

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Worcester</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 25 – Education</p>
<p>Title of case study: Enhancing learner development by influencing PDP policy and changing PDP practice</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The research described below has impacted on policy and practice relating to Personal Development Planning (PDP) - the structured and supported process by which learners reflect upon their own development and plan their future development. The impact has primarily been on the UK Higher Education (HE) sector, but has also extended beyond the UK and into other types of organisation (e.g. graduate recruitment networks). More specifically, the research has: shaped the guidance offered to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) on implementing and developing PDP policies and processes for students; enhanced the practice of PDP practitioners; stimulated debate among these practitioners; and informed the development of resources for these practitioners. This has had an overarching positive effect on learner development in educational settings and beyond.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Dr John Peters (employed at Worcester, 1993-present) has undertaken research into the effectiveness of Personal Development Planning (PDP), with a particular interest in the value of e-portfolios in this process, over a 15-year period. During this time, his role has shifted from lecturing in modern history (1993-1998) to working in the University's Educational Development Unit (1999-present).</p> <p>His initial research argued that modular degree programmes, specifically in History, had led to the fragmenting of traditional systems of progression and demonstrated the value of formative student profiles in addressing this 'problem' (Reference 1). Peters was subsequently part of the advisory group that informed the EPPI-Centre systematic review of PDP.ⁱ The review highlighted some critical limitations in the research to-date. These included: the greater focus on descriptive developmental research than on experimental testing of the effects of such new developments; serious methodological limitations in evaluations of effect; and limited focus on certain key areas, e.g. portfolios.</p> <p>Peters' subsequent work can be seen at some level as a response to this review. In 2005, he was part of a team that undertook an evaluation of the University of Wolverhampton's e-portfolio system for PDP, highlighting the value of the system being used while emphasising some practical issues to be addressed in rolling out it more widely, not least making the tool available to the student beyond the lifetime of the degree programme (Reference 2).</p> <p>In 2007, Peters developed a project funded through HEFCE's National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) Project Scheme, one of just 8 funded through the scheme (Grant a). The project was collaborative, co-led by Sue Burkinshaw, University of Bolton and involved 16 HEIs. It sought to establish a community of PDP practitioner-researchers – referred to as the NARN (National Action Research Network) - to research and evaluate their own PDP and e-portfolio practice and to inform the more effective implementation of PDP for students. The project outcomes (published as a special edition of the <i>Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education</i>) were a series of situated studies on PDP and e-portfolio practice and an overarching evaluation of the effectiveness of the NARN as a whole both in creating a community of practitioner-researchers and in capacity-building for researching PDP practice (Reference 3).</p> <p>Alongside this project, Peters was successful in bidding for a University of Worcester funded studentship match-funded through the NTF project (Grant b) to examine the impact and experiences of PDP implementation in the HE sector. This research has shown that PDP processes remain poorly defined, under-researched and increasingly driven towards particular political expectations and that attempts to establish personal, student-centred learning practices have been subsumed within outcome expectations demanded by various stakeholder groups (Reference 4). As such, this study places more emphasis on the continued need for research into PDP practice and the student experience of it.</p>

3. References to the research

1. Peters, J., Peterkin, C. & Williams, C. (2001) 'Progression within Modular History Degrees: Profiling for a Student Centred Approach' in Booth, A. & Hyland, P. (eds.), *The Practice of University History Teaching*, Manchester University Press: 137-53.
2. Halstead, A., Mcguirk, M., Peters, J., & Watkins, D. (2005) 'Implementation and Evaluation of an ePortfolio across a UK Higher Education Institution', *Proceedings of the International EPortfolio 2005 Conference: Transforming Individual and organisational learning*: 308-19. [<http://www.epforum.eu/sites/www.epforum.eu/files/ePortfolio%202005.pdf>]
3. Peters, J. (2010) 'Building research capacity in a practitioner community: framing and evaluating the 'National Action Research Network on Researching and Evaluating Personal Development Planning and e-Portfolio Practice' *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education, Special Edition: Researching PDP Practice*: 1-17. [Returned to UoA25 in REF 2014].
4. Tymms, M., Peters, J., & Scott, I. (2013) 'Personal Development Planning: Pedagogy and the Politicisation of the Personal', *Research in Post Compulsory Education*, 18(3). [Returned to UoA25 in REF 2014].

