

Title - Personal and Professional Development Planning

Keywords - Employability, Professional Development Planning

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Activity - Providing students with structured opportunities to self-assess a range of their current skills and attributes and to identify ones that they need to further develop. These will form the basis of their development planning. In other words: Where am I now? Where do I want to be? How do I get there?

Group - Any student at Napier University can choose the Personal and Professional Development Planning (PPDP) module as an elective or as a prescribed option on several programmes.

Aim - To introduce and develop the concept of reflective practice to inform personal and professional development.

Context / Background - The PPDP module is seen as one way of helping students to take responsibility for their own learning, self-evaluate, develop and practice critical reflective skills and to action plan for their future personal and professional development.

The learning outcomes enable the student to:

- Identify key components required for reflective practice and relate this to their own self development.
- Explore strategies for learning and the implications on personal and professional development.
- Review a range of employability skills and attributes and identify their own current status.
- Draw up an appropriate plan with objectives for future action.

Example - The module is divided into two sections:

- **Reflective Learning Practice** - introduces the concept and theory of independent learning and reflective practices. There are opportunities for the student to identify their own learning styles, stressing the importance of being an independent learner and setting themselves useful goals. It explores various reflective models and espouses the value of keeping a reflective learning journal and of recording and analysing their own learning. This learning can come from their studies as well as from outside the university, including sports and leisure activities, part-time work and past jobs. Care is taken to highlight that this learning relates to their

professional life and they are discouraged from disclosing private issues.

- **Developing Skills and Action Planning** - encourages the use of a range of tools to help students with organisational and time management, effective communication, effective reading and writing, using information technology systems to gather data, effective teamwork and leadership qualities, and with problem solving. Finally they learn how to identify and write appropriate objectives that are SMART and to prioritise activities so that they can produce an action plan to meet these objectives for their continuous personal and professional development.

Module delivery: The focus of delivery is on self-directed study, using two workbooks. It is delivered in a choice of two modes:

- **Taught route** - the students choose to attend weekly one hour workshops throughout the semester, so benefiting from discussion with their peers and supporting activities such as role-plays and simulation exercises.
- **Flexible route** - students work independently, supported by attendance at just three sessions, at the start, midway and at the end of the 15 week semester. They receive informal weekly email bulletins that contain useful prompts to learning, ask them questions, give advice and generally act as reminders to help them progress through their studies. Next semester they will also communicate through WebCT discussions.

Assessment for this module has two elements:

- **The personal development portfolio (40%)** consists of prescribed portfolio activities from ten units. This lets the student record their current strengths and weaknesses in a range of areas, give an overview of their skills and attributes and prove that they can critically reflect on their learning experiences from a range of situations.
- **Personal and professional development action plan (60%).** Students must demonstrate that they can write 12-15 'SMART' objectives and an action plan that is appropriate and realistic to their background, personal profile and future aspirations.

Both elements of the assessment require students to reflect on their experiences and on their learning processes, showing that they are able to self-evaluate and to formulate this reflective practice into effective personal development planning.

Other comments - The module has run for several years and feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Weekly email bulletins in particular were found to be useful as a support for student learning. A summary of last year's feedback indicates what students feel works well:

- It builds students' confidence and enables them to reflect on their strengths and identify areas for development.
- The learning journal was seen as a powerful tool for professional and personal reflection, and many students are keen to carry on using this approach post-graduation.
- Enhances students' understanding of the skills required for successful employment.
- Provides a very useful basis for career action planning.

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