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Report on the implementation of progress files

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REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRESS FILES

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Contents

1   Background

1.1   The Dearing Inquiry into Higher Education (The Dearing Report, 1997[1]) recommended that all higher education institutions should introduce a Higher Education Progress File which should comprise:

- "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 (Personal Development Planning/Recording)"

(Recommendation 20)

1.2   Following a wide consultation exercise involving universities, students, professional bodies and employers, the (then) CVCP, CoSHEP, SCOP and QAA jointly published in May 2000 a Policy Statement on a Progress File in HE[2] and prepared Guidelines[3] (in February 2001) to help universities and colleges of higher education to develop and introduce progress files.

The Guidelines stipulate that

(i)   transcripts should provide a comprehensive verifiable record of the learning and achievement of an individual learner and also provide learners with a record of their learning while they are studying in the form of a formative statement that should help students to monitor and reflect on their progress and plan their further academic development.

(ii)   the primary objective of personal development planning (PDP) is to improve the capacity of individuals to understand what and how they are learning and to review, plan and take responsibility for their own learning so as to help students to:

- become more effective, independent and confident self-directed learners;
- understand how they are learning and relate their learning to a wider context;
- improve their general skills for study and career management;
- articulate personal goals and evaluate progress towards their achievement;
- encourage a positive attitude to learning throughout life.

The deadline for implementation by higher education institutions is 2002/2003 for transcripts and 2005/06 for PDP.

1.3   As a result of the announcement in the recent White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*, the Progress File Implementation Group (consisting of policy advisers from Universities UK, SCOP, LTSN Generic Centre and QAA), at the request of the DfES, commissioned the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) of the Open University to undertake a survey of progress being made on the implementation and use of transcripts and personal development planning in higher education. The survey consisted of

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[1] The Dearing Report, 1997, *Higher Education in a Learning Society,* The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education.

[2] See http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/progfileHE/guidelines/policystatement/contents.htm

[3] see http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/progfileHE/guidelines/contents.html

- a postal survey of all higher education institutions on their use of transcripts and personal development planning, including the collection of examples of transcript formats;

- a telephone survey of a representative sample of higher education institutions (selected by type of institution and geographic location to include Scotland and Wales) in order to elicit more robust findings and to understand the drivers in, and obstacles to, the use of transcripts and personal development planning.

2 Details of the study

2.1 **Postal Survey**

Two separate questionnaires (one on Transcripts and the other on Personal Development Planning) were distributed by Universities UK and SCOP to all their member institutions at the end of March 2003.

Response rates were as follows:

- *Transcripts*: a total of 70 higher education institutions (HEIs) returned completed questionnaires. Of these 59 (84%) were universities and 11 (16%) SCOP institutions. Of the universities, 38 were 'pre-1992' and 21 'post-1992' universities. Eleven HEIs provided examples of transcripts in use.

- *Personal Development Planning (PDP)*: 73 HEIs returned completed questionnaires. Of these 65 (89%) were universities and eight (11%) SCOP institutions. Of the universities, 39 were 'pre-1992' and 26 'post-1992' universities.

2.2 **Telephone interviews**

A total of 23 interviews were undertaken with 19 HEIs. These comprised nine 'pre-' (including one Scottish and one Welsh) and seven 'post-' 1992 universities, and three higher education colleges. In the case of four institutions, two separate individuals were interviewed on the two issues. The individuals interviewed in the institutions were mainly senior staff in academic registries and directors of learning and teaching units or their equivalent. In one case a classics professor was interviewed in his capacity as chair of a working party addressing the development of PDP in his institution.

2.3 Detailed reports of the analyses of completed Transcript and PDP postal survey questionnaires are attached as annexes A and B respectively. A detailed report of the findings from the telephone interviews is attached as annex C.

3   Summary of findings

3.1   Transcripts

3.1.1   Most institutions have already introduced transcripts; where this is not the case they will be in place by summer 2003. The majority of institutions already produce transcripts for undergraduate students (although not all of them are currently meeting the minimum dataset requirements) but institutions are at different stages for postgraduates. A majority have still to include field 4 – "other types of learning within the context of a programme". In some institutions transcripts have been in place for a number of years (as long as 10 years in one) – they were introduced as part of the change to a modular system. In most institutions the development and implementation of transcripts has been separate from the PDP development.

3.1.2   In the majority of institutions the policy development and implementation of transcripts is centrally driven through the Academic Registry or equivalent with senior management/Academic Board input at the policy development stage. Maintenance of transcripts is part of the process of the student record system in most institutions.

3.1.3   A common format for transcripts is being introduced across each of the institutions that we consulted by telephone – one or two institutions are still working on producing transcripts that are acceptable and comprehensible for all faculties, e.g. to take account of the specialist requirements of subjects like art and design.

