

Enhancing practice

# Quality Enhancement Themes: The First Year Experience

Personal Development Planning in the first year

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# Quality Enhancement Themes: The First Year Experience

Personal Development Planning in the first year

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# Preface

The approach to quality and standards in higher education (HE) in Scotland is enhancement led and learner centred. It was developed through a partnership of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Universities Scotland, the National Union of Students in Scotland (NUS Scotland) and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Scotland. The Higher Education Academy has also joined that partnership. The Enhancement Themes are a key element of a five-part framework, which has been designed to provide an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement. The Enhancement Themes support learners and staff at all levels in further improving higher education in Scotland; they draw on developing innovative practice within the UK and internationally.

The five elements of the framework are:

- a comprehensive programme of subject-level reviews undertaken by higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves; guidance is published by the SFC ([www.sfc.ac.uk](http://www.sfc.ac.uk))
- enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR), run by QAA Scotland ([www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR))
- improved forms of public information about quality; guidance is provided by the SFC ([www.sfc.ac.uk](http://www.sfc.ac.uk))
- a greater voice for students in institutional quality systems, supported by a national development service - student participation in quality scotland (sparqs) ([www.sparqs.org.uk](http://www.sparqs.org.uk))
- a national programme of Enhancement Themes aimed at developing and sharing good practice to enhance the student learning experience, facilitated by QAA Scotland ([www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk)).

The topics for the Enhancement Themes are identified through consultation with the sector and implemented by steering committees whose members are drawn from the sector and the student body. The steering committees have the task of establishing a programme of development activities, which draw on national and international good practice. Publications emerging from each Theme are intended to provide important reference points for HEIs in the ongoing strategic enhancement of their teaching and learning provision. Full details of each Theme, its steering committee, the range of research and development activities as well as the outcomes are published on the Enhancement Themes website ([www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk)).

To further support the implementation and embedding of a quality enhancement culture within the sector - including taking forward the outcomes of the Enhancement Themes - an overarching committee, the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), chaired by Professor Kenneth Miller, Vice-Principal, University of Strathclyde, has the important dual role of supporting the overall approach of the Enhancement Themes, including the five-year rolling plan, as well as institutional enhancement strategies and management of quality. SHEEC, working with the individual topic-based Enhancement Themes' steering committees, will continue to provide a powerful vehicle for progressing the enhancement-led approach to quality and standards in Scottish higher education.



**Norman Sharp**  
Director, QAA Scotland

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Gratefully acknowledged for their valuable support are the QAA Scotland team; Liz Symon, University of Dundee (administrative support) and colleagues past and present in the Personal Development Planning in Higher Education (PDP in HE) Scotland Group.

# I Executive summary

This report presents the outcomes of the 'Personal development planning (PDP) in the first year' practice-focused development project for the First Year Experience Quality Enhancement Theme. The project's aims and objectives are set out in the context of the work of the other eight projects for this Enhancement Theme, each of which focused on different aspects of student engagement and empowerment in the first year, and on other significant developments in PDP implementation in Scotland.

The content of the project is outlined with reference to the outcomes - case studies in Section 4 and a literature review which is appended. Reference is also made to the outcomes of a workshop held to discuss interim findings with the sector, available on the Enhancement Themes website ([www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk)).

The main body of the report examines the key issues identified by the literature review and workshop discussions and makes reference to case studies, which are used to illustrate some of the issues arising, as well as listing associated recommendations for the sector. Each recommendation may not appear as particularly innovative in itself, but taken as a whole they should help to progress the engagement and empowerment of participants in PDP.

The following main recommendations (selected from the full list) are summarised under six broad themes:

## I.1 PDP in the first year

- Institutions should state a 'support entitlement', which makes clear from the outset the areas and levels of support provided for students.
- To underpin this entitlement, PDP should be implemented as a means of enabling students to gain self-awareness as developing learners and to plan the actions that will enhance personal and career development.
- Institutional policy should make specific reference to the rationale for introducing PDP in the first year and to the purposes of PDP for first-year students.

## I.2 Transition

- Time and resources should be allocated within the curriculum to PDP discussion and activities to ease new students into the first year. There should be recognition of prior experience of and exposure to PDP.
- Opportunities for peer mentoring (for example, second or third years supporting first years) need to be expanded as a support mechanism to help in acknowledging entrants' prior experiences of PDP (good or bad), as these may influence attitudes and engagement.
- Induction to PDP should focus on the process of personal development planning (what it is, the benefits, where it fits into the curriculum), as well as introducing the product or tools used (most often e-portfolios).

### 1.3 Pedagogy and assessment

- The relationship of PDP tools and processes to pedagogy and assessment should be clearly stated and discussed with students.
- An 'academic literacies' perspective may facilitate whole-institution provision for the development of reflective writing.

### 1.4 Engagement

- The careers service should be involved in implementing PDP in non-vocational degrees (where the links to career planning are less tangible than in vocational degrees), in order to encourage engagement. Careers staff have a specific role in assisting students to clarify goals, which can help to engage them in the process.
- More student-facing publications focusing on PDP in the first year should be developed for the sector.

### 1.5 Delivery

- PDP systems should involve human as well as online elements. The relationship between human and online processes should be made clear and discussed with students.
- The design of online systems should be clearly linked to pedagogical or other explicit goals, which should be discussed with users.

### 1.6 Support

- Staff development and training opportunities focused on staff working with first-year students should be offered to raise awareness of the benefits of PDP, the boundaries of their role, and the sources of expert help within their institution.
- Students should be encouraged to participate in supporting their peers in PDP mentoring or 'buddying' initiatives.
- More research into effective strategies for supporting academic 'buy-in' to PDP, and into staff development needs, should be undertaken and guidelines produced for the sector.

Given the parameters of the project, some aspects of PDP in the first year could have been explored further. Areas for future development are therefore covered in a section entitled: 'The way forward'.

Finally, the report's concluding remarks bring together the salient points emerging from the project. The key message is that a clear rationale for implementing PDP in the first year of higher education universally across an institution, with scope for adaptation to different degree disciplines, brings with it the benefits below.

### For students

- gives a means of forming a full picture of themselves as learners in the broadest context:
  - links current personal (identity), social (friendships and networks) and academic aspects
  - links to prior learning and education
  - provides a mechanism to relate these to current and future plans
- serves as a framework or structure to bridge:
  - between different educational settings
  - within the different elements of the first-year student life cycle
- plays a crucial role in personalising the mass experience of being a first year:
  - through owning and keeping track of their development and making sense of their experiences
  - by giving opportunities for peer support
- links employability to the curriculum, while providing opportunities for identifying and planning for career goals in a structured way
- provides a 'support entitlement', which makes clear how they are supported throughout the student life cycle when experiencing significant or critical incidents
- assures coherence and allows for equitable access to the appropriate tools (educational and technological).

### For staff

- integrates PDP and pedagogy from the beginning:
  - important because learning practices (including reflection) are set in the first year
  - assessment of the PDP process is essential for students' (and staff's own) engagement
- confirms senior management's commitment to PDP
- fosters staff engagement through recognising the need for time to develop tailoring to discipline needs
- raises the profile of those who teach first-year students.

In theory, by implementing PDP in the first year, using an integrated approach, institutions can benefit from increased retention from more engaged and empowered students, increased employability and more effective learners. However, there still seems to be a long way to go to meet a universal student entitlement to an effective PDP system which meets students' needs and engages and empowers all students, whatever their chosen subject.

Only more evaluation will tell whether the reality meets the aims, and whether PDP can deliver what we hope it can.

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 Background and context

'Personal development planning (PDP) in the first year' was one of the nine projects of the First Year Experience Quality Enhancement Theme, planned and directed by its steering committee as part of the work of the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee, supported by QAA Scotland<sup>1</sup>. The focus of this Theme was on the nature and purpose of the first year and how it can be developed as a transformative experience for the broadest range of students (rather than on the narrower support needs of a diverse range of entrants from widening access initiatives and issues relating to student retention).

Within this broad theme, the aim of this practice-focused development project was to consider student engagement and empowerment in the first year in relation to PDP. Its objective was to set out ways in which Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs) and their staff might change and enhance their practice to engage and empower students with respect to PDP.

There are links to the other eight projects, although we found that PDP was not often referred to in the literature on the first year experience and not necessarily seen as a priority in discussions pertaining to the first year. The other six practice-focused development projects covered key aspects of the first year experience, including curriculum design, assessment, scholarship skills, personalisation, peer support and issues of transition. Of the two sector-wide discussion projects, one reflected on the nature and purpose of the first year and considered the status of first-year teaching. The other explored with students their expectations, experiences and reflections on the first year (see Appendix 2 for full list of projects).

A number of other Scottish PDP-related projects and forums are running or have recently published their outcomes:

- The 'Individualised Support for Learning through ePortfolios' (ISLE) project<sup>2</sup>, funded under the Scottish Funding Council's Transformation Programme to look at how a shared model of PDP supported by e-portfolios can benefit the learning process (reported summer 2007).
- The Effective Learning Framework (ELF)<sup>3</sup>, an initiative coordinated by the Joint Working Group of the Scottish Advisory Committee for Credit and Access and Universities Scotland. Universities Scotland was designed to support institutions as they implement PDP. It published its reports in 2007.
- Forums held in April, May and June 2007 jointly by the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA), the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Scotland, who are working together to support

<sup>1</sup> [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/FirstYear/default.asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/FirstYear/default.asp)

<sup>2</sup> <http://isle.paisley.ac.uk>

<sup>3</sup> [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/ELF/default.asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/ELF/default.asp)

higher education (HE) in Scotland to implement PDP.

- Scottish Higher Education Employability Network projects (SHEEN<sup>4</sup>), funded by the Scottish Funding Council, which include several PDP implementation pilots.

This Enhancement Theme project has been the only one uniquely focused on the first year experience, but it could usefully have drawn on the outcomes of the others if the timing had been right. However, the resulting focus on PDP practice is providing a stimulus towards PDP implementation in the sector.

## 2.2 Content of the project

The project partners, all of whom are members of the Personal Development Planning in Higher Education (PDP in HE) (Scotland) group<sup>5</sup>, identified a number of potential issues to explore regarding student engagement and empowerment in relation to PDP. They included: the use of e-portfolios to support PDP processes; the role of assessment or accreditation of PDP; the efficacy of integrated models of PDP delivery compared to 'bolt-on' processes as a means of first-year engagement; and empowering students and staff to engage in PDP. These issues are examined in the literature review (Appendix 1).

The interim findings from the literature review were taken to the workshop organised for the sector in May 2007 at the University of Dundee. The outcomes of these discussions helped to clarify ideas and practice for future development. The workshop report is available from the QAA Enhancement Themes website<sup>6</sup>.

Case studies (Section 4) were used primarily as a means of identifying and exploring the issues regarding the adoption of PDP in the first year of study in Scottish HE. These case studies were not intended to showcase 'good practice' in order to encourage its emulation. The practices described are therefore to be regarded as neither 'good' nor 'bad', but as real occurrences that may be typical of situations in which PDP is being addressed.

Case studies 1, 3 and 4, in particular, serve to illustrate the potential role of PDP in supporting students through various significant or critical incidents in the first-year student life cycle (Appendix 1, section 2.5). Without a structured PDP process involving key staff to offer support, students may not find the abilities, people or skills to cope with these critical incidents, which can be positive or negative.

The project team found the use of the student life cycle illustrated in the work of the First Year Experience Enhancement Theme project on 'Personalisation of the first year' helpful in considering when, where and why PDP might be important. Also helpful in this regard were the diagrams offering structures to address and develop positive strategies to learn from feedback and critical incidents in *Effective Learning Framework: Using focused learner questions in personal development planning to support effective learning* (pp 7-9) (QAA Scotland, 2007).

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<sup>4</sup> [www.heacademy.ac.uk/aboutus/scotland/institutions/sheen](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/aboutus/scotland/institutions/sheen)

<sup>5</sup> A longstanding network of active practitioners from a wide range of disciplines and services in Scottish HEIs.

<sup>6</sup> [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/FirstYear/ProjectSix.asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/FirstYear/ProjectSix.asp)

## 3 Issues and recommendations

The following issues and associated recommendations, arranged under six broad themes, are drawn from:

- the discussions featured in the literature review (Appendix 1)
- a workshop for the sector, held to discuss the interim findings from this review<sup>7</sup>
- the four case studies (Section 4).

Further details of these issues can be found in the specific link to the source of evidence, noted in brackets. Reference is also made to links with the other practice-focused projects, where appropriate.

### 3.1 Focusing PDP in the first year

The findings of the series of projects under the umbrella of the First Year Experience Enhancement Theme have underlined the importance of the first year of study in HE<sup>8</sup>. During this period, new students must settle into the culture and practice of university life. Learning is a lifelong personal process, about building meaning and identity, which happens in a social context of relationships and communities. For students at university, learning happens in three areas which affect each other:

- personal - growing up is learning to be grown up
- social - forming and developing friendships and networks
- study - becoming familiar with the content, methods and rules of the discipline.

For new students arriving, assimilation into university life in each of these three areas may be traumatic and for most involves a substantial shift of attitudes and practices in a very short period of time (Appendix 1, section 2.5b; section 3).

Students are entitled to effective preparation, induction and support in the process of making the transition - personal, social and intellectual - into university studenthood. Faculties and departments clearly have a key role to play here in engaging students with the culture and community of practice of the discipline. A corollary of this role is that of identifying and supporting those students for whom the process of assimilation does not go well. Such students may have difficulty with the culture, content or methods of the discipline. Most can be brought to some satisfactory engagement, but a minority will ultimately feel that their choice of subject was not correct for them. Working with academic staff, student support services of all kinds have essential roles to play in sustaining and developing student engagement and commitment (Appendix 1, section 2.5b).

In this context, PDP activities can be a means of enabling students to gain an awareness of their own development as learners, reflect on the progress of that development, and make plans and decisions which forward their development in the direction they feel is right for them.

<sup>7</sup> [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/FirstYear/ProjectSix.asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/FirstYear/ProjectSix.asp)

<sup>8</sup> An overview of all nine projects will be published in 2008.

A plethora of terms, strategies, processes and products are used to describe these PDP activities, resulting in no uniform understanding of what PDP is beyond the commonly used definition from the Guidelines for HE Progress Files (QAA, 2001), point 28. PDP practice in HE can thus be defined by an institution, college or faculty, department or school, programme or module context (Section 4, case study 2). It may also be defined differently in other sectors - school, further education (FE), employment (Appendix 1, section 2.8a). As PDP is increasingly delivered electronically, a further factor is people's understanding of the terminology surrounding e-portfolios (Appendix 1, section 2.9).

