



**RTPI**

mediation of space · making of place

# **PREPARING YOUR APC SUBMISSION**

## **GUIDELINES 2012**

# Preparing your APC Submission

Once you have a minimum of two years of planning experience, one of which has been as a Licentiate, you will be ready to submit your Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) to the RTPI. Your application will be assessed by two Chartered Town Planners who will recommend whether you have demonstrated the competencies required to be elected as a chartered member of the Institute.

Full details of eligibility requirements are contained in *Becoming a Chartered Town Planner - A guide for Licentiates*. You can download this document from the RTPI website.

## 1. The Process

The RTPI takes APC submissions four times a year. Closing dates for applications are usually on the last Friday of the month in January, April, July and October. You can check the latest closing dates on the website.

### 2012 Calendar

Round	Closing date	Results date
1	Jan 27	Mar 20
2	April 27	June 19
3	July 27	September 18
4	October 26	December 18

Submissions will only be accepted electronically. Instructions on how to submit your APC will be available in December 2012. You can download the application form and a cover sheet for your submission from the website.

The whole process, from submission to results should take approximately 8 weeks. The date you will receive your results is also published on the website.

The logbook that you kept for the Licentiate period is to be submitted with the final written submission. If you have been keeping a log book which has been signed by your corroborator you will need to scan this to a PDF file for submission.

Once your have submitted your submission

- The membership team will complete administrative checks to ensure you have submitted all relevant documentation. Your application may be delayed if everything is not included or your fee has not been paid so please ensure you undertake the checks yourself.
- The submission will be sent to two APC Assessors, who are current Chartered Town Planners.
- Initially the assessors will consider the submission independently of each other and then arrange to confer and agree on a recommendation as to whether you have met the requirements or not.
- If the assessors cannot agree a recommendation a third assessor will be requested and the outcome of the assessment will be decided by majority vote if total agreement cannot be reached.

- The assessors complete a feedback report detailing the outcome of the assessment and making a recommendation as to whether you have demonstrated the competencies of a Chartered Town Planner.
- The membership team review the assessors report to ensure that due process has taken place.
- You will be sent your results and the feedback report.
- If you have been successful, you will be elected as a member of the RTPI.
- If you have been unsuccessful, you will receive information in your feedback report as to what you have to resubmit. You will not be re-assessed on any parts of your submission that have been considered satisfactory.

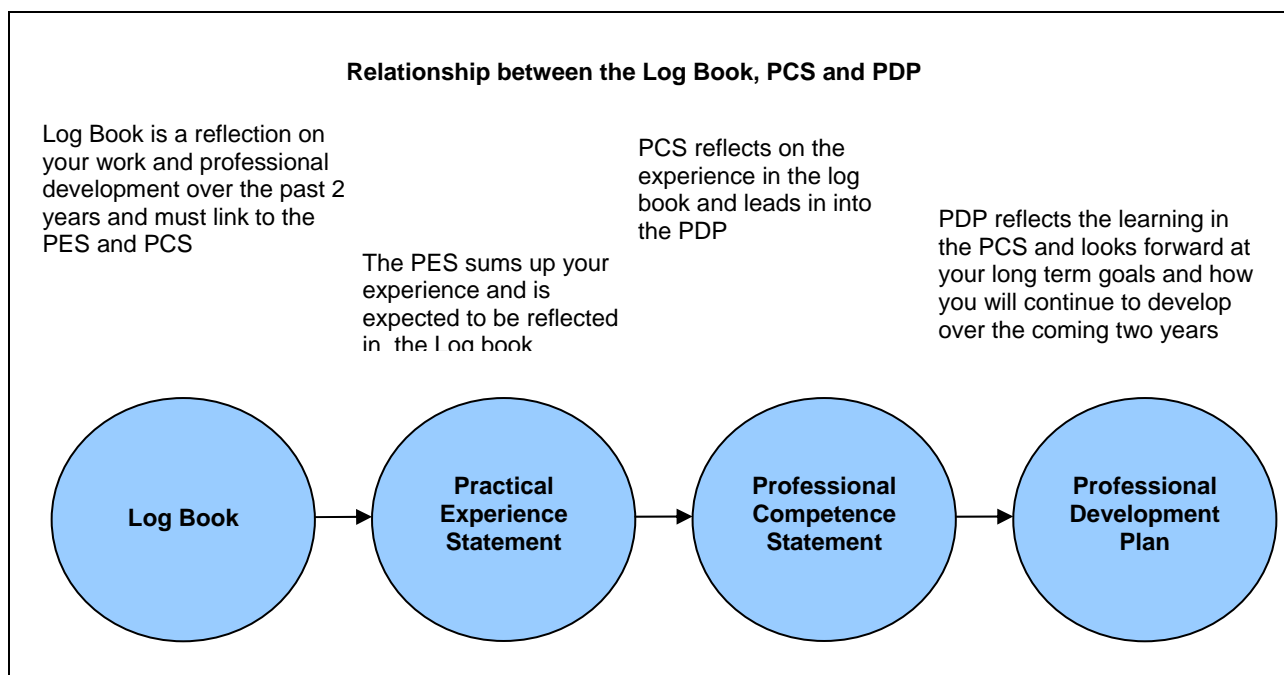
## 1.1 What do I submit?

Your submission should consist of the following:

- a completed Application Form;
- an Application Cover Sheet;
- a written submission of 5000 words (+/- 10%) comprising:
  - Practical Experience Statement (PES);
  - Professional Competence Statement (PCS);
  - Professional Development Plan (PDP);
- a logbook detailing the minimum of a year throughout the licentiate period
- a sponsor declaration
- declarations from corroborators which cover the whole period of your employment history.

Each of these components should be submitted as a separate Word or PDF file. If you are using a MAC computer, please save your Word document in a Word compatible format.

