

Aspect K: benefits for students

Student motivation is likely to be increased if they see tangible and personalised outcomes from the PDP process, such as a set of individually tailored and prioritised action plans for learning and other activities and a well-developed CV. Gaining academic credit, through engaging in PDP, is seen as a positive outcome by most. Less tangible, but important, outcomes from engagement with PDP include a better understanding of personal goals, aspirations and motivations, and a familiarity with vocabulary and language conventions related to reflection and employability. Increased understanding of the value of the PDP process and its outcomes (that is 'metacognition'), if made explicit, is also valuable, and can support future career management.

Self-assessment questions

Key strategic questions are highlighted.

'Tangible' outcomes

- K1 How do students self-audit their generic and discipline-specific skills and use the outcomes of this process within their PDP?
- K2 How and when are students given feedback on their PDP that can help them produce useful outcomes?

'Metacognitive' outcomes and awareness

- K3 How are students made aware of the potential benefits of PDP?
- K4 In what ways are your institution, faculty, college, school or department explicit about the outcomes that a student might achieve through PDP?
- K5 How do students define personalised outcomes of PDP?
- K6 How are PDP outcomes integrated with support schemes such as personal tutoring or careers advising? [See also Aspect I: support for reflection and action planning, page 47, and Aspect H: assessing PDP, page 42.]
- K7 How are students provided with a guide to the metacognitive and linguistic skills (for example, learning how to learn) they are (or could be) developing as part of PDP?
- K8 How could PDP in your institution, faculty, college, school or department develop understanding of concepts and vocabulary in relation to:
- Learning styles?
 - Academic literacy and deeper learning?
 - Teamwork roles?
 - Levels of learning and thinking (in the sense of Bloom et al 1956)?

- Personal qualities and attributes?
- Skills?
- Graduateness and employability?

Maximising advantage by integration with learning experiences

K9 How could PDP be made appropriate and relevant for students at different levels in their degree programme? [See also Aspect J: progression and academic development, page 51.]

K10 To facilitate integration, how are staff supported in acquiring knowledge, vocabulary and understanding associated with PDP-related concepts and process? [See also Aspect I: support for reflection and action planning, page 47.]

K11 How could the acquisition of deeper understanding of PDP-related concepts (for example, self-awareness, an ability to reflect and action plan) and relevant vocabulary be integrated within the student's PDP?

K12 How are students made aware of the potential for extracurricular activities to contribute to their PDP? [See also Aspect D: promotion and introduction, page 24]

K13 How are students made aware of the cyclical, developmental nature of PDP? [See also Aspect D: promotion and introduction, page 24, and Aspect J: progression and academic development, page 51.]

Commentary

According to QAA's *Personal development planning: guidance for institutional policy and practice* (QAA 2009):

PDP results in an enhanced self awareness of strengths and weaknesses and directions for change. The process helps learners understand the value added through learning that is above and beyond attainment in the subjects they have studied...

This can be considered to be the ultimate goal: in reality, outcomes are likely to range from quite narrow (for example, for a specific purpose, such as an effective CV) to much broader (for example, where genuine personal development or learning occurs). The theoretical benefits of PDP can be summarised as follows (QAA, 2009):

PDP helps learners:

- plan, integrate and take responsibility for their personal, career and academic development, identifying learning opportunities within their own academic programmes and extra-curricular activities
- recognise, value and evidence their learning and development both inside and outside the curriculum
- be more aware of how they are learning and what different teaching and learning strategies are trying to achieve
- be more effective in monitoring and reviewing their own progress and using their own records and evidence of learning to demonstrate to others what they know and can do

- evaluate and recognise their own strengths and weaknesses and identify ways in which perceived weaknesses might be improved and strengths enhanced
- develop their identity in relation to their academic, professional and personal progression
- develop a vocabulary to communicate their development and achievement
- be better prepared for seeking, continuing or changing employment or self-employment and be more able to articulate the skills and knowledge they have gained to others
- be better prepared for the demands of continuing progression and career development in professional and academic careers.

This is echoed by the approach of the National Union of Students to PDP (Streeting, 2007): '...we believe it to be a "good thing"; we think it is beneficial to those who have made the most of it..'