From the different models of PDP in practice, the evidence suggests that 'one size does not fit all', and that such diversity is therefore an essential feature of PDP. However, this lack of uniformity can affect a first-year student's experience by conveying mixed messages about purpose, process and outcomes:

- between different educational sectors
- within different academic discipline cultures in their degree (for example in arts, humanities or social science)
- as students progress within the undergraduate curriculum.

Clarity about the rationale for implementing PDP in the first year is therefore essential (Appendix 1, section 2.1).

Recommendations	Audience
1.1 Institutions should state a 'support entitlement', which makes clear from the outset the areas and levels of support provided for students. This should not be a 'deficit' model, but should be available to all students. The entitlement should indicate specific provision for different stages of the student life cycle. The entitlement should be developed, or if obtained externally, elaborated within the institution by policy-makers, academics, support staff and students.	Policy-makers, academics, support staff, students
1.2 PDP, or some other system of relationships, activities and tools, should be implemented as a means of enabling students to gain an awareness of themselves as developing learners and to plan the actions that will further their own personal and career development - specifically to underpin the 'support entitlement'. The system should be developed, or if obtained externally, elaborated within the institution by policy-makers, practitioners and students.	Policy-makers, academics, support staff, students
1.3 Faculty, college, department or school learning and teaching plans should make specific reference to where PDP should sit in the curriculum.	Senior managers, academics, support staff, students
1.4 Institutional policy should make specific reference to the rationale for introducing PDP in the first year and to the purposes of PDP for first-year students.	Senior managers, academics, support staff, students

Figure 1: recommendations for focusing PDP in the first year

## 3.2 Transition issues

A wide variety of students enter HE in Scotland, with a range of educational, work and social experiences. Some institutions have adopted specific measures to bridge the gap between prior experience and entry into HE (Section 4, case study 3), introducing students to the skills they will need in order to cope during their HE studies and encouraging them to plan for their exit. This career planning element is particularly significant for new students who have achieved advanced entry, as their exit point arrives more quickly than for those entering at level 1. In discussions with students on the Napier University Bridging Course, students in higher years were found to be valuable assets.

Students express worries about their first year experiences, and these concerns change throughout the year (Section 4, case study 1). A PDP process can help students to keep track of their development and enable staff to understand better the student experience, and may contribute to improving the design of the first year. It can also identify any problems or concerns about individual students, enabling appropriate support to be put in place at an early stage, thus hopefully minimising the effect of any problems. This support could be peer sharing or mentoring (Section 4, case study 4).

The school sector has a history of National Records of Achievement and Progress Files which incorporate PDP-type activities, but there was no evidence from the literature to suggest whether this helps or hinders student engagement at HE level. At present, there is no consistent system of PDP or similar activity in schools or colleges. However, significant projects are underway to introduce new approaches to teaching and learning within Scottish schools, notably the 'Assessment is for Learning' initiative. Careers Scotland anticipates being more involved with S4-6 pupils in future, helping them to develop a career plan of action. These developments are likely to have an impact on HE entrants in the future, with students arriving with a greater understanding of how they learn and greater experience of reflection and planning processes (Appendix 1, section 2.5a).

The benefits of a well-designed PDP system are that students are supported in their transition into HE, and engagement with their course is likely to be enhanced. The implications for staff and institutions are that time and resources have to be channelled to develop and support the process. However, this can lead to greater understanding of their students and to better design of the first-year curriculum.

No research was uncovered in the literature review to indicate whether induction to PDP in the first or second year engages more students, though some research has suggested a gradual process of induction. Some have advocated focusing more on the necessary skills at first, for example, reflection; others that induction to PDP should be embedded from the beginning of entry to HE, along with induction to the product or tools (for example, e-portfolio). Information overload could be an issue, unless properly managed (Appendix 1, section 2.4b).

In some first and second-year courses in Scottish universities, there is flexibility in subject choice. While discussion of the benefits of PDP in supporting students in making their choices was not explicitly identified in the literature, it is anticipated that a PDP process which encourages greater self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses can help students to make appropriate choices.

Recommendations	Audience
<p>2.1 Ongoing dialogue between the school, FE and HE sectors about PDP developments should be supported and encouraged, to ease transition and understand the changing experience of entrants to HE in the future.</p>	<p>Scottish Executive, Scottish Funding Council, QAA Scotland, HEA, academic staff, support staff</p>
<p>2.2 Time and resources should be allocated within the curriculum to PDP discussion and activities to ease new students into the first year. There should be recognition of any prior experience of and exposure to PDP. Interoperability of systems by sectors would provide a seamless transition and would be the preferred method for some; others will highlight the differences between prior experience in other sectors and PDP in HE.</p>	<p>Senior managers, academic staff, support staff</p>
<p>2.3 Opportunities for peer mentoring (for example, second or third years supporting first years) need to be expanded as a support mechanism to help in acknowledging entrants' prior experiences of PDP (good or bad), as these may influence attitudes and engagement.</p>	<p>Academic staff, support staff, students</p>
<p>2.4 Induction to PDP should focus on the process of personal development planning (what it is, the benefits, where it fits into the curriculum), as well as introducing the product or tools used (most often e-portfolios). Attention should be given to designing this process in such a way that time is built in to support student needs arising.</p>	<p>Academic staff, support staff</p>

Figure 2: recommendations for transition issues

### 3.3 Pedagogy and assessment issues

Education is recognised as a major arena for the creation of meaning in a social context and hence for the social development of individual identity. Hence students are no longer perceived as empty jars to be filled with knowledge according to the judgements of others, or as organisms that can be trained to replicate preferred observable behaviours, but as individuals involved in the process of building their own identity in a social context and of realising themselves as members of society. The student is the central actor in this process of identity construction, and education is gradually shifting to a position of enabling students to develop the ability to make meaning and thus to take decisions affecting their own future. Current pedagogical approaches focus on enabling the development of individual identity in the context of learning as social action.

We believe that PDP can make an important contribution to a student-centred pedagogy, in enabling students to form a full picture of themselves as learners (Appendix 1, section 2.1). To make this possible, course leaders should be explicit about pedagogical approaches, including assessment, and the relationship of PDP processes to

them. The extent to which PDP systems and processes are owned by students is important in influencing usage. The habits and practices which pedagogy encourages are established in the first year of study, and it is therefore important to integrate PDP processes and pedagogy closely from this point on.

There is evidence that assessment of the PDP process is essential for engagement by the majority of students. However, assessment of the actual reflections is almost certainly counterproductive; in that students will write what they consider is required. Fortunately, assessment can take many forms, including peer assessment (Appendix 1, section 2.3).

In order to engage effectively with PDP, a reflective capability is required. Not all students find reflection easy, and some staff may not understand what place reflective activities have within the curriculum. If PDP is assessed, then reflection may no longer be a private and personally motivated activity. Reflection can be at different levels (superficial or deep); the context will determine this. Students also need to be able to switch between different forms of writing for different purposes, including reflective writing (Appendix 1, section 2.4).

Recommendations	Audience
3.1 Pedagogical assumptions underlying PDP systems and practices should be made explicit and discussed with students.	Academic staff, students
3.2 The relationship of PDP tools and processes to pedagogy and assessment should be clearly stated and discussed with students.	Academic staff, students
3.3 Reference to the recommendations of the First Year Experience Enhancement Theme project 'Formative assessment and feedback' is pertinent to assessment of the PDP process.	Academic staff
3.4 An 'academic literacies' perspective may facilitate whole institution provision for the development of reflective writing. This implies the need for staff development opportunities. Funding may be required to support events.	Senior managers, academic staff, academic developers

Figure 3: recommendations for pedagogy and assessment issues

### 3.4 Engagement issues

Subject discipline culture seems to be a major factor in both student and staff engagement with PDP and whether and how PDP is implemented in the first year (Section 4, case study 2).

There is evidence that more vocational degrees than non-vocational ones (such as those in the humanities) are engaging with PDP from the first year (Appendix 1, sections 2.2 and 2.8). In subject disciplines linked to vocational pathways (such as nursing or education), where students are encouraged to consider issues of being a 'professional in training', PDP can help them to make meaning of the skills, competences and attributes valued in the profession they are seeking to join; support them in articulating, with examples, the skills they are developing; and make them aware of any skills gaps and

how they might fill them (PDP project workshop outcomes, University of Dundee, 14 May 2007). An issue for vocational degrees is therefore not so much about encouraging engagement in the PDP process at an early stage, but the specific focus of vocationally orientated PDP systems. First-year students on these degrees may miss out on a more generic approach to PDP which aims to stimulate more personal reflection and development (Appendix 1, section 2.7).

A key issue for students in the first (or first two) years of non-vocational degrees is that by studying a selection of subjects they do not belong to any one department. This can lead to potential lack of cohesion in terms of ownership of the PDP process and consistency in how PDP is approached across different subjects. To some extent this can be overcome by faculty-wide PDP systems focused on faculty mentors (Section 4, case study 1) or personal tutors; however, many of these are voluntary in nature, which is another contrast with vocational degrees.

A further issue concerns the academic culture of some non-vocational subjects, where employability is (paradoxically) less of a focus than in vocational subjects, leading to less engagement with PDP for both students and staff. Evidence suggests that student engagement with PDP can be enhanced by linking it to employability, although the literature review revealed little evidence on whether the first year is the appropriate time to start (Appendix 1, sections 2.2 and 2.7b).

Recommendations	Audience
4.1 In the design of PDP systems, attention should be given to the 'personal' aspect of students' planning for their personal, educational and career development.	Academic staff
4.2 The careers service should be involved in implementing PDP in non-vocational degrees (where the links to career planning are less tangible than in vocational degrees), in order to encourage engagement. Careers service staff have a specific role in assisting students to clarify goals, which can help to engage students in the process.	Academic staff, careers service staff
4.3 More reference should be made to the Student Employability Profiles <sup>9</sup> , which can provide a range of resources to help students to engage with PDP, particularly in non-vocational subjects. The Skills and Attributes Map could be used to encourage students to identify the skills they are developing through degree-level study, and how these relate to those competences that many employers value. The reflective questions section in some subject disciplines (for example, English) is specifically designed for students undertaking PDP.	Academic staff
4.4 More student-facing publications focusing on PDP in the first year should be developed for the sector.	HEA, academic staff, students

Figure 4: recommendations for engagement issues

<sup>9</sup> The profiles were produced by the HEA, Enhancing Student Employability Coordination Team (ESECT) and Council for Industry and Higher Education. Guide to the profiles: [www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/ta/employability\\_enterprise/student\\_employability\\_profiles\\_apr07.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/ta/employability_enterprise/student_employability_profiles_apr07.pdf). For links to all the profiles, go to: [www.prospects.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home\\_page/Student\\_employability/plfbbLLca](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Student_employability/plfbbLLca)

## 3.5 Means of delivery issues

### 3.5.1 Means of delivery: e-pdp

Digital technology has enabled a PDP breakthrough. By allowing the development of tools that can be used to store and manipulate PDP data to a much greater degree than is possible with paper-based systems, there is more justification for spending time on PDP activities. However, e-pdp systems are only tools (although powerful ones) and remain adjuncts to, rather than substitutes for, human-based systems.

Digital tools themselves raise issues which need to be addressed. The use of digital tools emphasises the value of information management skills. However, information management should not be confused with learning. Good information management is a step towards learning, but is not in itself evidence of good learning. Digital tools can be very powerful shapers of behaviour, and PDP systems will influence student behaviour. It is therefore important that their design should serve clear goals (Appendix 1, section 2.1g). Online systems that appear to be private can lead to students mounting much personal data, which could be leaked from the system or used improperly within the institution. The limits to private data entered and the use of this data should be made clear, and measures taken to safeguard data privacy (Appendix 1, section 2.1c). PDP is intended as a lifelong and therefore transferable tool; this raises issues of technical interoperability and the procedures by which PDP data are stored and made suitable for transfer to other systems.

Potential confusion arises from the interchangeability of the terms PDP and e-portfolio. In addition, the term e-portfolio has a range of meanings, from 'the system' to 'packages of items'. E-portfolios can be used for a range of purposes; four main ones are presentation, assessment, supporting learning and personal/professional career development (Appendix 1, section 2.9). Anecdotally, some academics talk about 'doing PDP', but they are actually using e-portfolio tools for some of the above purposes (PDP project workshop outcomes, University of Dundee 14 May 2007).

Recommendations	Audience
5.1 PDP systems should involve human as well as online elements. The relationship between human and online processes should be made clear and discussed with students.	PDP designers, academic staff, students
5.2 The design of online systems should be clearly linked to pedagogical or other explicit goals, which should be discussed with users.	PDP designers, academic staff, students
5.3 Justification for private data to be entered onto e-pdp systems should be made and the limits of such data made clear, along with the measures in place to safeguard data privacy. These matters should be discussed with users.	PDP designers, academic staff, students
5.4 Measures should be taken at the design and implementation stage to ensure that PDP data are portable. This should include the ability of PDP systems in HE to capture relevant data from pre-HE stages, and consideration given to graduate use.	PDP designers

Recommendations	Audience
5.5 The term 'portfolio' should always have a modifier or adjective that describes its purpose, for example PDP portfolio or educational portfolio (as suggested by Barrett, 2005a) because of the many purposes of e-portfolios.	Academic staff, students

Figure 5: recommendations for means of delivery issues

### 3.5.2 Means of delivery: face to face

At the PDP project workshop (University of Dundee, 14 May 2007), issues were raised surrounding a perceived over-emphasis on electronic means of PDP delivery. The discussion debated whether or not reflection was better done on paper, or indeed whether it was more dynamic as a group discussion activity. Also, while an institution-wide online PDP facility may provide a consistent experience for students, is it the most effective way of engaging students and helping them to understand the process?

Napier University's Bridging Course (Section 4, case study 3), a two-week pre-entry programme, provides an intensive and powerful opportunity for students to share and discuss the skills they need for HE and issues surrounding their career planning with their peer group, experienced students and academic tutors.

Houghton (2003) (Appendix 1, section 2.4b), from his studies with a cohort of first-year engineering students, suggested that students' own analysis of their progress is inconsistent and unreliable. He considered that encouraging students to engage in a dialogue about their learning prior to an e-pdp system may be more effective. Malins (2004) surveyed levels of tutor support for students undertaking stand-alone PDP systems and found that where tutor support was absent, students made a negative response to the process.