The elements of the submission are interrelated. You should cross reference between them and ensure that each section is consistent with the others.



This document provides information on each of the elements of the submission and on how to best prepare your submission.

## **1.2 The sponsor declaration**

Your application for Chartered membership must be sponsored by a Chartered Town Planner (a Member of the RTPI). There is a APC Sponsor Form which you can download from the website. Alternatively your sponsor can provide a letter or email supporting your application. Evidence of a sponsor must be included with your application.

Your sponsor must declare that they support your application and that they consider you to be a professional who reflects the values of the RTPI.

## **1.3 Corroborating your submission**

It is important that you have your submission and log book corroborated by your supervisor or employer. This is, in part, to ensure the integrity of all submissions. It is also for your benefit. Having someone review your log book as you progress will assist you in your reflection. The same applies to the submission.

The RTPI sees value in maintaining a discipline of corroboration for the submission. This process also ensures that your employer is aware of the claims you are making and the work that you have put into your submission.

In order to provide the most flexibility for candidates the requirements to have each page of the logbook and submission signed by a corroborator will no longer be imposed. Instead, you will be required to provide a letter or email from each employer or manager referenced in your submission, which states that they have read the relevant parts of your submission and agree with your claims. The letter must refer to your personal submission, stating your name, role within the organisation and must comment specifically on the work you have undertaken. It is not adequate to provide a generic letter.

If you already have some parts of your submission signed by your corroborator in accordance with past guidance, you may still submit these documents. You will however be required to scan these documents into a PDF file and submit it electronically.

Your corroborator does not have to be a member of the RTPI. Your corroborator can also be your sponsor if they are Chartered member.

## **1.4 Assessment outcomes**

Your submission will be assessed by RTPI accredited assessors who will consider whether you have addressed all the assessment criteria and demonstrated that you have acquired the appropriate knowledge, skills and reflective practices to be elected to the RTPI as a Chartered Town Planner.

There are two possible assessment outcomes – successful and unsuccessful. A successful outcome means that you have demonstrated your competency against all the criteria and will be elected as a member of the RTPI. An unsuccessful outcome means that you have not met some or all of the criteria.

You will receive a feedback report with your results. The report will address each of the three parts of the submission separately and explain any of the areas where you have not met the criteria. Most importantly the report will give you directions on what you need to do to address any problems with your submission.

You will not be required to re-submit any part of the submission that has been passed or to re-address any of the criteria that have been met.

## **1.5 Resubmissions**

If you have been asked to resubmit a part of your submission you will be given a due date to provide the additional material or to re-write the section. If you do not meet this date, you will have to wait until the next closing date before you can resubmit.

You will receive your revised outcome within three weeks of the resubmission.

From 2012, there will be a £30 fee for each section of the submission that is to be reassessed (£90 maximum for the three sections). This replaces the £230 fee for resubmission of failed submissions as this outcome has been removed.

## **1.6 How to submit your application**

You must submit your application electronically. Your APC Application Form, Cover Page, the actual submission, the Log book and your statements of sponsorship and corroboration should be submitted as separate files.

Instructions as to how to submit your application will be posted on the APC page of the RTPi website in Dec 2011. All Licentiates will be emailed with the details. Please ensure the RTPi has your preferred email address to ensure you receive any updated information. If you need to update your contact details, please email the RTPi at [changeofaddress@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:changeofaddress@rtpi.org.uk).

## **2. Understanding the Assessment Criteria:**

Planners rarely encounter standard problems needing standard solutions and it is thus the ability to learn in a reflective manner through taking action that is the hallmark of the true professional. A reflective practitioner grows and develops through experience and you must demonstrate that you are now working at a higher level of responsibility and able to make more professional judgements than you did when you first graduated.

All planners operating at a professional level must be able to critically assess a problem, research the issues and select an appropriate response after considering a number of options. This work is undertaken in an environment complicated by multiple stakeholders with different expectations, complex legal guidelines and political objectives.

Your application, and in particular, the Professional Competence Statement is not about what you did, but rather why you did it in a particular way and how you went about it. It will be assessed against seven assessment criteria, with each of the four elements of the final criterion considered separately. **You must demonstrate competency in each criterion in order to be successfully recommended for election.**

The criteria are interrelated, linked to one another. They essentially describe the elements of a process you would use when undertaking a project, which are:

- An understanding of context.
- An ability to identify and analyse issues.
- Competence in gathering appropriate information.
- Competence in identifying and evaluating strategies.
- Competence in initiating actions to implement strategies or dissemination and application of knowledge.
- Engagement in a process of monitoring and review.
- Knowledge and experience of the legal framework, ethical and political challenges and how the RTPI Professional Code of Conduct impacts on your work in practice.

You can use more than one case study if you wish, however you not be able to present an effective submission if you adopt a tick-box approach using a small example of how you met each criterion.

**More information on preparing case studies is at Section 4.1.**

### **NOTE:**

You should ensure your submission only refers to information in the public domain and does not breach professional confidentiality. Your submission should not refer to individuals by name or make references which could make individuals easily identifiable.

Further information on the assessment criteria is provided below.

### **2.1 An understanding of context**

You need to demonstrate that you understand the broader environment in which you are working. Regardless of whether you are in the public or private sector, in a regulatory body or academia, the work you are doing will impact on other professionals, will have downstream implications and affect a number of stakeholders.

You need to demonstrate through reflection how your work relates to stakeholders, the environment and the profession. You should also demonstrate your awareness of the spatial element of planning and the

relationship between a site or area and the surrounding areas and how it relates to other local and strategic activities such as transport links.

