

# PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT ADVICE NOTE 1

## CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### Introduction

The Royal Town Planning Institute’s chartered object is **‘to advance the science and art of planning (including town and country and spatial planning) ...for the benefit of the public’**. It does this primarily by ensuring professionals working in planning have the appropriate knowledge, training and skills and are committed to the maintenance and development of their professional competence throughout their working lives.

It is in the interest of both the individual members and the public that as well as meeting the initial entry requirements, members are seen to maintain and develop their knowledge and skills throughout their careers.

The RTPI has been operating an obligatory monitored Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme since June 1992. The scheme was been developed and revised in consultation with members and the requirements are embedded in the Code of Professional Conduct (01 January 2012).

CPD is a structured and planned process allowing people to maintain and improve competence, skills, knowledge and capabilities. CPD is not just formal courses or qualifications but can also include a wide variety of activities including research, work-based learning and online learning.

The RTPI’s scheme is intended to demonstrate publicly the profession’s commitment to CPD, and to offer formal recognition of individual members’ commitment to the maintenance of professional competence.

The scheme can help employers to justify resources for staff development.

This Professional Conduct Advice Note replaces the 2003 version. Its purpose is to:

- clearly set our members' CPD obligations
- provide supporting guidance and advice on meeting the CPD obligations
- provide a framework for preparing professional development plans and recording CPD activities
- answer queries about CPD
- explain the consequences of non-compliance
- assist employers and managers in dealing with CPD

## The CPD Obligation

### The requirements of the Code:

Clause 2 (a) of the Code of Professional Conduct requires that: "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."

With effect from 01 January 2012, the RTPI's CPD regulations, as set out at Clause A1 of the Code, require that: "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 Executive Board's discretion in exceptional cases:

- at least once a year prepare a professional development plan for the next two years identifying his or her personal professional development needs;
- in any two year period undertake a minimum of 50 hours CPD activity related to the undertaking or managing of town planning;
- maintain a written record of his or her CPD activity;
- submit to the RTPI on request and in such form as may be prescribed by the RTPI:
  - a copy of his or her professional development plan or plans covering the previous two years;
  - 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;
  - a copy of his or her current professional development plan, if not already submitted under (i) above.

- where appropriate, an explanation of his or her reasons for not having complied with any part of this regulation.”

## Notes

*CPD is defined by the RTPI 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’*

*Corporate members who have retired from practice but who have not transferred to Retired Membership, and who are therefore still corporate members, remain subject to the CPD requirements of the Code.”*

If you are a Chartered member, Chartered fellow, Legal associate, Associate member, Technical member or Licentiate member this Professional Conduct Advice Note is addressed to you. It offers advice on compliance with the CPD obligation, explains how to prepare a professional development plan and sets out the information which you are required to provide as part of your CPD record

The RTPI CPD scheme is an annual cycle of reflective learning. Each year members need to write or update a Professional Development Plan (Section 3) and undertake and record CPD activities in order to meet their professional development objectives. At the end of each year members should reflect on the relationship between their CPD and PDP to assess the extent to which they have met their objectives.

## Professional Development Plans (PDPs)

The RTPI believes that one of the most valuable pieces of CPD you can do is carefully to prepare a professional development plan (PDP). You should spend at least an hour preparing it each year.

There is no prescribed form for your professional development plan, although it must meet certain criteria and a template is available as part of Professional Space on RTPI Learn or to download from the RTPI website.

### [Professional Development Plan template](#)

- it will be unique to you
- it should form the primary focus for defining and recording your personal professional objectives
- it should be in a form which allows you to relate your development objectives to your actual CPD activities and to respond to changing circumstances
- it should analyse your current CPD needs, thinking about your current situation, any anticipated changes to your circumstances and your longer term aspirations. Use this to identify any skills or knowledge gaps which can be met through CPD.
- Set short and longer term objectives using the SMART (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic/Relevant and Timely) objectives approach. This means saying (as far as possible) what types of CPD activities you will use to meet your objectives, how you will know you have achieved your objective and when you want to have achieved it by.

Your objectives may be the same as those identified in any work-based staff development scheme. However, your overall ambitions may be wider than meeting the requirements of your current role and your PDP is an excellent place to plan your own professional development.

You must review your PDP at least once a year, rolling it forward to cover the next two years and amending it as necessary.

Your PDP is not inflexible and should not prevent you from taking advantage of (and recording) valuable but unexpected CPD opportunities. However, it does allow you to evaluate all your CPD activities against carefully identified needs.

### What counts as CPD?

The main test of what counts as CPD is to refer back to the needs identified in your PDP. Ask yourself, has it helped you to meet your needs? Or if it was unplanned, has it helped you to gain new or strengthen existing knowledge and skills which improve your competence as a planner.

Your CPD should be related to the theory or practice of planning or a related discipline (such as management or presentation skills) which you need in order to carry out your planning work. The RTPI recognises that there are no short or simple definitions of 'planning' or 'planner' as the New Vision for Planning shows <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/download/245/RTPI-New-Vision-for-Planning.pdf>

Nothing should be automatically accepted as CPD. Even a training course on a mainstream planning topic may not be CPD for you if you already knew everything that was covered. Only you can judge whether an activity has improved your competence as a planner.