3.1.4   Most institutions have paper-based transcripts and some are working towards developing electronic versions. Around a third of the institutions plan to produce both paper-based and electronic transcripts. There is fairly widespread development of new student record systems and transcript requirements are being met as part of this general development process.

3.1.5   In many institutions, students are issued transcripts at the end of a programme, at the end of the academic year and are also given interim transcripts. Some institutions mentioned that they hoped to be in a position to introduce transcripts on demand.

3.1.6   The main *benefits/advantages* of transcripts mentioned were:

- they provide a clear, portable and, because of the "QAA guidelines" (*sic*), comparable statement of student achievement;
- they provide a clear record of credits gained through exemptions or credit transfer;
- they make the process of assessment clearer to students, staff and employers;
- interim transcripts (in the context of a modular scheme) allow an extra level of monitoring in that students can challenge any inaccuracies in assessment.

3.1.7   The key *disadvantages/drawbacks* mentioned were:

- the possibility of a deluge of demands for retrospective transcripts from existing graduates if they become general currency with employers;
- the management of the process 'operationally', especially for large institutions;
- costs – staff time and the development of electronic versions.

However, it would be fair to say that these disadvantages were not heavily stressed. An additional concern expressed by some was to do with security and authenticity.

3.1.8   Additional support would be widely appreciated in respect of the following:

- the identification of HEIs who have successfully achieved the policy objective and who are prepared to share their experiences;
- simpler less technically worded guidance easily available on the web.

3.2   Personal Development Planning (PDP)

3.2.1   The majority of institutions reported some PDP activity although fewer than half had introduced formal policies on PDP. Although a majority of institutions were unable to state how many students were currently undertaking PDP, around half stated that all students were expected to do so in 2005.

3.2.2   There is considerable variation in approach between and within institutions although in a clear majority of cases the approach involves face-to-face periodic contact with a tutor. The variation is partly because there are no externally imposed deadlines to meet but also because it is perceived as being potentially resource intensive and representing values that will not be shared throughout higher education.

3.2.3   Two major dimensions of variation concern whether PDP is to be made compulsory and possibly assessed and whether it is conceived primarily in terms of employment considerations or more widely in terms of academic objectives (Figure 1).

Figure 1
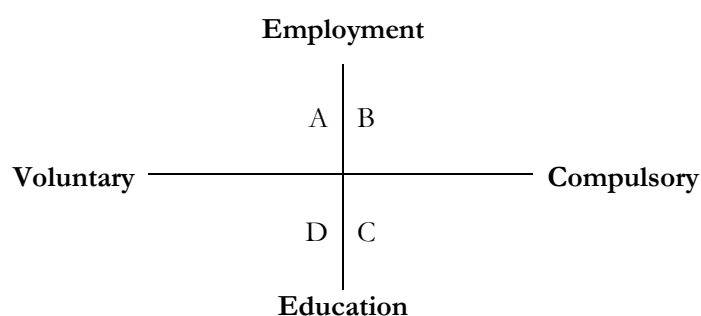
We found a tendency for 'pre-92' universities to occupy cell D and other institutions to occupy cells B and C.

3.2.4   There is no common understanding about what PDP really is. In the majority of places it includes a clear careers/employability focus, for example at one university the minimum requirement on all students will be to produce a CV in their final year. But in a small number of places the employment focus is rejected – largely because it would not be acceptable across the whole institution. Similarly, in a few places it appears to be a largely electronic system while in others quite intensive tutorial support is seen to be central to making it work. Others – perhaps more commonly – envisage PDP to embrace both face-to-face and electronic elements, although this may be an aspiration rather than a reality in many cases. Other differences in approach and understanding include:

- the extent to which non-academic experiences are relevant;
- and, if they are, what can be included – routine term-time working or domestic experiences seem rarely to be included although some people would aspire to do so;

- whether it is seen as a 'holistic/reflective' activity for the student or can be related to individual modules in a fairly fragmented way;
- whether it is part of a core module or a special PDP module, quite often related to drafting a curriculum vitae.

3.2.5   For all these reasons, progress is slow and uneven. In most institutions, there is recognition that there are some existing practices in some departments that may be quite similar to PDP (typically in areas like health, social work and education). In such cases, the issue is whether to disturb existing practice. At the same time, there are other departments where the idea of PDP is quite alien. Here the issue is one of awareness-raising and 'selling' the idea of PDP.

3.2.6   There is also variation in the level of central support and encouragement for PDP development within institutions. In some cases, senior managers have been involved and are actively supportive. In other cases, it seems to be left to the 'learning and teaching professionals'. Institutions also differ in the extent to which they are emphasising the introduction of some minimum institution-wide policy or are preferring to encourage different departments/faculties to develop their own approaches. A combination of both approaches is quite common.

