

# Networked Personal Development Planning in Support of Lifelong Learning in the Creative Industries

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## ABSTRACT

The introduction of Personal Development Planning (PDP) has been a major policy initiative for UK HE. The HE Progress File consists of two elements, the Transcript Record of formal qualifications and the Personal Development Plan, which includes both the processes that are involved in supporting the student in undertaking PDP and also the evidence base of student achievements. In response to the policies many electronic PDP and e-portfolio tools have been developed, both commercially and through nationally funded agencies. This paper considers the issues identified by the PDP4Life regional e-learning project relating to the transfer between institutions of learner records arising from e-PDP outputs and achievements. In particular it focuses on issues that occur in support of employability in the creative industries.

## Keywords

PDP, PDP4Life, e-PDP, e-portfolio, progress file, creative industries, employment

## INTRODUCTION

The introduction of Personal Development Planning (PDP) has become a major policy initiative for UK Higher Education (HE) in response to the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) recommendation in 1997 that all students should have a Progress File to enable them to make the outcomes of their learning more explicit and to demonstrate their achievements (NCIHE 1997). The Higher Education Progress File consists of two elements, the Transcript which records formal qualifications and the Personal Development Plan which includes both the processes that are involved in supporting the student in undertaking PDP and also the evidence base of student achievements. The Department for Education and Science (DfES) e-learning strategy takes this PDP element further by proposing that all learners should have a personal learning space by 2008 (DfES 2005).

PDP is defined as “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, 2000). With a start date of the academic year 2005/06 for the full implementation of the PDP element of the Progress File, many electronic PDP resources and e-portfolio tools have been developed, both commercially and through nationally funded agencies to help Higher Education Institutes introduce PDP in the years leading up to this deadline. At the same time, many universities have developed their own extensive websites to support PDP. The majority of these in-house developments are stand-alone systems that lack the facility to transfer learner records and outputs relating to students’ PDP achievements to other systems, despite the claims that PDP is an important vehicle for supporting lifelong learning. In addition to the lack of transportability of outcomes from e-PDP systems, there is also ongoing debate about the value of PDP for developing students’ learning and employability skills.

PDP4Life (Personal Development Planning for Lifelong Learning) is a regional e-learning project funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), that is attempting to identify issues relating to the transfer between institutions of learner records arising from e-PDP outputs and achievements and specifically, those that occur in support of employability in the creative industries vocational sector.

## CURRENT E-PDP SITUATION

The examples of PDP and e-portfolio tools that are being developed are numerous. Those developed through JISC funding include the ‘Personal ePortfolios for Teaching and Learning’ (PETAL) and ‘ePortfolios Extensions Toolkit’ (e-PET) projects. The PETAL project has developed a general e-portfolio tool based on the Open Source Portfolio Initiative (OSPI) and is designed to be useable in any post-compulsory, adult education scenario. The ePET project at the University of Newcastle is adding ‘Web service’ access to data and functionality to the e-portfolio. The e-portfolio was designed to incorporate a high degree of configurability in

recognition of the changing nature of users and curricula and can be customised for a range of different contexts. It is being used as a 'stand-alone' system but has been designed to integrate with Managed Learning Environments (MLEs).

Some are being developed within commercial Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) such as at the University of Dundee. This university has implemented a generic e-PDP scheme, which is web-based and presented via the University's e-learning system. The generic scheme can be modified to suit the needs of faculties or programmes as appropriate and web-based guidance material is available for support.

Other examples of extensive stand-alone systems to support PDP are at Bournemouth University and the Keynote project. Bournemouth's PDP website provides students with a structured process intended to support lifelong learning for all areas of their personal development, including academic, personal and career. A wide range of resources, such as further reading, web links, and other relevant information, is available on the website to facilitate students' reflection, self-assessment, and action planning. Course tutors are encouraged to support students' PDP process throughout their programme of study and ideas on embedding PDP into learning activities are also available from the Bournemouth University web pages. However, this site does not support the importing or exporting of student records of their achievement or allow them to save relevant evidence of personal development in one secure location except on their own personal disc space, and this is not accessible to viewing by others.

