WHAT IS CPD?
AN INTRODUCTION TO CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR IOP MEMBERS
What is CPD?

Continuous professional development is the systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and skill, and the development of personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties throughout your working life.

In plainer language, it’s a life-long learning approach to planning, managing and getting the most from your own development.

**CPD is:**
- continuous, because learning never stops, regardless of age or seniority;
- professional, because it’s focused on your personal competence in a professional role;
- concerned with development, because its goal is to improve personal performance and enhance career progression and is much wider than just formal training courses.

CPD’s emphasis on systematic development and the comprehensive identification of learning opportunities provides a framework within which both formal and informal learning activities can be set.

By applying a CPD approach, your learning and development becomes planned rather than accidental, and proactive as well as reactive.

How does it apply to you?

The scope of CPD is not limited to your current role and the skills that you need to do your current job. As an IOP member you can use it to address your ongoing development as an individual with a professional interest in physics. It is an approach that enables you to combine your development as a teacher (role) with your development as a physicist (specialism).

Furthermore, a commitment to CPD is a fundamental requirement for IOP members who aspire to chartered status. This stands for the highest standards of professionalism, up-to-date expertise, quality and safety, and for the capacity to undertake independent practice and exercise leadership.

As well as competence, the title denotes commitment to keep pace with advancing knowledge and with the increasing expectations and requirements for which any profession must take responsibility.

Academic qualifications are only the beginning of a career in physics and its applications. The need for CPD is widely recognised as the mechanism by which professionals maintain their knowledge after the formal education process has been completed. Chartered status signals a commitment to maintaining competence and moving ahead with the times.
Benefits of CPD

As a member of a professional body such as the IOP, you have made a commitment to ensure that the knowledge and skills that you gained in order to qualify for membership are systematically maintained and enhanced. Likewise, a commitment to acquiring new knowledge and skills or to equipping you for the future is also expected of you.

However, CPD should not be viewed as a “badge-collecting” exercise, or as a series of hoops that you must jump through to achieve chartered status – quite the opposite. If you engage in CPD with genuine commitment, the activity is its own reward.

Some of the benefits of CPD are outlined below. They demonstrate how those who choose to formalise their learning in this way not only improve their performance in their current job but also enhance their future career prospects. They also demonstrate why employers and indeed the IOP place a high value on CPD.

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<th>Individual</th>
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<td>Increases self-esteem as you look back on achievements.</td>
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<td>● Can support a claim for promotion.</td>
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<td>● Encourages analytical thinking: about your job, the tasks that you do and how you do them, thereby increasing performance.</td>
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<td>● Provides the opportunity to enrich and develop your existing job.</td>
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<td>● Aids career development – you can plan to learn skills that will equip you to move your career in a direction that interests you.</td>
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<td>● Through reflective practice it encourages you to assess alternative approaches to tasks and to think creatively.</td>
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<td>● Through reflective practice it helps you to feel in control of your work circumstances and to relieve stress.</td>
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<td>● When recorded in writing it allows you to demonstrate your skills in a very concrete way (e.g. when applying for a new job).</td>
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<td>● Helps you to recognise the way in which skills learned in other areas of your life could be applied in the workplace.</td>
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<td>● Through reflective practice it offers a safe environment for thinking about and assessing your mistakes, problems and perceived failures. It allows you to ask: “What did I learn from this?” It also helps you to think about what you would do differently in the future.</td>
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<td>● When recorded in writing it helps you to clarify your progress and achievements.</td>
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<td>● Increases morale in the workforce.</td>
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<td>● Helps enlightened employers to attract high-calibre staff and keep them.</td>
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<td>● Increases opportunities for funding.</td>
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<td>● Provides a cost-effective means of providing training through mentoring, sharing skills and work shadowing.</td>
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<th>Institute of Physics</th>
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<td>● Gains respect from other professionals who are probably participating in similar schemes.</td>
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<td>● Aids standardisation of professional skills.</td>
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<td>● Strengthens skills within the profession.</td>
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<td>● Helps to forge close cross-sectoral links via networking, mentoring relationships and the exchange of skills.</td>
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Future-proofing your career

CPD it entails an ongoing process of reviewing and developing your professional competence, so effectively it “future-proofs” your career by encouraging you to build your capacity to prepare for, and cope with, the challenges that you may face.