3.2.7   There are differences in view as to how far academic staff need to be involved in the PDP process. There are doubts about how far this would be realistic and electronic 'do-it-yourself' mechanisms are being considered as alternatives in some places.

3.2.8   Subject differences are important. The more vocational subjects are more likely to be supportive but then take a relatively narrow view of what is relevant. Other subjects may be opposed (either in principle or on resource grounds) or supportive – generally the former but when the latter they may be more open to a broader conception of PDP than their more vocational colleagues.

3.2.9   The major *advantages* of the introduction of PDP mentioned were:

- to help students become more rounded and confident learners;
- to improve retention;
- to help students to gain appropriate employment;
- to raise students' expectations;
- to rejuvenate the personal tutor system.

3.2.10   The major *disadvantages* mentioned were:

- impact on staff workloads;
- pressures on the curriculum;
- problems of motivating students;
- problems of staff scepticism;
- costs of setting up support systems.

3.2.11   There is some recognition that PDP could be a very radical innovation in higher education. However, that depends on how it is implemented and existing practice looks rather conservative in this respect. One positive note is that there is relatively little evidence of 'compliance' in introducing PDP. Those that are currently considering introducing PDP are doing so because they see value in it. Thus, it is likely that the introduction of PDP will take a long time but will occur providing:

- that both staff and students can see some real value in it; and

- that resource issues can be addressed.

3.2.12   In terms of additional support, institutions would particularly like to see the identification of HEIs which had successfully implemented the policy and which are prepared to share their experiences.

PROGRESS FILE IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY

Institutional Questionnaire

TRANSCRIPTS

ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES FROM HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

70 HEIs provided completed questionnaires - 59 (84%) Universities UK and 11 SCOP (16%) institutions. Of the Universities UK HEIs, 38 were 'pre-1992' and 21 'post-1992' universities.

Q1 Is your institution currently achieving the objective of providing a transcript meeting the minimum data set requirements (see note A) for ALL students in the following categories who have completed their course?

The majority of HEIs (**64%** - 45 out of 70) are achieving the objective for *undergraduate students*. This comprises 25 'pre', 14 'post' and six SCOP HEIs.

Fewer HEIs are achieving the objective for other types of students:

- *Postgraduate (taught) students*: **54%** (38) of HEIs (20 'pre', 13 'post' and five SCOP)

- *Continuing professional development students*: **38%** (27) of HEIs (12 'pre', 11 'post' and four SCOP)

Q2 For each category of student please indicate:

For this academic year estimates of total number of completing students and the number for whom a transcript was or will be produced

The year in which it is expected that all students would receive a transcript, indicating whether the date is one which is determined by the institution's plan or is an estimate.

Too few HEIs answered this question to make any analysis meaningful.

Q3 Does your institution provide transcripts in a paper-based or electronic format?

The majority of HEIs (**74%** - 52 out of 70) are providing paper-based transcripts (30 'pre', 14 'post' and eight SCOP).

Eighteen HEIs indicated that they are or will be providing transcripts electronically as well as in a paper-based format.

Q4 For each category of student, is your institution currently providing transcript information part way through programmes? If yes please indicate, if known, the percentage of each category of student who are provided such a transcript in the course of each current year.

The majority of HEIs (**74%** - 52 out of 70) are providing 'interim' transcripts for *undergraduate students*. This comprises 29 'pre', 15 'post' and eight SCOP HEIs. **Thirty-four** of these HEIs indicated that were doing so for 100% of their undergraduate student population.

Fewer HEIs are providing interim transcripts for other types of students:

- *Postgraduate (taught) students*: **57%** (40) of HEIs (21 'pre', 13 'post' and six SCOP)

- *Continuing professional development students*: **39%** (27) of HEIs (12 'pre', 11 'post' and four SCOP)

Q5   In relation to the provision of transcripts part way through programmes please indicate:

Whether your institution has an agreed policy

80% (56 out of 70) of HEIs have an agreed policy (32 'pre', 16 'post' and eight SCOP).

If yes, please summarise that policy.

Nearly half of the HEIs (**49%** - 34 out of 70) that answered this question issue transcripts/marks statements after each assessment board, semester or academic year. Six mentioned that transcripts are only issued on completion of the programme. Eleven stated that transcripts can be issued 'on request and in writing' and a further two 'on request and on payment'.

Nine HEIs mentioned online access to transcripts/marks statements. Three mentioned that these transcripts would be 'unofficial'; three allowed access at anytime during the programme of study. Five mentioned that access was available at the end of semester and/or academic year.

Please state for each category of students the year in which it is expected that ALL students would receive interim transcripts, indicating whether the date is specified as part of the institution's plans or is an estimate.