As part of the Keynote project, Nottingham Trent University in collaboration with the London Institute and the University of Leeds School of Textiles and Design produced a 'Personal Development Planner', a web-based resource with linked documents that can be edited and saved by the user. It was developed using Macromedia software and encourages a holistic approach to lifelong learning by encouraging users to plan and reflect on all aspects of their life. Staff can customise the PDP process to suit their students and are provided with support on customisation and implementation.

A fascinating portent for the future for the UK is offered by eFolio Minnesota, which is a state-wide e-portfolio system that provides every resident of the State of Minnesota, USA, the opportunity for a free lifetime e-portfolio of 3MB. eFolio is a web-based tool that has been customized with easy-to-use templates for creating three types of e-portfolios: student, educator, and career. Clients use simple word processing techniques in addition to more complex interactive tools such as audio and video and can apply restricted, password-protected access to their e-portfolios or parts of their e-portfolios. There is also a Help and Quick Tips feature to aid users. As of June 2005, over 32,000 users had taken advantage of the service since its launch in October 2002 of which most used the student template. A survey of 500 users by Cambridge (2005) showed that the system was being accessed by Minnesotans of all ages and for a wide range of different uses. Cambridge identified the following six primary functions of electronic portfolios: educational planning; documenting knowledge, skills, and abilities; tracking development; finding a job; evaluation within a course; and performance monitoring in the workplace. Although all functions were used to a certain extent, most clients used eFolio for documenting knowledge, skills and abilities and those who used eFolio's career template were mainly jobseekers. eFolio is unique in that it offers electronic portfolios for lifewide and lifelong learning not only to currently enrolled students and educators, but encourages "all residents of and students within the State of Minnesota to capitalise on their learning before, during and after formal education" (Cambridge, 2005).

However, despite this rapid growth in the range of resources and tools available to support PDP in the UK, there does not appear to be a great demand either from students or from academic staff to make use of them. The experience of students who are expected to use PDP is not resulting in other students asking to participate when they learn about it. This contrasts with the implementation of VLEs in institutions where student demand often results in increasingly rapid uptake of the systems. Academic staff also have concerns about the time commitment involved in supporting PDP, its assessment and its integration into the curriculum.

## **PDP4LIFE - AIMS**

If PDP is to become embedded as an integral feature of lifelong learning and be of value for employment, the achievements, records and evidence associated with its processes have to be accessible and transferable across a range of learning contexts. They also have to be accessible not only to the creator/owner but also to different audiences including employers as well as tutors. It was with these issues in mind that the PDP4Life project was developed.

PDP4Life is a collaborative project linking eleven higher and further education institutions across the South West of England. Led by Bournemouth University, it is funded by JISC through the Distributed E-learning programme and is one of 22 regional e-learning pilot projects that are designed to pilot networked systems or

resources that will be of use to the emerging regional Lifelong Learning Networks in support of vocational higher education (HEFCE 2004).

PDP4Life aims to develop frameworks within e-PDP systems that will enable learners to merge the formal transcript records and informal PDP records of their learning into one single database that builds into a record of their lifelong learning achievements. It is also facilitating the sharing of approaches to PDP processes, systems and assessment across the higher and further education institutions in the partnership, including the piloting of other emerging e-portfolio tools. Finally, because of the context of the Lifelong Learning Networks, the projects were encouraged to support a specific vocational area, so since the creative industries sector is one of the fastest growing areas of the economy in the South West of England, the focus of this project is on learners who are studying HE programmes in the creative arts.

## **PDP4LIFE - THE EXTENDED LEARNER RECORD**

The main aim of project is to extend an existing specification for an Individual Learner Record that currently records formal qualifications, to enable it to accept learner generated records of informal learning from local PDP systems hosted by Higher Education (HE) and Further Education (FE) institutions. The transfer of learners' informal as well as their formal records of learning between institutions is being piloted through the ioNode network, a set of open source tools developed through the work of SHELL, an earlier JISC funded project in the MLEs for Lifelong Learning programme that was led by the University of Plymouth (Croot 2005).

