on page 70. This kind of development opportunity is particularly suited to the beginning or end of the academic year where there is scope for anticipation of the year ahead or reflection on the past year.

Staff engagement

Engagement is taken to mean a positive attitude and commitment to the PDP concept and process. Why should staff not engage with PDP? Colleagues may have a number of preconceptions about PDP, most of which arise from misinformation with regard to the process, and which may include:

- concerns that subject content will have to be sacrificed to allow students time to engage with the PDP process
- a feeling that PDP is an external imposition
- considering PDP to be someone else's responsibility (perhaps the Careers Service?)
- concerns that a focus on PDP challenges the 'traditional' view of HE
- confusion about the terminology and underlying ethos of the PDP framework.

In this connection, Strivens (2006a) reported that:

Staff came up with four priorities for further development. A key concern was the development of a sound evidence base. They also wanted more high quality resources, more training in the skills necessary to support the process and more involvement from senior management. It also became clear that institutions were increasingly looking for technological support for all aspects of the PDP process.

It is recognised that staff engagement with the PDP process can be promoted via certain 'triggers', for example:

- having hands-on experience of working with PDP tools, such as creating their own PDP or using the self-evaluation 'instruments' provided with existing PDP material (for example, learning styles or personality questionnaires)
- discussing PDP with students or reading case studies regarding the student experience of engaging with the PDP process
- considering the benefits (and limitations) of reflection as a tool for learning

- learning about the ways in which PDP can be integrated within disciplinary programmes of study, perhaps by hearing about the approaches of others
- thinking about the ways in which PDP can be integrated within generic support such as advising systems
- learning about the views of invited PSB or employer representatives on PDP, possibly in relation to CPD frameworks
- recognition through reward and promotion schemes.

Ruth Lawton, Birmingham City University (personal communication) has outlined benefits from an approach that initially helps staff share their understandings of PDP as a concept and then identify PDP-related activities that are already encompassed within their curriculum. Another approach she advocates is encouraging staff to carry out PDP for their personal benefit, and having convinced them of its merits, linking this to support for developing the PDP framework for their students.

Helpful staff development events could include those that focus on information sharing; case studies of good practice; research evidence of impact on learning; and events which involve students so that staff can hear about the benefits 'straight from the horse's mouth'. Different strategies will need to be employed at different times for different groups of colleagues and some ideas for workshop sessions are provided in the Appendix on page 70.