For example, using one of your case studies, you might:

- explain the impact of the your project on planners in another sector or other built environment professionals and how you engaged with them;
- explain how you gave consideration to broader spatial planning issues such as environmental, social, economic or design issues;
- describe how you assessed a site and its physical and spatial context;
- explain how community input affected a project;
- show that you understand the multi-disciplinary context of your work and its relationship to the work of other stakeholders – identify your stakeholders in the case study.

## **2.2 An ability to identify and analyse issues**

A professional planner is rarely presented with a problem with clearly defined issues. You must show how you used your judgement to identify and analyse issues. It is vital that you explain your thinking here, and do not rely on a narrative of what the team or department did during a project. If you are using a team example, give a critical analysis of how the project was undertaken, how you approached your part and what factors you personally considered.

Some questions to help your thinking might be:

- Do I clearly explain the process I used to define the problem and to consider it?
- Have I demonstrated my personal contribution to the problem definition?
- Did I explain how I took into account any technical, administrative/procedural, political, legal, ethical and other factors and if so, what were they and how did I overcome them?
- How did I raise these issues with the team, other professionals and stakeholders?

## **2.3 Competence in gathering appropriate information**

The decisions you make can have a significantly impact on individuals and whole communities. To make good decisions, you need the right information to hand. You should demonstrate that you are able to engage in a range of information gathering strategies, whether desk and site-based. Demonstrate that you are capable of reviewing relevant options and can articulate why the methodologies were appropriate to the case in question. You should explain:

- what data sources were available for the project – such as plans, statistics, demographics, site visits, and public consultations or desktop research;
- why you used particular research methods and not others;
- whether there were difficulties you had to overcome;
- how you analysed and assessed the information you gathered and the impact it had on your project.

## **2.4 Competence in identifying and evaluating strategies**

Once you have a full understanding of the project, supported by appropriate information, you will begin to develop plans or recommendations to address the problem and to achieve the outcomes you are looking for. Briefly outline the solutions you considered, and then explain **why** you chose that course of action. You should:

- articulate the thought processes that supported your selection of a particular course of action;
- explain how you evaluated the alternatives;
- reflect on the relative merits of your plan of action in the immediate and wider spatial planning context;
- explain the rationale for rejecting other strategies.

## 2.5 Competence in initiating action to implement strategies or dissemination and application of knowledge (research experience)

After you determined the course of action, how did you put it into place? What did you do to make your recommendations happen? For example, did you:

- engage with other built environment professionals to seek their input;
- negotiate agreements;
- mediate between stakeholders and develop relationships;
- take the recommendations back to the client and explain their implications; or
- go out for consultation.

You need to outline in detail your own role in actually implementing the project or activity and the extent of your responsibility for decision making.

## 2.6 Engagement in a process of monitoring and review of your work

In any project or piece of work things change and you need to adapt or you will not be able to achieve your objectives. How do you ensure you are aware of changes? You need to demonstrate how you reviewed the recommendations you made or the work you were doing, in order to ensure you are still following the best course of action. For example, what happens if a client advises you of a change of budget or a public sector consultation brings up new information?

Show in your case study, how you adapted what you were doing in response to changed circumstances. What did you learn from the experience? What could you do differently next time?

## 2.7 An awareness of the legal and political framework and the ethical challenges of the work. An awareness of the RTPI Code of Professional Conduct and how it impacts upon the work of spatial planning professionals

Regardless of whether you are working in the public or private sector, you will be operating in an environment constrained by legal and political factors and influences. You will have to use your professional judgement to balance your obligation to your clients, elected members and/or the public against the requirements of the regulatory framework and public policy and the ethical obligations to act honestly and with integrity with all stakeholders. Sometimes the best outcome from a purely planning perspective may not be the best outcomes when all other factors are considered.

The complexity of the legal and regulatory environment in planning means that planners are constantly balancing a fine line between the demands of their clients, the needs of the community, and the objectives of the authorities setting the agenda. Planners must deal with each challenge in a thorough and honest manner and provide the best possible advice, regardless of the other demands upon them. From time to time, this will throw up ethical challenges.

Use one of your case studies to illustrate how you dealt with these challenges and what judgements you had to make.

### NOTE

You must demonstrate that you have dealt with legal **and** political **and** ethical issues. Highlight in your case study, what situations arose and how you responded. Show that you know how to deal with these issues.

You must also specifically provide an example of how the RTPI Professional Code of Conduct applies to your work. The example may be in relation to conflict of interest, disclosure, professional conduct, discrimination, fees or any other issue covered by the Professional Code of Conduct. For example, agreeing or managing fees in the private sector, or responding to a request to represent the council at an appeal following a refusal against your recommendation in the public sector.

This is an area where many candidates have experienced difficulty. You should carefully review your submission to ensure you have adequately addressed all four elements – legal, political, ethical and the code of conduct.

## **2.8 Professional standard**

Candidates should ensure their submission is of a sufficiently professional standard. You must check your submission to ensure:

- It does not contain spelling mistakes (spell check does not always give the right outcome so don't rely on it);
- the grammar is correct;
- it is well laid out;
- it is professionally presented.

Badly presented submissions are likely to be unsuccessful particularly if the submission is borderline in other areas. This is well within your control and a hastily put together submission is not going to get you the outcome you want.

Submissions that include inappropriate information or breach confidentiality are also likely to be unsuccessful.

***For guidelines on submission format and standard – refer to Section 6***

### 3. **Practical Experience Statement**

In this section of the submission, you need to describe the planning tasks that you have undertaken over the period of practical experience.

The Practical Experience Statement (PES) is used to assess whether you have undertaken sufficient practical experience at a relevant level of experience to justify your election to Chartered status. For each position you have held, the statement should include:

- the name and type of employer;
- the nature of the business (mainstream planning, multi-disciplinary practice etc);
- the size of the organisation;
- your own job description: a summary of the main role and responsibilities, including any line management responsibility;
- the nature of the work you undertook in the role; and
- dates and time periods covered.

