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## Chapter 1

# Understanding and developing yourself

Becoming increasingly self-aware and developing yourself requires commitment and, like a lot of skills, it is best learnt by doing.

This section provides an overview of different ways to increase your self-awareness and discusses why it is important for both your studies and your employability. Being self-aware involves having a strong understanding of your personality, emotions, strengths, weaknesses, motivations and values, and recognising how they are interconnected and impact on your actions and interactions. Self-awareness enables you to better understand why you feel, behave, act and react the way you do, and at university and in the workplace having self-awareness will increase your ability to:

- analyse your performance and behaviours
- work effectively with others
- seek opportunities for learning and development
- learn from feedback.

In other words, understanding yourself can be transformative.

This section also looks at different ways to plan and manage your development. From identifying goals and skills gaps to capturing feedback and reflecting on the development processes and outcomes, it explores the importance of taking a systematic approach to personal development. Many professionals use personal development portfolios to record their development planning and to capture outcomes, evidence and feedback, and in this section we will look at ways you can start to build your portfolio.

Increasing self-awareness and personal development are ongoing processes; they require time, effort and commitment, and as a busy student you may not see them as priorities, but they are important not only for excelling in your studies but also for laying the foundation for your career journey. After all, if you do not know what makes you, you, and you do not plan your development, how can you make yourself stand out from the crowd?

## What makes you, you?

### What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Your strengths are the behaviours and qualities that come naturally to you; they are things that you do well and that you enjoy doing. In contrast, weaknesses are the things you tend not to enjoy doing because of the difficulty you have doing them or because they make you

feel apprehensive or uneasy. Recognising your strengths and weaknesses is fundamental to increasing self-awareness, and a good way to start is through self-analysis.

### Activity

**Reflect on the questions below and answer them as fully as you can, including examples where possible.**

1 What gives me energy?

2 What types of things do I learn quickly?

3 What do I enjoy doing?

4 What do I excel at without trying?

5 What makes me tired quickly?

6 What types of things do I struggle to learn?

7 What do I not enjoy doing?

8 What types of activities do I put off or pass on to others?

**Numbers 1–4 are common indicators of strengths while numbers 5–8 are more likely to be indicators of weaknesses.**

### Activity

Drawing on the activity above, make a list of your strengths and weaknesses. Be as specific as you can; it will help you plan your personal development.

## How do others see you?

Another useful way to build understanding of your strengths and weaknesses is to use feedback from others. This can include feedback you receive on your academic work, a job or other activities. In identifying your strengths and weaknesses, it is useful to look for

recurring themes, across different types of feedback and over time. In the example below, think about what the different feedback tells you about this person's strengths and weaknesses.

### **Example: Identifying strengths and weaknesses from feedback**

Priyanka is a second-year film studies student. She works part time in a shop and is actively involved in a local charity. Here is feedback she has received from the different activities she is engaged in.

**Email from manager:** 'Thanks for helping Karen deal with the angry customer today. She said you really helped defuse the situation ... When you complete the stock requisition form, please can you remember to include the date.'

**Email from head of department:** 'Thank you for your work as student rep ... Canvassing the opinion of those on the course was a great idea.'

**Feedback on assignment:** 'When you cite a later edition of a book, remember to include which edition it is as the page numbers may not be the same.'

**Message from another member of an event-organising committee:** 'Great job on identifying some sponsors and potential stallholders. Could I just ask you to add their email addresses to the spreadsheet – you've just filled in the phone numbers column.'

You can see from the feedback that for Priyanka, interpersonal skills are a strength. The feedback highlights how she can communicate effectively with various people in different scenarios. An area of weakness, however, is that she does not seem to be good at focusing on details and completing work when she is carrying out administrative or procedural tasks.

You can also ask people for feedback. This may be feedback on your ability to carry out tasks and roles, like the examples above, or you may decide to ask people in more general terms about your strengths and weaknesses. In the case of the latter think carefully about who you will ask. Who are the people you are honest with and are honest with you? Who are the people you trust? They could be your friends, family or a personal mentor. Speaking to four to five people will ensure you get a good range of opinions.

Before you ask the questions, explain the purpose of the exercise, ask if they are happy to be involved and answer any questions they have. You will probably want to tailor the questions for some people but here are a few general questions you can ask:

- What do I do well?
- What types of activities or tasks would you ask me to help you with?
- What types of activities or tasks would you not ask me to help you with?
- What areas do you think I could develop?

If they have known you for a long time, you can ask them:

- What did I enjoy doing as a child?
- Do I still show these traits now?

You could also show them the list of strengths and weaknesses that you came up with in your self-analysis. Do they agree with some or all of your assessment? Is there anything they would add? You can use the feedback to reflect on and, if appropriate, revise the list generated by the self-analysis.

**Reflection: Responding to feedback**

How were you feeling during the feedback conversations?

What have you learnt or discovered from the process, or from what was said?

