Integrating The Personal Development Plan (PDP)
And Work Based Reflective Practice In Dietetic Education

1.0 Abstract

The current curriculum guidelines, the Health Professions Council and the QAA Benchmark statement for dietitians (HPC 2004, QAA 2001) all recognise that students have to demonstrate development in critical reflective thinking prior to registration.

This project aimed to analyse the effectiveness and engagement of the PDP as implemented in Dietetic Education as a model of integration of PDP with reflective practice carried out during work based placements and to make recommendations to improve the model used.

Baseline data from students on the BSc (Hons) Human Nutrition and Dietetics and MSc/Postgraduate Diploma in Dietetics programmes, Placement trainers and personal tutors showed that students did not fully engage with the PDP and there awareness of their own developmental needs prior to starting the three main placements on the programmes could be improved.
Following a training event for staff an improved model of PDP including integrating it to module assessments was introduced. Post intervention questionnaires from all stakeholders showed some degree of enhancement but the period of the project meant that the full extent of the changes could not be measured fully.

### 2.0 Introduction

Health and social care professionals, including dietitians are increasingly required to utilise reflective practice within their initial training and continued professional development. (Tate 2004). The current curriculum guidelines, the Health Professions Council and the QAA Benchmark statement for dietitians (HPC 2004, QAA 2001) all recognise that students have to demonstrate development in critical reflective thinking prior to registration.

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has a policy of universities introducing PDPs by 2005/06. (QAA 2000). However, the Centre for Nutrition and Dietetics has utilized the PDP with students on a personal tutor level since the early 1990s. The new education and training model introduced by the Dietitians Board in 2000 seeks to develop reflective practice skills by the production of a portfolio to demonstrate competence and led to a more structured approach to PDPs in the Centre. The PDP model in use at the start of the study (2006) involves students reflecting on their strengths and areas for improvement based on outcomes from the curriculum guidelines (Dietitians Board 2000) and the HPC Standards of Proficiency (HPC 2003). Preparation of students for the placements including portfolio management is carried out on a group basis prior to each placement.

### 2.1 Personal Development Plans (PDP)

Cottrell (2003) has identified three main benefits to students of engaging with the PDP during their programme of study. These are benefits to:

- **Academic performance** – PDP will give a deeper understanding of students’ learning
- **Professional life** – PDP will develop confidence in skills, qualities and attributes to students’ career choice and develop positive attitudes, creative thinking and problem solving approaches to a successful professional life and
- **Personal life** – PDP will give a better understanding of a students’ sense of self as an individual and will develop skills of reflection, self-direction and self-evaluation.

### 2.2 Reflective Practice

Reflective practice as a concept was introduced into many professions in the 1980s. It is one of the ways that professionals learn from experience in order to understand and develop practice. Reflective practice has three components:

- **Experiences** that happen to a person
- The *reflective processes* that enable the person to learn from those experiences
- The *action* that results from the new perspectives that are taken
Reflective practice differs from the reflective processes as it requires some action to be taken. (Jasper 2003)

The most commonly used form of reflective practice used with students in UWIC and clinical placements is critical incidence analysis. The fundamental stages of critical incidence analysis and reflective practice are:

1. Selecting a critical or meaningful incident to reflect on
2. Observing and describing the experience
3. Analysing the experience
4. Interpreting the experience
5. Exploring the alternatives
6. Framing action
(Jasper 2003)

The term ‘critical incidents’ was first described by Flanagan in 1954 (Jasper 2003)

Schon in 1983 described two types of reflection used by health care professionals;

- Reflection-in-action
  This is the way health care professionals think and theorise about practice while they are doing it. This is often seen as an automatic activity, particularly in advanced practitioners

- Reflection-on-action
  This involves health care professionals unconsciously exploring the experience and thinking about practice after it has occurred to discover the knowledge used in the situation. It is therefore a cognitive process.

