Background

The government Dearing Report (1997) and subsequent papers recommending the introduction of personal development planning (PDP) in Higher Education resulted in the University of Bolton (UoB) developing a PDP framework (2005). Implemented through a validation process across all departments of the university, this was later evaluated by Goodrich (2007) who highlighted problems and lack of engagement with the process. The recommendations from this report came at the point of reconfiguration from departments to schools and thus offered the opportunity to develop, within the newly formed Schools, different approaches to fulfill the UoB PDP framework, including electronic PDP (ePDP) approach in line with its new UoB eStrategy.

In 2008 the Faculty of AMT (former AME) eLearning team started testing the development of an ePDP resource within the University’s Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) WebCT. The results of that experience informed a second pilot using a more flexible VLE (Moodle). Art and Design were chosen to undertake both pilots as there is experience of working visually in a PDP context.

The faculty of Advanced Engineering and Sciences (AES) is a newcomer to the implementation of ePDP and there appears to already be some identifiable positives and some further challenges. The reflective requirement for PDP is the element that provides the biggest challenge, not least with staff. The challenge then requires two approaches: One approach to teach the software tools and another to get the STAFF and students to learn to reflect!

UoB PDP progression

While Moodle has resulted in one of the trials (AMT) a more flexible VLE for ePDP, when using technology cross platform and cross browser issues were apparent particularly the compatibility with Apple Mac’s. Also, AMT cohorts preferred a less ‘prescriptive’ approach to ePDP and explored the use of other cloud-based technologies to evidence their PDP. Mahara has been considered as a valid open-source option to progress with ePDP within the University, as AES trials have shown.

UoB Framework’s ‘Reflective’ table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To develop: Reflection</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Experience</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decide on areas you need to develop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning: Identify urgent and longer term needs</td>
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<td>Action: Using feedback to turn planning into action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review: Progress</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Applying framework using open source: Mahara

Example of ePDP applications 2010-2011

Conclusion

The culture of ePDP is slowly changing at the UoB due to the greater involvement of students and staff with technology (within and out the university). Both faculties (AMT and AES) have identified that the reflective requirement for PDP is the element that provides the biggest challenge, not least with staff. Many Engineering staff are ‘well established’ in their yearly cycle of activities, so the elements of self-reflection are something that passes many by! . In Art & Design staff the claim is that ‘due to the ‘nature of their work’, their piece of work demonstrates the reflective practice. The challenge then becomes twofold: ‘staff to embrace a new software (Facebook-type social networking software, in the case of Mahara)’ and getting STAFF and students to understand the UoB reflective practice approach.

References


UoB PiER Project http://pierproject.edublogs.org/ [available on 16/11/2011]