

# Introduction

## Background to the project

This Toolkit came into being as a result of a consultancy project sponsored by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Scotland, developed in association with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in Scotland and the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA).

The project had the following brief:

- to enable higher education institutions (HEIs) to analyse and evaluate their teaching and learning strategies in respect of the implementation of personal development planning (PDP)
- to complement the revised UK-wide PDP guidance document (QAA, 2009)
- to reflect the culture of quality enhancement operating in Scottish higher education (HE).

This led to the following aims and objectives:

- to provide a practical means of enhancement in the design, development and implementation of PDP
- to provide clarity on the process of implementing PDP
- to emphasise the central importance of PDP-type activities (such as action planning and reflection) to the process of effective student learning.

The Consultancy Team considered various models for a resource and, after consultation with the sector, opted for a Toolkit based on reflective self-assessment questions. This fits well with the ideas underpinning the Effective Learner Framework (ELF) (QAA, 2007), working at the level of institution and teaching unit.

Consultations took place during 2008 and included interactive meetings with the QAA Scotland/CRA/HEA Scottish PDP Forum, the Scottish Employability Co-ordinators Group and workshop participants at the 8th CRA Residential Seminar. These discussions resulted in changes to the scope and approach adopted and the team is very grateful to all who provided feedback and acted as critical friends.

## The Toolkit in relation to the QAA Scotland Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF)

The title of this Toolkit implies that it might be used to enhance institutional provision via reflection at various levels. What it 'says on the tin' fits well with the enhancement ethos of quality assurance within the Scottish HE sector and that is indeed how it is hoped it will be used.

The QEF is predicated on a continuous process of institutional improvement based on self-evaluation and reflective analysis. Among other things, this process is reviewed through consideration of annual institutional reports on internal reviews of taught provision and periodic enhancement-led institutional review. In relation to PDP, both of these approaches might incorporate the Toolkit into the process, whether as part of deliberations preceding programme evaluation or as part of reflective analysis at institutional level.

One of the Quality Enhancement Themes in the QEF dealt with the First Year Experience, and this initiative included a project and report on *Personal Development Planning in the First Year* (Miller et al, 2008) which might be considered as background reading to support the use of this Toolkit.

In 2011, the Toolkit was extended to include reference to PDP within placement learning and work-based learning. This followed the publication by QAA of the report *Making it work: a guidebook exploring work-based learning* (Ball and Manwaring, 2010) and workshops associated with QAA Scotland development and enhancement activity.

## **The Toolkit in relation to different institutional PDP practices and different stakeholder groups**

From the outset, consultations with the sector reinforced the view that, to be successful, the Toolkit needed to be capable of accommodating a wide range of models of PDP operation. This was true not only when considering the differing approaches across Scottish and other UK HEIs, but also when allowing for the range of PDP 'frameworks'<sup>1</sup> employed in different discipline units within an institution.

Experience, coupled with informal reviews of the published literature, indicates that there are three key ways in which PDP frameworks may be focussed:

- 1 with a personal tutor scheme
- 2 with career planning activities
- 3 with academic/study skills and/or recorded learning achievement (for example, portfolios).

Any given framework may involve a mix of these orientations and the focus may change developmentally within the curriculum. For further discussion, see Aspect B: model, design and branding, page 16.

Clearly, the Toolkit needed to be sufficiently flexible to allow for such diversity both among and within institutions and over time. This constraint favoured a model in which reflective questions could be selected from within an institution according to perceived requirements at any given stage of development.

It was also anticipated that the Toolkit would be used by different groups of stakeholders. In most institutions, different groups consider PDP strategy, policy and practice, while other sets of staff may be involved in design of resources, embedding within the curriculum and student support (see table 1 on page 10). Sometimes these groups overlap in personnel, but even so, their functional focus differs in different

<sup>1</sup> After debate, the term 'PDP framework' was agreed by sector representatives to be the least loaded of a range of terms like 'scheme', 'model' and so on. It is used in this Toolkit to refer to all aspects of PDP delivery within an institution or a teaching unit (see also glossary entry on page 89).

situations. This factor drove the Toolkit towards a model in which the PDP territory was divided into a set of aspects which could be considered singly, or in groups, by appropriate stakeholders. The resulting segregation of content is acknowledged as synthetic, and its underlying connectedness can be seen from the frequent cross-referencing that is required. Nevertheless, it has been assumed that there would be pragmatic value in groups focusing on a specific range of issues at any given time.