The practical experience statement must focus specifically on your own professional responsibilities. It is a factual description of roles and responsibilities and does not need to focus on competencies. Where you have been involved in group tasks or projects, you must describe your own role and responsibilities and how you personally contributed to the project as a whole. It is not expected that you will have been managing entire projects or been involved in a project in its entirety. Some projects you have been involved in may not have reached completion when you are finalising your submission.

You need to describe the type of spatial planning work that you undertook. If your job has changed or evolved within a single organisation over the period of practical experience, you should clearly indicate this. If some of your experience was gained in areas that were not solely planning related, you need to estimate the proportion of your time that was devoted to spatial planning responsibilities.

#### **NOTE**

If you do not clearly articulate the role that **you** undertook in the any project, you will be asked for a supplementary statement or to resubmit a section of your submission which will delay your election. Spending the time defining your contribution in the Practical Experience Statement will make preparing your Professional Competence Statement easier.

Assessors will look for linkages between your Practical Experience Statement and your log book.

#### **3.1 Do you have you enough experience?**

You PES must show that you have gained 24 months (440 days) of relevant spatial planning experience. You can include experience that is:

- full or part time or a combination of both (pro rata). The average working week is considered to be 35 hours, so you need to pro-rata your part time hours against the 35 hour week. For example, 2.3 weeks at 15 hours a week equals one week full-time;
- paid or voluntary;
- gained in the UK or overseas;
- spread over a period of time longer than two years. The 24 months does not need to be consecutive, breaks in employment for maternity leave, redundancy or travelling are fine and can just be factored into your time as a Licentiate. Once back in planning employment you can just 'pick up where you left off';

- gained either on a full or part-time basis while undertaking a part-time degree. You can only count part-time experience at the pro-rata rate of a full time post;
- gained whilst on a sandwich year or vacation placement as long as you held each job for a minimum of 3 months.

At least one year of this experience must be after you were elected as a Licentiate member. Experience gained prior to becoming a Licentiate may be acceptable and can be counted in addition to the year as a Licentiate member. However, you are not allowed to count any experience gained whilst you were registered as a student member on an intensive one year masters degree.

#### **NOTE**

It is not the time spent as a Licentiate that is counted. It is work experience time. If you are unemployed during your Licentiate time, you will have to continue as a Licentiate until you have gained the full period of experience.

### **3.2 Do you have the right type of experience?**

Types of spatial planning work that are eligible towards the APC will include:

#### **The preparation of plans, policies and related documents**

Some examples of this type of work include:

- research and analysis of information for policy formulation;
- the preparation of contributory material or actual formulation and monitoring of policy, guidelines and advice;
- spatial development strategies and statutory development plans as well as master, town, village/parish settlement and conservation plans for buildings, urban areas and the countryside;
- development briefs, design guides, environmental and traffic impact assessments;
- sustainability appraisal, transportation and economic assessments and travel plans;
- the associated processes of economic development, community engagement, preparation of materials for Inquiry, advocacy and presentation to clients are regarded as integral to plan preparation;
- landscape/biodiversity assessments and appraisals.

#### **Plan implementation**

This includes but is not restricted to activities such as:

- statutory development control and enforcement are included with the handling of appeals at all stages;
- preparation, submission and following through of planning applications;
- implementation of plans or schemes for conservation, environmental improvement, economic development, urban regeneration, traffic and transportation, tourism, minerals, waste disposal, or derelict land reclamation;
- planning involvement in housing and housing management, community development, environmental education and recreation, and urban design;
- site appraisal, feasibility studies, scoping exercises and all forms of study preparatory to the submission of a planning application;
- experience gained from involvement in investigation, negotiation and resolution of breaches of planning control, preparation of notices, handling of enforcement appeals and court proceedings.

## Monitoring and Research

Monitoring and research activities could include:

- research and analysis of information leading to the making of planning policy or planning recommendations and decisions;
- funded research for clients from the public/private/voluntary sectors;
- the monitoring of plans and policies leading to reports and plan revision;
- planning submissions on behalf of planners is also included, as is research appraisal;
- relevant research undertaken towards a PhD qualification provided that the Licentiate has already completed an accredited qualification (i.e. research undertaken towards an accredited PhD is not eligible, unless the candidate already holds an accredited undergraduate/postgraduate qualification). Be aware that APC Assessors will consider the prime purpose of the research; the stage of the research; the organisational context of the research; and how it relates to the making of spatial planning policy.

## Teaching

This includes higher education teaching experience linked with the types of activity described in paragraphs above and takes place on courses related to spatial planning or to interest/community groups in the context of community engagement.

### 3.3 What the assessors look for

Assessor will use this part of the submission to determine whether you have the right amount and the right type of experience.

Assessors may disregard parts of your experience if:

- they have difficulty identifying your role in the work outlined as you have described the project rather than your role in it
- you have described roles that are predominantly administrative or managerial and not spatial planning
- they feel a significant proportion of your work is more aligned to another aspect of the built environment such as surveying or architecture, or
- they are not convinced you have gained the minimum two full years experience.

If you are concerned that your experience is not sufficiently robust to meet the two year spatial planning criteria, you may prefer to wait until you have more solid experience before you submit your APC.

## 4. PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE STATEMENT

In this section of the report you set out to demonstrate how you meet the competencies outlined in the assessment criteria, see Section 2.

