**Personal Reflection and Development Plan**

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Introduction

Starting a Foundation Year in higher education in the United Kingdom (UK) has marked a significant turning point in my personal, academic, and professional journey. The transition from secondary school to university life presented various challenges and opportunities that prompted me to reflect deeply on my skills, goals, and attitudes. This module, aimed to facilitate our adaptation to higher education and encourage self-awareness, has offered vital learning moments and personal insights. The creation of a Personal Development Plan (PDP) as part of this module has helped me systematically scrutinise my strengths and weaknesses, cultivate realistic objectives, and map a course for continued growth.

This reflection will explore the vital themes encountered during this module, especially focusing on communication, employability, independent learning, and academic writing. These will be examined through the lens of my experiences, supported by academic literature, and will culminate in a PDP that outlines the path I indent to follow as I transition into undergraduate study and beyond.

This is not only a reflection of my learning but also as a benchmark for assessing how far I have come since the beginning of the Foundation Year. Each theme explored herein reflects a stage in my personal transformation. Through planned learning, peer collaboration, feedback from tutors, and critical self-evaluation, I have developed a deeper understanding of what it takes to succeed in higher education and how to sustain lifelong learning beyond graduation.

Awareness of Strengths and Weaknesses

One of the most treasured aspects of this module has been the opportunity to engage in self-assessment and identify personal strengths and areas for improvement. According to Moon (2006), self-awareness is essential to reflective practice and enables individuals to take ownership of their learning. Through workshop activities and reflective journaling (Seli, 2019), I discovered that I am highly motivated and capable of working independently, but I often struggle with time management and oral communication.

My ability to work independently was obvious in how I engaged with the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and completed assigned readings (Pem et al., 2021). Cottrell (2015) describes autonomous learning as a crucial employability skill, and I have begun to see how this independence will serve me well in higher education and future employment. However, during seminar discussions, I found it challenging to articulate my thoughts clearly, often due to anxiety and lack of preparation (Donelan and Kear, 2024).

To address these areas of weakness, I started engaging more actively with support resources such as personal tutorials and online workshops (Donelan and Kear, 2024). I learned that setting specific goals before each session helped reduce anxiety. For instance, I committed to contributing at least once in every seminar, regardless of how brief the comment might be. This practice, although initially uncomfortable, helped boost my confidence gradually.

Barker (2010) emphasises that communication is not only about conveying ideas but also about listening actively and responding appropriately. To further develop this skill, I practised speaking in informal group settings with peers and sought feedback. According to Degn et al. (2022) theory, peer-to-peer learning allowed me to adjust my communication approach and become more confident in expressing myself.

Understanding the Value of Higher Education

This module stimulated a re-evaluation of preconceived notions about university life (Reay, 2021). Initially, I viewed university solely as an academic institution fixated on acquiring knowledge. However, through class discussions and interactions with Career Development Services, I began to appreciate that higher education is a holistic experience aimed at personal, academic, and professional growth (Trought, 2017).

Workshops underlined how degree programmes are designed not just to teach subject knowledge but also to insert employability skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability (Gallagher, 2016). The opportunity to interact with academic staff revealed the staff-student relationship, helping me realise that lecturers are not gatekeepers but facilitators of learning (Read and Leathwood, 2020). This significantly altered my approach to seeking academic support.

I also gained insights into the university’s broader purpose in society, particularly its role in fostering social mobility, innovation, and civic responsibility (Read and Leathwood, 2020). According to Smith (2024), through case studies and guest lectures, I came to appreciate how higher education contributes to solving global challenges such as sustainability, health equity, and digital inclusion.

Furthermore, engaging with the CORE framework (Career, Opportunities, Resources, and Employability) allowed me to link my academic experiences to future career goals (Bennett, 2019). This integration of employability within the curriculum underscored the relevance of university education in real-world contexts (Smith, 2024).

Communication Skills Development

Effective communication is a critical skill in both academic and professional contexts (Aesefer and Abidin, 2021). At the beginning of the module, I found both oral presentations and academic writing intimidating. Creme and Lea (2008) argue that academic writing involves not only the presentation of ideas but also the development of a coherent argument supported by evidence.