Initially the ioNodes were installed at Bournemouth and two of its project partners. They were tested to ensure that the transfer of formal records replicated the activity undertaken in the SHELL project. Following this, discussions have taken place with staff dealing with student record systems and staff responsible for PDP systems across the partners to map their formal records outputs to the SHELL model and to identify outputs associated with PDP. This information is being used to develop an extension to the learner record specification that will accept informal as well as formal records of learning. The extended specification is then being mapped against IMS/UKLeaP e-portfolio standards. The SHELL project was able to document how the beginnings of a learner's lifelong record emerge from an example of a student studying at two different locations in the South West. Following an initial course of study at one location, the learner has a break before embarking on another course at another institution. The transcript records of both these courses can be transferred between institutions and stored in a central database. Figure 1 demonstrates how the ioAgent packages the information about the course at its location and the ioHub routes it from one location to the other and to the ioDatabase. A portal allows users, either student or administrators, to interface with the records in the ioDatabase. However, in the extended lifelong learning scenario capturing PDP outputs, the learner will also have opportunities to record development arising from other opportunities, for example, from periods of employment and voluntary or leisure activities. The activities learners engage in through the PDP processes of skills identification, action planning, reflection and evidence gathering are examples of the data that has to be captured by the extended specification being developed by PDP4Life.

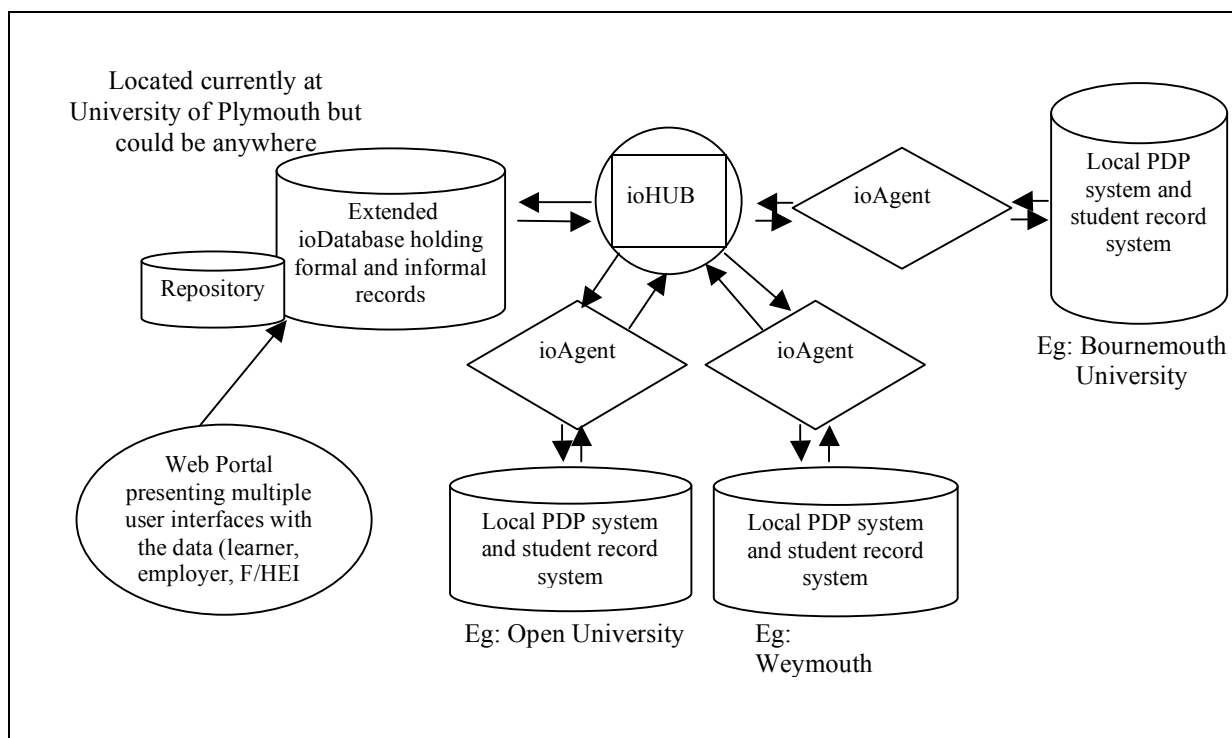


Figure 1: Learner Record Transfer

## PDP4LIFE - EMPLOYABILITY

The emphasis on linking with the Lifelong Learning Networks resulted in the regional e-learning projects being required to demonstrate how they would support the development of PDP for employability. PDP4Life chose to consider the PDP approaches and needs of students and employers in the Creative Industries. However, in the UK, in addition to the lack of transportability of outcomes from e-PDP systems, there is still ongoing debate about the value of PDP for developing students' learning and employability skills. For this reason, PDP4Life is sampling the views of academic staff, students and employers and using this feedback in the development of the specification for the extended learner record.

