

# Welcome...

## The opportunities and challenges of Burgess...

### Rob Ward, Director, the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA)

The final report of the Burgess Steering Committee presents some real possibilities and interesting challenges. In many places it certainly talks the talk – *‘the summative judgement thresholds distract and detract from information that conveys a fuller understanding of the skills and knowledge that the student has acquired. Ideally, it would be replaced with a more sophisticated approach that better represents the outcomes of student learning and encourage personal development and understanding in the context of lifelong learning’*. Whilst seeing the proposed Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) as primarily an academic document, it opens the possibility of the formal recognition by institutions of a wider range of student achievement, a recognition explicitly welcomed by the Association of Graduate Recruiters, amongst others. It also emphasises the importance of Personal Development Planning as a *‘vehicle for measuring and recording the skills and achievements that students acquire through extra-curricular activities’*. So far so good. We must however, be very wary that this does not get translated into seeing PDP as linked only to such an extra-curricular focus, when the evidence we have suggests that for PDP to support effective student learning a focus upon such learning, whether via a tutorial system based upon academic development and feedback or by being embedded within the credit bearing is the key element. We would also want to avoid any sense that PDP is restricted solely to concerns with *‘student-generated/driven information’*, when it is already so much more than that. A number of disciplines, amongst them health care, medicine and education, and the work of countless effective practitioners already provide good examples here of how PDP is built into the curriculum, and is often assessed in one way or another. It is a key – perhaps the key – response to the concerns of employers - also reported by Burgess – that *‘many graduates cannot effectively articulate their experiences and achievements and their relevance to the post for which they are applying’* (by which we need to emphasise all their experiences and achievements - including those related to the generic skills contained within every one of the subject benchmark statements - not only those from beyond the curriculum). Finally, we also need to be sensitive to the possibility that the current reported separation between

institutional transcripts and PDP practice may be a historical picture that may not survive as records are made available electronically to support formative decision making by learners.

The risk that institutions may seek to use some of the language of Burgess to restrict PDP practice places considerable importance on the forthcoming revision of the PDP Guidelines. As Jayne Mitchell’s contribution to this newsletter indicated this holds out the promise of being intensely consultative. It is therefore in the hands of us all to make sure the key messages about embedding PDP processes as core learning activities in the formal curriculum, and avoiding any move to restrict such practice to important but less central areas for some academic colleagues, are heard, understood, and acted upon! The evidence base reflected in our growing bank of case studies, evaluations and above all in our bones will need to be deployed to good effect as our work goes forward.

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## Using e-portfolios to help students reflect upon and improve their learning: A research project

Serena Bufton, Susannah Diamond, Ester Ehiyazaryan, Damien Fitzgerald and Richard Pountney

### Sheffield Hallam University

In 2006, Sheffield Hallam University became a participating institution in the U.S.-based Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research. In 2007, with funding from the Higher Education Academy and the support of the Centre for Recording Achievement, many more UK based institutions became involved. Each institution commits to a three-year research project on e-portfolio learning. As our research is now reaching the end of its first year, this is a good opportunity to share our experience so far.

The Coalition aims to create a body of knowledge about impacts of electronic portfolio use on student learning and educational outcomes. Our particular research focus is: *'How can we use e-portfolios to help students to reflect upon and improve their learning?'*

Our research is longitudinal and involves students from three degree programmes (two undergraduate and one postgraduate), each of which represents a different dimension of professional development:

- The Applied Social Science (ASS) Programme (undergraduate, with approximately 250 students per cohort). Students study for a range of single-honours and joint-honours degrees in the social sciences. Many have no specific career in mind when they enrol on their courses, and we are exploring their induction/transition to undergraduate study and on career orientation and preparation in later years.
- The Early Childhood Studies (ECS) Programme (undergraduate, with approximately 150 students per cohort). Here we are focusing on professional and career orientation from their first year and onwards as these students have a broadly-defined career goal from the outset.
- The e-Learning Multimedia and Consultancy (ELMAC) Programme (postgraduate, with approximately 63 students in total and 33 alumni involved). These students are already established in a career and we are interested in their post-graduate professional development.

Our data collection began in 2006/7 with the first-year ASS students. In this first phase, our sub-questions were as follows:

- How do students **interpret** feedback on their work and situate this feedback within a narrative of their learning experiences?
- How do students **respond** to feedback in their planning of future learning?
- How do they **evaluate** their progress?
- How can we develop our e-portfolio assessment to assist the above?

