

# Aspect J: progression and academic development

As a student progresses through levels of study, the level of PDP-related activity should match the sorts of learning outcome expected at each level (that is, following the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) descriptors). Anecdotal evidence suggests that attention should be paid to development in the middle stages of a degree, as induction and final-year outcomes are generally well-defined. The needs of late entrant, early exit and discontinuing students should also be taken into account.

## Self-assessment questions

Key strategic questions are highlighted.

### Progression planning and integration (on the part of staff)

- J1 How do you build in a progressive development in the types of PDP activities offered to students as they proceed through their studies?
- J2 How are the needs of first-year, middle-year and final-year students differentiated?
- J3 How and when is the process of development in PDP activities explained to students?
- J4 How are the needs of late entrants, early exit and discontinuing students taken into account?
- J5 In what ways are the final outcomes of PDP tailored for graduates within each discipline (for example, by cross-referencing to accrediting body benchmarks, via a well-refined CV, or by preparedness to engage in 'appropriate' CPD activities)?
- J6 How are the outcomes of the PDP framework connected to academic support, advisory systems and the careers service?

### Assisting the developmental process (information for students)

- J7 How are students encouraged to take medium and longer-term views of their personal development as well as constructing shorter-term action points?
- J8 How are students made aware of the cyclical, developmental nature of PDP? [See also Aspect D: promotion and introduction, page 24.]
- J9 What encouragement is given to students to compare earlier versions of their PDP activities with current ones, to gain an appreciation of their personal development?
- J10 How are links made between the achievement of learning outcomes and PDP activities?
- J11 How are students asked to connect action planning points from earlier engagement with PDP to later points in the developmental sequence?

J12 How are students made aware of the notions of lifelong learning and CPD to help them contextualise their PDP work?

### Commentary

Notions of progression and academic development are embedded in the SCQF, which describes itself as providing a method for learners to 'develop progression pathways' (SCQF, 2009), and are a key structural feature of QAA subject benchmark statements (see Jackson, 2001b, for a fuller discussion of the linkages between benchmarks and PDP). These fundamental requirements are recognised by staff and students alike and epitomise the concept of embedding in a curriculum context. Perhaps surprisingly, therefore, it is not always clear that PDP activities, when introduced at either modular or programme levels, have been developed in a manner which also takes account of progression and developmental issues.

The absence of clear progression linkages and clear evidence to students that development is taking place are more likely to suggest to students that PDP activities are, to them, less strategically relevant 'bolt on' activities. Conversely, students who can recognise clear evidence of personal development through the use of PDP are far more likely to engage with PDP activities (see also Aspect F: engaging undergraduate students, page 33). In short, where is the 'development' in PDP without some explicit element of progression?

### Progression

An example of a sequenced or planned approach to PDP across four levels of study is shown in table 5.

<b>Level 1</b>	Reflect on transition to university, acquisition of basic academic skills and competences and level 1 performance.
<b>Level 2</b>	Compare level 1 performance to institutional/QAA subject benchmark statements, assess development needs and prepare an action plan for those needs. Outline career planning assessment.
<b>Level 3</b>	Review of level 2 action plan, updated development needs plan and detailed career planning.
<b>Level 4</b>	Reflection on earlier levels and collation of information for employment applications.

Table 5: example of a basic mapping of PDP activities to levels of study within a four-level programme.

Note: this example assumes a Scottish HE four-year degree pathway and might need to be modified for other systems.

This model reflects an approach to PDP which is more focused at a programme as opposed to a module level of intervention, but it demonstrates an approach which results in a clearly identifiable developmental path which can be achieved in a broad variety of ways at both programme and modular levels. This example illustrates how

progression can be built into PDP activities across levels but also highlights a number of progression related issues which are noteworthy:

- at each level, the induction/training mechanisms used to introduce and explain PDP activities should not only explain the particular activities to be deployed within the level, but explain the relevant interaction with earlier and later levels (as appropriate; see also Aspect D: promotion and introduction, page 24)
- entry and exit-level PDP activities are often the easiest to define and map. Level 1 can, for example, be clearly linked to transition issues relating to the commencement of university studies, while exit-level activities may be focused on career-related, lifelong learning and CPD preparedness issues. Clearly defining progression and development issues at levels 2 and 3 is an essential element of retaining students as engaged participants at these levels
- levels 2 and 3 are also crucial levels for late entrant and early exit students and the design of PDP activities for these levels must accommodate those entrants
- wherever the point of entry may be for students, there must be an appropriate element of training in how to reflect. Evidence suggests that students will engage without difficulty with the technical IT aspects of an online PDP system, but they may have no explicit background, or recognisable experience, in the process of reflection (see Aspect I: support for reflection and action planning, page 47).

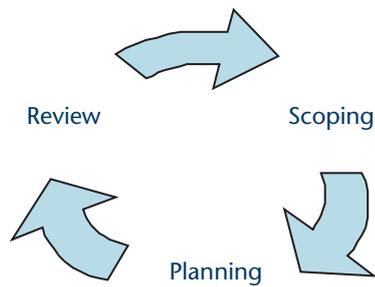
### The PDP cycle and evidence of development

From a student perspective, clear evidence of development as shown through PDP-use and outcomes is one of the strongest incentives for student engagement with PDP on an ongoing basis. As described in the *Guidelines for HE Progress Files* (QAA, 2001), in an example of effective PDP practice, students will have clear evidence of:

- their own learning experiences and achievement
- their progress towards the achievement of goals they have set.

The inherently cyclical nature of a well designed PDP process (figure 2a) should allow students to see development taking place. The first phase of the PDP cycle involves a scoping exercise which defines the parameters of the activity to be undertaken. This may, for example, take the form of a pre-prepared template which sets out the activities a student must undertake. Phase 2 requires the development of a prioritised plan to achieve the scoped activities, and the final phase is a review of the effectiveness of the scoped activities undertaken.

2a



2b



Figure 2a: a simplified three-phase diagram of the PDP cycle.

Figure 2b: the My PDP logo from the University of Dundee PDP framework, an example of PDP 'branding' that embeds implicit cyclical activity.

If a student pursues a PDP activity which follows this cyclical process then the chain of activity should demonstrate to the student whether personal development is taking place. The PDP cycle can be effectively embedded and at the same time promoted through directed branding (see Aspect D: promotion and introduction, page 24, and Aspect G: embedding PDP and the discipline context, page 37). The My PDP logo developed at the University of Dundee (figure 2b) provides a branded approach to the use of PDP which is readily recognisable and which also incorporates a very clearly communicated indication of the cycle of activities which is inherently part of the PDP process.