**Thinking strategically about personal development planning: how to engage with undergraduates at each level of study**

**Level 4 PDP activities**

**Introduce PDP**

The Introduction to the book (pages xv-xxiv) will help introduce the concept of PDP to students. It specifies some of the benefits of PDP. Students can be invited to personalise these so that they see the relevance of PDP to themselves. At level 4, students may need lecturers to make explicit the links between PDP and their course. Let students know how developing skills and personal qualities can assist academic progress on their particular course.

**Personal engagement**

Some students find it difficult to grasp the importance of forward planning. ‘The future’ can seem a long way off. This book provides many activities to assist students to focus on themselves, their ambitions and their motivation from a number of angles. Some activities focus more on self-understanding, some on life planning, and some on learning styles and habits. Tutors can help students by guiding them towards activities from Chapters 1-5 that suit their programme, interests or personality.

**Employability**

Students who make the wrong choice of degree are the most likely to leave early and may not be preparing adequately for jobs that interest them. You may like to invite the Careers Service to offer a session early on about career options and subject choices. Students also need to be informed early on about the kinds of skills, qualities and experiences that employers are looking for, so that they can plan their development. These cannot usually be gained ‘at the last minute’: personal skills, inter-personal skills and effective task-management take time and experience to develop.

**Identify local opportunities**

Identify what kinds of structured activities students can expect from the university/college over their time as a student. Clarify what, if anything, will be offered through the course and by academic staff, and the procedures for accessing this. Invite in representatives from student support units that provide some of those opportunities, to make a brief introduction, or ask them to provide a flier. Students might have met some of these staff in an advisory capacity during induction, but they would have a different role from a PDP perspective. Other sources for input are staff offering subjects that students can take to supplement their main subject or broaden their studies.

**Link to study skills**

It can be helpful to link PDP to academic development, especially at level 4. An initial PDP self-evaluation could be linked to the early identification of study skills needs. Students benefit from being involved in diagnostic and self-evaluation processes, even if objective testing is also used. Once areas for improvement are identified, these can be followed up by guidance and a plan of action. It is useful for course or specialist staff to monitor student action plans where this is feasible. However, students should be able to show how they have monitored and evaluated their own development. Students could also support each other in achieving development plans, such as through the action sets described in Chapter 11, pages 266-7. Materials for supporting specific study skills can be found in *The Study Skills Handbook* (Cottrell, 2019, 5th edn., published by Red Globe Press (formerly Palgrave Macmillan).

**Introduce self-management**

This can link quite easily with study skills such as time management and working with others. Some or all of Chapter 5, ‘Successful self-management’ and Chapter 6, ‘People skills’, will be useful at level 4. Chapter 4 is also useful in helping students to understand the conditions that impact on their performance and how they might take more responsibility for managing these better.

**Look forward**

School-leavers can find it difficult to think ahead towards a career, even at level 6. The earlier this is raised, the more time students have to plan towards a job they will want. This is especially important as the trend in recent years (prior to Covid 19) has been for employers to provide work-related experiences and placements from level 5 or even level 4. Activities in Chapter 2, ‘The Vision: What does success mean to you?’, encourage students to explore what is important to them for their futures. It can be useful to discuss different concepts of success and achievement, especially if student retention is an issue. Not all students will be as academically successful as they would like. This can be difficult, especially in a university culture where the academic focus is a major part of everyday life.

Mature students may be studying for a qualification for career reasons such as to progress to particular professional status within their current occupations or to change occupation. Good personal planning can enable such students to apply what they have learnt on their programme to their employment- and vice versa- as well as considering their broader career and academic options. Gaining recognition at work and/or promotions whilst still working towards the qualification can be a real spur to motivation, especially for part-time students on longer programmes.

For some students, aspects of personal identity and family duty, not to mention personal finances, are bound up with very specific ideas of what constitutes success. Whilst every attempt should be made to support improvements in academic performance, it is important that students think through what is really important to them beyond their degree, and the contribution that academic study can make towards achieving personal goals, irrespective of degree classification.

**Start early with skills of reflection**

Introduce the concept of reflection as early as possible. Many people find it takes time to develop reflective skills, so it is important to build this in early to ensure plenty of practice. Chapter 12, ‘The Art of Reflection’, gives examples of types of reflective activity. Draw attention to those used for your subject at each level. If possible, give brief examples of reflective writing from your subject discipline. Let students know from the outset whether reflective journals, logs or blogs will be seen by tutors so that they can make decisions about what to include and what is private. Realistically, if reflective materials do not count towards the completion of the module in some way or are not used actively as part of teaching, then students are unlikely to maintain them, however valuable they might be. Some ways of incorporating reflection into programmes are:

• set reflective activities drawn from various chapters of this book to discuss in class or tutorials;

• set a reflective essay or position paper for an assignment (see Chapter 12, ‘The Art of Reflection’);

• ask students to submit a summary from their reflective journal and copies of certain pages (by negotiation);

• ask students to reflect upon specific issues which they then discuss in class;

• make clear that reflective journals, logs or blogs are to be submitted and count towards the assignment mark (even if the journal itself is not given a mark);

• provide a reflective cover sheet for students to complete and hand in with assignments;

• make clear whether journals will be marked and, if so, what percentage of the mark is allocated to this;

• give time in class for comments to be recorded in journals after an activity has taken place;

• invite comments based upon reflective work, as relevant opportunities arise.