Too few institutions answered this question to make analysis meaningful.

Q6   Does your institution have a policy on what should be included in Field 4 of the transcript "Other types of learning within the context of a programme"?

The majority of HEIs (**60%** - 42 out of 70) answered 'no' (20 'pre', 13 'post' and nine SCOP).

Are there different policies and practices in existence in different parts of the institution?

Again, the majority (**70%** - 49) answered 'no' (26 'pre', 14 'post' and nine SCOP).

Please summarise your institution's policy.

HEIs indicated the following:

Work placements/experience, study abroad, APL/APEL are included on the transcript (12 HEIs).

If the learning results in academic credit/is a compulsory part of the formal learning/is approved by the assessment board, then it appears on the transcript (12 HEIs).

Other institutions mentioned
- local/specialists discretion is devolved to schools
- the transcript is modelled on the European Diploma Supplement
- all relevant learning is recorded

Two institutions stated that these types of learning are not included in the transcript.

Q7 What forms of support would your institution find helpful in achieving the policy objective? Tick all that apply.

HEIs would like to see the following:

- The identification of HEIs who had successfully implemented the policy and who are prepared to share their experience (**53 HEIs – 76%**)
- Simpler less technically worded guidance easily available on the web (**34 HEIs – 48%**)
- The provision of a list of consultants, individuals or agencies, who might be contacted to assist your institution (**17 HEIs – 24%**)

Other forms of support were mentioned and included:

- Financial support (**seven HEIs**)
- Sharing best practice (**three HEIs**)
- Use of software (**three HEIs**)
- Guidance on policy/practice of issuing electronic transcripts
- Workshops
- More detailed guidance in QAA's specifications and an email address for queries
- Access to details of policies/practices in other HEIs for benchmarking

Q8 What factors are delaying the implementation of the policy? Tick all that apply.

Responses were as follows:

- Not appropriate, the policy is being implemented (**42 HEIs – 60%**)
- Low priority being given to the initiative relative to other endeavours (**12 HEIs**)
- Lack of agreement with the policy on the part of the institution as a whole (**two HEIs**)
- Lack of expertise within the institution (**two HEIs**)
- Lack of agreement with the policy on the part of significant parts of the institution (**one HEI**)

Other factors mentioned include the following:

- Development of a new student records system (**16 HEIs**)
- Limited resources (**six HEIs**)
- Limits of the current database (**five HEIs**)
- Other priorities
- Introducing a credit scheme and therefore transcripts not possible until then
- On-going university curriculum review

Q9 Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Most amplify answers given previously in the questionnaire.

PROGRESS FILE IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY

Institutional Questionnaire

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES FROM HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

73 HEIs provided completed questionnaires - 65 (89%) Universities UK and eight SCOP (11%) institutions. Of the Universities UK HEIs, 39 were 'pre-1992' and 26 'post-1992' universities.

Q1   Has your institution already introduced a policy on PDP?

Over half of the HEIs (**55%** - 40 out of 73) had not introduced policies. (One institution indicated that it had made the decision not to implement PDP at this time because of lack of additional funding and the absence of advice and guidance on effective practice.)

Of the 33 HEIs that had introduced policies, 19 are 'pre', 10 'post' and four SCOP HEIs. Eighteen of these had introduced policies in 2002.

Q2   Does the approach to PDP adopted within the institution involve

Answers given are as follows:

	Yes, institution-wide	Yes, in parts
Face to face periodic contact with a tutor	**24**	**38 (52%)**
Interactive electronic student support	**18**	**34 (47%)**
Inclusion of work, extra-curricular, domestic achievements	**25**	**32 (44%)**
Student action plans	**27**	**32 (44%)**
Any form of assessment of achievements for extra-curricular activities such as volunteering or work experience	**3**	**37 (51%)**
Any award of academic credit for such achievements	**3**	**23 (32%)**
Requirement for students to undertake PDP	**17**	**29 (40%)**

Please describe

(a) the approaches to PDP that are in place

The main message is that the approach is varied within HEIs. A number of HEIs (six) allow flexibility of approach at the local level but within institutional frameworks/guidelines/minimum standards; while others (around 15) do not seem to require any set requirements, but encourage variety. Where institutions have a relaxed approach, it is because they wish to embed PDP into the curriculum in an appropriate way e.g. to link it with professional body requirement. Other HEIs (12) explicitly stated that they are undertaking various projects which use a variety of approaches. These will then be evaluated to help inform institutional policy and approach.

Six HEIs stated that they have an institution-wide approach. Three have developed compulsory activity in semester one or at level 1 after which PDP becomes 'student-driven'.

