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Personalised learning plans in Lifelong Learning Networks

**Report to HEFCE by the Centre for
Recording Achievement**

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Recording
Achievement

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Foreword

1. Personalised learning has become an important concept in policy discussion about education. Its significance lies in what David Miliband MP identified as the potential of personalised learning for giving people both 'choice' and 'voice'. In his paper for the Personalising Education Conference (organised by DfES, Demos and OECD) in 2004, Miliband elaborated a process that facilitated learners' formulation and articulation of their needs, interacting with the 'supply side' of education provision. Students were the 'co-producers of education', and 'voice' was the means not only of engaging them in 'their own learning' and 'developing their talents', but also of 'using their voices to help create choices' (Miliband, 2004 p27).
2. This has resonance with a statement from our consultation on Lifelong Learning Networks: 'The most successful networks will be those that succeed in attracting new learners to higher education because what is being offered, and the way it is being offered, enables learners to participate' (HEFCE Circular Letter 12/2004).
3. It is interesting to note that when that document was written, the term personalised learning was not in general usage. It was, and perhaps still is, a term primarily associated with the improvement of standards in schools. Thus we used the term 'individualised learning plans' in relation to the processes of learning, curriculum development and the engagement and re-engagement of learners, when in hindsight the term personalised learning would have been better.
4. This report, by the Centre for Recording Achievement, argues that personalised learning planning should be seen primarily as a process that has the potential to enhance learner motivation and confidence, enable learners to have a sense of ownership of the learning process, improve decision-making skills and help in the management of transitions, for example between learning providers. Also, as a process it should provide a means of purposeful dialogue between learner and tutor, supporting engagement, retention and progression. Furthermore, personalised learning plans can be a mechanism for testing how well flexible, learner-centred curricula, with clear progression pathways, are understood and used by learners, and for ensuring that learner expectations are well managed.
5. Professor Andrew Pollard and Professor Mary James, involved in the ESRC's Teaching and Learning Research Programme, welcomed the use of the concept in their report on personalised learning. They also wondered how well it would be used and to what effect.
6. A pertinent point, for our context of Lifelong Learning Networks, is their comment that the elaboration of the concept is lacking a proper connection with 'lifelong and life-wide' learning issues, and specifically the development of 'learning dispositions and learner identities' (Pollard and James, 2004 p24). This is something which the Lifelong Learning Networks are addressing. We located the development of a network's 'progression strategy within a commitment to lifelong learning' (HEFCE, 2004), while the Centre for Recording Achievement's investigation showed that personalised learning planning could be used to support not only the initial engagement of learners, but importantly their re-engagement with

learning. Thus, in the use they make of the process of personalised learning planning, Lifelong Learning Networks can contribute to making lifelong learning a reality for significant numbers of people for whom learning was perhaps initially not that attractive a proposition.

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Executive summary

Purpose

This document summarises the outcomes of a study designed to help Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) to develop good practice in the use of personalised learning plans (PLPs). It identifies current practice in the use of such plans in vocational areas aimed at supporting effective learning and progression. It also makes recommendations to HEFCE and to individual LLNs.

Role and terminology

The role accorded to individualise learning plans (ILPs), as they were initially termed, – as a means of maintaining a learner-centred focus – was outlined in the HEFCE letter announcing the LLN initiative (HEFCE Circular letter 12/2004). Annex A of that letter stated that:

*‘The key to success, and to ensuring that the process is not simply supply-led, is the provision of vocational education and career planning. LLNs will work with learners to create **individualised learning plans** so that learners can prepare at an early stage to take advantage of opportunities available.*

Career and education planning will include opportunities to add to the knowledge and skills already acquired at any given level, as well as deepening and extending learning. It will also include opportunities to change direction, engaging with more academic learning, or to mix academic and vocational learning as appropriate. The outcomes for individuals should be that:

- *they can clearly see a way through to their chosen goal*
- *there are programmes accessible to them to take them there*
- *they have the opportunity to “double back”, take different routes to the same destination, or adapt their learning patterns to changing goals.*

***Learner-centred plans** of this kind will take full account of learner needs in terms of mode of delivery – part-time or full-time, delivered on campus (including outreach locations) or through distance learning, including e-learning, or some combination of these. The most successful networks will be those that succeed in attracting new learners to higher education because what is being offered, and the way it is being offered, enables learners to participate.’*

This emphasises ILP as a set of processes, with elements in common with personal development planning and similar approaches; for example, the term ‘learner-centred plans’ is also used in the HEFCE letter. Given this learner-centred focus, a third term – personalised – may be equally or more appropriate. This aligns with the central importance of how learners might be engaged and re-engaged in learning by institutions and networks, and the wider concerns of Government with the personalisation of learning.

Key findings

The project included a survey of the literature on PLP and cognate practice, a questionnaire and telephone survey, and a consultative seminar.

The **survey of literature** demonstrated that much of the ethos and aspiration of practice relating to PLP in LLNs has been 'tested' through implementing approaches such as personal development planning. This provides evidence of what people have done that has been useful, or not useful, in their context, and findings that are generally transferable to PLPs in LLNs. It also provides evidence for the positive effects of the associated processes – reflection, recording, planning and action – in improving students' learning.

The key aspects may be summarised as the importance of:

- more explicitly developed processes of review, planning and negotiation as a mechanism for planning and managing studies;
- a focus on the process rather than the product;
- learners having a sense of ownership of the review, planning and negotiation process (as opposed to having it 'done to them');
- tutors and learners having time and opportunities to engage with the PLP process;
- provision of appropriate tutor/mentor support to guide the process, and appropriate staff development to facilitate this.

Findings from the **questionnaire and telephone survey confirmed** that it is early days in the development of LLNs, and the main focus at present is on building infrastructure. However, members of several LLNs expressed an interest in being kept informed of developments, and shared practice, or in taking part in a future survey of practice.

Potential benefits of PLP processes were specified in terms of: enhanced learner motivation and confidence; greater sense of ownership of the learning process; improved decision-making skills; and clear progression paths.

The main purpose of PLP practice was seen as supporting people to become more independent and autonomous learners.

Potential benefits of **online PLP provision** were seen to be: more flexibility in when and how to access learning; the diversity of digital formats as evidence of learning; ease of re-using materials; and simpler and more cost-effective administration.

In terms of **further development** the survey indicated that:

- use of PLPs within LLNs is at an early stage – just half of the 14 LLNs which responded had existing practice to report;
- provision was more often related to discrete packages of support within one episode of learning than to supporting learners across transitions;
- potential barriers to the adoption of practice included concerns about appropriate models of funding, managing learner expectations, time

- constraints for part-time learners, engaging staff in supporting learners through PLP processes, and ensuring cross-sector collaboration;
- areas for development before practice could become effective nationally included more appropriate funding models to support flexible curricula associated with personalised learning, integration of PLP within curricula, recognition by the main professional/vocational bodies, and clarity of the meaning of the term itself.

The **consultative seminar** identified the following elements as central to ensuring that PLP practice within LLNs is fit for purpose:

- PLPs should be part of the reviewing and planning processes applied to learning, with recording supporting this aspect, not the other way around;
- the emphasis should be less upon a standardised approach to what an PLP is and more on the reviewing and planning processes it supports;
- the existence of cognate practice should be recognised, and lessons learned from this and connections made to it as appropriate;
- the need for transferability within and between LLNs (interoperability in the case of e-based systems) should be set alongside the importance of practice that connects to work in particular programmes and units of learning;
- the role of technology within the overall provision should be recognised. Specifically, *‘technology should be embraced as a tool to support learning development, but should be as simple as possible, and not be implemented as a substitute for staff engagement with, and support of, learners’*.

Recommendations

Overall conclusions

The key to ‘learner engagement’ is the development of effective engagement with learners themselves. Such an emphasis places primary attention upon *‘support that encourage(s) learners’ critical reflective thinking, motivation and confidence building, through validating and celebrating existing achievement, action planning, and tutor guidance’*.

PLPs should be seen firstly as a means of enabling a process, and secondly as a means of recording the outcomes of this process which can be revisited (and re-negotiated) by learner and tutor periodically.

PLPs offer a mechanism not only for learner support and engagement, but also for testing how far flexible, learner-centred curricula, with clear progression paths, are articulated to learners, and for ensuring that learner expectations are managed appropriately.

Colleagues with experience of introducing foundation degrees, who have contributed significantly to these findings, may have particular experience to offer in supporting the integration of practice within LLNs.

The LLN initiative as a whole

Recommendation 1: HEFCE should continue to emphasise this area of practice as a key mechanism for supporting learner engagement and re-engagement in LLNs.

Recommendation 2: Short 'key message' briefing papers should be produced for key LLN stakeholders.

Recommendation 3: HEFCE should support the development of a 'community of practice' as part of the LLN practitioner group. This would:

- facilitate the sharing of PLP definitions across networks;
- encourage the development of high quality, reliable and accessible resources/support for staff (and learners);
- enable the development of evidence-informed practice across LLNs, to benefit the initiative as a whole, specifically by providing a web resource for case studies of practice that exemplify how PLPs can be used successfully within LLNs.

Recommendation 4: Clear and explicit links should be made between PLP development and related areas of practice, including the progress file in schools and further education (FE), initial diagnostic assessment work in FE, 'recognising and recording progress and achievement' in FE and adult and community settings, personal development planning in higher education, and continuing professional development in employment.

Recommendation 5: The concept of PLP should be refined by identifying its component parts in the broader context of learner engagement and progression.

Individual Lifelong Learning Networks

Recommendation 6: LLNs should agree a shared definition of the purposes served by an PLP, and what any processes and documentation must include to be fit for such purposes.

Recommendation 7: LLNs should be clear about the relationship of PLP to cognate practice, with a view to achieving the most appropriate balance between additional/special practice, and connecting such practice to wider institutional provision, thereby enabling learners to feel part of the wider learning community.

Recommendation 8: LLNs should clarify the relationship of PLP to credit and assessment.

Recommendation 9: LLNs should develop a practical and detailed plan for the effective implementation of PLP practice that will:

- engage senior management;
- audit existing related practice across the LLN;
- provide opportunities to develop and disseminate programme/discipline-specific practice which supports the integration of the 'plan-do-review' PLP approach into the learner curriculum;
- develop practice which explicitly enables learners to feel part of the higher education community, while taking account of individual needs and programme-related requirements;
- provide a programme of staff development to support implementation.

Support for online PLP

Recommendation 10: LLNs should recognise the added value of online systems.

Recommendation 11: LLNs should recognise that online support for PLP processes within distance learning needs to be fit for purpose.

Recommendation 12: Any online PLP systems should have the following characteristics:

- interoperability (the systems work seamlessly together);
- learner authentication (a user proving his/her identity to a remote system);
- learner accessibility/usability (which caters for special needs, disability and/or user preferences);
- information management, including editing rights, permissions for sharing information, respecting confidentiality, and notifications to comply with data protection and copyright requirements;
- guidance to learners about the purpose and use of a system;
- the appropriate 'form and feel' to support a wide range of learner preferences.

Section 1: Introduction

A. The report

This report represents the outcomes of an investigative and consultative process undertaken during late 2005 and early 2006 by the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA)¹ on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The purpose at this time was to identify a range of current practice in the use of personalised learning plans (PLPs) in vocational areas, aimed at supporting effective learning and progression.

Section 2 sets out meanings of the term PLP, and gives an account of relevant policy developments.

Section 3 presents a review of relevant literature.

Section 4 presents findings from the questionnaire and telephone survey of current PLP practice.

Section 5 presents a summary from a consultative seminar, as annotated by participants.

Section 6 draws together the key issues, and makes 12 recommendations for action for consideration by HEFCE and the emerging PLP community.

B. Aims and purposes of this investigation and report

In June 2004 (HEFCE Circular letter 12/2004), HEFCE announced a Joint Progression Strategy with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to facilitate approaches to support vocational learners' progression into and through higher education (HE), and thus to widen participation in higher level learning. The initiative, which involves the establishment of Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs), further highlighted PLPs as a key means of supporting learner progression from vocational contexts into HE.

Our overarching aim is to help LLNs to develop good PLP practice by identifying what has been done before that has been helpful, or not, and how that understanding can most effectively help to progress the work of LLNs. Specifically, we sought to identify:

- i. Key findings from national and international reviews of cognate practice.
- ii. A range of current UK practice in the use of PLPs to support learners on vocational pathways, in order to explore key issues such as the:
 - ownership and sharing of data;
 - storage and use of information;
 - ways of locating/tracking learners and raising awareness of learning opportunities;

¹ For information about this organisation, and others referred to in the text, see the Glossary of terms and organisations.

- promotion of dialogue between networks and learners.
- iii. The potential for 'added value' provided by the use of online, e-based provision.
- iv. Those elements – within systems and supporting guidance provision – which:
- promote and sustain effective choice-making;
 - enable learners to make and sustain purposeful and effective transitions into higher level learning programmes;
 - foster a sense of inclusion within learning;
 - support higher levels of educational attainment.

The aims and purposes documented above were pursued through a literature survey of PLP and cognate practice, and a questionnaire to identify current PLP practice aimed at supporting effective learning and progression. Subsequently, a limited number of exemplars were identified for further investigation through a telephone survey, and emerging evidence tested with practitioners through a consultative seminar.

This report summarises the outcomes of the investigation, as the basis for discussion with and by colleagues from LLNs.

Section 2: Policy developments

A. The context

This section sets out contexts for and broad meanings of the use of the term ILP, and summarises policy and development activity in the use of ILP/PLP and cognate good practice.