To improve, I utilised writing resources such as "The Study Skills Handbook" by Cottrell (2013), which provided direction on planning, drafting, and editing written work. I also attended workshops on referencing and academic integrity, which clarified the importance of citing sources correctly (Simpson, 2019). As a result, my confidence in writing improved, and I began receiving positive feedback from tutors on my written assignments.

In terms of oral communication, I participated in group discussions and presentations, despite initial discomfort (Grieve et al., 2021). Over time, I recognised that preparation and practice are key to effective speaking. Barker (2010) supports this, noting that confidence in communication grows with experience and feedback.

I further developed this skill by watching recorded lectures and presentations, analysing the delivery style and content structure (Grieve et al., 2021). This self-guided learning enabled me to identify areas for improvement, such as tone modulation and audience engagement. I also began practising mindfulness techniques before speaking tasks to reduce performance anxiety and improve focus (Cigrand, 2020).

Independent Learning and Time Management

A recurring theme throughout the module was the importance of independent learning (Holisoh et al., 2025). In secondary education, the learning environment is often structured and supervised, whereas in higher education, students are expected to manage their time and workload independently (Stuart-Hoyle and Wiles, 2012).

Initially, I found it difficult to balance my academic responsibilities with part-time work and personal commitments (Goodchild, 2019). According to Lund and Wiese theory (2021), using time management tools such as planners and digital calendars helped me allocate time for study, revision, and relaxation. I also began setting SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals for weekly tasks, which improved my productivity and reduced stress (Stuart-Hoyle and Wiles, 2012).

In addition, I created a weekly review system where I reflected on what I accomplished and what needed adjustment (Goodchild, 2019). This habit of metacognition, that is, thinking about thinking, allowed me to refine my learning strategies over time (Silver et al., 2023). As Cottrell (2015) argues, metacognitive awareness is essential for academic success and lifelong learning.

According to Lumley and Wilkinson (2014), the ability to manage time effectively is a key employability trait. By developing this skill now, I am not only improving my academic performance but also preparing myself for the demands of the workplace (Stuart-Hoyle and Wiles, 2012).

Employability and Career Planning

Understanding the role of employability within the higher education curriculum has been one of the most enlightening aspects of this module (Scott and Willison, 2021). Prior to this, I believed employability was something to be considered in the final year of study (Bennett, 2020). However, sessions with Career Development Services highlighted the importance of early engagement with career planning (Trought, 2017).

Trought (2017) stresses the importance of developing a personal brand and engaging in activities such as networking, internships, and skills development from the outset of university life. According to Bennett (2020), I have since created a LinkedIn profile, attended virtual career fairs, and started exploring volunteering opportunities related to my field of interest.

Moreover, this module introduced me to the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) for reflecting on past experiences and articulating skills in job applications and interviews (Hill et al., 2020). Practising this method has improved my confidence in describing my competencies to potential employers (Trought, 2017).

Additionally, I participated in mock interviews and CV writing sessions organised through the university’s employability centre. Feedback from these activities helped me refine my responses, tailor applications to job descriptions, and better understand employer expectations (Bennett, 2020).

Personal Development Plan (PDP)

Crafting a Personal Development Plan (PDP) has allowed me to set concrete goals based on the reflections above. The PDP focuses on five key areas: academic writing, oral communication, time management, career exploration, and networking (McGill et al., 2020). Each goal includes specific actions, deadlines, and measures of success (West et al., 2019).

For example, to improve oral communication, I plan to join a student society that involves public speaking. For time management, I will continue using a weekly planner and evaluate my adherence to it monthly. In terms of career development, I aim to schedule a one-to-one session with a career advisor each term and apply for at least one internship opportunity by the end of the academic year.

Moon (1999) emphasises the role of reflection and planning in achieving long-term development. The PDP is not a static document but a living plan that will evolve as I progress through university (West et al., 2019).

Moreover, I plan to review my PDP every term and adjust goals as necessary. This ongoing review will ensure that my development remains aligned with both personal aspirations and academic requirements (Mistry, 2021). I will also incorporate feedback from tutors and peers into this review process (McGill et al., 2020).