The research focus implies a primarily (but not necessarily an exclusively) qualitative approach. Our data collection so far includes:

- A baseline questionnaire survey of incoming students to assess their experience of, and feelings about, electronic forms of communication and learning.
- A detailed analysis of students' assessed e-portfolios, which contain reflections on, and analyses of, their progress and subsequent action plans;
- Focus-group meetings with sample groups of students and tutors.

Data collection from students on the ECS and ELMAC programmes will begin in 2007/8. All data collection will be completed during 2008/9.

Whilst our early findings locate the reflective abilities of our first-year students mainly at a 'beginning' level, we are starting to identify interesting differences between students - for example, in their ability to analyse and critically interrogate feedback; identify wider criteria by which to assess progress; make use of evidence to substantiate claims of progress; formulate appropriate development strategies in response to feedback; and evaluate the degree of success of these strategies. In addition, it appears that e-portfolios are initially more empowering for some students than others: whilst some are already using them to develop a positive, holistic view of their progress towards specified goals and their confidence as learners, others appear to have focused more narrowly on their weaknesses and shortcomings.



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## PDP for Learners in Employment

### Gill Scott and Roger Clark Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance

Providing appropriate provision that is employer-led and meets employer (and employee) needs is a key focus of the work of Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance. The GMSA is a membership organisation of six universities, 22 colleges, work-based learning providers and other key stakeholders. The GMSA works collaboratively in partnership to increase the progression of vocational learners and those in the workplace into and through higher education.

An implementation of the GMSA partner institutions' credit accumulation and transfer agreement (CAT) is being realised through the ModCAT project (a reference to a catalogue of modules offering Credit Accumulation and Transfer). This will offer employers and employees a range of accredited CPD modules at higher education level. The modules of learning from different institutions can be built into bigger awards providing the flexibility and range of expertise from a wide range of higher education offerings.

The modCAT project throws up real issues in how the potential learner will navigate their way through an increasingly complex range of opportunities building their own portfolio of higher level learning in a coherent way. A structured PDP process can offer the possibility of leading the individual learner through such complexity.



One significant challenge in developing these processes concerns the differences between employment sectors. In the Creative Industries sector the focus is on the individual managing their own professional and personal development in an industry of freelancers, micro businesses and short term contracts. There is a blurring of boundaries between employer and employee. This state of flux is the norm within this sector. It is a very different context for PDP than the Healthcare sector where there are clearly defined skills linked to specific job roles.

The JISC funded SOLVS project is taking on this challenge of supporting this diversity of learners in work. It is developing a learner-centric portal with elements that support self-discovery, development and self-presentation. The organising principle of the SOLVS portal is "ProjectMe": viewing one's personal development as a project and projecting oneself effectively. ProjectMe activities divide into self-knowledge (skills audits, aptitudes, interests), career development pathways, local course or module searching, and CV/e-portfolio creation.

The portal incorporates e-portfolio in two senses; presentational e-portfolio and artefact storage. Further support for the learner comes from a flexible and innovative approach to Personal Development Planning. The idea for this came from discussions with Janet Strivens and others about whether it is possible to identify common "elements" of PDP. These elements might then be flexibly combined into activity sequences, providing a supportive framework or scaffolding for the learner, but tuned to the requirements of the employment context. Phosphorix Ltd have developed a sequence builder tool as a first step to test this approach. Currently the end product of a sequence can be a document (e.g. a CV), or a presentational e-portfolio, or a skills self-assessment. An outcome of the approach could be a library of these PDP sequences that can be shared and then adapted and re-used by PDP designers.

Two learner portals are being developed with this approach, one to support learners employed in the creative industries, and the other aimed at the healthcare sector. Our aim is to see whether this flexible approach can accommodate the needs of learners in both these very different contexts, and to provide personal development planning tools that offer value to learners beyond the individual episodes of recognised accredited learning. Anyone interested in learning more or contributing to this work should contact Roger Clark at [roger.clark@gmsa.ac.uk](mailto:roger.clark@gmsa.ac.uk).

