IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY OF PDP WITHIN A PRACTICE BASED CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT
This paper will identify the aims of Personal Development Planning (PDP) in a broad national context. It will consider the approach taken by The University of Salford (UoS) in structuring and implementing PDP requirements, and discuss how such policies may be delivered as an integral part of a practice based programme curriculum.

There are a number of models for the implementation of PDP currently being delivered within UK Higher Education Institutions, however the broad range of academic study now available creates a dilemma when trying to assess which model proves the 'best fit'. The interpretation of a broad strategic vision given by University policy makers may not always readily covert into activities and processes that align with a programme's curriculum. In this paper, methods for the implementation of PDP at programme level will focus on the UoS Product Design programme as a case study. Taking University policy as a starting point, the programme developed a PDP structure that attempts to align itself coherently with a heavily practice based curriculum.

Keywords: Personal Development Planning, Reflection, Curriculum enhancement

1   NATIONAL CONTEXT
In May 2000 a joint policy statement by Universities UK, Universities Scotland, QAA and the Standing Conference of Principals announced the HE Progress Files policy. The Progress Files policy is based on recommendations from The Dearing Report of 1997 Higher Education in the Learning Society, coming out of The National Committee of Inquiry in Higher Education (HMSO 1997) and is unique in that it is the first National policy mandate for a form of learning in Higher Education. [1]

"*We recommend that institutions of higher education, over the medium term, develop a Progress File. The File should consist of two elements: a transcript recording student achievement which should follow a common format devised by institutions collectively through their representative bodies; a means by which students can monitor, build and reflect upon their personal development*" [2]

All HEIs in the UK have had to respond to this challenge and are charged with providing structured and supported provision for PDP the term used to describe the process of students' monitoring, building and reflecting upon their own development. Universities UK have argued that employers are not interested in lists of desirable attributes anymore and are much more concerned with the transferability of skills, self

knowledge, and the ability to adapt, and students need to be able to evidence this. [3] Jackson and Ward have suggested that the progress file in the UK is the current systemic solution to the 'problem' of assessing and representing students' learning to a range of audiences in a meaningful way. [4]

According to Jackson, PDP can be seen as a proxy for a number of constructs that connect with notions of reflection, and draw benefits from recording and action planning and should involve: planning, recording, reviewing and evaluating, using the personal knowledge and sense derived from PDP to plan future actions, change thinking, beliefs, behaviours or communicate learning and achievement to others. [5]

2   THE UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD

The UoS has welcomed the progress file policy. According to the implementation strategy the Progress File provides the University with the opportunity to express fully an institution wide view of academic progression, student support, graduate employability and career management. [6] The University sees the ethos of Progress Files and in particular PDP as wholly aligned with its Learning and Teaching, Students Support, and Widening Participation Strategies. Providing a rich, relevant and high quality range of study opportunities which enable learners to maximise their abilities…to enhance employability and innovation and support lifelong learning. [7]

In line with the University's collegiate approach to strategy implementation the rollout is described as 'partially devolved'. This allows schools a certain amount of choice and flexibility within a framework which has been developed to balance development and ownership at a school level with the need to ensure that the University provides a PDP programme that has common features. [8] A University PDP development officer was appointed and Faculties and Schools nominated PDP co-ordinators. The University's implementation strategy outlines the advantages of adopting a partially-devolved approach as listed below:

- The PDP can be embedded within existing systems
- Existing PDP practice can continue, avoiding duplication
- PDP can fulfil subject specific or professional requirements
- It is probable that students and staff are more likely to engage with processes of PDP that are embedded within subject and school culture, fulfil pre-existing needs and are integral to the academic and personal development of students

These points were important to the School of Art and Design as it was felt that there were already many existing elements of PDP good practice embedded within programme structures which we wanted to harness.