Recommendations	Audience
5.6 Consideration should be given to introducing dialogue and discussion on PDP, particularly in the early stages of the first year. This could benefit students by giving them a deeper understanding of the process, and could support their induction into the course. Students in later years could also be involved in the discussion.	Academic staff, PDP developers, students

Figure 6: recommendations for means of delivery: face to face issues

## 3.6 Staff and student support issues

Issues of support for students undertaking PDP and for staff delivering PDP have not been predominant in the literature to date, particularly in relation to the first year (Appendix 1, section 2.6).

At the PDP project workshop (University of Dundee, 14 May 2007), staff identified a number of factors that colleagues needed reassurance on in order to engage with PDP

implementation. One example was clarity on the value of PDP to students. Questions were raised about whether dedicated staff should deliver PDP, or whether all staff should be involved. This was linked to the perceived importance of PDP by academics.

While there has been no overall analysis of the current picture, it is probably safe to say that delivery of PDP in Scottish higher education is at present 'patchy'. At one end of the spectrum, PDP is being delivered in a blanket way, perhaps electronically, with little or no tutor intervention; at the other end it is being delivered by individual staff who are enthusiastic about PDP and are often inspirational to their students in the delivery of it (Appendix 1, section 2.8b).

All the evidence suggests that if PDP is to be delivered to all HE students in a meaningful and helpful way, then staff engagement must be a priority (Appendix 1, section 2.8b). Staff need to be clear about its purpose in relation to their own context (within their subject as well as their institution), in addition to understanding the benefits to them and to their students. Databases of practice showing successful strategies for engaging first-year students exist and will continue to grow<sup>10</sup>. Raising awareness of these, improving staff's own experience of CPD, offering staff development opportunities to understand the PDP processes and activities they must deliver all need to focus on staff working with first-year students. If PDP is to be a successful experience for students throughout their university career, its introduction at level 1 needs to be done in a positive way and made relevant to their circumstances.

It is important that staff delivering PDP understand the process and are sensitive to boundaries when leading group discussions or talking to individual students. Training in how to manage appropriate referral to expert support staff within HEIs is important to ensure that students are protected from inappropriate disclosure, to tutors or peers, of information they may on reflection prefer to keep private (Appendix 1, section 2.6).

Three specific areas of student support needs arise from implementation of PDP: personal, educational and technological (the diversity of intake means a range of information technology (IT) literacies). Specific skills are required to effectively engage in PDP (Appendix 1, section 2.4). Student engagement may also be enhanced by training in how to make the most of their PDP experience. Involving students from other years as advocates, guides and role models will also raise engagement, possibly more powerfully than using staff (Appendix 1, section 2.6).

Recommendations	Audience
6.1 Staff development and training opportunities focused on staff working with first-year students should be offered to raise awareness of the benefits of PDP, the boundaries of their role, and the sources of expert help within their institution.	HEA, academic staff, academic development departments, student services staff
6.2 Students should be encouraged to participate in supporting their peers in PDP mentoring or 'buddying' initiatives.	Academic staff, support staff, students

<sup>10</sup> Centre for Recording Achievement; HEA Subject Centres; ISLE project.

Recommendations	Audience
6.3 More research into effective strategies for supporting academic 'buy-in' to PDP, and into staff development needs, should be undertaken and guidelines produced for the sector.	QAA, HEA, academic staff
6.4 There is a role for a new printed or online staff guide to PDP in the first year. This could supplement the <i>Guides for Busy Academics</i> , available on the HEA website.	HEA
6.5 Evaluation of PDP implementation with first-year students needs to be encouraged through programme review and other internal procedures, in preparation for Enhancement-led Institutional Review. Sharing and using this evidence in an appropriate format needs to be further encouraged in the existing CRA and HEA Subject Centre evidence databases to substantiate the efficacy of implementing PDP from the first year.	Academic staff/practitioners

Figure 7: recommendations for means of delivery: staff and student support issues

## 4 The way forward

Recommendations for future work which this project did not have time to address include:

- drawing more specifically on examples (from Australia, Europe and the USA) where PDP is introduced in the first year of HE, to highlight the key factors for staff and student engagement
- exploring the balance in different academic disciplines between effective learning and employability as the focus for first-year implementation of PDP, perhaps investigating the references relevant to the first year from two specific sources - the ISLE project<sup>11</sup> (whose report was published after the main research for this project had taken place) and the CRA website<sup>12</sup>, which contains growing evidence of practice
- further developing the concept of PDP as a framework to support significant or critical incidents - both positive and negative - in the student life cycle; and, in particular, illustrating this in diagrammatical format.

No specific reference is made to the resources required to implement these recommendations. However, resources will be needed for additional research and/or evaluation on specific issues, at both micro and macro level, as well as on staff development time and costs and to support the tools made available to deliver PDP.

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<sup>11</sup> [http://isle.paisley.ac.uk/PDP in Practice/Forms/By SCQF Level.aspx](http://isle.paisley.ac.uk/PDP%20in%20Practice/Forms/By%20SCQF%20Level.aspx)

<sup>12</sup> [www.recordingachievement.org/he/case\\_studies.asp](http://www.recordingachievement.org/he/case_studies.asp)

## 5 Case studies

### 5.1 University of Strathclyde

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#### 5.1.1 Aims of scheme

The scheme was introduced into the Law, Arts and Social Sciences Faculty during 2005-06 to meet the requirement that the cohort of around 600 first-year students would be entitled to PDP. This requirement needed to be met without inflating staff costs or commitments. It was hoped that a successful scheme would help students to adjust during the transition period between school/college and university, and that it would link with the existing LASS Faculty mentor scheme. The belief was that such a scheme would offer the possibility of revamping the early warning system. Finally, it was hoped that the scheme would improve faculty retention rates.

Contributors included members of the LASS Faculty staff, the Careers Advisory Service, staff from the Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement and local employers (specifically for second and third-year PDP).

#### 5.1.2 The scheme

The LASS Faculty scheme operates as e-PDP using the domestic University of Strathclyde virtual learning environment (VLE) developed by the Department of Pharmacy. A pre-existing e-PDP VLE package was adaptable to the Faculty's needs, and is able to evolve to meet the emerging requirements of the scheme as it is rolled out into second and third-year levels.

Training in the use of the university's VLE is embedded into the first-year IT class. Although it bears no credits, this class is compulsory unless students have an exemption because of prior training. However, the VLE session is still recommended for such students.

The e-PDP scheme is also non-credit bearing. After the initial session in the IT class, it is a purely voluntary scheme.

#### 5.1.3 The elements of e-PDP

The scheme has three core elements:

- i **Personal skills** - students work through a questionnaire enabling them to identify what skills they already possess and how good they think they are at them. A simple four-point scale is used, where 1 represents 'I am not very good at this - yet!' and 4 is 'I do this very well. I am consistent and successful in it.' Key skills identified include

information gathering and analysis; IT skills; time management; effective information gathering in lectures; essay and report writing; making a presentation; tutorials/small-group work.

- ii **Diary** - students are asked to identify two key skills they would like to work on during the first semester or first year. In their diary they record why they have identified these areas, to develop and establish a development plan.
- iii **Diary review** - at the end of the first and second semesters, students are asked to review the progress they have made, identifying in their own estimation the extent to which they have succeeded in improving their skill level in identified areas.

On the university's VLE, students can maintain course files in which they are able to upload their work. They can also establish a blog and group discussion boards, customise their records and put privacy locks on material they do not wish to share with the PDP Coordinator or their discussion group. The confidentiality of the scheme is stressed. The Coordinator and VLE administrator is the only member of staff given initial access to the development plans. Students are at liberty to discuss the contents with any other member of staff, but it is their choice.

Administrator tools on the VLE enable the Coordinator to know which students have completed the elements of e-PDP, how many times they have tackled the questionnaire or made diary entries, and the dates of last entries. This allows the preparation of statistics on students' participation in the scheme.

On students' VLE e-PDP pages, links are provided to various people who can help them to formulate their plans or seek other help during their first year, including:

- university support schemes (for example, welfare, special needs, Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement)
- Students' Association support schemes
- mentor scheme
- departmental contacts
- adviser of studies.

#### 5.1.4 Response to the scheme

The extent to which students have taken the diary and forward planning elements of e-PDP has been heartening. Very few students have provided one-line responses. Most have clearly thought about the exercise, and provide detailed and mature responses. Effectively, they are using the e-PDP diary as a personal blog, and most appear comfortable with this. There is no major difference between the sexes or the age of students in their responses.

For instance, in the first semester most students (65 per cent) identify **effective information gathering in lectures** and **time management** as key problems during the transition phase. Comments on the former have included issues of understanding what the main points in lectures are and not trying to write everything down, not reading the preparatory texts or following up information after the lecture, and making sense of what has been written during lectures.

Development plans have included: identifying material remembered from school/college so that students can concentrate on giving the Coordinator information; creating time to complete the prescribed additional reading; attending study-skills seminars; and actually trying to listen to the lecturer.

**Time management** issues for students include weaknesses in forward planning, falling asleep in class because the external paid employment/university work balance is poor, mature students worrying about when they will find time to complete work while coping with family responsibilities, spending too much time (and money) on their social life, and generally leaving too much to the last minute.

Development plans have included: establishing study timetables; ending procrastination; assessing the difficulty of tasks and assigning appropriate time to complete them; not leaving things to the last minute; buying a diary; trying to get external paid employment shifts worked out in advance.

The comments have provided an interesting insight into student priorities, hopes and worries.

#### 5.1.5 2006-07 statistical results

Note: Figures in brackets are for the 2005-06 session.

- 11 per cent (12 per cent) did not sign up for e-PDP
- 10.5 per cent (22 per cent) logged onto the VLE, but did not complete any element of PDP
- 21 per cent (12 per cent) completed diary reviews
- 27.5 per cent completed diaries
- 30 per cent completed questionnaires only.

Overall, 78.5 per cent (61 per cent) of first-year students carried out at least one element of e-PDP, and 48.5 per cent (41 per cent) carried out two or more elements.

There was a marked increase in engagement in e-pdp by the 2006-07 first-year cohort in comparison with the previous year. The scheme was emphasised more during the induction week, but it appears that the 2006-07 first-year cohort were more comfortable with the exercise.

Students were asked informally why only 21 per cent completed the diary review. The responses included concentrating on exams then forgetting or regarding it as a second-year exercise.

In the 2006-07 session, e-PDP was rolled out into the second year, but only 20 per cent of students completed at least one element. Reasons offered for the low response emphasised a general feeling that students knew the ropes by the second year and felt more confident in their abilities. There is e-PDP at the third-year level for the first time in the 2007-08 session, focusing on transferable skills and CV creation. Local employers and the departments have been involved in its formulation. It is hoped that the practical benefits, relevance to needs and novelty of the approach will encourage a good response by third-year students.

### 5.1.6 Other results

The pattern of responses over the year has provided a snapshot of the first year experience, allowing better planning of departmental skills development programmes. Essentially, the responses suggested that students have worries throughout the first-year experience, but that they change over time. From early generic worries about time management and lecture note-taking, by late semester 1 and early semester 2 the concerns are practical issues of essay and report writing, information gathering and working in small groups. Knowing this suggests that there is little point in sessions on essay-writing skills during induction week or early in semester 1 - it is too early and most of the information will have been forgotten when required. Skills development sessions embedded in the departmental syllabus should adapt to the pattern of the first-year experience. This would allow a more meaningful induction process, giving students a quicker sense of belonging to the university.

The practical skills identified as a priority later in the first-year experience also correlated with higher patterns of completion. Students identifying the need to improve essay-writing skills, information gathering and small-group work were more likely to complete the development review and assess their level of satisfaction with the skills developed. This would seem to reflect that already during the first year students were maturing and, while still anxious, were better developing the ability to identify and manage their skills development.

E-PDP helped in understanding the 'at risk' student and made the early warning system both faster and more precise. Students who had not engaged with e-PDP by week 4 of semester 1 were cross-referenced with information from Basic (First Year) Class Coordinators to identify patterns of poor engagement. These students were then invited to meet with Graham Hollier and Patricia Barton to identify ways in which they could be helped. This contrasted with our previous early warning system, which would take until week 8 to be effective, at which point many troubled students had decided to leave. It helped to identify students not yet ready for university life, enabling them to enter voluntary suspension or leave university before incurring heavy student debt.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that the Faculty's retention rate is improving, and it will be interesting to see if this is borne out.

### 5.1.7 Conclusion

The LASS Faculty's e-PDP scheme has had a successful introduction at first-year level. It has involved a mature self-assessment by the majority of the first-year cohort, and has had benefits for the Faculty's administration and for staff members planning the first-year syllabus. Above all, the student diaries have provided a comprehensive picture of what the first year experience entails, both negative and positive, and as such will help the Faculty in its future planning to aid new entrants to the university.

## 5.2 University of Glasgow

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### 5.2.1 Introduction

Case studies have been adopted in this project as a means of identifying and exploring the issues that have arisen with respect to adoption of PDP in the first year of HE. This account of the University of Glasgow is not intended to be exhaustive, but to give an indication of developments that have occurred and to identify some issues that have emerged.

### 5.2.2 Early Adopters

Between the publication of the Dearing report in 1997, with its recommendation to develop progress files as well as transcripts, and the efforts of the QAA in the early 2000s to encourage HEIs towards adoption of PDP, several 'early adopters' had taken up paper-based PDP systems. In the Faculty of Medicine, 'Personal and Professional development' (PPD) was established as part of the undergraduate curriculum, which in the late 1990s had been completely reconstructed on a problem-based learning basis. In the Education Faculty, staff implemented a paper-based professional development reflective tool for the BEd degree programme, and later (2005-06) consulted closely with students to develop an online PDP tool, offered as an optional extra which students may take up if they wish. The Chemistry department adopted a paper-based PDP issued by the Royal Society of Chemistry.

