The Enhancing Series Case Studies: Student Centred Learning

To Embed or Not to Embed? The Embedding of PDP in the Curriculum

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Summary

This case study is based on the Tourism Personal Development Planning (PDP) Module Evaluation and Redesign project in the Division of Tourism, Leisure and Sport Management. This intervention was funded by the University’s Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (Bridges) with the intention to explore students’ perceptions of PDP and to evaluate their learning needs. This case study outlines some of the key aspects of this project and also captures how our approach to the PDP in tourism at the University of Bedfordshire changed with time. It considers how issues arising out of the work of the Bridges CETL could be incorporated into the redesign of modules to support the overall objectives of PDP. The changes are discussed in the light of various PDP models that are employed in UK universities, and concludes with a set of suggestions for curriculum designers.

Objectives for Changes in Tourism Curriculum

There are various models that enable curriculum designers to build PDP into study programmes. These models are still developing; as Atlay (2006b) points out, they are built on the premise that academic staff should work towards adding value to the learning-teaching experience, helping students take greater responsibility for their own learning and providing more focused and effective support and guidance. Taking these factors into consideration the tourism course team wanted to provide students with an educational structure and process that enables them to develop towards their future successes in personal and professional areas by:

- relating their learning to a wider professional context;
- improving their general skills for study and career management;
articulating their personal goals, enhancing opportunities and evaluating progress towards their achievement.

Rationale Behind the Changes

PDP is intended to improve the capacity of individuals to communicate their learning to others who are interested, such as academic staff and employers, to self-reflect, to plan and monitor the achievement of personal objectives (QAA Website 2004, http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressFiles/default.asp). Within the tourism courses there are modules that deal with improving students’ skills and reflection on their development. The module Personal Development Planning (PDP) in tourism was introduced in 2003 to enhance students’ awareness and understanding of careers within tourism, and to develop knowledge and skills to enable students to make and implement their career decisions, both now and in the future.

The PDP module is of high potential benefit to tourism graduates who, when considering career options, face an uncertain economic environment, the burden of tuition fees, increased competition for traditional graduate positions, and the fact that tourism degrees often have low value within the tourism industry (Petrova and Mason, 2004b). The industry perceives tourism degrees as broad-based, providing generic knowledge, intertwined with business studies and economics, while the tourism industry values highly personal skills such as communication and numeracy (Amoha and Baum, 1997). PDP as a process embedded in the curriculum should support students in facing these challenges and improving their skills.

Context

For the last eight years the University of Bedfordshire has been developing a distinctive undergraduate curriculum model which supports the personal and professional development of students through integrating PDP, transferable and career management skills into the academic curriculum. In 2005 the Bridges CETL was established to build on the experience of embedding PDP processes, incorporating skills in the curriculum, fostering employability and sustaining excellence (Petrova and Ujma, 2006b).

Bridges is involved in supporting PDP implementation across the University. It is intended that regardless of discipline, PDP should enable students to make links and gain a (holistic) overview of their studies, reflect critically, become more independent, adopt a more pro-active stance in their academic study, extra-curricular pursuits and career planning, and capitalise on their learning in a variety of contexts (Atlay, 2006b).

The tourism department has long been committed to students’ personal development and employability prospects. It has been involved in researching its tourism students’ career expectations and aspirations (Petrova, 2001, Petrova and Mason, 2004b, Petrova and Ujma, 2006); the impact of work
experience on student development and the relevance of tourism degrees to the tourism industry across the UK (Petrova and Mason, 2004a, 2005). The department has also worked towards improving students’ career prospects and taken steps to embed PDP and employability in the tourism curriculum in a strand of inter-related modules.

The Changes in the Tourism PDP

Components of the Tourism PDP strand
The tourism PDP strand consists of three modules across the programme. The Personal, Professional and Academic Development Planning (PPAD) module in Level 1 of tourism degree courses was introduced in 2003. PPAD concentrates on the development of academic skills in our new students. Students then progress onto the Personal Development Planning (PDP) in tourism module in Level 2 and are encouraged to take their development a step further, to enhance their career-related and employability skills, through interactive exercises, group activities and individual reflection. The strand is completed at Level 3 in the Final Year Project.