Broader Academic and Personal Growth

Beyond the specific skills outlined above, this module has contributed to a broader sense of personal identity and purpose. I have learned to view challenges not as obstacles but as opportunities for growth (Robinson, 2020). I am now more open to feedback, more resilient in the face of academic pressures, and more committed to continuous improvement (Ross et al., 2024).

I have also begun to appreciate the value of collaboration and peer learning (McGill et al., 2020). Participating in group projects taught me to manage interpersonal dynamics, delegate tasks effectively, and synthesise diverse perspectives. As Trenholm and Jensen (2004) argue, interpersonal communication is vital for academic and workplace success.

Finally, the reflective process itself has instilled a lifelong habit of introspection and goal-setting (Moon, 1999). I now keep a learning journal to track my progress, record insights, and plan future actions. This habit has improved my motivation and provided a tangible record of my journey through higher education (West et al., 2019).

Evaluation Against Learning Outcomes

According to the module handbook, students are expected to demonstrate an awareness of the value of higher education (LO2) and show improvement in communication, both oral and written (LO3). My reflection throughout this document and the practical steps outlined in my PDP clearly demonstrate how I have met these outcomes.

The development of this reflection and the accompanying PDP required the integration of academic and practical learning, a core expectation for this assessment. By applying theories from Moon (2006), Cottrell (2015), and Trought (2017), I have contextualised my experiences and growth in relation to established research and frameworks.

Reflection on VLE and Digital Learning Resources

A significant portion of this module relied on the use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), which provided access to essential materials such as recorded lectures, discussion boards, and supplementary reading lists. Initially, I underestimated the importance of these digital resources, treating them as secondary to in-person seminars (McLeod, 2022). However, I soon recognised that the VLE was not just a repository but a dynamic space for engagement and knowledge construction (Johnstone et al., 2019).

Through recorded Collaborate sessions and asynchronous discussions, I was able to revisit complex topics and gain a deeper understanding. The ability to pause and rewatch lectures contributed significantly to my learning, especially when preparing for assessments (McLeod, 2022). Furthermore, forums and online chats enabled me to ask questions and engage with both peers and tutors outside traditional classroom hours, an experience I found empowering and inclusive (Jones et al., 2025).

According to Gallagher (2016), the integration of digital tools in higher education enhances student autonomy and supports diverse learning styles. My use of e-learning materials throughout the term contributed to my progress in academic writing, referencing, and critical thinking (Johnstone et al., 2019).

Critical Engagement with Support Services

Engagement with support services was also a pivotal aspect of my development (Bonfield et al., 2020). Personal tutor meetings provided a safe space to discuss academic challenges and receive tailored advice (McIntosh et al., 2020). I also made use of the library’s academic skills workshops, which covered topics ranging from referencing to critical reading (Ross et al., 2019). These sessions, although optional, became crucial to my development and bolstered my confidence in producing academic work.

Moreover, feedback from tutors on formative assignments was instrumental in developing my academic style and structuring arguments more effectively (Bonfield et al., 2020). I learned to see feedback not as criticism but as a developmental tool (Morris et al., 2021). This shift in mindset represents one of the most significant attitudinal changes I have undergone during this module.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

As a commuter student with part-time work commitments, time management often felt overwhelming. There were weeks when I fell behind on readings or struggled to meet deadlines (Gallagher, 2016). Rather than becoming discouraged, I decided to approach this challenge constructively by reassessing my priorities, reorganising my weekly planner, and seeking support from peers and mentors (McLeod, 2022). Although I value collaboration, I initially found it difficult to contribute confidently, especially when others appeared more knowledgeable (Newell and Bain, 2020).

These experiences have reinforced my resilience and adaptability. I now feel better equipped to manage setbacks and respond constructively to feedback. These attributes will undoubtedly serve me well in my undergraduate studies and future career.

Conclusion

This module has been instrumental in preparing me for the demands of higher education. It has encouraged deep reflection, fostered self-awareness, and provided practical tools for personal and academic development. By understanding my strengths and areas for improvement, I am now more confident in my ability to navigate university life and work towards my career aspirations.

Through the development of transferable skills such as communication, time management, and self-directed learning, I have laid a strong foundation for academic success and lifelong employability. I am grateful for the support of tutors, peers, and career services and look forward to applying what I have learned as I transition into my undergraduate degree.

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