**Building strengths and overcoming weaknesses**

Throughout the rest of the book, we will look at different ways to address strengths and weaknesses, but here are a couple of factors to bear in mind. Recognising your weaknesses can be problematic. You may find it hard to pin down exactly why you find something difficult or, if it is a weakness identified in discussions with friends and family, it may take further reflection and discussion for you to reach a point of acceptance. Recognising and accepting a weakness is, however, an essential starting point for beginning to address it.

When you have completed a self-analysis, it is important to avoid focusing purely on your weaknesses. Seeking opportunities that build on your existing strengths can help your growth and development, and research has shown that you are likely to achieve success by building on your strengths rather than by trying only to strengthen your weaknesses (Capp, 2010).

**What motivates you?**

Motivations empower you to act in particular ways and can be both intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivations are those that come from within. This type of motivation empowers you because you find the activity rewarding and enjoyable, rather than it being something you do because of external factors. For example, you may have decided to study a subject based purely on your interest and desire to learn more about it, rather than because you need knowledge of the subject to pursue a particular career path or goal. In contrast, extrinsic motivations come from external sources. You do something because of the external rewards, for example a pay increase or a promotion, or to avoid consequences like being dropped from a sports team or overlooked for promotion.

Having a good understanding of motivations is important for your personal setting of goals and ensuring you sustain the energy, commitment and focus to keep working towards them.

**Activity**

What are your motivations? Write a list.

To help identify your motivations you can use specific prompts like:

What motivated you to come to university?

What motivates you in your studies?

What motivates you to pursue a career in...?

You could also set yourself the task of writing two lists: of your intrinsic motivations and of your extrinsic motivations.

Keeping a list of your motivations can be very useful not only in helping you plan your personal development but also to remind you why you are doing something when your energy levels or morale are low. Motivations usually change over time so it is important to

review your list as part of your personal development. Changing motivations will impact on both your ability to carry on with particular courses of action and your ability to achieve particular goals. For this reason it is important to have a good understanding of all your motivations, so when your intrinsic motivations are low you can draw on your extrinsic motivations to keep you going, and vice versa.

### Students' perspectives on motivation

#### Drawing on extrinsic motivation when intrinsic motivation is low

'I find history fascinating and really enjoy my course, but when the essay deadlines are mounting up I can get disheartened and demotivated. That's when I remind myself that if I want to do a research degree I need to keep working hard to get the grades I need to secure postgraduate funding.'

#### Drawing on intrinsic motivation when extrinsic motivation is low

'I've just found out that I've not secured one of the lead parts in the Musical Theatre Society production this year. It's a shame because I've been putting in extra hours practising my singing and attending master classes. I feel a bit fed up, but when I think about it the reason why I'm a member of the society is because I enjoy working with my friends and being involved in productions. It's a great way to wind down after a day in the lab.'

## Setting goals

Most people have dreams and aspirations but those who actually turn them into goals, by investing time in clarifying, prioritising, scheduling, planning and monitoring the journey, are more likely to achieve them.

## Identifying and clarifying your goals

Start the process by writing down your goals. Once you have an overview, you can start to clarify, group and prioritise them. The following techniques will enable you to do this.

### 1 Question your goals

Questioning your initial descriptions of your goals will help you clarify and fine-tune them.

#### Example: Clarifying goals

| Initial goal                       | Possible questions   |
|------------------------------------|--|
| I want to be happy                 | What does happiness look, sound and feel like?<br>When am I happy?<br>What makes me unhappy?<br>What are the barriers (internal and external) to happiness?                              |
| I want to be rich                  | What will being rich feel like?<br>What will being rich enable me to do?<br>Is it the process or 'end product' of becoming rich that is important to me?                                 |
| I want to be a university lecturer | What do university lecturers do?<br>What will being a university lecturer enable me to do?<br>Are there other professions that would provide me with the opportunity to do these things? |

Asking questions like these can also lead you to revise the initial goal. For example, someone who wants to be a university lecturer might realise that it is a particular aspect of the role that they find attractive: working in a university, conducting research or teaching. If this is the case, the goal might change to become working in a particular sector or type of role and the process of achieving the goal will involve exploring different career options.

## 2 Short-, medium- and long-term goals

Once you have clarified your goals, a good way to begin grouping them is to think in terms of short-, medium- and long-term goals. These are determined by the deadlines for achieving them. For example, a short-term goal could be to get a good overall mark for a module you are taking this semester, a medium-term goal might be to get a First for your degree while a long-term goal could be to have a particular job within five years.

As you start to group your goals, you will see that some are dependent on you achieving others. For example, entering a particular profession or securing a place on a postgraduate programme (both long-term goals) might be dependent on you achieving a first in your degree (medium-term goal).

