

PADSHE PROJECT

Summer 1998

Newsletter

Personal and Academic Development for Students in Higher Education

'PADSHE' stands for Personal and Academic Development for Students in Higher Education. The University of Nottingham PADSHE Project is piloting programmes for developing and recording students' achievement in five UK universities. The work is financed by the HEFCE's Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning over three years, 1996-99.

Enquiries from interested individuals/groups in other universities, or other sectors of education, training and employment are warmly welcomed (see back page for contact details). Plans are in hand for national and regional workshops to provide a forum for discussion and exchange of good practice. If you would like to receive an invitation, or simply to join the mailing list, please contact us.



PADSHE steps up the pace



By March of this year, the level of student participation in the second year of the PADSHE Project had exceeded the original target of 1250 by a factor of three. By the last official count, there are now over 4000 students taking part in pilot schemes across the five PADSHE universities, together with over 300 staff.

Dissemination outside the original pilot departments of English has taken place in every partner university, involving joint honours courses at Birmingham, Liverpool John Moores, Newcastle and Northumbria, and further departments across all faculties at Nottingham.

Support for the PADSHE Project from the HEFCE Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning is due to close in July 1999, but, thanks to the award of DfEE funding to the universities of Newcastle and Nottingham for associated work to be developed from April 1998 to March 2000, the PADSHE initiative will continue into the new millennium. The DfEE project will develop a user-friendly IT tool to enable institutions to construct PADSHE-style processes and materials to meet their individual needs and preferences.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM



Liverpool John Moores University

UNIVERSITY of NORTHUMBRIA  at NEWCASTLE

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE



PADSHE in action: views from pilots in Physiotherapy and Politics

Under the PADSHE Project, academic departments are encouraged to customise both a basic process and the Personal and Academic Record documentation (PAR) which goes with it, in terms of their own needs and ethos. Here two academics from Nottingham, Anthony Forster from Politics and Heather Reid from Physiotherapy, talk to PADSHE Director Angela Smallwood about the pilot schemes running in their departments this year. The differences reflect something of the contrast between a non-vocational discipline and a vocational one, governed by a public/statutory body, with a stronger tradition of formalised procedures.

AS How did your departments handle student support prior to the PADSHE initiative and why did you join it?

HR The staff in the division of Physiotherapy have always enjoyed good relationships with their students and have practised a close and informal personal tutor system. Students have always managed to seek advice both on pastoral and academic matters, but we decided that, like many areas, this valuable component of practice required structure, equity and documentation.

AF In Politics we had an ad hoc personal tutor system, which when it worked well provided a supportive academic network. But it gave no guarantee of regular contact with the tutor, little supporting documentation of meetings and no guarantee of high teaching quality standards and pastoral care.



AS PADSHE suggests identifying key moments in the academic process and using them to timetable one-to-one developmental meetings between tutor and tutee. How have you interpreted this in relation to your disciplines?

AF As with most PARs, the backbone of the Politics system is based around three structured meetings per year between the student and their personal tutor, who remains in that role throughout the student's university career. The first meeting is introductory and takes place at the beginning of the year. The second comes at the end of the first semester, to return marks and discuss the tutee's progress. The third one takes place at the end of the year, to return marks, discuss the tutee's development over the academic year and a self-evaluation exercise.

HR In Physiotherapy, scheduled, formative meetings are timetabled after each mid semester progress board (designed as a forum for academic staff to report on students' progress). At the end of each semester, following assessment, summative meetings take place to allow feedback on performance. Of course, students can also arrange to meet their tutor at other times as need be. One area we were keen to develop in our record is the self appraisal/reflection form. These have been designed to provide a vehicle/prompt for students to reflect on their personal achievements and goals and to focus student/tutor meetings. We recommend that the student gives these completed forms to their tutor prior to a meeting; this allows the tutor to pay attention to any issues that may arise.

AS What sort of reactions have you had from staff and students?

HR The structured focus was well received by students in Physiotherapy, as was the emphasis on confidentiality. So far informal feedback (both students and staff) seems very positive, but it will be very interesting to see the results of the formal evaluation in the autumn.

