

CPD and the Institute of Geologists of Ireland

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Introduction

The nature of professionalism at work is going through major changes as we move into the 21st century. Major changes are taking place in the nature of our jobs, the work we are doing, the responsibility we carry and the effects our work has on other professions in multi-disciplinary teams. This article reviews the role of CPD and how it is being developed in the Institute of Geologists of Ireland.

Background

Towards the end of the last century the quickening pace of technological advances in the sciences began to pose questions for professionals working in their own areas of expertise. Was it good enough to base one's career on an initial primary degree, often followed by a Masters level post-graduate course? Was 6-7 years of training, followed by on the job experience over at least 5 years, producing fully formed professionals in a world where well known tasks were being transformed by modern technology? Computers were removing much of the drudge and making interpretation and analysis easier. Equipment was becoming automated so that data acquisition was becoming remote from the operator.

In parallel, the working environment was being monitored and controlled by regulatory bodies and scrutinised by insurance assessors. Professional errors were being punished under contractual interpretations of responsibility and duty of care. Professional bodies examined the role they played in protecting and supporting their members and it is in this context that the concept of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) was born.

What does CPD mean?

CPD is 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 a practitioner's working life (Geological Society, 1998). Put more simply, CPD aims to keep professionals up to date in their existing areas of expertise. It also provides a structure under which one's experience can be broadened. A recent article in *Eurogeologist* (Fails, 2000) provides a good introduction to many of the issues affecting the need for CPD.

CPD has become a priority in Europe because of an ageing workforce and the decline in numbers studying the geosciences. CPD also addresses the pace of technological change in the geosciences, as well as the danger of skills obsolescence and over-specialisation. To

maintain the competitiveness of geoscientists, it must be a major priority for the professional bodies to persuade their membership to stay up to date and maintain a high standard of work. Equally, companies and organisations that are leaders in their field view CPD as a priority and make it an intrinsic part of their overall business strategy. They believe that the investment in the ongoing training and education of their professional and technical staff is justified commercially while leading to better career planning, greater job satisfaction and personal confidence.

To take an example in economic geology, understanding the controls on the formation of polymetallic base metal deposits in volcanic rocks changed markedly during the 1970s. Understanding of the alteration caused by mineralising fluids, through the recognition of changes to the mineralogy and chemistry of the host rocks has proved a valuable guide to exploration in areas believed to host such orebodies. Many new deposits have been discovered through the careful logging of mineralogy and lithochemistry of drillholes and outcrops to guide more detailed exploration. If an exploration geologist working in this area failed to keep abreast of such developments and techniques, the value of his work would be fatally diminished. It is obvious that this risk is minimised through reading the relevant literature, attending conferences and field trips and reassessing exploration data armed with new ideas.

Good professionals have always recognised the importance of maintaining high standards. In theory, all of us spend time studying the science we work in and keep abreast of new developments. We also try and add to our skills by attending courses, for example, in computer skills training, a modern language or even first aid. The concept of Total Quality Management (TQM), a 'buzz' phrase in management circles, sums up this idea. For products and services the European standard ISO 9000 is an example of this type of scheme. It is designed to provide consumers with confidence that high standards are maintained while providing the suppliers and producers with a scheme to help them achieve these standards. For professionals, CPD provides a model for achieving these goals.

The main problem with CPD is its introduction. No professional who has worked well in his or her job without CPD appreciates having to report to a third party. Many people have objected that CPD schemes are intrusive, take too much time to complete and believe they do not need to prove to anyone that they are good at their job. This perception arises because it is based on a misunderstanding – CPD is not 'checking up' on the individual. It is providing a basis for career development that will benefit the individual throughout his or her working life. The 'checking' is there to provide a formal motivation and attempt to set a standard of which the profession can be proud. Certainly CPD is a challenge to those of us who have not set out our career development path clearly in advance. However it is never too late to improve our vision of our jobs and CPD provides one way of achieving this, to the benefit of all.

CPD and Professional Geoscience

As in many professions, the geosciences have begun to implement CPD schemes for their members. The type of schemes being proposed or used vary but are mostly undertaken by the individual and administered by the professional body. Some schemes are relatively simple while others require more detailed work. For example, one body requires only a signed annual affirmation, sent in with a subscription payment, for renewal of membership. Others request a detailed log of CPD during a specified period, setting out courses and lectures attended, papers read, etc., all recorded and assessed using a points system.

Whatever the method, the underlying idea is to encourage the membership to make a conscious effort to ensure a minimum level of CPD activity throughout the year or over a set period. However this raises the most important aspect of CPD - it really makes most sense if done according to a pre-meditated plan. As will be seen below, the IGI has used the concept of the 'CPD Cycle' to help its members with their plans.

