

PDP Academy 11: INSTITUTIONAL CASE STUDY

The title of your initiative:

PDP through e-Portfolios: engaging students to enhance their learning and employability

Theme(s)

This project has covered the following two themes with opportunity of evaluation:

1. Developing and implementing a resource.
2. Influencing Institutional Policy/strategy

Your Aims and Objectives (Max. 50 words)

The aims of the project were to:

- make PDP an inclusive process, open to all Bucks students at all levels of study (QAA 2009)
- provide every Bucks student with a personal online learning space to build a record of achievement for lifelong learning and contribute to an ePortfolio
- enhance the employability of Bucks students through academic and practice based learning experiences
- encourage Bucks students' personal ownership of ePortfolios: a learner-owned application, independent of any individual institution, interacting with services accessed over the web

Your Approach(es) and Activity/ies (Short breakdown of your activities – Max. 200 words)

The intention of this project was to build on current institutional progressive development of PDP implementation and the emerging practice of the use of ePortfolios. It was also intended to extend the practice to disciplines and schools which have yet to engage with PDP supported by e-Portfolios. Therefore the project team took a case study approach focusing on four disciplines three of which have PDP embedded or integrated into the course and are now being supported by ePortfolios. The fourth discipline was psychology where the course team are working towards the inclusion of PDP within the programme. Two of the case studies were newly developed health care courses, one using "Profile" and the other using "Google Sites". The third case being Sports Management where the course team have been involved in the development of the CV development tool, "JobSavviGrad".

The Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA 2005) recommends that a PDP initiative is likely to be most effective when it is embedded into a programme of study and if it engages positively with the beliefs of academic staff (Clegg and Bradley 2006). Furthermore, students' PDP experiences are believed to result from academic staff who teach them (QAA 2009), therefore, the project team agreed to involve both students and academics in the data collection. Focus group interviews were conducted between February and May 2012 to explore student and academic staff understanding of PDP supported by ePortfolios, its purpose and how it affects learning and teaching. Some of the interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees. The themes for the Focus Group interviews were:

1. Understanding of PDP (what it is and why it is needed)
2. Opportunities for PDP
3. Space (ePortfolio) for recording achievements and evidence with reflections linked to PDP and monitoring progress
4. Benefits and drawbacks of the space adopted for above as perceived the students and academic staff
5. Continued use of space or application of skills for recording CPD post graduation

The responses were analysed and the findings were grouped into the themes which form the fundamentals of PDP and ePortfolios based on their definitions:

1. Purpose
2. Process
3. Structure
4. Content
5. Collaboration including sharing, feedback
6. Support
7. Potential for CPD/lifelong learning

Outcomes so far (What is the result of your actions so far – max 100 words)

• **Intended**

The University's use of the following definition is appropriate as all students and academics had a common understanding of PDP and agreed that:

Personal Development Planning is 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 2001:1)

It is now possible to write up clear guidelines with evidence of best practice for including PDP within the curriculum and guide academics to choose an appropriate ePortfolio tool.

Identification of ways to enhance student engagement.

• **Unintended**

PDP has to be delivered to ensure students value the purpose and the impact it has in improving their employability at the end or even during the programme, best practice to enhance student engagement was identified.

Freedom in writing an ePortfolio can encourage both creativity and critical thinking as the needs and expectations of the audience are satisfied.

Important moment(s) in the project (Max. 200 words)

The opportunity to discuss experiences of the students in the focus groups and the demonstration of their need to present themselves as individuals within their ePortfolio came as a surprise. The team identified that the structure of e-Portfolio needs to be flexible enough to guide and engage students in the process, but allow for individualisation by the student to foster ownership of the process. At this stage, it appears that the students as "creators" would like the ownership of the PDP process and the product ePortfolio allowing them to be creative and present their learning the way they see fit for the audience; moreover, ownership engenders feelings of pride, responsibility, and dedication (Paris and Ayres 1994:10). This clearly supports the requirement to ensure students value the purpose and impact of PDP on their future employability. Furthermore this process could then be a true personalization' of learning (DfES 2005): a story of learning, OWNED by the students, structured by them and told in their own VOICE (literally and rhetorically), something they WANT to maintain as a lifelong learning tool and not as something "done to them" (Barrett and Carney 2005).