The assessors will assess you against each of the assessment criteria discussed in Section 2. These are:

1. An understanding of context
2. An ability to identify and analyse issues
3. Competence in gathering appropriate information
4. Competence in identifying and evaluating strategies
5. Competence in initiating action to implement strategies or dissemination and application of knowledge (research experience)
6. Engagement in a process of monitoring and review
7. Knowledge and experience of:
  - the legal framework in which spatial planning is undertaken
  - ethical challenges faced in spatial planning
  - political challenges of your work
  - how the RTPI Professional Code of Conduct impacts on your work

### IMPORTANT

Do not treat your submission in the same way you would frame a job application. They are not the same. You are expected to be **analytical and critical** of your performance, of the environment in which you operate, of the processes you have used and of the outcomes you have achieved. You are to demonstrate what you have learnt and how you have become a better planner as a result of that experience. You must also demonstrate your personal professional contribution.

You do not need to structure your submission around the criteria. The most effective way to demonstrate your professional competence is by discussing one or two case studies or projects drawn from your experience over the two years covered by your submission.

Do not simply list the tasks you undertook as part of the project. The assessors need to see how you used your professional judgement and competences. You should not expect the assessors to presume anything from the tasks you describe in your PCS.

### 4.1 Using case studies

It is expected that you will use case studies to demonstrate how you have met the criteria. As outlined in Section 2, the assessment criteria are interrelated and describe what you would do to manage an activity within the planning environment.

From your experience, select a project or activity where you have made a significant contribution, then consider how you approached the task. In some projects, you may have had a major role in researching and monitoring and in another you may have dealt extensively with other professionals or with a complex group of stakeholders. Alternatively, you may have been involved in one project which required you to use all your skills.

Identify which aspects of your experience demonstrate each of the criteria. Once you have mapped out what and how many case studies you will need to address all the criteria, determine how you will divide the word limit for this section.

The PCS is not simply an extended PES. You are expected to go into considerable detail in your case studies so try not to cover more than three projects if possible.

#### **NOTE**

Cross reference your case studies to the relevant entries in your log book. This provides the assessor with more information should he/she wish to clarify something. Make sure that the case studies you are using are referenced in your Practical Experience Statement. There should be strong linkages between all the elements of the submission.

One way to structure a case study is to include the following elements:

- problem definition – briefly describe the issue and provide enough background to provide the assessors with the context of the situation;
- the challenges and issues that arose and your role in addressing them; and
- a conclusion which summarises what you learnt from the experience and how it relates to the criteria.

Use language that shows your analysis, such as:

- I contributed to this by....
- I was responsible for.....
- This project helped me to understand....
- The tensions resulted in ....
- This was a challenge for me because...
- As a result of changing circumstances, I ....

#### **Note**

Go back over your statement and mark where you have addressed each of the criteria. If you can't find the reference, don't expect the assessor to.

## 5. Professional Development Plan

### 5.1 Why is the professional development plan important?

Many candidates for the APC ask why the PDP is so important and why the assessors concerned about the quality of the PDP when reviewing submissions. The reason for this focus is to ensure that all members of the profession begin a habit of life-long learning. Qualifying to enter a profession does not mean that you remain competent to practice for the rest of your life. All professions change as new technologies, techniques and approaches are developed which require all professionals to continue to learn, debate, discuss and keep up-to-date on an ongoing basis. A good PDP demonstrates effective reflection.

Your profession, your clients and the general public must have confidence in the position of *Chartered Town Planner*. It is a designation that implies a standard that you will be required to uphold. This focus on life-long learning that leads to a reflective and analytical professional is embodied in the RTPI Code of Professional Conduct. The code states:

Members shall take all reasonable steps to maintain their professional competence throughout their working lives and shall comply with the Institute's continuing professional development regulations as amended from time to time

Every member, except for Student members who have not obtained a recognised planning qualification and Retired members shall, subject only to the exercise of the Board of Trustees' discretion in exceptional cases:

- (a) at least once a year prepare a professional development plan for the next two years identifying his or her personal professional development needs;
- (b) in any two year period undertake a minimum of 50 hours CPD activity related to the undertaking or managing of town planning;
- (c) maintain a written record of his or her CPD activity;
- (d) submit to the Institute on request and in such form as may be prescribed by the Institute:
  - (i) a copy of his or her professional development plan or plans covering the previous two years;
  - (ii) a written record of his or her CPD activity over the same period of two years, with an assessment of the value to him or her of each activity recorded and an explanation of the relationship between the CPD undertaken and the professional development plan or plans covering the period in question, taking into account any revisions to the plan made during the two year period;
  - (iii) a copy of his or her current professional development plan, if not already submitted under (i) above.
  - (iv) where appropriate, an explanation of his or her reasons for not having complied with any part of this regulation.

CPD is defined by the Institute as: **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 the practitioner's working life.**

<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/download/154/Code-of-Professional-Conduct-2007.pdf>

You need to demonstrate the ability to analyse your learning needs and plan to cover any gaps in your knowledge and skills as you will be required to continue this practice throughout your career as a Chartered Town Planner.

Your PDP should cover three essential elements:

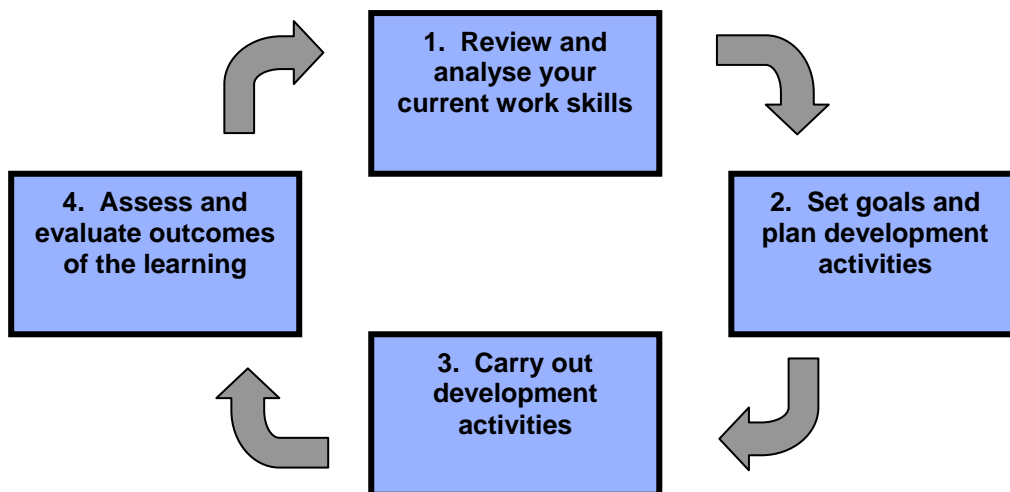
1. What have I learnt in my career to date?
2. What direction do I want my career to take?
3. How will I get there?

