



## CPD: The bane of our lives or a golden opportunity?

### Introduction

Mention the words Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and the common reaction is a groan or a resigned sigh. Common myths abound such as 'I don't know what it is'; 'I don't need to know'; 'I don't need to do it in my job'; 'I never do anything new in my job'; 'I can't go to meetings so I can't do CPD' and, the most common, 'I don't have enough time to do it'.

The reality is that we are learning throughout our lives, often without recognising the fact. In these days of information overload, one of the hardest things to do is to sift the information we are getting, decide whether or not we have to remember it, decide how to store that information and decide whether we need to act on it and how.

As professionals, in our jobs we need to demonstrate that we are appropriately skilled and that we are continuing to be the right person for the job. Most job descriptions will state a requirement to keep up to date or will mention CPD specifically. CPD is a requirement for membership of IPEM and is a requirement for registered professionals e.g. for HCPC, CSci, RSci, RSciTech, CEng, IEng and EngTech as well as for VRCT.

So, what is CPD? How do we get into the habit of taking the time we need to think about what we are learning? How does it improve or change our working practice and how is it best recorded?

### What is CPD?

CPD is learning (from activities both inside and outside work) that we can apply to our work. The Science Council's definition is 'CPD is the means by which professionals maintain, improve and broaden their knowledge and skills and develop the personal qualities required in their working lives.'

There are four key elements here:

1. Maintaining our knowledge and skills involves repetition and refreshment by doing.
2. We improve our knowledge and skills by tweaking or changing our methods to achieve greater efficiency, effectiveness or understanding.
3. Our knowledge and skills are broadened e.g. by reading or learning from other people.
4. We develop the personal qualities required by looking carefully and honestly at ourselves to identify the areas that are needed for our work; often benefiting our lives outside work at the same time.

### What are we learning?

How do you know you have learned something? You recognise that you now know something you didn't know before. Someone else recognises that you now know something you didn't know before – and tells you. Did you find something hard to do or did something take more effort than you expected? These require reflection on what is happening, by you. Why not practise the skill of reflection by thinking over the day as you travel home from work or as you get into bed at night. What went well and why? What did not work out as you'd hoped or expected and what was the reason? Take time to think about these things, and you'll find it only takes a few minutes once you're in practice. Don't forget to jot down a few notes to add to your CPD record before you forget.

### Learning new knowledge/skills happens in various ways

Learning is a natural part of life, such as learning to walk and talk. We learn some things out of necessity, e.g. when we need a new skill to progress, such as holding our own in the school playground, learning to argue and negotiate to get what we need and want. We may also have a career goal that necessitates attending a particular course of study, training or apprenticeship. We learn out of desire, e.g. learning a new sport. Perhaps, particularly in the work environment, we learn because someone else needs us to do it with or

without our buy-in. Whichever way we learn, we have to be honest with ourselves: two people can do the same task and each will learn something different from doing it. Only by defining goals and reflecting on what we have learned will we recognise what we have (or have not) learned. There is a presentation on reflection and a reflection diary template in the Members' area of the IPEM website which you may find useful.

### **What and how much do we need to do and record?**

The five categories used by IPEM and the Science Council, and a number of other CPD schemes, are as follows:

1. Work based
2. Professional activity
3. Formal/educational
4. Self-directed learning
5. Other

Some CPD activities are obviously in one category or another, while others could be put into different categories, depending on the way that you describe or emphasise the activities. It is recommended that you try and include activities in two or three of these five categories at least, in any one CPD year.

#### **1. Work-based learning**

This is professional development that takes place by fulfilling the current job role and will naturally take place as we gain experience, are given greater independence and responsibility and do tasks that are more complex or have greater scope. Have a look at your job description, where phrases such as the following give some useful terminology to put in your reflection about what you've learned:

- '...be responsible for...'
- '... establish and maintain competency...'
- '...investigate incidents and report findings...'
- '...supervise and train others...'
- '...work independently...'
- '...follow standard procedures...'
- '...adapt to sudden change in priorities...'
- '...communicate critical/sensitive information...'
- '...undergo annual appraisal...'
- '...undertake continuing professional development...'

Ask yourself 'Can I do all these already to the required standard?'; 'Do I need to learn how to do some of them (better)?'; 'Do I need to improve/change my methods?'; 'How do I need to update my knowledge?'; 'How will I work towards the next level up, or progress in my chosen career direction?'

#### **2 Professional activity**

This includes participating in the activities of a professional body, developing our own professional skills and contributing to the knowledge of other professionals and participating in activities that apply scientific expertise in the wider community e.g. attending a careers fair that informs the public about our area of work.

#### **3 Formal/educational**

The most obvious activity is that which leads to gaining a further academic or professional qualification. Also in this category would be attendance (in person or remotely) at structured learning organised by professional bodies and preparation of papers, articles or presentations for a professional audience.

#### **4 Self-directed learning**

In this category, you as the individual, take the initiative in diagnosing your learning needs, formulating learning goals, designing the learning experiences that will be most effective for you, identifying and using the human and material resources needed and finally, but most importantly, evaluating the learning outcomes.