### Activity

- 1 Decide whether your goals are short-, medium- or long-term and write them in the columns below.
- 2 Are any of your long-term goals dependent on you having completed any of your medium- or short-term goals? If so, draw lines between them. Similarly, are any of your medium-term goals dependent on you having achieved any of your short-term goals? If so, draw connecting lines between them.

| Short-term goals | Medium-term goals | Long-term goals |
|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
|                  |                   |                 |

You now have a better understanding of the order in which you need to work towards particular goals and whether they are interdependent.

### 3 Prioritising your goals

This can help you avoid a situation where you are working towards so many goals that you are unable to give any of them the time and commitment they need. A good way to prioritise is to take a look at your list of goals and ask yourself which is the least important. Once you have decided, cross it out. Then read the list again and cross out the next least important. Carry on doing this until you have one left. This can be a challenging activity but what it leaves you with is a prioritised list of goals. You may decide to focus solely on the one goal left, or maybe the last few that you crossed out. Either way, it is important to recognise that if your list of goals was initially quite long you will need to put some of the less important goals to one side so that you can focus on achieving your priorities. It varies depending on the nature of your goals but, as a rule, having more than three goals at any one time can reduce your likelihood of success.

### 4 Are your goals SMART?

Another good way to clarify your goals is to use the SMART model, to check that your goals are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**ime-bound.

Write your goals along the top row and check that you can answer the five questions for each one. We have filled in the first column to give you an idea of how you can use the SMART model.

|  | Goal 1:<br>Do well in this term's history module   | Goal 2: | Goal 3: |
|--|--|---------|---------|
| <b>Specific</b> – what exactly will I do?  | Attend all the lectures and tutorials. Do all the reading and prep required and leave sufficient time to work on the three essays. |         |         |
| <b>Measurable</b> – how will I know I have achieved my goal?                                 | An overall mark of 65 or higher.   |         |         |
| <b>Achievable</b> – is it achievable, given the time, skills and resources I have access to? | Yes, though it will mean I have to plan ahead and make sure I don't take on too many other commitments.                            |         |         |
| <b>Relevant</b> – is the goal aligned to my other goals? Will it give me what you need?      | Completion of this module is a prerequisite for the honours option I want to take next year.                                       |         |         |
| <b>Time-bound</b> – what is the deadline for completion?                                     | The essay submission dates are:<br>20 January, 3 February and 10 March.  |         |         |

**Activity**

Write a list of your goals and use the four processes outlined above to clarify them.

When you have done this, answer the following questions:

- How have your goals changed from the initial list?
- How has your understanding of your goals and goal setting developed?

## Turning goals into actions

Once you have clarified your goals you can focus on what you will need to do to achieve them. You do this by identifying the tasks and activities you need to complete and setting yourself deadlines for completion of each stage. In the process of breaking down the journey towards completing a goal, you may find that you are in fact breaking it down into series of small-scale or interim goals. For example, if the overarching goal is to be a member of the university cricket A team by the end of the year, as you start to plan how you will achieve your goal you may find yourself setting multiple interim goals around changing your lifestyle or training regime. Use the relevant sections of this book, including *Chapter 3: Project management* and *Part III: Entrepreneurial attributes* in planning the actions you will need to take to achieve your goals.

When you have mapped out the journey to achieving a goal, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I willing to put in the time and effort needed to achieve the goal?
- Am I prepared to make the changes and possible sacrifices necessary to achieve the goal?
- Do I have the motivation, energy and focus to sustain me through the process of working towards the goal?

Be honest and realistic about this or you could be setting yourself up for failure. If the answer to any of these questions is 'no', you need to review and revise your initial goal.

## Reviewing and reflecting on goals

Having clarified, planned and started working towards your goals, it is important to revisit them regularly, not only to check that you are keeping to the plan and timescale you have set but also to check that they are still valid. Changes in your life might mean that your motivations and goals change, or during the process of working towards a goal other options and possibilities may become open to you. For example, you may start university with a clear career goal, but during the course of your studies or through the wider experience of being at university your career plans might change.

When you achieve your goal, spend some time reflecting on the process. What went well? And what would you do differently if you were to work towards a similar goal in the future? We do not always achieve our goals. When we fail to achieve goals, negative feelings can get in the way of evaluating what happened. It is important to revisit the goal and process and ask yourself if it was sufficiently SMART. Also reflect on the energy you put into achieving the goal and your levels of motivation and commitment throughout the process. It is not always easy to do this, particularly if you are feeling disappointment, but it is an essential stage in the process of deciding the answers to the following questions:

- Do I have the skills, resources and time to try again to achieve the goal?
- Do I have the motivation, energy and drive to try again to achieve the goal?

- Is the goal still appropriate and relevant?
- Should the goal be revised or refined?

You can also consider the following. What would be the implications for you and those around you if you decide to:

- Continue to work towards the goal?
- Work towards a revised version of the goal?
- Set the goal aside in favour of other goals?

Whatever course of action you decide to take, you will have learnt a lot from the process and this will have a positive impact on your future ability to set SMART goals and achieve them.