Grants

- a. Dr John Peters (Principal investigator), *National Action Research Network on Researching and Evaluating Personal Development Planning and e-Portfolio*, 08/2007-07/2010, HEFCE's National Teaching Fellowship Project Scheme (NTFS), £199,968.
- b. Dr John Peters (Lead Supervisor), *An exploration of the impacts and experiences of PDP at a UK university*, 10/2008-10/2011, University of Worcester Research Studentship Scheme, £30,000.

The University is confident the underpinning research meets the excellence threshold. References 3 and 4 are returned to UoA25 in REF 2014 with Output ID "Peters2" and "Peters4" respectively. Both result from funded research which the University believes is indicative of its excellent quality. Reference 1 has become a key reference for pedagogic research in history (cited 22 times in Google Scholar).

4. Details of the impact

Shaping Guidance

In 2008, Dr Peters was invited to be part of the QAA's Personal Development Planning Advisory Group, a small body of experts established to develop sector guidance on implementing PDP. The growing body of evidence from both practice and research (not least Peters' own work) necessitated an update of the QAA's *Guidelines for HE Progress Files* published in 2001. The product of this Group, *Personal Development Planning: guidance for institutional policy and practice in higher education*, was published in 2009 (**Source A**). Peters contributed to the publication as a whole but in particular authored the section on "Key actions for the effective implementation of personal development planning" which is confirmed in a letter of support from Dr Jayne Mitchell, Director for Research, Development and Partnerships at the QAA (**Source B**). This section highlights three areas for action: institutional strategy and policy, presence within programmes and engagement with learners. It therefore sets out to shape both policy *and* practice of HEIs.

Enhancing Practice

Peters' research has enhanced the practice of PDP practitioners through: the NTFS Project; and his work with the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA). PDP practitioners can be defined narrowly as those working within the HE sector (but also in other contexts such as graduate employment organisations) who have direct responsibility for developing and supporting PDP processes. It can be more broadly defined, however, to include academic staff for who PDP is part of their learning and teaching, their role as a personal tutor, etc.

The NTFS Project set out to develop a community of PDP practitioners who were committed to

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developing their capability to undertake robust research and evaluation; and to use the evidence that emerged from this process to enhance their practice. In practice, three regional groups were established during the project (North, South, Midlands) but further groups at institutional level and beyond also emerged. For example the University of Bedfordshire adopted and implemented the full NARN project model and applied this across the institution to support academics and practitioners to develop their capacity and capability as researchers (**Source C**, pp.8-9)

Dr Peters has worked with and for the CRA since 2001, initially as an institutional correspondent and subsequently as its Associate Director for Research. The CRA, directed by Rob Ward, seeks to develop and demonstrate the value of PDP in improving learning and progression in education, training and employment through a programme of leadership, consultancy and research. Its members are drawn from local authorities, schools, universities, colleges and professional bodies. In essence, its work impacts directly on “PDP practice” in its member organisations. Peters’ research has been central to this work (**Source D**). An excellent example of this work is the PDP Academy 2011: a 1-year initiative set up by CRA to support individual HEIs to identify, understand and resolve key issues affecting PDP in ways which directly enhance the quality and effectiveness of the student learning experience. 12 HEIs were involved in the programme (Birmingham, Bolton, Bradford, Buckinghamshire New, Central Lancashire, Essex, Kent, Oxford Brookes, Salford, Sheffield, Ulster). Peters was central to the delivery of this programme. He co-delivered three 1-day workshops during the programme, produced a number of “key project documents” (e.g. [The Pedagogies of PDP](#)) and directly mentored three of the HEIs involved (Birmingham, Bucks New and Oxford Brookes). Each HEI undertook a project in one or more of three areas: developing and implementing a PDP resource; influencing institutional policy/strategy on PDP; designing and implementing a PDP experience or intervention. The outcomes of each of the projects can be found on the PDP Academy 2011 web pages a number of which explicitly highlight the impacts on practice and by extension on the student learning experience (see, for example, the Buckinghamshire New University project, “PDP through e-Portfolios: engaging students to enhance their learning and employability”, **Source E**).

