

Chapter 10

10.0 INTRODUCTION

Personal development planning or PDP means creating opportunities to think through, in a structured way, questions such as:

- What do I really want to achieve from life?
- What kind of person do I want to be?
- Am I clear about my personal goals and ambitions?
- Am I making the right decisions to get me where I really want to be?
- Am I in charge of my life and my studies - or am I just hoping it all will work out somehow?

It has been recognised that students need structured opportunities to think about, and plan towards, their future. The exact content really depends on you. How much of your time do you want to give now to planning your future?

10.1 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

10.1.1 What are progress files?

All universities are required to offer progress files to students. The term 'file' is misleading. Progress files really include three elements:

1. A process of personal development
2. Personal records of learning and achievement
3. A formal transcript provided by the institution

10.1.2 A process of personal development

Development planning can be a very personal process - or it can be a process required by your employer or tutor. As the word "development" suggests, PDP is something that happens over time. It isn't a last minute thing. PDP works best when you:

- Think deeply and in structured ways about your life and ambitions. What does success mean to you personally?
- Have the right information to make good choices.
- Have people you can trust to share your reflections.
- Have opportunities to experiment and test yourself in new areas so that you have a better understanding of your abilities and limits.
- Have opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills to achieve your ambitions.

In the work place, the personal development process may be linked to your annual appraisal or supervision.

10.1.3 Personal records of learning and achievement

These are your own personal records rather than those provided by the university.

10.1.4 A formal transcript provided by the institution

A formal transcript will be provided by the university, usually in addition to a degree certificate, it records more information about your learning and achievement than the traditional degree certificate.

10.1.5 Benefits of PDP to academic performance

Some advantages of taking a personal development approach to your studies are:

- Gaining a clearer focus to your learning.
- Helping to keep yourself motivated.
- A better understanding of how you learn and how to improve your performance.
- More enjoyment and less stress from your learning as you become consciously skilled.
- More awareness of how to apply your learning to new problems and contexts.
- Reflective thinking skills that can strengthen academic performance.

10.1.6 Benefits of PDP to professional life

- Clearer ideas about the kind of life and work you want.
- Greater confidence in the choices you make.
- Greater confidence in the skills, qualities and attributes you bring to the career of your choice.
- Being in a better position to compete for jobs.
- Being better able to discuss your skills, personal qualities and competences with employers.
- Better problem-solving and planning skills.
- Developing the positive attitudes and approaches associated with successful professional life.

Many employers now expect employees to understand their own performance - and to know how to adapt to meet times of increased workload, stressful situations or conditions of change. Employees are expected to respond well to change. Whilst some employers offer training, it is more typical for employers to expect graduates to arrive ready to manage both their own performance and the performance of other people. Time devoted to understanding what influences your own performance can be very well spent. It is also important to be aware of how your behavior affects other people.

Employees are often expected to show personal commitment to their continuous professional development (CPD), actively seeking out information, training and events that will keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date. Knowing how to learn, and how you learn best, will be invaluable in the work place.

10.1.7 Benefits of PDP to personal life

- A better understanding of yourself and how you ‘tick.’
- Being in a better position to make appropriate choices to meet your aspirations.
- Greater awareness of your needs and how to meet these.
- Greater awareness of the unique contribution you can make.
- Developing a positive, forward-looking approach.

10.1.8 Self-evaluation quiz

Now you know what personal development is about, and how it can help you, why don't you take this self-evaluation quiz to see how effective your PDP is at the moment, and identify areas where you may need to improve. (*See activity section*)

10.2 PRIORITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

10.2.1 Identify priorities for personal development

10.2.2 Identify personal development opportunities

Each university offers a different set of opportunities for personal and professional development.

10.2.3 Create an action plan

Targets should provide clear guidelines for action and be built into an action plan. Download the action plan template to record your own targets. Remember, targets are not written in stone: they should be monitored and reviewed as the project proceeds so that it can be completed on time.

10.2.4 Monitor your progress

You may find it helpful to work to a format to explore your progress on current goals.

10.2.5 Evaluate your personal performance

10.3 MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES

Choosing the right courses at college or university could prove invaluable when you begin looking for a job after graduation. However, what about longer term? Sometimes the decisions you make when you are younger will have an impact on what you end up doing, ten or even twenty years down the line.

- I know what job I want to do
- Taking the right courses
- Extra-curricular activities
- Clear life goals

10.3.1 I know what job I want to do

Some people come to university because they are very clear about their career goals. Many others find it very difficult to decide what they want to do for their future. There are always chances in life to return to education and to take further program. Training is also offered through some jobs. Not everyone wants to spend more time and money on re-training if they could have planned their route better the first time around.