Three other institutions have a more 'relaxed' approach whereby students are encouraged, but not required to participate, through the use of an online system.

Two institutions stated that the PDP process will be incorporated into the university-wide personal tutoring system.

One HEI stated that progress files are for students' use but are not verified by the university.

A further six reported that they were at the planning stage and offered no further information on their approaches.

(b) the extent to which different approaches are used in different parts of the institution

Again, variety is seen as important by most institutions whether it is within set guidelines/minimum standards or not. Ownership by programme teams and departments is critical and therefore tailoring to the needs of the programme/subject is encouraged. There is also an expectation that practices will differ, although common goals will be shared. Good practice derived from local initiatives is also seen as important and many institutions mentioned that policies were built on these initiatives.

Q3 Does your institution provide PDP files in a paper-based or electronic format?

42% of HEIs (31 out of 73) provide PDP files in both paper-based and electronic formats. Sixteen provide paper-based and 12 electronic formats only.

Seven HEIs indicated that they provide PDP files in neither format. One stated that no formal recording mechanisms will be introduced until all aspects of the process are "securely embedded". No further clarification was provided by the others.

Q4 For each category of student please indicate

For this academic year your estimate of the total number of students who are undertaking PDP supported by your institution. Please state both the total numbers and the percentage of students in that category that the number represents. If this is not known centrally, please state.

In the main, the majority of institutions stated that this information was not known for the three categories of students (38, 37 and 37).

The year in which it is expected that all students will undertake PDP, indicating whether the date is one specified as part of the institution's plans or is an estimate

Around half of the HEIs (**49%** - 36 out of 73) stated that all students are expected to undertake PDP in 2005.

Q5 Which of the following best describes the basis on which the use of PDP is being introduced ?

Answers given are as follows:

- Institutional decision and policy but local implementation (**42 HEIs – 58%**)
- Institution decision but local policy and implementation (**15 HEIs – 21%**)
- Institutional decision and policy centrally implemented (**10 HEIs – 14%**)
- Local decisions and policies (**two HEIs**)

Others, please specify

One HEI indicated that it wished to see evidence of impact before making PDP compulsory for all students.

Who is leading on the implementation of PDP? Indicate both the single individual or group who have prime responsibility for the leadership role (and provide the title of the individual or group) and those who are making a major contribution.

44% of HEIs (32 out of 73) mentioned that prime responsibility came from a steering group (comprising 19 'pre' and 13 'post'). Eleven HEIs mentioned this group was a sub-committee of the Learning and Teaching Committee or equivalent.

In terms of composition, this varied from institution to institution, but the main players seem to be: those with relevant expertise/expertise who might comprise of faculty representatives, students/student unions, central units/services (careers, staff development, academic registry, teaching and learning service/educational development unit, student support), and senior management.

Other 'prime responsibility' was met by an existing committee (**21 HEIs – 29%**) followed by a particular unit (mentioned by 20 HEIs – 27%).

In terms of a 'major contribution' this was met through a particular unit (mentioned by **23 HEIs – 32%**) followed by an existing committee (**11 HEIs – 15%**).

Others mentioned:

- Schools/departments/faculties (**four HEIs**)
- Externally-funded projects
- Programme leaders

Q7   How might the implementation of PDP be characterised? Tick all that apply

Answers received are as follows:

- Through the deliberate sharing of good practice (**51 HEIs – 70%**)
- Systematically within institutional procedures (**34 HEIs – 47%**)
- Systematically at subject/departmental/school/faculty level (**33 HEIs – 45%**)
- Through a dedicated co-ordinator (**31 HEIs – 42%**)
- Idiosyncratically at subject/departmental/school/faculty level (**16 HEIs – 22%**)

Other comments were as follows:

- Not yet implemented (**three HEIs**)
- Not high on the agenda; must fit in with other developments, institutional culture and student requirements
- Departments are asked to state their intentions and workshops are run to encourage expertise
- It is planned to make PDP a validation requirement of new programmes

Q8   What are the main drivers in the adoption of PDP? Tick all that apply

Answers are as follows:

- To help in the achievement of goals relating to employability (**61 HEIs – 84%**)
- Inclusion in quality assurance reference points such as QAA code of practice and subject benchmarks **55 HEIs – 75%**)
- To help in the general achievement of institutional goals (**53 HEIs – 73%**)
- To help in the achievement of goals relating to student retention (**49 HEIs – 67%**)
- To help in the achievement of goals relating to widening participation (**49 HEIs – 67%**)
- Adoption of PDP by professional practitioners (**42 HEIs – 58%**)
- Availability of advice and guidance on effective practice (**31 HEIs – 42%)**)
- Wishes of students (**17 HEIs – 23%**)
- Wishes of employers (**13 HEIs – 18%**)
- Wishes of the staff of the institution (**11 HEIs – 15%**)