Low grades and poor attendance on the Level 2 PDP module suggested that prior to academic year 2005/6, PDP in Tourism was not maximising the potential benefits for students – or staff. It was also observed that neither staff nor students were particularly happy with the module and did not entirely understand its aims and objectives. To investigate the reasons behind this, an evaluation of our PDP provision was conducted. Evaluation was supported by funding from the CETL Bridges and the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning Phase 5 (FDTL5) project into feedback (Higher Education Academy Website 2008 http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/detail/projectfinder/projects/pf2255 ). Independent researchers conducted surveys of students’ views, observation of teaching practice, focus groups with students and meetings with members of staff involved in teaching and supporting the PDP provision. Following the evaluation processes, changes in the PDP provision have been gradually introduced to the tourism curricula.

Module changes at Level 1
At the same time as the changes in the Level 2 PDP module were undertaken, parallel research was carried out on the Level 1 (PPAD). It focused on the use of feedback by tourism students (Lawrence and Ujma, 2007). This research is not discussed here in detail, as its impact on the PDP module re-design was somewhat serendipitous, rather than carefully planned and designed.

The students’ limited awareness that feedback is part of the learning process at Level 1 was somewhat surprising. As a result of the research, workshops are now embedded in the Level 1 Tourism PDP curriculum aiming to raise awareness and empower students to ask appropriate questions, and to encourage reflection, critical in creating lifelong learning (Hinett, 2002). The course team are now considering ways of optimising feedback throughout the
PDP undergraduate curriculum, so that tourism students leave university as self-regulated learners who can genuinely use feedback and understand its value. This is congruent with the development of life-long learning skills, a part of the PDP objectives.

**Module changes at Level 2**
The re-design of the PDP in tourism module consisted of four stages which included Module Evaluation, Development, Testing and Dissemination of Results. The module evaluation stage began by assessing the provision of the module, establishing areas of strength and weakness, including assessment and student experiences. The outcomes of the evaluation were reported in previous selections of case studies (Becket and Kemp, 2006, Petrova and Ujma, 2006a) and in a conference presentation (Petrova and Ujma, 2006b).

The new module was introduced and subsequently evaluated with the tourism and leisure students (81) and three members of staff in academic year 2006/7. Through a combination of evaluation tools, the new module has been assessed by students, staff and external observers, and additional changes have been incorporated in the current academic year 2007/8 as now detailed.

Firstly, a questionnaire survey of tourism, leisure and sports students was conducted to investigate their career aspirations and steps taken to date in their personal development planning. Further to this, lectures and seminars were observed, and student feedback was sought. Two focus groups were conducted with sport and leisure and then tourism students. The results suggested that students did not see the module as practical or challenging. They felt they knew the basics and the module went over familiar ground. Students also indicated that they liked the opportunity to talk and did not like being ‘talked at’, suggesting that more interactive workshops, rather than the traditional lecture and seminar delivery, might be more productive. Some even questioned whether lectures were needed. Students did like the first assignment - a job study and comparison between skills required for a job and the personal specification of the student applying for it. Although they may have not found the module ‘interesting’, they admitted that the module made them think about their career objectives. The module achieved its aim of enhancing students’ awareness of careers via the assessments administered, but not necessarily through the delivery of content.

The questionnaire survey showed that students are interested and committed to the industry and increasingly more and more of them work part-time during their study, often in a subject-related area. However, they were lacking awareness of industry skills needs and in the ability to assess their own skills against industry requirements. So in redesigning the module we considered academic and employability skills, peer- and self-assessment of skills, and industry demands in relation to skills. (Petrova and Ujma, 2006). Changes have been introduced to the module in three areas: teaching methods, role of technology and assessment.

*Teaching* sessions were changed: lectures and seminars to workshop sessions, with a smaller number of students in each workshop (up to 20). This has given the teaching team an opportunity to get to know the students better.
On the other hand, it was also more resource-intensive, as more staff hours were needed.

Technology has become more important in the module delivery, both in ‘spicing it up’ and in engaging students with new technological solutions. New Breo design\(^1\) offering tools for online reflection and access to notes / handouts and teaching materials, which students needed to use independently between scheduled sessions, played an important part in the new module delivery. New teaching rooms, designed in an office-like layout, introduced an exciting change to the teaching environment. The layout proved conducive to group work (each group having access to a computer) and positively impacted on students’ experience. Students’ views about these changes have been recorded occasionally throughout the semester in their reflections, and in the last week of teaching, in a FacilitatePro online meeting session\(^2\) designed for that purpose. FacilitatePro software was used to get a better insight into students’ opinions of the module, submitted in an anonymous brainstorming session.