### 5.2.3 PDP and Employability

In the early 2000s employability began to be regarded as a key aspect of HE. PDP was seen as one of the major routes in developing employability. The university's employability strategy, presented in December 2003, included a commitment to 'Introduce elements of PDP (where not already in existence) to undergraduate programmes by session 2005/06.' Towards the end of 2003 the university conducted an employability audit, which included 'preparedness for PDP implementation'. Most responding departments felt they were not yet ready for the implementation of PDP in 2005-06. Recommendations of the audit report focused on the need to give more information and support, to seek better awareness of subject relevance and of what tools and approaches are available. An employability working party took a special interest in PDP and enabled interested individuals across the university to network more effectively. Employability groups also existed in some faculties, and promoted actions such as an employability project running across all three science faculties.

### 5.2.4 The Student Development Suite

The IT Education Unit (ITEU) was responsible for the University's IT Literacy Programme, established in 1995 as one of the first in the UK. In seeking to evolve the programme to meet the needs of increasingly IT competent students, ITEU proposed adopting a 'Digital Literacy Framework', which would identify student IT needs right through any academic programme, and focus on development of students as digitally literate, ie not only possessing digital skills, but also being able to use them in real-life situations

(Martin, 2006). This led to the idea of a digital literacy PDP, which would allow students to see themselves developing as digitally literate persons, and to decide what digital competences would help them in the direction they wished to develop. This concept was discussed with contacts in academic departments, who responded that the plan for a digital literacy PDP could be developed into a generic online PDP system.

Contacts with the Arts Faculty led to a university Learning and Teaching Development grant to develop an online PDP system in the Arts Faculty, focused initially around a programme of employability events for students. Work began on the system, known as the Student Development Suite (SDS) in the spring of 2006. The SDS would offer the student five main facilities: a **Learning Record**, where learning achievements, formal and informal, could be recorded; an **Evidence Base**, where items giving evidence of learning achievements could be stored; a **Personal Planner**, where personal plans for study, work and life could be set out and compared with current achievements; a **Reflective Focus Tool**, where reflective topics set by students' own departments or faculties could be addressed; and a **Curriculum Vitae Builder**, which would enable students to set up and maintain an up-to-date CV.

The Medical Faculty, which had been supportive of the Digital Literacy Framework development, saw the SDS as a means of moving their PPD activity onto an online medium, and joined the development process. This provided an addition in perspective, since while those leading the PPD activity for medical undergraduates had a clear idea of what they wanted to achieve - moving the existing PPD action online and seeking whatever additional benefits could then be gained - the members of the Arts PDP group were still thinking through how the online PDP tool could complement their employability programme, and for this group the specification of the SDS tool was part of the process of establishing what PDP meant for them.

As this work proceeded, it became evident that there was considerable interest in it among those staff interested in taking forward PDP. It should be noted that this group was very small in size, but perhaps more influential than might first appear, since the members, being committed to innovation and the improvement of learning and teaching generally, were themselves, or were close to, Associate Deans for Learning and Teaching in various faculties. Several faculties expressed interest in using SDS once it became available, and a demonstration of the semi-completed SDS prototype attracted an audience from across the university.

### 5.2.5 Strategic Adoption of e-PDP

At the same time the need to make strategic decisions on PDP development within the university was becoming recognised as urgent by the university management. Electronic PDP (or ePortfolio) was becoming more widely visible across the UK HE sector, and awareness was growing of the electronic PDP tools used elsewhere, some based on in-house development, others on the adoption of commercial options. The development of SDS offered a possible in-house solution, but there was perhaps a worry that if central initiative were not taken, the result might be a plurality of PDP systems throughout the university.

Rather than viewing the large range of products available, the decision making process was focused on the University's prior commitment to Moodle as its VLE, and the criterion was set that the PDP system adopted must be compatible with, or even integratable

with, the Moodle VLE. A product that met this criterion was MyStuff, being developed by the Open University, which had also adopted Moodle as its VLE. The compatibility with Moodle was a powerful factor in support of the adoption of this product. There was also probably an element of caution, in avoiding the risk of going it alone with an in-house product, preferring to join an established and well-funded major player in a system that other HEIs might also be expected to use. The open-source aspect was also seen as a cost-minimising factor, although it was acknowledged that internal development and customisation of MyStuff would require some resource. Although not developed in Moodle, SDS could be made to pop up in Moodle, and possessed the advantage of any in-house product - that the university would have complete control over it.

The choice was not easy to make since both SDS and MyStuff had advantages and disadvantages. However, a decision to adopt MyStuff was made in early May 2007. At this point development work on the SDS project was brought to a halt, with the draft version of the product about 50 per cent complete. This is not to say that nothing was gained, or that the modest investment in SDS was wasted. Important gains were made in learning about what PDP could be used for, and how it could integrate with pedagogy. For the Arts Faculty, these gains would enable customisation of MyStuff to be more rapidly focused. As a catalyst for thought and then action, SDS was a significant development in the movement towards PDP adoption, for the discussions focused around it indicated academics' awareness that realising PDP as a learning adjunct could be more effectively achieved when supported by an electronic tool.

However, the process has now moved on, and a system having been chosen for university-wide adoption, the university's Learning and Teaching Centre, which has been given responsibility for the online PDP system, is at the stage of planning the customisation and roll-out of MyStuff, and the support and training that will be required to make best use of it.

Part of the process will undoubtedly be to involve consultation of students. Consultation of the SRC as part of the decision-making process on online PDP adoption elicited the response that students would be interested in PDP if it were beneficial for them, but that they knew very little about it and would appreciate more information. This echoes the low profile given to PDP by students in the Quality Enhancement Theme project on Student expectations, experiences and reflections of the first year.

### 5.2.6 Developmental Progress

To view the point reached now from a developmental perspective, the model derived from the *Management in the 90s* research project at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is useful (Scott Morton, 1991). The transformational model indicates the effect of IT on change in companies, and involves five stages grouped into three phases which are outlined below.

The **Evolutionary** phase represents the movement from uncoordinated ad hoc developments towards an organised structure, although IT remains supportive of, rather than embedded within, core business activities. It consists of two stages:

- i **Localised** - ad hoc activities or local initiatives with little or no central policy or support.

- ii **Co-ordinated** - these initiatives are brought together into an organised structure, or replaced by a centrally imposed structure, which maintains the same types of activity.

The second phase is the **Transformative**, in which rethink of IT activities is undertaken. It consists of one stage:

- iii **Transforming** - change agents begin to reshape IT activities, and to draw them closer to core business activities, which are themselves caused to change.

The final phase is the **Revolutionary**, in which IT activities move into the centre of core activities and themselves become a force for change. It consists of two stages:

- iv **Embedded** - IT activities have become embedded within core business activities, which are now radically different from before.
- v **Innovative** - IT activities now become a source of ongoing change to the core activities themselves and the nature of the business and the company.

This model can be applied as a generic model of the integration of IT-related innovation within an organisation. We can thus reasonably apply it to PDP adoption in HE. What we find is that Glasgow University, like many other HEIs, remains in the first, evolutionary, phase but has reached the second, *co-ordinated* stage, at which individual localised developments are being brought together into a developing strategic context. There is also a desire to move into the transformative stage, an awareness that development of effective PDP will affect the whole learning process. There is still some way to go if PDP is to play a part in changing the fundamental nature of the way in which the university goes about its business. Proponents of PDP argue that it is part of the move towards a more empowering, lifelong, student-centred practice of learning, and as such, has real transformative potential.

### 5.2.7 Varying Perspectives on PDP

It is clear from discussions with PDP-interested individuals in different faculties and departments that perceptions of what PDP is and what it could or should do vary considerably. Thus for Medicine, PDP is identified with the personal and professional development element of the medical curriculum, itself derived from the expectations of the professional body, and seen as a useful way of enabling students to engage in appropriate activities, by describing and analysing relevant experiences, and evaluating their own learning from these. By contrast, in Education the vocationally-focused self-evaluative activities similar to the PPD element of the medical curriculum are seen as part of the course assessment apparatus, and not as PDP; by PDP is meant an add-on, optional and wholly student-controlled tool to enable reflection on more general transferable skills. In the Arts Faculty it is seen as a means, initially, of supporting employability, but also perhaps as an adjunct to the assessment process, whereby students may be persuaded to reflect upon the comments given by tutors on their assessed work, and derive from this process more specific as well as general learning benefits.

This variation in approach is consistent with research in this area. Clegg and Bradley (2006) propose three 'ideal types' of the attitudes of different subject or discipline areas to PDP: the **professional** type, shaped by the requirements of professional and statutory bodies; the **employment** type, which includes a general orientation to graduate employment and also specific work placement during study; and the **academic** type,

which focused on academic development of the student, incorporating metacognitive skills and those of the subject discipline. Experience at Glasgow broadly supports this view. The first type, the professional, could be observed in Medicine, and the second and third, together, perhaps in Chemistry, where employability benefits were tied to subject understanding. The third type, the academic, was masked in the Arts Faculty by employability concerns, however, as the process rolls out to include staff less committed to employability initiatives, the pure meta-skills aspect may come to dominate. This point reminds us that initial developments are driven by innovators and later evolution may be more influenced by the majority of staff.

Another interesting take on perspective on PDP is the distinction between positivist and constructivist models of PDP made by Paulson and Paulson (1994). They characterise the former as institution-focused, tending towards testing and standardisation, and the latter as student-focused, encouraging self-evaluation and personalisation. They suggest however that by their nature as individually-created objects, portfolios tend to encourage constructivist forms. In terms of this dichotomy, perceptions at Glasgow tended towards asserting the constructivist approach, but sometimes suggesting that assessment goals could be met even through a student-owned product. In Education a clear distinction was made between what the institution owns (the assessment process) and what the student owns (the PDP process).

### **5.2.8 Involvement in PDP**

The most worrying aspect from the point of view of PDP innovators was the low level of involvement shown by the generality of both staff and students. For staff, other than as a QAA requirement or an aid to assessment in vocational areas, PDP still has to be justified in terms which will bring them willingly on board. The awareness-raising effort and level of support offered will need to be substantial.

For students the challenge may be even greater. If PDP is compulsory, the response may simply be to address the requirements in a very instrumental way, supplying strictly what is required to succeed (this approach may also apply to staff). If not, the task of persuading students that they have something to gain from using PDP will be a daunting one. The danger is that PDP will be adopted by the minority of pro-active students who take a positive attitude towards any new opportunity, and that it will become a means of exacerbating rather than reducing the gap between more successful and less successful students.

## 5.3 Napier University

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### 5.3.1 Background

The Effective Learning and Career Development module is delivered in a two-week programme prior to the start of the academic session to students who are moving to the university from Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND) courses in further education. It is a 15-credit module, assessed at level 2. Assessments take place at the end of the two-week course and again at the end of semester 1, which is of 15 weeks' duration.

Numbers vary year on year, but in 2006 approximately 120 students attended. The course is led by five tutors and five student facilitators, although these numbers also vary from year to year. Participants are mostly business school students who are entering a variety of courses at level 2 or level 3 but the module is open to any direct entry student from other subject areas and has included small numbers of social science and creative industries students. Similar numbers were anticipated for 2007 entry.

The module has been developed over a 10-year period and was an initiative in response to needs expressed by students to help to prepare for the different approach to study at higher education. As students making this transition tend to be more mature and more concerned about their career prospects, a career planning element was also introduced.

### 5.3.2 Module content

The students attend a series of skills development workshops in groups of 25, and receive a file of support materials for each session. They self-assess their skills at the beginning and again at the end of the two-week programme. Students develop and practice a range of study and other skills, including:

- effective reading and note-making
- essay writing
- critical thinking
- referencing
- presentation skills
- exam and revision strategies
- team-building and group-work skills
- career development and employability skills.

Activities are designed to help students to understand what is expected of them during their time at university, and to help them look ahead to and focus on developing their employability skills.

The students are given a diary to complete during their first semester of study. This includes prompt questions to encourage reflective writing. They are strongly encouraged to continue to keep the diary going throughout the duration of their course.

### **5.3.3 The role of tutors and student facilitators**

A tutor and a student facilitator are assigned to each group. Student facilitators are recruited from the experienced student body and are carefully selected. Their role is of critical importance in reassuring the new students and raising their aspirations. Student facilitators receive training, including awareness raising of boundaries, the role of a professional tutor, communication skills and their new role as employees of the institution (cf their previous role as students).

Student facilitators contribute examples of their own experiences and encourage the new students to try out new methods or approaches to learning. A careers adviser also participates, giving a session on employment opportunities and employability skills, to assist students in their research. Follow-up appointments can be made to discuss issues individually.

### **5.3.4 Assessment**

The students complete two assessments: a group presentation and a written individual reflective report. The reflective report assignment includes asking students to do research on employment in an area of their choice. This includes completing a skills matrix and reflecting on their suitability for a particular area of employment. The reflective report demonstrates the student's ability to explore the job market and gain an insight into the types of qualifications, skills and experience expected by employers.

Part of the report includes students reflecting on their development in the first term at Napier. They identify their strengths and weaknesses and seem to be able to give an honest view of changes that have taken place and how they are coping with their academic studies.

Assessment marks tend to be high - usually between 60 and 80 per cent. Students are clearly engaged with the process and in using the tools they are provided with.

### **5.3.5 Feedback from participants**

Evaluation of the two-week course is done by questionnaire, and minor adaptations are made to the programme and materials each year, based on feedback from students, tutors and facilitators. The following quotations are from reflective reports submitted in January 2007:

'By the end of the bridging course I felt that I was a lot more prepared for the course than I would have been otherwise. It was not just helpful, it was essential!'

'By the end of the bridging course most of my anxieties were alleviated. I had a clear impression of what was expected of me, what I could expect from the university and felt positive and motivated for the following year ahead!'

'I really enjoyed the critical thinking exercises which encouraged me to think about how I can gain confidence in critical thinking in my studies and not to accept arguments at face value but to consider alternatives.'

'For the duration of the bridging course I felt that I was constantly learning and developing skills, realising my strengths and weaknesses and how to maintain or improve them.'

'I found that there were many differences at university compared to what I was used to at college, and had I not learned about this during the bridging course I believe I would have felt very lost, and am unsure if I would have coped with university life.'

'The course was fun to attend and I made a lot of new friends, some of which have remained very good friends and some who have become a face to say hello to in passing.'

The assessed report, however, gives greater anecdotal insight into the effectiveness of the module. Students have given positive feedback on the module and welcomed the process. They have generally expressed a sense of feeling more integrated socially into the institution, that they might have left if they had not developed a strong network of friends through the course, and that they understood better what is expected of them as students.

## 5.4 Heriot-Watt University

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Target year: first-year civil engineering students (55 students in cohort studied).