Others drivers mentioned:

- To improve student autonomy, learning and self-reflection (three HEIs)
- Externally-funded projects (two HEIs)
- To focus objectives and goal setting in 1-to-1 tuition
- An externally-driven/national agenda which does not fit with the institution's interest/agenda

Q9   What are the main obstacles to the use of PDP? Tick all that apply

Answers given are as follows:

- Views of the staff of the institution related to workload/resources considerations (**63 HEIs – 86%**)
- Lack of additional funding (**45 HEIs – 62%**)
- Views of the staff of the institution related to other issues (**23 HEIs – 32%**)
- Views of students (**22 HEIs – 30%**)
- Absence of advice and guidance on effective practice (**13 HEIs – 18%**)
- Insufficient quality assurance reference points such as QAA code of practice and subject benchmarks (**eight HEIs – 11%**)
- Resistance to adoption of PDP by professional practitioners (**nine HEIs – 12%**)
- Not seen to be helpful in the achievement of institutional goals (**seven HEIs – 10%**)
- Views of employers (**four HEIs – 5%**)

Other obstacles mentioned include:

- Time/value given to the process by staff/students (five HEIs)
- Problems with student records system (two HEIs)
- Autonomy of school level management and variations in discipline cultures
- Personal tutorial system is already under strain

Q10   Has your institution found the following sources of information useful?

Information on the Centre for Recording Achievement and the LTSN Generic Centre websites was found to be useful

- 'to a significant extent' by 21 HEIs (16 'pre', 11 'post' and three SCOP)
- 'to a limited extent' by 30 'pre' and 31 'post' HEIs

Q11   Indicate the nature of additional support, if any, that would assist in the implementation of policy. Tick all that apply

HEIs would like to see the following:

- The identification of HEIs who had successfully implemented the policy and who are prepared to share their experience (**43 HEIs – 59%**)
- Simpler less technically worded guidance easily available on the web (**28 HEIs – 38%**)
- The provision of a list of consultants, individuals or agencies, who might be contacted to assist your institution (**20 HEIs – 27%**)

Other forms of support mentioned:

- Financial support (**10 HEIs**)
- Evidence to persuade staff/students of the usefulness (**three HEIs**)
- Regional practice-based workshops
- Sharing experiences/practices (through facilitation of consortia)
- Subject-specific guidance and support
- Strong and consistent messages
- Consistency in the use of terminology
- Better information from CRA
- Clarification regarding the 2005/06 deadline: what are the incentives/penalties?

Q12   Please describe the extent to which the introduction of PDP is linked with the institution's overall strategic planning. In doing so you might wish to make specific reference to the following aspects of institutional strategy:

In terms of aspects of institutional strategy:

- Eight HEIs stated that all aspects are inked
- 47 HEIs specifically mentioned links to their teaching and learning strategies
- 15 HEIs to their widening participation strategies
- 11 to their employability policies

Other comments made included

- PDP has been introduced because it is an external requirement (two HEIs)
- There is no wish to make it compulsory because there is no evidence about usefulness
- There are no links at present

Those made are varied. Some amplified answers to previous questions, while others raised new issues, for example:

- There are concerns about standardising PFs across FE and HE
- There is a resource issue; the unions have already been involved regarding staff workload issues
- It is not possible to have 'one fit for all' institutional PDP because of diversity. PDP should not be assessed or be a requirement for progression, and they should be embedded in the curriculum
- Students should be allowed to opt for these opportunities rather than forced to do them; there is no strong pressure from students to do more targeted PDP work
- PDP should be nationally promoted with employers and need to see greater employer engagement in PDP usage; students are then more likely to engage with them
- The lack of resources means that PDP will become optional and therefore it is likely they will be ignored; there is deep scepticism among staff
- A staff resource pack is being developed on implementing PDP that might be of interest to the rest of the sector
- A major project is reporting later this year

Report of the telephone interviews undertaken on the development of transcripts and personal development planning in higher educations

1   Introduction

A total of 23 interviews were undertaken in 19 higher education institutions (HEIs). These comprised nine 'pre' (including one Scottish and one Welsh) and seven 'post' 1992 universities, and three higher education colleges. In the case of four institutions two separate individuals were interviewed on the two issues. The individuals interviewed in the institutions were mainly senior staff in academic registries and directors of learning and teaching units or equivalent. In one case a classics professor was interviewed in his capacity as chair of a working party addressing the development of PDP in his institution.

2   General

In most cases the two developments are being pursued independently.

3   Transcripts

3.1   How is your institution progressing the introduction of transcripts?

Many institutions claim that they have been producing transcripts for some years, their introduction often being linked to the development of a modular structure. Transcripts are generally being introduced at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels with progress being greater at the undergraduate level. There were few references to Continuing Professional Development (CPD); those there were suggested that the same system was in use.

