

Aspect G: embedding PDP and the discipline context

Although PDP can work effectively outwith a curricular context for some students (for example, in a co-curricular or centrally-provided model), embedding PDP into mainstream academic activities in a subject discipline context has been suggested as one of the characteristics of effective PDP practice. This can increase staff and student engagement and result in a number of positive outcomes, including improved student learning. In many cases, models of implementation will vary within an institution, depending on discipline, but should be underpinned by an institutional policy which sets out a rationale and strategic framework for doing so.

Self-assessment questions

Key strategic questions are highlighted.

Contextualisation/embedding in the curriculum

- G1 What opportunities are there to include PDP activities in your curriculum? Are these opportunities more beneficial at programme or module level? Has a curriculum mapping exercise been carried out?
- G2 To what extent does PDP and/or PDP-related skills, for example reflective skills, feature in the QAA subject benchmark statement for your subject (either implicitly or explicitly), and how do your intended learning outcomes reflect this?
- G3 How can skills or attributes which are particularly relevant to your subject discipline be identified by a student through the PDP process?
- G4 How can you ensure PDP activities associated with the curriculum are developmental in nature and therefore appropriate for students at different levels?
- G5 How could HEA Subject Centre resources on PDP, where present, be used more effectively within your subject?
- G6 How could the terminology surrounding 'PDP' be made more user-friendly in your institution/department?
- G7 If you do not currently use the term 'PDP' in your department/school (for example, because reflection and planning activities are embedded), how are students aware that they are undertaking the process?

Generic versus subject-specific aspects of PDP

- G8 How can you ensure that students in combined courses or in earlier years do not receive mixed messages about PDP in modules run by different teaching units within the institution?

G9 To what extent are any skills audits, templates or other means of capturing student self-audit activities orientated to your subject or discipline?

G10 To what extent could the language used to describe PDP-related activities be contextualised in your subject or discipline, or are there advantages in using generic language? If discipline-orientated, how is it introduced or accommodated in PDP resources available to students?

Professionalism/CPD links

G11 To what extent are students given opportunities within the curriculum to meet careers advisers or external contacts (for example, professional bodies' representatives, alumni, practitioners or potential employers), to link PDP practice to future career development?

G12 How could PDP link effectively to professional behaviours/ethics for your subject area, where applicable?

G13 How could PDP link effectively to the membership criteria and/or models of CPD required by the professional bodies associated with your subject or discipline?

G14 If you use the term 'professional development planning', rather than 'personal development planning', how is personal development incorporated in what you do?

Commentary

PDP can be linked with personal tutoring schemes, career planning activities or the mainstream curriculum (see Aspect B: model, design and branding, page 16). This commentary focuses on the integration or embedding of PDP into academic activities - viewed as potentially one of the most effective ways to maximise staff and student engagement (see Aspect E: engaging academic staff, page 28, and Aspect F: engaging undergraduate students, page 33). Atlay (2006) outlined six main points in favour of this approach:

- 1 it supports learning - by encompassing learning processes and skills
- 2 all students can benefit from PDP - by ensuring it is a 'normal' activity
- 3 it ensures a common and coherent student experience - through effective curriculum design
- 4 it is a more effective use of resources - for example, through staff working with a class rather than individuals
- 5 it prepares students for life beyond university - acting as a vehicle for introducing professionalism
- 6 it fosters belief - by sending a clear message that PDP is valued.

The latter point is regarded as vital - without embedding there is a risk that students will perceive PDP activities to be 'bolt-on' to their curriculum and hence of less potential relevance to them than their curricular activities. As the Individualised Support for Learning through E-portfolios (ISLE) Project (2009) reported:

PDP proved to be most effective and valuable where it was embedded into programmes of study or into specific modules....The voluntary approach seems to equate to 'less important', and students have demonstrated that they will prioritise other 'more important' activities.

Effective embedding of PDP within the curriculum should result in discipline-appropriate learning outcomes that are inherently attractive to both staff and students.