The terms ‘individual learning plan’ and ‘individualised learning plan’ are used in a range of educational sectors, including schools, further education (FE), adult learning and HE. These terms have a range of meanings according to their context and purpose. A primary purpose emphasises processes supporting learner development, including reviews of learning and performance, and planning future goals and targets. For this purpose, ILP/PLP is most often based on an initial assessment of a learner’s knowledge and understanding, and seeks to map the route from that starting point to the intended achievement.

The term ILP/PLP is also used to denote the record or product which documents such target setting and learning. In this context it is commonly used as an assessment management tool, for monitoring progression or assessment of competences. For such assessment purposes, evidence may be required to support claims of learning incorporated within the ILP/PLP. An associated use is by funding organisations, which sometimes specify a form of ILP/PLP that is primarily intended as an audit document for drawing down funds.

In the context of this study, the acronym ILP stands for individualised learning plan and PLP for personalised learning plan. In both cases the focus is the provision of flexible and personalised progression routes to support vocational learners into and through HE, *with the opportunity to 'double back', take different routes to the same destination, or adapt their learning patterns to changing goals.*

This role – as a means of maintaining a learner-centred focus – was referred to in the HEFCE letter announcing the LLNs initiative (HEFCE, 2004). In that letter, HEFCE and the LSC invited institutions to consider establishing networks to focus on vocational and workplace progression into and through higher education in the context of lifelong learning. The aim at that time was to seek views and stimulate debate about the form that such networks could take.

Annex A of that letter identifies provision of vocational education and career planning as the key to successful LLN implementation. Individualised learning plans were envisaged as a part of that process. Quoting from the Annex:

‘The key to success, and to ensuring that the process is not simply supply-led, is the provision of vocational education and career planning. LLNs will work with learners to create individualised learning plans so that learners can prepare at an early stage to take advantage of opportunities available.

Career and education planning will include opportunities to add to the knowledge and skills already acquired at any given level, as well as deepening and extending learning. It will also include opportunities to change direction, engaging with more

academic learning, or to mix academic and vocational learning as appropriate. The outcomes for individuals should be that:

- *they can clearly see a way through to their chosen goal;*
- *there are programmes accessible to them to take them there;*
- *they have the opportunity to ‘double back’, take different routes to the same destination, or adapt their learning patterns to changing goals.*

Learner-centred plans of this kind will take full account of learner needs in terms of mode of delivery – part-time or full time, delivered on campus (including outreach locations) or through distance learning, including e-learning, or some combination of these. The most successful networks will be those that succeed in attracting new learners to higher education because what is being offered, and the way it is being offered, enables learners to participate.’

This emphasises ILP/PLP as a set of processes, with elements in common with personal development planning (PDP). The term ILP appears not to be fixed, since the term ‘learner-centred plans’ is also used. Subsequently, the ‘LLN Progress Report and Next Steps’ document (HEFCE, 2005a) included the terms ‘personalised learning’ and ‘personalised learning plan’ (paragraphs 30 and 31). Given their learner-centred focus, this third term is equally or more appropriate. This aligns with the central importance of how learners might be engaged and re-engaged in learning by institutions and networks, and the wider concerns of Government with the personalisation of learning (Leadbetter, 2004). Hence our use of both terms interchangeably within this report.

The issue of meaning and identity is revisited later in the report (Section 6), particularly with respect to refining our understanding of PLP by the identification of the PLP ‘domain’ with its component parts or elements. This allows it to be mapped onto other processes which support learners in similar ways, such as PDP, and to be understood in the broader context of lifelong learning.

B. Policy developments regarding PLP and cognate practice

This part of the report draws together and summarises policy and associated developments in PLP. It is based upon several starting points, including policy developments, the importance of connectivity with cognate good practice², and the interest of the CRA in supporting such practice. It first outlines policy developments as they affect HE, and then sets these in the wider context of congruent policy developments in other sectors.

i. Policy developments in HE

Relevant policy developments in HE have been reviewed in detail by Gallacher and Reeve (2000). Part of the outline which follows has been based on that paper.

² Such cognate practice includes processes and products known variously as individual action plans, negotiated learning, individual learning plans, records of achievement, learning contracts, personal development planning, progress file, and portfolios.

During the 1980s and '90s, a key priority of government policy was the reform of HE to make it more responsive to the needs of the changing economy so as to maintain international competitiveness. An important role was considered to be that of developing a workforce with vocationally relevant higher level skills. The 1987 White Paper set out the case for widening access to a more vocationally orientated HE, and this has been a major influence in setting the agenda of reforms and developments over the past two decades (Department of Education and Science DES, 1987). There was an increasing emphasis on a closer relationship between education and work, bringing together learning opportunities in the workplace and in higher education, and through initiatives such as the government-funded Enterprise in Higher Education initiative (EHE, 1988-96), on preparing students more effectively for the world of work. EHE encouraged the development of review, reflection, recording and planning within higher education, as part of a drive to help learners be more aware of the higher level skills being developed and their potential role in employability.

Contemporaneously, there was pressure on employers to explore and invest more in learning opportunities for employees. The concept of a 'learning society' as one which 'invests in knowledge' was emphasised by both a European Commission White Paper (European Commission, 1995, cited by Gallacher & Reeve, 2000), and, in the UK, through the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, also known as the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997). Both affirmed the need to establish closer links between education and the world of work and for learning opportunities to continue throughout a person's working life – as a framework for lifelong learning.

Within this framework, the Dearing Report (*op cit*) recommended the introduction of an HE progress file. This comprised two elements:

- a transcript recording student achievement which should follow a common format devised by institutions collectively through their representative bodies;
- a means by which students could monitor, build and reflect upon their personal development (personal development planning/recording).

Sector-agreed policy was that by 2005/06, all students would have access to the PDP aspect of the HE progress file (QAA, 2001).

The extent to which different policy considerations have influenced implementation of progress files in HE were explored in a questionnaire designed to identify institutional drivers for the adoption of policy (Brennan and Shah, 2003). Reported data, based on 73 institutional respondents, indicated that the most frequently perceived driver to adoption was employability (61 of 73 respondents). This was followed by inclusion within quality assurance (QA) reference points (55), retention (39), and widening participation (39)³. Thus employability and widening participation were seen as important drivers for implementation of the HE progress file, the PDP element of which is cognate with PLP practice.

³ Far fewer respondents identified student demand (17), employer demand (13) or staff demand (11) as drivers.

As part of the agenda to widen participation in HE, more vocationally orientated programmes with greater 'flexibility' in timing and location have been developed. These include Foundation Degrees⁴ which were introduced in 2001, and developed through the Foundation Degree Forward initiative. These are designed and delivered in partnership with employers. An important feature of Foundation Degrees has been the accreditation of prior and contemporaneous workplace/experiential learning (often termed APEL). This has necessitated a move from programme-wide pre-defined competences or learning outcomes towards programmes negotiated on an individual basis between the learner, employer and institution. Such programmes of study – in this and other areas – have been associated with the introduction of learning contracts, agreements or plans, which identify timescales, milestones and what are recognised as potential learning opportunities in the workplace, as part of a contract between the learner, the organisation and HE institution (HEI).

There is much good practice in this area which is highly congruent with the vision of PLPs in LLNs, including the use of APEL claims to accredit prior learning, and learning contracts to specify the programme of study agreed between the learner, employer and institution. Exemplars of good practice in the use of learning contracts to support learners on Foundation Degrees have contributed to the survey of practice described in Section 4 of this report.

ii. Policy developments in other sectors

Early policy outlined in this section is based partly on Watts (1992), and Daugherty (1995), to which the reader is referred for fuller accounts.

The concept of a learner documenting his or her own educational and personal progress and achievements was introduced more than two decades ago. In 1984 this was embodied in a policy statement by the (then) Department for Education and Science (DES) on records of achievement. This emphasised the recognition of achievement, a contribution to the *personal development* of learners through enhanced motivation, the opportunity for reviewing the curriculum in the context of supporting broader personal development, and the production of a *short, summary document of record* (DES, 1984, p3). Records of achievement were used predominantly within the later years of compulsory education, and became for many a largely retrospective leaving document, which recorded an individual's progress. Rather less attention was paid to forward planning or setting future goals.

At around the same time, there were increasing pressures on employers to invest more in learning opportunities for employees in the workplace. An important element associated with such opportunities was negotiating learning and recording progress. The (then) Training Agency launched its Employment Training Programme (1988), within which training agents worked with individuals to develop personal 'negotiated' action plans based on vocational learners' individual training needs, which were to be delivered by training managers.

⁴ See Annex D for information.

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI 1989, cited by Burke, 1995) recommended that school records of achievement should be merged with the work-related education and training 'national record of vocational achievement', bringing together within into one document the retrospective recording of achievement with forward action planning to create a career-orientated profile. Subsequently, the Department of Employment (DE) and the DES introduced the 'national record of achievement' in 1991. Building on previous initiatives, their purpose encompassed both recording and planning:

'... planning for future needs in the light of evidence and dialogue and the recording of those needs as a set of targets within individual development plans' (DE, 1991).

Subsequently⁵ and immediately prior to the HE Review cited above, the 1996 review of qualifications for 16-19 year-olds recommended a review, restructuring and re-launch of the national record of achievement⁶. This emphasised a shift away from a school-leaving document towards a process to support self-development, formal learning and career management. New materials were developed, trialled and disseminated nationally, under the name 'progress file'. Some of these have been made available electronically⁷. Meanwhile, in 1997, in the context of vocational learners, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) was formed to administer National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), with the first NVQs being awarded in 1998.

For learners aged 14-19 on vocational and professional programmes, 'portfolios', including online portfolio systems⁸, have been developed for assessment management particularly in response to the evidence and credit-based approach to vocational competence and accreditation (QCA, undated).

The evaluation of progress file demonstration projects in schools by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted, 2002⁹) emphasised the value of such approaches as supporting students in taking greater responsibility for their own learning. It

⁵ This part of the review draws upon material from an unpublished document 'E-portfolio: a perspective on developments in the UK' prepared for the American Association for Higher Education/UK HE Academy meeting on 'e-portfolios', Washington, 25-26 October 2004, and with a subsequent contribution from Helen Beetham.

⁶ The national record of achievement, with its close association with leaving school at 16, no longer fitted the new emphasis on 14-19 year-olds and ceased to be available in July 2004.

⁷ These electronic materials are no longer supported by or available from the DfES, as from April 2006, because the DfES has indicated: "... the principles and processes which underpin progress file are now well established and have been adopted in an increasing range of other products and services." (information available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/progressfile/> (accessed 15/05/06))

⁸ See, as an example, http://www.tribaltechnology.co.uk/html/products/education_systems/skillsfolio.htm (accessed 26/02/06)

⁹ Ofsted might also be expected to have a perspective on the development of ILP/PLPs and related practice, especially given the statutory requirement on all schools since 1998 to set performance targets in relation to national expectations for raising attainment (DfEE, 1998). However a search of the Ofsted website did not return any useful material in relation either to ILP/PLPs or to 14-19 pathfinder projects, where most development work might reasonably be expected to have taken place, and only two related to progress files.

noted that *'the quality of tutor support and guidance is the biggest factor influencing the impact of Progress File on pupils' work habits and attitudes'*. More recent data collected for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) by Ward, Strivens and Pierce (2006, unpublished), did however highlight the interest of Ofsted in such practice, alongside other formative feedback on the effects of implementation. This indicated that:

- a. The progress file (PF) has contributed to improved GCSE results. *'In schools with PF, examination results have improved and this is attributed to PF ... a couple of Headteachers have stated that PF has certainly contributed to GCSE results ... Though cause and effect cannot be proved, three schools have made a considerable leap forward in examination results and in each case they have made considerable use of PF.'*
- b. PF has been important in supporting engagement by disaffected learners: *'Four years ago, in our KS 4 Increased Flexibility Programme there was a 10% drop-out in the first week; PF has helped to reduce this to 1%.'*

Individual learning plans were also introduced as an expectation for all post-16 learners on courses funded through the local LSCs established in 2001. These were focused upon documenting formal achievement (for example, through 'performance measurement indicators'), and have been part of the requirement for drawing down funding. As such, they tend to be much less learner centred than some other types of learning plans. They have, however, also been developed for use in other contexts, such as to support 'basic skills work with adults', including support of those with special needs (DfES, undated), as demonstrated through the work of the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI). In this context, ILP/PLPs are typically used with a wide range of work-based learners, including those on apprenticeships.

Congruence between PLPs supporting FE college students or work-based clients, such as those on apprenticeships, and the vision of PLPs in LLNs for supporting progression of vocational learners into and through higher level learning, is readily apparent in the 'detailed guidance' section on the ALI website. This notes that:

'Apprenticeships are individualised programmes of learning and so each apprentice should have an individual learning plan (ALI, undated, a); and similarly for other adult learner groups, such as FE college students (ALI, undated, b).

Much of this work has involved client groups with limited current educational attainments and been centred upon addressing learning difficulties, but some important messages can be discerned from this work (ALI, undated, c). Employer training pilots, introduced in 2002 and, more recently, employer training programmes (launched 2006) aim to provide accredited flexible and accessible training for experienced but unqualified employees, and are using PLPs in the training and assessment of work-based learners' employment skills. Whilst evaluation work indicated that employees enjoyed participating in these pilot programmes, it highlighted that training providers demonstrated 'poor practice in implementing effective initial assessment', (essential to an 'assess-train-assess' model to identify skills gaps), 'poor use of supportive guidance and of individual

learning plans', and 'little planned training'.¹⁰ A tendency for employees to receive accreditation for pre-existing skills, and a concern that there was insufficient emphasis on improving literacy and numeracy, so that the basic skills agenda is not being met, were also identified, together with 'poor target setting and (in some pilots) little emphasis upon achievement'. The report further identified concerns that employers were reluctant to admit that they had employees without basic skills, and employees who were embarrassed about admitting deficits in basic skills, as contributing to poor provision and low uptake (Hillage and Mitchell, 2003).