There were no significant resource restraints mentioned, but a number of respondents said that they were constrained by "QAA guidelines" or by their "bought in" student record management information systems.

In general transcript policy is seen to be a centrally managed issue but in two institutions the focus was at departmental level. In most cases it is the Academic Registrar who is responsible. In general, the senior leadership of institutions is not involved.

Most institutions are moving towards mixed paper/electronic transcripts while a number specifically mentioned the possibility of transcripts being available on line and hence on demand. However, one institution pointed to the problems of producing authenticated transcripts electronically.

Two institutions said that their interim transcripts contained details of failed and repeated courses but that the final transcripts did not.

3.2   How are transcripts being driven in the institution?

The almost universal response to this question is that they do not have to be driven because they are happening. Transcripts are not seen to be a policy issue or even a major resource issue.

One respondent said that if there was a driver it was an external one, being the user group associated with the software supplier.

3.3   Perceived advantages and disadvantages of transcripts

Advantages

- Provide a clear, portable and, because of the "QAA guidelines", comparable statement of student achievement.
- Provide a clear record of credits gained through exemptions or credit transfer.
- Make the process of assessment clearer to students, staff and employers.
- Interim transcripts (in the context of a modular scheme) allow an extra level of monitoring in that students can challenge any inaccuracies in assessment.

Disadvantages

In general none were identified although one respondent referred to staffing and systems constraints.

3.4   What appear to be the main resource and other implementation issues arising from the development of transcripts?

The most representative answer was "None, we are already doing it".

One institution expressed concerns about people wanting duplicates and retrospective demands from graduates.

One respondent referred to the possibility that transcripts could be used as the link between PDP and the personal tutors but that would need assessment marks/feedback on progress transcripts to be obtained from the tutor. The respondent did not know whether the institution will move in this direction.

4   Personal Development Planning

4.1   How is your institution progressing the introduction of personal development planning?

For most aspects there was a very wide range of messages from the interviews but perhaps the most common response was that very little progress has yet been made. Against this, however, was the number of respondents who said that some of the more vocationally related departments had been engaged in PDP-like activity for some time (especially in the context of meeting professional body requirements).

Most institutions could point to pilot schemes although these have generally not yet involved significant numbers of students. While one institution said that the approach was particularly appropriate for research students, who already keep a skills log, the majority of institutions had restricted their pilots to undergraduate students. Many respondents said that their institutions had not yet started to consider the extension of PDP to postgraduate students. The only respondent to refer to distance learning students said that no thought had yet been given to their possible involvement in PDP activity.

None of the respondents were able to report that the initiative had been widely accepted within their institutions. On the whole, the reason was lack of knowledge on the part of the academic staff but in some institutions there is a serious opposition. In at least one

case this includes younger students; mature students were said to be more aware of the potential benefits of PDP. A number of institutions are taking steps through staff development activities to reduce the ignorance of staff while some are making use of their course or modular approval arrangements to ensure the introduction of some PDP activity.

A number of respondents said that their institutions, in formulating policies and practices, were extremely interested in drawing on the experience of others.

Institutions are adopting very different stances in relation to the links between PDP and the personal tutoring system. Some believe that PDP should be developed through the personal tutorial system while others take a totally contradictory position. Some institutions are hoping that the thinking that is associated with the introduction of PDP will be of relevance to a review of their personal tutor systems.

A number of respondents said that PDP was difficult to implement because academic staff were not reflective in their own practice.

One respondent reported that a major barrier was the negative publicity and negative experience that many students had at school relating to Records of Achievement (ROA). In contrast, another respondent said that one of the benefits of PDP was that it allowed students to build on their school Records of Achievement. She went on to say that students who she felt were generally positive about ROAs often bring their ROAs to the institution but, as they could not be used, the students felt they were devalued. Conclusions should not of course be made from two observations, but it might be noted that these two contrasting observations come from institutions based in the same city. The institution whose students had a negative experience of ROAs is a university; the other a university college.

A related issue is the extent to which PDP will be integrated within individual modules. A number of institutions are moving towards systems where PDP would be related to core (compulsory) modules; on the whole these seem to be institutions that have made the greater progress, while others are thinking in terms of either a non-module related activity or the creation of a special module that would help relate the PDP material to the drafting of curriculum vitae. A number of those institutions that are not going down the compulsory module route emphasise their desire not to force either students or departments to engage in PDP activity - these tend to be pre-1992 universities.

There is also variation in the form in which PDP records are maintained. At present what PDP files exist are mostly in paper form but most institutions are planning to base them on electronic systems.