AF The introduction of the PAR system met with little resistance from the staff in Politics, in part because of the obvious need to demonstrate teaching quality to external assessors, but also because of the generational change in the



department which has recruited new (and young) members of staff, who are committed to the process and who have genuinely relished the opportunity to provide a more structured and inclusive approach to personal and academic development. On the student side, the success of the PAR and the limited nature of the pilot scheme (first years only) has caused some resentment amongst the current second and third years, and we plan to extend the scheme to all three year groups for the next academic year!

AS Especially for a non-vocational discipline like Politics, the PAR can offer more than an upgrading of personal tutoring, can't it Anthony?

AF Yes, the PAR has also acted as the vehicle for addressing the issue of transferable skills in the Politics curriculum, through a skills audit which is included in the PAR and reviewed by the student with their tutor at the end of the academic year. The PAR has also been useful in formalising our student contact with the Careers Advisory Service and incorporating the development of a Curriculum Vitae into the process of academic and personal development of our students. Clearly there is still much work to be done in refining the system, but the PAR has proved its value and has quickly become a key part of our commitment to the highest teaching quality standards.

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Calling all employers

'It is now almost universally accepted that it is one of the many purposes of Higher Education to help students in the transition from education to the world of work. The availability of a well developed formal system for reflecting, reviewing and recording their achievements and planning what they need to do will give them the best opportunity to develop the skills and attributes which will be vital in their working lives.'

Roly Cockman, Chief Executive, The Association of Graduate Recruiters

The PADSHE project is delighted that representatives of BT are to lead a seminar at Nottingham in November to discuss the relationship between Personal and Academic Records (PARs) and BT's own scheme for Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

In the light of Lord Dearing's report on Higher Education, the PADSHE Project would like to broaden its understanding of the potential interface between PAR-style processes, which help students reflect on progress and personal development at university, and good practice in CPD in employment. The need is especially strong in the case of vocational courses, but no less important for the non-vocational ones.

PADSHE would be very pleased to hear from employers interested in taking part in any of a range of proposed activities:

- development work in PADSHE universities in vocational or non-vocational disciplines
- a PADSHE project forum for employers in 98-99: an information and consultation day at Nottingham
- regional PADSHE seminars in autumn and/or spring for academics, employers, university careers advisors, teaching quality officers, IT developers and staff developers in the NE, NW, Midlands, SE and SW.

Please let us know now what would be of most interest and relevance to your company. Our contact details are on the back of this newsletter.

PADSHE's first national seminar

On Friday 22 May, PADSHE held its first national seminar at the University of Nottingham, to disseminate some of the project work and exchange good practice with interested representatives of other universities outside the five project institutions. The twenty-six delegates came from nine pre-1992 universities and eight post-1992 universities and formed three broad interest groupings: student services (including careers services), academic departments and enterprise/teaching quality directorates.

Examples of pilot PARs were available for inspection and discussion, along with other materials contributed by delegates, including presentations on IT systems used by Oxford Brookes and Liverpool. Gill Murray spoke about the outcomes of her evaluation work, exploring issues arising from the feedback available so far at the University of Nottingham, where there are now over 2000 students and over 200 staff involved in pilot schemes.

Issues discussed included:

- revitalising personal tutor systems and linking them with PARs, transferable skills, CV-building and career orientation
- personal tutor roles and the value of the staff/student personal relationship
- the importance and difficulty of involving academic staff, even with IT support
- basing recording and reviewing in the real needs of academic departments
- allowing diversification and flexibility to encourage ownership
- student-centred and holistic approaches
- skills 'language' as an obstacle to staff and student engagement with skills development
- academics' reservations about national skill frameworks

Strategies agreed in the final plenary included:

- Look seriously at a discipline-based approach to recording, reviewing and action planning
- Make a start, however small
- Connect with other agendas
- Train students (as well as staff)
- Embed in timetable, because giving time to the process shows that it is valued

Further seminars will be held on a regional basis in the autumn and spring of 1998-99. To join the mailing list and receive information about an event near you, please contact the PADSHE Project. Contact details are given at the foot of the back page of this newsletter.

new

PADSHE case studies

One of the greatest challenges to schemes for recording achievement in Higher Education is that of motivating students to participate. The PADSHE approach has a high level of success in this area, because it is academic-led, and students review their progress in partnership with an academic. In another move to maximise take-up, the project has from the start emphasised the need for individual disciplines to adjust the PADSHE process to fit their distinctive needs and ethos. Experience is showing that sensitive customising is essential to success, and so project partners are now working on a range of case studies, reviewing the requirements of particular student groups, within and across distinctive disciplines.