## Developing skills

Skills are your ability to perform particular tasks. Some skills may be specific to contexts or subjects, like driving a car or using a microscope, while others have wider applications, for example, teamworking or presentation skills. The latter are often described as *transferable* or *generic*. In this book the focus is on these generic or transferable skills, with an emphasis on the types of skills employers look for.

At the beginning and at intervals during your studies, it is useful to conduct a skills audit. It is a good way to take stock of your current range and level of skills and plan your skills development. Your department or university might provide a skills audit for you to complete, but if not it is easy to create your own.

### How to audit your skills

**Step 1:** List the skills that you need for your current studies and future career. You can find the skills you need for your studies in the course and module descriptions. To gain an understanding of the skills you will need for your future career, make use of your university's careers resources and check the web pages and recruitment material for companies you are interested in, to find out the skills they are looking for. You may also find it useful to review job adverts for specific roles you are interested in. If you identify a long list of skills, either group them thematically (e.g. IT skills, writing skills or analytical skills) or divide them into subject-specific and generic skills. To help you get started, here is a list of the skills employers generally look for.

#### The top ten skills graduate recruiters look for

- 1 Commercial awareness (an understanding of the business or sector you want to work in)
- 2 Communication (including written, verbal and listening skills)
- 3 Teamwork
- 4 Negotiation and persuasion
- 5 Problem solving
- 6 Leadership
- 7 Organisation (time and project management)
- 8 Perseverance and motivation
- 9 Ability to work under pressure
- 10 Confidence

*Target Jobs (2017)*

**Step 2:** For each skill, reflect on your current level of ability. Write down your thoughts and include examples to illustrate the points you are making.

### Students' perspectives on reflection

**Presentation skills** – 'I have some presentation skills. I've not given any presentations in the department yet but I have some experience of public speaking from school and last term I gave a talk about my summer job at a Volunteering Society meeting. Next term we need to give a group presentation as part of a project, which is something I've never done before.'

**IT skills** – 'I'm proficient in word processing packages but the course I'm taking next term includes statistics and I'm not familiar with some of the software we will be using for quantitative analysis.'

As the first example shows, when you are reflecting on your experiences it is important to include things you have done in the past and think about how you are developing the skill outside your studies. You may also find that you are proficient in some aspects of a skill, but not all. In the second example, in thinking about their IT skills development, the student narrows down their development needs to focus on particular software.

**Step 3:** Prioritise your skills for development. You do not have unlimited time so it will be important to do this, particularly if you have a long list of areas to work on. A good method is to think about skills in terms of their level of importance and urgency.

**Importance:** Which are the most essential skills for your studies and future career?

**Urgency:** Which are the skills you need now or soon?

The skills that you identify as being both important and urgent are the ones you should focus on first. These should be your priorities for development. It can be useful to ask for feedback on your prioritised list of skills for development. Someone who works in the profession you are aiming for, a friend who did the module the year before, a careers advisor, tutor or academic advisor will all have first-hand experience that will enable them to give you insightful advice.

### Students' perspectives on prioritising skills development

'I identified quite a long list of areas for development so took them to a meeting with my academic advisor to get her advice on which to prioritise. She said that project management could wait until later in the year as we don't do any projects until the second year. She did, however, think that it would be important to prioritise developing my time management skills because that's fundamental to being able to manage all the different tasks and assignments I'll be doing this term.'

'I identified four pieces of software that I should learn how to use for next term's module but wasn't sure which to start with. I spoke to some friends in the year above and they all said that I should first concentrate on a particular one. Not only is it the one that is used most in the module but if you learn how to use that first, it's then a lot simpler to work out how to use the other three.'

**Step 4:** Plan your skills development. Ask yourself the following:

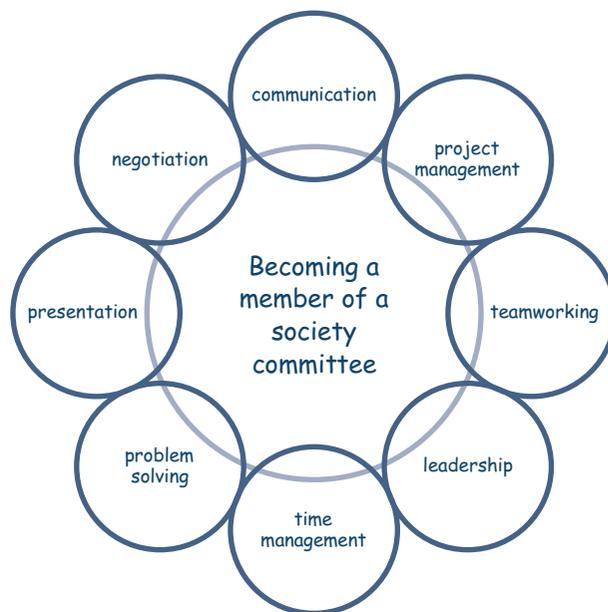
How will I develop these skills...

