What is CPD Anyway?

What Does It Mean?

Continuing Professional Development[1] (CPD) involves intentionally developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience you need to perform your professional duties.

Who Has To Do It?

In the UK, nearly every organised professions is expected to do CPD, including a number of occupational groups that have not traditionally regarded themselves as being professionals – for example, car park attendants or sales professionals. Degrees of expectation, in terms of the amount of CPD and methodology, vary considerably:

Mandatory CPD is professional development that is required as a condition of belonging to a professional body. Most professional bodies today make CPD mandatory.

Obligatory CPD is professional development that is expected of members of a professional body, but is not a condition of membership.

Voluntary CPD is professional development undertaken out of choice by individuals who do not belong to a professional body or are not required to undertake training by their employer.

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[1] CPD has different names in different countries and terminology can also vary between institutes. For example in the US it is commonly called 'Continuing Professional Education' (CPE). The focus of this article is the United Kingdom, where CPD is widespread and still growing. Many of the core ideas apply in other countries.

Which organisations require CPD?

Regulators, such as the General Medical Council and the Financial Conduct Authority, often require CPD to be undertaken by professionals in their sectors. They set the minimum requirements, which professional bodies and institutes then incorporate into their schemes.

Professional bodies and institutes nearly always expect their members to undertake CPD. The great majority have their own schemes, which set the rules for CPD, and provide advice and recording tools for members. Where CPD is mandatory, a certain percentage of members each year are required to submit their CPD records for auditing to ensure compliance.

Employers often require their professionals to undertake learning and development. This may count toward a professional body's CPD scheme, or – if the employer has negotiated an arrangement with the relevant institute – may be a substitute for it. Employers tend to use the terms 'learning and development' or 'professional development' rather than CPD.

Why Has CPD Become So Important?

- It is seen as one of the guarantees of professional competence. An important duty of professional bodies is to uphold professional standards among their members. They do this by overseeing the quality of initial professional training, through their disciplinary procedures and by encouraging CPD.

- In today's society, knowledge advances at an ever faster pace. CPD enables professionals to keep abreast of developments in good practice, broaden their knowledge and expand their range of competences.

- Done well, CPD has many benefits for individuals and organisations. See articles (blogs) '6 Reasons For Doing CPD' and '7 Reasons Why Employers Should Support CPD'.

How Is CPD Organised?

Formal CPD schemes usually fall into one of three categories:

Input schemes typically require a set number of hours, points or credits that can be accumulated by doing different types of training and learning activities. Professional bodies often provide a list of 'approved activities' that can be undertaken and recorded as CPD. In some schemes the time spent on different activities are worth more or fewer points or credits.

Output schemes put the emphasis on what you have learnt. The individual is expected to describe what they have learnt and how it is relevant to their role. In recent years, to emphasise the quality rather than quantity of learning, a number of schemes have shifted from an input to an output basis.

Outcome schemes, which are rare, put an accent on how learning has made a difference to practice. The CPD scheme for family doctors (GPs) in the UK, for example, allows doctors to claim twice the number of hours for an activity if they can demonstrate how it has improved their practice.

How Is CPD Undertaken?