The groups selected so far include:

Birmingham Joint Honours students

Contact:
Prof Kelsey Thornton
Email:
R.K.R.Thornton@bham.ac.uk



Liverpool John Moores Part-time MA students

Contact:
Dr Glenda Norquay
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G.Norquay@livjm.ac.uk



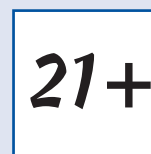
Newcastle Postgraduates: research and masters

Contact: Dr Tom Cain
Email:
T.G.S.Cain@ncl.ac.uk



Northumbria Mature undergraduates

Contact:
Prof Allan Ingram
Email:
Allan.Ingram@unn.ac.uk



Nottingham Students spending a period of study abroad

Contact: Gill Murray
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'Northumbria has a long-standing commitment to effective personal tutoring. In our view, the PADSHE Project has the potential to develop that commitment in terms of today's educational challenges.'

Professor Tony Dickson, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic), University of Northumbria at Newcastle

Professor Allan Ingram on PADSHE project work at Northumbria

In student support terms, modern history at Northumbria began in 1994 with the implementation of a modular degree scheme across the entire university – 'unitisation', as Northumbria decided to call it. Prior to this, while optionality was certainly a significant feature of many students' experiences of degree study, especially on the English and History programme, coherence and commonality were assured by students' belonging within the coherent structures of large, more or less autonomously run courses with strong academic identities. Unitisation, on the other hand, produced a range of smaller courses and a much larger number of option choices, usually shared between the degrees available within a department. Student support had previously been able to adopt a rather hands-off, problem-solving approach. Now it had to come to terms with a potentially fragmented student experience, with a centralised administration system, and with all the advantages and risks of individually tailored student pathways.

The response, within the university, and particularly within the Department of Historical and Critical Studies, was to begin a process of upgrading of the Personal Tutor system in order, first, to ensure a more structured series of contacts between tutors and students, and, second, to enable the compilation of a student file that both tracked progress and encouraged reflection over the three or more years of a student's degree. This preliminary decision was given a massive boost when the English division within the Department became part of the PADSHE Project.

What PADSHE work has done is to provide a location and a rationale for personal tutoring. The rationale existed and was



already being articulated, but PADSHE, with its emphases on regular student evaluation of learning, on identification of skills, and on career potential, clarified the opportunities for coherence that existed within our newly framed student support mechanisms. More distinctively, at Northumbria, we have also prioritised the design and presentation of our Personal and Academic Record (PAR) materials in order to give visual expression to that coherence. PADSHE funding has allowed the development of a student package through which the functions of PADSHE take place: tracking of student choices; evaluation by students of their experience across the full range of their chosen units; identification of skills; framing of goals and of possible career options. Our PAR calendar expects students to meet their Personal Tutor three times in their first year and final

year, twice in their second year, thus ensuring a developing relationship of advice, discussion and evaluation alongside the compilation of materials within the PAR package. Other events in the calendar include workshops from careers advisers and sessions on further degree work.

A pilot scheme in BA (Hons) English Studies and BA (Hons) English and Film in 1997 was followed by an agreement across the entire Department to adopt PAR in 1997-98 for all undergraduate degrees, including BA (Hons) Historical Studies and BA (Hons) History of Modern Art, Design and Film. Staff agree that, in an educational context that is still subject to change and modification as modularity becomes more maturely embedded, PAR is providing a source of stability in both staff and student experience, and has done so with a surprising economy of time and effort, not least because of the efficiency gains involved in combining tutorial functions.

Our current intention is to develop, in consultation with our PADSHE partners, a Web version of PAR materials, initially for postgraduate students on our creative and conservational programmes, that, like the undergraduate hard packages, will combine a variety of functions focused upon the very distinctive needs of these students. As such, PADSHE for us has been and will continue to be an exciting enabling force that has helped us to accommodate educational change and promises to help us to utilise increased access to new technologies in the furtherance of educational and support goals.

Professor Allan Ingram
University of Northumbria
at Newcastle

Visit our website at: <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~aezpadsh/>

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