Globalization and the impact of technology mean that the level of competition in all areas of work is accelerating. The nature of work is changing and the 21st century will see an increasing divide between workers who are increasingly valued and those who are increasingly marginalized. The difference between the two will be the extent to which their work, and the skills required to do it, are complex, evolving and adaptable; or functional, static and routine. The former will be prized, the latter outsourced.

The oft-peddled notion of “no more jobs for life” is too simplistic. There are still plenty of examples of long-serving and valued people in most organizations. However, they are unlikely to be performing the same role in which they started, even if their employee status has not ostensibly changed. They have evolved with the organization, adapting and developing, often informally and with no prescriptive training.

If you aim simply to be employed then you may be heading for redundancy; but if you aim to be employable you are more likely to find security. CPD, with its emphasis on a broad, personalized blend of formal and informal development activity, and its focus on your career rather than your job, is an essential source of competitive advantage in the world of work.

Basic CPD concepts

Education does not stop when you leave university
As IOP members, we must encourage the concept of lifelong learning, not only to make us better at what we do, but also to encourage us to consider the opportunity that it can offer to explore new challenges and advance the field as a whole.

Studying for a professional qualification at the start of your career provides a valuable foundation but does no more than ensure that you have acquired expertise that was relevant when you obtained the qualification.

CPD is not just an activity that is relevant to your membership status
Many professionals in mid or later career, including those in senior positions, find that CPD has even greater relevance. Earlier formal studies may have become outdated and your attention may have been diverted from longer-term developmental needs and opportunities.

People differ significantly in the ways in which they learn best
A large proportion of effective learning takes places in the working environment but is not always recognised as being of relevance. We all learn by doing, which includes our successes and mistakes.

Development is continuous
Professionals should always be actively seeking improved performance.
The CPD process

When communicating CPD concepts, many people refer to Kolb’s learning cycle and the cyclical process of experiential learning.

In a work context, this demonstrates how an individual experiences a task (or tasks) followed by a period of reflection, reviewing what was done. This is followed by interpretation and evaluation of those events and understanding the relationships between them. The next step is to take on the new understanding, translating it into predictions about what actions should be taken to refine the way in which the task is handled next time.

So, in practical terms, CPD is a circular process of assessment, research, planning and action.

The difference from the Kolb cycle is that you start by reflecting on a range of (usually) recent experiences.

**In the reviewing and assessing stage you:**
- identify the need for development;
- identify your priorities for development;
- identify your preparedness for development.

**In the speculating and researching stage you:**
- generate ideas for future development opportunities;
- gather relevant information about your options.

**In the evaluating and deciding stage you:**
- compare the costs and benefits of the various opportunities;
- establish a system to prioritise options;
- eliminate less-satisfying or less-realistic options;
- set specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely objectives.
In the implementing and adapting you:
● develop firm strategies and tactics for achieving your goals;
● identify potential obstacles to progression;
● fill any gaps between your abilities and the requirements of your new path.

Thus you travel round the cycle, continually reviewing your development needs, seeking out opportunities to address them and then evaluating your options. Once you have decided what your next professional development need is, you will implement your decision – perhaps a training course, or development of new skills, or undertaking an additional role, such as mentor. You will then continue on round the cycle again, repeating each stage and exploring further opportunities for development.

Essential CPD principles

Development should be owned and managed by the individual learner
You are the principle stakeholder in your professional development. There are others, such as your manager and colleagues, who can assist and enable you, but they cannot identify all of your needs or make decisions on your behalf. Relinquishing control to others means that you don’t determine your own career direction so your performance and professional wellbeing will eventually suffer.

