

Personalised learning plans in Lifelong Learning Networks

Report to HEFCE by the Centre for 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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References

The full report is available on the web at www.hefce.ac.uk under Publications/Research and evaluation.

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