



The Secret To Spotting A Good Course



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If you or your colleagues are like the 1000 people in the CPD Research Project survey, you will have experienced good and bad training. Respondents' comments ranged from 'really useful' to 'so boring'.¹

So how can you avoid the disappointing courses and choose the good ones?

This is an important decision. A poor course will waste your time, waste you or your employer's money and discourage you from doing more professional development. On the other hand, a good course will enthuse you, help you to do better in your job or to advance your career and leave you with a sense of achievement.

After studying a course's promotional literature, the golden rule is to:

Ask the provider for additional information

It is amazing how many people don't do this! They end up on a disappointing course because they did not ask enough questions in advance.

Don't be shy! Providers want to sell you their courses, so they will be prepared to answer your questions. If the person at the end of the phone doesn't know, ask to speak to their manager. If a provider gives evasive answers, that will be a warning sign.

¹ Amanda Rosewarne, CPD Research Project, www.whatiscpd.com.

So what should you look for?

- ✓ Is the promotional literature clear about the specific content, and what you will have learned by the end of the course?
- ✓ Is it clear for whom the course is designed - e.g. what previous experience/qualifications are required?
- ✓ Who wrote the course, and what are their credentials and background?
- ✓ Is the course instructor the same person as the author? If not, what is the instructor's background and credentials?
- ✓ Is the course certified for quality against professional standards or accredited by a good source?
- ✓ Does the course include any assessment of what individual learners need? If so, how is this used to adapt the experience of participants?
- ✓ Does the provider have feedback from and ratings by course participants?
- ✓ If so and these are not published, ask how the feedback from this course compares to feedback from others by the same provider? For example, is the course in the top or second quartile? If it is a long course (more than a day) and you are paying for it, ask if you can speak to someone who has been on the course.
- ✓ Ask in particular about feedback on delivery and pace. Does the instructor have good delivery (does s/he read from notes) and good pace (does s/he go too fast or too slow)?
- ✓ What kinds of interaction does the course include? Is it mainly delivered by the presenter, mainly group discussion, or some other combination? This will help you select a style of course that suits your personal preferences. (Don't just think what you like and find easy - your best learning and personal benefit may come from some temporary discomfort! In particular, sitting back and listening to a lecture is rarely a good investment of face-to-face time - you could do that online.)
- ✓ Will there be carefully-designed material that individual learners can quickly apply to their jobs?

- ✓ Will there be space during the day to consider how to apply lessons from the course? (If you don't do this on the day, you won't do it in all the busyness when you get back. Ideally, two people from the same organisation should attend together so they can discuss how to apply the lessons).
- ✓ Will there be hand-outs and supporting resources so that knowledge is not forgotten?
- ✓ After the course, will there be an opportunity to contact the instructor or the course provider with any queries?
- ✓ Ask someone who has been on the course before. Theirs will be the best first-hand information.

Finally, a successful course is not just about the quality of the course itself. Before you make a decision about the best course for you, remember to involve your colleagues for any training you undertake:

- Before the course - Research shows that manager support is key. So be specific and discuss with your manager and other colleagues - not only to agree your time away from daily work, but also discuss the potential benefits to your work and your team, and agreement to try out and use any new knowledge and skills you have acquired.
- After the course - Share what you have learnt with your peers. This will cement your learning, add to it through the feedback of others and increase the course's value to you. It may also encourage others to undertake training, as you did.

About the CPD Futures Project

Led by Dr Michael Moynagh, CPD Futures is a research-based project that is helping to make CPD more fulfilling for professionals and more effective for organisations and the people they serve.

Details can be found at: www.cpdfutures.com