It can save a lot of time and expense to give thought to your future earlier rather than later even if it seems hard to know where to begin. Whether or not you are clear what job you want, you can move forward by thinking about the wider questions that should influence your choice.

Consider:

- What kind of life do you want to live? Will that be possible in the kinds of jobs you are thinking of doing longer term?
- What kind of person do you want to be? What kinds of job would help you be that person?
- What kind of people do you want to be with when you are at work?
- What kind of income you want? How important is money to you?
- What sort of activities do you enjoy? Will you be able to do any of these in your job?

Focus on the Careers Advisory Service

Visit the Careers Advisory Service early in your time at university. Don't wait until they invite you for interview. They are usually very pleased to see students early - before they make the wrong choices for the careers they want.

Careers Services have specialist staff, a wide range of materials about different careers and jobs, labour market information to help you identify gaps in the market and much, much more.

If you need a job while you are a student, there may even be a job-shop run by your service. They usually have access to a wide range of job services on line and through local contacts with employers. There may be special projects or courses run at the university or in the local community that the Careers Service can tell you about.

In some universities, Careers Services offer training in useful skills – or can refer you to someone who can. Some invite local employers or those in professional occupations to give talks about different jobs or what employers are looking for in graduates.

Careers Advisory Services are usually interested in helping you to plan towards your future life rather than directing you to a particular job. They will have many resources for helping you to narrow down the kinds of work that might suit you.

In addition, Careers services can give you advice on aspects of applying for jobs, such as writing CVs, interview practice, and going to assessment centers.

10.3.2 Taking the right courses

Bear in mind that there will be many graduates going for some jobs. Give some thought to how you will stand out.

- A combination of options may make you a better fit for some jobs. For example, if you are studying accountancy or law, which options would help you to become an accountant or a lawyer in the sports industry? For media companies? For medical or pharmaceutical companies? For construction industries? For manufacturing industries?
- An unusual option may encourage some employers to interview you out of interest.
- Check carefully the requirements of professional bodies – you may need to take certain accredited units to progress to further qualifications or into the occupation of your choice. The Careers Service can help you to check the programmes you need.

If you are on a course that offers subsidiary subjects or optional modules or units, you may wish to choose your options from a career perspective. Alternatively, you may want to choose options that broaden your personal interests as a welcome change from your main subject. Remember: too much variety can be difficult to manage, as you need to learn the conventions and background knowledge for the different subjects you take. A little variety can be really useful. It opens up new opportunities and gives you new perspectives on your main subject or on life in general.

10.3.3 Extra-curricular activities

Graduates generally have more employment opportunities and earn more than non-graduates. However, to get the job you want at an early stage in your career, a degree may not be enough. When you go for interview employers may be looking for a wide range of skills and experience. In particular, employers tend to prefer applicants who:

- Have taken on responsible roles.
- Have led projects.
- Have had work experience.
- Speak languages apart from English.
- Have taken on challenges and can describe how they learnt from them.
- Have the problem-solving skills to get on with a new job without too much direction.
- Get on well with other people.
- Are confident in communicating with a wide range of people.
- Are creative thinkers.
- Are good at finding solutions rather than focusing on the problem.

Some program now build opportunities for developing such skills into the main curriculum. If so, it is worth keeping good records of the skills you develop. It is also useful to consider the opportunities for developing these skills outside the curriculum.

10.3.4 Clear life goals

Although it is important to spend time thinking about your academic subjects and your career objectives, sometimes the bigger questions that will really affect you can get left out. For example:

- What do you want to achieve over your lifetime? Is there any one thing you would like to fit into the next 10 or 20 or 30 years?
- Where in the country or in the world do you want to live?
- What values are important to you?
- Who are the important people in your life? How do they fit into your life plans?
- What does success mean for you?
- What are you prepared to sacrifice to get what you want?

Tip

Do something outside of your normal routine - take a journey, go for a walk, join a different class for a day or do something creative that you wouldn't usually do. Then jot down some ideas to the questions above. You may give very different responses when you step outside of your normal daily activities.

10.4 PERSONAL QUALITIES

Discovering what personal qualities you have to offer is a good way to begin your personal development planning.

10.4.1 Valuing personal qualities

- How do you know you have the qualities that you have identified?
- Check with someone who knows you whether they share your opinion of your qualities.
- Which of your personal qualities do you value the most?

