

## **Individual Learning Plans – a lifetime of performance or the performance of a lifetime?**

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The title refers to a theme within many recent initiatives (such as contracts, audit, inspection, benchmarking, league tables, impact and targets) as exemplified by Individual Learning Plans. Students in all phases of education are monitored in a variety of ways which entail that their performance is constantly assessed. 'Performativity' is a mode of regulation in which the

"performances (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as measures of productivity or output ... As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within the field of judgement." (Ball 2003: 216).

On this perspective not only is individual performance constantly monitored but also that performance is supposed to be of a high quality. The increased use of benchmarking can be seen as one way of ratcheting up performance requirements: 'good' is the new 'satisfactory'. In fact one underlying assumption is that the monitoring of performance produces high quality results. Performance becomes the purpose.

ILPs have recently taken a more prominent role in the learning and skills sector in England and Wales (DfES 2003). This paper discusses the interim findings of a DfES Standards Unit funded pilot into using Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) on in-service and pre-service teacher training programmes for PCET across four sites. The aim of the pilot was to engage three constituencies (the trainee, the education institution, and the employer) in the process of developing a learning plan in order to establish what flexible systems and procedures are necessary to use ILPs successfully in a sector with such diverse employment contexts.

On the part-time programme the whole process started with initial assessment at interview which consisted of:

- a numeracy assessment
- a short written piece on 'what makes a good teacher' which was intended to assess sentence construction, sequence and flow.
- a trainee self assessment of teaching & learning aimed at covering the range of what teachers are expected to do adapted from the eight FENTO main areas and their reformulation by OfSTED (Appendix 1).
- an action plan based on their self assessment with three action points, one for each of the following categories: teaching, subject pedagogy, literacy & numeracy (Appendix 2).

Following the interview the results were reviewed by the Programme Leader and fed back to the trainees (whether their literacy and numeracy were acceptable or needed developmental work). The results were conveyed to the Module 1 tutor. Copies of the self assessment & action plan were sent to the Module 1 tutor & to individual Practical Teaching tutors

1. Module 1 tutors used the information to amend their scheme of work and to respond to particular needs
2. Module 1 tutor got trainees to review their action plan at the end of the module and to plan their next actions
3. Practical Teaching tutor reviewed their tutee's action plan following each observation and got them to plan their next action
4. Trainees discussed their progress with their line manager/curriculum mentor (f/t prog.)
5. The trainee retained the main copy of the ILP

6. The Programme Leader maintained an overview of the process

On the full-time programme the self assessment and action plan was introduced in week 12 after the trainees had had some experience in their placement college. They undertook group work to help each other review their abilities and the process was re-visited at a later stage of the course with group work and discussion. The significant point is that in contrast to the part-time programme there were group activities which led to individual outcomes.

**Data gathered by**

- o 2 rounds of semi-structured interviews with combinations of the parties: trainee on their own, the employer on their own, the trainee and employer together
- o Semi-structured interviews with module tutors and Practical Teaching tutors
- o Questionnaire to full-time trainees and whole class discussions

**Key Findings**

*Overall*

1. initial assessment & forms can be improved
2. timing of processes can be improved
3. staff and trainees need better (and more enthusiastic) briefing so that processes are firmly embedded in the programmes
4. there needs to be a layered understanding of who the employer is
5. line manager may not be the best person to conduct the reviews
6. ILPs could mesh with employers' appraisal systems but there were issues of repetition and timing
7. trainees concerned about employer involvement when they invested so little in their development
8. logistical difficulties of arranging meetings
9. issues of version control and dissemination
10. differences between employment contexts related to how systematic and meaningful the appraisal systems were

*Tensions*

A number of tensions in the system emerged:

*Programme Leader*

<b>Tension between</b>	
Passing on the results of the initial assessment in a timely manner	Engaging trainees in the process of initial self assessment
Developing an appropriate philosophy	Getting forms completed
Version control	Control by trainee

*Tutor*

<b>Tension between</b>	
Trainee not in the best position to judge their abilities	Confidence in validity of trainees' self assessment
Confirming trainees have reached the required standard	Believing in the trainee to act in their own best interest
Ensuring that actions have been carried out	Checking that the action plan has been reviewed

*Trainee*

<b>Tension between</b>	
Another bureaucratic procedure	Meaningful engagement with their own development needs
Wanting employer to take more interest and invest in their development	Wanting to retain some autonomy over the process and not have it tied to pay/review/promotion
Line manager as the best person to review progress as they manage work load	Expert colleague as best person to review progress as they are not in power relationship

*Employer/line manager/curriculum mentor*

<b>Tension between</b>	
Wanting to know more about their employee's progress	Insufficient time to invest in monitoring & meeting
Timing of programme does not fit with employer review cycle	Wanting to mesh the programme into their review cycle
Ensuring trainee reaches the required standard	Wanting trainees to invest in their self development