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## Personal Development Planning (PDP) in the First Year

### Is there a role for PDP in developing the first year 'as a transformative experience for students'?

**Kirsty Miller, University of Dundee and Allan Martin, formerly University of Glasgow, from the PDP in HE (Scotland) Group**

'PDP in the First Year' is one of nine First Year Enhancement Theme projects commissioned by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland. The project outcomes will initially be published on

the Enhancement Themes website<sup>1</sup> and will also contribute to an overview publication on the first year experience.

Our project ran from October 2006 to July 2007 and involved partners from the universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow, Heriot-Watt, Strathclyde and Edinburgh College of Art. The project included a literature review, compilation of case studies, a workshop, conference presentation and much collaboration and discussion among the partners.

Our work suggests that PDP could play an important part in what is a crucial transitional period for the student, enabling a reflective engagement with the personal and social activity of being a student, as well as the expectations and practices of the academic and professional disciplines in which the student has to participate. The first year is the period in which the student learns to be a student, in personal, social and academic terms.

Although we did not find a great deal of published evidence on PDP in the first year, there is enough in the literature on the first year of higher education (HE) and on PDP in general, to conclude that PDP can serve as a potentially useful framework or structure to serve as a reflective mediating element between different educational settings and HE at a time when HE itself is becoming more diversified.

This structure can also enable students to pass through the assimilation process into the culture and practice of HE. In this 'first year student life cycle' (which starts pre-entry), we identified the role of PDP in supporting students through various significant or 'critical' incidents (which could be either positive or negative) and found this particularly helpful in considering the role of PDP in the first year. Without a structured PDP process involving key staff to offer support, the student may not find the appropriate abilities, people or skills to deal with these incidents. (Examples might include uncertainty about course choice; completing first assignments on time and to an acceptable standard; or finding part time employment in a new environment).

As the link between the personal (self identity), the social (forming and developing friendships and networks) and the academic aspects of the new experience, PDP can give students a means of forming a full picture of themselves as learners and future graduates. Most importantly, PDP can play a crucial role in 'personalising' the mass experience of

being a first year, through the student 'owning' and keeping track of their development and making sense of their experiences.

In order for PDP to be effective and for student engagement, we found the need for certain prerequisites:

- a clearly defined purpose (for example, linked to the curriculum or employability)
- a context (there needs to be something to reflect on);
- an audience and an opportunity for dialogue (with peers as well as staff);
- attention given to the skills required to undertake PDP effectively (including reflection), thus integrating PDP and pedagogy from the outset;
- support for the personal, educational or technological needs arising;
- the first contact with PDP in HE needs to be a positive experience, delivered and supported by staff enthusiastic about the benefits.

ICT is widely seen as enabling PDP to 'come of age' and there are many ICT-based PDP systems, including both commercial products and those developed by HEIs and shaped by their own experience and requirements. What is clear however is that ICT-based PDP facilities complement, but do not replace, human interaction.



One of the resulting recommendations is that PDP should be the underpinning mechanism for a form of support entitlement in its widest sense, which would be applicable to all students, not only to those from widening participation or retention initiatives. This entitlement, which would be developed by each HEI, would make clear areas of personal, academic and career support and would include specific provision for different stages of the student life cycle. This requires the specific engagement of staff who work with first year students, including both teaching and supporting roles, as well as those in strategic positions who can influence the curriculum and the student experience.

If PDP is to be effectively introduced at the first year stage, it needs to be seen as directly relevant

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<sup>1</sup>  
<http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/FirstYear/default.asp>

(accessed 27 November 2007)

to the first year experience, and for that to happen, needs to be made so. In doing so, the diversity of perceptions and expectations of PDP, both between and within institutions, needs to be taken into account. Students vary, in their maturity (personal, social, and academic) and approach to learning; tutors in different disciplines regard the role of PDP differently; and institutions may see PDP achieving different goals ranging from assessment to personal empowerment. We should therefore continue to expect tremendous diversity in the implementation of PDP.

Senior management need to commit dedicated time and resources to allow this customised implementation to take place, in the knowledge that supporting staff and students in making PDP relevant to first year should be time well spent.

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## What is not an e-portfolio- a better place to start?