10.5 PERSONAL RECORDS

10.5.1 When will you need personal records?

- **For jobs or for further qualification and training**
You may be asked for some of this information many times over the rest of your life - so it is really helpful if you keep good records from as early as possible. Without good personal records, it is easy to forget the details of what you have done. You can waste a lot of time chasing information – and may miss out on valuable job opportunities.
- **For yourself**
Personal records can contain details of personal goals, plans, reviews and achievements. They are a source of material for you to draw upon to monitor your own progress.

- **For your program**

Your programme may require or encourage you to use a log or journal or it may leave it to you what shape your personal records take. This website offers you materials to supplement PDP opportunities at your university.

You may want a paper-based record too - to hold your certificates and references. You may like to include your diary, letters, photographs and pictures as part of your records. Some program such as counseling and creative program encourage this.

Tips

Few people look forward to updating their records. It is easy to keep putting it off. However, many people find it useful to have good personal records and enjoy looking back over them in the future. So make an event of it. Put some good music on or have a good TV program on in the background. Make yourself a favorite snack. Don't try and rush it.

Put time aside three or four times a year to update your personal records. Write these dates into your diary. You won't regret it. You will save a lot of time and effort finding key information when you need it.

Your records say something about you. Personalize them as far as you can so you can take pride in them.

10.6 APPLYING FOR JOBS

Applying for a job can be a long process, but it is important to do your background research –getting a job isn't just about filling in the application form!

- Skills required by employers
- Job applications
- Writing a CV and a cover letter
- Competence-based job applications
- Evidence of skills and competence
- Health and safety issues
- Equal opportunities issues

10.6.1 Skills required by employers

The degree classification is only one thing employers take into consideration and it may be the least important. Forty per cent of graduate jobs are open to graduates of any subject so the degree subject may not be significant to the job you enter.

Tip

Send off for job applications for jobs in a career that interests you. These will have person specifications that list the kind of skills, experience and personal qualities that employers require.

Draw up a list of the skills and qualities they ask for. Which ones come up the most often for the areas that interest you?

Where can you develop those skills and qualities?

10.6.2 Job applications

There are several stages in applying for jobs. If you have applied successfully for many jobs, you may not need to develop your knowledge and techniques further.

10.6.3 Writing a CV and a cover letter

A CV and cover letter can often be an employer's first contact with you, and therefore it is where they make that all-important first impression. This section will give you advice on the different types of CVs and some top tips for a cover letter.

- Functional CVs
- Chronological CVs
- Targeted CVs
- Cover letter tips

a) Functional CVs

Functional CVs focus on skills rather than on dates or places of employment. They are useful if you:

- Are changing careers and some of your previous experience is not relevant to your target job.
- Want to highlight specific skills rather than list your life history.

The functional CV format classifies information according to skills. The most marketable information is presented at the front of the document. The functional format allows for selective organization of information, and enhances your ability to customize the resume for the particular position.

Sample layout of functional CV

Name Your full name.

Address Your current residential or business address.

Phone numbers Home and or business numbers.

Email address Your business or personal email address.

Skills and abilities List the major skills you have acquired from your experience, which are relevant to the job you seek.

Practical/Technical List skills that show your ability to tackle the tasks that your target job requires.

Skills These include knowledge of software and operating systems, and languages.

Education List your educational qualifications with most relevant first. Include all professional development and short courses that you attended.

Professional Memberships Briefly list them, if relevant.

Awards and Achievements List, only if relevant to the new job.

Employment History Name of employer, position (job title), period of employment.

Interests List, only if relevant.

b) Chronological CVs

The chronological format lists education and work experience in reverse chronological order (most recent items listed first). Chronological resumes are useful if:

- You have a steady work history.
- All or most of your recent work experience is relevant to the position.

Do not use a chronological resume if:

- Only one or two jobs in your work history are relevant to the position sought.
- You have a complicated or diverse work history.
- You have many gaps in your work history that are difficult to explain.
- You are pursuing a career change and wish to highlight transferable skills.

Sample layout of chronological CV

Name Your full name.

Address Your current residential or business address.

Phone numbers Home and or business numbers.

Email address Your business or personal email address.

Education List your educational qualifications with most recent first.

Employment History Name of employer, position (job title), period of employment, duties, achievements. Begin with current or most recent position and work backwards.

Practical/Technical List skills that show your ability to tackle the tasks that your target job requires.

Skills These include knowledge of software and operating systems, and languages.

Professional List, if relevant to job.

Memberships List, if relevant to job.

Interests List, if relevant to job.

c) Targeted CVs

Targeted resumes follow the specifications given in an application package or job advertisement. They are similar to functional resumes, but concentrate on skills that are directly relevant to the requirements listed in the vacancy. When writing a targeted CV, answer the question or follow the formatting directions given by the recruiting company.

