STUDENT COUNSELLING
USING A PERSONAL STUDY PLAN

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Background

As a result of the degree reform carried out in Finland, the universities adopted the personal study plan (PSP) and began to offer PSP counselling for the students. The PSP is a concrete plan on the progression of the studies, studies-related choices and schedules. It covers the courses included in the degree and their compensations. Furthermore, the PSP is a way of thinking about learning and development, and a way for the student to reflect on his or her previous knowledge and skills, strengths and development targets and thinking about the development of academic expertise.

In spring 2008, the Learning Centre of the University of Kuopio carried out a survey for the “Five Years – Two Degrees (5Y2D)” project funded by the Ministry of Education. The data was collected from counsellors (n=283) of Finnish universities. The survey sought to chart how the introduction of the PSP has affected study counselling and how it has advanced the goals of the degree reform. The results of the survey are presented in this poster.

Results

PSP Practices in the Finnish Universities

The survey sought to investigate how commonly the PSP is used and what the practices relating to its making are. According to the study counsellors working with PSPs, 90% of the students always or nearly always make the PSP. The students made their PSP either independently or with the help of a study counsellor. The study counsellors provided the students with various forms of support, including:

- personal counselling discussions
- introductory lectures
- PSP courses
- Integration of the making of the PSP as part of a basic or online course
- online counselling
- mentoring
- counselling in small groups, and
- presentations of different study paths.

Personal Study Plans as Means of Improving the Quality of Counselling

PSP counselling is given throughout the entire study path, although the emphasis lies in the early stage of the studies. The results suggest that the PSP has improved the contents and quality of student counselling:

- the PSP reaches new students well;
- the available counselling services are more visible to the students than before;
- the PSP is clearly linked to the degree;
- the PSP helps the students to see their studies as an entity;
- the PSP promotes individual choices;
- the PSP serves as a tool for monitoring the progression of the studies; and
- the PSP has improved the quality of the students’ studies.

Most Central Future Development Targets for PSP Practices

The respondents would like to develop the PSP towards a more open and portfolio-like direction. In future, the development work should focus on the Master’s and postgraduate level studies. Information dissemination concerning the PSP process, extending the PSP process to span the entire study path, developing systems for monitoring, checking and giving feedback on the PSP, and archiving PSPs in particular still require further development. The monitoring of the PSP should be developed towards a more systematic direction. The integration of the ePSP into the university’s quality assurance system, if such a system already exists, was considered to be significantly important.

Fig. The most central future development targets for PSP practices.

References:

Laitinen, K., Pekonen, E. & Pirttimäki, S. 2009. Personal Study Plan Practices - Study counsellors’s working with PSP's side of the things been done as planned, in compliance with the goals of the degree reform. Learning Centre. University of Kuopio. Finland.

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