### Shane Sutherland, Pebble Learning

There exists a measure of obfuscation and equivocation in the theory and practice of 'e-portfolio'. The former results, at least in part, from the plethora of technical projects adding to the extant vocabulary: thin model; domain mapping; identity management; IMSeP; interoperability etc. The latter arises from the very word itself, used variously to describe inputs; outputs; processes; tools and functions. Here I will attempt to provide some clarity – or further muddy the waters – by defining what is *not* an e-portfolio. I hope that in so doing we will arrive at a clearer sense of what is an e-portfolio.

Some time ago I completed a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator questionnaire and discovered something about myself. The questionnaire indicated that I was an INTJ and I subsequently read and learnt more about types, their strengths and my own areas for development. This process of discovery and subsequent action is common to 'development planning' of various persuasions. For me this process began on paper; though today many similar inventories are taken on-line. Even though the resultant report, or artefact, was added to my CertEd portfolio neither the process nor the artefact was 'portfolio' in itself. Several existing tools provide opportunities for learners to self-audit their abilities, competencies or tendencies. They produce results; assets; reports or profiles but neither the tools nor the artefacts are e-portfolios.

Employability almost certainly includes the skills and aptitude to work collaboratively. Much of my own professional learning takes place in a communal context and I use whatever tools best allow me to communicate and collaborate with others. When I

create a document that is intended to be seen and worked on by my team I sometimes choose to place it in a group folder in Outlook. I then assign permission to the folder to allow others to view, or write to it and return to observe the results from wherever I am in the world. However, this ability to store items and to share them with others is not an e-portfolio; it is file storage and sharing, and is replicated in systems like Flickr, YouTube and SlideShare.

In a previous life, I taught for a living. We designed programmes which encompassed a wide range of subject specific, personal, and generic outcomes. These were aligned with the requirements of the professional body for that award and were mapped across multiple modules to ensure all were covered. Some would appear in different forms in different modules to give learners sufficient opportunity to demonstrate and develop the **abilities** considered most important. Of course, keeping track of which students had demonstrated which abilities in which modules; of identifying which outcomes caused most students the greatest difficulty, or which were easily attested, was problematic. Whether managing outcomes; placements; research projects or competencies the issues are much the same and electronic tools are in use to provide information to both tutors and learners about timelines, deadlines, items done and items pending. These tools are more or less useful for the 'manager' or the learner depending upon their design – but they are not an e-portfolio.

So what if I decide to create a scrapbook or file in order to 'sell' myself to a potential customer, employer or assessor? In that book I include only content that supports the story I know or believe the recipient wants to read and I illuminate, evidence or enrich my story with documents, pictures, letters and feedback from others. We would recognise that as a **portfolio** and its, apparently oxy-moronic, 'digital analogue' is the **e-portfolio**. In the e-portfolio the book is replaced by a website and the documents, pictures, letters and feedback are digital – augmented by sound, video and animation.

Of course not all of us are able to build websites and so we need tools that help us construct our digital presences. Most would also like a means of controlling who has access to the stories they create; particularly if these involve others or are deeply reflective, challenging or personal. Controlling access means choosing who can see **this** e-portfolio and the level of interaction they have with it: to view, to comment, to collaborate.

Increasingly it is important to be able to link to evidence in institutional systems. For example a learner will want to link to their transcript; a tutor

will want to link to CPD records in the HR system and a researcher might want to link to one of their papers held in a research repository. Equally, the learner might want to use an e-portfolio to apply for a course; a tutor might want to seek HEA accreditation and the researcher might want to apply for funding. These activities require systems to talk to other systems often using what are called 'web-services' and people start to talk again of e-portfolios as systems. They are not; e-portfolios are simply evidence-based stories. This indicates though that you do have to ask some questions about the stories you wish to tell; the kinds of uses you will put them to, and the skills your story-tellers have.

**An e-portfolio then is a story, a presentation of digital evidence; a purposeful aggregation of digital items - ideas, evidence, reflections, feedback, data etc - which 'present' a selected audience with information about the subject of that e-portfolio.** Some of that evidence might have been generated by tools specifically designed to engender insight; tools to capture knowledge or ability but these tools are not e-portfolios in themselves. Some of the stories will be shared with others or supplemented by data from other systems but the sharing and consuming services are not e-portfolios; simply tools that enhance the power of the story if the story needs it.