3   SCHOOL OF ART & DESIGN

The School of Art and Design delivers 13 undergraduate programmes along with 9 at post-graduate level and has over 1000 students. Situated in The Greater Manchester area the School has an ongoing commitment to actively promoting widening participation and has been involved in a number of student retention initiatives. PDP has therefore been seen as a potential important contribution in this respect. The School took part in the University PDP pilot scheme exploring student self-assessment and mentoring and there has been much discussion within the School about how to take PDP forward in a meaningful way. The coordinator and members of staff participating in the school PDP steering group were concerned that PDP should not be approached as something running in parallel or as a bolt on to programme modules. We were aware that PDP could be seen as a further burden to workloads by both students and staff who are

already suffering from agenda fatigue. Simon Larter raised the issue of student mistrust of PDP in his Guardian Newspaper article of November 2005.

"The real issue in all of this is how universities are going to help students improve their ability to study. Wanting to do that is laudable, because basic skills are seriously lacking. Students are acutely aware of it. What they want is practical help, not 50 pages of twaddle about learning styles and endless nagging about time-planning and being responsible…PDP places an even greater burden on young people long before they are ready, able or willing to deal with it." [9]

We wanted to develop a PDP approach which would be seen as an integral and dynamic part of the student experience – a process rather than a product where opportunities for different kinds of learning would be made explicit. While discrete PDP events are delivered periodically at a programme level such as 'Studentship & Success' and 'Reflection workshops' for Level one students, on the whole PDP would be made continually explicit through module design and programme delivery.

We drew specifically on work done by Peter Knight around the idea of a creative curriculum, and also his insights into a variety of models for implementation of PDP. This confirmed our ideas about the usefulness of a more integrative approach and also that this is not something that can be done quickly or easily. [10] Knight outlines four main approaches as:

a) Additive: Separate guidance, skill building and portfolio-making modules available to students. Level 1 provision likely to be compulsory but optional thereafter

b) Integrative: Making the implicit explicit to create "knowing students" Guidance, skill building and portfolio-making modules or other sequences are designed into a programme of study. Level one provision likely to be compulsory less likely at Levels two and three.

c) Integrative: As above but reinforced through the curriculum. There is a scheduled pattern of PDP activity timetabled throughout the programme and, if it is not compulsory, it is certainly treated as very important. The PDP framework is tailored to reflect the learning outcomes valued in particular programmes.

d) A Personal Curriculum: Rather than PDP centring on a coherent programme, this proposes that students use the PDP process to make sense of and integrate the learning choices they have made. [11]

We see our approach at present as somewhere between b) and c) above but would seek to be firmly in c) as we develop new programmes or amend existing modules. According to Knight's integrative approach, the programme team orchestrates an all-through programme involving careers and guidance colleagues in its design and delivery. *"This is probably the ideal. Difficult to design, although easier when new programmes are being devised than when it is a case of re-working established programmes. Harder with highly modularized, high choice programmes"* [12]

Knight speaks of 'knowing students' and this links with discussions elsewhere about notions of meta learning "being aware of and taking control of one's own learning". [13] Knight further emphasizes that a creative curriculum should not just refer to reflection but actually needs to contain spaces for reflection, and cites Alheit *"spaces for reflection and communication, as well as interactions with 'spaces of opportunity' are at least as important as developing 'instruments for individual self management".* [14]

4   PROGRAMME INTEGRATION CASE STUDY

BA Product Design is an established programme within the School of Art and Design at UoS. With cohorts of approximately 35 students each year (100+ students in total) it is considered a medium-to-large programme within the School. The curriculum is heavily practice based, and as such requires students to produce practical design solutions that answer the requirements of project briefs. The programme develops students design abilities through a variety of project themes, covering basic design communication skills, manufacturing issues, research methodologies, user centred design approaches and professional practice. This very experiential process anticipates that a student's learning develops by 'doing' as they progress through their programme of study. Further, it anticipates that through progression they develop self direction, motivation to learn and an understanding of their own learning process. Thus, enabling the interpretation and appropriate application of their own learning. These outcomes are in essence closely aligned with the expectations of a PDP process, but are communicated through the students project design work.

