

INTRODUCTION

Across the UK workforce, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is expected of individual professionals in most sectors. It is generally governed by sector-specific professional bodies or regulators. Employers also increasingly expect their staff to undertake CPD, and may even measure them on it.

Anyone who is a member of a professional body is likely to have CPD requirements laid out for them by the body, rather than by their employer. There are currently over 1,400 professional bodies, institutes and membership associations nationally. They represent all industries and professions, and many have CPD policies known as CPD schemes.

Anyone who works within a sector that is formally regulated (e.g. by the Solicitors Regulation Authority or Financial Conduct Authority), is likely to be required to track and progress their CPD in order to maintain their license to practice or professional accreditation. Regulatory bodies are established to ensure that the public receives services of the required standard, so CPD is taken very seriously.

Employers will often support an individual's CPD, and may even contribute to CPD plans. However, the onus is very much with the individual to source CPD training activities that meet their personal learning needs and objectives.

WHAT IS CPD?

It is the term used to describe the learning activities which professionals engage in to develop and enhance their knowledge and competencies. It enables learning to become conscious and proactive, rather than passive and reactive.

CPD combines different approaches to learning, such as training workshops, conferences and networking events, e-learning, best practice techniques and ideas sharing, all designed for an individual to improve and realise effective professional development.

Accompanied by such growth is the acceptance that academic qualifications must offer more vocational and skills-based or 'practical' learning. A structured, practical and methodical approach to learning helps employers across industries to recruit and retain key staff and to develop the skills and knowledge in their organisations to maintain a sustainable and competitive advantage.

Engaging in CPD ensures that both academic and vocational qualifications do not become out-dated or obsolete; allowing individuals to continually 'up skill' or 're-skill', regardless of occupation, age or educational attainment.

WHY CPD?

For training and learning providers, CPD offers an excellent opportunity to help individuals enhance their careers. Training activities which offer formal CPD accreditation will guarantee their relevance and thus have a much stronger appeal.

For employees, CPD ensures that the professional standard of their qualifications and registrations is maintained. Furthermore, it contributes to their professional sense of recognition and direction. Completing CPD helps to build their confidence and credibility, allows them to showcase their achievements, and equips them with tools to adapt positively with change.

Other reasons – CPD:

- ensures that the professional standard of qualifications and registrations is maintained
- contributes to a professional sense of direction
- recognises the characteristics of a certain occupation as a profession
- helps employees keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date
- is beneficial for employees' career progression and advancement
- helps when wanting to specialise in a different area or switch focus in employment situations
- demonstrates learning agility and dedication to CPD can make a substantive difference to the organisation's ability to reinvent itself and respond to changing pressures

For employers, the primary benefit of CPD is ensuring that standards across the company [and profession] are attained, maintained and consistent. CPD also:

- promotes greater work engagement from the workforce and general commitment to job roles
- allows for the sharing of best practice and support
- contributes to maximising staff potential and improving staff morale
- provides a useful benchmark for annual appraisals where undertaken.

A good CPD policy will be well researched and evidence based, and efforts should be made to improve it on an on-going basis. It will help to benchmark services and provide underpinning support to enable the organisation to strive for excellence.

An organisation should consider becoming an accredited provider of CPD when the practitioners it represents seek more formal recognition of their status as professionals. Becoming an accredited provider of CPD will offer significant added value to an organisation's membership proposition, enhancing the organisation and its members' status and providing a pathway into a wider community of accreditation-providers. This will enable networking with hundreds of other providers, and sharing of best practice. So not only will there be access to extensive expertise in the provision of CPD training, but also benefit from input from across the broader community.

Organisations may additionally find that in certain situations there could be considerable benefit in sharing expertise and best practice with industry peers and accredited members even in fiercely competitive sectors.

However, the importance of Board involvement cannot be overstated and CPD should be clearly and comprehensively embedded into the culture of the organization. Whether provision is offered from internal sources or whether CPD is sourced externally, without firm commitment to ensuring that the whole organisation is involved, the potential benefits will be difficult to achieve and maintain.

THE PROCESS OF GAINING ACCREDITATION FOR TRAINING COURSES

Many organisations from an extensive range of sectors are able to benefit from CPD accreditation for their training courses, workshops and educational events. The CPD Certification Service provides a substantial portfolio of support for accredited CPD providers and for gaining accreditation for training courses.

Ensuring suitability

The first phase of the course accreditation process is to have an informal consultation to ensure training courses and events are suitable for CPD. This essentially defines structure and scope to manage expectations, and needs to be benchmarked. This can be done using an external accreditation body but what is important is that the CPD course accreditation process follows an appropriate practical method that has been continuously developed utilising best practice across a range of sectors. The objective is to provide the highest standards of structured CPD for delegates and attendees and which will meet their expectations.

Gaining accreditation for training courses

If an accredited CPD provider is used, the next step is to submit training courses to start the accreditation process. The training course materials required for review typically include presentation slides, handouts and any additional training course notes.

The materials will be evaluated, along with a review of the structure and provide advice to help develop the training courses where required. This process is to ensure the training courses are educational in content, structured coherently, with clear learning objectives and outcomes. Each CPD training course is benchmarked against a proven assessment criteria to ensure the required standards are met across a number of key areas.

Certification and Listing

Upon successful completion of the accreditation process, an accreditation certificate is granted, demonstrating that the training course meets the required standards. The 'CPD Certified' or similar symbol can then be used on the accredited training course materials, as well as the delegate certificates of attendance. At this point, a description of the accredited course is listed in the CPD Courses Catalogue (if available for the public request) and added to the specific CPD Member Directory profile.

Benefits of CPD accreditation for training courses

Organisations look to obtain CPD accreditation for training courses for a variety of reasons. It can increase delegate bookings, create discernible competitive advantage from other organisations within the market, and help organisations to represent themselves as industry experts, increasing the chances of meeting the right target audience.

The CPD accreditation process provides increased appeal to an organisation's proposition and helps to further develop new and existing client relationships. Gaining accreditation for training courses provides an endorsement for an organisation, a greater profile recognition and credibility, improved quality of training, access to experienced CPD experts with advice and a framework to help continuously improve the educational offering. The accreditation process is fast, detailed and invaluable as organisation's drive their CPD objectives forward.

In summary, CPD can bring considerable benefits to all parties in an organisation.