Thirty-five references to ILPs are listed on the ALI good practice database (ALI, undated, d). These are however, essentially providers' accounts of case studies of use, with little evaluation of the impact of such practice.

Connections can also be made to 'recognising and recording progress and achievement' (RARPA) in non-accredited learning¹¹. Results from pilot work in planning and implementing the five stage process of RARPA (LSC, undated, online), emphasise many of the key points raised from the consultative seminar elements of this investigation, and reported in Section 5. They include the need for integrating practice and the importance of models that relate to local circumstances.

More recently the report on 'Setting targets for pupils with special educational needs' (Ofsted, 2004), emphasised the importance of focusing on precise curriculum objectives for individuals, allied to the failure to set targets related to personal and social development on a systematic basis. This echoes challenges identified by the ALI in the use of ILPs.

C. Policy developments in online provision

The concept of a negotiated learning contract also connects with the concept of a 'portfolio' to provide evidence of achievement and learning, currently the focus for developments across a range of educational sectors. Much work here is now focused on online provision. This reflects developments over the past decade, during which there has been an increasing, though by no means universal, move towards electronic implementation of processes supporting PDP/ PLP, across HE and other educational sectors. These developments have in turn reflected the

¹⁰ From a wider perspective, paucity of planned training should perhaps not be viewed as too great a cause for concern, since Eraut et al (1999) surveying employee experiences of workplace learning, found that most workplace learning fell into the 'informal learning' category.

¹¹ The RARPA staged process consists of five elements. These are:

1. Aims appropriate to an individual learner or group of learners.
2. Initial assessment to establish the learner's starting point.
3. Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives.
4. Recognition and recording of progress and achievement during programme (formative assessment).
5. End of programme learner self-assessment; tutor summative assessment; review of overall progress and achievement.

This must be implemented by all LSC-funded providers by September 2006. (See Annex D for further information). The RARPA site also provides access to a further range of documentation, and to a list of RARPA 'champions'.

increasing use of IT-based learning environments, study off-campus, pressure on staff resources, and the increasing readiness of many students and an increasing number of staff to engage with the technology. Thus, the report of the Scoping Group on Measuring and Recording Student Achievement in HE, the Burgess Report (Burgess, 2004), envisaged the possibility of a personal electronic portfolio for all HE students in the medium term. Selected evidence from such an e-portfolio could be presented for a range of purposes and in a range of different formats.

The move towards online implementation of practice in this area also reflects the attention given to the development of electronic support mechanisms signalled in the e-learning strategy produced by HEFCE (2005b). This emphasised the encouragement of *'e-based systems of describing learning achievement and personal development planning'* within its joint implementation plan. This development is highly congruent with the DfES' e-strategy (DfES, 2005) and skills strategy (DfES, 2003)¹², and with other initiatives under development to support learner engagement and re-engagement, for example through 'Enquiring minds' (Enquiring minds, undated, online).

The DfES e-Strategy (DfES, 2005) has recently emphasised that, across all educational sectors:

'We will encourage every institution to offer a personal online learning space to store coursework, course resources, results and achievements. We will work towards developing a personal identifier for each learner, so that organisations can support an individual's progression more effectively. Together, these facilities will become an electronic portfolio, making it simpler for learners to build their record of achievement throughout their lifelong learning.' (Para10, page 5)¹³

There has therefore been increasing recognition of the need to align the provision of effective individual support with the 'e-delivery' of such learning plans, and with wider e-portfolio developments such as those associated with the implementation of personal development planning processes in higher education¹⁴ (QAA, 2001, HEFCE 2005b, para. 3.4). This has been supported by lessons from the Managed Learning Environments for Lifelong Learning programme (MLEs4LL) funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). In particular some projects have sought to encourage progression from more to less supported learning environments (see e.g. Strivens, 2005). Briefing papers (JISC, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d) for senior managers, produced as a result of a synthesis of learning from across the programme, have emphasised the need for joined-up thinking across sectors in supporting PDP and related practice in the context of lifelong learning, and this may be extended to include practice such as PLP.

¹² The skills strategy highlights the need for an adult credit framework – an important prerequisite for a credible national record of achievement – and promises to invest in e-learning and e-assessment to help meet government targets on skills development.

¹³ While the focus here is upon developments in England, parallel work is under way elsewhere.

¹⁴ See: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressFiles/guidelines/progfile2001.pdf>, (accessed 14/02/06).

In contrast to emerging developments in HE, so far the majority of practice reported by ALI appears to be paper rather than IT-supported, although at least one college, based in Buckinghamshire, describes how an online ILP is provided as part of an ICT course for learners:

'Learners have Smart Cards containing a standard ILP. It gives them access to a virtual learning environment, with all their course notes and learning resources. They can edit their ILP and extend it to a lifelong learning plan.

(ALI, undated, e).

Sections 3 and 6 include consideration of the functional requirements of online portfolio/ PLP systems necessary to support learners' progression, including across transitions. Potential benefits and concerns regarding online implementation are further considered in sections 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Section 3: Literature review

A. Introduction

This review of literature, although centred on ‘individualised/personalised learning plans’, also includes literature associated with cognate good practice. Such practice includes processes and products known variously as individual action plans, negotiated learning, individual learning plans, records of achievement, learning contracts, personal development planning, progress files, and portfolios. Wider consideration is important for two reasons: firstly, because much good practice congruent with PLPs has been established over several decades; secondly, many learning points from such cognate practice are relevant here. Our focus is therefore on literature from which lessons for PLP practice can be drawn or inferred. Our aim is to draw attention to what others have done that may be helpful to LLNs to develop learner-centred practice in their own contexts.

B. Implementation of PLP and cognate practice

The development of policy and associated implementation has been outlined in Section 2, and is reprised here only to explain or clarify points made through the literature review.

i. Implementation in higher education

Gallacher and Reeve (2000) provide a useful starting point in reviewing literature on ILP/PLPs. Their paper provides the background through an account of initiatives and developments in both policy and practice. These were influential in improving learning opportunities in the workplace, and in approaches to planning the learning process itself. They first review developments of work-based learning (WBL) in higher education, and national drivers for those developments, over the past two decades. Here the impetus for change reflected the Government’s priorities for reform of HE to meet the needs of the economy and employers in order to maintain international competitiveness. The aims were to:

- a. Embrace the need for vocationally relevant higher level skills;
- b. Move from an elite to a mass system of higher education by widening participation to a much broader cross-section of society;
- c. Combine study with employment whether at undergraduate or postgraduate level (DES, 1987).

Based upon experience from a number of projects in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s they concluded that the emphasis of WBL differed from traditional academic programmes in three ways:

‘... a new emphasis on learning from experience ... of integrating WBL with academic programmes ... and of assessing and accrediting WBL (in new ways)’.

Gallacher and Reeve highlight greater recognition of competency-based approaches to learning and qualifications, and report how moves towards lifelong learning have been characterised by a blurring of boundaries between the workplace and HE. They distinguish between aspects of traditional disciplinary knowledge production (termed ‘mode 1’) and multi-variant, transdisciplinary,

'chaotic' knowledge production (mode 2), such as may be gained through '*real activities and learning through (devising approaches to) problems in the workplace*'. To enable accreditation in HE of such knowledge production in the workplace, typically there has been a move away from programme-wide pre-defined competences or learning outcomes towards programmes negotiated on an individual basis. Two recognised purposes of such negotiated programmes have been: as a means to prioritise the learning goals of the individual or employer/organisation, and as a means to begin to structure the chaotic potential of the workplace.

The development of such individually negotiated programmes of study has been associated with the introduction of learning contracts, agreements or plans, as a means of planning the learning process itself. One approach has been to reduce potential tensions between academic 'structure' and workplace learning 'flexibility', by identifying timescales, milestones and what are recognised as potential learning opportunities in the workplace, as part of a contract between the learner, the organisation and HEI. Such plans are provisional in nature and may be subject to negotiated review (Brennan and Little, 1996).

Anderson & Boud (2000) developed this theme. Drawing upon research into the use of learning contracts in the School of Adult Education at the University of Technology in Sydney, they identified key issues which need to be considered before adopting such approaches. They regarded negotiated learning contracts as potentially one of the most useful tools available to those interested in promoting flexible approaches to learning, supporting diverse learning needs, and suiting a variety of purposes both within courses and in the workplace. However, they also emphasised that such approaches need to be carefully introduced and supported, and that problems can arise if they are used in an instrumental fashion. This is illustrated by the points below, drawn from their paper; each of these would be as valid for the introduction of PLP.

*'... it is rather misleading to talk about "a **learning** contract" as if there were only one model to follow. The original idea ... has been extended and modified to suit a variety of contexts – even in one program ...'*

*'... it can be tempting for the adviser to take charge of the process ... The problem here is that the more input the adviser has the less learners will regard it as their contract. The sense of ownership of the **learning** (which is a key point of the exercise) will be lost.'*

*'The question of who "owns" the **learning** and whether the institution perceives its role as a director of **learning** or a resource for **learning** is critical here.'*

'... personal attitudes and the prevailing organisational culture are often the main problems.'

'(The most important issue not normally given enough attention by staff is the) significance of investing time and effort into orientation and initial support for learners, even more than may at first be thought necessary.'

Another issue commonly raised in the context of learner engagement is the extent to which staff model the behaviour which they are encouraging in learners. In relation to a major initiative at the University of Auckland to raise the profile of the teaching portfolio to fit with its stated goal as 'the primary means of evaluating teaching', Stefani (2005) recognises the importance of staff engagement with portfolios for continuing professional development (CPD) as a promotional tool to learner engagement with the e-portfolio process. The paper concludes:

'Perhaps if faculty modelled the process of reflecting on their teaching, it would be easier to encourage and support students in reflecting on their learning.'

Negotiated learning contracts or plans are now an established feature of foundation degrees. Good practice in supporting learners through negotiated learning contracts is highly congruent with potential developments relating to good practice use of PLPs in LLNs. Although such learning contracts - and foundation degrees themselves - were not developed with the aim of supporting learner 'engagement and re-engagement' such as is envisaged here, this has nevertheless been an outcome, as indicated by the comment from one respondent to the survey questionnaire:

'Although the dream of through-life ILP is not part of the [this HEI's] model it is remarkable how many students who go through an undergraduate learning contract degree return to study a masters award.'

LLNs potentially have much to gain from partners with experience in congruent good practice through the provision of foundation degrees. However, it would be misleading to focus on a negotiated learning contract or PLP as a 'product', since the provision of support for learning is also considered in the contract/plan, and the importance of mentor support for the processes of review, negotiation and planning is emphasised. Additionally, assessment has become negotiable, with a variety of workplace 'products' being allowed as evidence of learning, together with a 'portfolio commentary', which draws the learning together, analyses processes of learning and evaluates the knowledge gained.

The relationship between a negotiated learning contract or aPLP and the concept of a 'portfolio' to evidence achievement and learning is considered below.

ii. Congruence of concepts and purposes of PLP and portfolios

The term portfolio, as used in the UK, generally describes a collection (or archive) of reflective writing and associated evidence which documents learning, and which a learner may draw upon to present their learning and achievements¹⁵. A portfolio therefore encompasses the concept of personal development records, including records that may contribute to the HE progress file, and extends beyond that, to incorporate artefacts which may evidence claims made in personal development records. Normally, a portfolio would also include elements of action planning.

In professions such as teaching and disciplines allied to health, 'portfolios' have been used for many years to document and evidence learning, and to capture

¹⁵ Some authors define portfolio as a tool to enable these (e.g. Rodaway, 2005).

elements of action planning¹⁶. For example, Challis (1999) has provided a useful guide and framework for the effective use of practice underpinning portfolios in medical education. This includes much that would be relevant to practitioners developing PLP practice to support vocational learners into higher level learning. Of particular use is her key stages in the processes undertaken by tutors supporting learners, and by learners themselves, in developing a portfolio (including: *'establish means for supporting the learning during portfolio development ... introduce portfolio to learners, develop individual action plan ... monitor progress ... assess/ review portfolio'*).

The past few years have seen a profusion of developments in portfolios, both in paper and electronic format. A recent review (Grant, Rees Jones & Ward, 2004) draws together much of this work and gives an account of the relationship between PDP and e-portfolios, including developments relating to e-portfolio purposes and practice, from both UK and international perspectives. Of particular relevance to PLP are the four main purposes listed. These are concerned with:

- a. Supporting formal (e.g. curricular) learning;
- b. Supporting overall development (encompassing personal and career areas as well as educational ones, and learning/experience derived from less formal contexts)¹⁷;
- c. Presentation/showcasing for progression;
- d. Formal summative assessment.

A fifth purpose, 'to support individual inclusion within contexts where learners may be undertaking programmes across different learning environments', might also be added, and might be considered highly relevant here.

iii. Implementation in other sectors

As we have already identified, key purposes of PLP processes include action planning and negotiated learning, the use of which has been well established over several decades.¹⁸

Congruence between purposes of, and issues raised by, PLP practice and individual action planning is readily apparent from exploring the work of Watts (1992, 1994), who reported on an evaluation of the use of individual action planning in a youth development project in Essex. This project (sometimes known as the Essex Project) was one of 47 youth development projects across schools, further education colleges and training centres, set up by the (then) Training

¹⁶ Their use has been extended more recently to other professions, including engineering and librarianship.