The assessments were also changed. The job study now has an added element of action planning to encourage thinking about future career plans as soon as possible. The second assessment was changed from the submission of an application pack to a process of mock interviews, crucial as a training process for real job interviews. Submitting an application pack before the mock interviews has become just one of many steps students need to complete the interview processes. On the day of the mock interviews students are all ‘performing’ on both sides of the process, role-playing employers and employees. The interview panel (a team of students performing as employers) needs to select the best candidate for the job for a given vacancy and provide feedback to the successful and unsuccessful candidates. The students are observed in the process, mainly by staff from the Careers Centre at the university, who also provide feedback on the performance of the panel and individual interviews. The process is not assessed, but reflections on it must be included in the final individual and graded report.

Mock interviews, although very complicated and labour-intensive, have offered students the opportunity to develop as self-directed learners. Interviewing has numerous impacts on the students’ learning experience. For example, it enables them to realise the value of preparation before the session, makes them see how not co-operating in group work may affect other students, allows them to master peer assessment and self-assessment processes and helps to develop reflective practices.

All these changes were introduced in order to help students focus more on their future career choices, and to enhance their opportunities and ability to evaluate progress.

\(^1\) BREO is the name of the University of Bedfordshire VLE Blackboard system and stands for the Bedfordshire Resources for Education Online

\(^2\) FacilitatePro is an online collaborative meeting software designed to support collaborative group brainstorming and decision making processes ([http://www.facilitate.com](http://www.facilitate.com)).
Evaluation of PDP Practices

The effectiveness of the changes introduced in the Level 2 PDP in Tourism module has been analysed through a set of specifically designed tools, presented in a separate detailed report, produced for the Bridges CETL (Petrova 2007).

In addition, the module was also evaluated using the Student Perception of Module (SPOM) Questionnaire, a standard module evaluation tool at the University of Bedfordshire. It consists of 20 questions designed to elicit views about the quality of the learning experience and is distributed during the teaching sessions around weeks 11-12 of the 15-week semester. It is a part of the standard quality assurance procedure. The results are analysed centrally and forwarded to teaching teams.

SPOM results for the Level 2 PDP module (Figure 1) confirm that changes have positively impacted upon students’ experience. The chart shows that the redesigned module is graded higher than previously, in all aspects, apart from three questions related to the module aims, assessment and required level of skill, indicating that the changes were beneficial to students’ experience.

![SPOM Chart](chart-url)

**Questions Asked:**
- Q1. Module runs smoothly
- Q2. Handouts were useful
- Q3. Opportunities to ask questions
- Q4. Module information available
- Q5. Accurate information available
- Q6. Aims of module were clear
- Q7. Module assessment clear
- Q8. Correct level of skill assumed
- Q9. Correct prior knowledge assumed
- Q10. Sufficient time on module
- Q11. Staff made subject stimulating
- Q12. Feedback record was informative
- Q13. Good explanations
- Q14. Usage of knowledge & skill
- Q15. Staff interested in student views
- Q16. Retrieve and use info effectively
- Q17. Comm/present info effectively
- Q18. Apply method to problem solving
- Q19. Work well with others
- Q20. Rate module

**Scale:**
1=EXCELLENT  2=GOOD  3=SATISFACTORY  4=POOR  5=VERY POOR

**Figure 1:** Mean results for the Student Perception of Module (SPOMs) for PDP in Tourism – comparison of results before and after interventions
Further to the changes to the PDP strand outlined above, there have been a number of other developments introduced to the tourism curriculum over the last five years. The following section explores how these changes fit within the various models of embedding PDP in curricula.

**PDP and the curriculum**

Atlay (2006c, 2008a) suggests that five main approaches to PDP in the curriculum have been adopted by various universities. These include a discrete model, where PDP is additional to the curriculum; linked, with PDP in parallel to the curriculum - but not integrated; embedded modular, embedding PDP in certain modules; integrated, with PDP embedded across the whole curriculum (in some cases as ‘curriculum carrier’) and finally, an extended model.