### 5.4.1 Background

Students need to develop the skill of managing their studies, taking responsibility for maintaining or improving their grades, while juggling a range of other commitments (maintaining an independent lifestyle, paid and/or voluntary employment, socialising and sport and hobbies).

The PDP framework/process being delivered in Civil Engineering, part of the School of the Built Environment, has been built on the success of a range of professional development initiatives developed and delivered over many years. One element of the programme - the practice described in this case study - seeks to empower students to overcome the potential difficulties that could arise from one of the 'critical incidents' in the first-year student life cycle: notification of their grades from their term 1 modules.

### 5.4.2 Description of practice

Early in term 2, just after students have received their term 1 marks, first-year civil engineering students are asked to complete a reflective questionnaire. Although this work is not assessed, it is presented to students as an integral part of their Professional Development Planning<sup>13</sup>, which itself is located within one of the technical modules of the course and so is viewed by students and staff as part of the core curriculum.

Non-personal information from the completed questionnaires is collated, converted to graphical/ pictorial format and then presented to the students at the earliest opportunity. This collated information also becomes part of the dataset used to monitor and evaluate the modules/programme of study.

As this practice is integrated with the term 2 mentoring process in first-year Civil Engineering (which needed buy-in from all relevant members of staff for it to be effective), each student takes a copy of their completed questionnaire with them to the next scheduled one-to-one meeting with their mentor (the academic with responsibility for pastoral support for that student). The completed questionnaire acts as an agenda for this meeting, enabling the mentor to focus on the student's individual needs. First-year civil engineering students meet their mentor weekly in terms 1 and 2, so an ongoing relationship between the pair can be established and developed, and action points arising from this particular PDP activity can be explored and discussed at this and subsequent mentor meetings.

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<sup>13</sup> Heriot-Watt University uses the term 'Professional Development Planning' when referring to PDP, as this gives greater buy-in from students and staff.

### 5.4.3 Outcome

Time and again students tell us that the presentation of the collated responses from the questionnaire offers them a source of reassurance at a critical point in their studies - that is, the return of their term 1 grades. Having previously kept their concerns private, they feel relieved and reassured now they realise that the challenges they face in their studies are shared by others in the class.

Where this practice uncovers particular issues which might affect an individual student's performance, staff may note this on that student's record (perhaps to bring to the attention of the Progression Board). Where appropriate, such students may be referred on to other student support services in the university.

This work has been carried out year on year since 2002.

Originally, the questionnaires were paper-based and completed in class time, with the results collated by hand. The questionnaires are now web-delivered and completed outside class time, potentially offering students more privacy in completing their questionnaire. Collation of results is carried out electronically, offering a saving in staff time. Despite the change of medium, over this period (since 2002) similar results have been obtained from each cohort of students.

## 6 Concluding remarks

### What is the significance of PDP to the first year experience?

Firstly, there is a widely held view that in order to improve the student experience generally, the focus of the first year might be to provide a learning environment in which individual students' needs are catered for, rather than seeing students as part of a potentially problematic mass. By its commonly accepted definition<sup>14</sup>, focusing on the 'holistic' personal, educational and career development aspects of the individual, there may be a role for PDP in redressing the mass experience of being a first-year student, and specifically in addressing the issues of student engagement and empowerment. Secondly, as PDP is envisioned as a continual process, relating past actions and reflections to positive future actions, it can potentially provide a bridge and structure for entrants to higher education at a time of transition.

All the evidence points to induction, assimilation and integration being key processes in the first year, at a time of critical transition in personal development as students enter HE.

The project team found that there is a deficit of literature specifically on PDP in the first year. However, the various resources available from the literature on the first year and on PDP in practice provided enough evidence to conclude that PDP can serve as a potentially useful framework or structure to bridge different educational settings and the different elements of the first year student life cycle. At its core are processes of reflection, action planning and self-efficacy, all helpful characteristics that PDP may help to develop in students. Depending on how effectively it is used (evidence is growing), PDP can also provide links between educational, personal and career development, engaging and empowering students on their route towards becoming successful graduates. There were also references to PDP offering a way of personalising the first experience of HE, with many potential opportunities for peer support, helping first years to make sense of their experiences.

The project identified certain requisites that are necessary for PDP to engage students. There needs to be a clearly defined purpose (for example, linked to the curriculum or employability) and a context (something to reflect on). Having an audience and an opportunity for dialogue with peers as well as staff, are essential. Attention needs to be paid to the skills required to undertake PDP effectively (including reflection), and students must be offered support with any personal, educational or technological needs arising. The first contact with PDP in HE through an effective induction needs to be a positive experience, delivered and supported by staff who are enthusiastic about the benefits.

Although there were many examples of staff' willingness to help make PDP successful, an encouraging attendance at recent events held for the sector to support the implementation of PDP, much still needs to be done to ensure that staff are 'on board' with PDP, particularly with reference to first-year students.

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<sup>14</sup> PDP is defined as: 'a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development.' (QAA (2001) *Guidelines for HE Progress Files*, point 28)

If PDP is to be adopted universally in the first year, it has to be perceived as directly relevant to the first year experience, and for that to happen, it needs to be made so. HEIs need to think carefully about the experience they want students to have in the first year and the part PDP could play in this. Similarly, those tasked with developing PDP need to think about how PDP should evolve throughout the years of study to bring students with it, as their concerns change.

This institution-wide approach, taking account of PDP's role in the student life cycle from the pre-entry stage to post-graduation, might assure coherence and equitable access to the appropriate tools (educational and technological) to aid student and staff engagement. It would also serve to confirm senior management's commitment to PDP and be a driver for staff engagement, by recognising the need for development time to allow tailoring to discipline needs.

As Jackson (2001b:4) so rightly noted in East (2005) p 168: 'The lack of time is often the biggest barrier to change. Financial support buys time and can provide an incentive to change...PDP is one area which could be supported through a whole series of small incentives if earmarked funding was provided'.

### In summary:

#### **1 The evidence suggests that the benefits of introducing PDP in the first year across the institution are that it:**

- gives students a means of forming a full picture of themselves as learners in the broadest context, as it:
  - links current personal (identity), social (friendships and networks) and academic aspects
  - links to prior learning and education
  - provides a mechanism to relate these to current and future plans
- serves as a framework or structure to bridge:
  - different educational settings
  - the different elements of the first-year student life cycle
- plays a crucial role in personalising the mass experience of being a first year through:
  - students owning and keeping track of their development and making sense of their experiences
  - giving opportunities for peer support
- integrates personal development planning and pedagogy from the beginning, which is important because:
  - learning practices (including reflection) are set in the first year
  - assessment of the PDP process is essential for student (and staff) engagement

- links employability to the curriculum, while providing opportunities for identifying and planning for career goals in a structured way.

**2 An integrated approach across the institution (but with built-in flexibility) could address many critical issues and barriers to engagement by helping to:**

- define a 'support entitlement' which makes clear how students are supported throughout the student life cycle when experiencing significant or critical incidents
- assure coherence and allow for equitable access to the appropriate tools (educational and technological)
- confirm senior management's commitment to PDP
- foster staff engagement by recognising the need for development time to allow tailoring to discipline needs
- raise the profile of staff teaching first-year students.

In theory, by implementing PDP in the first year using an integrated approach, institutions can benefit from increased retention, more engaged and empowered students, increased employability and more effective learners. However, there would still seem to be a long way to go to meet a universal student entitlement to an effective PDP system that meets their needs and engages and empowers all students whatever their chosen subject.

The question can be raised as to whether PDP is applicable to all students in all institutions. In principle it is, but might there be other activities, currently ongoing in the sector or which could be developed further, that fulfil the objectives of PDP? Only more evaluation would tell whether the reality meets the aims and PDP can deliver what we hope it can.

# 7 Appendices

## Appendix I: Literature review

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# I Introduction to the literature review

'Personal development planning (PDP) in the first year' was one of nine projects of the First Year Experience: engagement and empowerment, the Enhancement Theme for 2005-07, supported by QAA Scotland. The remit required the project team to review the literature to identify effective and interesting approaches that have been used to address the issues related to PDP in the first year, with reference to the recent HEA review on the first year.

The literature review was carried out between October 2006 and February 2007. It was contained in the Interim Report provided to QAA Scotland and the Steering Group of the First Year Experience Enhancement Theme in March 2007.

This revised edition of the literature review updates references contained in the main report on the project, published in summer 2008. It also includes references and commentary, where applicable, on the case studies (Section 4) used to illustrate specific issues, as well as links to the work of the other projects in the First Year Experience Enhancement Theme.

## 1.1 The PDP in HE network

The team who undertook this project are all members of the Personal Development Planning in Higher Education (PDP in HE) (Scotland) network, which has been established for over 10 years. Network participants are active practitioners from a wide range of disciplines and services in HEIs throughout Scotland. The network seeks to:

- influence HE policy-makers
- disseminate good practices and develop common principles
- develop a broad network of experience by welcoming all HEIs in Scotland
- promote PDP through collaboration with relevant student organisations, professional bodies, local enterprise groups and staff in further and higher education.

The inclusiveness of the network allowed the project team to identify the appropriate people to review the literature, by being in a position to identify practice and research across the sector.

## 1.2 Process of deciding on issues

The first meeting of the project team members on 21 September 2006 discussed what the issues relating to PDP in the first year might be, based on their experience as active practitioners. They identified 12 issues that might be explored in relation to engagement and empowerment, although they recognised that these could not all be explored in detail. The resultant matrix (Figure 8), which organised these issues into four major themes and eight issues, helped to frame the search.

## 1.3 Process of creating a review template

The team agreed to record all reviews of the literature in a similar way. A template was created (Figure 9) to serve the joint purpose of enabling all team members to access the key ideas in each other's reviews, and to allow the details of each review to be stored in the same software programme, facilitating the creation of bibliographies and cross-referencing during and after the project.

Major themes	Range of issues							
	Guidance and support	New v. mature students	Vocational v. non-vocational	Ownership and ethics (of control)	Culture, nationality and diversity	PDP and relation to CPD (professions)	Previous experience and transitions	Design
Assessment or accreditation v. voluntary								
Staff and student support								
e-portfolios v. paper/people-based support								
Integrated v. 'bolt-on' process								

Figure 8: matrix of PDP issues

<b>Source information</b>	Author	
	Year	
	Title	
	Source title	
	Publisher	
	Volume	
	Issue	
	Pages	
	Edition	
	ISBN/ISSN	
	Electronic resource number	
	Accession number	
	Keywords	
	Abstract	
	Notes (author conclusions etc)	
	URL	
	Link to PDF/doc	
	Access date	
	Name of database	
	Database provider	
<b>Reviewer information</b>	Research design	
	Geographical area referred to in the study/article	
	Date data collected	
	Sample characteristics	
	Research methods employed	
	Key findings	
	Reviewer's comments	
	Reviewer	
	Date	

Figure 9: PDP literature review template

## 1.4 Methodology

The project team identified possible sources of literature and agreed to sub-divide the search. As the time constraints of the project meant that it was not feasible to undertake as systematic a review as would have been desired, participants chose to investigate literature in areas where they already had some knowledge and/or interest. No constraints on publication date were applied at the outset. The following is a brief outline of the success or otherwise of these initial searches.

### a HEA website

#### Subject Centres

Each Subject Centre was searched systematically. Listed project reports were scanned and if there was a global site-search facility, appropriate terms were entered (for example, 'PDP', 'personal development planning' and 'e-portfolio').

If sites contained sections archiving their journals and newsletters, these were also visited and search terms applied if there was a search facility. If no search facility existed, individual issues were visited in the archive.

It was found that vocational areas such as education, engineering, hospitality and leisure, geo-subjects and the built environment exhibited more widespread publications on the use of PDP. In some subjects, for example history, classics and archaeology, and philosophical and religious studies, searches for 'personal development planning' produced no results. In other Subject Centres, such as art, design and media, note was taken of projects currently underway but not yet reported, and contact was made with project leaders to ascertain progress and publication dates.

No constraints on publication date were applied, but it is perhaps worth noting that even though the subject network pre-dates the founding of the HEA in 2004, it was relatively unusual for references discovered by this methodology to pre-date the HEA.

#### Literature Review Reference Directory

The Literature Review Reference Directory on the HEA website incorporated all the references from the mandatory publications on the first year experience which the project team were required to consult (Harvey and Drew 2006), as well as some additional items. A number of search terms were chosen to identify literature relevant to PDP, as follows.

Selecting 'The First Year Experience' database:

'Personal development planning' - no results

'PDP' - no results

'Portfolios' - 3 results; 3 of potential relevance; 1 review resulted

'Progress file' - no results

'Reflective' - 40 results; 12 of potential relevance; 1 review resulted (as above)

'Personal development' - 24 results; 1 of potential relevance; 1 review resulted (as above).

Selecting 'All' (Blended Learning; Doctoral Experience; Reflective Practice; Widening Participation) databases:

'Personal development planning' -13 results; 1 of potential relevance;  
1 review resulted

'PDP' - no results

'Progress file' - 1 result; not relevant

'Reflective+practice+first+year' - 15 results; 2 of potential relevance;  
1 review resulted.

## **b UK academic journals**

The reviewer chose to investigate research studies conducted and academic papers written after the publication of Gough et al's systematic literature review (2003) on the effectiveness of PDP, on the basis that anything significant written prior to that date would be covered by that review.

The bibliographic database Ingenta Connect was used to search for UK-based articles using the search terms 'Personal Development Planning' and 'First year since 2002', the date of the most recent pieces reviewed in the systematic literature review. This resulted in no hits, so the search was widened to 'personal development planning' with subsequent internal searches for references to the first year. This search uncovered 215 titles. The titles and publications of these were scanned to find those which were likely to relate to PDP in a higher education context with undergraduates. From this, 24 abstracts were read and a selection made of 10 articles for full review. These covered a range of approaches (theoretical and empirical research), geographical location, subject disciplines and, in the case of empirical research, focus, methods and informants. To this list was added the aforementioned systematic literature review and an unpublished conference paper written by the reviewer in 2004.

An interesting finding of the systematic literature review was that most of the studies it investigated adopted a prescriptive approach to PDP implementation, to achieve course-specific outcomes. However, a significant proportion adopted a negotiated approach to implementation, for course-specific outcomes and for broader self-development. This variation in approaches and goals of the process became an issue the reviewer wished to explore further. It related closely to the first of the main issues the project team had identified, that is, whether the process is assessed/accredited by the institution or engaged in voluntarily by students.

