

# Practitioner-Determined Continuing Professional Development

## Introduction

This title explores the concept of practitioner-determined continuing professional development ('CPD'), which is a view of CPD that seeks to connect the learning objectives of individual professionals with their participation in targeted CPD activities. Generally, most professions give their members significant scope to complete their CPD requirements as they choose, subject only to hour or credit caps on certain types of activities or learning in a certain subject matter.

Beyond this, the active involvement by professionals in the formulation of a Professional Development Plan ('PDP') has the benefit of situating the learning objectives of individuals in their specific context, allowing them to meet objectives in a manner which suits their learning preferences and day-to-day work. This is particularly apt given that no two professionals' objectives and learning styles are identical.

The PDP also engages another important aspect of CPD – reflection – which is pivotal in ensuring that CPD is a continuing process of engagement by an individual with their learning objectives and the methods they intend to use to meet them. Reflection also ensures that professionals implement key performance measures to track their progress against such objectives. The value of reflection also lies in guiding professional associations to develop CPD programs that meet identified trends in the market or gaps in knowledge, which are identified through a process of engagement with members. This can be seen in the brief description of the Professional Standards Council reporting requirements in this title.

This title explores practitioner-determined CPD under the following headings:

- Benefits of practitioner-determined CPD
- Professional Development Plans
- The importance of reflection.

## Benefits of Practitioner-Determined CPD

Practitioner-determined CPD refers to the mechanisms used by individuals to plan, record and reflect on their participation in activities in satisfaction of their CPD requirements. The active participation by individuals in these stages of CPD ensures that:

- Individuals consider the different facets of their work
- Individuals have a better understanding of how each facet may be enhanced through CPD
- Individuals are better able to take advantage of opportunities for improvement.

Furthermore, individual involvement removes the rigid regulatory lens through which CPD obligations can sometimes be viewed and ensures that CPD is flexible, inclusive and beneficial for all professionals. This

aligns with Dorie Clark's view that an individual should view professional development as consisting of learning, connecting and creating.<sup>1</sup>

'Learning' allows individuals to identify any knowledge gaps or unfamiliarity with areas of their practice or profession. 'Connecting' forces individuals to consider their networks both within and outside their organisation to understand what resources they must 'fill' any gaps. Finally, 'creating' is the process of developing content and sharing insights as a form of professional development. Clark notes that such a process enables individuals to improve their understanding and engage more deeply with any identified issues. This view of CPD largely aligns with the planning mechanisms discussed below in relation to different professions.

## Professional Development Plans

Holloway's research on effective professional development emphasised the importance of PDPs to facilitate effective learning through CPD. Holloway highlighted the value in individuals conducting a 'needs assessment' to formulate a plan, that is, the process of determining practice or learning needs.<sup>2</sup> To this end, Holloway proposed the following 'essential components' of CPD plans.<sup>3</sup>

1. Essentials of a PDP
  - Based on needs assessment
  - Clear learning objectives, which are:
    - Specific
    - Measurable
    - Attainable
    - Resourced
    - Time-limited
    - Allow for discussion and feedback.
  
2. Areas to consider in devising a PDP
  - Job-specific training and educational requirements needed to carry out one's job effectively
  - Continuing development within one's job/role to consider future developments and changes of role
  - Personal development needs that may be independent of one's current role.

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<sup>1</sup> Dorie Clark, *Plan Your Professional Development for the Year* <<https://hbr.org/2016/01/plan-your-professional-development-for-the-year>> (accessed 1 November 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Josanne Holloway, 'COD Portfolios and Personal Development Plans: Why and How?' (2000) 6 *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 467, 470 <<http://apt.rcpsych.org/content/6/6/467>> (accessed 1 November 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Holloway, above n 2, 471.

In creating a PDP, Holloway recommends that professionals ask themselves questions such as:<sup>4</sup>

- Where am I now?
- Where do I want to be in X years' time?
- How do I get to where I want to be?
- What resources (government policy, key individuals, training opportunities etc) could help me?
- What is hindering/may hinder me from getting there?