So - don't just go and buy an 'e-portfolio' and don't just use what you've got. Most things labelled 'e-portfolio' are actually competency management systems, e-PDP, student placement systems or CV builders. Some systems labelled e-portfolio now realise that the 'presentations' are only one outcome from a much more meaningful 'personal learning space'. Against all current trends, 'Don't just do something. Stand there!' Think about the stories that you and your learners want to tell and to read and then start to think about the tools and services that will support what you want to achieve. Then you'll be better placed to ignore the labels, cut through the obfuscation and unequivocally describe the tools you want to support learning.

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## The national action research network for researching and evaluating PDP and e-portfolio practice [NARN-PDP]

**John Peters, University of Worcester & Sue Burkinshaw, University of Bolton**

The NARN-PDP is one of only nine National Teaching Fellowship Projects funded by HEFCE for 2007-2010. It seeks to bring together PDP practitioners from a range of Higher Education Institutions to support each other in improving our research and evaluation of PDP

and e-portfolio practice. The two key outcomes of the project are intended to be:

1. A greater capacity amongst a significant group of PDP practitioners to undertake robust research and
2. A considerable number of scholarly research reports on PDP practice.

These outcomes are intended to meet the often expressed concern amongst PDP practitioners that we do not have enough robust research evidence on the efficacy of PDP in HE.

It is worth remembering that the introduction of PDP in UK HE is a world first in that it is 'a sector-wide initiative aimed at implementing a particular framework for capturing and enhancing student learning.' Unsurprisingly, there have been repeated calls for more robust evaluation of PDP and its implementation. These have come from:

- Institutional stakeholders, such as those who initially agreed the sector wide initiative or have a stake in its success, [QAA, UUK, GuildHE, Burgess etc.]
- Educational researchers and, not least,
- PDP practitioners, keen to have an evidence base for their practice.

The problem is that while the cross-sectoral agreement to implement PDP is clear about the purpose and claims for this approach, it has explicitly encouraged individual HEIs to implement PDP as they see fit. The result is that the implementation of PDP differs markedly from institution to institution with different emphasis in terms of:

- Key Purpose, e.g. employability, skills development, career management, learning to learn, professional development, etc.
- Methods, e.g. throughout the curriculum, through personal tutoring, in discrete modules, using e-portfolios, etc. and
- Models, e.g. based on learning cycles, reflective practice, record keeping, action planning, coaching or counselling, etc.

The result is that there may well not be any such thing as PDP that is the same and comparable across all UK HEIs. Research into the effectiveness of PDP as a means of supporting student learning is therefore arguably best undertaken through the gathering of situated, rich pictures of the student experience of its varied implementation in these different settings. With enough of these studies it might be possible to construct a 'patchwork quilt' of the student experience of PDP nationally and to make some tentative recommendations about what works where. This sort of detailed, situated research is not going to be done, unless it is undertaken by PDP practitioners themselves.

The NARN-PDP is therefore aimed at building capacity amongst PDP practitioners to develop, undertake and share situated, rich, robust research and evaluation of PDP and e-portfolio practice. Its objectives are to build on the existing CRA network and the current practice and expertise of network members. Each project member institution has committed to undertake at least one research project on PDP or e-portfolio and to share the research process and outcomes with colleagues. The result should be the emergence of a community of 'research capable' PDP practitioners with a significant body of research evidence to share with the sector.

The NARN-PDP is based at the University of Bolton and managed jointly by Sue Burkinshaw and John Peters NTF2001, using the expertise and network power of the CRA. It brings together PDP practitioners from 16 institutions in three regional networks, under the leadership of the first named institution:

- Northern – Bradford, Bolton, Newcastle, Liverpool, Salford and UCLAN;
- Midland – Bedfordshire, Birmingham City University, Coventry, Gloucestershire, Wolverhampton and Worcester; and
- Southern – Bournemouth, Canterbury Christchurch, Exeter and Portsmouth.

The first national meeting took place in October 2007 and the first regional meetings are taking place this month. We will no doubt be reporting on the ups and downs of the project through the pages of PDP-UK over the coming years!