Impact (including evidence of impact – max. 200 words, qualitative and quantitative indicators if possible, in respect of some or all of)

The following identifies the current and anticipated impact from the project so far and some aspects are yet to be realised:

- Staff: increased awareness of the value of PDP to support employability this is local to the case studies, but expected to be circulated more widely; Acknowledgement of student feedback to improve the teaching of reflection within the programme;
- Students: The provision of an institution independent, student owned, cost free e-portfolio tool that acts as a repository, which enables reflection and review by invited others to support employability and lifelong learning beyond their university programme
- the HEI: Empowering academics to embed PDP and utilise a variety of e-portfolio tools to suit the student need through the development of guidance and best practice.
- other significant stakeholder: employers will be able to select from candidates who are able to articulate their employability that is fit for purpose, through the development of evidenced CV's or portfolios.

Lessons learned (including what you might do differently on a future occasion, max. 400 words)

The project has been a useful opportunity to engage academics across the institution in a student focused activity alongside the Student's Union, furthermore it has enabled the institution to engage with other institutions and experience best practice and similar challenges. The following provides detail of some of the lessons learned along the way and what we would choose to do differently in the future:

• **Personal level.**

On a personal level, it was good to engage in a project that was student focused to evaluate a service

provision. The team had not anticipated the amount of time that was needed to be given to the project and this created individual challenges which did have a knock on effect on the original plan.

- **Professional level**

It was noticeable and reassuring that the majority of the students believe PDP to be a product, a personal plan to develop themselves to help achieve their goal which is generally linked to employment. In addition those that were on a professional programme could identify with the purpose of demonstrating their learning in an ongoing way to meet the continuing professional requirements of professional bodies.

In turn the academic staff involved in the delivery of PDP were clear in its purpose and saw it as an opportunity for students to develop self-awareness skills to enable them to be reflective and set goals they aspire to with strategies to achieve them. In other words, PDP is a process of learning about self and knowing how to develop during their study programme and beyond.

- **Team level**

Commitment from all members of the project team was required to ensure motivation and actions were fulfilled. The encouragement tended to come from one member of the team and without that the project to date would not have been as successful. For future projects clearer milestones and actions are needed, with more frequent opportunities to meet and reassess.

The questions prepared for the focus groups were too specific and during the process were turned into themes, thus more time and thought will be given to the preparation for focus groups in the future.

- **Institutional level**

The Institution is mindful that to implement change an investment of time and resources is required to ensure that such a project runs smoothly and to seek regular updates with clear milestones in which to achieve the set objectives.

It is apparent that a one size ePortfolio is not suitable for all subject areas and that the structure of any ePortfolio needs to be flexible enough to guide and engage students in the process, but allow for individualisation by the student to foster their ownership of the process.

Your next steps (max. 150 words)

- **What will happen next?**

1. Follow the experiences of the cases during their Year 2 of PDP/ePortfolio experience
2. Invite a larger group for focus group interviews (more Personal Tutors and not limited to Programme Leaders)
3. Produce an institutional PDP good practice guide endorsed by the Bucks Learning and Teaching Steering Group
4. Highlight PDP as an opportunity for colleagues to address the 'Reflection & Evaluation' feature of the employability framework currently being used at Bucks.
5. Make example course documentation where PDP is embedded available on the Employability organization shell on Blackboard™

- **What needs to happen next?**

1. Produce an institutional PDP good practice guide endorsed by the Bucks Learning and Teaching Steering Group.
2. Share best practice to enhance student engagement in PDP activity

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