**Record achievement**

Encourage students to begin the process of recording achievement. This should arise naturally out of writing action plans, setting targets and monitoring these. At level 4, you may prefer to focus such action plans entirely on skills development or planning for a particular assignment. The aim is to help students to become systematic in thinking ahead, making plans, executing a plan and reflecting how the plan and their performance could have been improved.

**Level 5 PDP activities**

It is likely that the bulk of PDP activity will take place at level 5. At this level, tutors can usefully establish a baseline. This could include:

• students identifying progress to date, based upon work undertaken at level 4 and outside of university study;

• updating personal goals and action plans;

• making specific links between academic skills and their application and adaptation to non-academic contexts.

**Management skills**

The four skills areas covered between Chapters 5-11 are loosely referred to here as ‘management’ skills as they enable students to:

• manage themselves;

• manage their working relationships;

• manage tasks, projects and problem-solving;

• manage their minds and their thinking.

These skills are mutually reinforcing, and together form the core of what is needed for the kinds of jobs graduates can expect to enter. A weakness in any one of these skills can impact upon the others. Together these four skills areas establish a solid basis for working in most situations with confidence, irrespective of the context. Students will be better prepared to address any problem from a strategic and creative standpoint, identify their own development needs, take responsibility, cope with pressure, and work with others to arrive at a solution. Material in Chapter 4, ‘Improving your personal performance’, is also relevant.

Academic staff can assist students by creating opportunities to develop these four ‘management’ skills, using the materials in the book as well as subject-specific examples. The emphasis on each skill will vary depending on the kinds of careers usually associated with the programme and with what it is feasible to cover either through the programme or alongside it. ‘People skills’, for example, will mean different things depending on whether the skills most frequently needed within the discipline are primarily for working on an individual basis with clients, working in a research team, managing other people’s work, coping with the public and so on. Tutors can guide students to the appropriate skills within the chapter and use naturally occurring situations to evaluate, discuss and reflect upon relevant skills. It is worth noting that over 40 per cent of graduates enter professions that are not related to their subject discipline, and where ‘management’ skills are likely to be at a premium.

**Career planning**

In their penultimate year, which is usually HE level 5, students need to prepare more seriously for employment. Employers are now much less likely to offer intensive training after employment than was the case in the past. They prefer to take on graduates who already show relevant skills in areas they want. The skills required are especially those of self-management, working and communicating with others, and being able to ‘hit the ground running’ to solve problems, especially as part of a team. This means that students who lack experience of team working, employment culture, applied problem-solving or project work are likely to be at a disadvantage when they apply for jobs. Students need to be much more alert to career planning than was the case several years ago and need to be active in searching out opportunities to develop and apply skills.

The Careers Service is obviously the first port of call for guidance about career planning. If you act as a personal tutor, you could identify those who have not yet seen a Careers Adviser and prompt a visit early in the penultimate year of study. Academic staff can also promote career planning by activities such as inviting alumni and professionals to talk to students about how they used subject skills in particular work situations. Assignments that focus on applying subject knowledge to work or ‘real life’ contexts can also encourage work-related reflection.

**Experience**

Students can be reluctant to take on extracurricular activities in case this negativey affects their degree grades. It can be helpful if academic staff give guidance on this and encourage them to broaden their experience by taking up the kinds of opportunities available to them as students. Increasingly, courses have developed links with businesses, agencies, schools and community groups to generate work experience and placements that enable students to explore themes or develop skills relevant to their programme. These can be used to produce assignments for formal assessment, and provide opportunities for students to gain feedback on their skills from people other than their tutor.

**Recording achievement and attributes**

It is not enough for students to have developed skills and gained experience: they also need to be able to talk about their these, drawing out their relevance to different contexts. HEIs are now much more aware that students, as well as gaining knowledge and skills, also need to understand the relevance of these and be able to articulate them in ways that make sense to employers and others. This is one reason for the emphasis on structured reflection: ‘transferable skills’ and ‘transferable experience’ are not always readily recognised. It is helpful if academic or careers staff make explicit the ways that skills developed on-course are relevant to, and could be transferred or adapted to the world of work,

In addition, employers are interested to know about personal qualities, how these have been acquired and demonstrated. They may be keen to see whether the student is aware of the relevance of their skills, qualities, experience and knowledge to the workplace, and how good they are at spotting and using opportunities. This means that ‘recording achievement’ is not simply about writing a list or even a curriculum vitae (CV). Many employers do not accept CVs any more. Useful records are now more analytical, evaluative and reflective. The materials provided in Chapters 12 and 15 and the online Resource Bank on the Student Companion Site all encourage students to draw out the significance of their achievements. This puts them in a better position to address competence-based job application processes.

**Level 6 PDP activities**

**Projects and dissertations**

PDP at level 6 is likely to consist of fine-tuning and updating work undertaken at level 5. Some universities are linking level 6 PDP to the final year project, show or dissertation. For example, students are encouraged to map the development of their project planning skills when they undertake their dissertation. Students are sometimes introduced to dissertation skills at level 5, such as through early project planning. Chapters 1, 9 and 11 are likely to help in developing these skills. These would need to be supplemented by materials relating to the research methodologies used for different subjects.

**Recording achievement**

Although, ideally, students would have been recording achievement throughout their programme, records will need to be completed and updated during level 6. The key time for interviews is early in the final year, so record maintenance should be encouraged at the end of level 5 and the start of level 6. See Chapter 15.

**Applying for jobs**

The Careers Service will provide the main support for job applications. However, if you are aware that students are soon to attend an interview or have not visited the Careers Service, you may wish to draw their attention to Chapters 13-15.

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