



DOWNING COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE

During your time in the University you will be given various opportunities both in your academic work and other activities to develop skills that will be transferable to situations outside academic work and study. You are encouraged to use these opportunities to develop skills such as critical reflection; the ability to gather, organise and deploy evidence, data and information; the ability to identify and solve problems; the ability to present material orally in a clear and effective way; the ability to present written material clearly and appropriately; self-direction; self-discipline...and so on.

The process of identifying skills that you might need for your course, your career or other areas of your activities, and then looking for opportunities to develop those skills is called *personal development planning*.

You are encouraged to keep a file or record of the opportunities that you have used to develop these skills. These could be very diverse: being a member of the JCR or MCR Committee, participating in sport, voluntary work, University or College societies, acting. These records will form part of your *Progress File*. In the next few years students in all universities will be expected to leave their university with a Progress File which they can use for constructing their *curriculum vitae*, showing to prospective employers, and which their tutors or supervisors could use to inform references.

Other elements of the Progress File will be a transcript of Tripos or M Phil examination marks, copies of supervision reports and self-assessment forms. Colleges will encourage you to keep these things together in a file for yourself. Systems have been put in place so that you are able to receive copies of your supervision or supervisors' reports and an end-of-year transcript will be made available.

Your Tutor/Director of Studies will be able to give you more information and guidance about Progress Files, but one of the points of Personal Development Planning is that you take responsibility for your own development. You can start to tackle this in three ways:

1 **The Careers Service**

Make contact with the [University Careers Service](#) early on – don't wait until exams are upon you!

2 **Your Faculty or Department**

Look on your Faculty/Departmental website or Handbook for its transferable skills policy – this will give you an idea of the opportunities that exist for personal development planning.

3 **The Transferable Skills website**

Use the [University Skills Portal](#) on-line induction website for ideas of the kinds of skills you might want to develop, and how to find the opportunities to do it.

Personal Development Planning: What is it all about?

As you commence your studies at Cambridge, it is worth bearing in mind that what lies ahead will almost certainly prove to be one of the most important experiences of your life. Your academic studies are the primary part of this experience but they are not the 'whole package' of a Cambridge education. Some of the most significant changes that occur over the three or four year period of your degree will be in the area of personal development. If this is your first time away from home, living and studying in Cambridge should encourage you to be more independent, self-confident, resourceful and probably more assertive, better at managing your time and money and better at working with others. Your horizons, geographical, cultural and intellectual, will be broadened by the experience of studying in Cambridge's international environment and by the extra-curricular activities and opportunities you choose to pursue.

No doubt you have already started thinking about how to spend your first few months at Cambridge and planning is the first step towards making the most of your time here. To get the best out of your Cambridge experience there are two things you might like to consider doing, namely recording and reflecting on your experiences, the essence of **Personal Development Planning**. The pace of College life can be hectic but you will find it helps to navigate a steady course if you can prioritise and plan effectively. Furthermore, you will enjoy term time more if you can train yourself to slow down once in a while, to take stock of the bigger picture. When you are looking to the future, you will find it helpful to have a record (even if it is a basic one) of how you spent your time.

In planning your career, looking for jobs and pursuing a career you should be able to draw on the experiences gained during your degree for many years to come. Your degree will provide a wealth of material to enrich your CV, as well as a valuable bank of experiences you can refer to when asked by an interviewing panel to demonstrate how you have risen to challenges and dealt with tricky situations. While your University education has intrinsic intellectual value, it will also make you more employable and equip you with a wide range of life and transferable skills (e.g. communication, working independently and working with others) that will be needed throughout your academic and working life.

The University of Cambridge has developed an Undergraduate Transferable Skills Website for you to use as an interactive guide. It explains more about Personal Development Planning and provides some tools for your own planning. Use it according to your needs and experience. Some of the examples provided may not seem relevant to your personal circumstances but may enable you to analyse your strengths. For example, juggling personal/family life, studies and extra-curricular activities shows commitment, organisation, time-management and adaptability. All are important skills.

The University is aware of the personal development that students undergo during their education and is equally aware that students do not always articulate and take full advantage of the variety of skills and experiences they have acquired. They are therefore keen to help students to capitalise on their experience as much as they possibly can. It is hoped that you will leave Cambridge with a tangible output of the process: your PDP Portfolio.

Your Tutor and Director of Studies will be able to give you more information and guidance about Progress Files but one of the points of Personal Development Planning is that you take responsibility for your own development. Begin as soon as you can by visiting the transferable skills web pages for either [undergraduates](#) or [postgraduates](#).