

## **Making IT Personal –**

### **Personal Development Planning at Westminster Kingsway College for HE Hospitality**

#### ***Students on FdA Hospitality***

##### ***Becki Fong – full-time and Darren Garwood – distance learner***

**Q** *So we're going to talk about PDP, I'm just going to ask you some questions about it first of all. In relation to using Blackboard have you had any experience of using an online virtual learning environment such as Blackboard prior to starting this course?*

**Becki** No

**Darren** No, not really at all. Certainly nothing as in depth as Blackboard.

**Q** *So it was all new to you*

**Becki** Yes, very (laughs).

**Q** *So what tools have you used in Blackboard that have helped you to reflect on your learning?*

**Becki** I've used the blogs. The wikis. Partly to reflect back on things that have happened in the past. Even just accessing material online, it also helps us as it reinforces lessons.

**Darren** Really all the exercises that we've done as we've gone through the course really, stuff that we've done as a group or stuff that I've contributed individually. It's been quite good to go back on and have a look through and see where you've initially started off and where you are now.

**Q** *Okay, so what were those actual tools?*

**Darren** Obviously the wikis and the blogs and some of the referencing materials that sit behind Blackboard as well.

**Q** *And have you used a blog before starting the course?*

**Becki** Never used one, no.

**Darren** No I haven't. I didn't have a clue what a blog or a wiki was if I'm honest. I heard things on the radio, come see our blog but what I thought it was I'm not quite sure.

**Q** *When was the blog for personal development planning actually introduced to you?*

**Becki** Pretty much the first lesson as I remember it was one of the first things that they sort of mentioned that was going to be big part of this course.

**Darren** Basically right at the beginning of the course, it sort of laid the foundation for the rest of the course really. So we started on that module along with Hospitality in the Environment, they worked alongside each other.

**Q** *Initial thoughts when it was introduced to you.*

**Becki** Actually it was quite exciting because I think we're in a world where there's blogs every where, not just in college, it is a big part of a lot of people's lives so it's always been something that's interested me but kind of something I've been apprehensive to approach.

**Darren** I don't know really, I was fairly open minded I came on to the course fairly open minded about what we were going to be doing and I suppose sort of throwing down your thoughts on a computer just to be read back by someone else I was a bit unsure initially when you started inviting, you know putting your thoughts down for this, you know is this appropriate, what do you write sort of thing but it gets easier as you sort of go through and start getting some of the feedback it sort of becomes quite an easy process.

**Q** *So how have you used your blog?*

**Becki** Really more than anything to reflect back on significant things that have happened during my time at college but also really to reflect on things that have happened in the past and outside of college and that's related to the actual degree, so things to do with my actual career and just to make sure I'm kind of improving .

**Darren** I must admit I'm fairly, I save things up, I do a couple of weeks or something and then I'll have something to say. I know some of the guys open it up and they pour their hearts out on it but I'm sort of more, you know, the highs and lows, things that are like when the results drop through the post and it can be quite a good high or a piece of work that you've done and you've got a good mark for it then I'll go in then and write something. Or I could be midway through a module and I'll be stuck or there'll be something I'm unhappy with or that I've done and I'll sort of do two or three bits in one hit. It's not something I go into every night and put stuff into. It's good.

04.08

**Q** *So what sorts of things have you written in your blog?*

**Becki** I think it's just about what I've learned. What I've found exciting and what I haven't, any issues that I've had. I find it a very good way of getting things across but it not being too personal so it just allows me to get more things across because I don't feel too emotionally involved with it.

**Darren** Definitely the grades that I've had and the highs and lows and things where I possibly thought I'd got the wrong end of the stick or something like that and sort of asked for a bit of clarification or something like that. Allsorts really and some of the PDP pieces, you know some of the objectives I've looked at some of those.

04.57

**Q** *Have you used it for tracking some of your progress?*

**Becki** Yes, again it's things that have happened in the past, in semester one or something. I know I've been quite emotional when I've written about some things – whether it's been happy or sad or whatever and it's quite interesting going back and seeing it from a more objective point of view and also going through stages of when I was completing my assignments and just seeing how I used to handle things you know about a few months ago

05.34

**Q** *And what about things like monitoring your grades and feedback and things like that?*

**Becki** Yes, I think grades are very important against dealing with the assignments looking back at how these are the grades I've got and how I can improve on it and along with that you've got feedback online which I think helps because then the things we are doing in the present we can look back and it's all on hand easy access when you want to use that to improve for the future anyway

06.00

**Q** *Have you used it for tracking some of your progress?*

**Darren** For me, not so much with progress I guess it's more if you went back to the start to look at where you started then yes you can see the progress and so obviously with putting grades and so on you can see how you progress through.

06.19

**Q** *And how's the Personal Development Planning process helped with this?*

**Becki** Again, it kind of teaches you the skills that you need in a professional sort of way of executing projects, I think, there's the time management which I think is very important especially when you try and juggle college life and work and then there's even just the SWOT analysis and those just kind of self analysis but trying to be as objective as possible. I think that things like that just help in that you would do something and if things get a bit out of hand you've got these skills to try and take a step back and really try and analyse what you're doing from a more objective point of view and just try to keep the emotion out as much as possible so that it doesn't interfere with the way you look at things.

**Darren** It just helps you to focus on what it is you want to be doing really in lots of areas because it just doesn't have to be all areas or just personal it can be all related it could be just normal assignment, study objectives stuff or it could be something in the workplace which you could follow on there.

