



Understanding your Students

FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

COFFEE BREAK GUIDE

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UNDERSTANDING YOUR LEARNERS IS VITAL

to good teaching practice. To ensure students are successful, the lessons you create must meet their needs. A learner profile is a good way of establishing the needs of your learners.

There are many tools available to help you understand your learners. These tools aim to give you a profile of your learners.

Learner Profiles are useful when:

- Setting the entry criteria for the programme
- Deciding the level of delivery – based on literacy and numeracy levels identified and the level of the programme.
- Choosing of the most appropriate mode of delivery based on IT access and skills - face to face, blended, other flexible modes of delivery, block courses, evening classes,
- Understanding their general characteristics (age, sex, cultural background etc)
- Profiling their previous learning experience
- Identifying why they are learning - what is their motivation?
- Exploring what they already know - what experience can they build on?
- Ascertaining their favoured learning style.
- Evaluating any specific needs.

A learner profile might incorporate many different types of data, including:

- Age
- Employment status
- Highest qualification
- Access to IT and IT skills
- English and Math skills
- Motives for learning
- Existing knowledge of a subject

How a Learner Profile might be used

Once students have been surveyed, a general trend might be evident. For example, 30% of students enrolled in a



course with large aspects of online delivery do not have access to a home computer with internet access. In a figure this high, alternative arrangements would need to be factored into the course delivery to ensure those students are not disadvantaged.

In another example, a survey might indicate that a few students do not have the required literacy ability to be successful in your course. Plans can be put into place from the outset of the course to ensure student success – or the student counselled into taking a different option.

Different ways of Profiling Students

Learner profiles might be called pre-study diagnostics, independent learning plan, personal development planning, personal learning plan or other similar name. Internationally a number of countries have developed a range of surveys or diagnostics to allow staff in higher education to better plan for successful student outcomes. http://www.recordingachievement.org/downloads/Learner_Profile_V1.1.pdf

A Case Study

PEP at WelTec

Personal Education Planning (PEP) is about providing support and guidance to an individual student. It aims to assist all students to succeed by helping them understand their particular learning needs and what additional support they may require while studying.

Students have not always used the support services as early as they should to gain maximum benefit, and establishing a PEP early on helps to address this.

A PEP advisor helps the student identify their career goals, programme choice, learning styles, study goals and strategies for success and together they set these out in a PEP.

Setting up a PEP is usually part of the enrolment process for all new students is encouraged.

All new students are proactively contacted before their study begins and appointments are made for students to undertake a one-to-one interview.

Based on the information gathered at the interview, students can then be assisted to find the most appropriate help and support from the appropriate support service.

Students may be referred to other relevant support services such as Learning Support, Disabilities Support, Maori Liaison or Support, Pasifiki Liaison or Support, a counsellor, a nurse or a career counsellor.

Literacy and Numeracy Assessment

A brief evaluation of the students literacy and numeracy skill levels, contextualised for the student's area of study, helps students and their teachers to recognise their potential challenges.

Learning Styles assessment

Using a custom-built computer programme, the student discovers their preferred learning style (visual, auditory or tactile, right or left brain and multiple intelligences). Information is provided to students that helps them consider their learning preferences and develop effective study strategies.

The student's PEP advisor discusses the assessment results with the student and provides information and encouragement to use the support services available.

Copies of the student assessments are also sent to their subject tutor. This provides the tutor with understanding around any issues that might impact on the student's ability to succeed. If the tutor has information on the whole class, their teaching strategies may be adjusted to ensure all their students succeed.

Career planning

Right from the first interview, the PEP advisor discusses with the student their career interests and goals, the level of their study programmes and their current level of experience and knowledge. This process allows the student to verify they have chosen the correct programme or explore other opportunities with the careers advisor.

This is revisited in any subsequent meeting so that students are encouraged to develop their career-thinking skills including learning pathways.

Ongoing contact

The PEP advisor maintains ongoing contact with the student where appropriate to discuss their progress towards their goals and any concerns they may have.