The IGI scheme

In Europe and in the EFG the emphasis on CPD varies greatly. The older organisations can have difficulties introducing CPD because it cannot be imposed on members who entered their professional bodies under regulations which did not include any CPD requirement. However the IGI is fortunate in that it was established in 1999 with the objective of modernising and promoting the geosciences in Ireland. CPD was made a priority and all members have agreed to be bound by the IGI scheme. This article sets out the details of the current system which has been underway since 2000. It is expected that refinements and changes will occur in the coming years as the membership gets used to the scheme.

The IGI scheme is based on the concept of the CPD Cycle (Figure 1). It demonstrates that CPD is an ongoing process, developing in parallel with the member's career.

The concept is simple:

- Set out who you are and what you are good at;
- Identify areas where you are weaker or where you would like to expand or improve your capabilities;
- Draw up a Personal Development Plan (over a 3 year period);
- Attend courses, attend lectures, develop skills within the workplace;
- Record this activity on an annual basis;
- Complete a summary record and submit to IGI;
- Review progress and reassess the Personal Development plan for the next year.

The IGI provides members with the materials needed to organise their CPD, which can be downloaded from the institute's web-site (www.igi.ie). This consists of a 'How to' handbook, a spreadsheet workbook (in Excel) with a step-by-step guide for constructing a Personal Development Plan and recording CPD activities, as well as detailed guidelines designed to address all aspects of the CPD scheme. The idea of the spreadsheet system is to make the

process user-friendly, while attempting to impose a certain discipline on the process of recording activities claimed for CPD. From experience, users report that the entire process, completed on an annual basis, can be done in two hours. However a bit more thought should be put into the Personal Development Plan, which is after all the most important part of the process.

The Personal Development Plan, which consists of two forms in the IGI scheme, allows members to set down who they are – qualifications, experience and expertise. From this starting point, they identify their training needs and set out their priorities over a three year period. Ideally they should try to set measurable goals for themselves so that they can monitor their progress and achievements.

At the end of each year, members submit a summary record of CPD activities they completed. This is based on the concept of a 'PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT HOUR' (PDH). A PDH is earned by spending time on training and development, but different activities will earn PDHs at different rates. For example, an hour attending a lecture is worth less than an hour spent on a formal training course.

These activities are divided into six areas:

- Professional Practice
- Formal Training
- Informal Activity
- Participation
- Presentations
- Contributions to Knowledge

The most important category is the first one. This is a record of the number of hours spent at work or in professional practice working in a creative manner. Here we are not talking of work which requires little intellectual input. The focus is on those hours spent actually using one's skills to best effect. These hours are the best kind of self-development and are entirely up to the member's judgement. It is difficult to define what work qualifies but using one's skills in an active way rather than 'free-wheeling' is the distinction sought. Twenty hours of professional work will earn 1 PDH.

If a person claims 40 PDHs it means that they believe they have spent 800 hours (about 20 weeks) in the year working in a manner which led to an improvement in the quality of their work or knowledge.

In the workbook provided by the IGI, the six areas are reported on separate forms. The hours worked are entered into the column provided beside a short description of the activity and the time the work was carried out. The corresponding PDHs are calculated automatically.

Similarly, the other five categories are reported on the forms provided.

- 'Formal Training' refers to courses where attendance is obligatory and assessment may occur during it and/or on completion.
- 'Informal Activity' includes lectures and conferences attended which did not require any direct involvement.
- 'Participation' records time in which the member was active on bodies additional to their work duties, for example organising a conference or working on a committee of a geoscience association.
- 'Presentations' refers to any lectures given or conference sessions chaired which do not form part of routine work.
- Finally, 'Contributions to Knowledge' includes writing articles and papers or reviewing papers written by others.

These detailed forms transfer the PDHs into the summary form which is submitted annually to the IGI. The detailed forms are not submitted but are retained by the members.

At meetings held in 2000, IGI members strongly expressed the view that some mechanism must be established to monitor compliance with the CPD scheme. To this end, an Audit Committee will examine the CPD returns of a proportion of members selected at random each year and may seek additional detail from them in support of their submitted CPD forms. The IGI believes that with time the strength of this CPD scheme will serve the membership well.

Conclusions

CPD provides a mechanism whereby professionals can continually improve and develop their skills throughout their careers. Furthermore, it provides the world outside the geosciences with tangible evidence that we endeavour to do a good job and have the commitment and means to maintain high standards. A more specific objective of the IGI is to persuade Irish regulatory authorities to require geological input from Professional Members of the IGI, or from equivalent professional organisations, in all appropriate work. CPD is one of the cornerstones of the IGI's case for such recognition of professional geologists; IGI Professional Members must not only be proficient and up to date in their areas of professional expertise but must also have the means to demonstrate that they have made this commitment. The IGI expects that the fruits of this scheme will be apparent over the coming decade.

References

Fails, T. 2000. Continuing Professional Development: What is it? Is it important? *European Geologist* 10, 114-116.

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