Models for linking PDP to the curriculum

Atlay (2009) identified five distinct ways in which PDP could be associated with curricular activities and noted advantages and disadvantages to each:

- 1 Discrete (or 'bolt on') - where 'students may be provided with opportunities to engage in PDP, and encouraged to take them, but these are optional and additional to the curriculum and students are left...to decide whether they should engage'. Simplicity and low resourcing are the main advantages here, with lack of student engagement being the main risk.
- 2 Linked - 'PDP [is run] in parallel with the curriculum but linked to it, so that there is an explicit and supported relationship between the two'. The advantage is that the student experience is more controlled, with minimal disruption of the standard curriculum, but lack of student engagement remains a risk.
- 3 Embedded (appearing within specific modules within a programme) - 'These modules provide the main support for PDP and may serve to link with material studied in other modules...[and] may have a skills and/or a subject focus as well as emphasising PDP'. The main advantage is greater control over the student experience, but a risk is that this is fragmented.
- 4 Integrated (appearing in most if not all modules within a programme) - here, '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'. The advantage is that PDP becomes an integrated part of student and staff thinking, but there are difficulties in persuading all staff to carry this out, and a risk that PDP loses 'visibility'.
- 5 Extended (PDP is used to integrate activities both within and outwith the curriculum) - in this case, 'PDP consciously serves to provide the link between the academic curriculum and...wider experiences'. This approach draws together study, work and other experiences, but outcomes may be unpredictable.

Developing the integration of PDP within the curriculum

In many instances, activities, skills and processes which are appropriate for inclusion in PDP activities will already exist at programme or module level within a current curriculum. Atlay (2006) provides a tool for auditing and reviewing practice, focusing on academic, personal and employability strands. Activities which may be susceptible to 'translation' for PDP purposes can be highlighted by means of curriculum mapping. This will assist in identifying both immediate and potential opportunities for inclusion of PDP activities in an

existing curriculum and whether present practice and activities are focused at modular or programme levels. For example, it can reveal whether all PDP activities are focused in a few modules (that is, the Modular model) and whether opportunities for PDP activities can be identified in others (that is, moving towards an Embedded or Curriculum Plus model).

The initial mapping of areas which may be translated to PDP should then be considered in the context of any external requirements at a discipline level, such as professional accreditation requirements and QAA subject benchmark statements with a view to producing a blended approach to PDP activities which meets not only the pedagogic requirements at module or programme level, but reflects the needs and requirements of relevant external bodies and regimes. A holistic approach such as this is more likely to effectively meet the needs of students, staff and external bodies.

In turn, the learning outcomes at module and/or programme level should reflect the PDP activities and PDP-related skills which have been identified from the curriculum mapping and recognition of external requirements. It follows that they should be reflected in the manner and modes of assessment at module and/or programme level (see Aspect H: assessing PDP, page 42).

Such a mapping exercise will also reveal the extent to which PDP activities are developmental in nature and clearly identifiable as appropriate to the level of study a student has reached within a programme of study, as discussed in Aspect J: progression and academic development, page 51.

External influences and guidance

The process of embedding PDP in a subject discipline context provides an ideal opportunity to address the needs and requirements arising from external relationships and sources in a manner which may not only enhance the overall approach to PDP but also address the needs and requirements of discipline-linked third parties in a more effective way. Examples of such instances are as follows:

- PDP can be designed to incorporate student-centred reflection on engagement with QAA subject benchmark statements
- PDP can be designed to record achievement and evidence skills attainment and development which may be directly relevant to external or professional accreditation at a module and/or programme level
- inculcating the use of PDP can be directly linked to notions of professionalism within a disciplinary context and may be used as direct preparation for engagement with models of CPD used within particular disciplines and/or professions
- increasing numbers of employers use competence-based methods of assessing suitability for employment which require solid evidence of skills and competence attainment. PDP provides an ideal mechanism to record such competences and to develop the skills to create such a record.

Support for discipline-related activities is increasingly available from HEA Subject Centre websites. The UKCLE (UK Centre for Legal Education) project on 'Using e-portfolios in legal education' has produced a range of outputs, including a dedicated guide to the use of e-portfolios in law as a discipline (UKCLE, 2009). Accrediting bodies are also

increasingly active in this field, both in relation to requirements and expectations in qualifying modules and programmes and in respect of support and guidance to achieve accreditation requirements. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) has a requirement that all candidates seeking the APC (Assessment of Professional Competence qualification) which leads to full professional qualification must maintain an up-to-date personal development plan which must be reviewed every six months (see Aspect C: evaluation, review and quality enhancement, page 20). In addition to this requirement, the RTPI provides electronic templates for PDPs, examples of good and bad practice, and guidance on how to make PDPs work (RTPI, 2009).