These approaches, as explained in the following sections, are not mutually exclusive, and mixed or intermediate models are also possible. Each has its own value and those designing curricula need to find a model which works best for their subject and, particularly, their students. The nature of the student body, the curriculum, the institutional and wider context and the aims of the course team are all factors which need to be considered when incorporating PDP into the curriculum.

**Model 1: Discrete / additional - PDP as additional to the curriculum**

In this model students are provided with opportunities to engage in ‘PDP activities’ and encouraged to undertake them, but these are additional to the curriculum. Students maintain their own PDP, often in the form of a portfolio, deciding what to include and undertaking their own analysis and reflection. This model might be seen as one which best prepares students for their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) since the onus for its operation is in their hands.

This model existed in the tourism department in the early 1990s. Students were encouraged to keep a paper-based PDP folder and collect information about their professional and academic progress throughout the course, even though these may not have been assessed in any way. Some examples of the activities (surviving to this day) include becoming a student representative or taking part in additional (to the obligatory diet of modules) activities, which may lead to obtaining some certificates and / or enriching CVs.

Additional activities and lectures are provided, for example by the Bridges CETL “U CRe8” Club ([http://www.beds.ac.uk/bridgescetl/events](http://www.beds.ac.uk/bridgescetl/events)) and within the Knowledge Hub ([http://www.beds.ac.uk/knowledgehub](http://www.beds.ac.uk/knowledgehub)). The “U CRe8” Club invites all students to themed creative sessions organised co-operatively by students and staff. These sessions build on practical skills and develop creative thinking and employability in a friendly environment. The ‘Basics of Building a Business’ (B3) is a free lecture series from the Knowledge Hub, running through the autumn and spring terms. The lectures are open to all, including local people, start-up companies, staff and students of the university ([http://www.beds.ac.uk/knowledgehub/entrepreneurship/basics](http://www.beds.ac.uk/knowledgehub/entrepreneurship/basics)).
Students often participate in these options. They search for additional knowledge and skills, but full advantage is gained when students engage and reflect, often telling staff about these experiences during the PPAD and PDP modules.

**Model 2: Linked - PDP in parallel to the curriculum, but not integrated**

In this model, the PDP element and the curriculum are distinct. The linkages may only occur at certain points (related, for example, to activities in certain modules / units) or throughout the course. Students are given activities as part of the course which emphasise PDP and consciously link these to their personal progress.

Before introducing the PDP strand in each level of the tourism courses, a personal tutoring system was tested with Level One and Two students. When the PDP in tourism on Level Two became a core module, the personal tutoring system was replaced by the PDP strand described earlier. Students are encouraged within the PDP modules to take an opportunity to discuss their future careers with a number of academic and support staff at the University, but it is left to them to arrange. They can do so with academic advisors within faculties and centrally in the Professional Academic Development (PAD) section, career advisors, study exchange and work placement and learning resource teams at any stage of their studies, when they feel the support of those various groups is needed. The PDP module serves to an extent as a place where these additional services are being promoted to students.

Sessions in the Bridges CETL, designed to share the teaching activities between staff from different subject areas, helped the tourism course team realise that most of the modules offer opportunities for students to reflect on their learning process and show links between theories studied and world-of-work practices. For example, in sport tourism on Level Two, students examine customer services and are encouraged to write a job advertisement, detailing selection criteria and skills required to perform a particular job in the industry. To do so students need to research the job requirements and the employment market and discuss the selected characteristics during seminar sessions. By doing so, they follow PDP practices, even though they may not realise that this is the case. Within a number of modules (especially those involving group work), students are encouraged to keep a log of activities undertaken in specific projects with a view to strengthening their reflection on the ‘learning curve’ and to realise the ‘distance travelled’ in the learning process. These activities are most effective not as a one-off, but when they are incorporated, structured and supported within a curriculum.

**Model 3: Embedded modular - PDP in certain modules**

The modules designed to provide the main support for PDP may serve to link with material studied elsewhere and the student’s progress file or portfolio. Such modules may have a focus on skills and/or a subject as well as emphasising PDP processes. The tutors for these modules tend to take primary responsibility for PDP development and support within their curriculum area. There may be any number of such modules within the
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curriculum, but they tend to be more likely at higher education Level One or Two. At higher levels students normally take responsibility for their own learning and PDP. This model appears to be the dominant curriculum model emerging in many higher education institutions.