Many different models or frameworks for reflective practice have been developed and stem from Kolb’s experiential learning cycle which includes having the experience, reflecting and reviewing the experience, Making conclusions from the experience, making plans for action, having a new experience and so on (Jasper 2003). The models of reflective practice that are used by health care professionals include:

- What, so what, now what? (Driscoll 1994)
- Strands of reflection (Fish, Twinn and Purr)
- Schon’s models of spective reflection (Schon 1983)
- John’s model of structured reflection (Johns 1995)
- Van Manen’s ‘levels’ of reflection (Van Manen 1977 cited in Goodman 1984)

Gallimore (2004) studied the expectations, attitudes and experiences of the second cohort of postgraduate students to follow the new curriculum and placement guidelines. This study was carried out retrospectively following the second of the three placements. She found that the students thought that the PDP useful but difficult to engage with. The sample also did not see the connection between the PDP and the placement portfolios. To date there has been no other research in UWIC or the wider community to consider best practice in the development of reflective practice in dietetic students.
3.0 Aims:

The project aims to:

- Analyse of the effectiveness and engagement of the PDP as implemented in Dietetic Education as a model of integration of PDP with reflective practice carried out during work based placements.
- Make recommendations for the improvement of the model

3.1 Objectives

The objectives of the project are to:

1. Critically evaluate the engagement of dietetic students on the BSc (Hons) Human Nutrition and Dietetics programme and MSc/Postgraduate Diploma in Dietetics programme with the PDP and their development of reflective practice skills pre and post placement.
2. Critically evaluate the perceptions of dietetic students’ personal tutors of the PDP system as currently operated.
3. Critically evaluate placement educators in Wales perceptions of UWIC students reflective practice skills.
4. From the findings make recommendations for the implementation of a model of enhanced integration of reflection in university-based and work-based education, including the provision of training for UWIC staff.
5. Re-evaluation of objectives 1, 2 and 3 following implementation of the model.

4.0 Method

4.1 Baseline data

The aims of the project will be met by:

The development of three questionnaires to measure the:

- Perceptions of students at various stages of their programmes.
- Perceptions of personal tutors on the engagement of students with their PDP and skills of reflection
- Perceptions of placement trainers on the reflective skills of UWIC students and students from other HEIs.

The questionnaire for the students will contain questions on the engagement of the PDP, the preparation for placement, skills of reflection during placement and post placement reflection.

The timescale for this proposal makes it difficult to obtain baseline results throughout one cohort of undergraduate students from the beginning to the end of their course. Instead current students at all stages of both the undergraduate and postgraduate courses will be used.
The baseline data will be obtained from the following groups:

**BSc (Hons) Human Nutrition and Dietetics**

Year 1 – at the end of year 1

Year 3 – prior to Placement B

Year 4 – following Placement C

**MSc/Postgraduate Diploma in Dietetics**

Year 1 – prior to Placement B

### 4.2 Intervention

- Following the staff training event a small working group met to consider amendments to the PDP system in place as follows:
  - Simplifying the PDP process from September 2006
  - In addition to a paper copy of the PDP a module ‘Nutrition and Dietetic PDP Information’ was developed with access given to all students on Nutrition and Dietetic courses.
  - Ensuring that PDP is not forgotten about by BSc (Hons) Human Nutrition and Dietetics students in years 2&3 prior to Placement B – since September 2007 the programme specific regulations have included a clause which states that all students should engage fully with the PDP prior to Placement B
  - Enhancing Placement Preparation on reflection by introducing models of reflection.
  - Including assessments on reflection throughout the courses – these were introduced in the 2006/07 academic year and are shown in table 1. Table 1 showing the assessments including an element of reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>BSc (Hons) Human Nutrition and Dietetics</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Skills and Studies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assignment 1 - skills development portfolio including an element of skills developed via PDP with a personal tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assignment 2 – essay reflecting on the role of the dietitian and a reflection of students’ own personal qualities to undertake the role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dietetics A and Clinical Studies 2 modules:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Essay post placement A and B respectively reflecting on the students’ progress towards meeting the HPC Standards of Proficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>MSc/Postgraduate Diploma in Dietetrics</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Skills</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Essay reflecting on the role of the dietitian and the students’ progress towards meeting the HPC Standards of Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clinical Practice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Essay post placement B reflecting on students’ progress towards meeting the HPC Standards of Proficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Post intervention Data

The post-intervention data was collected from

**BSc (Hons) Human Nutrition and Dietetics**

Year 1 – at the end of year 1
Year 4 – following Placement C
Year 3 – prior to Placement B