¹⁷ Helpfully, similar categorisations are presented in a report to Becta by Strivens 'Current e-portfolio developments in the 14-19, Adult and Lifelong Learning Sectors' (2005, unpublished), and in a paper reviewing emerging practice in Europe developed to facilitate discussion at the 2004 e-portfolio conference held in La Rochelle (Rees Jones, 2005).

¹⁸ The implementation of ILP as a performance measurement indicator in adult workplace literacy education has been reviewed by Hamilton (in preparation). However, although this paper has much of interest, and the topic is important in the context of adult literacy, it is not further explored in this report, since it is not envisaged that PLPs in LLNs will be used for that purpose.

Agency in partnership with local education authorities in 1989. the projects were concerned with development of individual action planning.

Watts reported that such individual action planning was seen to have a range of purposes: firstly as a pupil-management process, to encourage learners to take more responsibility for their behaviour and learning within the school environment; secondly as a guidance process, to help learners set targets at transition points; thirdly as an educational process, to help learners develop skills which would be of use to them throughout life; and fourthly, as a management of learning process, to encourage learners to take responsibility for the direction of their learning, which encompassed a long- term view of career and other goals. The descriptions of the latter three processes are recognisable as elements of PLP practice (although the terminology used to define them differs).

In respect of attitudes to such practice, many issues which surfaced through both the youth development project in Essex (Watts, 1992, 1994), and the national evaluation of such projects (Squirrell, 1991), continue to be topical and relevant. They reflect a range of tensions between the priorities of different stakeholders. These included, for example, whether the focus should be on 'process' or 'product', whether it should be about enhancing 'quality' of provision or 'quantity' of the action plans or learning plans created, and thus whether it should reflect a student-centred or employer-centred approach. Other familiar issues relate to improving learner engagement: positive drivers included a sense of ownership and explicit support in use by staff; whilst negative drivers included perceptions of such action plans being 'over-used' or 'repetitive', and a poor sense of 'ownership' when the process was initiated by the institution. Additionally, the importance of, adequacy and appropriateness of resource structures was raised, referring to:

'... the implications for institutional structures, which have to be resourced and managed in ways which make them adaptable and responsive to individual demands'

'... these kinds of developments need to be adequately resourced in ways which extend the range of options'

'... particularly in respect of providing time for guidance, negotiation, and responsiveness to needs that cannot be met within existing provision.'

iv. Consortium agreements

An intended key feature of LLNs is collaborative support and provision, including 'joined-up' practice in the provision of PLP processes. Charlesworth and Home (2005a) provide aspects of legal guidance in developing and maintaining consortium agreements in the format of frequently asked questions. The specific relevance of this for PLP practice is that it was developed in the context of collaborative support for lifelong learning (through the JISC MLEs4LL programme). It captured learning from projects which developed means to transfer and share learner information and records between organisations in a range of sectors, including between employment and HE, and between FE and HE.

C. Emerging perspectives on support for lifelong learning

One way in which the vision of PLPs in LLNs differs from most other established cognate provision is the concept of the learning plan **being used by the learner on a continuing basis**, across transitions. This can be from employment into HE, when moving from FE into HE, or vice versa, as well as by remaining available for use contemporaneously within several sectors.

As reported in Richardson and Ward (2005):

'Recent developments in e-learning technologies and a change of emphasis, from a focus on learning sectors towards learners themselves, have provided an impetus to generate a more joined-up approach to learner support, and therefore to create e-portfolio products with the potential to support the lifelong learner. There has been recognition of a need to support learners particularly across transitions between stages of education and employment, which, with changing employment patterns and widening participation, are likely to vary increasingly in sequence and in combination.'

The JISC MLEs4LL programme mentioned above supported the development of both management/business-centred and learner-centred 'fit for purpose' systems. This was to enable a joined-up approach to lifelong learning records, including those supporting PDP and e-portfolio processes, to more effectively support the transfer of learner information across transitions. Recently published programme outputs (JISC, 2006e), although centred on cognate practice, include resources relevant to future developments in PLPs in LLNs. They include a series of briefing papers on e-portfolios, cross-institutional provision, and lifetime learning across the educational landscape (JISC, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d respectively), whilst individual managed learning environment projects have demonstrated how such interoperation may work in practice (JISC 2006e).

Two individual projects, which may be helpful in the development of PLP processes, are 'PROSPERO' (processes for support of personal development records online) and 'Specifying an ePortfolio'. The former investigated requirements for interoperability between learning systems in FE, HE and workplaces, and developed online PDP support for mature, employed learners studying for a degree part-time (Somerville, Smith and, Lodge 2005). 'Specifying an ePortfolio' concerned web-based UCAS application processes. This included development of a technical framework for enhancing learner information within a personal statement, and how this might contribute to a 'presentational' portfolio, as part of a more flexible admissions process to support a wider range of learners (Smallwood, 2005).

A later JISC project is developing a reference model for e-portfolios to support learners across transition points in lifelong learning. This is also expected to be relevant to developments of PLP in LLN¹⁹.

¹⁹ DeL project 'ePortfolio for Lifelong Learning (eP4LL) at <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ePReferenceModel> (accessed 27/02/06), including a briefing paper: ePortfolio Initial Reference Model, at http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/ePortfolio%20briefing%20for%20the%2015th.doc

Such e-system developments align with recent national policy initiatives, which have encouraged:

- a. Collaborative provision through partnerships at cross-sectoral (DfES e-strategy, DfES, 2005) and cross-institutional levels (HEFCE strategy for e-learning, HEFCE, 2005b);
- b. The use of common systems and open standards for electronic learning, administration and business systems, to facilitate support of learners in a more joined-up way across different episodes of learning.

These developments support progress towards provision of a personal electronic portfolio for all HE students in the medium term, as envisaged in the previously cited report on measuring and recording student achievement (The Burgess Report, Universities UK, 2004). An PLP could form the starting component of such a portfolio, which could itself be either paper-based or electronic.

D. Perspectives on online materials to support personalised learning plans

A useful starting point for stakeholders considering the potential benefits or otherwise of online provision to support PLPs is found in Brown, Cooper and Ward (2002). Although this paper discussed advantages and disadvantages of IT systems to support PDP, its conclusions are transferable to PLPs in LLNs. The main competing tensions identified in respect of 'fitness for purpose' of IT support of PDP may be summarised as:

- a. For institutional embedding – a tension between diversity (PDP works best with local context and 'ownership') and commonality (previous online systems have tended to emphasise 'one size fits all');
- b. For engagement with learners – a tension that some elements of support are best managed by human intervention, others are managed well by electronic means;
- c. For contextualising the technology – a conflict as to who has 'ownership' of a learner's records, and who should decide who may have access to them;
- d. For interoperability – how to ensure that records can be shared, transferred or read by different online systems.

Since that report, developments have begun to address some of those issues. For example, re 'one size fits all', web pages may be customised for different learner communities; re ownership of records, greater clarity has followed from the work of Charlesworth and Home (2004, 2005b); re interoperability, many development projects have taken this forward, although there is still much to do (see Richardson & Ward, 2005, Grant, Rees Jones and Ward, 2003). An aspirational consequence of this might be, for example, being able to cross-reference the contents of an PLP with standards of competence, hosted by an industry sector governing body, in order to present a file for accreditation of prior work experience (as suggested by the European Institute for E-Learning, EIfEL, 2006). What remains an issue of importance for PLP practice as well as for PDP, is a continuing need for appropriate human intervention.

Beetham (2005) reviewed the uses, technical developments and functional requirements (including organisational, management, regulatory and policy issues) of e-portfolio applications for 'post-16' learners. Her paper sets out a table of functional requirements based on potential benefits for learners across all four contexts of e-portfolio use (personal development, curricular learning, assessment and presentational, as listed in section 3.B.i). This is most effectively illustrated by showing one row of the table:

Potential benefit	Functional requirement to achieve that benefit
Recognition and development of competences, across as well as within programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access and interoperability across programmes • Access to diagnostic tools within e-portfolios • Links to key skills materials

Richardson and Ward (2005) surveyed an illustrative sample of e-portfolio products supporting learners in a range of educational sectors, including HE, FE, vocational learning, both 14–19 and adult, and schools. The reviewers developed a mapping tool and explored an illustrative range of 12 e-portfolio products, which exemplified the range of existing UK systems in terms of target learner communities, purposes, functionalities and provision on a commercial or non-commercial basis. They reported that:

- most e-portfolio products have been developed for a particular age or stage of learning rather than to support lifelong learning;
- the main purpose of most was to support PDP type practice, usually alongside a tutorial programme²⁰, or with a facility for mentor feedback;
- two products were more appropriately described as assessment management tools, and three provided a means for creating presentational portfolios;²¹
- all products allowed learners to create and edit text;
- most supported file uploads and/or linked files;
- about half the products stated their privacy policy on site;
- similarly, about half allowed the learner to select others to share either selected parts or all of their e-portfolio;
- very few products supported learner-controlled screen display preference settings. Some were planning development in this area;
- most product developers reported that 'conformance with e-learning standards was under development', although at that time, none yet supported interoperable transfer of learner information to another e-portfolio product. Some did allow transfer to another system in the same institution, such as the virtual learning environment or the Management Information System.

From the mapping tool developed for that survey, a planning template was devised to facilitate the process of developing or selecting an effective learner-centred e-portfolio system for PDP processes (Ward and Richardson, *ibid*). This template emphasised the importance of a range of functional requirements (outlined below) to take into account.

²⁰ Tutorial support was usually face to face, hence, a system encompassed electronic and human delivery.

²¹ However, these purposes overlap and some systems supported more than one purpose.

The same functional requirements would be important to consider in the development or purchase of online systems to support learners in the use of PLP. They include:

- interoperability, so that a learner's portfolio or other relevant information can be shared with, read by, and transferred between, different systems in the same or different organisations, without the need for re-keying. For a technical discussion of this, see also Grant et al, 2003);
- support for learners with differing screen display preferences utilising Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG, 1999)²², and for learners with special needs (Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, SENDA, 2001);
- some legal considerations associated with support in the areas of confidentiality and data protection, as explained in Charlesworth and Home, 2005a, 2005b;
- support of learners to facilitate social inclusion (see Home and Charlesworth, 2005).

Leivers and Henry (2005) have reported on the value of e-based provision in a pilot scheme in which interoperability between relevant systems in an FE and an HE institution, and support for visually impaired learners, were both successfully tested. Provision supported both FE and HE learners in FE, including foundation degree students. They noted that: *'In the evaluation of the project, both staff and students provided positive feedback and students welcomed the use of e-progress file to assist them in their personal development.'*

E. Evaluation studies

A review of the literature would be incomplete without reference to studies of evaluation and evidence of potential or actual benefits of use.

There are two key challenges in evaluating the impact of PDP/ PLP or portfolio systems in providing support for learners. Firstly that, in a conventional educational setting, it would normally be unethical to design an empirical study with groups of learners some of whom were exposed to the support intervention (experimental groups), and others who were denied it (control groups). Instead, most studies rely on observation of naturally occurring data. Secondly, with such naturally occurring data it is generally not possible to attribute changes to a particular intervention. Thus much of the 'evidence of impact' tends to be qualitative, for example through case studies, rather than through empirically designed studies with controlled data collection.

Notwithstanding those caveats, the international research synthesis undertaken by Gough, Kiwan, Sutcliffe & Simpson (2003), provided evidence for the positive effects of the processes associated with PLP congruent practice on improving students' learning. This undertook a systematic mapping and synthesis of PDP

²² WCAG (1999) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0 <http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/> (accessed 21/02/06). For an example of this in practice, see Leivers and Henry (2005).

related research by screening 14,000 studies for review, of which 157 met the inclusion criteria for the detailed review. These were key worded to produce a systematic map of research activity in the field. Twenty-five were selected for in-depth review on the basis of researcher intervention and independent outcome measures, such as knowledge, approaches to learning styles or self-review. The papers were judged on the quality of research and weight of evidence, and the outcome being that 'processes which involve reflection, recording, planning and action improve student learning'. Although this judgement was based on a small number of studies, the authors concluded there was good evidence of a strong association.

It is more straightforward to undertake evaluation studies of attitudes to processes such as PDP or PLP, although these do not inform whether learners have benefited through their experience, or whether behaviour has changed. Reference to evaluation studies of attitudes to individual action planning by staff and students has already been made (e.g. Watts, 1992, 1994). For those, the emphasis has been on factors which promote or reduce learner engagement. Factors which promoted uptake were focused on process rather than on product, engagement with learners themselves, and a sense of learner ownership. Additional factors, which were seen to be important for engagement from a staff perspective, were adequate resources in terms of structures for flexible and individually negotiated provision, and time for engaging with learners for guidance and negotiation.

Subsequently, Rouncefield and Ward (1998) reported upon a questionnaire-based study of 812 students commencing undergraduate study in six separate institutions in 1994. Though based exclusively upon self-report, this sought to link learner experiences of the processes of recording achievement and action planning prior to HE to outcomes from such processes. Results showed that respondents who participated in a process that they reported were characterised by the following elements:

- discussion with teachers/tutors as to the rationale for particular pieces of work;
- discussion of the ways in which work was to be assessed;
- assessing their own work;
- contributing to the assessment of the work of other students;
- jointly compiling a summative record;
- regularly updating this record;
- learning how they might make use of this record outside school or college.

They were significantly more likely to:

- report the experience as helpful in planning and managing their studies;
- feel more confident in identifying skills, experiences and important achievements;
- feel more confident in being able to present evidence for their achievements;
- report the action planning process as being helpful;
- feel more confident in deciding upon their immediate goals.