Members of staff are encouraged by various initiatives at the University of Bedfordshire to practise this approach to PDP. The Employer Liaison Scheme offers financial benefits to interested members of staff, as well as opportunities to develop their own personal development planning. That approach has worked in some instances and benefits have been forwarded to students because of practical PDP-related options, introduced to the course diet.

For example the Airport Services Management module is based on the Servisair training programme delivered by their staff at London Luton Airport in co-operation with our Employer Liaison Fellow. (Servisair is a global operator in aviation ground services http://www.servisair.com). Students who achieve good results on the module are offered short-term employment with Servisair during the summer.

Practical modules that develop employability are popular with our students. Airport Services Management gives students the opportunity to experience the realities of working in the industry, and to compare it with their own expectations and dreams of working in the aviation sector. They commented on and discussed their development during the workshops and in the structured reflections in the PDP module, rather then in the Airport Services Management module itself. This practice stresses the value of a structured and supported PDP process, exploring links between modules and ‘real-world’ practices.

Model 4: Integrated – PDP embedded across the whole curriculum
Where the whole curriculum embraces a PDP-based approach and most modules or units involve activities which adopt PDP processes, PDP is embedded in all or most of the experiences of students. In such a model, reflective approaches underpin the delivery of the curriculum. Curricula seeking to address employability issues particularly lend themselves to this type of approach.

So far the tourism PDP strand can be placed somewhere between Models 3 and 4. The PDP strand across Levels deals specifically with reflection on skills developed. These processes often pose problems to students, so to facilitate them the course team works closely with the University’s Centre for Personal and Career Development.

PDP aids students’ ability to look at the course, and skills development, as a whole. It teaches them how to assess and apply their skills within different contexts and to reflect on other modules on offer as part of our tourism

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3 ‘Working in Partnership’ Event was a direct result of the Employers Liaison Scheme and is summarised on http://newsweaver.co.uk/corpnews/e_article000861289.cfm?x=b11_0.w
courses. To enable this process the tourism PDP co-ordinators explore the links with other modules within the tourism curriculum, particularly where there is an emphasis on the development of practical skills and reflection on the overall development of our students. The challenge is to extend this responsibility to all members of the teaching team.

**Model 5: Extended Model**

PDP processes are embedded in the curriculum and also serve consciously to integrate activities which occur outside the curriculum. Such a model is most often found in professional programmes where students are working in an area related to the topic they are studying. Here PDP serves to provide the link between the academic curriculum and these wider experiences.

Usually in tourism, mature students can see clear links between the practice in their jobs and some aspects of the course. Their younger colleagues, despite having worked in a number of tourism-related part-time jobs, need to be prompted to notice the links between the ‘two worlds’, which they often compartmentalise and treat as separate entities. Students have the opportunity to apply for Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), where the experiences from the world of work are credited at the university and count towards their degrees.

The extended model includes negotiated programmes. Independent study modules, where the learning outcomes are negotiated between the tutor and an individual student, are considered mini-examples of this practice and provide a strong personalised input in learning. Similarly, in the Level Three Final Year Project, a relationship between the student and his / her supervisor provides some personalised structure to the research-centred PDP approach.

**Advantages and disadvantages of the models**

Effective curriculum design is dependent on a wide range of factors and each of these models presents distinct challenges to staff and students. The possible advantages and disadvantages of each are shown in Table 1.

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<tr>
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<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrete / additional</td>
<td>Simple, places onus on the student, minimal disruption to the existing curriculum, less resource required.</td>
<td>Not all students will engage, students’ experience will vary; resource and opportunity may be wasted. Doesn’t prepare students for the transition into employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linked Parallel -not integrated</td>
<td>Student experience is more controlled, there is some (but minimal) disruption to the curriculum and can build on existing activities such as induction and tutoring.</td>
<td>Students may still choose not to engage and hence impact on student learning and employability for those most likely to gain may be minimal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded modular</td>
<td>All students will experience PDP at some stage. PDP</td>
<td>Experience may be fragmented, PDP modules</td>
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Table 1 Advantages and disadvantages of different models of PDP integration (Atlay 2008a)