Cover letter tips

Ideally, the cover letter should not exceed four paragraphs (one or one and a half page), and should cover the following material:

Opening paragraph *Indicate the purpose of writing.*

Second paragraph *State relevant skills and experience.*

Third paragraph *Demonstrate your knowledge of the company or organization and show how you 'fit in.'*

Fourth paragraph *Close with confidence and anticipate an interview.*

Here are some general tips for writing an effective cover letter:

- *Always type your cover letter, unless the job advertisement specifically asks for a handwritten one. A resume is always typed, no matter what.*
- *Keep paragraphs short.*
- *Adapt the content to the particular organisation and job position for which you are applying. That is, show that you are “one of us.”*
- *Use bullet points and lists to highlight information.*
- *Include contact details (name, address, phone number, fax, email), either in a letterhead or in the concluding paragraph.*
- *Don't point to any of your weaknesses. Instead, match your skills and experience to the requirements of the position.*
- *Don't refer to personal interests or hobbies unless they are directly relevant to the position, or you share an interest with the recipient of the letter.*
- *Don't use sarcasm or irony.*
- *Don't criticise a former employer.*
- *Don't send a photocopy of a cover letter. Your signature must be original.*

10.6.4 Competence-based job applications

Some employers only accept competence-based applications.

Typically, competence-based applications ask you to complete a specific set of questions on an application form. Most questions will ask you to give evidence of your experience and abilities in specific skills that the employer wants in the successful candidate. The aim is to choose the person who will be most competent in the job.

For competence-based applications, you will probably be told NOT to send additional sheets or a CV. The application form does not usually contain much space so you need to be very succinct in summarizing your competences and use that space well.

Usually, such jobs are open to a very wide range of people. It helps if you are very clear about which of your skills and qualities transfer well to different contexts.

Interviews for these jobs are likely to follow the same pattern. Most questions may relate to the list of key competences that the employer has outlined in the information sent to you about the job.

Competence-based applications are time-consuming, so it is useful to keep good and updated personal records so that you can identify information quickly. The competence sheets on this website give good practice for competence-based applications.

10.6.5 Evidence of skills and competences

10.6.6 Health and safety issues

Health and safety issues take on great importance in the work place because employers have legal obligations. All employees also have obligations for health and safety. It is worth considering health and safety issues in order to take care of your own safety and the safety of others. If you go for a job, employers may check your understanding of health and safety issues.

10.6.7 Equal opportunities issues

Equal opportunities issues take on great importance in the work place because employers have legal obligations. Equal opportunities apply to everyone. They cover matters such as understanding our rights and responsibilities, having reasonable adjustments made on our behalf if we have or acquire a disability, being treated fairly irrespective of our racial heritage or gender. It applies to men and women. New legislation covers additional issues such as sexual orientation and age. Nobody feels good if they are treated unfairly - and most people don't like others to feel bad because of anything they have done or said without thinking of the impact.

It is worth considering how the legislation applies to you and to occupational areas that interest you. You may be asked specific questions about equal opportunities when you are interviewed for jobs.

10.7 STRUCTURED REFLECTION

Reflection can take many forms. Daydreaming or keeping a diary of your thoughts are ways of reflecting on your experience in unstructured ways.

Structured reflection is simply reflection, which has prompts, questions, activities or organized discussion to help you to think more deeply about an issue. The questions and charts provided on this website, for example, help to structure reflection about your personal development.

All universities are required to provide opportunities for structured reflection at each stage of study.

- Recording reflection
- Taking the time
- Forming your own judgement
- Using feedback well
- The 'reflective practitioner' approach

10.7.1 Recording reflection

Unstructured reflection can be as useful as structured reflection.

Your university may require you to keep a log, journal or portfolio and give you very precise directions about what to include and how to present it. Alternatively, you may be asked to devise your own records and presentation.

It is still a good idea to keep a diary or journal even if you don't have to do so as part of your program. It can seem like an effort to write entries on a regular basis, but the reward comes when you read these back several months later. You will be surprised at the things you have forgotten - and the changes you may notice in yourself over time. Entries don't have to be long.

Tips

Purchase a book that is light and easy to carry around.

Set yourself 7 minutes every day, at the same time, to write an entry about whatever is going on for you at the time.

Write about things that are relevant to you – things you are enjoying, things that worry you, any problems you have getting on with people and your ideas for dealing with these, ideas you have for your life, thoughts you have about topics covered on your programme.

10.7.2 Taking the time

Usually, we are too caught up in what we are doing to have a really good perspective on how well we are doing and the effect we are having on the people around us.