- ...through my studies?
- ...through employment/volunteering?
- ...through other activities?

At this point it is important to include as much detail as possible. If you set yourself specific tasks and goals, with deadlines, you are more likely to succeed in developing the skill than if you just have a list of ideas.

| Planning your skills development   |   |
|--|---|
| x  | ✓   |
| Attend a workshop on time management   | Attend the 'Introduction to Time Management' workshop (22 October, place booked).   |
| Look for opportunities to develop my teamworking skills in the History Society | Volunteer to join the History Society New Year Party planning team and talk to the President about becoming a committee member next year.   |
| Give more presentations  | Put my name down to deliver one of the seminar presentations in the first half of this term.<br>Volunteer to be one of the speakers for the group presentation we are giving later this term. |

You may find that a particular opportunity can help you develop more than one skill. For example, you may become a member of a society committee with the aim of strengthening your teamworking skills, but think about all the other skills it will give you an opportunity to develop:



It is also useful to think about what the indicators of success will be. Some skills will be tangible and relate to particular outcomes, for example getting a good mark in an assignment or securing a placement with a company you would like to work for in the future. Others may be intangible or general, like feeling more confident when you are giving a presentation

or working more effectively in a team. Feedback you receive during and at the end of the process can be valuable evidence in terms of monitoring whether you are on the right track, and at the end it can be an important indicator of the extent of your success.

Having indicators of success is a good way to keep focused on your skills development, and when you look back over your journey to reaching the point of success you will be able to see the distance you have travelled, which can be a great motivator to spur you on to further skills development.

## Skills audit

To get you started on auditing your skills, the table below outlines the 11 skills that are covered in the next 11 chapters of this book. Completing this skills audit can help you plan how you use the rest of the book. The chapters are written as stand-alone sections so you do not have to read them in the order in which they are written. Think about each statement and choose the answer that best describes your current level of experience or skill.

|  | Yes,<br>I do             | Yes, though<br>I could do<br>this better | Only<br>rarely           | No,<br>I don't           |
|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I plan how much time I will spend on particular activities – and stick to it.<br>(Chapter 2)                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I manage planned activities (projects) that have start and end dates and clear outcomes or aims.<br>(Chapter 3)    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I use communication skills to share information, create meaning and establish shared understanding.<br>(Chapter 4) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I build good working relationships with people from different backgrounds and cultures.<br>(Chapter 5)             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I cooperate with others to achieve a goal.<br>(Chapter 6)  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I lead people and manage processes to achieve goals.<br>(Chapter 7)  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I approach change positively and adapt to new situations.<br>(Chapter 8)   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am proactive and take the lead.<br>(Chapter 9)   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I identify problems and implement solutions.<br>(Chapter 10)   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I make decisions based on evaluation and analysis of evidence and information.<br>(Chapter 11)                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I spot opportunities, have new ideas and make them happen.<br>(Chapter 12)   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Which of the skills identified above are you strongest in?

Which are the skills you need to develop?

The skills areas in this audit are addressed in following chapters:

Chapter 2: Time management

Chapter 3: Project management

Chapter 4: Communication

Chapter 5: Understanding others

Chapter 6: Teamworking

Chapter 7: Leadership

Chapter 8: Adaptability

Chapter 9: Using initiative

Chapter 10: Problem solving

Chapter 11: Critical thinking

Chapter 12: Creativity and innovation

This exercise is intended only to get you started and each chapter includes more focused audits, reflective activities and resources to help you develop your skills.

## Using online self-assessment

There are many personality and career self-assessments online. Some you will need to pay for and others are free to access. Your university might recommend you try particular ones and you may be able to access some of the paid-for assessments via your department, student support or careers service where you may also be provided with the opportunity to talk through your resulting profile with a qualified professional. Traditionally the free tests will provide you with computer-generated feedback whereas the paid-for services may offer more individual, tailored feedback.

Increasing your self-awareness does not necessitate your using online assessments but they can be useful in supporting your reflection and helping you think about things in different ways. At the end of this chapter we have listed a few free online options to get you started.

## Personal development planning

All the activities discussed in this section, from reflective tools for better understanding yourself to ways of identifying goals and planning your development, can be grouped together under the umbrella term *personal development planning* or PDP. An important part of the PDP process is to bring the different strands together in the form of a PDP portfolio, a means of capturing your self-assessments, plans for development, feedback, reflections and evidence of achievements.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), the independent body that oversees the quality of higher education in the UK, has produced PDP guidance for universities which includes the following breakdown of what PDP is. These guidelines identify the benefits not only for your studies but also for longer-term planning and your future employability.

**PDP is:**

- a structured process that is integral to learning at all levels
- concerned with learning in a holistic sense (in academic, personal and professional contexts)
- an inclusive process, open to all learners
- something that an individual does with guidance and support which decrease as personal capability is developed so that it becomes self-sustaining
- a process that involves self-reflection, the creation of personal records, and planning and monitoring progress towards the achievement of personal objectives
- intended to improve the capacity of individuals to communicate their learning to others (for example academic staff and employers).