#### NOTE

The Assessors will grade you on each of the three elements above and you must successfully demonstrate all three to be successful in this part of the submission. Don't treat your PDP as a last minute add-on to your submission. It is as important as the Practical Experience and Professional Competence Statements and more Licentiates are asked to re-submit this section that any other. Give this part of your submission equal consideration.

## 5.2 The professional development process

The process of planning for and implementing a program of professional development is cyclical as demonstrated below.



### STEP 1 - Review

You should reflect on what you have achieved so far in your career and how you plan to develop your career in the future. Ask yourself questions such as ranging from high level thoughts about the future to how you are dealing with your day to day work – questions such as:

*As a professional planner, what direction do I want my career to move in the next 5 or 10 years?*

*What's new in the planning environment and is that where I want to go?*

*How will I develop the skills and experience to achieve my goals?*

*What am I really good at?*

*What problems am I having in my current workplace?*

*What personal values do I want to reflect in my work?*

## **STEP 2 – Plan development activities**

Your PDP is your plan for your professional development over a stated period. It is not the same as the performance plan or review you may be required to conduct at work. This plan is about you as a professional planner and where you want to go and what skills and experience you need and how you are going to get there. Your PDP should flow out of your review. The RTPI provides a template to make preparing your PDP easier. The template contains all the elements you **must** address in your PDP. As long as you cover all these elements the format of the PDP is not important.

A successful PDP will:

- contain each of the three required elements;
- display a mature self-reflection and strong critical analysis;
- clearly reflect the Licentiate's own personal experience and requirements;
- be clearly presented and easily understandable;
- be thorough and comprehensive.

PDPs will not be successful if they:

- are overly limited or restricted;
- lack depth;
- are formulaic – the plan should relate to your own personal experience and needs, with clear evidence of this
- omit any of the three required elements – the SWOT, your objectives and your SMART plan on how to achieve them.

## **STEP 3 – Carry out development activities**

When you are preparing your PDP you are looking forward. The next two steps are reflective. This is where you would use your log book or your CPD record of activity to record that you have actually undertaken the steps you laid out in your plan.

Schedule time to implement your plan. The plan is not an end in itself, although it is what you will be assessed on. Ultimately you want to achieve the objectives you have set for yourself.

## **STEP 4 – Analyse and evaluate outcomes of the learning**

It is important to evaluate the PDP and what you have learned from the process. Your PDP should change over time as you achieve your goals. It should be updated every year – rolling forward over the next two years.

A reflective practitioner should be able to demonstrate critical thought.

Questions you might ask yourself include:

- What were the most valuable learning experiences during the year?
- How have applied this new learning?
- What do I want to carry forward?

- Have I addressed the issues I identified in the plan?
- Am I still heading in the right direction?
- What did I get out of the learning?

Use your log book or CPD record of activity to record your deliberations.

Once you are elected as a Chartered Town Planner, you may be asked at any time to provide this information and your last two PDP's as part of a CPD audit.

### 5.3 Structuring your PDP

You are required to submit a PDP for assessment as part of your APC. Your PDP **must** consist of the following three elements:

- A SWOT analysis
- Your goals and objectives for the next two years, and
- An action plan on how you intend to achieve those objectives.

There must be a relationship between all three parts. For example, if you identify a lack of knowledge or skill in an area as a particular weakness that is impacting on your career, the assessors would expect to see some reference as to how you plan to address that weakness in your action plan.

#### NOTE

Your PDP **must** cover the forthcoming two year period from the date of your submission. If not, your submission will be rejected and you will have to resubmit at the next available deadline. Make sure the dates are correct

### 5.4 Undertaking a SWOT Analysis

As part of your review of where you are, you should start by developing a SWOT analysis. This **must** be included in your submission.

Your SWOT analysis must be based on the information you provided in your Professional Competence Statement and build on the critical reflection. The competence statement was looking back at the achievements over the past few years, while the SWOT analysis is forward looking.

It is worth reiterating that it is essential that there is continuity between the Professional Competency Statement and the SWOT analysis and the SWOT and your PDP.

Undertaking a rigorous SWOT will make preparing and updating your PDP much easier.

The information outlined in the SWOT should lead to a current PDP for the **forthcoming** two year period. The PDP should be updated every six months to a year to reflect your changing circumstances, Once you are a Chartered Town Planner, you are expected to prepare a new PDP every year rolling the two year period forward. The RTPI may at any time, request a copy of your current PDP and CPD records.

#### NOTE

Assessors are most interested in **how** you developed your objectives, not the objectives themselves. Make sure there are clear links between your review and your plan.