While this study was undertaken with a different client group, it does hold potential significance for LLN work, specifically by indicating that the process of practice

can be associated with important outcomes for learners related to both supporting learning and managing transitions. Indeed, the focus upon learner confidence might be of particular significance for the LLN client group. The researchers drew four conclusions:

- a. The processes of recording achievement need to be developed more explicitly as a mechanism for planning and managing studies, linked to a framework for teaching learning and assessment which emphasises greater transparency in terms of outcomes sought and greater student involvement in assessment.
- b. Staff need time and opportunity to provide one-to-one tutorial support, which emerged as an important element in student perceptions of both the quality of provision and positive outcomes.
- c. Greater recognition needs to be given to the ability of the processes of recording achievement and action planning to promote desirable characteristics, in terms of making and implementing transitions. This is an issue which might be of even greater relevance in the context of a multi-provider network.
- d. Guidance provision needs to focus on a broader process of self-management and learning management so as to support the development of skills and attributes which facilitate progression.

A different evaluation approach has been undertaken in a national cross-sectoral survey (HE, FE, school) to identify typical uses, purposes, processes, activities, and associated outputs/records of PDP or cognate practice (CRA, 2003/4)²³. Purposes of PDP identified through that survey, and listed below, generally align with those identified (through the current investigative survey) as purposes of PLP practice:

- help people become more independent and autonomous learners;
- help the learning process towards goals and achievements;
- raise learners' self-esteem;
- raise learners' self-awareness;
- help with career progression, employability or further study;
- ensure provision of personal tutorial support;
- help learners to articulate/present their skills and achievements to third parties;
- instil in learners relevant professional attitudes and responsibilities.

Many of the processes identified would be appropriate for consideration for inclusion in PLP practices within LLNs; and typical information outputs, as elements within personal development records, might be relevant to record a learner's progress within PLP documentation.

Building on this theme, a recent paper by Ward, Jackson & Strivens (2005) identified typical information outcomes from personal development records, which

²³ Individual institutional data that contributed to the survey may be viewed at <http://www.cetis.ac.uk/members/pdpcontent>. Documents aimed to support dialogue about or self-survey of practice are available at <http://www.cetis.ac.uk/members/PDPcontent/threads>.

support PDP methodology and have significant potential for transferability and for use at transition points. Notably these were:

- the evaluation of self in relation to skills;
- the accumulation of evidence for skills acquisition;
- reflective writing, referring to experiences or to logs;
- the development of action plans (for education or work goals);
- the compilation of CVs/personal statements.

The paper was developed through consultation in four workshops designed to evaluate progress in implementing progress files in HE. Although it focused on PDP, it contains key messages which are highly relevant for development of PLPs in LLNs. These included:

'The recorded 'outputs' from PDP were predominantly seen as records of the process itself and as raw material on which students may draw when presenting/representing themselves to others. Such outputs significantly extend the range of information about students' experiences and achievement.'

'Participants identified a range of persistent development issues and development needs, including staff and student motivation.'

A somewhat comparable point, which encompasses much of what might be considered 'fitness for purpose', was made by contributors to the survey of practice reported upon here:

'The process is more important than the medium through which it is supported.'

F. Conclusions

The overarching message which emerges from this literature survey is that much practice relating to PLP in LLNs has been 'tested' through the experience of implementing PDP and associated practice. This provides evidence of what has been useful or not useful in differing contexts, and findings that are generally transferable to the development of practice of PLPs in LLNs.

The helpful aspects may be summarised as the importance of:

- a. More explicitly developed processes of review, planning and negotiation, as a mechanism for planning and managing studies.
- b. A focus on the process rather than the product.
- c. Learners having a sense of ownership of the process (as opposed to having it done 'to them').
- d. Tutors and learners having time and opportunities to engage with the process.
- e. Provision of the twin requirements of appropriate tutor/mentor support to guide the process, and appropriate staff development to facilitate this.

Section 4: Survey of ILP/PLP²⁴ practice

Here we outline the survey methods and document findings from a questionnaire and telephone survey of existing and planned practice in the use of a range of ILP/PLPs to support learners on vocational pathways in the UK, and of cognate good practice.

A. Outline of survey method

The survey comprised three strands:

- A questionnaire (see Annex B) was circulated widely to contacts across a range of UK networks, projects and organisations who were anticipated to have experience of ILP, or of cognate practice that aimed to support vocational learners' entry into higher level learning.
- Information from questionnaires was collated to indicate the range of practice reported and, from this, to decide the focus of follow up telephone conversations.
- Telephone conversations were undertaken with a selected sample in order to explore practice in greater depth.

The emerging findings from the survey were subsequently used to inform the consultative seminar, with a view to scoping the development agenda. The seminar is reported upon in the next section of this report.

Further information about the method, and data relating to the survey sample, are in Annex C.

B. Scope of reported practice²⁵

Eighteen of the 27 LLNs contributed to the investigative process, by replying to the survey of practice questionnaire (14), by taking part in the telephone survey (7), by being represented in the consultative seminar (8), or through a combination of these (9).

Thirty-nine questionnaire replies were received, from 14 LLNs (including at least one from each of the nine regional teams and one from the national team). The number of replies from an individual LLN varied between one and 10.

Partner institutions representing seven LLNs each completed at least one questionnaire which described existing ILP or cognate practice.

²⁴ The text in this section emphasises the term ILP, as that was the term used in this part of the investigation.

²⁵ In this section, the term ILP practice is taken to include cognate practice, which may go by another name, such as PDP, or progress file practice.

A partner institution representing one LLN completed a questionnaire which described planned ILP practice.

Partner institutions representing five LLNs each reported that they had no ILP practice to share, as it was too early in their network's development. Some expressed an interest in taking part in a survey at a future date or of being kept informed of practice as it developed.

Partners of one LLN reported that they were in the final stages of the bidding process, and that, as they were not yet funded, they had no practice to report.

Ten telephone interviews were undertaken with partners from seven LLNs, all of whom had either existing or planned ILP or cognate practice to share. Five of these LLNs had also contributed to the questionnaire, and one had contributed to both the seminar and questionnaire.

C. Overview of reported practice

Here we summarise the survey findings. Part D then explores these in greater depth.

Table 2: Main findings from the questionnaire and telephone survey

- Seven of the 14 LLNs which responded to the questionnaire had existing ILP practice to report.
- The main purpose of reported ILP practice was to help people to become more independent and autonomous learners, particularly through goal setting and critical reflection.
- Existing ILP provision appeared to be more often related to discrete packages of support within one episode of learning than to supporting learners across transitions.
- Elements within systems and guidance provision that were associated with effective use were seen to include support that encouraged learners' critical reflective thinking, motivation and confidence building, through validating and celebrating existing achievement and action planning, and tutor/mentor involvement in these processes.
- Potential benefits of ILP processes were seen mainly in terms of enhancing a learner's motivation, confidence, sense of ownership of the learning process, and improving decision-making skills. Providing clear progression paths was also identified as a potential benefit.
- Potential benefits of online provision of ILP guidance and systems were seen mainly in terms of enhanced flexibility of time and location for accessing learning, diversity of digital formats as evidence of learning, ease of re-using materials, and simpler and/or more cost-effective administrative arrangements.

- From the perspective of practitioners supporting learners, potential challenges to the adoption of ILP practice were seen to include concerns about appropriate models of funding, managing learner expectations, time constraints for part-time learners, engaging staff in supporting learners through ILP processes, and ensuring cross-sector collaboration.
- Perceived areas for development before ILP practice would become effective nationally were seen to include more appropriate funding models to support flexible curricula associated with individualised/personalised learning; integration of ILP within the main qualification; recognition and accreditation by professional/ vocational bodies; and clarity of meaning of the term ILP.

D. Aspects of emerging practice

This section explores in more detail aspects of practice reported through the questionnaire and telephone survey.

i. Purpose and nature of practice

Reported practice was variable, but its purpose was consistently described in terms of supporting learners to take responsibility for their own learning, e.g.

‘To allow learners to set appropriate short, medium and long term goals that they have ownership of and have them regularly checked.’

‘To allow for the learner to have direct influence and understanding of what they are learning and why. It shows a more involved and informed approach to learning and focuses on joint ownership of learning goals.’

‘An introduction to analysis... critical reflection which is central to the ability to learn from experiential and work-based settings, plus, for mature learners, giving the ability to take stock and plan for future learning which really fits with what they identify, with support, as being central to their (and their employer’s) development needs.’

LLNs generally did not mention support for learners’ progression and transition into HE as a purpose of their ILP practice. However, two colleagues who are experienced practitioners in the Foundation Degree Forward (FDF) network (and members of academic staff in a partner HEI of an LLN), reported that an important purpose of their practice was to support vocational learners’ progression into HE, and to continue to support them once in HE – where ILP processes tended to merge with PDP processes.

It was apparent that while several LLNs were planning to develop ILP practice, with some describing this in aspirational terms, particularly from the perspective of widening participation in HE, few have so far developed practice which aimed specifically to support vocational learners’ progression into higher level learning.

One example of such aspirational practice, was described as follows:

'The university is developing an LLN with other HE and FE partners and we are therefore very interested in using ILPs to support progression. We wish to use ILPs to help us with mapping of progression routes and alignment of curricula especially from BTEC/NVQs into undergraduate and foundation degree programmes. This analysis will lead into progression agreement development and subsequently identification of gaps in the curriculum and also support needs for students. We do not have established practice in using them at present at the university.'

Within individual LLNs who responded, the focus of practice varied with the type of institutional setting, and often appeared as a discrete package of support associated with that institution rather than a joined-up process to support learners' progression. For example, within one LLN, practice was described for FE provision and for HE foundation degrees in FE. In that network, a respondent describing FE provision reported ILP/PLP processes, which included tutor/student review, as a vehicle to support basic skills development (IT, numeracy, English for speakers of other languages), and target setting within the FE context from Level 1 to Level 2. In the same network, transitional support was more evident in the response describing support for part-time learners on HE foundation degrees in FE. Here the respondent identified target setting processes as a key activity for progression, and explained that tutor/student review continued to be 'expected' as part of the institutional ethos as students progressed from FE to higher level learning:

'Regular progress review is key, and tutorial provision is a minimum requirement of the programme for HE learners, just as for FE learners. This is monitored.'

'Staff ask students to complete an ILP. They double check that the programme that the learner is on matches his/her aspirations and address any barriers which may affect outcomes. Together with students, staff establish both soft and hard targets, e.g. with respect to academic progress, planned career changes, HE course applications.'

In another LLN, an HEI respondent²⁶, reporting on PDP, described practice for which HE provision was viewed as a starting point rather than a progression point. The practice was available to all students, although it was considered to be of particular use to vocational learners:

'The (above) process is available to all students. Particular benefits to those on vocational programmes would be for the self-assessment to be a starting point in taking responsibility for their own learning. Many vocational programmes e.g. Education, Nursing etc have a requirement for students to maintain a portfolio or similar.'

ii. Elements within ILP/PLP processes associated with effective use

²⁶ In this example, an LLN contact had passed on the questionnaire to a colleague in the teaching and learning support centre of that HEI, who reported on cognate PDP practice.

The questionnaire asked respondents what elements within systems and supporting guidance provision were associated with effective use, for example in:

- promoting and sustaining effective choice-making;
- enabling learners to make and sustain purposeful and effective transitions into higher level learning programmes;
- fostering a sense of inclusion within learning;
- supporting higher levels of educational attainment.

The key elements within systems and supporting guidance provision associated with such effective use were listed as support that encouraged learners' critical reflective thinking, motivation and confidence building through validating and celebrating existing achievement, action planning, and tutor guidance.

In respect of critical reflective thinking, key areas of support mentioned were the introduction to self-audit, the use of critical reflection, and the ability to analyse and come to appropriate conclusions based on valid evidence, i.e. conclusions informed by appropriate theoretical and expert perspectives.

In respect of motivation and confidence building, key areas of support included:

'Validation of the students (helps with confidence building) through celebrating what has been achieved so far; identifying what is still to be achieved, establishing whether the learner is on target to achieve their goals, and action planning using SMART targets.'

iii. Potential benefits of ILP/PLP for learners

The questionnaire asked respondents what they considered to be the potential benefits for learners. Practitioners described such potential benefits mainly in terms of enhancing a learner's motivation, confidence in their own ability, sense of control and ownership of the learning process, and improving their decision-making skills. Providing clear progression paths was also identified as a potential benefit.

iv. Potential added value of online provision

Respondents were also invited to comment upon the potential added value – if any – of online provision.

Benefits mentioned mainly related to more effective learner support, including greater flexibility in terms of time and location to access ILP/PLP resources. This was seen as especially beneficial to employed part-time or distance learners, who experienced particular time constraints. An associated potential benefit was that a tutor could support learners from a distance, including reviewing a learner's work. This was considered to be an advantage not only for employed learners, but also for those who may be unemployed, or 'isolated' learners studying from home. It was considered that such provision can therefore help to widen participation. For example:

'It is available to people at work and at home – good for the employed and distant learners.'

'Ability to tutor from a distance and therefore to widen participation.'

'It can be "just in time" – when required not when we want to teach it.'

Another perceived benefit was that a learner could provide evidence of their learning in a variety of digital formats, and that this would be particularly of value to vocational learners who might wish to provide evidence of undertaking a skilled task:

'The candidate can submit anything as evidence that can be stored electronically, including video and audio.'

From a provider's perspective, one potential administrative/managerial benefit was to provide a core resource base which allowed repurposing and sharing of materials more readily and more effectively than with hard copy materials. Another was that online provision would provide a consistent approach across the learning, mitigating the variability in support associated with human intervention, and that learning modules could be linked explicitly to competence measures to help learners recognise their achievements. For example:

'Learning modules can easily be linked to competence measures etc, to help learners. These can be set as 'must have' before a candidate can move on, or 'nice to have' and allow a candidate to move on if not achieved.'