The policy makers are convinced of the value of PDP for employability. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) asserts that

*"The primary objective for PDP is to improve the capacity of students to understand what and how they are learning, and to review, plan and take responsibility for their own learning. In developing this capacity students will be better equipped to convince employers that they are employable and they should be more aware of what they need to do to stay employed" (HEA 2002).*

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education cites the following benefits in relation to employment:

*"PDP will help students:*

- be better prepared for seeking employment or self-employment and be more able to relate what they have learnt to the requirements of employers;*

*be better prepared for the demands of continuing professional or vocational development when they enter employment.*

*PDP will help academic staff:*

- by creating a mechanism through which career-related skills and capabilities can be recorded;*
- by improving their understanding of the development of individual students and their ability to provide more meaningful employment references on their behalf" (QAA, 2000).*

However, one major research survey by Gough, Kiwan, Sutcliffe, Simpson, and Houghton (2003), although confirming that PDP does support the improvement of students' academic learning and achievement, has found less evidence to support claims that it enhances employability. The study reported that:

*“The findings of the map and synthesis confirm the central policy claim that PDP supports the improvement of students' academic learning and achievement. The absence of research studies that address other claims, particularly those relating to broader self-development and improved employability outcomes, means that these claims cannot be substantiated at this stage” (Gough et al, 2003).*

Moreover, the evidence about employer views on the value of PDP and records of students' achievement in this study appeared to be drawn mainly from the large, traditional graduate recruiters, whose importance in the graduate recruitment market is lessening.

## **CURRENT PDP IN CREATIVE INDUSTRIES SITUATION**

Some studies that have already been undertaken in PDP and the creative industries suggest that further research into the PDP needs of students and employers in this sector would be worthwhile. James (2004) has drawn attention to the fact that research into the perceptions and needs of creative industries students and employers in relation to PDP is very limited, but that the nature of the creative arts disciplines might merit a specific approach to PDP on the strength of their unique educational practices. She points out that traditionally in PDP there is a concentration on text production and that the importance of visual practice in the creative arts needs to be recognised. She also found that “Most in my study struggled with the written aspect of their assignments for different reasons” and thus feels that multiple formats for PDP in the creative disciplines are important and that it is necessary to consider developing alternative textual practices and valuing alternative kinds of writing that are more suited to the creative disciplines.

James also suggests that writing skills are often linked to issues of confidence and/or study skills, and that it may be useful to teach these in addition to PDP. She provides a model of PDP, where responsibility is shared between the programme team, support staff and students by identifying on-programme opportunities for PDP. She recommends supplementing PDP practices with additional workshops or support on self-awareness, personal confidence and presentation to try and avoid some of the difficulties with writing that students experience. Although generic frameworks are practical, they need to permit local interpretation to make PDP processes and outcomes relevant and meaningful to students in the creative disciplines (James, 2004).

Malins & McKillop (2005) conducted an evaluation of GraysNet, a MLE at Gray's School of Art, the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, which was developed to support learning and teaching in an art and design context. GraysNet includes features which support a more discursive approach to PDP, as the focus is more on discussion due to the subjective nature of art and design. They were interested in whether students felt able to express what they wanted in the text-based section, as students in art and design are used to expressing themselves using many different formats.

Their evaluation has shown that students in the creative disciplines are able and willing to engage actively in the process of assessing, and reflecting on, their own learning experience using an online PDP tool. Students varied, however, in the extent to which they were self-managed learners. Providing appropriate structures for assessment and reflection can support them in being more active and more deeply engaged in the process of PDP. At the same time, a certain degree of flexibility is essential to enable students to reflect in the individual ways they find most useful. Furthermore, Ulster University provides an example of incorporating more visual exercises such as mind maps into PDP processes, which is seen as being very beneficial for art and design students and that more research into the use of visual representation in PDP systems should be undertaken (Malins & McKillop, 2005).