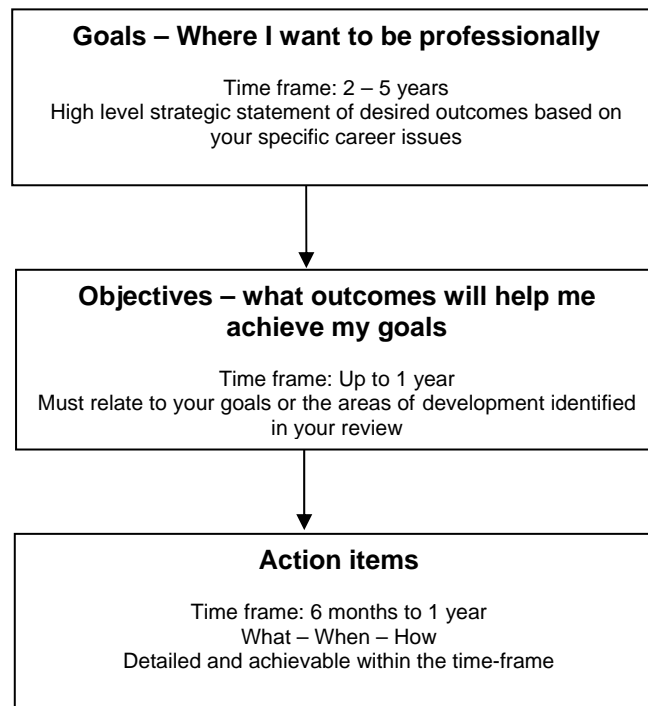
**Example: This example aims to direct your thinking not provide a definitive list of headings for you to follow.**

**SWOT analysis:**

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• area of strong planning knowledge and understanding</li> <li>• strong transferable skills and competencies</li> <li>• commitment to personal and professional development</li> <li>• good contacts/successful networking</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• areas of weakness in planning knowledge and understanding</li> <li>• underdeveloped transferable skills and competencies</li> <li>• poor commitment to personal and professional development</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities within the industry</li> <li>• Opportunities within your organisation</li> <li>• Training &amp; professional development offers</li> <li>• Support of RTPI (Branches/Regions, Networks etc)</li> <li>• A strong interest in a particular area</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry downturns</li> <li>• Negative changes within the organisation e.g. downsizing/restructuring</li> <li>• Better qualified competitors</li> <li>• Limited training opportunities</li> </ul>

**5.5 Goals and objectives**



A goal is a broad statement of what you want to achieve. It should specify the end result.

Your long term goals should at least cover where you see yourself in two years' time (the period covered by your PDP). You do not need to limit yourself to two years if you have already developed a strong idea of the direction you want your career to follow.

You might like to think about where you'd like to be working (perhaps in terms of organisation, sector or even country); the nature of the work you'd like to be doing (e.g. types of spatial planning role/specialism) and/or the level you'd like to be working at (perhaps seeking promotion opportunities). With this in mind, a goal such as 'to obtain a promotion' is, by itself, too broad – promotion to what role, with what new responsibilities and new work opportunities?

#### **NOTE**

Assessors want to see that you have a sense of vision regarding your career direction. Make sure you address this.

### **Setting objectives**

Objectives are sub-goals with measurable outcomes that you expect will help you achieve your goals.

Using the example above of aiming to gain a promotion in two years' time - what might you have to do to give yourself the best chance of securing that? Your objectives are therefore a way of breaking down your longer term goal so that you can begin to work towards or prepare for it.

It is also helpful to have some of your objectives aiming to address some of the areas of weakness you have identified earlier – otherwise, how can you expect to improve in these areas? It might be that all three areas come together – achieving your long term goal might depend on improving your performance in certain ways/addressing areas of weakness, so identifying short term goals can help you to work towards improvements in these areas.

Practising objective setting as you go along should allow you to become more familiar with what a meaningful or realistic objective looks like. If you find you are consistently not meeting your goals, and as a result your PDP is never-changing or repetitive, it could be for a number of reasons:

- *Objectives are too broad or long term:* while you are encouraged to set goals that reflect a longer time-frame, objectives should be more focused and contribute to your overall long term goal. A long term goal of achieving a particular senior role or become a specialist consultant might be entirely appropriate, if there are no related, short term goals to work towards this goal, you will have nothing to review your progress against at three to six month intervals, with the long term goal still far off in the distance. It is therefore important also to break down longer term goals into shorter term objective, and in turn identify realistic CPD activities to achieve in a set time-frame, in order that your overall goal becomes more achievable.
- *Objectives are unrealistic:* if you are consistently not meeting the goals set out in your PDP over a long period, it might be that these goals are unrealistic – either in terms of the time-frames set out or in relation to what you are seeking to achieve. This could be a good opportunity to review your expectations when you complete the next PDP.
- *Too much emphasis on 'what' at the expense of 'how':* as part of the PDP, you are required not only to identify your goals, but to think about how you intend to go about meeting these. Failing to consider realistic, practical measures that you can take to meet your goals could be one reason why you are not managing to achieve them.

Two examples of poorly considered objectives which are overused in submissions are:

- I want to become a chartered member of the RTPI or
- I want a promotion at work

## 5.6 Your action plan - Activities and tasks

This is your action plan. The activities and tasks are the actions you will take to achieve each objective. They will answer questions such as:

- What will be done?
- Who will do it?
- How will it be done?
- When will it happen?

Activities and tasks do not need to be sequential. You can carry out two or more activities concurrently. An indication of a good action plan is if it is detailed enough for someone else to implement.

### SMART TARGETS!

When compiling your PDP, the SMART model **MUST** be used, confirming that your objectives are:

**Specific:** precise about what you want to achieve.

**Measurable:** how will you know if you have achieved the objective?

**Achievable:** objectives should stretch you, but should be capable of being reached.

**Relevant:** objectives should pertain to your personal or professional development.

**Time Based:** there should be a set time-frame in which you intend to achieve your objective.

In order to help you plan a clear and defined professional development route you must make your aims and objectives SMART. And remember, there must be a clear link between what you have identified in your SWOT and what you detail in your PDP!