However, respondents also recognised potential limitations to online provision, which could not completely replace face-to-face intervention and support. Ensuring consistent and adequate internet access was raised as a major consideration in some areas of the UK. A more important consideration than whether a system supporting ILP/PLP processes was online or not was that ILP/PLP processes should be integrated within the curriculum. For example:

'It works if it is supported by the personal tutorial touch and is only part of the equation. The process is more important than the medium through which it is supported.'

'Need to consider implications of ILP for whole of curricular design. Embedding and integrating with [the] programme as a whole is key, as otherwise provision can be uneven.'

v. Potential challenges to adoption of practice

The questionnaire asked respondents what they considered to be the potential challenges to adoption of ILP/PLP practice. Such challenges, from the perspective of practitioners supporting learners, included concerns about appropriate models of funding, managing learner expectations, time constraints for part-time learners, engaging staff in supporting learners through ILP/PLP processes, and ensuring cross-sector collaboration.

For example, regarding funding models, providers reported that:

'The funding model is inappropriate – the units of resource are “inappropriate” for flexible curricula.'

'ILP learning is not normally measured in the same units of measurement as are used in HE programmes.'

Regarding management of learner expectations, concerns were raised that vocational learners engaged in ILP/PLP processes may believe that they would gain admission to HE once certain criteria have been fulfilled and be able to follow a 'tailor-made' curriculum, but that reality may match neither of these expectations.

vi. Key priorities for ILP/PLP to become more effective in supporting learning and progression

The questionnaire asked respondents what they considered to be key priorities that would need to be addressed in order to ensure that ILP/PLPs would become more effective tools to support learning and progression. The main areas for development before ILP/PLP practice would become effective nationally were seen to be more appropriate funding models to support flexible curricula associated with individualised/personalised learning, with smaller units of resource that follow learners. One suggestion made was to use part of widening participation or access funding to contribute to learning opportunities that may fall outside normal programme structures. A clear definition of the terms ILP/PLP was also seen as highly important. Finally, recognition by professional bodies would help ILP/PLP to become more effectively embedded in learning programmes and would serve to motivate learners.

Key priorities to ensure that ILP/PLPs become more effective tools to support learning and progression institutionally were seen to be integration within the main qualification, thus being accorded appropriate recognition and accreditation by faculty staff and by professional/vocational bodies.

Respondents felt that the terminology used should make it clear that ILP/PLP may mean or be included within many processes, such as PDP, APEL, learning plans, learning contracts, reflective progress reviews and reports. Overall, greater clarity is required around what ILP/PLP aims to do, what its functionalities should be, and how it builds on the progress file or feeds into PDP processes.

vii. Conclusions and comment on the findings

Current practice in the context of development time frame of LLNs

As described at the start of this section, seven of the 14 LLNs which responded to the questionnaire described existing ILP practice; one described 'planned' rather than 'existing' practice; and six had no practice to report, including one that was not yet funded. Existing practice included FE provision, and HE in FE provision. Much of the practice in HEIs was based on cognate practice, such as PDP or

learning contracts. Of particular note and relevance in this respect was the practice developed in supporting learners on foundation degrees.

There was little evidence of support specifically articulated at transition points to encourage lifelong learning, or of evidence of joined-up practice which would be essential to supporting vocational learners' progression across transitions from 'pre-HE at any age' into higher level learning.

These findings are not intended to imply that ILP/PLP/cognate processes which support vocational learners into higher level learning do not exist; rather that the practice reported by FDF colleagues offers good evidence that such practice is becoming established. It appears however, either that the remit of LLNs to develop ILPs has yet to be realised, or that it is on-going but we have not yet managed to capture evidence of it. Since all regions and half of LLNs were represented among the questionnaire responses, it seems more likely that ILP in LLN practice has not yet developed adequately. It is possible that a follow-up survey, after more time to embed practice, would be more useful.

Some reasons given for lack of practice to report included, that people were still bidding, at set-up stage, have multiple jobs; or were developing structures, consortium agreements or curricula, before developing ILP/PLPs.

The impression gained is that it is early days' in the development of LLNs, and the main focus at present is on building infrastructure. This includes curriculum development for 2006, cross-institutional (consortium) progression agreements about pathways which will be opened up by the LLNs, and agreeing additional student numbers.

This may partly explain the low response rate to the questionnaire. It was noted above that partners from six LLNs (10 respondents) had 'no practice to share' at present, and it is possible that some others without practice to share may have decided not to reply.

Some other potential reasons for non-response included that people were too busy, or that they had other demands and priorities. For example, in some LLNs, where key staff were not yet in place, LLN work was being undertaken in addition to normal employment commitments.

However, an enthusiastic commitment to the development of practice was indicated by members of several LLNs, who have expressed interest in being kept informed of developments and shared practice as they emerge, or of taking part in a future survey of practice. There would thus appear to be a potential benefit of raising awareness within LLNs of established good practice within FDF initiatives in supporting vocational learners into and through HE²⁷.

²⁷ Feedback from the consultative seminar would also support this, as a request was made for presentation of exemplar case studies to illustrate practice.

Section 5: Outcomes from the consultative seminar

A. The context

Here we present the key elements considered within the consultative seminar held in Birmingham in February 2006. This allowed colleagues who attended – from eight LLNs both funded and under development – to comment upon the emerging material from the literature review and to provide complementary perspectives from their own experience.

This section is based upon the notes presented to participants following the meeting; the recommendations developed during the seminar have been incorporated into Section 6.

B. Purposes for ILP/PLPs within LLNs: stakeholder perspectives

Discussion sought to strike a balance between the overarching issue for LLNs – that of the engagement and re-engagement of learners – and the multi-faceted potential of ILP/PLPs to play a full and effective central role in supporting learner development and progression.

Based upon an initial activity, within which some participants were asked to draw upon their experience of colleagues and students rather than their own, the following perspectives were identified:

- i. From the learners' perspective**, there was felt to be a need for ILP/PLPs to:
 - a. Create/provide a personal context for learning.
 - b. Support key processes which enabled learners to answer key questions such as:
 - Who am I? What are my career interests, aspirations and goals?
 - Where am I now? What qualifications, work-related experience, or achievements do I have already, and how do these feed into my aspirations and goals?
 - What 'value' does my existing learning (whether formal or informal) have in the eyes of admissions tutors? How will my employment experience and learning be accredited for the purpose of admission?
 - What do I need to do to succeed (whether in bite-sized chunks of learning or over a programme as a whole)? What programme do I need to follow, and how might it be customised to take into account my existing qualifications and experience?
 - What support might I need to progress, and where/how can I access this? How can I best take responsibility for my learning, whilst taking advantage of support and resources on offer, and how can I (find out how to) access these?
 - The ILP/PLP was felt to have the capacity to act as a 'personal organiser' for learner development.

- ii. **From the perspective of academic staff**, an ILP/PLP needs to:
 - a. Formalise in a clear (contractual) way what the student has agreed to do and what the institution has agreed to provide.
 - b. Emphasise the degree of learners' responsibility for their own learning.
 - c. Act as a context for the integration of elements within what might be seen as a fragmented curriculum (thereby reinforcing the 'personal organiser' element, and also facilitating tracking and monitoring).
 - d. Avoid being seen as another 'bolt-on' administrative burden.
 - e. Highlight a range of routes to a chosen destination (rather like an underground tube map).
 - f. Enable learners to make the most of scarce tutorial time, where this exists, by providing a means of organising the agenda for such discussions.
 - g. Be part of, and directly connected to, the learning and teaching experience. A degree of inclusion of the ILP/PLP approach in the discipline or subject context was therefore seen as crucial to success. This should sit alongside periodic reviews and re-planning activities where reviewing and updating the ILP/PLP is an explicit focus of attention. There was therefore a need for both integrated/embedded/implicit and explicit, focused practice, e.g. through the tutorial meeting. The former may have implications for making the process itself credit-bearing.

- iii. **From the perspective of senior institutional managers**, ILP/PLPs should demonstrate how they can contribute to the key business concerns of the organisation through:
 - a. Enhanced student recruitment.
 - b. Improvements in retention, which might be expected through greater student involvement in planning processes, which in turn produces more motivated learners.
 - c. The development of practice which can later be deployed in other areas.
 - d. The sense that, ultimately, a student-driven, staff-supported model with ILP/PLPs at the centre will require less institutional support.

It is also important to note here that employers of learners were seen as likely to share a concern with 'bottom line business benefits' in terms of a return on their investment in the learner.

C. Developing ILP/PLP practice that is 'fit for purpose' in terms of supporting learner engagement and re-engagement

On the basis of the discussions, and taking into account different perspectives presented from stakeholder positions, the following elements would seem central to ensuring that ILP/PLP practice within LLNs is 'fit for purpose':

- a. ILP/PLPs should be seen as supporting the 'plan-do-review' process applied to learning rather than as a record *per se*. Recording should support the process, not the other way around.

- b. The emphasis here should be less upon a standardised approach to what an ILP/PLP is and more on what it needs to support and do. As one respondent noted:

'If we took a spec or template approach and specified a list of what a PDF/ILP/PLP should do rather than what it should include, the resultant flexibility would give students/academics more space to tailor it to the student's needs.'

We revisit this, in terms of the ILP/PLP domain, in Section 6.

- c. The existence of cognate practice to ILP/PLP (such as progress files, learning contracts, PDP or CPD) should be recognised. This is part of the educational landscape and therefore of the experience of at least some LLN learners. Lessons need to be learned from the experience of implementing such initiatives, and connections made to them where this is appropriate and cost effective.²⁸
- d. The existence of such cognate practice notwithstanding, there is the opportunity to develop a clear national brand for the ILP/PLP process, such that it could be recognised and supported across different LLNs.
- e. The need for transferability²⁹ within and between LLNs (and hence technical interoperability in the case of e-based systems) needs to be set alongside the importance of practice that connects to work in particular programmes and units of learning.

D. The potential benefits of online ILP/PLP

In terms of online ILP/PLP, the seminar supported the views expressed within the survey – that an electronic ILP/PLP would offer a number of advantages, but that this approach could not be expected to replace face-to-face contact. A range of advantages and challenges can be noted here.

- a. In support of technology, for example, the emphasis was upon the ways in which this would fit with existing and emerging institutional practice:

'It's the way we work.'

'Lots of educational content is delivered electronically now.'

'We can link it to other IT based resources, e.g. management information systems and enrolment.'

And on its potential to meet the particular needs of learners:

'It will help the students feel part of the university.'

²⁸ In the 'recommendations' section we seek to address the issue of how to connect/integrate the two developments in ways which help learners to feel part of the HE community, whilst not ignoring individual needs and programme-related requirements.

²⁹ A related issue, the accreditation of other learning, was also seen as a major problem. The recognition of other qualifications may be crucial to transferability and coherent development.

'It's the best way to support distributed learners.'

'ILP could evolve into learners' own websites – magnificent tool to add to employability, especially in visual and performance subjects such as graphic design, multimedia and performing arts.'

- b. There was also recognition of the potential for cost savings, and for the use of an online ILP system, designed to interoperate across institutions, to meet core requirements of the LLN initiative:

'The use of technology has the potential to facilitate progression across providers and even across LLNs.'

Alongside these potential benefits, however, there were a range of concerns about how such 'new to HE' learners may engage with practice delivered electronically. Three factors came to the fore here.

- c. In respect of learners, it was felt that they may:

'need lots of support'

'not like technology, so we might frighten them away'³⁰

'not take to the technology we have available, which has been developed for a different client group'.

Some felt that learners may be disadvantaged by a lack of access to technology itself because they:

'may not have internet access, or it may cost'

'may not have internet access because broadband is still location dependent – non-existent in some areas of England'.

- d. In addition, it was recognised that technology may fail to 'deliver the goods', or be expensive when needed in multiple configurations:

'Technology has been known not to work like the developers say it should.'

'Technological solutions tend to work best on economies of scale, multiple adaptations of e-ILP to suit different curriculum contexts and route ways may not be cost effective.'

Technology needs to be usable by all learners, and to be interoperable (allowing the transfer of a learner's information, without re-keying, between systems, either within or between institutions). To achieve this, it needs to comply with certain technical standards, including UK LeaP (BS8788)³¹ and specifications, including IMS ACCLIP (IMS Accessibility Guidelines for Developing Accessible Learning Applications (see Glossary).

³⁰ LLN learners should, however, be given maximum encouragement to engage with technology. Not being able to use a computer, even at a basic level, is now a serious barrier to employment – in effect a form of illiteracy.

³¹ See Grant, Rees Jones and Ward, 2003, and the Glossary.

- e. Finally, there was a universal view that technology should support the tutorial support and guidance that was seen as being at the heart of the implementation of successful practice:

'At the end of the day, ILP is about person-to-person discussion.'

Overall it was considered that technology should be embraced as a tool to support learning development, but should be as simple as possible, and not be implemented as a substitute for staff engagement with, and support of, learners. Technical support, like staff support, should be thought about in terms of supporting ILP/PLP processes implicitly and explicitly.

Section 6: Key conclusions and recommendations for development

A. Introduction

As already identified, our overarching aim is to help LLNs to develop good practice by identifying what has been done before that has been helpful - or not - and how that understanding can help to progress the work of LLNs. A further part of our role is to 'make recommendations so as to provide a sustainable platform for an agreed programme of further work'.

This section of the report therefore:

- a. Draws together key points from earlier sections, specifically the literature review and direct investigative activities (Sections 3-5).
- b. Identifies recommendations, based upon these key points, in terms of priorities for development to support the effective implementation of PLP within LLNs:
 - at the level of the overall LLN initiative;
 - for individual LLNs;
 - to support the development of online practice.

