

Personal and Professional Development Planning Jennifer Graham and Jenny Westwood: Napier University

Students at Napier University can choose the Personal and Professional Development Planning (PPDP) module as an elective or as a prescribed option on several of the programmes within the Business School. It is seen as one way of helping students to take responsibility for their own learning, self-evaluate, develop & practice critical reflective skills and to action plan for their future personal and professional development.

The PPDP module provides students with structured opportunities to self-assess a range of their current skills and attributes and to identify ones that they need to further develop. These will form the basis of their development planning.

In other words – *Where am I now? . . . Where do I want to be? . . . How do I get there?*

The aim of the module is to introduce and develop the concept of reflective practice to inform personal and professional development.

The learning outcomes enable the student to:

- identify key components required for reflective practice and relate this to their own self development
- explore strategies for learning and the implications on personal and professional development
- review a range of employability skills and attributes and identify their own current status
- draw up an appropriate plan with objectives for future action

Module delivery

The focus of delivery is on self-directed study, using two workbooks. It is delivered in a choice of two modes:

- On the **taught route** the students choose to attend weekly one hour workshops throughout the semester, so benefiting from discussion with their peers and supporting activities such as role-plays and simulation exercises.
- On the **flexible route** students work independently, supported by attendance at just three sessions, at the start, midway and at the end of the semester. They receive informal weekly bulletins via email that contain useful prompts to learning, ask them questions, give advice and generally act as reminders to help them progress through their studies. As from this semester they can additionally communicate through WebCT discussions.

Structure of the module

The module is divided into two sections:

a. Reflective Learning Practice introduces the concept and theory of independent learning and reflective practices. There are opportunities for the student to identify their own learning styles, stressing the importance of being an independent learner and setting themselves useful goals. It explores various reflective models and espouses the value of keeping a reflective learning journal and of recording and analysing their own learning. This learning can come from their studies as well as from outwith the university, including sports and leisure activities, part-time work and past jobs. Care is taken to highlight that this learning relates to their professional life and they are discouraged from disclosing private issues.

b. Developing Skills and Action Planning encourages the use of a range of tools to help them with organisational and time management, effective communication, effective reading and writing, using information technology systems to gather data, effective teamwork and leadership qualities, and with problem solving. Finally they learn how to identify and write appropriate objectives that are SMART and to prioritise activities so that they can produce an action plan to meet these objectives for their continuous personal and professional development.

Approach to studying

Students are given advice on setting targets and making a study plan, particularly on the flexible route. Key features include: learning and reflecting critically on things that they have done; measuring

their own performance; writing outcomes for their personal development; writing in the first person; and to understand that the module is not an easy option.

One of the things that students quickly discover about this module is that it is different from traditional university modules – it is about themselves, their skills and attributes and their performance now and in the future. It is not just about a subject. There are no definitive answers – something that some students find difficult at first. They are continuously reminded that it is the process rather than their specific examples that are being assessed.

As students work through this module they are asked to record a lot of information about themselves some of which they may not have committed to paper or even thought of in any great detail before, but in the end they decide which pieces of information or new insights they wish to discuss with colleagues, friends or mentor.

Module assessment

Assessment for this module has two elements:

- **The personal development portfolio (40%)** consists of prescribed portfolio activities from ten units. This lets the student record their current strengths and weaknesses in a range of areas, give an overview of their skills and attributes and to prove that they can critically reflect on their learning experiences from a range of situations.
- The second element for assessment is the **personal and professional development action plan (60%)**. Students must demonstrate that they can write 12-15 'SMART' objectives and an action plan that is appropriate and realistic to their background, personal profile and future aspirations.

Both elements of the assessment require students to reflect on their experiences and on their learning processes, showing that they are able to self-evaluate and to formulate this reflective practice into effective personal development planning.

Student quotes from the conclusions to their assessment

Next year is my final year and I feel more confident and motivated in my studies since completing this module and have learnt a lot about myself and my learning style, through keeping the journal and I am going to start keeping one permanently so my reflective learning process can be enhanced. I now know the skills that graduate employers will be looking for and I must have them to get a good job- my action plan will help me to do this.

This module has helped me understand the key areas of both my personal and professional life which require development. I am now glad I chose this module because it has been worthwhile. I leave this module with a clear action plan on what I need to do to enhance my skills.

I have enjoyed this module very much overall as I mentioned in my portfolio as it has taught me a lot about what I need to do for myself in order to develop myself, its not just been a case of learning information we are given This has been a very worthwhile module as I feel I have got a lot out of it.

I would recommend this module to anyone, it not only identifies your weak skills it also identifies weaknesses in your stronger skills. It has been a very difficult exercise for me because I am certainly not accustomed to analysing or reflecting upon myself or my skills need.