| <b>Title</b>                              | <b>Description</b>  |
|---|---|
| <b>Policy makers and managers</b>         | Included in this group is anyone whose role in PDP is to create and develop policy and to manage planning and delivery. This group includes senior academic managers (for example, vice principals in the Scottish HE sector) with responsibility for learning and teaching, educational development and/or quality enhancement, but also, depending on the level of devolvement of responsibility, for aspects of PDP within the institution: heads of faculties/colleges: and deans/departmental heads. |
| <b>PDP developers</b>                     | This includes members of teams having the remit to design and maintain the overarching PDP framework for an institution or discipline. In this Toolkit, the role is treated as distinct to that of learning technologist (see below). Such a team may be drawn from both academic and support staff, but the common feature is the specialised 'design brief'.  |
| <b>Academic staff</b>                     | This category includes those involved in planning and practice for PDP at the programme (degree) and module levels, including curriculum design, setting learning objectives, and assessment, where used. It includes staff with roles as programme leaders, members of teaching teams, and individual staff and tutors involved in induction, delivery and support.  |
| <b>Learning technologists</b>             | This relatively specialised grouping, which is not relevant in some cases, relates to staff whose role in this context is to design and maintain the software and hardware associated with e-portfolios used as part of PDP, including online resources.  |
| <b>Careers and/or employability staff</b> | This group includes what may or may not be two distinct sets of post-holders, with the common factor being an interest in the employability and employment aspects of PDP. Both sub-groups may also be involved in the design process, and in the induction and support of students taking part in PDP.   |

**Quality review teams**

This group name is shorthand for those involved in evaluation and review of PDP policy and implementation at institutional and programme levels. It could include, for example, internal teams involved in QAA Scotland's Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) process, staff creating and monitoring learning and teaching strategies and plans, and those involved in internal periodic programme review and annual programme monitoring processes.

**Educational developers**

This group includes all those who have a role in disseminating PDP-related policies and information and thereby in assisting staff and tutors to develop awareness, understanding and skills relating to PDP.

**Students and their representatives**

This group includes those who take part in PDP or represent those who do, and who may be involved in the design and development process via evaluation and feedback. In many respects, therefore, the primary stakeholders in PDP.

**PSBs and employers**

Professional and statutory bodies (PSBs) differ in their interest in PDP but may provide guidelines linked to vocational continuing professional development (CPD) schemes or review PDP implementation as part of the accreditation process. Employers may have an interest in PDP insofar as associated portfolios and CVs may provide information about students and their ability to reflect and self-develop.

Table 1: key stakeholder groups involved in PDP strategy, policy and practice<sup>2</sup>. Terms may vary in different institutions and there will almost certainly be multiple or combined roles for individuals in any given case.

<sup>2</sup> This listing can be used to amplify the titles used in table 2 on page 10 to denote groups with specific interests in PDP.

## The structure and focus of the Toolkit

The 16 aspects of PDP that are covered are:

- A: strategy and planning for implementation
- B: model, design and branding
- C: evaluation, review and quality enhancement
- D: promotion and introduction
- E: engaging academic staff
- F: engaging undergraduate students
- G: embedding PDP and the discipline context
- H: assessing PDP activities
- I: support for reflection and action planning
- J: progression and academic development
- K: benefits for students
- L: employability and employment
- M: lifelong learning, CPD and portability
- N: engaging postgraduate students and postdoctoral staff
- O: placement learning
- P: work-based learning.

For each aspect, there is:

- a brief introduction
- between 10 and 17 self-assessment questions (SAQs) related to practical aspects of implementing PDP within the area covered by the aspect
- a commentary.

The SAQs are presented under 'sub-aspect' headings, as appropriate. Within each aspect, cross-references to cognate aspects are provided. In addition, five key strategic SAQs are identified to assist focused discussion in relation to wider issues of planning and implementation, for example, in situations where an institutional policy needs to be determined or reviewed. These sub-headings, cross references and key strategic questions should be regarded as indicative only.

A commentary is also provided for each aspect. This is intended to provide relevant background, raise operational matters that need to be considered, support any contentions made either in the introduction or the SAQs and highlight certain issues that might arise from consideration of the aspect. The commentaries are not intended to be comprehensive academic reviews of the area, but rather short synopses that should aid interpretation of the aspect and the SAQs and which may have value in supporting workshop events. It is acknowledged that the views expressed are mainly subjective on the part of the Consultancy Team. Accordingly, the style is informal in nature, and the references and quotes highly selective. Readers requiring a comprehensive review of any specific topic should seek this elsewhere.

