



**RTPI**

mediation of space · making of place

## RTPI Assessment of Professional Competence Guidance Notes for Mentors

### Note 3: Professional Development Plan (PDP)

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#### 1. What is the PDP for?

Understanding the purpose of the PDP can go some way towards producing a strong document. Professional Development Plans kept through the period of Licentiate membership should:

- Review progress, set objectives, and identify ways to meet these objectives
- Form the basis of mentor meetings
- Prepare for the PDP in the final submission

PDPs are primarily forward-looking documents, to help the Licentiate to set targets and work out how these will be met. Although they will also include a review of previous objectives, which may or may not have now been met, PDPs should never contain objectives which have all already been achieved. Acknowledging how far the Licentiate has come with his or her objectives is an important part of the process, but PDPs are not mere progress reports, and PDPs which do not set new objectives are somewhat meaningless.

#### 2. What should I look for in a 'good' PDP?

It is important to note that, as professional development planning is a personal process, there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to produce a PDP. In order to ensure that all the requirements are met, the RTPI strongly recommends that Licentiates use the format of the template provided – although there may be other, more creative processes which go into the identification of objectives which are then translated into this format. However some key things to think about when reviewing a PDP include:

- ***Does it relate to the candidate's role?*** In the final PDP, submitted as part of the APC final submission, Assessors will be looking for clear evidence that this is a personal plan, produced by the Licentiate and directly related to his or her own role and experience. Bland, generic or formulaic PDPs will not be successful – the PDP should clearly relate to the Licentiate's own role and development goals as identified in the log book (see below).
- ***Does it draw on the log book?*** The penultimate column in the APC log book provides an opportunity for Licentiates to identify further areas for development as a result of the work they have undertaken. These can and should be translated directly into objectives in the professional development plan, particularly if they are recurring frequently – why identify a development need if you are not going to take steps to address it? This is another area that Assessors are very aware of when assessing the PDP as part of the final submission.
- ***Does it grow out of the SWOT analysis?*** For the PDP produced as part of the final submission, there should be a strong integration between the SWOT analysis and the PDP, with any weaknesses identified in the SWOT being conveyed into the PDP and objectives set against these.
- ***Are short term objectives related to longer term objectives?*** Short and long term objectives might not be related in each and every case, but it can be helpful to think about breaking down long term objectives into shorter term, more manageable goals. For example, the objective 'to gain a promotion' could be considered to be too large an objective to think about as a whole – there will very likely be a whole range of more short-term objectives that will contribute to meeting this aim.
- ***Has the Licentiate identified meaningful professional development activities?*** When Licentiates identify ways of meeting their objectives, there can be a tendency to over-rely on vague activities such as 'to shadow or observe other colleagues', or 'to take on more responsibility'. Mentors may want to question Licentiates who rely on such activities to reflect

on how they actually intend to learn from them, or to suggest such complimentary activities as structured reading, research, or use of online resources. It may be helpful to bear in mind that simply taking on extra responsibility may not be the best form of professional development – what if the work is too advanced, what will be the effect of this on the Licentiate? Mentors and Licentiates may wish to discuss these kinds of issues.

- ***Is there evidence of progress over time?*** The PDP is a document designed to help Licentiates to drive their own career progression. If the same objectives are recurring in many consecutive PDPs, this could suggest that:

*Objectives are too broad or long term:* while Licentiates are encouraged to think in the long term, there will no doubt be smaller, short term objectives that can contribute to the overall long term aim. For example, a long term goal ‘To achieve promotion to the next grade within two years’ might be entirely appropriate as a long term goal, but if there are no related, short term goals to accompany and work towards this aim, the PDP will become repetitive and meaningless. It is therefore important also to break down longer term goals in order that they become more achievable.

*Objectives are unrealistic:* if Licentiates are consistently not meeting the goals set out in the 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 the candidate’s role. Mentors can help Licentiates to think about what might be meaningful and realistic objectives.

*Too much emphasis on ‘what’ at the expense of ‘how’:* as part of the PDP, Licentiates are required not only to identify their goals, but to think about how they might go about meeting these. Failing to consider realistic, practical measures that they can take to go about meeting their goals could be one reason for Licentiates failing to meet their wider objectives.

### **3. Should we use the SMART model?**

The SMART model, used to test the appropriateness of objectives, now has a number of different interpretations, but is often rendered as a test of whether objectives are:

**S**pecific  
**M**easurable/meaningful  
**A**greed/achievable  
**R**ealistic/relevant  
**T**imed

Given the flexibility inherent in this model, rigid adherence to it is probably best avoided, but establishing whether objectives are meaningful is a particularly good test that can cover many of these elements. For example:

- The objective ‘To become MRTPI’ is not a very meaningful objective. The whole APC process leads up to this, and once an application is submitted it is essentially out of the Licentiate’s hands.
- The objective ‘To gain a promotion’ might be a useful objective, but without further thought given to this it is not very meaningful. What kind of time frame is the Licentiate aiming for? What can they do to try to work towards this? This will probably lead to the setting of other, shorter-term goals. Licentiates may also need to consider whether there are any personal or institutional barriers to these.
- The objective ‘To progress my career’ is entirely too vague to be a meaningful objective. With this kind of objective mentors may be asking in what direction the Licentiate would like to progress, in what time frame, or indeed what they mean by ‘progress’?.