

Best practice guide for the retreat model of staff development to design ePDP tasks

University of Wolverhampton

Pathfinder project



For more information go to www.wlv.ac.uk/pathfinder or contact Dr Paul Brett: p.brett@wlv.ac.uk
Megan Lawton: m.j.lawton@wlv.ac.uk Emma Purnell: e.purnell@wlv.ac.uk

University of Wolverhampton Pathfinder project.

www.wlv.ac.uk/pathfinder

Best practice guide for the retreat model of staff development to design ePDP tasks

Do you need to retreat to advance? Approaches to the focused immersion residential retreat model of staff development for the design of blended ePDP

The following guide identifies key considerations for using a residential retreat model of staff development to facilitate the design of ePDP¹ tasks.

Context

This guide has been based around a series of staff development sessions held by the University of Wolverhampton as part of their Pathfinder project. They consisted of three sequential two day residential retreats held at locations outside of the university, over a period of one academic year. Each retreat supported a specific phase of the project and built on work carried out in the previous retreat. The focused immersion model take staff away from the responsibilities and distractions of the normal work day to work with colleagues on a focused and specific task(s). In the case of Wolverhampton, the retreats were designed to facilitate and support the staged process of the mentoring model underpinning the project and to support and facilitate staff in the design of the ePDP tasks which were at the heart of the project. The focused immersion model using residential retreats is not a new concept and has been used in both business and industry. However, in the Wolverhampton context the new aspect was the phased and sequential nature of the retreats.

Transferability and general principles

The focused immersion model can be transferred into different educational contexts. The following set of principles² (as followed in Wolverhampton) could be adapted to suit different contexts:

- **Venue:** Timing is crucial, staff have an array of institutional commitments, everything must be done to ensure to try to ensure a suitable time during the academic year to maximise the potential of attendance. To maximise the potential for total immersion we recommend the retreat lasts 24 hours or more (as opposed to more traditional 'away days')
- **Timing:** The venue for the retreat should be away from the university campus, in the Wolverhampton example we use local hotels as venues. This is because it is important that the evening networking and socialising happens in the same location as the daytime event. We also encourage all staff to stay over (even if they live close by) as often the informal networking and learning in the evening is as important as the formal part of the retreat.
- **Technology:** If your retreat has a technological element such as being able to access the internet, always check with the venue that they have suitable (and hopefully free) WIFI access. Also remember if all your participants will be accessing the WIFI at once this can considerably slow the process down, try to stagger online activities wherever possible.
- **Resources:** Be prepared, be over prepared! Remember if you are away from the institution it is much more difficult to 'pop' and get something you may have forgotten. Take spare resources pens, paper, laptops etc
- **Action packed itinerary:** take your responsibility as host/ess of the day seriously. Make the itinerary an action packed one. Staff have taken valuable time out of their work life, it

¹ ePDP in this instance is eportfolio facilitated Personal Development Planning

² Please note that the following set of principles are based around the experiences at the university of Wolverhampton and are just one way in which the focused immersion model of residential retreats might be interpreted

has to be worthwhile. Whilst ensure an itinerary that has enough meaningful activities, be sure to include time and space for colleagues to work together, as this may be the only focused time that some subject teams get to work together.

- **Support:** Make sure there is adequate support during the retreat to ensure help and advise wherever needed during the retreat
- **Follow up:** Ensure that you have planned suitable follow up activities to ensure a connection between the retreat and continued work back in the work place. Ask staff to make a plan of how they are going to apply the knowledge from the retreat back in the work place.

Obviously, cost, logistics and content mean that the retreat model of staff development is not suitable for all staff development needs. Perhaps use the questions below to consider the suitability of the focused immersion retreat model of staff development for your needs.

Rationale

- What are your reasons for wanting to deliver a staff development session using the focused immersion retreat model of staff development?
- Is this a new staff development session? Or is it an existing session that you want to do differently? Why do you want to do it differently?
- If it is an existing session, what are the current strengths of the session? How will delivering through a retreat model enhance these strengths?
- Are all people involved in the delivery of the session in agreement as to the benefits of the retreat model?

Logistics and cost

- Is there a venue that you could use that is suitable and cost effective?
- What will the cost per person be? Remember to include staff time costs for participants and organisers
- What do you want as your return on investment?
- Is the proposed timing of your retreat going to clash with any institutional commitments that staff may have?

Support, resources and implementation

- What financial, technical, administrative, mentoring needs do you anticipate? How are you going to meet these needs?
- What resources are you going to need for the retreat itself? I.e., projector, screen? Etc. Do you have access to these is they are not provided by your chosen venue?
- What activities are you going to include? Is there enough to fill a 24 hour (or more) retreat? How do you plan to manage the balance of an 'action packed itinerary' with ensuring thinking and discussion space for participants?
- Does your planned session lend itself easily to follow up activities? How do you plan to ensure the investment spent on the retreat will be reinvested back in the workplace?

For more information go to www.wlv.ac.uk/pathfinder or contact Dr Paul Brett: p.brett@wlv.ac.uk
Megan Lawton: m.j.lawton@wlv.ac.uk Emma Purnell: e.purnell@wlv.ac.uk