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<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Curriculum carrier</td>
<td>Becomes part of student and staff thinking in all modules and hence an approach to work and study. PDP helps provide coherence to students’ studies</td>
<td>Difficult to get all staff to implement, maybe become so embedded as to be invisible (and non-existent).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provides coherence to students’ learning and enables a high degree of personalisation of the curriculum. Only the staff running the core PDP spine need to fully understand PDP processes.</td>
<td>Resource intensive, student experience can still feel fragmented. Providing time within the curriculum for the PDP spine can be difficult. Students need to engage with the PDP element and see its advantages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Becomes a holistic way of working, draws in work and life experience</td>
<td>Activities beyond the curriculum are varied and uncontrollable, learning will be as well. Some may see this as a problem - particularly those who like to have clear outcomes.</td>
</tr>
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The Advantages of Embedding the PDP in Curricula

Why embed PDP in the curriculum?
Atlay (2008b) lists the main reasons supporting integration of PDP into programmes as follows:

1. **It supports learning**: PDP prepares students for academic study by emphasising learning processes and skills. Students often have a poor understanding of their learning processes and how to maximise their potential. By introducing activities allowing students to recognise their learning styles and allowing them to make mistakes (for example in the mock interviewing process), they get an opportunity to make the most of their learning potential.

2. **All students can benefit from PDP**: embedding ensures equality of provision where all students get the opportunity to become more effective, independent and confident self-directed learners. True PDP processes should help and support the effective learning of a wide range of students and help them to become more confident in the
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‘world of work’ and in life. At the end of the course all students will have experienced similar opportunities, aiding teaching and student management.

3. **More effective use of resources:** if PDP processes are integrated within the curriculum, resources may be saved in the longer term in comparison with an additional optional process, which if repetitive in modules, may waste scarce resources. Changes introduced in the PDP strand in tourism were resource-hungry in the first instance, but the materials produced will be used in the future, saving time and energy, even though contact time and staff hours increased.

4. **Preparation for life beyond university:** PDP processes are widely used in ‘professional’ life as part of continuing professional development and all students need to be prepared for this as well as for life beyond university.

5. **The relationship between PDP and the curriculum**

Regardless of the type of PDP model adopted, curriculum designers often choose to emphasise one particular aspect over another depending on the nature of the issues they wish PDP to address in their own course, or their own perspective on the role of PDP in relation to student learning. When embedding PDP they may focus on one of the three purposes for PDP: student learning, careers and employability, or students’ personal development.

For example, vocational courses are more likely to emphasise educational and career dimensions while more traditional academic courses may emphasise personal and educational aspects. Tourism students tend to value the practical elements of their course, especially if they see the relationship of this to their increased employability. As mentioned earlier, through various staff schemes the university encourages development of practical modules in the curriculum and employer engagement. This aspect is popular amongst staff and students. Sometimes though, as observed in tourism, the vocational aspects are so satisfying to students, that they can neglect educational dimensions of the course. To avoid this situation the overall notion of students taking responsibility for their own learning and development, in a structured and supported way, should be at the heart of any approach to PDP and all three purposes of PDP should be balanced in course delivery.

In a true PDP curriculum, students’ self-awareness, their ability to use feedback and to take responsibility for their learning and development will all be emphasised – at all levels. PDP becomes a philosophy which underpins curriculum delivery and fully embracing the notion of PDP is thus an issue for the whole institution. In this approach the development of PDP can’t be marginalised, or left to individual elements within the curriculum or particular members of staff. In order to work across all areas, there must be a common language and understanding amongst course teams, support services and the student about what PDP is and its value in supporting student learning. The challenge of this approach should not be underestimated.
Challenges
The main challenges, not in any particular order, arising from attempting to fully embrace PDP in the tourism and other curricula at the University of Bedfordshire are:

- Getting the appropriate balance between learning, career and personal development and ensuring that one is not over emphasised to the detriment of the other two.
- Viewing PDP as only about skills and not about process, which can happen, for example, when the careers and employability strand is viewed as being only about students getting jobs and not about acquiring the ability to change roles and continuously develop their careers.
- PDP being marginalised and not seen as an important part of the curriculum or the learning process; this can happen if it is given to specific members of staff and not embraced by whole course teams.
- A PDP curriculum should be more student-centred than tutor-centred. The needs of individual students are as important as the demands of the curriculum. The tutor becomes a facilitator of the learning process and needs to be supported in this role.
- The systematic and sustained staff development that is required to support staff awareness and understanding of PDP and its application. Examples where staff role-model PDP processes in the ways in which they themselves work is good supporting practice.
- Difficulties in getting students to see the value in PDP immediately - the views of students are largely formed from the views and attitudes of the key staff with whom they interact.