Our students build towards producing a portfolio of design project work that communicates the journey of their development, each project demonstrating specific subject understanding, knowledge or skills. Throughout many practice based design subjects this nature of output is considered the primary vehicle by which an individual's development and progression is demonstrated. A Product Design Graduate's portfolio is the physical result of their whole educational journey, and as such is considered highly important to them. The portfolio enables the communication of their design 'persona' and is a means of achieving employment. In this sense, a portfolio of work can be considered to align well with a number of desired PDP Progress File objectives such as communicating skills, abilities and achievements. It also evidences progression and development, demonstrating readiness for a professional career.

The design portfolio clearly demonstrates an individual's process of work, and development of their skills and abilities. However, a portfolio really lacks explicit evidence of 'how' an individual has developed. Have they applied any level of reflective practice, identified shortcomings and acted to enable improvement. Or, have they just lurched from one project to another with no clear path of development. In short, have they understood 'how' they learned as well as 'what' they learned? The integration of a more formalised PDP structure to engage students at this level of personal development clearly held great potential, but its delivery could appear a very alien process if incorrectly positioned within a practice driven curriculum.

5   APPROACH AND MODEL SELECTION

In examining approaches towards implementation, it was highly important that PDP did not become a tick box paper exercise. That it was not viewed by students or staff as something separated from the overall programme philosophy, but fully integral to it. Knight's Integrative approach c) re-enforced through curriculum provided the opportunity to begin building a PDP approach that could be developed to align with our current curriculum and learning culture. Although identified as being the most difficult to implement into an existing curriculum, it appeared the most appropriate choice.

In developing an integrated approach it became evident that many practices supporting PDP already existed within our curriculum. However, this underlining coherence was not totally explicit, and without examination may not have been readily evident. The distribution of these supporting activities, such as self assessment or

career/portfolio planning sessions appeared to align 'roughly' correctly with examples of a PDP structured approach. This was a very positive discovery, as it demonstrated that a coherent and integrated PDP structure should be possible to achieve within our existing curriculum.

Table 1, details our PDP structure as it is introduced throughout the programme, combining aspects of established PDP objectives with programme specific themes. In developing this progression it was important to the programme team that students understood the underlining rationale for the structure and placement of PDP objectives. Each semester would involve a PDP related activity, to trigger student involvement and engagement with the process. Such activities, plus the inclusion of PDP statements within all module and project specific documentation aims to ensure the continual presence of PDP throughout our students' educational journey.

Table 1 PDP Semester objectives

Level one (semester one)	**Level one** (semester two)
Introduction to Studentship Design awareness, Peer interaction	Design awareness, Staff/peer dialogue Technical skills & knowledge Peer assessment
Level two (semester one)	**Level two** (semester two)
Contextual awareness, Communication Reflective practice, Self assessment	Presentation, Professional practice Development strategy, Career planning
Level three (semester one)	**Level three** (semester two)
Synthesis of skills, Autonomous learning Self identity, Self management	Synthesis of skills, Autonomous learning Self identity, Self management Exit strategy/philosophy

The partially devolved 'programme centered' approach to developing PDP provision has enabled its relatively straight forward integration into our existing curriculum. Additionally, it has also enabled us to see other activities within the programme that are clearly aligned to PDP objectives. Current curriculum content such as assessment methods could now be 'mapped' onto the PDP structure and delivered as an integral part of it, re-enforcing the integration of PDP and programme development.

6   CONCLUDING REMARKS

In demonstrating the implementation of PDP from a University strategy through to programme level delivery, we have highlighted some of the many issues that this process raises. Both practical and philosophical questions have been identified, and will continue to be discussed. Such issues now need to be taken on board by all programmes to achieve a more coherent and holistic School based approach to the implementation of PDP. For this to be successful our programmes will need to play an active role in this 'partially devolved' approach, to enable flexibility in programme coordination and delivery of PDP objectives. Only then can the correct balance between subject specific expectations and the PDP agenda be met.

Learning is tricky, never mind talking about learning!

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