

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

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
- Record your skills development and achievements

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 focused 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 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.

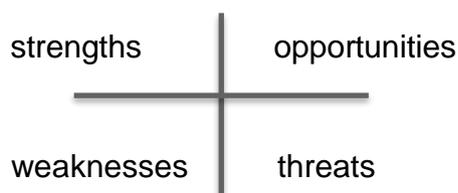
To practise PDP it helps to have a structure to guide you. The following steps provide a useful framework, with reflection needed at every stage:

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 **strengths**, **weaknesses**, **opportunities** and **threats** on a grid.



Assess your skills (academic, work and personal). Consider your achievements and review them, identifying the transferable skills you have developed. Look for areas you wish to develop further or gaps in your experience.

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* 'I 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

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 – Reflect

How do you know if you have achieved your goals? Set time aside to consider academic marks, feedback or self-assessments.

Step 4- 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

One way of recording the skills you have developed, together with supporting evidence is the STAR® technique. This technique can also be applied in job applications and interviews.

| The STAR® technique | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Situation | Set the scene e.g. as part of a 2nd year Business module I worked as part of a group of six on a project and was chosen as team leader |
| Task | What was the goal, aim or challenge? e.g. we had to submit a marketing report on a particular industry within a month |
| Action | What you did / your role e.g. as team leader I had to lead meetings and ensure all group members were contributing to the report |
| Result | What was the outcome? e.g. we submitted the work on time and were awarded a good mark You will also find it useful to: |
| Reflect | What you learnt e.g. leadership skills, negotiation, working to a deadline |

All study advice sheets are available to view and download on the following website:

<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/services/library/students/learningsupport/adviceandplanningsheets/>

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