We focus upon 12 recommendations for implementing effective PLP practice at different levels. We also note some of the wider issues that the work has identified, which have implications for PLP work.

B. At the level of the overall initiative

Key findings

i. Early stage of development

At the level of the overall initiative, there is a sense that PLP practice within LLNs is at an early stage and currently relatively under-developed. This conclusion is supported by survey responses and by those who attended the consultative seminar. The main focus of LLNs at present is on building infrastructure, including curriculum development for 2006, cross-institutional (consortium) progression agreements about pathways which will be opened up by the LLNs, and agreeing additional student numbers.

At the same time however, our report indicates that there is powerful external evidence that processes which involve reflection, recording, planning and action do improve student learning. In addition:

- a. Evidence suggests that factors which promote uptake generally focus on process rather than on product, engagement with learners themselves, and a sense of learner ownership.

- b. Quality practice in this area can be defined, as exemplified by the Rouncefield and Ward (1998) study, good practice summarised within the conclusions of the literature review (Section 3.F), the elements associated with effective practice in Section 4.D.ii, and the practitioner perspectives in 5.B.ii.
- c. Practice can be associated with important outcomes for learners related to both supporting learning and managing transitions, e.g. between learning providers.
- d. PLPs offer a mechanism not only for learner support and engagement, but also for testing out how well more flexible, learner-centred curricula, with clear progression paths, are articulated to learners, and of ensuring that learner expectations are managed appropriately (a concern identified by some survey respondents). PLPs should be seen firstly as a means of enabling a process, and secondly as a mechanism for recording the outcomes of this process which can be revisited (and re-negotiated) by learner and tutor periodically (Section 3).
- e. In the context of this second area, PLPs provide a means for 'purposeful conversation' between learner and tutor, thereby having the further potential to help retain learners once they are re-engaged.

These findings lead to **Recommendations 1 – 4** below.

ii. Identity and meaning of PLP

There is a sense among stakeholders that the identity and meaning of the term PLP needs clarification, as explained in Section 2.A.

This leads to **Recommendation 5** below.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: HEFCE should continue to emphasise this area of practice as a key mechanism for supporting learner engagement and re-engagement in LLNs.

Recommendation 2: Short 'key message' briefing papers should be produced for key LLN stakeholders. These should pull out key points from this report and elsewhere and focus respectively upon issues:

- for senior managers;
- for practitioners;
- on the implementation of online PLP.

They should emphasise the process of individual learning planning, and of the plan as a support to that process rather than the other way around (see 5.C.i).

Each briefing paper should be a short document (2–4 pages), that brings together key issues contained in this report for one stakeholder group. Issues that arise through policy considerations, the literature review and investigative processes should be drawn together and evidenced by quotations with their source

referenced. Each paper should include recommendations to address the issues identified.

Recommendation 3: HEFCE should support the development of a community of practice as part of the LLN practitioner group that will explicitly:

- facilitate the sharing of PLP definitions across networks (see below) in order to enable the transferability of PLPs across LLNs if learners change locations or providers;
- encourage the development of high quality, reliable and accessible resources/support for staff (and learners);
- enable the development of evidence informed practice across LLNs, to the benefit of the initiative as a whole, specifically through the provision of a web resource for case studies of practice that exemplify how PLPs can be used successfully within LLNs.

Recommendation 4: Clear and explicit links should be made between PLP development and related areas of practice such as those already identified in this report (see e.g. Sections 3.B.ii and 5.C.iii). These include progress files in school and FE, initial diagnostic assessment work in FE, RARPA in FE and adult and community settings, PDP in HE, and CPD in employment. PLP implementation should also be recognised and promulgated in the broader context of lifelong learning, and should be specifically addressed in the context of supporting professional-level learning.

Within this context it will be necessary to pay explicit attention to the views consistently expressed within this investigation that the key to 'learner engagement' is effective engagement with learners themselves. Such an emphasis places primary attention upon support that encourages learners' critical reflective thinking, motivation and confidence building through validating and celebrating existing achievement, action planning, and tutor guidance. (See Sections 4.C, 4.D.i, and 4.D.ii).

Recommendation 5: The concept of PLP should be refined by identifying its component parts in the broader context of learner engagement and progression. This further allows it to be mapped onto other processes which support learners in similar ways, and to be understood in the context of lifelong learning (see 5.C.ii).

The broader context of learner engagement and progression might encompass:

- a. Tutorial provision or a guidance tool to support review of learning and performance, planning future goals and targets, and informed choice of progression routes.
- b. A record of progress through such processes.
- c. A means of encouraging a sense of personal identity.
- d. A means of presenting oneself and one's skills, qualities and achievements to others.
- e. A means of sharing and collaborating.

- f. A repository for artefacts, such as might be used to provide evidence of learning (through digital capture of for example objects created, images, texts, discussions or presentations).
- g. A means of accessing personal information, perhaps held in distributed databases.
- h. A means of collecting and selecting assessment evidence.
- i. A means for staff to receive feedback about the curriculum on offer.

Tables 3 and 4 below document our proposals for consideration as a starting point for defining PLP.

Table 3: What learner activities might PLP support, and how do these map onto the broader context of learner engagement and progression?

Learner activity	Relationship to learner engagement and progression
Connecting learners to: mentors, peers, and resources, including diagnostic tools for self-assessment, programme pathway options, career management choices, as part of a guidance system (a. above)	Progression facilitated through enhancement of informed choice of options and potential pathways
Recording activities undertaken, capabilities demonstrated, and achievements to contribute to a record of progress (b. above)	Enhanced motivation through greater awareness of prior achievements etc: 'I'm further on than I thought I was!'
Reflecting – commentary by the learner on any aspect of themselves or their artefacts, as a means of developing a sense of personal identity (c. above).	Enhanced motivation to pursue task and progress (e.g. engagement/re-engagement) through realising 'how far I have come already', and through making sense of self/personal identity in the context of learning, workplace and life.
Collecting evidence in respect of the achievements and competence to contribute to a repository for artefacts (f. above).	Enhanced confidence as a result of undertaking collection of evidence (which may itself present challenges – 'where shall I start? How shall I manage this?')
Evidencing – a collection of artefacts that a learner creates and selects, and which says something about the learner, as a means of developing a sense of personal identity (c. above).	Enhanced sense of self-identity and therefore confidence through appreciation of self-worth in creating something.
Presenting – more than just prettifying the content; presenting offers an opportunity to tell a story or make a point as a means of presenting oneself to others (d. above). Likely to involve some elements of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● selecting ● planning ● negotiating ● formalising a contract/contracting (an agreement) ● motivating (self) 	Enhanced confidence, through presenting self to others, articulating prior learning and achievements, supports/facilitates progression and re-engagement.
Sharing with peers to support collaborative learning, with mentors to	Building confidence and self-esteem through sense of belonging and sharing

facilitate review/feedback/feedforward, as part of sharing and collaborating (e. above).	the journey with others.
Designing (including degree programme).	Enhanced motivation through building a sense of ownership of the degree programme being undertaken.

Such learner activities can thus be seen as central to learner engagement and re-engagement, and to progression.

Table 4: What institutional activities might PLP support?

Enhancing recruitment, retention and progression.
Widening participation, and the specific opportunity to address the issues that this imports into FE/HE e.g. the remediation of partial or inadequate secondary schooling leading to written literacy issues.
Developing and implementing good practice (including in curriculum design).
Facilitating formalised/contractual agreements with learners.
Staff development.

C. At the level of individual Lifelong Learning Networks

Key findings

- a. It is necessary to be explicit about the role of learning plans within any LLN. While a primary purpose has been identified within Section 4 – to help people to become more independent and autonomous learners – the broader range of purposes identified by Watts (1992) might offer a helpful perspective here (Section 3.B.ii). There is also a need to recognise broader roles (including in progression), as identified by practitioners experienced in cognate good practice around learning contracts and PDP developed through foundation degrees (see Sections 4.D.i and 5.C.i).
- b. It is important to develop and implement models of practice that relate to local circumstances (one size does not fit all).

These findings lead to **Recommendation 6** below.

- c. There is a need for the integration of practice, in four senses:
 - in supporting learner ownership of learning/management of studies;
 - as part of the overall curriculum offering, particularly where workplace or experience-based learning is involved.
 - in terms of ensuring congruence with cognate practice, such as PDP, that the learner is likely to experience (see also Section 5.C.iii);
 - as a link to the use of portfolios to evidence achievement and learning where appropriate.

Colleagues with experience of implementing foundation degrees have contributed significantly to these findings and may have particular experience to contribute in supporting the integration of practice. Such integration will also ensure that PLP is seen as core to the learning and assessment processes rather than a bolt on and peripheral activity (see also 5.B.ii.g).

This finding leads to **Recommendations 7, 8, and 9a-d** below.

- iv. Tutorial support is an essential pre-condition for effective implementation, and this has implications for staff development.

This finding leads to **Recommendation 9e** below.

Recommendations

Recommendation 6: LLNs should agree a shared definition of the purposes of a PLP, and what any processes and documentation must include to be fit for such purposes.

As already identified, the emphasis should be less upon a standardised approach to what a PLP is and more on what it needs to do to support learner engagement, (see Table 3). This should be through explicit attention to starting 'where the

learner is' and working to develop confidence and motivation as a pre-requisite to engagement with curriculum choices and structured progression routes.³²

This should be at a high level in terms of core criteria which can be agreed as the basis for implementation across a network.

Any national policy framework should similarly leave scope for local adaptability and development.

Recommendation 7: LLNs should be clear about the relationship of PLP to cognate practice, with a view to achieving the most appropriate balance between additional/special practice, and connecting such practice to wider institutional provision, thereby enabling learners to feel part of the wider learning community.

This will require LLN communities to address a number of issues, including:

- a. When is a PLP process really personalised learning planning, and when is it more accurately identified as part of personal development planning or creating a portfolio?
- b. How far are PLP processes part of a continuum of personal and professional development, with their main relevance being on transition to HE, bridging between employment, FE and HE, and helping with specifying a programme?
- c. Within HE, is it unhelpful to view PLP processes as something separate from personal development? Is there a risk that if seen as different from mainstream PDP in HE, PLP will isolate vocational from other learners? Or does PLP as an entity continue to have currency additional to PDP, if it is also about a learner negotiated curriculum?

Recommendation 8: LLNs should clarify the relationship of PLP to credit and assessment.³³

Consideration might be given to the feasibility and requirements of assessment. For example, a small number of credits within each module might be made dependent upon production of evidence, and its incorporation into the PLP. Evidence might cover:

- the development of higher level skills through work-based learning;
- the creative progression (for art and design) in any appropriate format;

³² The evidence of this report inclines towards the primary value of PLPs within LLNs within what might be termed a social-constructivist paradigm: helping learners develop individual meaning from their learning experiences as a prior condition towards work on a more positivist paradigm – such as might be associated with LSC funded courses in FE – with its emphasis upon the agreement of externally defined learning outcomes, the achievement of which is then reviewed.

³³ Here we note the role of the Joint Forum for Higher Levels (JFHL) in taking forward work in regard to the overarching principles and operational criteria for a common approach to credit between FE and HE. See the QCA web-site for further information, www.qca.org.uk.

- the acquisition of enhanced knowledge, understanding and skills for non-vocational disciplines such as history.

Recommendation 9: LLNs should develop a practical and detailed plan for the effective implementation of PLP practice that will:

- a. **Engage senior management** within LLNs, including as a standing item on the agenda of reporting bodies.
 - b. **Audit existing related practice across the LLN**, with the objectives of:
 - facilitating both development and maintenance of effective consortium agreements (see Charlesworth and Home, 2005);
 - identifying transferable cost-effective practice;
 - building a ‘community of practice’ within an individual LLN;
 - initiating an evidence base so as to provide a clear demonstration of benefits in terms of meeting the objectives of LLNs.
 - c. **Provide opportunities for the development and dissemination of programme/discipline-specific practice which supports the integration of the ‘plan-do-review’ PLP approach into the learner curriculum.**
 - d. **Develop practice which explicitly enables learners to feel part of the HE community, whilst taking account of individual needs and programme-related requirements.**
 - e. **Provide a programme of staff development**³⁴ supported by appropriate resources, specifically based upon:
 - the recognition that particular attitudes, qualities and skills are needed to facilitate PLP processes, and staff need to be supported and enabled in relation to these;
 - the need for admissions tutors to recognise the value of vocational qualifications and accreditation of prior experience and learning, as well as of learning gained through informal opportunities (see, for example, Eraut *et al*, 1999, Taguma, 2005);
 - the need for all stakeholders in the process to work towards agreed practice which takes account of their differing priorities and organisational cultures. A specific approach that could facilitate this (which worked well and was instrumental in progressing practice in the MLEs4LL programme), is the development of scenarios of practice. Some developed examples are available within the outputs of that programme, including for support of workplace learners (Lodge, 2004).
- D. Future requirements to support development of online systems to facilitate PLP processes**

³⁴ A training manual for staff is seen as less helpful than development models that encourage staff to take ownership of PLP processes, in ways to facilitate reflection and to support planning and development amongst students.

Key findings

There are a number of potential advantages in providing support online. These include the *'enhanced flexibility of time and location for accessing learning, diversity of digital formats as evidence of learning, ease of re-using materials, and simpler and/or more cost-effective administrative arrangements'* (Section 4).

Online provision, developed to meet technical standards, can support the movement of distributed learners within an LLN (Section 3.C). It can also serve, though the wider concept of an e-portfolio, to integrate support for learning with learning resources and assessment outcomes. Progress has been made on a number of technical issues identified in this area (Section 3.D).