QAA (2009)

## PDP portfolios

There are many templates and portfolios for PDP. Your university might provide or recommend one and there are many options online. These range from being highly structured and prescriptive to being more fluid repositories for the information and evidence you decide to include. Having looked at some options, you might decide to develop your own framework. Whatever the structure, electronic portfolios are particularly valuable as you can share sections, or the whole, with others, including lecturers and employers. Having an electronic PDP portfolio also allows you to incorporate evidence like photos, videos and hyperlinks to online material, including your web pages or a blog/vlog.

Selecting or setting up a PDP portfolio is a long-term investment and you need to ensure that it has the potential and flexibility to remain useful when you complete your degree. For example, when you move from study to employment, will the structure you developed as a student also accommodate the probationary, appraisal and annual staff review documents that your employer will probably use? Also, if you use a template or package provided by your university, it is important to check that there is a way for you to either download or take your portfolio with you when you have finished your studies.

### Examples of electronic PDP portfolios

**Mind tools personal development plan: includes advice and templates** [www.mindtools.com/courses/lnV924x0/PersonalDevelopmentPlanning.pdf](http://www.mindtools.com/courses/lnV924x0/PersonalDevelopmentPlanning.pdf)

**Template.net 6+ sample personal development plan templates** [www.template.net/business/word-templates/personal-development-plan-template](http://www.template.net/business/word-templates/personal-development-plan-template)

**Businessballs.com: goal planning template** [www.businessballs.com/freepdfmaterials/goal\\_planner.pdf](http://www.businessballs.com/freepdfmaterials/goal_planner.pdf)

Regardless of the type of portfolio you use, it is important that it captures all stages of the development process. Using Figure 1.1 will help you ensure you include all relevant material and complete the process, and it also serves as a reminder that personal development is continual.

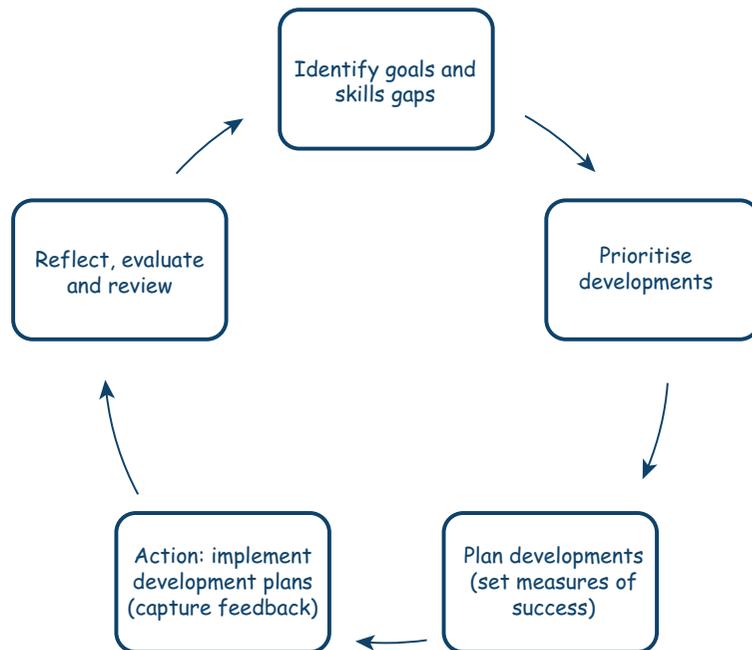


Figure 1.1 Personal development process

You do not need to engage with your PDP portfolio on a daily or even weekly basis but you will find it far more useful if you use it for planning, monitoring progress and reviewing your skills regularly. Think of it as an integral part of the process it captures.

## PDP portfolio checklist

This list is intended to prompt you to think about the wide range of documents and evidence that you might include in your PDP portfolio.

A PDP portfolio should be tailored to meet your needs so if you can think of other things that it would be important for you to include, add them to the rows at the bottom of the table. Once you have started using your PDP portfolio, refer back to this list on a regular basis in to check that you are capturing all the relevant material.

| Things to include in my PDP portfolio                              | Yes/No |
|--|--------|
| Self-reflection and analysis                                       |        |
| Others' appraisals of (or feedback on) my strengths and weaknesses |        |
| Others' appraisals of (or feedback on) my performance              |        |
| Skills audits  |        |
| Skills development plans   |        |
| Goal setting   |        |
| Action plans   |        |
| Measures of success  |        |
| Feedback   |        |

|  |
|--|
| Evaluation and review during the process |
| Evaluation and review of the outcome     |
| Evidence of the process                  |
| Evidence of the outcomes                 |
| Reflections on process                   |
| Reflections on outcomes                  |
|  |
|  |
|  |

## Self-awareness and employability

Being self-aware will help you with career planning and decision making, which will be of particular importance when choosing roles and organisations to apply to.