## Financial Planning Association of Australia's ('FPA')

Holloway's research is echoed throughout the FPA's CPD approach. The FPA places a strong emphasis on involvement by individual professionals in satisfying their CPD requirements, requiring its members to create a PDP as a condition of membership. The PDP sets out a member's learning objectives and planned participation in CPD activities across the triennium and is viewed by the FPA as 'central' to good professional development.<sup>5</sup> The template PDP provided by the FPA has five components, which build upon one another to ensure that a member's CPD activities are appropriate to their experience and career development goals. The template PDP sets out the five components as follows:<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Personal reflection

The individual reflects on certain questions related to each Professional Dimension (as covered by the CPD Requirements title) to identify opportunities for improvement and any gaps in knowledge. For example:

- Are there any other areas of [insert practice area] that I would need or like to explore?
- Do I need to update my knowledge to improve the performance of my own practice?
- How do I reflect my ethics in my client value proposition?
- Do I reflect on my experiences to identify learning opportunities?
- What leadership qualities do I have and what skills need further refinement?

An individual's answers to these reflection questions ideally should guide them in selecting CPD activities that will target any areas where they identify gaps in knowledge or understanding. This ensures that their CPD plan is specific and beneficial to them and their career.

### 2. Seek feedback

The individual reviews their reflection with supervisors, mentors, colleagues or others to gain further insight and consider new CPD opportunities.

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<sup>4</sup> Holloway, above n 2, 471.

<sup>5</sup> Financial Planning Association of Australia, *FPA Continuing Professional Development Policy* (June 2016) 3 <[https://fpa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016\\_05\\_18-CPD-Policy-2016\\_5-FINAL.pdf](https://fpa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016_05_18-CPD-Policy-2016_5-FINAL.pdf)> (accessed 1 November 2017).

<sup>6</sup> See Financial Planning Association of Australia, *FPA Policy and Audit* <<https://fpa.com.au/education/continuing-professional-development/cpd-policy/>> (accessed 1 November 2017).

### 3. Set objectives

The individual sets out their objectives for the year, including identifying key performance measures that will assist them in identifying the achievement of these objectives.

### 4. Develop an action plan

The individual develops an action plan, which sets out CPD activities, the relevant Professional Dimension, the due date, delivery method and provider name.

### 5. Update reflective journal

The individual records their formal learning or real experiences in a reflective journal, which involves answering a series of questions relating to their perception of, and insights gained from the experiences. For example:

1. What was the situation?
2. What happened in this situation?
3. How did you go about it?
4. Why did you go about it that way?
5. What was the outcome?
6. What did you do well?
7. What could you have done better?
8. What would you do differently next time?

An individual's progress against their PDP is then tracked using a Professional Development Record and both documents must be retained by the individual for five years after the relevant triennium.<sup>7</sup>

The cyclical process in Figure 1, below, ensures that professionals are consistently able to reassess their objectives and learning priorities, measure their performance and maintain momentum in building skills and filling any knowledge gaps. It is also important to ensure that members can complete the minimum hours of CPD requirements per year, to ensure that they meet their triennium obligations.

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<sup>7</sup> *Financial Planning Association of Australia, FPA Policy and Audit*, above n 6.

Figure 1: The Professional Development Plan Process



In any event, members are free to create a plan in any format that will facilitate their completion of the CPD requirements. A good tool to begin planning could involve an individual working out their preferred learning style and then selecting activities that will facilitate productive learning, whilst meeting learning objectives.<sup>8</sup> This gives members the freedom to plan in a way that is motivating and fulfilling to them, further assisting the shift away from viewing CPD as merely a regulatory obligation.

### Doctors

Similarly, as briefly highlighted by the CPD Requirements title, doctors who hold a 'general' registration with the Medical Board of Australia have the choice of completing their CPD requirements in accordance with those set out by a specialist college relevant to their scope of practice or in a 'self-directed' format. In the 'self-directed' format, doctors are given the autonomy to participate in CPD activities of their choice, subject only to the requirement to complete one self-assessment reflection activity, clinical audit or performance appraisal.<sup>9</sup> Whilst there are strict rules about providing evidence to substantiate activity, this format arguably facilitates greater flexibility for the completion of CPD requirements, particularly in light of the unpredictable work schedule faced by some professionals. Notably, however, doctors are not required to develop or maintain a plan using this format, which could result in an end-of-year rush to complete the relevant requirements.