## **c Other online sources**

In addition to the above, the following online databases and websites were used to access abstracts and articles:

<http://eric.ed.gov>

[www.springerlink.com](http://www.springerlink.com)

<http://journalsonline.tandf.co.uk>

[www.blackwell-synergy.com](http://www.blackwell-synergy.com)

Online search engines were also used to search for 'online PDP', 'ePDP' and 'e-portfolio'. Sites were examined for any interesting links to other sites or sources and these were

followed up. Documents which were located online and had a clear provenance were identified, including conference presentations and working papers. PowerPoint presentations and other non-textual ephemera were not considered stable enough to be acceptable. Anything published before 2001 was only accepted if really significant. In all, 30 papers were identified by this method. In addition, CRA<sup>15</sup> resources were used extensively to source examples of practice relevant to the first year.

## 2 Literature search results

The following headings are as they appeared in the initial version of the Interim Report. They have been reorganised in the main report, to take into account information obtained from other sources, including case studies and workshop outcomes.

### 2.1 Pedagogical issues in models of PDP

#### a **Positivist versus constructivist model of online PDP**

Paulson and Paulson (1994) made a distinction between **positivist** and **constructivist** portfolios, characterising the former as institution-focused, and tending towards testing and standardisation, and the latter as student-focused, encouraging self-evaluation and personalisation. They suggested that by their nature as individually created objects, portfolios tend to encourage constructivist forms. Greenberg (2004) contrasted the structured e-portfolio, which is pre-organised around curricular or learning objectives and is used for assessment or mentoring purposes, with the learning e-portfolio, which is focused on the owner's own development and is therefore dynamic, changing in response to the learner's own development. Barrett (2001) referred to learning portfolios, with a formative function, and assessment portfolios, where the emphasis is summative. Roberts et al (2005) drew a distinction between the institution-centred virtual learning environment (VLE) and the learner-centred e-portfolio. Lorenzo and Iltelson (2006) distinguished between student e-portfolios, teaching e-portfolios and institutional e-portfolios, underlining that e-portfolios, even if they may be student-focused, are not necessarily always student-centred.

#### b **Approaches to assessment<sup>16</sup>**

Adoption of one of these models would suggest different approaches to assessment. The positivist approach would favour a PDP designed around curricular goals and learning outcomes, and intended to capture student evidence of achievement of learning outcomes. The constructivist approach would favour a PDP structured around the student's predicament and identity-building possibilities.

In the latter approach, the PDP's contribution to assessment might be in the form of personal responses to learning tasks, showing reflection on the process of learning.

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<sup>15</sup> [www.recordingachievement.org](http://www.recordingachievement.org)

<sup>16</sup> Assessment is also discussed in Appendix 1, section 2.3, **Assessment or accreditation versus voluntary engagement.**

Barrett (2005a) suggested that it is possible to have both positivist and constructivist elements, with an e-portfolio system involving a digital archive of learners' work, a learner-centred portfolio, and an institution-centred database to collect assessment data. Love et al (2004) offered a five-level maturation model, in which the upper levels show increasing integration of e-portfolio into curricular goals and assessment structures.

### **c Online PDP as construction of learning identity**

From the positivist perspective, learning identity is a construction assimilated from collating the totality of data on the student; identity is formed by the system and conferred upon the student. McAlpine (2005), while approaching e-PDP from a positivist perspective and seeing it as a valuable tool to assist the assessment of school-age children at national level, nevertheless warned of the potential danger of e-portfolios drawing together data (including vulnerable and sensitive data about children), creating 'powerful reflections of themselves' and raising serious issues of security and control.

From the constructivist perspective, online PDP is designed to enable construction of a personal learning identity by the student. The student's own narrative plays a key part, in that his/her own story is the driver for self-evaluation and planning for the future - indeed, for the conception of a personal trajectory for study, work and life. Barrett (2005b) discussed the construction of an e-portfolio as a process of reflective storytelling, in which developing a narrative of one's own learning represents a major reflective act.

### **d Online PDP as collaborative action**

Clegg et al (2005) emphasised the importance of dialogue in learning, and suggested that interaction and collaborative action are essential elements of reflective self-evaluation. Thus, while PDP is a personal development, an individual's personal development is seen best with a degree of perspective, in terms of the reactions of others - teachers, mentors, colleagues, friends - to that person's individual achievements. Making identity is itself an intensely social act, and we only understand ourselves through meanings drawn from those that are current in society, which are part of its culture. Giles and Middleton (1999, p24) defined culture as 'the production and circulation of meaning'; culture is thus essentially dynamic - meanings are instantiated in actions that can in turn affect the meanings. Developing an identity is therefore engagement with meaning and with change.

From the positivist approach, collaboration is best seen as between student and tutor or mentor, the student responding to feedback on learning tasks supplied by the tutor/mentor. Collaboration by students is best limited to group-work activities where individual attribution of responsibility for specific pieces of the learning product is not required. These activities would tend, however, to receive small elements of overall assessment gradings, compared to learning actions in which individual input can be clearly identified.

From the constructivist approach, interactions with tutors, mentors and especially with peers and friends are all important in enabling learning and the construction of identity.

**e Ownership of the learning process**

Online PDP is generally considered in a context in which the student is the focus, even if the agenda belongs to the institution. Student engagement in or ownership of the process is seen as important. Even Banks (2004), who advocated e-portfolios as an assessment tool, suggested that a 'sense of ownership' is important. From the positivist perspective, 'personalisation' involves building an interface that gives students the 'sense' of ownership, while being aware that their inputs are important in justifying their attainment of learning outcomes. The PDP is an individual's personal opportunity to claim learning achievements. From the constructivist perspective, 'personalisation' involves giving students the reality of ownership and control.

**f Skills requirements<sup>17</sup> for online PDP usage**

Implementation of any new system can create new skills requirements, and online PDP is no exception. Thus, Roberts et al (2005) suggested concept-mapping as a new skill needed for e-portfolio usage. Aside from the familiarisation with new software, however, the main skill requirement for online PDP is the ability to reflect. This requirement is no different from that for paper-based PDP systems, but adoption of online PDP may involve a move to much larger-scale implementation of PDP, with a greater number of users confronting the need for reflective ability. Reflection does not come naturally to many students, nor is its use confined to PDP activity, and the development of reflective capability could be seen as a generic requirement to be embedded into any educational action. But, whether embedded or addressed separately, reflection needs to be learnt, and the learning of reflection must be built into the considerations surrounding the development of online PDP.

From the positivist perspective, learning to reflect may involve familiarising students with the way in which, for example, professional development questions are framed and phrased, and the type of response that is required. From the constructivist viewpoint, learning to reflect may be a greater challenge, since it involves encouraging a critical and questioning attitude to the development of oneself. Even learning to recognise the questions may be hard.

**g The virtual defines the real**

Lambeir and Ramaekers (2006) offered a powerful warning that the nature of any virtual learning environment defines the nature of the learning process and, in providing tools and templates for actions, shapes it. All too often the learning process is thus subtly moulded as an instrumental rather than a critical process. They argued that learning in this context has become a process of managing information (including personal information) rather than discovery, insight and growth, and that the virtual has enabled a managerial model of learning to be surreptitiously substituted for the dialogic and critical model which characterises the ideal of learning in higher education.

Figure 10 shows how various issues are reflected through positivist and constructivist approaches to online PDP. In practice, it is suggested, PDP systems do not all lie at one extreme or the other; the majority probably lie somewhere in between, reaching for some sort of compromise. Whether this is possible is by no means clear.

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 1, section 2.4, **Reflection and PDP**, for more on skills requirements for PDP.

Issue	Positivist approach	Constructivist approach
Structure and focus	The e-PDP is structured according to curricular goals or desired learning outcomes. The focus is on institutional requirements.	The e-PDP is structured according to the planning and reflective agendas of the student. The focus is on the student's personal requirements.
Assessment	Students respond to assessment tasks. They may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide evidence of the achievement of learning outcomes</li> <li>• respond to feedback on assessed work</li> <li>• 'redeem' work based on feedback received.</li> </ul>	Students build their own meaning around assessment tasks. They may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make personal responses to or comments on learning tasks set</li> <li>• make evaluative statements of their own learning achievements.</li> </ul>
Identity	The identity of the student is built up through institutional collection of data. It is conferred upon the student.	Students build identity by developing their own learning narrative and perception of the self.
Planning	Students choose from options offered by the institution (for example, honours courses, placement preferences).	Students form plans according to personal goals.
Collaboration	Learning tasks may be shared for collaborative input. Dialogue more likely between student and mentor/tutor.	Learning experiences may be shared in order to aid reflection.
Ownership	Data belong to the institution, though students may have a 'sense of ownership' and feel that they have some control over their own data.	Data belong to the students, who have total control over material in the PDP.
Interface emphasis	The interface emphasises the institution and courses.	The interface emphasises students' personal ownership of the PDP tools.

Figure 10: pedagogical issues and approaches to online PDP

## 2.2 Integrated versus bolt-on models

Can 'bolt-on' PDP models work, or is an integrated model always better? Learning or study-skills development is best contextualised and embedded in the curriculum rather than being supported by stand-alone courses or workshops, according to Harvey and Drew (2006). Can the same be said for PDP?

From the survey of the literature in the HEA Subject Centres, it is mainly vocational degrees that are engaging with PDP, and because many aspects of the PDP process are covered in the learning outcomes of modules on vocational degree programmes, they tend to integrate PDP into the curriculum. One such example is Willis and Davis (2004), who, from their case study of an approach to incorporate key skills development and PDP into a Field and Enterprise Skills module for first-year civil engineering students, would agree that the integrated model is better, having run these elements on a stand-alone basis previously. Students had found it particularly difficult to provide evidence of skills in a skills audit exercise, for example, and had reverted to 'ticking lots of boxes'. Students felt that the new, integrated module 'gave context to everything', and they could even see the links to CPD and becoming a Chartered Engineer.

On the other hand, Monks et al (2006) in an integrated approach (combining the Business Faculty, careers service and library at Dublin City University) to a bolt-on PDP module for first-year students (in the semi-vocational degrees of business studies, accounting and finance and the vocational degree of nursing) reported very beneficial effects with their approach. They compared issues such as self-efficacy, self-awareness in connection with skills development, reflective capacity, self-reporting, students' motivation towards their degree and career goal clarification between a group of predominantly first-year students taking a PDP module and a group not taking it. They particularly noted that those taking the PDP module were much clearer at the end of it about how their degree fitted into their life plans, and also that clarification of goals may be an important factor in student retention and might indicate the potential value to students of engaging in PDP. However, it would be interesting to know whether the improvements in students' motivation towards their degree and level of self-awareness which they reported were due to the PDP process as such, or whether these improvements could be attributed to including an element of career planning at first-year level.

A tentative conclusion might be drawn here about the need for context in ensuring student engagement. This is provided by the curriculum in the integrated model described above, but by the career planning element in the bolt-on module.

## 2.3 Assessment or accreditation versus voluntary engagement

One of the first themes the project team identified as an issue regarding first-year students' engagement and empowerment with the PDP process was whether such engagement carried any credit in the degree course or was undertaken voluntarily. The literature reviewed contained considerable discussion of this issue.

Ellis et al (2006) argued that assessment of the PDP process is essential for engagement, but warned that assessing the actual reflections would 'almost certainly be counterproductive' (p 218) as it would lead to learners writing 'bland and meaningless'

reflections which they consider contain what is required. In support of this position, Smyth's (2004) first-year education students commented that they had not prioritised completion of the progress file materials because they were not assessed. Ellis et al (2006) also argued that the amount of time required for maintaining a portfolio should be acknowledged, and that the process may be devalued if it is not assessed in some form.

However, Ellis et al's (2006) focus-group discussions with 10 of the 37 tutors involved in PDP revealed a concern that assessment could interfere with the ability of tutors to identify pastoral issues, and that a distinction between PDP tutors as facilitators of progress and assessors needed to be made. They were alert to the need for the difference between assessment and appraisal to be clarified for both students and tutors, with appraisal offering a 'framework for planned, constructive, professional dialogue...as a platform to set goals for future development' (Ellis et al, 2006, p 224).

On the basis of their (albeit limited) research, Ellis et al argued that any assessment of portfolio work should be done independently of the tutor who engages with the student, to facilitate personal development. Their work related to PDP with undergraduate dental students undertaking clinical placements in addition to university education, and their findings from this professional group cannot necessarily be applied to students on more generic courses.

This is supported by Clegg and Bradley's (2006) discussion of PDP models, in which they argued that there is stronger engagement from students and staff in courses that are linked to professions<sup>18</sup>. They extended this argument to suggest that PDP is easier to introduce into courses where the curricula are subject to external influence, as opposed to those where the curricula are derived largely from academic influence.

Clegg and Bradley (2006) interviewed staff from across the faculties and disciplines in one university. One method of assessment they uncovered related to the production of CVs in the first year, which were peer assessed and carried on to the second year for further development. Outwith the PDP arena, this 'sustainable assessment' (Boud, 2000) has been argued to be the way forward for engagement and meaningful assessment related to an idea of lifelong learning.

An audience and purpose for PDP were found to be motivating or limiting factors in engagement for Smyth's (2004) students. Having an audience for their work was a key factor for Smyth's fourth-year students. They did not consider that self-reflection was enough on its own, but needed to be used for a purpose, for dialogue about professional development. These students engaged voluntarily with the PDP process, but those who felt that their work was not valued did not engage as thoroughly. Many of those who found an audience and purpose for their reflection did so for themselves, for example engaging with placement teachers. This perhaps goes some way to explaining why first-year students on the same course and with the same materials did not engage with PDP so fully; at an early stage of their degree they did not see the relevance, and it did not form part of their strategic learning strategies.

This difference in engagement with the PDP process between new and more experienced students does not always occur in this way, however. A self-directed portfolio of study was introduced in a non-professionally focused languages course at the

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix 1, section 2.7a for more on [Links to CPD and the professions](#).

University of Chester (Beigel, 2006). Beigel reported that in focus-group discussions with 10 students a key factor for completion of the portfolio had been because it formed part of their assessment rather than for its own sake, so external motivation was required. However, some of the students reported discussing the tasks with their peers and using issues as the basis for tutorials, again indicating the importance of audience. Beigel further reported (2006, p 3) that many of the students found the portfolio work difficult and requested more support with what was intended to be self-directed study, suggesting that at least for this group of arts-based students they were not ready, without tutoring, to commit themselves in writing to reflection on their learning. The university has now introduced a Placements Abroad Personal Development Portfolio, for which students receive a certificate. Beigel reported success with this development.