PDP as a process
We have listed a number of practices within tourism courses at the University of Bedfordshire. We are in the process of reviewing our curriculum, so that the best student-centred designs are implemented.

The tourism example shows that just because we might have a range of activities that we broadly label PDP, it does not mean that we are necessarily ‘doing PDP’. PDP is not an event or a series of unstructured and unrelated activities but a ‘structured and supported process’. Events such as case studies, employer visits and group work often cited as meeting the career dimension of PDP, only become true PDP activities when students are engaged in a process which actively and consciously supports their learning and the making of connections. There are various examples of processes which can be followed – these are discussed in detail in Kumar (2007).

The questions below guide us in monitoring whether our curriculum allows PDP to be ‘structured and supported’ and they can be recommended for that purpose in any institution.
Some questions to make PDP events a structured PDP process:

- Do students consider what they’ve done before the activity that might have a bearing this time round? For example, if they are doing a group work activity, does the activity start by looking at what group work activities they did the previous year or in their pre-university studies – and what they learned from these?

- Do students assess their own abilities in relation to the task and consider how they might improve? This can be done at the beginning, middle or end of the activity.

- Do students consciously reflect (in a structured way) on what they’ve learned during and/or after the activity?

- Are students helped to make connections between what they learned in the activity and future planned activities or the world beyond their current course? This might be in their personal life, in future study or in employment.

Some questions to make PDP events a supported PDP process:

- Are students provided with clear guidance as to what PDP is and how it is supported?

- Are students supported in seeing the activity in context? Are they provided with guidance on what is different about this activity from similar activities they’ve done in the past, (such as the nature or the level of the intended outcomes)? Are they helped to see how it relates to their wider academic study, to the attainment of learning outcomes and to the world beyond the university?

- Do students know of sources of help (staff, written material, e-learning guides) with the key elements of PDP (task-specific requirements, self-awareness assessments, reflection)?

- Are they guided as to how to keep records of their reflections and activities (using notes, blogs, portfolios, journals)? The recording is not an essential requirement but it can help with contemporaneous and subsequent reflection and is a means of evidencing development.

When activities are set in context and explicitly linked, where addressing the above sets of questions becomes a way of working for staff and students, then we will have a real PDP curriculum – a truly structured and supported learning process. We are still in the process of finding the best match between our own and our students’ needs in the tourism courses, but we hope that the changes introduced and planned for the future will help us to create an exciting curriculum, structured around PDP practices, benefiting staff and, most importantly, our students.
Biographies

Dr Mark Atlay is Director of Teaching and Learning and the University of Bedfordshire’s Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). Mark worked at the University of Glamorgan and at the Open University before moving to Luton where he has worked in a number of areas including quality assurance, staff development, quality enhancement and educational development. His co-ordination of the development and implementation of the university’s curriculum model involving a revised approach to skills development linked to progress files and PDP led to the designation of the university as a CETL for this work (see www.beds.ac.uk/bridgescetl ). His current role involves responsibility for the development of the university’s curriculum and in his spare time he does some teaching on a postgraduate course for new academic staff.

Dr Petia Petrova is lead researcher (scholarship and curriculum) in the University of Bedfordshire Teaching and Learning Directorate. Petia is responsible for introducing initiatives which ensure that staff research impacts on the learning experiences of students across the university. She is also an associate of the university Bridges CETL. Petia was previously a research fellow at the division of tourism, leisure and sport management, responsible for re-designing the content and delivery of the ‘Personal Development Planning in Tourism’ module. She has just completed a PhD on tourism employers’ views of the value of tourism degrees.

Dr Dorota Ujma is a senior lecturer and a field chair in undergraduate tourism studies at the University of Bedfordshire. Previously she taught at the Krakow University of Economics in Poland. She completed a masters degree in Krakow, and a PhD on tourism distribution channel relationships at the University of Luton. Her current research interests are focused on tourism marketing, specifically distribution in tourism and hospitality, health resorts and tourism associations and their role in the travel trade. Dorota is a member of the Tourism Society and the Higher Education Academy, as well as a Bridges CETL Fellow. As such, she focuses on employability issues and links between employers and curriculum, as well as on the processes guiding development of tourism career management skills.

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