CPD is more than training courses and seminars and can come from a wide variety of activities. When you are recording your CPD you should ensure you have a mixture of different activities including:

home-based learning such as distance learning packages, online-learning, systematic study or structured reading on particular themes or topics (but not routine reading of the technical press, which the RTPI considers should form part of members' everyday professional activities)	<b>H*</b>
action-based learning (there are various definitions of action-based learning. In this context it means a learning process involving a systematic, structured approach to the identification of problems in the work place and the search for solutions, with clear benefit to the individual member in terms of meeting the personal CPD needs identified in his or her PDP)	<b>A*</b>
the preparation of material for courses, technical meetings or publication in the technical press	<b>M*</b>
supervised and academic research	<b>R*</b>
background reading, research or preparation required in order to tackle a new area of work (but not the day to day work in these new areas)	<b>W*</b>
RTPI activities of a technical or professional nature, e.g. involvement in specialist working parties or panels, planning aid work, or acting as a consultee on topics of professional interest (membership of a regional/national executive committee or the general assembly would not)	<b>P*</b>

normally count in themselves, but preparation of or participation in discussion of professional issues related to the needs identified in your PDP could do so)	
conferences, seminars, workshops and other technical and professional events and meetings, including in-house training	<b>C*</b>
courses leading to a qualification, including for example an N/SVQ	<b>Q*</b>
other form of CPD. Explain clearly what the activity involved	<b>X*</b>

(\*You are asked to use these codes on your CPD record to help the RTPI identify the different modes of CPD which members are undertaking.)

There is no prescribed form for your written CPD record, although it must meet certain criteria and a template is available to download from the RTPI website.

#### [CPD record template](#)

- It should be in a form which allows simple recording, monitoring and assessing of the progress of your CPD both by yourself and by the RTPI if you are selected for monitoring.
- You should reflect on what you have learnt from each CPD activity.
- At the end of each year you should reflect on the extent to which you have met your PDP objectives through your CPD activities. This will feed into your new PDP.

### Monitoring and Sanctions

The RTPI will confidentially monitor PDPs and CPD records from a sample of members selected randomly from the whole membership.

If you are selected for monitoring you will be asked to submit:

- Your PDPs covering the previous two years and your current PDP
- Your CPD record covering the previous 2 years

Members whose plans and records meet the requirements of the Code will be excluded from random selection for the next two years.

Members whose PDPs or CPD records do not meet the requirements will be contacted explaining why. In some cases this will be due to incomplete information, and by supplying more information the member can meet the requirement. In other cases it may be due to a misunderstanding of the requirement or to genuine difficulties in meeting it. In such cases the RTPI will offer what advice or help it can.

In very exceptional cases the RTPI may be willing to exercise its discretion to relieve a member of the requirement, in whole or in part.

The RTPI will continue to provide advice and information on CPD and will build on its provision of CPD opportunities to members, both centrally and through the branches. It will continue to take a caring

and supportive approach to the small number of members who may for various reasons have real practical difficulties in meeting the obligation. Experience has shown that advice, guidance and review of progress have been helpful in overcoming the real or perceived difficulties.

Beyond this, as CPD is a requirement under the Code of Professional Conduct, disciplinary action is taken against members contravening the CPD obligations in the same way as it is in respect of members contravening other requirements of the Code. Under Byelaw 20, if any member is found to be in breach of the Code, the RTPI has the power to warn the member as to his or her future conduct, to reprimand the member, to suspend the member from membership of the RTPI or even to terminate his or her membership.

Failure to supply a plan or a record, in the absence of acceptable reasons for not doing so, is likely to constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct and to lead to disciplinary action being taken against the member. The RTPI has already demonstrated its willingness to discipline members in these circumstances.

It is extremely unlikely that disciplinary action would be taken against a member whose record, whilst failing to meet in full the requirement of the Code, showed evidence of a real attempt to do so.

### Advice for Particular Groups

The RTPI takes the view that the CPD obligation falls equally on all members by virtue of their status as members of a professional institute, and irrespective of the kind of work which they are doing or of whether they are currently employed at all. In the RTPI's view, all members who wish to retain their status (whether as Chartered Town Planners, Legal Members, Associate Members, Technical Members or Licentiates) have a common duty to maintain their competence to practice as such.

With these concerns in mind, the RTPI has deliberately defined CPD sufficiently widely (in terms both of content and of modes) to allow members considerable discretion in selecting the forms of CPD best suited to their circumstances, and has established a requirement in terms of a minimum number of hours which averages half an hour a week and which should be reasonably achievable by all members. The RTPI therefore does not accept that there are members who cannot reasonably meet the CPD requirement, unless they are prevented from doing so by incapacitating illness or equally exceptional circumstances.

### Members under temporary domestic pressures

The RTPI recognises that if you are working part-time or taking a career break to look after your children or care for a relative, you may have limited time and resources for CPD.

You should review and amend your PDP to reflect your circumstances and focus your objectives on subjects or themes that will help you maintain your competence as a planner.