However, Jackson and Ward (2004, p 428) argued that while the assessment of disciplinary learning resides with the institution, the evidence of learning in the transdisciplinary world in which PDP resides must rest with students themselves. Jackson and Ward described five different 'curriculum-assessment' patterns that may exist in institutions. They acknowledged (p 434) that the many different curricular interpretations of PDP 'introduce new dimensions to the 'problem' of assessing and assuring the quality of a transdisciplinary type of learning'. However, they provided a useful model (p 434, figure 2) for considering the nature of the assessment that might prevail in different models of PDP implementation. They argued (p 438) that different PDP models need to ensure congruency between purpose and assessment method, and also that assessment should not conflict with the stated values of the process itself.

Jackson and Ward also argued (2004, p 439) that whatever the model of PDP, it should involve some form of self-assessment, and that this is a skill which needs to be taught<sup>19</sup>.

Issues arising from the above discussion of assessment or accreditation versus voluntary engagement for first-year students are outlined below.

- It seems to be clear that audience and purpose are required for successful engagement and that they need to be provided at an early stage, particularly on those courses which are not linked to professions. The most obvious way to do this is by making the process assessable. But does this then achieve the goals of PDP? Some students seem to find their own audience, and perhaps this is something that should be focused on in further development.
- Students need to be clear about how, if at all, their work on PDP will be assessed or accredited. This clarity needs to be introduced at the outset of the process, reinforced throughout and congruent with the stated overall values of the process for the student.
- No discussion was found on culture, nationality or other form of diversity in any of the literature reviewed, yet there are certainly cultural differences regarding what counts as learning and how academic writing is presented, and in prior experience of similar processes to PDP.

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<sup>19</sup> See further discussion in Appendix 1, section 2.4b on **Students self-reporting**.

## 2.4 Reflection and PDP

Those involved in implementing and developing the process of personal development planning accept the definition of PDP as a 'structured and supported process...to **reflect** upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement...' QAA (2001), point 28.

The earlier section on **Pedagogical issues** (Appendix 1, section 2.1) showed that a requirement for reflective capability is evident in both positivist and constructivist models of PDP. Lucas and Tan (2006) specifically linked the need for reflection as an integral part of learning to learn with both substantive studies and the maintenance of personal development portfolios. Moon (2005) provided a background to reflection and reflective learning for the development of PDP within higher education. She noted particularly that a purpose and an idea of the kind of outcome of reflection are required - particularly if the reflective activity is to be assessed. She commented that a frequent observation is that not all students find reflection easy when it is introduced as a specific requirement, and staff may not understand what place reflective activities have within the curriculum. This issue was also raised in the introduction section to the outcomes of the ELF and employability project (QAA 2007), which stated that 'evidence from several projects reporting on the use of student PDP demonstrates that students often find it difficult to openly share self-reflections of their learning experiences...!'

The question as to whether reflection is an innate skill or whether it can be learnt is very pertinent to the first-year experience, where research has suggested that the first year is a time of considerable cognitive growth and appears to be important in developing learning behaviour (Harvey and Drew, 2006). In the context of medical education (in this case in the Netherlands), Driessen et al's (2005) findings suggested that although reflection may be initially difficult for first-year students, almost all students can learn how to reflect, provided that favourable conditions are created. The favourable conditions identified through interviews with 13 teachers experienced in mentoring students in the process of developing their portfolios included good coaching, portfolio structure and guidelines, adequate experiences and material for reflection, and summative assessment.

It is interesting to note, however, that Driessen et al (2005) pointed out that reflection for medical educators is characterised by focusing on action, whereas in education, reflection is focused on individual identities and beliefs. The question as to whether some academic disciplines are inherently more reflective and therefore more predisposed to learning through PDP was posed by Jackson and Smallwood (2001).

### a Individual differences in reflection

So, although there is some evidence that reflective skills can be learnt, there is also evidence that students' capacity to engage in reflection is affected by their 'way of knowing', as described by Marcia Baxter Magolda's work (1992) cited in Lucas and Tan (2005). Magolda explained that 'a way of knowing' is more than a cognitive skill that can be developed, it is 'firmly a part of what it is to be the person you are - your identity'. She found in research in the USA that students' 'ways of knowing' affected the way in which they learned and their ability to make the most out of higher education, and discussed the implications for how we teach and support students in their learning.

Many PDP systems encourage students to understand their 'learning style', as part of self-reflective activities. The Universities of Dundee and Ulster both use the VARK analysis, for example<sup>20</sup>.

Coffield et al (2004, p 120) suggested that learning styles can provide learners with a 'lexicon of learning...which they can use to describe and explore their own behaviour...an immensely motivating and positive experience and has the potential to help them to reflect and develop their critical thinking', although they also asserted the need to be critically aware of pitfalls in this complex area.

The learning styles literature cited in Rees et al (2005) suggests that some individuals have a preference for reflection, while others prefer more active styles of learning such as active experimentation. It is also interesting to note in Rees et al's study of the utility of reflective portfolios as a method of assessing first-year medical students' personal and professional development that some students seemed to dislike reflective writing. Some engaged in the thinking but found difficulty in writing about their thoughts, although they could see why this would be useful. Others simply disliked the time that writing took.

The First Year Experience Enhancement Theme project on scholarship skills addressed the term 'academic literacies' in its literature review. The findings may be relevant for student involvement in PDP. The main issue arising was that first-year students cannot just be expected to automatically engage with the reflective learning process inherent in PDP. Like Driessen et al (2005) (cited above), the evaluation by Malins (2004) of his in-house 'managed learning environment' with art and design students showed that providing the appropriate structures for assessment and reflection (questionnaire/form-filling style) can help to support students in being more active and more deeply engaged with this process. Ellis et al (2006) raised the issue, however, that although students like the structured nature of the process, this could reduce individuality, and possibly reduce the level of self-discovery and the personal development aspects of PDP.

## **b Students self-reporting**

According to Harvey and Drew (2006), published research evaluating performance suggests that first-year students tend to overrate their knowledge and abilities. Houghton (2003) identified from his studies with a whole cohort of first-year engineering students that students' own analysis of their progress was inconsistent and unreliable. Having a clear set of intended outcomes for learning (attitudes, skills and knowledge) and understanding about the learning process that students need in order to learn effectively, was presented. The aim was to engage students in a dialogue about their learning processes and to encourage reflective learning and habits, prior to using an e-PDP system.

This model of developing a learning environment conducive to PDP prior to introducing PDP to students can be a reason for introducing it to students in the second year. This was an approach adopted successfully by Town and Regional Planning at the University of Dundee (QAA Scotland, 2007, p 25). No research was discovered in our literature search to indicate whether induction in the first year or second year engages more students. However, Harvey and Drew (2006) indicated that there is a strong case for a gradual process of induction, to prevent information overload at this crucial time.

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<sup>20</sup> [www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp](http://www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp)

Disappointingly, in the first systematic review of the effectiveness of PDP for improving student learning (Gough et al, 2003) there was insufficient evidence to state which balance of the many PDP approaches was more or less effective in impacting on student learning. Neither was there evidence to comment on the influence of the individual teacher in promoting and facilitating learning through PDP. Since then, more evidence has emerged of the importance of the role of staff; for examples see Malins (2004) and Ward et al (2006).

## 2.5 Transitions

### a Pre-entry

New students entering HE come from a variety of backgrounds, from education, work and childcare activities and from all over the world. Inevitably, their life experience and experience of education vary enormously.

Middleton et al (2006) highlighted the wide range of experiences reported by first-year students in their preparation for HE at school. Some school pupils benefit from a proactive approach, designed by their teachers to prepare them for HE modes of study. Others, who are not in receipt of this experience, are disadvantaged in the radical leap in teaching/lecturing provision in higher education. Middleton et al also found that while HEIs frequently offer study-skills workshops for freshers, the emphasis on this sort of provision and the pastoral care required to support some students needs to be increased to reduce the drop-out rate in the first year of university among those who cannot cope with the new demands being made of them.

Changes are taking place within the school sector in Scotland, and Personal Learning Planning is a central concept within the Scottish Executive Curriculum Review Group's *A Curriculum for Excellence*: '...A young person will build up a record of their attainment and broad achievements which will be recognized and valued by themselves, parents, employers, colleges and universities - a 'passport' to further learning and work...' (Scottish Executive, 2004).

The Scottish Executive's<sup>21</sup> Assessment is for Learning (AifL) initiative is leading a transformational change process impacting on teaching and learning in all schools in Scotland. AifL is sub-divided into three areas of activity:

- Assessment for Learning
- Assessment as Learning
- Assessment of Learning

'Assessment as Learning' links the curriculum with learning and teaching and promotes Personal Learning Planning for all pupils in the primary and secondary sectors. Personal Learning Planning was described by Robertson (2005) as being 'built on... concepts that empower learners to become increasingly self-directed, self-evaluative and responsible for their own learning.'

<sup>21</sup> Known as the Scottish Government from September 2007.

<sup>22</sup> [www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess)

A discussion with a Scottish Executive Policy Manager (Assessment) revealed that while all schools are involved in AifL, not all teachers are yet engaged with the initiative. However, it is anticipated that involvement will grow.

Careers Scotland<sup>23</sup> provided the following statement on its current role in PDP. At present, career planning is an 'add-on' service, but as of the 2007-08 academic session it will be delivered to all S4-6 pupils.

'Careers Scotland is not involved in the PDP process. However, we do produce Career Plans of Action (as a result of guidance interviews with clients, including pupils aiming for higher education) which regularly feed into the PDP in schools, colleges and universities. There is no specific strategy at this stage with regard to PDP involvement as our focus is on careers guidance or career planning. We are aware that at present the PDP process is not a major factor in our work in schools, but recognise that we would like to get further involved if the PDP process was required to become a higher priority for Careers Scotland by the Scottish Executive.

It should further be noted that the recent agreement between Careers Scotland and the Scottish Executive on the extension of the guarantee to all S4, S5 and S6 pupils from the academic session starting in August 2007 is likely to result in the vast majority of school leavers (including those aiming for higher education) receiving a Career Plan of Action as a result of participation in a careers guidance interview.'

The growth of PDP activity at school level means that, increasingly, HE entrants from Scottish schools are likely to have a greater understanding of the learning process and experience of the reflection and planning processes. An understanding of developments outside the HE sector and an appreciation of the range of possible prior experiences of new HE students is therefore important for those developing and reviewing PDP systems in higher education.

## **b PDP as support for students in the transition into HE**

This section supplements information found in the literature review by referring to three specific case studies.

PDP has been introduced into many institutions in the first year of courses. It has been offered as a vehicle for students to review skills they have prior to entry, as well as subject choice and future goals. For example, when the Law, Arts and Social Science Faculty (LASS) at the University of Strathclyde (Section 4, case study 1) introduced a PDP scheme, one of the aims was to help students to adjust during the transition period. The LASS scheme included a skills review, keeping a diary to record development in two skill areas, and a diary review completed at the end of the period. The scheme was neither compulsory nor credit bearing, and 78.9 per cent of students completed at least one element of it.

Staff involved in the LASS scheme, however, learnt a great deal about the concerns of students, identifying the changing worries which students have during the first year and planning the departmental skills programme better to adapt it to the pattern of the first year experience. They felt that as a result of the lessons learnt from introducing the

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<sup>23</sup> [www.careers-scotland.org.uk](http://www.careers-scotland.org.uk)

scheme and adaptations made to it, 'this should allow a more meaningful induction process giving the students a quicker sense of belonging to the university' (case study 1).

The scheme also enabled staff to identify students who had not engaged with the system and cross-reference this with information from class coordinators to identify patterns of poor engagement. Students identified in this way were invited to a face-to-face meeting aimed to help them. This early intervention addressed serious concerns about students' readiness for university life and resulted in early withdrawal, avoiding increasing debt.

Some HEIs have recognised the need to provide additional support to some new students to ease them into the institution. For example, Napier University's Bridging Course (Section 4, case study 3) was developed 10 years ago in response to particular needs expressed by those making the transition from an FE background. It has been delivered as an add-on, two-week, pre-entry course covering the identification and development of skills for HE study, career management and personal development. Feedback from participants has been universally positive. Students have expressed feeling increased confidence, a greater understanding of what was expected of them as HE students, and a sense that they may not have stayed on the course without the experience of the Bridging Course.

The report of the First Year Experience Enhancement Theme transition project identified many themes and issues in common with the delivery of PDP in the first year:

- time has to be allocated for discussion and activities within the first year experience
- curricular compromise is a challenge - what content is omitted to make way for PDP/induction activities?
- do tutors providing support and engagement understand and appreciate the benefits?
- senior management support is needed allocating resources to the activity and valuing the contribution made by staff involved, through career progression
- student engagement and empowerment may also be a challenge, as there may be resistance because of lack of appreciation of the importance of the induction and PDP activities at the time of delivery.

During the whole process of assimilation, there are interventions to support students' progress, particularly at potentially 'critical incidents' such as receiving their first grades, when they are also juggling a range of other new activities. Students arrive in HE with a variety of social and educational experiences. Their prior experience of learning, the environment they live and work in and their social and family networks help to shape how they respond to the new challenges they experience in beginning an HE course. As they progress through their first year, students may encounter significant or 'critical' incidents (which could be positive or negative) that they have to deal with. These may include:

- uncertainty about their choice of course
- coping with social isolation, making new friends
- understanding how the institution's systems work - for example, library, IT services

- taking lecture notes for the first time
- completing first assignments to an acceptable standard and on time
- dealing with domestic issues for the first time, such as buying a TV licence, using a washing machine
- finding employment in a new environment
- juggling paid work with study and social life
- preparing and contributing to seminars
- coping with failure in exams - reflecting on performance.

At Heriot-Watt University (Section 4, case study 4), PDP is used to offer a shared understanding with peers of a student's reflections, as well as being used in a more traditional mentoring process.

### 2.6 Staff and student support

At first-year HE level, the many different ways of delivering PDP - from 'bolt-on' electronic systems through delivered self-standing modules, to reflective practices delivered seamlessly within the curriculum - results in as many different models of support for students.