Further information about the project, its development, activity and outcomes will also be provided through the CRA website at: <http://www.recordingachievement.org/>



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## Using Web 2.0 to Support PDP

**Simon Cotterill, Newcastle University,  
Alan White, Northumbria University and  
Becka Currant, University of Bradford**

### What is web 2.0?

Technically the term 'Web 2.0' is a con. The term implies a change in technologies, but most of the tools of Web 2.0 (blogs, wikis and social networking etc.) have been around since the early days of the Web. So why all the hype? Web 2.0 represents a very real and fundamental change in the use of the Internet – it has changed from a medium largely used for finding and viewing information to one which now also realising large-scale personal publishing and social networking. This has been made possible by the availability and rapid uptake of fast networks (although inclusion is still an issue for some sections of society and globally). Web 2.0 tools tend to be relatively unstructured and are characterised by an ease of publishing, a high level of interaction, self-assigned semantics (tagging) and are often media rich.

Not many of us haven't heard about 'Web 2.0' and at least some of the sites which are currently all the rage (Facebook, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, Blogger, Wikipedia etc). They have large numbers of users e.g. there are now over 180 million blogs out there and Facebook alone has 54 million accounts. OK, so it's a modest proportion of Internet users and a small proportion of the wider population – but it's growing very rapidly.

### Web 2.0 for learning?

Web 2.0 is great for chat and banter with friends, networking and sharing your holiday snaps with the whole world. But can it be used to support learning? Web 2.0 fits in neatly with the Constructivist philosophy of education; people can create their own structures and meaning using these tools rather than having them prescribed, they can join communities of shared interest without being restricted by organisational boundaries – taken to its extreme, if communities generate their own facilitators, will we need those colleges and universities any more? Regardless of educational philosophy, social networking software clearly has applicability to group work and potentially as a medium for inducting and preparing applicants prior to their arrival on our courses. Where Web 2.0 does struggle is when Assessment comes into the equation because of the lack of structure and inconsistent use of 'tagging'.

### Can web 2.0 support PDP?

Blogs can be used for recording reflection, one of the essential elements of PDP. Most sites allow learners to control access to their work, though the

emphasis of Web 2.0 is on publishing to groups and often the default is to be completely public. Does publishing to a group change the nature of the reflection? Probably for many, but not necessarily for the 'Net Generation' who have grown up sharing their thoughts and experiences (not necessarily reflective) online. Web 2.0 doesn't provide any 'scaffolding' to prompt reflection or planning or structured outcomes / objectives. As such there is likely to be a greater need for facilitation compared to more structured environments. One very neat approach is to train and support student facilitators rather than putting impossible burdens on tutors.

### How should we use Web 2.0?

There are a number of broad options (not mutually exclusive);

- 1) use the sites 'out there' (MySpace, Facebook, Ning etc.) they are free and now well established (usually supported by advertising),
- 2) host specialist social networking software, Wikis etc. at the institution (some are Open Source),
- 3) Use/develop Web 2.0 features integrated into institutional VLEs / e-portfolios

One thing is for sure; ignoring Web 2.0 is not really an option – it is certain that many of your students and a few of your staff are using it 'out there' now in relation to learning and not just for fun. The next generation of learners will have grown up with the Web 2.0 way of thinking; we ignore this at our peril. However, the approach you adopt needs careful consideration. As tutors, our going 'out there' might not always be welcomed – some students may want to maintain a distinction between their working and social lives, and as with the 'real world', students will want to discuss aspects of their courses away from tutors and the institution. Whichever approach, effort to help students understand how to use Web 2.0 effectively for learning is probably required. We also desperately need high quality research into use of Web 2.0 for learning and PDP.

The authors of this article (below) ran a Workshop at the CRA Residential in Manchester, 2007 – thanks to all those who participated! They are developing and using Web 2.0 in a variety of ways:

Simon Cotterill is a Senior Research Associate at Newcastle University. He and the team at Newcastle have integrated blogs and community publishing into the ePET portfolio ([www.e-portfolios.ac.uk](http://www.e-portfolios.ac.uk)). The blogs are unstructured but entries can be linked directly to structured programme learning outcomes / skill sets for selective inclusion in evidence summaries. The approach is being evaluated as part of the JISC funded EPICS-2 regional e-portfolios project ([www.epics.ac.uk](http://www.epics.ac.uk)).

Alan White is an academic adviser for e-learning at Northumbria University. One of the most recent projects that he has been involved with was the development of an online, distance learning degree based largely around the use of wikis, and he is currently developing an e-journal hosted within a social meeting/learning space.

