Personal Development Planning (PDP)

Personal Development Planning, or PDP helps learners think, not only about the learning that has already taken place, but also planning for the future. PDP is a great way to build on all the opportunities university life has to offer, but it is up to you as an individual to decide what you want to get out of PDP and how to set about doing this. This Advice Sheet will help you to:

• Recognise what is involved in PDP
• Identify opportunities presented to you
• Practise techniques to support PDP through action planning
• Employ a PDP tool, for example the electronic tool, RAPID

What is PDP?

Personal Development Planning can be defined as a process that helps you to think about your own learning, performance and/or achievements and to plan for your personal, educational and career development.

PDP, therefore, makes you aware of how you are progressing and this awareness brings a number of benefits. For example, it will be easier to identify to tutors areas of concern and it will help you to demonstrate to prospective employers that, through PDP, you have acquired strategies that make you a desirable, well motivated and focussed individual. Furthermore, PDP processes can motivate you when your interest starts to wane.

The main PDP processes that help learners think about their learning and to plan for the future usually include:

- **Reflection** – pulling different thoughts and ideas together to make sense for a particular purpose
- **Recording** – thoughts, ideas, experiences; you can keep records in written form or use audio, video, etc.
- **Action planning** – setting out a plan means more likely achievement of a goal
- **Executing** – carrying out activities referred to in the action plan
- **Evaluating** – making sense of what you have been doing

However PDP is presented and practised, the responsibility is on *you* as an individual to plan your learning, to act on the plans and to generate evidence of what you have achieved.

Identifying Opportunities

PDP isn't only relevant to your studies – extra-curricular activities and part-time work also contribute to your skills. Opportunities to practise PDP may come through:

- Modules you are taking, particularly skills-based modules. Make a special effort w where modules highlight areas where you would like to improve, e.g. numeracy or IT skills
- Tutorial sessions, particularly personal tutorials, where you can discuss your progress with a tutor
- Leisure activities: perhaps you are an active member of a club or society
- Extra-curricular activities: for example, being a course or hall representative
- Part-time work: where a range of skills will be acquired and/or developed

Opportunities to practise PDP might already be timetabled into your studies in an obvious way, for example, through a study skills module or study skills tutorial. Sometimes opportunities arise in less obvious ways, for example, through a project or extended essay, where you need to take stock of what you *already know*, what you *need to know* and plan how you will *proceed*.

Practising PDP

PDP processes should help you to write things down and develop a clear picture of where you want to go. Being able to **reflect** on what you are doing through your writing is a key skill central to the notion of PDP. Reflection is a form of deep and focussed thinking and essential to critical thinking and self-assessment – both important features of university level study.

To practise PDP it helps to have a structure to guide you. The following steps provide a useful framework, with reflection needed at every stage:

Step1 - Take a Skills Audit

This is a useful starting point for PDP because it acts as a 'stocktaking' exercise to systematically analyse your strengths and weaknesses.

You could also do a **SWOT** analysis – a common problem solving method which summarises your **s**trengths, **w**eaknesses, **o**pportunities and **t**hreats on a grid.

strengths	opportunities
weaknesses	threats
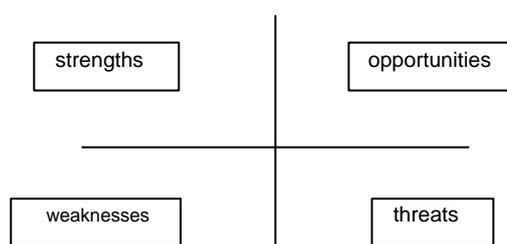
Once you become aware of where you are now, you can think about where you want to be and how you will get there through action planning.

Step 2- Write an Action Plan

Action Planning helps you to identify and set targets, documenting a thought out strategy. A well written action plan will be clear in its intentions, unambiguous and focussed. A useful rule of thumb is to ask yourself if it is **SMART**, i.e.

- **Specific**: e.g. 'I will identify and practise good time management techniques to reach my project deadline steadily and without panic', *rather than* 1 will learn how to manage my time'

- **Measurable**: e.g. I will set myself a weekly schedule of things to do

- **Achievable**: e.g. I know there are workshops and books on time management and I will use these to identify good practice

- **Realistic**: e.g. I know I have some free time every Thursday morning and I will use this time to work on my techniques

- **Time-Bound**: e.g. I will work towards the project deadline, setting weekly targets

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You are recommended to set yourself a few clear goals, ranking them by preference, and then set clear sub-goals. These sub-goals will help you to measure your progress *en route* and help you to consider the various steps ahead so that you won't be tempted to set unattainable targets.

It is often useful to talk through goal setting with another person, who may help you to think things through and maybe pick up on something you may have missed. Your personal tutor is a good person to ask.

Step 3 - Keep a Record

Auditing your skills and action planning will themselves generate written documentation. You also need to document which skills you've developed and how you have evaluated this. It is important to keep written records for a number of reasons:

- helps you to measure your progress
- provides information to draw upon when applying for jobs
- offers a source of information to share with your tutor
- helps you to think about how plans could be improved

Using RAPID

RAPID is an electronic PDP tool. It is interactive and can be used to keep personal records of information and evidence of skills competence in a range of areas.

RAPID stands for Recording Academic, Professional and Individual Development. It was developed at Loughborough University and there are a number of versions – some for different subject disciplines. You can see a list of all the versions on the website - http://rapid.lboro.ac.uk/

The majority of students will use the generic version of RAPID: **RAPID Express**. There is a tailored version for engineering students called RAPID Engineering. Another version (RAPID PGR) can be used by postgraduate research students.

There are two key elements of RAPID: PACE and SPEED.

PACE:
Personal Information, Achievements, Career Management, & Evidence Repository. Use PACE to store information that will form the basis of your CV.

SPEED:
Survey – Identifying skills development needs, opportunities for skills development, skills auditing
Plan – setting goals, identifying tasks and producing action plans
Execute – Carrying out activities and monitoring your progress
Evaluate – Reviewing outcomes and evaluating effectiveness of process, reflecting upon your learning experience
Document – Recording development of skills competence and storing this evidence

All study advice sheets are also available to view and download on the following website: http://www.lboro.ac.uk/library/skills/

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