In the literature, issues of support for students undertaking PDP did not feature as a predominant issue in the way that issues such as methods of delivery and content did. Malins (2004), however, surveyed levels of tutor input in a number of institutions and found that where tutor support was absent, students made a negative response to the process. When surveying his own students following a stand-alone PDP process, only 51 per cent of them felt that they required no additional support.

No study specifically assessing the support needs of first-year students was identified. It could be assumed, however, that their needs are at least as great, if not greater, than those of students in later years.

PDP activity in some institutions is designed and delivered by careers professionals and in others by committed academic staff, or sometimes it is co-delivered by these two groups. Peer support and review is an increasing feature, and the examples of current practice highlighted in the First Year Experience Enhancement Theme project on peer support show the potential.

For PDP to become more widespread, it seems inevitable that academic staff not yet engaged in the process will have to become involved. This raises issues of support for staff undertaking PDP for the first time. While some recent case studies (for example, Brunel University, Kate Smith)<sup>24</sup> have shown guidelines written for academic staff by careers professionals, the literature contained little about staff development issues.

For example, how should first-year students who disclose that they are unhappy with their choice of course be handled? Will these students feel comfortable disclosing this to

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<sup>24</sup> See [www.recordingachievement.org/downloads/20070301KateSmithBrunel.pdf](http://www.recordingachievement.org/downloads/20070301KateSmithBrunel.pdf)

their tutor, or to fellow students? Are boundaries recognised and discussed by staff and students before any discussions which may lead to personal disclosures arise (for example, if the student has a disability)?

In the Conclusions section of his report, East (2005) suggested that PDP needs to be properly resourced 'otherwise many staff are likely to resist becoming involved'. He went on to quote Jackson (2001b, in East, 2005, p 4): 'The lack of time is often the biggest barrier to change. Financial support buys time and can provide an incentive to change... PDP is one area which could be supported through a whole series of small incentives if earmarked funding was provided'.

## 2.7 Links to employability

### a Links to CPD and the professions

In the HEA publication *Personal development planning and employability*, Ward et al (2006) advanced the proposition that the relationship between PDP and employability 'is central to the development of learners' ability to identify, articulate and evidence their learning and overall development and that this, in turn, provides the key to effective progression through learning and work throughout life'. It is therefore in employers' interests to encourage this process, and there is support for this from many professional institutions. For example, as cited in Rees et al (2005), the General Medical Council (2003) has stated that medical graduates should be able to reflect on their practice, as well as being supportive of the use of personal portfolios, because 'they allow students to identify their strengths and weaknesses, thus focusing their learning appropriately'.

Higgins (2006) stated that 'most of the built environment professions require something similar to a PDP covering the work experience requirement preceding full membership' (for a case study example, see University of Westminster, Jacqueline Pond)<sup>25</sup>. In its new Knowledge and Skills Framework (Agenda for Change), the Royal College of Nursing requires each nurse to have a personal development plan to support career progression and personal development. The General Teaching Council Scotland, in connection with attaining the Standard for Initial Teacher Education, supports PDP processes in order to develop specific e-portfolios. These PDP processes start at first-year level.

The project team was keen to explore whether there is stronger engagement by students and staff in those courses that are linked to professions. Clegg and Bradley (2006) argued that there is. This also seemed to be the case from the examples in the HEA Subject Centre Network. However, an issue for vocational degrees linked to specific professions is not so much about encouraging engagement in the PDP process at an early stage, but whether the specific focus of vocationally orientated PDP systems means that first-year students on these degrees may miss out on a more generic PDP approach which aims to stimulate more personal reflection and development.

### b Employability and student engagement

Duncan and Weatherston (2001) raised the importance of connecting PDP with employability in 2001, and this is clearly still high on many people's agenda. Kneale

<sup>25</sup> See: [www.recordingachievement.org/eportfolios/case\\_studies\\_detail.asp?id=154](http://www.recordingachievement.org/eportfolios/case_studies_detail.asp?id=154)

(2004), for example, reported that student motivation can be achieved by linking PDP with employability, and indicated that students were largely unaware that career and development planning activities are integral in many business environments.

There was, however, little evidence from the literature review as to whether these links should best be made in the first year or whether they have a greater impact closer to graduation. Leggot and Stapleford (2004) again linked PDP with employability, but with a focus on the development of independent learning and skills. They specifically looked at the gap between students' perceptions of the skills they possessed and needed and employers' skills requirements, and adopted PDP as a methodology to bridge that gap.

## 2.8 Staff and student engagement

### a Are the different definitions of PDP a potential barrier to engagement?

To understand the relationship of PDP to the first year experience more widely, it is useful to consider the context in which personal development planning has developed.

*The Guidelines for HE Progress Files* (QAA, 2001), which introduced the concept of a means for students to 'monitor, build and reflect on their personal development' - commonly referred to as PDP - deliberately did not impose a format on the sector, recognising many different stages of development regarding PDP. HEIs were expected to develop their own PDP policies and practice within these guidelines. The term PDP became 'proxy for a number of constructs that attempt to connect and draw benefit from reflection, recording and action-planning' (Gough et al, 2003), which can be facilitated or self-directed and delivered via paper-based and increasingly by electronic means.

The resulting diverse PDP practice is thus defined by individual institutional, subject-based and even individual staff contexts (Section 4, case study 2). In addition, there has been a history of PDP-related activities within the school and further education sectors, and CPD by employers also uses the language of personal development planning<sup>26</sup>. This diversity of practice and associated understandings, even within the accepted definition of PDP, can be a barrier to staff tasked with implementing personal development planning with new entrants, where a shared and clear understanding of PDP's relevance to them is a crucial factor in engagement.

### b What is the evidence of engagement from the HEA Subject Centres' publications?

The overriding impression left by the process of reviewing HEA Subject Centre publications for references to PDP was that despite widespread acceptance that PDP has benefits, implementation is nevertheless limited and patchily distributed among disciplines. There was also no clear focus on PDP for any particular cohort or level of students; for example, very few if any publications differentiated the first-year experience (engineering was an exception).

Diversity in PDP practice is perhaps not too surprising given academic diversity, with a wide range of cultures existing in research, teaching and professional development. Differential use of reflective practice, recording and evidencing achievement in the range

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<sup>26</sup> PDP in other sectors is discussed in Appendix 1, section 2.5a **Transitions - Pre-entry** and section 2.7 **Links to employability**.

of academic cultures might be reflected in a predisposition to adopt PDP. This literature review was by no means comprehensive, but would tend to indicate that vocational areas such as education, hospitality and leisure, geo-subjects and the built environment exhibit more widespread publication on the use of PDP. The opposite is the case for more 'traditional' academic subjects, the classics and IT. What limits engagement is not so clear. However, quite a number of recommendations for good practice have emerged from those who have adopted and reported on PDP practice, aimed at developing engagement for both staff and students.

For example, Higgins (2006) in her Centre for Built Environment case study reported that key good practice involves encouraging student participation by getting the process right and ensuring staff participation and development. The question, however, is what exactly is the right process and how and when need it happen? There is some evidence that the 'right process' might not happen immediately, rather that it might take some time to develop. Beigel (2006) reported on focus-group evaluations held between 2003 and 2005 of level 1 and 2 students' engagement with PDP. Over this period the perceived usefulness of PDP increased for the students, perhaps reflecting the increasing commitment and familiarity of supporting staff with the process. It is interesting that students reported that their portfolio was 'all about growing up, maturing, moving on from A-level'. It may be that the process of implementing PDP must also be a process of institutional 'growing up'.

The idea that the process must involve both staff and student engagement was pressed forward by Ward (2004): 'Where the PDP is regarded by personal tutors as an integral part of the student learning process its relevance is appreciated by students'. More recently, Ward et al (2006) found that 'staff and students recognised that the value placed on PDP by subject staff influenced student engagement'. We must therefore ensure that staff and students 'buy-in' for success. But what evidence is there in the literature of successful strategies for 'buy-in'?

Lumsden (2005) reported a problem-solving strategy for engaging a science faculty, where 'introducing and embedding PDP is not something that comes naturally to those working in science-based disciplines'. He argued that the best strategy for staff engagement is to allow individuals to take ownership, treating PDP as a 'problem' to be solved. The engagement of staff as well as students was also considered as key by Strivens (2006). She reported that: 'Staff came up with four priorities for further development. A key concern was the development of a sound evidence base. They also wanted more high quality resources, more training in the skills necessary to support the process and more involvement from senior management. It also became clear that institutions were increasingly looking for technological support for all aspects of the PDP process'.

## 2.9 The move to e-portfolios from paper-based systems

Centrally developed approaches to PDP (as opposed to discipline or programme-specific approaches), which are intended to serve as a threshold benchmark for implementing an institution-wide framework for student entitlement, are commonly being delivered via an IT platform (Ward et al, 2005). A survey of e-PDP and e-portfolio practice in UK HEIs (Strivens, 2007) stated that almost all of the 66 HEIs which responded to the survey<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Out of a total of 89 institutions, if Wales and London are counted as single institutions. [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/faqs/showFAQ.asp?ID=2#HowmanyuniversitiesandhighereducationinstitutionsarethereintheUK\(PlusbreakdownbyEngland,Wales,ScotlandandNorthernIreland\)](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/faqs/showFAQ.asp?ID=2#HowmanyuniversitiesandhighereducationinstitutionsarethereintheUK(PlusbreakdownbyEngland,Wales,ScotlandandNorthernIreland))

claimed that PDP has now been implemented in their institution, and over three-quarters of these were using some form of electronic tool to support the process.

This move to e-PDP may also reflect the increasing use of virtual learning environments, as well as study off-campus, pressures on staff resources and the greater readiness of many students and a growing number of staff to engage with technology (Ward et al, 2005). Personal development planning is increasingly being delivered via e-PDP, and technology is a factor in student (and staff) engagement with PDP.

There is potential confusion, however, about the terminology surrounding e-portfolios, which are used for a number of different purposes in education - including summative assessment, presentation, learning, reflection and self-assessment - as well as for PDP (Ward and Grant, 2005). Barrett (2005a) suggested that with so many purposes for developing portfolios, the term portfolio should always have a modifier or adjective that describes its purpose, for example PDP portfolio or educational portfolio. When implementing PDP for first-year students, differentiating the process from the product may benefit understanding for the students in subsequent years.

### 3 Preliminary conclusions from the literature review

Harvey and Drew (2006) identified induction, assimilation and integration as key processes in students' first year of HE. For most students, whether straight from school or coming to HE after a period of work, higher education seems a different world, with new procedures and expectations. The nature of the cultural environment in which they find themselves depends on the global culture of HE (based on western models originally taken to America from the ancient Scottish universities), the influence of national policies and practices, the particular institution they are in, and the structures built around the subject(s) they are studying. In this complex and dynamic environment, students learn to be students. They learn the activities that are to be carried out (formal and informal), develop appropriately and recognise the expectations placed upon them. In doing so, they become part of the community of their peers, or rather the multiplicity of overlapping and serially embedded communities that make up the community of students.

A crucial element of this process is learning how to 'think like a student', or more accurately 'think like students are expected to think'. Various proposals may be made in this direction, such as critical thinking, analytical skills and meta-skills. However, in terms of relevance to PDP, the aspect of thinking which comes to fore is that of reflection. Whether reflection is a thinking skill or an awareness, it seems, first, that reflective students will be more successful as learners (both during their undergraduate studies and afterwards) and, secondly, that students do not find it easy to learn to reflect (and it does not come naturally). The main benefit conferred by reflection is self-awareness, of oneself as a learner and as an individual, and PDP seems to be a good vehicle for developing this awareness.

Another key element for students to learn is the identity and practices that form their discipline culture. For those who have come from school, where the emphasis is usually

on unifying elements of learning cultures, the strength of discipline cultures comes as a shock and a challenge, and those who fail to become part of the community of the discipline are most likely to drop out. Different disciplines address aspects of being a student differently, and approaches to the purposes and nature of PDP therefore also vary.

New students learn, among other things, the ways in which study is carried out and their progress through that study is measured and reported. In no other area of life is there so much angst about assessment. Approaches to assessment vary considerably, and the relationship of PDP practices to these approaches varies even more so. Sometimes PDP is bound up and even driven by the institution's processes of assessment; at other times it interacts partially with assessment activity, focusing on particular curricular areas or sets of learning outcomes. In yet other instances PDP stands apart from assessment, having an evaluative and personal agenda. In each case, the character of student involvement, the nature of the activity and the benefits delivered are different.

In the face of the power of the discipline culture, however, students also construct the meanings and trajectories of their own lives and the attitudes and intentions they develop towards their study, their employment and the rest of their lives. At the beginning of an undergraduate course, surrounded by so much that is new and different and embedding themselves in patterns of personal maturation, the possibilities for study, work and the rest of life can be the source of gigantic confusion and doubt. In this context PDP can be of great value in focusing and clarifying the processes of self-evaluation and future planning.

The first year of university also offers students new technological environments in which their studies are situated, and into which other activities can be integrated. Student portals opening up to VLEs containing a range of online tools and facilities enable students to join up their personal technology with that provided by the institution in ways that most of them will not previously have experienced. Interaction with people has become an important part of online environments, and so we should regard them as socio-technological environments. PDP is normally made available as a socio-technological facility, and students learn to use PDP online, but they also use it to reflect on their own use of the socio-technological environment.

In addressing the areas identified above, we are aware that a growing body of research enables PDP issues to be addressed theoretically. Models and theories can be brought to bear to reduce the plurality of 'unique' PDP cases to a limited number of recognisable forms, and to derive from these some 'ideal types' which demonstrate the range of possibilities. We are aware that we are working in an area which is in itself not rich in evidence - PDP in the first year of study - yet we can draw from work on the first year of study, and from work on PDP, to make this barren area richer in theory and knowledge, and in the means to see what is possible.

Many practitioners are seeking to make PDP more effective (sometimes in different ways), including academic staff and those whose task it is to support and enable students in their study and life planning. There are also many stakeholders - including employers, parents and students themselves - for whom PDP can offer clear benefits. For all these, this exploration of PDP in the first year can be of value and can contribute to the betterment of higher education.

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## Appendix 2: Quality Enhancement Themes First Year Experience reports

### **Sector-wide discussion projects:**

Gordon, G (2008) *Sector-wide discussion: the nature and purposes of the first year*

Kochanowska, R and Johnston, W (2008) *Student expectations, experiences and reflections on the first year*

### **Practice-focused development projects:**

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Nicol, D (2008) *Transforming assessment and feedback: enhancing integration and empowerment in the first year*

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