The individual learner should be encouraged to learn in a way that suits them
The effective learner knows best what they need to learn, and also how they learn most effectively. You may find structured training interventions ineffective and tedious, or you may like a great deal of flexibility in how you fit development activities into your day-to-day work. With CPD you have a say in both your learning objectives and the means by which you intend to achieve them.

Learning objectives should be clear
As the CPD process demonstrates, your development goals and the means by which you achieve them must be “SMART”: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely. If they aren’t, you (and other stakeholders such as your manager) will find it very difficult to review your progress. Objectives should, wherever possible, serve organisational or clients needs as well as individual goals.

Regular investment of time in learning should be seen as an essential part of professional life
If development is treated as a luxury or an optional extra, the performance standard of the individual, organization and profession will ultimately deteriorate. CPD incorporates a variety of learning activities and should not be viewed as distinct from or as an alternative to “actual work”.

Key features of CPD

Learning from a range of activities
As noted earlier, CPD is a flexible approach that encompasses the different learning preferences of individuals and can be built around work. In addition, although the emphasis of CPD should be on planned activities, you should also be able to recognise and use unplanned opportunities that may arise. If you have been involved in any activity that didn’t feature in your development plans but from which you have learned something, you can record it and consider whether it applies to any of your specified objectives or whether it may contribute to a new objective in the continuing development cycle.

Close integration of learning and work
The close connection with experiential learning means that CPD views work as a potential learning experience rather than, say, a set of tasks that we perform only when we have learned a new skill in a more formal environment. If work presents new challenges, and stretches the workers abilities, it is developmental.

Emphasis on “outcomes” rather than “inputs”
By engaging in CPD you are seeking to answer the questions “What have I learned?” and “How do I plan to apply this learning?” rather than “What kind of training/learning activity did I do?”

Emphasis on recording learning and reviewing progress
 Much of the value of CPD is not just derived from the learning activity but from reviewing your experiences in order to describe, analyse and evaluate them – and so inform your ongoing development. Recording your experiences enables a greater degree of analysis, and through reflection you will learn to understand and clarify situations, speculate on how you might have done things differently and consider what additional knowledge or skills might have been helpful.

What counts as CPD?
CPD is not just about courses and qualifications. It includes a variety of activities that lead to learning and development, both personal and professional. Clearly, the primary objective is to enhance your professionalism, so it is expected that, in any one year, at least half of the outcomes of your CPD will be directly related to your current employment/business activities.

However, the IOP recognises that many members gain great benefits in personal development from a range of general and specialised activities.

CPD doesn’t always have to be upwards; it can also be sideways, encompassing anything that helps to broaden your range of skills, knowledge or competence. So even if you are at a standstill in your career and can’t move forwards, for whatever reason, there is still lots that you can do on the CPD front. CPD activities can take place in many different situations.

Informal or unstructured learning could be:
- work experience projects
- coaching and mentoring
- planned reading
- networking
- using multimedia resources
Formal or structured learning could be:
- attendance at conferences, seminars or IOP and other professional meetings
- distance learning with feedback or some form of assessment
- studying for a qualification
- undertaking research
- attendance at short courses
- teaching and making presentations

Getting started – how to use the IOP CPD service

The IOP website has a free online tool that allows you to identify your development needs or career goals and to plan activities to help you to reach them, and record and reflect on your learning. There is also a version designed to help you to work towards chartered status. Visit members.iop.org and log in to gain access.

Further information in this series

This information sheet is part of a CPD toolkit for members. The other titles in the series are:
- How to Identify Your CPD Needs
- What is a PDP? Directing the Growth of Your Professional Competence
- When formal training can meet your development needs and when it can’t????????
- Training: How to Identify, Select and Brief a Training Provider
- Coaching: an Introduction for IOP Members
- Networking for Professional Development
- Staying ahead of the curve?????????
- Web 2.0 for Professional Development
- Reflecting on Developmental Experiences

Further reading


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