**MSc/Postgraduate Diploma in Dietetics**

Year 1 – prior to Placement B

5.0 Results

5.1 Student Questionnaire Results

Table 2: How useful is the PDP?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BSc Year 4</th>
<th>BSc Year 3</th>
<th>BSc Year 1</th>
<th>MSc Year 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Useful - post intervention</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(76%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(48%)</td>
<td>(54%)</td>
<td>(86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful – baseline data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show that students in all years appreciated the PDP less post intervention. The only group of students who completed the questionnaire twice are the Year 3 baseline students and the Year 4 post intervention – this cohort reported a decline in the usefulness of the PDP.

Post intervention, undergraduate students reported that the positive aspects of completing the PDP were to improve reflection, increase confidence, provide a written record of development, increase skills and abilities and give a sense of achievement. This list is enhanced form the baseline data.

The majority of all students still continues to find that the time commitment to completing the PDP to be the most negative aspect. In year 1 BSc HND students continued to be unsure of what to write whereas in years 3 and 4 BSc HND comments were made on being unsure of the purpose of the PDP and some found it boring, repetitive and additional work for no reason.

Students also commented again that it was often difficult to make appointments with their personal tutors.
### Table 3: Completing entries in PDP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year group</th>
<th>Baseline data</th>
<th>Post intervention data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BSc Year 1</strong> (n= 15 baseline n=19 post intervention)</td>
<td>25% completed entries every 2 weeks or more often 67% irregularly or not often</td>
<td>53% completed entries every 2 weeks or more often 26% irregularly or not often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BSc Year 3</strong> (n= 22 baseline n=13 post intervention)</td>
<td>Year 1 mean no of entries = 3.8 Year 2 mean no of entries = 2.3 Year 3 mean no of entries = 0.2</td>
<td>Year 1 mean no of entries = 3.6 Year 2 mean no of entries = 2.9 Year 3 mean no of entries = 0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BSc Year 4</strong> (n= 18 baseline n=16 post intervention)</td>
<td>Year 1 mean no of entries = 1.4 Year 2 mean no of entries = 1.7 Year 3 mean no of entries = 1.7 Year 4 mean no of entries = 1.6</td>
<td>Year 1 mean no of entries = 2.2 Year 2 mean no of entries = 1.5 Year 3 mean no of entries = 0.4 Year 4 mean no of entries = 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MSc Year 1</strong> (n= 15 baseline n=12 post intervention)</td>
<td>33% not often 20% before meeting tutor 7% weekly</td>
<td>25% not often 42% - 1-2 per term 25% - 3 times per term</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows variable results with the greatest increase in completing entries in year 1 post intervention.

### Table 4: What the PDP entries are about

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year group</th>
<th>Baseline data</th>
<th>Post intervention data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BSc Year 1</strong></td>
<td>Confidence, improving assertiveness, study issues, developing skills</td>
<td>Reflection, student experiences, recognition of personal qualities, assignments, strengths and weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BSc Year 3</strong></td>
<td>Time management, essay writing, presentations</td>
<td>Reflection, clinical placement student experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BSc Year 4</strong></td>
<td>Strengths and weaknesses, placement related</td>
<td>Clinical placement, self-reflection, personal development, confidence building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MSc Year 1</strong></td>
<td>Difficulties faced, assignments, progression</td>
<td>Assertiveness, clinical placement, communication, personal development, group work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that the range of entries post intervention has increased across all year groups.
5.2 Results From Trainers

12 trainers from Trusts in Wales completed the questionnaire.

Table 5 shows the trainers perception of the students’ ability to reflect pre and post intervention

**Table 5 Trainers’ Perception of students Ability to reflect**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UWIC UG</th>
<th></th>
<th>UWIC PG</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>Post intervention</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>Post intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent/Good</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows the trainers perception of students’ awareness of personal development at the start of Placements A, B and C

**Table 6 Trainers’ Perception of students’ awareness of personal development at the start of Placements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UWIC UG</th>
<th></th>
<th>UWIC PG</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answered yes</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>Post intervention</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>Post intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement A</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement B</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement C</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show that trainers’ perception of students’ awareness of personal development has shown a slight improvement post intervention.
Table 7 shows the trainers' perception of students' ability to take action on areas to be developed during Placements A, B and C

Table 7 shows the trainers’ perception of students’ ability to take action on areas to be developed during Placements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UWIC UG Baseline</th>
<th>Post intervention</th>
<th>UWIC PG Baseline</th>
<th>Post intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answered all and most of the time</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Placement A</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Placement B</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Placement C</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Placement A</strong></td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Placement B</strong></td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Placement C</strong></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show that trainers’ perception of students’ ability to take action on areas to be developed during placements has improved dramatically post intervention.