### Other Professions

By contrast, the Law Society of NSW, Engineers Australia and Chartered Practising Accountants Australia New Zealand offer little in the way of resources for the planning and organising of CPD activities by their members. Rather, the emphasis from these bodies, as explored in the CPD Requirements title, is on completing the minimum CPD requirements and having appropriate evidence to substantiate participation in activities that count towards an individual's hour or credit quota. This has the potential effect of hindering the motivation by individuals to engage with CPD in a way that is meaningful to their circumstances and rather,

<sup>8</sup> A Thomson, 'How to Make the RCPCH CPD Guidelines Work for You' (2006) 91 *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 65, 66 <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2083081/>> (accessed 1 November 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Medical Board of Australia, *FAQ: General Registration CPD* <<http://www.medicalboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Policies/FAQ/FAQ-general-registration-CPD.aspx>> (accessed 1 November 2017).

participating in activities simply to meet the minimum requirements.<sup>10</sup> Good CPD practice ensures that individuals learn, connect and create, as discussed above. There is a risk that without a plan, CPD is viewed by individuals as being superfluous or a nuisance.

## The Importance of Reflection

There is undoubtedly a strong link between reflection and good professional development practice.

Reflection has a central role in guiding practitioner-determined CPD as it enables professionals to:<sup>11</sup>

- Identify opportunities for learning
- Assess their knowledge in their areas of practice
- Develop clear objectives
- Gain maximum reward from formal and informal learning opportunities.

Reflection also adds meaning to CPD activities as it ensures that learning is not simply 'recorded' but digested by individuals in a way that is beneficial to their work. This is highlighted by the fact that reflection is one component of the template PDP provided by the FPA and a mandatory requirement of the Medical Board of Australia for doctors completing their CPD requirements using the self-directed format option.

Furthermore, reflection adds a heightened degree of accountability to the participation in CPD activities by professionals. This can be seen in the requirement for FPA members to track their progress against their PDP in a CPD Record. Professionals are constantly forced to evaluate their progress and make any relevant adjustments to ensure learning objectives are met. This contrasts with the less prescriptive approach to CPD offered by other professions, whereby members must simply provide evidence that they have met an hour or credit requirement at the end of the reporting year. Arguably, such professionals are never forced to truly consider the benefit or value of their participation in a certain activity.

## Professional Standards Council

The Professional Standards Council requires associations with a Professional Standards Scheme to prepare an 'Annual Report on your Professional Standards Improvement Program'. One component of this report must be in relation to continuing professional development programs for members. The association must describe new and existing education programs that members have undertaken and explain the relationship of the program to any identified trends or knowledge gaps.<sup>12</sup> The process of reflection therefore extends beyond individual professionals and is seen to have value in guiding associations to prepare CPD policies and programs in ways that are relevant and pertinent for its members.

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<sup>10</sup> Thomson, above n 8, 67.

<sup>11</sup> Jill Shostak et al, General Medical Council/Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, *The Effectiveness of Continuing Professional Development* (2010) 58 <[http://www.gmc-uk.org/Effectiveness\\_of\\_CPD\\_Final\\_Report.pdf\\_34306281.pdf](http://www.gmc-uk.org/Effectiveness_of_CPD_Final_Report.pdf_34306281.pdf)> (accessed 1 November 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Professional Standards Councils, *Our Improvement Program* <<http://www.psc.gov.au/sites/default/files/Professional%20Standards%20Improvement%20ProgramV2.pdf>> (accessed 10 October 2017).

## Summary

In summary, research supports the active involvement by individual professionals in directing and satisfying their CPD requirements. The development of PDPs assists professionals to tie their learning to their personal development goals, thereby facilitating more meaningful participation by professionals in CPD activities. Reflection has a pivotal role in allowing individuals to measure their performance and continually seek to engage with and participate in activities that will motivate them to view CPD with a positive, lifelong learning mindset. The benefit of reflection further extends to professional associations themselves, with the requirement for associations operating under a Professional Standards Scheme to report on continuing professional development programs in their annual reports. The FPA's template PDP provides a good starting point for understanding a framework for a holistic approach to CPD that recognises that important input from individual professionals themselves.

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