### EXAMPLE

You have highlighted in your SWOT that one of your weaknesses is poor presentation skills. You identify a number of options to tackle this problem, including:

- Shadow senior colleagues when they give presentations
- Attend a presentation skills course
- Present to a group of colleagues at work.

These are all valid strategies, but are not SMART objectives. For example, if you intend to attend a presentation skills course include information about:

- When are you plan to attend the course
- What you need to do to secure employer approval and funding
- Why you chose the course you are attending
- The duration of the course and when you will be finished
- How will you judge whether the course has been successful. This is very important as it demonstrates critical thinking.
- How and when you will have be able to test your new skills and confidence

You need to detail how you are going to go about achieving the goals you set. How will you make that happen? What do you need to organise? What timescales are you bound by or working towards

What practical measures can you take to begin to meet your objectives and to address some of the areas for development that lie behind them? These should therefore be the actual CPD (Continuing Professional Development) activities that you aim to undertake.

#### NOTE

Your action plan must be **specific and measurable**. All activities should have a specified time-frame associated with them. This means that when that time arrives you can clearly say whether you have achieved the objective or not.

Assessors have raised concerns that Licentiates sometimes over-rely on vague activities such as 'taking on more responsibility' or 'work-shadowing' as ways of meeting their objectives. While these might be useful activities, they should be structured, meaningful and achievable – and most importantly within your sphere of influence. Can you realistically 'take on more responsibility', or is this determined by work patterns and line managers – factors outside of your control which could prevent you from undertaking the activity in the intended time-frame?

The RTPI accepts an extensive range of activities as appropriate CPD, so you have a great opportunity to select activities that are appropriate to your need. Some examples of valid development activities include:

- formal qualifications
- supervised academic research
- preparation of materials for training courses, technical meetings or the technical press
- formal events such as conferences, seminars or workshops
- short courses
- online learning modules such as those offered by [PlanningMatters.co.uk](http://PlanningMatters.co.uk)
- structured targeted reading on a particular topic
- volunteering perhaps through Planning Aid
- work shadowing or placements, or
- mentoring.

#### How will I know I got there?

You **must** include the time-frame in which you want to achieve things by – either by a given month (before June this year) or a time-frame (in three months).

Assessors are looking for tangible outcomes. You should set success criteria for your outcomes which will show that you have achieved your objective. Remember – critical assessment is what the assessor wants you to demonstrate. This is easier to achieve with clear and precise outcomes.

#### NOTE

Meaningful action should have an outcome at the end that will improve your performance. As such, an aim such as 'to explore opportunities for job swap', even if achieved, won't actually lead to improvements. It is only through **undertaking** the activity that you can hope to learn or develop.

## **6. Format of the APC Submission**

### **6.1 Structure**

The submission should be broken down in the three sections:

The Practical Experience Statement, the Statement of Professional Competence and the PDP. If you compose the submission chronologically or thematically you will be able to avoid unnecessary repetition.

### **6.2 Presentation**

The submission should be word processed in Arial 10pt font and double spaced for easier reading. The submission should be in English and composed to a high professional standard. Referencing, where required, should be to the Harvard style. Pages of your submission should be numbered.

### **6.3 Reference to the log book**

You can refer to entries in your log book to emphasise, clarify or elaborate upon an area of experience. When referring to experience in your log book, clearly indicate where the assessor can find the reference. Do not expect the assessor to search through the log book to corroborate your reference.

Where you make reference to the log book, you should ensure the information is of the same standard as the rest of the submission, including standards of presentation and good written English. Pages of your log book should be numbered.

### **6.4 Additional Materials**

Licentiatees are permitted to include illustrations in their written submission, though this is not a requirement. It is unlikely that more than two illustrations would be needed.

Any additional materials including reports, cuttings, diagrams etc are not permitted to accompany the written submission. Assessors will not base their decision on the examples of the Licentiate's professional work other than that described and reflected upon within the written submission and will not take into account opinions of a third party (manager appraisals, references, performance reports etc).

### **6.5 Confidentiality and ethical consideration**

You are required to demonstrate an appreciation of the RTPI Code of Professional Conduct, and the APC submission should be written in the spirit of this Code. Therefore, you should be aware of professional confidentiality, and ensure you have your employer's consent before disclosing any material that may be considered to be professionally sensitive. In the event that this consent cannot be obtained, you must either omit or disguise this information.

You should avoid specifically naming colleagues or other professionals, regardless of whether this is in a positive or negative light.

### **6.6 Word count**

The word limit for APC submissions is 5,000 words +/-10% (i.e. 4,500 – 5,500 words). The submission itself is indicative of the Licentiate's research & analysis and report writing skills. You should include the word count at the end of the submission.

## 6.7 Professional standard of the APC submission

The APC submission should reflect the professionalism of the Licentiate. It should be composed to the highest standards of written English, clarity of thought and presentation.

Please have your submission proof read before submitting it. Many candidates with good experience let themselves down with poor quality, badly put together submissions.

## 6.8 Electronic submission

You will be required to submit your application electronically as either a Word document or a PDF file. Submitting as a PDF file will ensure that your formatting, such as page layout, will not change so you may prefer to convert your files to PDF. Any letters or emails of corroboration are also best submitted as a PDF file. If you are using a MAC computer, please save your Word document in a Word compatible format.

The RTPi is currently updating its technology base including introducing a new website and a virtual learning environment to be known as RTPi Learn. As these new initiatives come online, the process of submitting your APC may change, so please check for the latest instructions on the website when you are ready to submit. Any process changes will not impact on what you have to submit.

### For more information

If you have questions about the APC process or how to submit your application, please first check the website for updates then contact the RTPi Membership Team.

Email: [membership@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:membership@rtpi.org.uk)

Phone: 0207 929 9462