Sources of CPD that you might find useful include: the general planning press, RTPI branch events, RTPI networks about a subject of interest to you, online research and online learning.

In addition, the RTPI has agreed that mothers are exempt from CPD Regulations for 6 months following childbirth. This also applies to members taking adoption leave or extended paternity leave.

### Members taking a career break for travelling/study etc

If you are taking a career break for whatever reason you are still required to meet the CPD obligation.

If you are going to be away from home you need to plan how you will be able to maintain your competence as a planner whilst you are away. You could consider online learning, reading technical journals and site visits in the countries you are travelling.

If you are studying for a planning related qualification this is likely to make up the majority of your CPD. If you are studying a course that is not related to planning you will need to find other sources of CPD.

### Members approaching retirement

Unless you have transferred to retired membership you are required to meet the requirements of the CPD obligation. No matter how near retirement you may be, you need to maintain your professional competence. Your clients will expect you to maintain a level of professional competence and be up to date with changes in policy and legislation regardless of the fact that you are retiring.

On approaching retirement you should draft your PDP to reflect your plans. If you intend to use your planning skills and knowledge once you have retired, perhaps through giving talks or working on a voluntary basis, then you will need to address how you will make this transition. Ask yourself if there are any additional skills you need to develop. You can also use your PDP to set yourself a timescale for retirement.

### Members no longer employed in planning/unemployed

If you are not working in planning your CPD will need to be clearly related to the theory or practice of planning so that you are maintaining your competence as a professional planner. You need to judge how best to comply with the obligation to maintain your professional competence as a planner, and to justify this in your PDP and CPD record having regard to your own circumstances.

Sources of CPD that you might find useful include: the general planning press, RTPI networks about a subject of interest to you, online research, online learning and attending branch events where unemployed members are often offered a discount.

### Members living in remote areas

Members who live in remote areas may have difficulty in getting to CPD events. But there are many other ways of undertaking CPD. Sources of CPD that you may find useful include the RTPI networks, online learning, planning publications such as the RTPI library series and online research.

### Members of other professional bodies

If you are a member of more than one professional body (e.g. RICS, the Law Society etc) you will have to meet the CPD requirements of each professional body. It may well be that some of the CPD undertaken may be equally appropriate for more than one professional area, and if so there is no reason why it should not be included on your RTPI CPD record as well as on the CPD record from your other professional body. The test of relevance should be whether it meets your PDP objectives or provides an unforeseen opportunity to improve your competence as a planning professional.

### Members working part-time

If you are working part-time or job-sharing, you will need to be equally competent to those in full-time work, and will be expected to undertake the full 50 hours CPD over any two year period.

### Members working overseas

If you are working internationally sources of CPD which you may find useful include online learning, attending local conferences and events, reading planning publications, participating in the RTPI networks and undertaking online research.

### Academic members

All academics should have no problem meeting the RTPI's requirements since the need to maintain and develop competence is as important for academics as for practitioners.

The work of academics including the preparation of teaching materials and undertaking research are both potentially valuable sources of CPD. Learning new skills, in-depth study of areas of expertise, and developing new areas of knowledge, are also all CPD.

Academics may also want to undertake CPD through job exchanges, voluntary work, involvement in RTPI consultations through the branches, or involvement in RTPI networks.

The test of relevance should be whether it meets your PDP objectives or provides an unforeseen opportunity to improve your competence as a planning professional.

### Former members wanting to reinstate their membership

All former members who are applying to reinstate to membership are required to provide evidence of 50 hours of CPD activity over the last two years. This will be in the form of a completed CPD record sheet showing 50 hours of relevant learning activities that meet the requirements set out in this advice note.

## Employers and Managers

Although the responsibility for meeting the CPD obligation rests with the individual member, there is a great deal that employers and managers can do to support their staff.

Clause 2(b) of the Code says: **“Members who, as employers or managers, have responsibility for other members shall take all reasonable steps to encourage and support such other members in the maintenance of professional competence and in compliance with the Institute’s continuing professional development regulations.”**

Employers/managers can support staff to review their personal development objectives on an annual basis. This could be through an organisational performance development review scheme which may identify the same objectives as the staff member’s PDP or it could be by giving staff time to prepare their PDP.

Employers/managers can support planning staff by providing a training budget and time for learning. As a rough guide, it is suggested that employers should spend at least 1% of their total salary costs on staff development. Some EU countries have even adopted this by statute. Where this responds to the objectives and needs identified in PDPs this activity is also CPD.

Organisations are also likely to benefit from conducting a learning needs analysis for the whole department/organisation to identify the departmental/organisational learning needs. Although this may be done by your HR/training department managers are increasingly being required to do this. Using the results together with individual development plans can help you to balance the learning needs of individuals with the priorities of the organisation.

Some employers are very good at supporting their staff and many have had this recognised by gaining RTPI Learning Partner status. This status recognises the excellence of learning and development for planning employees and offers a number of benefits. Your organisation can achieve Learning Partner status by submitting a portfolio of evidence demonstrating a commitment to professional development. Further information about Learning Partner status is available at [http://www.rtpi.org.uk/education\\_and\\_careers/learning\\_partnerships/](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/education_and_careers/learning_partnerships/)