07.34

**Q** *Have you seen an impact on your grades or a general improvement on areas such as study skills?*

**Becki** Yes, I think when I first started college just my ability to write reports and essays and things like that was probably not great but we'd be going to classes and learning about our study

skills and working on those I think it helps you become more of a complete person. I'm able to complete projects a lot easier.

**Darren** Certainly such things as Harvard referencing and the things that don't come 'normal' I suppose, that don't come easily, some of the academic side of life, it's just that, again, it focuses you in on those areas because it's a weakness.

08.19

**Q** *Have you used wikis in your online activity?*

**Becki** That was, again, one of the first things we were taught to do when we came in and they made it fun, like the first one we did was fun, we had to produce a profile on ourselves and it was just another good way of introducing ourselves to our classmates that you have no idea about and it just reflects a bit of your personality.

**Q** *And have you used them later on to peer review other students' work?*

**Becki** Yes, I know in class we've had tasks to complete and we've done it in the form of wikis and again I think this helps in that you can share the way that you interpret certain tasks with other students and they can then obviously look at your work and work out what's the best way to approach it and it also gives you the chance to comment on other students so there's definitely that interactive feel going on in the class and I think you learn a lot more and a lot quicker that way as well.

09.19

**Q** *Have you used wikis in your online activity?*

**Darren** Yes, several times actually, we've built some as groups or as individuals and we've gone in and put pictures up or videos or clips up there and people have gone in and done a peer review process where they've commented on your wikis and it's good to see other people's wikis so that you can see what you might have done differently or possibly what you have missed out of your own work.

09.43

**Q** *So, how would you say that's actually helped you?*

**Becki** I would say really it kind of opens my eyes to other people's views. I think you know, there are times when I think you know I'm going to be writing this particular point so it's always good to have a reinforcement or even someone to challenge your ideas you know it's another way of learning and it's something that happens in life anyway.

**Darren** All things really it gives you another angle to look at things from. You might be attacking it from one angle and someone else will be attacking it from another angle so you're able to pull in your work, their work and the comments from tutors to develop your own work for next time.

10.34

**Q** *What other tools have you used within Blackboard which have helped you to monitor your progress and your personalise your learning?*

**Becki** I think the whole idea behind Blackboard is the whole login, you have to log in yourself so that makes it very personalised because everything's very private. I think the idea of submitting your work online, I think that's very good because you don't have to carry hard copy with you. There's so many things can go wrong with hard copies, so with it being stored online as long as you've got internet access you can, or if you've got your USB or whatever. So I think. You get feedback as well online and you could be working outside, at home where you don't get that level of feedback but you're doing another task on a project and you just kind of need to remember what things you needed to improve on and focus on and so again you've just got easy access to it.

**Darren** Mainly the feedback from the tutors and, as I say, other work that's on there that you can just dip in and out of the lessons it's quite useful to go back and forwards for instance when you're doing work on a particular assignment you could just flick open Blackboard, go back to the lessons, go into some of the referencing materials, some of the earlier lessons and then go back to your work and incorporate some of the information back in again.

11.56

**Q** *And how have you found the electronic submission?*

**Darren** Fairly easy actually, it's been quite an easy process because you can just work away, save your work on folders, set up an assignment folder in each area, and when the dates due then just go straight to it and upload, it's really simple.

12.16

**Q** *How did you communicate with your personal tutor?*

**Becki** Lots of ways actually, through Blackboard, and we have the blogs and there's also, we communicate via email quite a lot, mobile phones – you know there's text messaging from the tutors and they're very good because they're very instant and of course there's tutorials as well and there's lots of one on one appointments made really.

**Darren** It's been a little bit on the phone, it's been text messaging, it's been instant message, email, on the webcam, through the feedback from grades or submitting work and first drafts and etc from that. So there's been every medium really.

12.59

**Q** *Do you feel face-to-face input is a necessity to help you with your progression and update your PDP?*

**Becki** Absolutely I think you can't underestimate that sort of unspoken feedback you receive through body language, face-to-face it's very personal and alongside emails and things like that which are impersonal you can let a lot to your tutor and a lot of feedback from them and I just

think with being face-to-face it makes the feedback just a little bit more real and I think you kind of need to take action on that and whatever they kind of tell you to do.

**Darren** It's not a necessity but I suppose the webcam and the odd visit just gives you that bit of, puts a friendly face on it so that you can actually see and talk things through, but it's not a necessity.

13.52

**Q** *And how do you plan to continue using your PDP process after completing the course?*

**Becki** I think what I've learned, just over the last term is that it's helped me become a more complete person and I can just understand myself in a more professional light and I think in that it's just helping me improve even just that side of my career at the moment and helped me improve just day to day life really and if I kind of neglected that then I think you just end up walking round kind of lost in what you're doing and you haven't really got a direction and I think it's important that I carry on using these skills so I carry on with those goals and I've got a target to reach and you just, it's a lot easier I think to stay on track that way.

**Darren** I think it's probable that I might not use it in a formal PDP document as if I was using it in an assignment but I would use parts of it to structure what you want to do next. It's just like a PDP in different format I suppose and what I found most surprising was just by writing it down meant that I had something to focus on and because you've written it down it means you think about it more and a few that I put as further away objectives I actually got done quite quickly once I'd written down the quite small steps I needed to do to get them done so yes I think I'd definitely use the process but whether I'd do it in a formal document I don't know but certainly writing it down and printing them out and focusing on them helps in completing them.

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