Phelps and his team at Goldsmiths University have developed an e-learning software tool, V-MAP, which uses a pre-defined visual mapping template for students to plan, construct and update their e-portfolios as well as enabling them to share, publish and disseminate their e-portfolios to their institutions. V-MAP built upon the need to provide fair and equitable opportunities for learning to all in the support of lifelong learning, and set out to build a set of tools that provided an innovative, flexible and accessible approach to the creation and sharing of e-portfolios (Phelps, 2004). As the initial aim of the project was to provide a software tool that was more accessible to dyslexic students, who like using and presenting information in a concept map type approach, an e-portfolio publishing tool was developed that allowed e-portfolios to be compiled and presented in a non-linear, visual format. Since creative arts students also prefer and are accustomed to presenting information in a visual format, V-MAP could be an interesting tool to use in PDP processes for the creative industries.

## **PDP4LIFE – CREATIVE INDUSTRIES**

With this background in mind, the PDP4Life project seeks to identify the extent to which e-PDP systems and records are applicable to students currently studying courses aimed at careers in the creative industries. In order to identify appropriate questions to ask the students, preliminary discussions have been held with four academic staff who teach in the areas of photography, interactive media, costume and arts event management in one of the PDP4Life partner institutions. Several of these academics are also practitioners in the field in which they are teaching, so they also have a good grasp of the attitudes of employers to PDP.

Overall, the staff were convinced of the value of PDP and did not consider their workload to be greatly increased by its introduction, because the process is integrated into what is already delivered within their course units; PDP was already an integral part of their programmes and a very student centred-activity. Some students, such as the interactive media students, were reported to be already very adept at using computers and establishing web sites and blogs. They were also accustomed to using portfolios for job-seeking and were encouraged to bias their portfolio towards the potential jobs they were aiming for and to relate their skills to specific employers. However, the academic practitioners were less convinced of the value of a central repository holding lifelong learning records and evidence. They recognised the value of encouraging the students to continue to adopt a reflective approach to learning in their professional life, but remained to be convinced of the technical advantages of a single repository and emphasised the importance of having the flexibility for the user to make the PDP truly individual. They felt that it was important that the employer sees a PDP that is succinct and reflects the individual visual stamp of the job seeker.

These comments underpin many of the as yet unresolved issues associated with e-portfolio ownership and access. Effective e-portfolios have both public and private sections so there needs to be a policy regarding who has the right to set the viewing and editing permissions. The formal transcripts of learning are owned by the institution that issued them and other evidence may be owned by employers or professional bodies. However, it is very important that some of the informal areas are private to enable genuine personal reflection which is key to effective PDP. Although Gough et al's study provided insufficient evidence to ascertain whether PDP has an effect on personal factors such as identity, Roberts et al (2005) believe that portfolios can facilitate the user's representation of their own identity, by encouraging the user to make explicit their successes through reflection (with evidence often enhanced with peer or mentor commentary) and to facilitate the development of self-awareness. The raw material produced by PDP and housed in their progress file will provide the basis for a critical commentary on who they are, where they are going and what they have to offer (James, 2004).

A further issue is the size of the storage facility, particularly for creative industries lifelong learners. There are also the issues relating to data protection and copyright legislation. Focus group interviews are now about to be undertaken with around 50 students and with other employers to test out these issues identified by the academic staff/practitioners. The feedback from these interviews will inform the final stages of development of the specification for the learner record.

## **SUMMARY**

During the course of undertaking PDP4Life a number of issues have already arisen that have implications for the future development of a portable and inter-operable individual learning record that can record outputs from e-PDP systems. At a national level, the policy of allowing HE institutions to develop their individual approaches to the implementation of PDP has resulted in a wide variety of approaches and tools in use, ranging from very small scale use in a few departments to a fully integrated and assessed approach with all first year undergraduates. This variety quickly became evident even within the PDP4Life partnership as another important aim of the project is to encourage sharing of information about PDP processes and practice, including the piloting of other JISC e-portfolio tools. Consequently, the specification for the extended learner record has required a broader range of categories than expected both to support this variation of approach and to serve the needs of the creative industries.

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### **PDP4Life Project Partners**

- Bournemouth University (Lead institution)
- Arts Institute at Bournemouth
- College of St Mark & St John
- Dartington College of Arts

- Open University in the South West
- University College Falmouth
- University Centre Yeovil
- University of Bristol
- University of Gloucestershire
- University of Plymouth
- Weymouth College