Many institutions, especially 'old universities', are reluctant to impose a 'top down' approach to the introduction of the PDP process. The provision of a minimal framework and some central support is coupled with encouragement of departments to integrate PDP into their teaching in ways appropriate to the subjects. Although this approach entails slow progress, it avoids the dangers of compliance and may produce more successful outcomes, but in the longer term.

4.2   *How is the introduction of PDP being driven in your institution?*

In virtually all cases a working party has been established or is to be established to progress the initiative. Typically the working party is a sub-group of the Teaching and Learning Committee or its equivalent.

It does not appear that there has been much discussion of the issues surrounding PDP at the Senate or Academic Board level. Neither is it an issue that greatly engages the attention of the senior academic leadership, although in some cases senior management were involved in the initial introduction of PDP. The most often cited group of staff concerned with driving the initiative were careers staff while in a number of cases learning and teaching officers are also said to be taking a major role. Progress is more advanced in those institutions that have specially designated staff engaged in the development.

It is perhaps noteworthy that far fewer references were made to external constraints such as QAA guidelines than was the case with transcripts.

While one or two respondents said that their institutions were giving high priority to the introduction of PDP, the overall impression was that this is not something that is being afforded high priority.

4.3   *Perceived advantages and disadvantages of the PDP initiative*

Advantages

- Fills the gap between subject knowledge and helping students to become "more rounded learners". PDP will help the institution to define better its expectations of students and make them less tutor dependent.
- Increased contact with personal tutors might help retention. It is also suggested that the reflective process will help students think more clearly about the nature of their higher education experience and help them become more confident learners. It is suggested that this might be particularly helpful for those who "have drifted" into higher education without giving it much thought as well as those who come from a "non-traditional" background.
- Will help students gain appropriate employment, in part by helping them become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and hence more likely to apply for a suitable job and in part by helping them present themselves better in their CV and interview.
- Raises students' expectations, for example if weaknesses are identified students expect the institution to introduce means by which they can be helped to overcome them.
- Builds on students' experience with Records of Achievement.
- Could help rejuvenate the personal tutor system.

Disadvantages

- Impact on the workload of staff, in some institutions leading to trade union resistance. A number of institutions place this potential problem in the context of the tensions between teaching and research.
- Pressures on the curriculum; a reluctance to reduce "subject time".
- Costs, at least initially in that some respondents suggest that once established the on-going costs may not be significant.
- Problems of storage if records are in paper form.
- Some point to problems of assessment (others state that no attempt will be made to verify the contents of the records) and certification.
- Problem of motivating students.
- Lack of objective evidence of the benefits to convince the sceptics.

- The problems caused by different attitudes within an institution. In general the differences are between vocational and non-vocational areas but some respondents suggested that this was too simplistic a distinction.

However, there are quite different views of what PDP is intended to be about. In some cases it is regarded as being almost entirely about employability. In others it is about enhancing learning and academic objectives more generally. There are also quite different views taken as to whether participation in PDP should be compulsory for students and, if so, whether it should be assessed.

4.4   *What appear to be the main resource and other implementation issues arising from the development of the PDP programme?*

Practically all institutions said that the major resource constraint was academic staff time, while a number of other institutions also referred to demands on the time of careers office staff.

A number of respondents referred to the point that either no additional resources were being provided for PDP activity or that the resources would be available for a limited period only.

The problem of initiative fatigue was mentioned in a few of the conversations.

Staff development is seen to be a major issue. A number of institutions point to the champions and enthusiasts that already exist but report on the difficulties of enthusing, or even informing, the remainder of the staff. One respondent admitted that much of the relevant staff development activity was a case of "preaching to the converted". A fair number of institutions mentioned the postgraduate certificate in education and PDP was said to be covered in the courses in all cases; in some institutions the course is compulsory for all new staff and in other cases it was said to be "highly encouraged".

PDP was included in a number of different staff development activities that are mostly of a voluntary nature. A more systematic approach was adopted by those institutions that are developing PDP modules in that it was reported that the validation of such modules provided an opportunity to assess the relevant knowledge and expertise of staff.

On the whole respondents appeared quite sanguine about the costs of IT development related to PDP work. Some, however, did refer to reasonably substantial upfront costs. It must also be remembered that most institutions are at a very early stage in their PDP development and may not as yet have budgeted the costs. A large number of institutions said that their institutions were beginning to explore the extent to which the "Blackboard" system could be used to support PDP activity.

One unresolved question is how far academic staff need to be involved in the PDP process. In general, the view is that in an ideal world most should be. But some would question whether this is realistic and consideration is given to mainly electronic 'do it yourself' mechanisms perhaps coupled with support from Student Services or the Careers Service. Underlying this issue are large questions about the changing nature of the higher education teaching role.