Most CPD schemes encourage individuals to progress through a cycle, usually some version of this classic 'CPD cycle'.
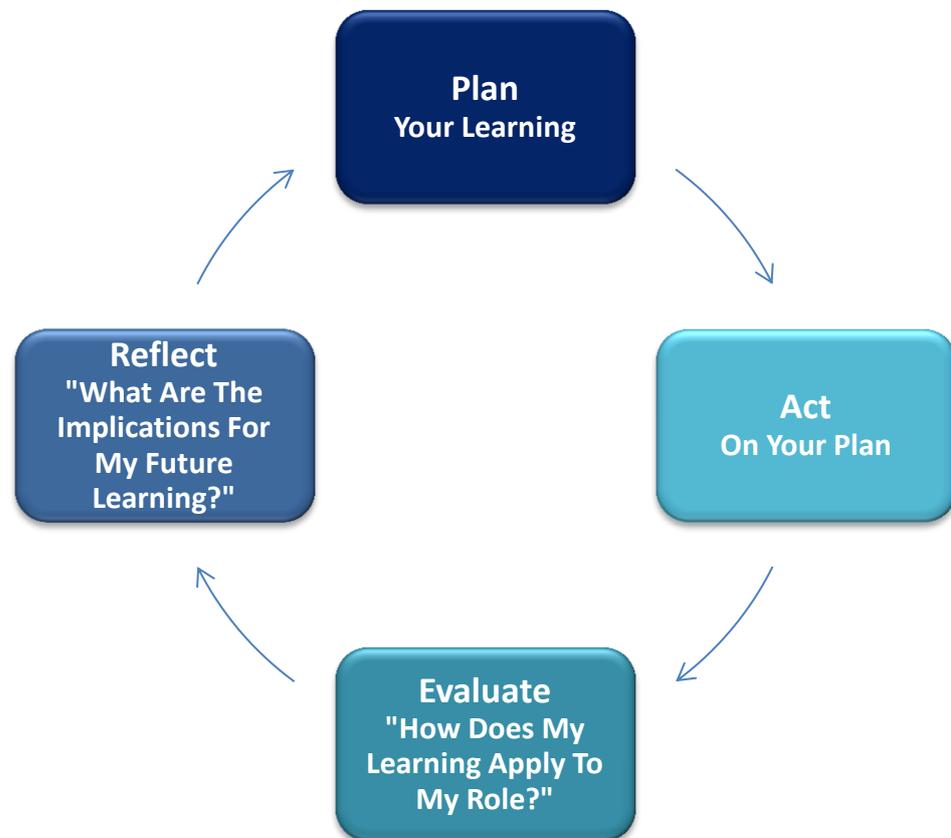
Source: Andrew L. Friedman, Continuing Professional Development. Lifelong learning of millions, Abingdon:Routledge, 2012, p. 103.

We are researching approaches that connect more strongly to the challenges individuals face in their roles and are more collaborative. See the free download, 'How to do CPD'.

CPD Plan

Many schemes require or advise professionals to develop an annual CPD plan. This should set out their learning objectives for the year and the activities they will undertake to meet them. The plan should be kept in the individual's CPD record.

Record Keeping

Schemes require professionals to keep a record of their CPD, and often provide an online template for this purpose. Individuals must record details of their CPD activities and keep evidence that they have completed them.

Reflection

Professionals are frequently required to include some reflection in their records. This may involve answering a set of questions, such as:

- How did the activity fit into your CPD plan, or relate to your work role?

- What did you learn?

- How will you use this knowledge?

Reflection is the key to making CPD purposeful, and is the central theme of our free download, 'Boosting Your Professional Intelligence'.

Unravelling The Language

CPD is beset by technical terms, some of which have different meanings in different sectors. Below are some of the more common ones with their most common meanings:

CPD Hours. Input-based scheme have traditionally stipulated the minimum number of hours the individual should spend on CPD (usually not less than 10 per year).

CPD Points / CPD Credits are used by many input-based schemes as an alternative to requiring a set number of hours. So many hours on a specified activity are worth so many points. Different activities may carry varying amounts of points.

Structured CPD is generally defined as learning activities or materials that are designed to achieve specific learning outcomes, and where successful completion by the individual can be independently verified.

Unstructured CPD can be understood as an activity that meets a professional development need, yet was not undertaken with that specific need in mind. While reading a trade publication, for instance, you came across a technical article that expanded your professional knowledge and was relevant to your role. Yet you didn't read the publication with the aim of acquiring that particular knowledge.

Verifiable CPD may be used to describe an individual's learning activity where 'evidence' can be provided that it a) took place and b) that the learning was relevant to an individual's career needs. Individuals often need to explain why they chose to undertake the activity, how it was relevant to their learning objectives and how they applied the learning to their roles.

Non-Verifiable CPD is a learning activity that has taken place, which did not have a defined or specific learning outcome, such as general reading or attending a seminar relevant to professionals from a variety of disciplines.

Formal CPD/Education are activities, traditionally instructor-led, that are designed to meet well-defined learning outcomes through a structured process based on sound educational principles. Some schemes describe them as Structured or Verifiable CPD.

Informal CPD may cover unstructured or non-verifiable CPD. Sometimes the definition includes the thought that the learning aims will not have been provided for you.

Self-Directed Learning is the process by which an individual can learn from general or non-specific learning activities, such as reading a specialist journal. Schemes often describe these activities as unstructured, non-verifiable or informal CPD.

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