However neither of these points negates the need for effective tutorial support or integration as identified above. The conclusion that *'existing ... provision appeared to be more often related to discrete packages of support within one episode of learning than to supporting learners across transitions'* suggests that further cross-network development is an important priority.

In addition, such potential for breadth of support needs to be balanced by *'the importance of practice that connects to work in particular programmes and units of learning'* (Section 5.C.e).

These findings taken together lead to **Recommendations 10-1 2**.

Recommendations

Recommendation 10: LLNs should recognise the added value of online systems (e.g. e-mail/texting) to support 'any time, anywhere' reviews/discussions with mentors, which may be especially important for part-time and distance learners.

Recommendation 11: LLNs should recognise that online support for PLP processes within distance learning needs to be fit for purpose. In this context, this includes taking account of learners' differing prior experiences, and the need for seamless provision across transitions. There is a need to build on the learning from the JISC MLEs4LL programme (JISC, 2006e).³⁵

Recommendation 12: Any online PLP systems should have the following characteristics:

- **interoperability** (i.e. the systems work seamlessly together, so that electronic information can be read by, and transferred between, different systems in the same or different organisations. In the case of a learner's e- PLP, or e-PDP or e-portfolio, this would include transfer of a learner's information without the need for re-keying);
- **learner authentication** (a user proving his/her identity to a remote system);

³⁵ The CRA, which led a support project with responsibility for supporting development work of projects in that programme, including technical interoperability developments, is well experienced to play a key role in this area.

- **learner accessibility/usability** (which caters for special needs, disability and/or user preferences);
- **information management**, including editing rights, permissions for sharing information, respecting confidentiality, and notifications to comply with data protection and copyright requirements;
- **guidance to learners** about the purpose and use of a system;
- **the appropriate ‘form and feel’ of a system** to support a wide range of learner preferences. This would include what the system looks and feels like in use, what its outputs look like, how easy it is to navigate, read and use, including uploading files, and cross-referencing claims of learning with evidence.

Functional requirements which might usefully be considered by stakeholders who are looking to develop or buy an online portfolio system were discussed by Ward & Richardson (2005).

To reiterate our earlier point:

‘Technology should be embraced as a tool to support learning development, but should be as simple as possible, and not be implemented as a substitute for staff engagement with, and support of, learners. Technical support, like staff support, should be thought about in terms of supporting ILP/PLP processes implicitly and explicitly.’

D. Wider issues

Finally, some issues raised through individual feedback and within the consultative seminar were more wide ranging than the PLP initiative itself, though they have considerable implications for it. For example, the need to reconsider funding models, so that funding follows learners and enables flexible degree structures, was felt to be highly cognate with the perspective on learning that PLPs were designed to support. Similarly, the importance attached to helping learners feel part of the HE community, whilst not ignoring individual needs and programme-related requirements, does not relate only to the PLP process. While such matters are beyond the scope of this report, they do raise additional issues for those charged to support PLP implementation.

Glossary of terms and organisations

ALI	Adult Learning Inspectorate www.ali.gov.uk/ ALI is the inspectorate for skills, workforce development and preparation for employment.
AP(E)L	Accreditation of prior (experiential) learning
Authentication	A user proving his/her identity to a remote system.
BS8788	British Standard 8788: otherwise known as UKLeaP. This is a technical standard for interoperability of learner information, such as that associated with the HE progress file. For further information, see the British Standards Institution website at www.bsi-global.com
CETIS	Centre for Educational Technology Interoperability Standards www.cetis.ac.uk CETIS represents UK higher and further education on international educational standards initiatives. It advises universities and colleges on the strategic, technical and pedagogic implications of educational technology standards. CETIS also provides strategic and technical input to JISC programmes, and the e-learning framework programmes.
CHERI	Centre for Higher Education Research and Information www.open.ac.uk/cheri/index.htm CHERI aims to inform higher education policy, by providing research, intelligence and analysis to policy makers at institutional, national and international levels. It also contributes to the international field of higher education policy research and disseminates information about higher education developments to the wider academic community.
CRA	The Centre for Recording Achievement www.recordingachievement.org The CRA is a national network organisation that seeks to 'promote the awareness of recording achievement and action planning processes as an important element in improving learning and progression throughout the world of education, training and employment'. CRA is an Associate Centre of the Higher Education Academy.
DD8788	Draft for Development 8788 – the status of BS8788 has been amended recently to draft for development (March

2006).

DfEE	Department for Education and Employment (now the DfES)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills www.dfes.gov.uk The DfES provides official information about education and skills.
EHE	Enterprise in Higher Education, a DfES initiative on preparing students more effectively for the world of work.
EIFEL	European Institute for E-Learning www.eife-l.org/ EIFEL is an independent, not-for-profit European professional association whose mission is to support organisations, communities and individuals in building a knowledge economy and a learning society through innovative and reflective practice, continuing professional development and the use of knowledge, information and learning technologies.
e-portfolio	online portfolio
EPPI (Centre)	Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (and Co-ordinating Centre) http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk The EPPI-Centre is part of the Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. It was established in 1993 to address the need for a systematic approach to the organisation and review of evidence-based work on social interventions. The work and publications of the Centre engage health and education policy makers, practitioners and service users in discussions about how researchers can make their work more relevant and how to use research findings.
FDf	Foundation Degree Forward www.fdf.ac.uk/ FDf supports the development of foundation degrees, through its work in partnership with all relevant agencies, institutions, organisations and interest groups, to ensure that the development of foundation degrees is driven by the needs of students and employers and satisfies the requirements of all stakeholders.
FE	Further education
HE	Higher education

HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England www.hefce.ac.uk HEFCE distributes around £6.7 billion of public funds for higher education in England. Its mission is, working in partnership, to promote and fund high-quality, cost-effective teaching and research, meeting the diverse needs of students, the economy and society.
HEI	Higher education institution
ILP	Individual/individualised learning plan
IMS ACCLIP	Technical specification for interoperability of learner information, in the context of accessibility for individual preferences. For example, so that a learner can select screen display settings, and these will be stored and used each time that learner logs into that website. For further information, see the CETIS website: www.cetis.ac.uk .
Interoperability	The ability of systems to work seamlessly together. In the context of e-learning, this includes the ability for electronic information to be read by, and transferred between, different systems in the same or different organisations. In the case of a learner's e- PLP or e-PDP or e-portfolio, this would include transfer of a learner's information without the need for re-keying. For a technical discussion of interoperability, see also Grant, Rees Jones and Ward, 2003, or the CETIS website: www.cetis.ac.uk .
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee www.jisc.ac.uk JISC supports further and higher education by providing strategic guidance, advice and opportunities to use information and communications technology to support teaching, learning, research and administration. JISC is funded by all the UK funding bodies for post-16 and higher education.
LLN	Lifelong Learning Network www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/lln/ Lifelong Learning Networks are groups of institutions, including higher education institutions, further education colleges and other regional partners, that come together across a city, area or region to offer new progression opportunities for vocational learners.
LSC	Learning and Skills Council www.lsc.gov.uk

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. Its goal is 'to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to make sure its workforce is of world-class standards'.

MLEs4LL	Managed Learning Environments for Lifelong Learning: programme funded by JISC
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education www.ofsted.gov.uk Ofsted is the inspectorate for children and learners in England. It contributes to provision of better education and care through effective inspection and regulation.
PDP	Personal development planning
PF	Progress file
PLP	Personalised learning plan
QA	Quality assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency www.qaa.ac.uk The QAA aims to safeguard and help to improve the academic standards and quality of higher education in the UK.
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority www.qca.org The QCA aims to build a world-class education and training framework. It regulates, develops and modernises the curriculum, assessments, examinations and qualifications, including NVQs. For further information on NVQs see http://www.qca.org.uk/14-19/qualifications/index_nvqs.htm (accessed 26/02/06) As an example of online provision to support NVQ assessment see: http://www.tribaltechnology.co.uk/html/products/education_systems/skillsfolio.htm (accessed 26/02/06)
RARPA	Recognising and recording progress and achievement
VLE	Virtual learning environment
WBL	Work-based learning

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Annex A: Terms of reference

To investigate the development of processes and tools that affect how learners engage and re-engage in learning.

There will be a presentation through a consultative seminar of emerging results from the literature and telephone survey, combined with the investigation of a limited number of UK exemplars.

The final outcome will be a report detailing the range of current practice nationally, with reference to the wider international picture. This will be written so as to:

- be appropriate for the funding body and to be of value to a wider practitioner audience;
- feed in to future strategic decision-making and operational action;
- make recommendations so as to provide a sustainable platform for an agreed programme of further work, as appropriate.

Annex B: The survey of practice questionnaire and invitation to complete it

Use of Individualised Learning Plans in vocational areas aimed at supporting effective learning and progression

The Centre for Recording Achievement has been asked by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to help identify current practice in the use of ILPs which supports effective learning and progression for learners on vocational pathways towards higher level learning. This is of particular relevance to the emerging Lifelong Learning Networks, and to those projects which are supporting FE/HE progression, such as the Distributed E-Learning Projects funded through JISC.

As the funding council identified in the original circular letter for Lifelong Learning Networks:

'The key to success, and to ensuring that the process is not simply supply-led, is the provision of vocational education and career planning. LLNs will work with learners to create individualised learning plans so that learners can prepare at an early stage to take advantage of opportunities available. Career and education planning will include opportunities to add to the knowledge and skills already acquired at any given level, as well as deepening and extending learning. It will also include opportunities to change direction, engaging with more academic learning, or to mix academic and vocational learning as appropriate. The outcomes for individuals should be that:

- *they can clearly see a way through to their chosen goal*
- *there are programmes accessible to them to take them there*
- *they have the opportunity to 'double back', take different routes to the same destination, or adapt their learning patterns to changing goals.'*

We should therefore appreciate very much if you would complete the questionnaire below by reference to your own practice or interest. **This has been designed so that all recipients will be able to respond to at least one of the questions below.** Plus you might want to include relevant practice that goes under another name in your context.

Please email your reply, preferably by **23rd December**, to Helen Richardson, acting on behalf of the Centre for Recording Achievement, at b-h.richardson@ntlworld.com. We will use the information we receive in reporting to HEFCE, though no individuals or organisations will be identified.

Your Name	
Your Institution/Organisation	
Your role	

If there is a range of ILP practice in your network or organisation, please tell us about the practice which for you most effectively supports learning and progression for learners on vocational pathways, or the practice with which you have most experience.

About ILP practice:	.
1a. Please describe the context in which for you the use of ILP processes and materials most effectively supports learning and progression for learners on vocational pathways, <i>(If this can focus upon routes into higher level learning programmes so much the better, but our primary interest in this section is upon effective practice)</i>	
1b. What do you see as the main purposes of the ILP practice in this context?	
1c What do you see as those elements – within systems and supporting guidance provision – which are associated with effective use , e.g. in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promoting and sustaining effective choice-making; - enabling learners to make and sustain purposeful and effective transitions into higher level learning programmes; - fostering a sense of inclusion within learning; - supporting higher levels of educational attainment? - 	
1d What do you see as the key benefit(s) of using ILP processes for individual learners?	
1e What for you are the key challenges ?	
2. About 'e' based ILP provision	
2a Is your ILP provided electronically for learners. If no , go to 2b, if yes go to 2d.	
2b Is part of your current work to develop e-ILPs? If no , go to 2c, if 'yes' go to 2e	

2c Is this the consequence of a particular decision, or does it reflect other factors?	
2d. If you are using e-ILP systems, what do you see as the 'added value' – if any - provided by the use of 'e' based ILP provision? For example, this might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more effective learner support, such as through more effective provision of elements noted in (1c) above • more effective information systems management, such as sharing of resources, or learner information between organisations. • more effective administrative provision, such as sharing of learner information, on a 'need to know' basis, between staff supporting learners. 	
2e. What do you see as the potential for the use of such e-based systems?	
3. What do you see as the key priorities that will need to be addressed in order to ensure that Individualised Learning Plans become more effective tools to support learning and progression?	
4. Please feel welcome to add additional information about your ILP practice that you would like to share with us.	

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.
If possible, we would wish to follow up as many respondents as possible through a short telephone discussion. If you would be happy to participate, please tell us

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some dates (and preferred times if any) in early January when you would be available; 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a contact telephone number (which will be used only for the purpose of this survey). 	

We will email you to make/confirm an appointment before the telephone survey call.

The Centre for Recording Achievement
December 2005

Annex C: The survey method and sample

Questionnaires (see Annex B), were emailed to approximately 100 contacts across 10 LLNs, 10 Distributed e-Learning projects, and eight FDF networks.

Each person was contacted as a member or representative of a relevant network or organisation, which was selected on the basis of our understanding of its being likely to have practice relevant to, or cognate with, ILP/PLP processes. Contacts included: colleagues in LLNs, including Aimhigher and Connexions Services colleagues; members of those JISC Distributed e-Learning pilot projects which included elements of PDP; members of FDF networks; plus additional PDP/ILP/PLP practitioner colleagues of the CRA with established relevant practice, both nationally and internationally. A few people contacted had a role in more than one of the networks or organisations. In the findings, any such person's reply is counted once only.

A reminder email was sent approximately one month after the initial request to prompt additional replies. A further follow-up email was sent three months after the initial request, to those who had not replied, to ascertain reasons for this.

Ten follow-up telephone conversations were undertaken with partners of seven LLNs. Five conversations were with respondents (in five LLNs) who had completed a questionnaire, which indicated relevant or cognate practice. Additional telephone conversations were carried out with five practitioners with relevant experience who had not completed a questionnaire.

Annex D: Acknowledgements

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