



CAREERS

How do I prepare a personal development plan?

Working on your personal development plan can seem like a daunting task. Three experts talk to **Abi Rimmer** about the best way to tackle it

Abi Rimmer

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Reflection drives learning

Fiona Tasker, a dermatology registrar in London, says, “Any route to success must start with a plan. Making a personal development plan (PDP) will help you to recognise educational needs as well as personal aspirations and it will allow you to map out how you can achieve these. There are three main elements:

“Firstly, review your learning needs and make SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound—goals. When choosing your goals, try to select areas that interest you, ideally things you are passionate about as you’re more likely to commit to the tasks and enjoy achieving them. Don’t forget to add a date by which you aim to achieve your objectives. If you struggle to identify areas to develop, talk to your supervisor or consider setting up a peer support group to help promote and enhance reflective learning and planning of goals.

“Next, outline learning activities that will match your objectives. For example, attending courses, conferences, meetings, completing e-learning modules, or learning from seniors or peers.

“Finally, consider how you will show that you have achieved your objectives. This could be through reflection, certificates from courses or e-learning modules, a logbook, or assessments or feedback.

“Planning and evaluating learning should be a continual process as circumstances change and plans may need to be modified. After these three steps, reflect on how effective your PDP has been and whether there are areas that haven’t been tackled or haven’t worked. Reflection must drive learning, and your completed PDP should be a building block for future plans.”

Celebrate your achievements

Mano Manoharan, a consultant perinatal psychiatrist at the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, says, “A personal development plan is a dynamic and structured process of nurturing skills. It’s about reflecting on your current learning and performance, and developing plans for the future. It helps give you direction and is essential at all stages of a career.

“A core component for preparing a PDP is reflecting on your performance and identifying your current strengths and areas where you need to improve.

“Once you’ve identified your learning needs you need to establish SMART objectives. Always give a clear time frame to achieve each objective and record the outcomes. Never forget to celebrate your achievements and remember you can carry on with the unfinished objectives next year.

“It can be useful to divide objectives into different areas, such as career specialty, leadership, research, and personal objectives. For example, last year I included the courses I wanted to do in my career section. I put quality improvement projects, key performance indicators, and service development priorities in my service section. In my faculty section I put taking up a role in an executive committee in my faculty and working on college related priorities. Finally, completing and reflecting on my assessments went into in my leadership section, recruiting for projects in research, and completing the London marathon in my personal goal section.

“There’s no hard and fast rule in developing a PDP and, as always, one size doesn’t fit all. If planned effectively, PDPs can be a very useful, career enhancing tool.”

Gain career direction

James Ashcroft, academic foundation programme doctor, says, “As physicians we put an immense amount of time and energy into our careers. This can often be undirected, however, and can leave gaps in our skill sets. A PDP is your individual strategy to direct your efforts in order to become a well rounded doctor, allowing you to achieve your career aspirations and improve the care you provide to your patients.¹

“The first step is reflecting on your practice and identifying your strengths and weaknesses. The General Medical Council’s Good Medical Practice and Continuing Professional Development frameworks can guide you in your aims for excellence.^{2,3}

“Secondly, plan ways you could improve any gaps in your ability. These aims should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound.⁴

“Thirdly, look for opportunities to tackle your weaknesses through your department, colleagues, medical journals, conferences, college websites, and social media.

“Next, undertake these opportunities, which may be in the form of courses, e-learning, meetings, or positions in institutions. Consider the skills you are aiming to develop.

“Achieve through your efforts and document what you have learnt. A record of any certificates, prizes, or feedback can be incorporated into your portfolio.

“Finally, practise your newly gained skills and apply them in order to improve the care you give. Reflect on this, and begin again.”

- 1 Bullock K, Jamieson I. The effectiveness of personal development planning. *Curric J* 1998;9:63-77. doi:10.1080/0958517970080106.

- 2 General Medical Council. Good medical practice. 2013. www.gmc-uk.org/-/media/documents/Good_medical_practice_English_1215.pdf_51527435.pdf.
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- 4 Doran GT. There's a SMART way to write management's goals and objectives. *Manage Rev* 1981;70:35-6.

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