Stimulating Debate

Peters’ research has been widely disseminated to practitioners in HE and beyond through workshops and conference presentations. So, for example, the findings of the NTSF project have been presented to a broadly UK HE audience at a Higher Education Academy/QAA one day seminar, ‘PDP in action: student-centred approaches and evaluating effectiveness,’ held at the University of Edinburgh in April 2009; to a broader audience of UK PDP practitioners at the CRA Annual Conference, Birmingham in November 2010; to a graduate recruitment network, the Association for Graduate Recruiters in March 2009; to an international audience at the CRA’s Second International Residential Seminar, ‘Researching and Evaluating Personal Development Planning and e-Portfolio’ at the University of Nottingham in April 2010 which attracted delegates e.g. from the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden; and at the Australian e-Portfolio Conference, Queensland, Australia in February 2009 (**Source C**, Appendix 1 lists all dissemination activities associated with the project).

Peters is the only UK member of the Association for Authentic, Experiential and Evidence-Based Learning (AAEEBL) Research Committee. AAEEBL is a US-based professional association for those working with e-Portfolios at all levels of education and workforce development. The Research Committee, chaired by Dr Helen Chen of Stanford University, was set up in Spring 2012 partly to undertake research in its own right but also as an international reference group for sharing research results globally (**Source F**).

Developing Resources

Peters has developed resources for practitioners which have been informed by his research. Specifically, he co-developed a toolkit: “[Personal Development Planning Evaluation Guides and Tools](#)”. It was launched on the CRA website in September 2009 and has continued to be utilised by practitioners over REF period: most recently a small independent charity used it to evaluate a careers education initiative in the pre-HE sector (**Source D**). This toolkit was subsequently referenced in QAA Scotland’s 2011 publication, *A toolkit for enhancing personal development planning strategy, policy and practice in higher education institutions* (**Source G**). It has also been

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highlighted on the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement website as an example of “How to do it: engagement in practice” (**Source H**).

In addition Peters’ research has informed the development of others’ PDP resources. For example, he features in a video resource provided for HE practitioners by Learn Higher on PDP, where he talks about research and evidence relating to PDP (**Source I**).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. *Personal development planning: guidance for institutional policy and practice in higher education* (2009) Quality Assurance Agency.
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/PDPguide.pdf>
- B. Letter of support from Dr Jayne Mitchell, Director: Research, Development and Partnerships, QAA.
- C. Final Project Report of National Action Research Network on Researching and Evaluating Personal Development planning and e-Portfolio Practice (2012):
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/ntfs/projects/NTFS_Project_Bolton_Final.pdf
- D. Letter of support from Rob Ward, Director, The Centre for Recording Achievement
- E. *PDP through e-Portfolios: engaging students to enhance their learning and employability*:
<http://www.recordingachievement.org/images/pdfs/PDPacademy/pdpacademy11bucks.pdf>
- F. AAEBL Newsletter, June 2012:
http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.aaebl.org/resource/collection/EDBA4E28-FC69-42CA-8EB4-E948C9D9569E/June_2012_Newsletter.pdf
- G. *A toolkit for enhancing personal development planning strategy, policy and practice in higher education institutions* (2011) QAA Scotland:
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/PDP%20Toolkit%20revised%202011.pdf>
- H. National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement Website:
<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/guides/introduction-evaluation/learning-and-higher-education>
- I. Learn Higher Workshop Toolkits: <http://archive.learnhigher.ac.uk/videoresources/pdp/>

ⁱ Gough, D.A., Kiwan, D., Sutcliffe, K., Simpson, D. & Houghton N (2003). A systematic map and synthesis review of the effectiveness of personal development planning for improving student learning. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit.