Aspect M: linking PDP and continual professional development

Institutions should provide graduating students with either a copy of their PDP record or allow ongoing access to that record, and alert them to the issues involved in transferring a PDP to a continuing professional development (CPD) scheme. The portability of PDP content is an important issue. The goal of seamless transfer of information depends on the development and widespread adoption of common standards for information capture and dissemination. Institutions should also ensure that information is recorded in a form that complies with the relevant government legislation.

Self-assessment questions

Key strategic questions are highlighted.

Ownership and continuing access to PDP materials

M1   Are students provided with a permanent record/download of their PDP? If so, how?

M2   How do the students' PDPs link to their transcript and other portfolio materials?

M3   Are students allowed to access and continue developing their PDP for a period after graduation? If so, what support is available?

M4   How are students given opportunities to discuss their PDP portfolio with a personal tutor or careers advisor after graduation?

M5   How can students and graduates provide access to their PDP, or selected parts of their PDP, to potential employers (for example, through online or printed versions)?

Portability

M6   How does the institutional PDP comply with relevant interoperability standards and relevant government legislation?

M7   How are students provided with guidance regarding interoperability?

Links to CPD

M8   How are students alerted to the CPD 'agenda' for different potential occupations related to their discipline (and the potential role of PDP in training for this)?

M9   Where relevant, how are links made with the CPD systems offered by representative employers? [See also Aspect L: employability and employment, page 60.]

Commentary

Process versus product

While students - and staff - may talk about 'doing' or 'creating' a PDP, or in terms of working on their PDP, we should not forget that we are concerned with a **process** as much as a **product**. Personal development **planning** makes use of templates, questions and prompts for reflection, often based on the context of the discipline which build into a tangible entity - the personal development **plan**. However, it is the process of developing the PDP - the thinking, reflection, self-evaluation and forward planning and goal setting - which are the graduate attributes that we want our students to develop and which they will take with them into the world of work, as part of a positive approach to lifelong learning and continuing professional development (CPD). Thus, according to the CRA (2009c):

> The ability to effectively manage your own learning and development has been proven to be a key characteristic of high performing graduates 5-10 years into their career.

Lifelong learning and continuing professional development

Personal development planning does not stop when an individual leaves university and takes their first step on to the employment ladder. In addition to continuing to put into practice the skills and attributes developed during their previous experiences of PDP, graduates will also now be looking to CPD within their chosen profession. Personal development planning sits at the core of CPD in the world of work and for professional bodies. All of these schemes will be different.

Examples can be found in the field of healthcare, such as the CPD Planner developed by the British Dental Association (BDA, 2009); the PDP checklist and forms provided by the Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCP, 2009); and in other professional areas, such as town and regional planning (RTPI, 2009) and architecture (RIBA, 2009), which also encourage their professionals to use PDP as a way of identifying, recording and planning future CPD activities.

In the paper *Connecting PDP to Employers and the World of Work*, Edwards (2005) said:

> Overall, employers emphasised that PDP skills learnt by students in their undergraduate years are crucial (and indeed constitute the first concrete step) for lifelong learning, management of their own careers and to enable the widest possible contribution to performance improvement in organisations.

Some moves are currently being made to develop and pilot systems which involve learners and academics with employers and PSBs in using 'technology in the PDP process to generate the transferable records that support lifelong learning', such as the PDP4XL2 project funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) (JISC, 2008). Yet, in many respects the idea of developing a PDP for a period of time, whether at school or university, and then moving on to a new version is very positive. The PDP serves its

purpose for that period of time, with focus and activities centred on the immediate experience of being at school or university, but what moves with the individual to the new period of study or into employment are the skills of personal development planning. The PDP forms a continuous pathway to bridge the transition periods between school, college, university and employment. For some, that pathway may be discontinuous but if the individual chooses to embed the PDP process in his/her approach to lifelong learning and employability then it has the potential to enhance their future career prospects. Thus, according to the Institution of Civil Engineers (2009):

> CPD is about improving your performance at work, enhancing your career prospects, increasing your capacity for learning and being more capable and confident when faced with change.

Portability

The issues of process and product comprise part of the ongoing discussion around personal development planning, but are perhaps most clearly highlighted with regard to questions over the portability of the content of the PDP developed during university study. While graduates will be able to take with them the attitudes, skills and attributes with the potential to enhance their future employability gained through **the process** of developing a PDP, the physical (or digital) portablility of PDP as a **product** remains more challenging.

Questions students might ask include:

- can I access my PDP after I graduate?

- how will I be able to take my PDP with me for future use?

- will it be possible to integrate my university PDP with other personal development planning approaches in the workplace, for example, those currently being developed by vocational areas, such as medicine or town and regional planning, or the PSBs within those disciplinary areas?

Original intentions around PDP in the early years of its development envisaged an online system whereby student PDPs could be made portable through the application of technology by, for example, burning onto a CD or by giving students access to their PDPs after graduation. However, these ideas have largely fallen by the wayside due to practical and logistical concerns. A CD version of a PDP would be a static rather than dynamic development tool so would serve little purpose other than as a historical record. Meanwhile, the idea of lifelong access to areas of institutional servers for graduates, while appealing, would put an enormous strain on capacity, plus the associated technical support and resource, making this approach impractical.

Students can currently cut and paste elements of their PDP and transfer their documents/CV in this way, although it may be viewed by some as a clumsy approach to what should be a streamlined process.

And while there **may** be an ideal world of transfer between university and employer, we are in reality quite far away from this point; and moreover, there is scope for debate as to whether it is even desirable, because of the different purposes and models involved.