In the process of compiling the SAQs and seeking feedback on drafts, it became evident that many of the terms used are capable of multiple interpretations and that institutional terminology may differ radically. A glossary has therefore been included on page 89 that provides the interpretation favoured by this team and against which institutional 'translations' of terms might be made. Even the acronym 'PDP' has different interpretations - here it is taken to mean the process of personal development planning rather than any of the other possible meanings.

The focus of the Toolkit is primarily on undergraduate PDP because that is currently the predominant context for most users. However, in recognising that postgraduate PDP was a developing area of interest, a supplementary Aspect (N, page 66) has been included related to this topic. Users focusing on this aspect should find that many generic topics in the resource are applicable to the needs of this diverse group.

## How to use the Toolkit

There is no intention to be prescriptive about the use of the Toolkit. Nevertheless, it has been constructed with several underlying notions about usage that have influenced its structure.

It was clear during consultations that potential users felt that the full involvement of academic staff was an important prerequisite to successful PDP implementation (Aspect E: engaging academic staff, page 28). Several commented that they would like to see outline suggestions about how the Toolkit might be used in practice. The sector was then consulted both on types of stakeholders likely to use the Toolkit and on aspects that each group might consider useful and appropriate to their remit or purpose. Because the names and roles of groups involved in PDP varies considerably across the sector, an explanation of the stakeholder classification is provided in table 1 on page 5.

The 'mapping table' provided in table 2 (page 10) matches these stakeholder groupings with aspects, and hence SAQs. This table is only a guide, as the circumstances for each HEI may dictate different priorities for the stakeholder groups and these may vary with time.

Due to the stranded approach of its design, the Toolkit has the potential to be used with these stakeholders in a variety of ways:

- ~ as a planning tool for programme teams developing new curricula
- ~ for quality teams evaluating current curricula
- ~ by academic managers at all levels aiming to embed the PDP process.

The Toolkit can also be used for development purposes as part of a workshop approach to work with more diverse groups. The aim of any development session will clearly affect the composition of the group and four models are proposed with four different target audiences and four different aims (see Appendix on page 82). Some of these may appeal, and others not, but it is hoped that they will provide examples which can be adapted for a specific institutional context or provide a stimulus for development of bespoke sessions.

Whatever approach an institution takes to use of the Toolkit, a key to achieving success is to ensure that there is constructive alignment between strategy, policy, design, delivery and outcomes.

## **The 16 aspects of the PDP Toolkit**

Together, the aspects form a resource that HE staff can use to evaluate and enhance PDP provision within their institution.

It is not intended that all aspects or SAQs will be relevant to all staff at any given point. To assist with the selection of relevant SAQs as part of a reflective process, the Toolkit:

- ~ provides a guideline mapping table showing the aspects which might be considered important for different stakeholder groups (see table 2 on page 10)
- ~ within each aspect, groups SAQs under subheadings according to common topics
- ~ identifies a sub-set of key strategic SAQs for each aspect which will be of particular relevance to staff considering 'overarching' as opposed to 'practitioner' issues.

| Stakeholder interests and roles                          |                            |                |                |                        |                                    |                      |                        |                                    |                    |
|--|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| PDP Aspects  | Policy makers and managers | PDP developers | Academic staff | Learning technologists | Careers and/or employability staff | Quality review teams | Educational developers | Students and their representatives | PSBs and employers |
| A: strategy and planning for implementation              | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| B: model, design and branding                            | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| C: evaluation, review and quality enhancement            | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| D: promotion and introduction                            | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| E: engaging academic staff                               | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| F: engaging undergraduate students                       | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| G: embedding PDP and the discipline context              | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| H: assessing PDP activities                              | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| I: support for reflection and action planning            | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| J: progression and academic development                  | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| K: benefits for students                                 | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| L: employability and employment                          | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| M: linking PDP and continuing professional development   | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| N: engaging postgraduate students and postdoctoral staff | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| O: placement learning                                    | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |
| P: work-based learning                                   | ■                          | ■              | ■              | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                    | ■                      | ■                                  | ■                  |

Table 2: mapping of the Toolkit's 16 PDP aspects against stakeholder groups.

Key: ■ shading indicates that an aspect and its SAQs are likely to be of high relevance, while ■ shading indicates reasonably high relevance. There is no intended implication from lack of shading that a stakeholder group would never take an interest in that aspect or its SAQs: this may depend on institutional and discipline circumstances.