## 5 Other

This 'other' category is there to include activities, inside or outside work, which may not require scientific expertise, but which help develop transferable skills and gain experiences that are valuable in the current professional role or in future career directions. Some examples include being a member of a Parent Teacher Association, being a secretary, treasurer or coach for a club/society, attending an evening class to learn a new life-skill.

### **What do we need to record to demonstrate CPD?**

For your own benefit you are identifying the learning you have done and categorising it to order the activities; reminding yourself what you've done in the past year and what you've learned; and justifying your role and your employment

For your manager's benefit a record of your CPD is particularly useful for the appraisal process to demonstrate how you have met the goals outlined in your Professional Development Plan (PDP) and to ensure that you have learned what was required.

For your organisation's benefit – are the staff remaining current, efficient and worth keeping?

Keep a record of your CPD in a way that suits you (a spreadsheet is ideal and simple). Chronological order is usually the simplest, in terms of adding activities as they occur. Make sure each activity in your record has a date; the title of the activity; reflection on the benefit to you; reflection on the benefit to the person/people/organisation you were doing it to/for; a note of where to find the evidence and a rough estimate of the time spent on the activity in hours, or CPD points allocated, if applicable.

Keeping track of the evidence of your learning (taking care not to breach confidentiality policies in your keeping of evidence) can be done in numerous ways, to suit you and your department:

- Diary or log book
- Spreadsheet
- E-mails, memos
- Certificate
- Copy of new procedure
- Report
- Record of a repair/design etc

Structuring your learning in the work environment will make the process more efficient:

- Create a spreadsheet to record your activity (use the system or format provided/required by your CPD provider if you have one)
- Plan your CPD in advance. Sources of information that you might include are your Job description, appraisal goals and personal development plan, your employer's objectives, applicable skills/activities from outside work and your career / life goals
- Update the spreadsheet regularly e.g. once a month, using your diary, notebook, etc to remind you of what you've done
- Decide on a plan of action and carry it out (keep it simple)

Sometimes there is confusion between what CPD is and what is discussed in your appraisal. Your CPD plan is much wider than your appraisal goals, but you may choose to limit what you write up in your CPD record, if you wish to keep your longer-term goals to yourself. An example of an objective from your PDP discussed at your appraisal and how it connects with CPD plan activities is:

- PDP objective: Become proficient in repairing new equipment types X and Y within 6 months, by following department procedures, to a standard which passes the internal assessment process.

- CPD plan activities: Read instruction manuals, go on training course, complete e-learning module, shadow colleague, talk with users in another department, repair equipment under supervision and prepare for assessment with line manager. Each of these CPD activities can be listed separately or batched together on your CPD record, with the appropriate reflection of learning outcomes against each.

Each year 5% of IPEM CPD registrants are selected randomly to have their CPD record audited. The records are audited against the HCPC standards (1-5), as follows:

- **Standard 1:** A registrant must maintain a continuous, up-to-date and accurate record of their CPD activities.
- **Standard 2:** A registrant must demonstrate that their CPD activities are a mixture of learning activities relevant to current or future practice, from the five categories above.
- **Standard 3:** A registrant must seek to ensure that their CPD has contributed to the quality of their practice and service delivery.
- **Standard 4:** A registrant must seek to ensure that their CPD benefits the service user.
- **Standard 5:** Upon request, present a written profile (which must be their own work and supported by evidence) explaining how they have met the standards for CPD.

**Standard 1:** A registrant must maintain a continuous, up-to-date and accurate record of their CPD activities: CPD activities should be spread over the year, should not have unexplained gaps (explain any gaps longer than approximately 1 month) and be for the period requested. It is good practice to have your line manager, appraiser or mentor review your CPD record with you on an annual basis.

**Standard 2:** A registrant must demonstrate that their CPD activities are a mixture of learning activities relevant to current or future practice. Try to have CPD activities in at least two, if not three of the five categories and be creative in how it's written up. Keep a wide focus in all the categories and think about everything you are doing (inside and outside work) to assess whether your learning is applicable to the work environment.

**Standard 3:** A registrant must seek to ensure that their CPD has contributed to the quality of their practice and service delivery. Be clear as to how the activity has benefited you, e.g. by thinking about how to justify to your line manager why you needed to do that activity and how it has benefited you.

**Standard 4:** A registrant must seek to ensure that their CPD benefits the service user. How has the CPD activity benefitted your employer, the patient, your colleague, the service your department provides, a member of the public you are telling about your job etc? E.g. benefits to the service could be leading to improvements in accuracy, efficiency, patient care or safety.

**Standard 5:** Upon request, present a written profile (which must be their own work and supported by evidence) explaining how they have met the standards for CPD.

## Conclusion

Creating a CPD record does not have to be an arduous process, but does need to be thought out and acted upon. There are resources on the IPEM website and on the websites of the registration and other professional bodies to help identify and record CPD, so that it does not become the bane of your life, but a golden opportunity to demonstrate your life-long learning.