### Considering your career options

Using online career self-assessments will help you to gain a better understanding of your skills and may also suggest job roles that you may be interested in.

#### Activity

Complete an online career self-assessment and write a list of the job roles and sectors which match your personality, strengths and skills. Research the roles online using job role profiles and job descriptions and highlight the roles or sectors you are interested in applying for.

Your university careers centre may have particular packages you can use, or you could try

[www.prospects.ac.uk/planner](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/planner)

[www.careerfitter.com](http://www.careerfitter.com)

[www.career-test.co.uk](http://www.career-test.co.uk)

If you are interested in pursuing a specific career path, you may want to go back and update your list of goals to reflect researching and applying for relevant opportunities.

In some sectors, for example human resources, general management or law, there will be thousands of opportunities for you to apply for, so your next step is to consider how you will reduce that to a select number of organisations that would be the best fit for you. Researching employers from a position of self-awareness will mean that you carry out meaningful analysis to see if an organisation or specific opportunity suit both your current skills and professional potential. This will also undoubtedly save you time in the long run as you are able to make a smaller number of well-informed, targeted, quality applications rather than applying for an increased number of opportunities with lower quality applications.

Factors you may want to consider include:

- **Personal motivators**

Consider what personally motivates you; be honest with yourself. Are you motivated by money? Or are you interested in working in a charitable organisation which may offer

less financial reward but allows you to work towards a bigger vision? Do you value a work-life balance or are you prepared to work more hours as you build your career?

- **Practicalities**

Do you want to be based in a particular area? Do you want the opportunity for international travel? Would you be able to cope in a job role that involved six-monthly rotations to different areas of the country? Would you excel with the support and competition of a group of new graduates or would you prefer to be the only new recruit in an organisation?

- **Organisational values**

Does an organisation have any core values which underpin their strategy and policies? Often linked to recruitment processes and annual reviews (which in some instances are linked to financial reward), the values can be an indication of how an organisation will expect you to behave when in the role. Consider if these values play to your strengths.

- **Organisational culture**

Speak to people, use your networks and carry out detailed research beyond the website and recruitment brochures to get an insight into the organisational culture and consider how this aligns with your own values. Consider what is important to you. Does the potential employer offer financial reward schemes for excellence, have good parental leave policies, offer volunteering hours for employees? What working hours are expected? Is the work constantly at a steady pace or does it have peaks and troughs? Could you manage this style/pace of workload?

- **Further development**

Do you excel in an environment where you are continually learning or do you prefer to use the knowledge you have already gained? Do you want to lead a team? Would this be the natural progression of the role or are there opportunities for progression without line management? Consider if the role involves further qualifications and carry out research using LinkedIn to get an idea of the career progression opportunities in the organisation. Do the current and future opportunities fit with your strengths?

### Activity

Using your highlighted list of job roles from the previous activity, choose a job role which is likely to exist in a number of different organisations. Research this role in five different organisations and rank them in order of your personal preference.

## Demonstrating your self-awareness throughout the recruitment process

Throughout all stages of the recruitment process, recruiters will be looking to gain an insight into your conscious skills and values as well as unconscious strengths to determine if you will fit both the culture of the organisation and the role that you are applying for. This can be done through observing your behaviour with peers in assessment centres or work trials or through the responses you give in applications and interviews.

Part IV covers evidencing your skills to employers in applications and interviews in more depth, so for now we are going to focus on how an employer determines your level of self-awareness and how you would tackle this in an interview situation.

Recently, some employers have adopted a style of questioning potential recruits known as '*strength-based interviewing*'. This style of interviewing is aimed at identifying a person's natural strengths and motivations. Increasing your self-awareness will enable you to respond in an honest, meaningful and memorable way. According to a recent survey by the Institute of Student Employers (2018), over 40% of graduate recruiters now use this style of questioning. Strength-based interviewing, along with examples of questions that are used by recruiters, is one of the themes discussed further in Part IV.

The questions below (or variations) will be asked in every single interview you have. The employer is looking to determine if you understand the role that you are applying for and to gain a better understanding of who you are, what skills you have and how you could use them in their organisation.

- 'What skills can you bring to the role?'
- 'Why do you think you are suitable for this role?'
- 'What do you think are your strengths?'

Your research into the organisation should give you an insight into the practicalities of the role, the operations of the organisation and the department to which you are applying. Use the knowledge you have gained from increasing your self-awareness to highlight your strengths in a very specific way. Touch on how you have demonstrated them and where possible talk about how you would use them in the future in the role you are applying for. Use your knowledge of the job description and person specification to ensure you highlight skills that will be relevant to the role. See a possible answer to this type of question below:

### Sample interview question

**Q – 'What are your strengths and how would you use them in this role?'**

**A –** 'I can build relationships with a variety of different people quickly. I used this skill in my role as student representative for my course, working alongside staff in the academic department, and feel that it will benefit me when working with managers, colleagues and with new and existing clients. I also have high levels of drive; I am a very self-motivated person and once I have a goal I actively work towards achieving this without the need for external pressure from management. This drive allows me to meet set deadlines and achieve high standards in my tasks.'

