The process of reflective evaluation

In its various definitions the CPD cycle encompasses the principles of planning, action, review and reflection. CPD is most effective when activities are aimed at meeting development plan objectives.

The sorts of questions you may wish to ask yourself, or others, are:

- Has the activity met your development objective in terms of appropriate changes in knowledge, skills, attitude and judgement?
- What have you gained from this experience?
- What will you do differently as a result?
- How will this help you in your current role?
- What benefits will it have for your clients and/or your service?
- How does it help to prepare you for a new role?
- Does this flag up any additional development that would be helpful for you to undertake?

Like so many things, sometimes your CPD will not have the intended outcome. But this in itself may be a valuable learning experience, identifying further learning or development needs.

The allocation of CPD hours

The key thing to remember is that this is not just about completing a list of activities undertaken during the year that add up to 6 or 12 or 30 hours. The time spent can be meaningless unless it makes a difference.

For example, attendance at a half day conference or workshop which gives updates on current technology may well involve 3 hours or more listening, note-taking and discussion.

If on return, full of ideas for changing how you will work in the future, you put the discussion and notes into practice and then measure the ‘so what’ factor by analysing:

- what can been changed
- what feedback there was
- what difference it has made to your working life.

This could result in many more than 3 hours. The time spent preparing and reflecting on the activity is vital for professional development to make an impact and counts as CPD.

It will be your professional judgement that will determine the hours spent on each activity and the total for the year.
How do I begin planning my professional development?

This series of 6 steps (figure 2) will help you to track professional development as it takes you through the reflective practice cycle from planning to impact assessment.

As with any experiential learning cycle, your learning and development will not always follow these steps neatly and in sequence. It is quite appropriate that you address a particular stage of this process when you see it as relevant and timely to your own developmental journey. But at the outset, particularly if you are not experienced at planning CPD, a systematic approach helps.

The professional development cycle incorporating reflective practice

When to reflect?

One of the most common queries about reflection, or reflective evaluation, is when to do it. Do I reflect while I’m undertaking an activity, when I’ve completed the activity, or at the end of the year? Well, aside from there being no one way of doing things, there is value in all of the above. You may also find it useful to reflect on groups of related activities.

Online recording tools will help you capture the outcomes of your reflection, but others simply use their diaries or Outlook calendars to keep a record.

Relevance to practice

Standard 2 requires registrants to carry out CPD which is a mixture of learning activities relevant to current or future practice. To understand the different categories please refer to the categories of CPD guidance document. The key to any activity you wish to record is that there is a demonstrable relevance to your professional practice.
Further reading

There is a wealth of further reading available for those wishing to read more about CPD, benefit and reflective evaluation. Here are a few of the links we have found useful:

CIPD: What is reflective learning? ²
A useful summary from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

LSIS: Reflective practice ³
Guidance on the role of reflection within the CPD cycle

RICS: Reflection ⁴
Examples of potential personal and business benefits of CPD from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors

QIA: Reflective learning ⁵
And for an in-depth study, this 8-page guide from the QIA

2. http://www.cipd.co.uk/cpd/aboutcpd/reflectlearn.htm