

# Personal development plan

Business



Personal Development Planning Made Easy! A guide to recording experience and learning from it What is Personal Development Planning? Studying at university is not just about learning a lot of things that are fascinating in themselves but — at least in the case of most Arts subjects — rather disconnected from ‘ the real world’.

At the same time as you develop your knowledge of your subject and the skills required to perform well in it, you’re actually developing a whole range of skills and intellectual abilities that can be transferred to other areas of life, including your future employment.

Arts subjects don’t generally equip you for a specific job; they actually equip you to undertake almost any job that doesn’t required specialised scientific training. Moreover, university life is intended to present you with all kinds of chances to develop yourself as an individual with a range of interests and experiences, and not just as someone reading books, writing essays and taking exams. An Arts graduate should be versatile, imaginative, critical, flexible, incisive, confident and articulate, and so ready for any challenge or task — if only you can recognise these abilities in yourself.

This is where Personal Development Planning (PDP) comes in. With an ever-increasing number of well-qualified graduates entering the labour market each year, it is crucial to your success after completing your studies that you know exactly what skills you have to offer — academic, work-related and personal — when you start applying for jobs, and that you can provide solid evidence of those skills.

Your studies will have helped you develop crucial transferable skills and personal attributes, and so will many of your extra-curricular activities; you just have to be able to articulate these to prospective employers.

PDP helps you to keep track of what you've learned, how you learned it, and what you might do with that learning later on; it can also help you to plan for the future and to identify what skills or attributes you may need to develop in order to achieve your goals. Getting involved with PDP should help you to:

- Consider what you really want to do
- Make the right academic, personal and professional decisions
- Set personal goals and targets
- Identify programmes and extra-curricular opportunities and training to help you develop your skills
- Plan ahead to achieve your goals
- Evaluate your own progress
- Record different kinds of achievement

Personal Development Planning is one part of your university ' progress file'. This is not an actual document but a combination of any personal development planning activities that you engage in and record, as well as the formal academic transcript of your marks that your university provides you with at the end of your studies. It offers a detailed, rounded account of everything that you have achieved at university.

In recent years, universities have become more aware that their students need to be highly employable, and that means not just graduating with a good degree but being able to demonstrate a whole range of skills and abilities that will help you to gain and maintain the employment you want.

Getting used to setting targets for yourself and evaluating your progress now will stand you in good stead for success in your future working life, and one

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of the key aims of an Arts education at Bristol is to help you realise that learning is a truly life-long activity, not something that stops when you leave university.

We want, therefore, to encourage you to reflect regularly on your performance; we aim to provide useful guidance on how to go about this, for example through this guide, and to provide regular opportunities for reflection and discussion, above all through the personal tutor system. Ultimately, you have to take responsibility for your own personal development, but we'll do our best to help and support this process. Do I need Personal Development Planning? Try this self-evaluation exercise.

For each of the following statements, rate your responses: strongly agree = 0; agree = 1; sort of agree = 2; disagree = 3; strongly disagree = 4. 1.

I am certain that I can keep myself motivated towards achieving my degree for the next few years 2. I am very clear what my goals are for the next five years 3. I am confident that I have planned sufficiently to enable me to achieve my goals 4. I am very clear how my degree fits into my life plans 5. I am clear which skills employers are looking for 6.

I am confident I have the skills employers are looking for 7.

I am very clear about the importance of reflective activity to professional life 8. I am comfortable that I am able to undertake structured reflection without guidelines 9. I am confident that I can develop an effective strategy to meet most circumstances 10. I am confident that I can set well-formed targets 11. I have a clear understanding of how to evaluate my own performance 12. I

am confident that I know how to improve my performance in most circumstances 13.

I know how to apply my expertise in one area to a very different field 14. I am confident that I can see myself as others see me 15. I am confident that I have effective listening skills 16. I am an assertive person 17. I am a good ‘self-starter’ 18. I am aware of the best roles for me to fill for team work 19.

I am confident at problem-solving 20. I am confident that I know how to make best use of my mind 21. I am confident that I will take a creative approach to most problems 22. I am confident about making competence-based applications for jobs 23.

I am always very clear about which skills I am developing 24.

I can see clearly how my skills apply to a wide range of other situations 25. I know where my own ‘developmental edge’ lies The higher your total score, the more likely it is that you need to undertake some form of personal development. Even if you feel that you do not need this right now, this may change over the course of weeks or months, as you need to keep self-evaluating and identify key areas for development as your circumstances change. Learning From Experience

If the self-evaluation exercise has left you feeling that you need a lot of personal development — or that you don’t even understand what half the questions are getting at — don’t worry. Chances are that you already have a great deal of learning behind you to draw on; you just need to learn how to articulate it clearly. We all learn from experience, and PDP will help you to

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get into the habit of regularly recording that learning as well as thinking about how it could be applied in the future.

### 1 Having a concrete Experience Doing 4 Testing 3

Conceptualising Concluding This is known as Kolb's Learning Cycle. A simple example is that of a young child's first experience with fire: Stage 1 Child puts hand in or near to fire and feels pain. Stage 2 Child reflects on what happened. Stage 3 Child begins to form a theory or conclusion that contact with fire produces pain. Stage 4 Child may approach the fire again in order to test out or check the theory that fire equals pain.

Fans of The Simpsons may recall the episode in which Lisa runs an experiment on 'Is my brother dumber than a hamster?' — illustrating the perils of not learning from experience. There are two challenges involved. Firstly, most of us don't take the time to think about and reflect on what happened, what went well and what didn't — we'll look at how to reflect critically on our own performance a bit later on. Secondly, learning through experience can be disorientating and sometimes stressful, especially when things don't go according to plan. To progress and develop means reviewing the ways in which we usually act, but change can be difficult.

If you are looking to improve your performance in a particular area (get higher essay marks, give a confident presentation, be a better listener) this often means altering your existing habits and patterns of doing things. Basically, if you keep doing things in the same way as you always do them, you'll keep getting the same results... Make some small changes, and things

might turn out quite differently, and hopefully in the way that you want them to. This is known as leverage — making small changes to get big results.

Spending some time recording what you are doing, what results you're getting and then planning ahead is a process of critical reflection. If you take on board the fact that employers cite self-awareness as a crucial graduate skill, you can see how important this process is to your future prospects, as well as helping you to improve your academic learning right now.

Reflecting On Your Learning Many areas of work now require a 'reflective practitioner' approach which is built into the work cycle in some way, such as through reviews or appraisal.