### Activity

Choose a role that you are considering applying for. Prepare an answer to the question above for this role.

Note – We strongly recommend that you adopt good habits now. Choosing a role to focus your answer on rather than simply just considering how you would answer this question is best practice, as this will force you to tailor your applications using the job description and person specification to identify your strengths and experiences that are relevant to the role.

Another common question asked at interviews, aimed at giving the employer an insight into how well you understand yourself, is:

- 'What are your weaknesses?'

Many candidates can be thrown by this question in an interview and preparing for it now will mean that you have a response if or when it comes up in an interview situation. Always make sure that you choose weaknesses that do not have a direct impact on the job role and be careful about choosing general skills that may make you appear unreliable such as poor timekeeping or poor organisation skills.

As you become increasingly self-aware you will better understand your weaknesses. If you are struggling to think of a weakness it is worth remembering that some strengths can bring with them accompanying weaknesses. For example, good teamworkers might not be able to manage conflict or manage their managers (generally known as *managing up*) and those with good attention to detail may find it hard to work on multiple projects at the same time, or having a competitive spirit may mean that you meet targets but you could alienate your peers on the way.

When giving your answer always take care to provide further information about how you counteract or modify that weakness, rather than simply stating the weakness itself. This shows that you actively find ways to overcome your weaknesses.

Try to avoid giving the cliché of 'I am a perfectionist...'. This is overused and very rarely true. An alternative approach would be to highlight areas of development, again stressing how you would overcome this deficiency; this suggests reflection and a desire to improve.

### Sample interview question

**Q – 'Tell us what you think is your main weakness.'**

**A –** 'I like to get involved with a range of projects which can sometimes mean that I have the potential to be overstretched and end up in a situation with lots of conflicting deadlines at once, but I keep to-do lists with deadlines to make sure my workload is manageable at all times.'

or (if adopting the areas-of-development approach)

**A –** 'I have gained extensive experience of teaching through a variety of work experience and extra-curricular opportunities but I have not yet supported students through their SATS. If I was to be given Year 6, I would speak with other colleagues who have been through this process to learn from their experiences and successes.'

### Activity

Choose a role that you are considering applying for. Prepare an answer to the question 'What are your weaknesses?'. Highlight two weaknesses and be sure to talk about how you combat your weaknesses where relevant.

Through your responses, an employer will have an insight into your levels of self-awareness. They will be beginning to formulate their own opinion of you, based on the behaviours you exhibit and the responses you give to the questions asked. Often they will then want to know about your 'bigger plan' and how the role you are applying for fits in with this:

- 'Where do you want to be in five years' time?'
- 'How will this role help you in your career path?'

When preparing for this question do consider your short-, medium- and long-term goals. Do you want professional qualifications, or to achieve chartered status? If so, how long does this typically take to achieve? Your research into the role and organisation should help you to identify professional opportunities at key points of one, five and ten years. Use this information to inform your answer. Do you want to progress onto management roles and manage staff and projects? If so, use LinkedIn to research career trajectories of staff in the organisation to identify promotional paths.

Be honest about your plans but do consider how the organisation will view your response, for example, if your intention is to gain commercial experience and sponsorship through professional qualifications, before moving to another location/organisation/sector: an organisation is unlikely to want to dedicate resources to recruiting and training someone who is planning to leave after a couple of years. Employers will be looking to identify individuals who are committed to working for their company, not people who plan to use it as a stepping stone into the organisation that they are really targeting.

### Sample interview question

**Q – ‘Where do you want to be in five years’ time?’**

**A –** ‘If I am successful in getting this role, I hope to complete my accountancy exams in the next three years. Throughout this time I hope to build my skills and experience working with clients to be able to progress to managing smaller projects, with a view to taking on a role as manager with a team of people. This will allow me to use the transferable skills gained in my leadership role as captain of the football team and as bar supervisor.’

### Activity

Choose a role that you are considering applying for. Prepare an answer to the question ‘How will this role help you in your career path?’

## Online self-assessment tools

Career-test.co.uk

[www.career-test.co.uk](http://www.career-test.co.uk)

Personality test with some matched job ideas.

Jung Typology Test

[www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes1.htm](http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes1.htm)

Personality test based on Carl Jung’s and Isabel Briggs Myers’ typological approach to personality.

Prospects

[www.prospects.ac.uk/planner](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/planner)

What job would suit me? Quiz aimed at students and graduates.

The Big Five Personality Test

[www.truity.com/test/big-five-personality-test](http://www.truity.com/test/big-five-personality-test)

Five-factor personality test.

Work values test

[www.123test.com/work-values-test](http://www.123test.com/work-values-test)

Focusing on what makes you happy or unhappy in work.

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