5.3 Results from Tutors

57% (n=4) tutors responded to the questionnaire

Tutors were asked their opinion of the new format of the PDP 75% though it was more user friendly and simplified but one tutor (25%) though that it was too flexible and needed a more rigid structure. The main barrier to the PDP perceived by tutors were lack of assessment up to now and lack of a suitable room to hold meetings.

All tutors thought that the introduction of the enhanced Professional Skills and Studies assignment in year 1 was an enhancement. All tutors thought that the training event in September 2006 had enhanced their understanding of reflective practice.
Figure 1 shows the tutor perception of the engagement of their tutees with the PDP pre intervention (2006) and post intervention (2007). Tutor perception shows an increase in engagement.

6.0 Discussion

The study aimed to consider the use of PDP within Dietetic education and develop a model that integrated PDP with reflective practice skills needed on work based placements. Dietitians are required to utilise reflective practice within their initial training and continued professional development. (Tate 2004). The current curriculum guidelines, the Health Professions Council and the QAA Benchmark statement for dietitians (HPC 2004, QAA 2001) all recognise that students have to demonstrate development in critical reflective thinking prior to registration.

The post intervention questionnaires were completed at the end of the first year of the introduction of the revised PDP and assessments. The early collection of data was made to accommodate the length of the teaching fellowship and as a consequence there are few differences to the results from the baseline data.

The scores for the usefulness of the PDP from baseline to post intervention has shown a dramatic decline in all year stages, with all year groups still reporting that they do not have time to complete the entries.

There needs to be more consideration given to selling the benefits of PDP to students on the Programmes and perhaps including more PDP in assessments or in timetabled personal tutor sessions in order to ensure that students have more time to complete their PDPs.

The results from completing entries in the PDP (Table 3) show that whilst the number of entries reported from Year 3 and 4 students declined or remained the same, the post intervention data for Year 1 undergraduate and postgraduate students did increase, indicating that the enhanced emphasis on the PDP given in induction week and during the first year of both programmes is having an impact. The content of the entries for the PDP listed in Table 4 show a greater range and depth for all year groups surveyed, again reflecting the greater emphasis made on PDP in all years.
Tables 5 and 6 consider the Trainers’ Perceptions of students’ ability to reflect at the start of Placements A, B and C. The results show that overall students’ ability to reflect is relatively high, ranging from 75% to 83% (table 5). At the start of placements there has been an increase in students’ awareness of personal development for Placement B and C for both programmes and could be the result of enhanced emphasis made on reflective practice and development both in the preparation for placements and in personal tutorials. However, only 50% of trainers considered that students were aware which is quite a low figure. The awareness of development at the start of Placement A is still very low and so more needs to be done to enhance this in UWIC.

Table 7 shows the trainers perception of students ability to take action on areas to be developed during placements and this has improved dramatically post intervention although the highest score of 67% shows that there are still 33% of students at least who could find it difficult to take action on areas to be developed.

The results from personal tutors indicate that there is some disagreements to the benefits of the revised PDP document but all tutors thought that the enhanced assignment in year 1 to be worthwhile. Figure 1 shows the tutor perception of the engagement of their tutees with the PDP pre intervention and post intervention. The Tutor perception shows an increase in engagement with the PDP although this is only true for year one of both the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

Due to the time constraints of the project a limitation is that the post intervention questionnaires were carries out too early. A longer term study tracking the benefits of the intervention on one cohort of students during the two or four years of their programme (for postgraduates or undergraduates) would give more meaningful results. However, overall there has been an improvement in the use of the PDP in dietetic education and its impact on work based learning.

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