Becka Currant manages the Learner Development Unit at the University of Bradford. She created a new space called Develop Me! to help ease the transition and progression of new students into the University ([developme.brad.ac.uk](http://developme.brad.ac.uk)). This includes reflective tools to help develop confidence in different skill areas, social networking spaces and online learning materials designed to support independent skills development.

Neil Currant is the project officer for the Enhancing Learner Progression project ([www.elp.ac.uk](http://www.elp.ac.uk)). He has set up a private social network on [www.ning.com](http://www.ning.com) for use on the MEd in Training and Development at the University of Bradford. Students and tutors have engaged with the social networking and the blog in particular has successfully engaged students in sharing their thoughts and reflections.



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## Revising the Guidelines for Personal Development Planning: an update on progress

**Jayne Mitchell, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**

### Background

A joint policy statement on Progress Files for HE was agreed in 2000<sup>2</sup> and an accompanying set of *Guidelines for HE Progress Files* (the *Guidelines*)

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<sup>2</sup> The joint policy statement can be obtained from <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressFiles/archive/policystatement/default.asp> (accessed 30 November 2007)

was published in 2001<sup>3</sup>. Following publication of the policy and *Guidelines*, a Progress Files Implementation Group (PFIG), made up of representatives from the main stakeholders, was established. The PFIG maintain oversight of the implementation of the policy and support the development of effective practice in personal development planning (PDP).

## Development

Since 2000, higher education providers have been developing their policies and implementation strategies for personal development planning, in line with the policy and *Guidelines*. The emergence of case studies and examples of effective practice, research evidence of the value of PDP to the learning process and developments in higher education policy mean that it is timely to consider the progress made towards implementing PDP across the higher education sector and review the currency and applicability of the *Guidelines*.

During 2007-2008 a revised PFIG will be undertaking a review and revision of the *Guidelines*. The aim is to publish a second edition of PDP element of the *Guidelines* before the start of the academic year 2008-09.

To assist with the review and revision an Advisory group will be established to help steer the work. This group will comprise experts, practitioners and representatives of other major stakeholders. It is anticipated that the Advisory group will meet several times during spring 2008. Stakeholders and interested parties also will be given the opportunity to comment on a proposed second edition of the *Guidelines*.

The Advisory group will work in parallel with a professional development group taking forward the development of the content of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) proposed by the 'Burgess Group'.<sup>4</sup>

The Burgess Group proposes that the HEAR should only contain information which is verifiable by the institution. The Burgess Group considered "*non-formal' learning - the skills gained by students during other activities (for example, in the students' union, or by volunteering, or taking part in sports and societies) and acknowledged its importance in this context, as*

*well as a growing recognition by students and employers of the value of such activities.*" (pp. 39). However, the Group recommended that "*further work is done on measuring and recording the skills and achievements gained through non-formal learning, and that student generated / driven information should be part of PDP and kept separate from the HEAR.*" (pp. 39).

The Advisory group will take these recommendations, and the work of the professional development group, into account when revising the *Guidelines*.

## Next steps

Letters of invitation to join the Advisory group will be sent to potential members in January 2008. A series of potential meeting dates will be included with the invitation, along with an outline timescale for the work of the group.

## Further information

Further information about the progress of this work can be obtained from the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) website; <http://www.recordingachievement.org/> (accessed 30 November 2007), by subscription to the QAA email news alert service; <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/news/list.asp> (accessed 30 November 2007), or by contacting Jayne Mitchell, Assistant Director at QAA ([j.mitchell@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:j.mitchell@qaa.ac.uk)).

## News and Events:

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Beyond the honours degree classification: The Burgess Group final report can be downloaded from:

[http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/Burgess\\_final.pdf](http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/Burgess_final.pdf)

Hard copy versions of the Report can also be obtained.

A full programme of CRA seminars for the New Year will be circulated to members of PDP-UK shortly.

If you have any news items or events that you wish to publicise in the next issue, please email  
Laura Fletcher at  
[laura@recordingachievement.org](mailto:laura@recordingachievement.org) with the details.

<sup>3</sup> The *Guidelines* can be obtained from <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progress/Files/guidelines/progfile2001.asp> (accessed 30 November 2007)

<sup>4</sup> The proposals for the development of HEAR can be obtained from [http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/Burgess\\_final.pdf](http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/Burgess_final.pdf) (accessed 30 November 2007)