Fortunately, we can stand back occasionally and reflect about such things as our aims, responses, feelings and performance. Well-developed skills in reflection can help us to:

- Gain a more in-depth and honest picture of us.
- Become more aware of our hidden motivations, our thinking styles, and of how we appear to other people.
- Develop a better understanding of what affects our own performance and progress.
- Develop our insight and judgements.
- Gain more control over our own thoughts, emotions, responses and behaviour so that we are in a better position to achieve what we want to achieve.

10.7.3 Forming your own judgment

As a student, you are expected to take responsibility for your own progress. University students are expected to develop into independent thinkers, capable of evaluating their own performance, drawing conclusions about what they did well, what could have been improved, and how to improve. It is important to develop confidence in your own evaluation and judgment of your work rather than relying on evaluations by tutors. This will help you develop your critical thinking - and will be invaluable if you have a responsible job now or in the future.

10.7.4 Using feedback well

You need to be clear in your own mind about what is required and see for yourself whether or not you have achieved this, irrespective of what anybody else thinks. Your evaluations should be based upon sound criteria rather than a general feeling that you are right and your lecturers are wrong. Consider the differences between your own evaluations and the feedback you receive from others. Those differences may hold important clues about how to achieve better grades and to improve your performance generally. Don't throw that invaluable feedback in the bin without reading it first!

10.7.5 The ‘reflective practitioner’ approach

Many areas of employment now use a ‘reflective practitioner’ approach. This is built into the work cycle in some way, such as through reviews or appraisal. Typically, this means taking personal responsibility for matters such as:

- Your continued professional development (CPD).
- Making a fair and reasonable evaluation of your own work – this might affect your pay.
- Knowing your own strengths and where you can make a valuable contribution to the team or the business.
- Recognising your personal limitations and identifying the training you need to improve your performance.
- Recognising the effects of your own behaviour on others and taking responsibility for your actions.
- Knowing when you are making useful contributions to team discussions – and when you are not being helpful.
- Identifying ways of improving individual and team performance.

ACTIVITY: SELF-EVALUATION QUIZ

Do I need personal development planning?

Self-evaluation

For each of the following statements, rate your responses as outlined below. Note that 'agree' carries no score.

Rating

Insert your score in the box then check your rating below. Please note you will be taken to another page to validate your results.

- 0 = 'agree'
- 1 = 'sort of agree'
- 2 = 'disagree'
- 3 = 'don't know'

I know what personal development is	<input type="text"/>
I have good personal records of my life and achievements	<input type="text"/>
I have clear life goals	<input type="text"/>
I know what job I want to do	<input type="text"/>
I know what courses I need to take to get the job I want	<input type="text"/>
know what extra-curricular activities I need to do to help me get the job I want	<input type="text"/>
I know what skills are required by employers for the kind of career that interests me	<input type="text"/>
I have an up-to-date record of education and training	<input type="text"/>
I have an up-to-date record of my employment history and work experience	<input type="text"/>
I have an up-to-date profile of my skills and personal qualities	<input type="text"/>
I know my personal qualities	<input type="text"/>
I can easily give examples of where I demonstrate my personal qualities	<input type="text"/>
I am confident about all aspects of applying for a job	<input type="text"/>
I know what is meant by a competence-based job application	<input type="text"/>
I have detailed personal records of my key competences	<input type="text"/>
I know what my priorities are for personal development	<input type="text"/>
I have an action plan for my personal development	<input type="text"/>
I know the PDP opportunities that are open to me	<input type="text"/>
I regularly monitor my own performance	<input type="text"/>
I regularly undertake a formal evaluation of my performance	<input type="text"/>

I am good at 'structured reflection'

I am clear about the range of services offered by the careers advisory service

I have a good understanding of health and safety issues

I have a good understanding of equal opportunities issues

I know where to go for more information about PDP

Score = 0

Double your score to get a percentage.

Interpreting your score

Although this is only a rough guide, you now have a personal development 'needs' score.

Zero: you don't appear to need PDP at present. However, this is likely to change within a few months or even weeks, as your circumstances change.

0-30%: you have some PDP needs. How essential is it to you to address these PDP issues?

30-60%: PDP is likely to be of use to you - the higher your score, the more likely it is that you need to undertake personal development. This website can help you explore this further.

60-100%: this is a high score. Your PDP needs appear to be high. This website can help you get started but it is probably a good idea to speak to a careers adviser sooner rather than later.

Personal development is an ongoing process, in which you need to:

- Identify priorities for personal development
- Identify personal development opportunities
- Create an action plan
- Monitor your progress
- Evaluate your personal performance