The issue that taxes many staff is how to convince students (and sometimes their own colleagues) that there is benefit in them undertaking what is sometimes seen as additional work in the context of other curriculum and outside commitments.

To maximise the possibility that students will ultimately gain from participating in PDP, it is vital that they can appreciate readily the 'tangible' benefits from this engagement. If these outcomes are personalised and meaningful for the individual, then it is even more likely that engaging in the PDP process will be beneficial. Among the many models of PDP implementation, three ways of helping students realise the benefits of engaging in the PDP process stand out and are described further:

- linking PDP to employability
- embedding the process in an accredited module or programme
- linking PDP to a personal tutor system.

Benefits from linking PDP to employability

Through the use of tools such as personal transferable skills audits, commonly used in PDP frameworks associated with employability, students can make links between their curricular and extra-curricular activities and what employers value. These activities are particularly beneficial in the context of work-based learning, work placements, internships or fieldwork. Students commonly report in focus groups and questionnaires that the development of CVs (process and product) is something they find of particular benefit. Using evidence accumulated in either an e-portfolio or paper-based portfolio, an enhanced CV can be a practical way of articulating the skills and knowledge they have gained to the requirements of employers. As well as skills and knowledge, employers also value students who recognise that they have developed personal attributes such as 'metacognition, encompassing self-awareness regarding the student's learning, and the capacity to reflect on, in and for action' (Yorke and Knight, 2004); an outcome of engaging in PDP. (See also Aspect L: employability and employment, page 60.)

Benefits from linking PDP to assessment and accreditation

Accrediting aspects of PDP, and thereby maximising participation in the process, can benefit students by helping them 'be more aware of how they are learning and what different teaching and learning strategies are trying to achieve' (QAA, 2009). As Jackson (2001a) notes:

The key lesson from practitioners who have used PDP to promote learning is that the process should be integral to learning. Students do not participate in such processes for altruistic reasons: they have to perceive the investment they make will be valued.

However, students can also take a strategic approach, and if the reward from investment of effort is less than 5-10 per cent of the total mark, for example, they may only pay lip service or not engage at all, thus accruing little or no benefit.

Benefits from undertaking PDP in vocational subjects, particularly in those accredited by PSBs, can mean that students can see themselves as 'better prepared for the demands of continuing progression and career development in professional and academic careers' (QAA, 2008). As the approach to PDP can be highly prescriptive, however, the wider benefits of PDP for personal development may be less clear.

In their paper *A Systematic Map and Synthesis Review of the Effectiveness of PDP for Improving Student Learning*, Gough et al (2003) confirmed that engaging with PDP through the curriculum benefits students, although there is still a perception that this view is not supported by robust research according to the LearnHigher Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (2008). This crucial question is being addressed in the long term by a number of action research projects, as part of the National Action Research Network on Researching and Evaluating Personal Development Planning and e-Portfolio, available from the CRA website (CRA, 2009d).

Further discussion of these matters is provided in Aspect G: embedding PDP and the discipline context, page 37, and Aspect H: assessing PDP, page 42.

Benefits from linking PDP to a personal tutor system

Although 'personalisation', as discussed in the QAA Scotland First Year Enhancement Theme (Knox and Wyper, 2008), is not just about one-to-one interaction with personal tutors, models of PDP which are centred on this means of delivery undoubtedly bring the benefits of personalisation to students. Having this focus in earlier years is seen as being particularly beneficial and may be one of the reasons behind the association between PDP and improving student retention. In this context, Knox and Wyper (2008) summarised the benefits to the student of PDP as follows:

Through PDP students can personalise and take responsibility for their learning. Fundamentally, PDP is a process, not a product, so it can be used to support the personalisation of learning through facilitating the selection of pathways through learning that suit the individual learner. Whatever system we use, the more personalisation is allowed the more students will take ownership of their PDP and the more they'll make it their personal development portfolio, not a personal development portfolio.

Individual responsibility for PDP

Personal development planning: guidance for institutional policy and practice (QAA, 2009) states clearly: 'The ultimate responsibility for deriving benefit from PDP rests with each learner'. Although the onus is on the individual student to derive benefit, QAA Scotland, through its enhancement agenda, will be promoting examples of PDP policy and practice which maximise the opportunities for individuals to do so.