COMPANY RECORDING OF CPD ACTIVITY

The following guidance is provided for companies wishing to support their professional engineering personnel in the management of their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activity, consistent with the requirements of the Engineering Council's CPD Policy Statement [1].

Although the Institution of Mechanical Engineers and most other Professional Engineering Institutions (PEIs) provide tools to facilitate the management of CPD by individual Registrants, it is recognised that many companies already have processes and procedures to monitor personnel development through their annual appraisal schemes. Therefore, to avoid duplication of effort, use of company-based systems is perfectly acceptable, assuming that appropriate, comprehensive records are maintained, a summary of which can be made available to Institution Assessors for the purposes of auditing.

Background

Professional Development includes both Initial Professional Development (IPD) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Initial Professional Development (IPD)

To become professionally registered, an individual must develop the required specialist skills and knowledge through education, work experience and training. This phase of development, known as IPD, is essential to achieving the required standard of competence and commitment for registration at any category.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Professional development does not stop with the achievement of registered status. Professionally registered engineers and technicians are required to maintain and enhance their competence throughout their active careers.

CPD is the acquisition of knowledge and skills and the development of personal qualities, and plays a crucial part in achieving, maintaining and demonstrating the technical and leadership competencies of your employees.

All Engineering Council registrants make a commitment to maintain and enhance their competence. In practice, this means undertaking CPD. This obligation underpins the value of the professional titles of Engineering Technician, Incorporated Engineer and Chartered Engineer, as well as serving society and enabling it to have confidence in the engineering profession. The requirement is set out in the UK Standard for Professional Engineering Competence (UK-SPEC) [2].

As of January 2019, recording of CPD is mandatory for all professionally registered and active engineers and technicians. Under the Engineering Council CPD policy the Institution is now mandated to carry out an annual audit on a sample representation of its registered Members and Fellows. Repeated failure to engage in the audit requirement on request from the Institution will ultimately result in a loss of registration.

CPD Requirements

The Engineering Council CPD Code for Registrants [3] requires all Engineering Technicians, Incorporated Engineers and Chartered Engineers to take all necessary steps to maintain and enhance their competence through CPD. In particular they should:

1. Take ownership of their learning and development needs, and develop a plan to indicate how they might meet these, in discussion with their employer, as appropriate.
2. Undertake a variety of development activities, both in accordance with this plan and in response to other opportunities which may arise.
3. Record their CPD activities.
4. Reflect upon what they have learned or achieved through their CPD activities and record these reflections.
5. Evaluate their CPD activities against any objectives which they have set and record this evaluation.
6. Review their learning and development plan regularly following reflection and assessment of future needs.
7. Support the learning and development of others through activities such as mentoring, and sharing professional expertise and knowledge.

What Constitutes CPD?

CPD has several purposes, which will vary in relation to an individual's circumstances, needs and career progression. It can also take a variety of forms. At its heart is informal learning through the challenges and opportunities of working life, and interaction with others such as colleagues, customers and suppliers, including professionals from other disciplines. This may be supplemented by structured activities such as courses, distance learning programmes, private study, preparation of papers and presentations, mentoring, involvement in professional body activities, or relevant voluntary work. This list is not exhaustive and individual registrants are best placed to determine their needs and how to meet them.

Professional development generally takes place in a working environment and draws on knowledge and understanding, training and experience. However, it is not necessarily separate from education and the two processes may be integrated, for example in work-based degrees or apprenticeships.

CPD does not only include formal learning activities (training courses and seminars), but also includes self-directed learning, often on-the-job. Furthermore, it includes engineering-related voluntary activity such as STEM outreach & Institution roles, which will generally take place outside of the work environment.

Formal CPD is the easiest to identify, whether it be attending a conference, going on a management course or attaining new qualifications. However, this is not the only recognised form of CPD; informal learning is often overlooked, despite being a major component of a balanced CPD plan. Learning completed as a part of the day-job contributes towards an individual's development, whether it be in the form of advancing knowledge and understanding of engineering through research for a new project, taking on responsibility for a new budget; or developing communication and inter-personal skills and coaching others.

Professional development in engineering is usually described in relation to achieving and maintaining registered status as set out in the UK Standard for Engineering Competence (UK-SPEC):

There are five generic areas of competence and commitment for all registrants, which broadly cover:

A – Knowledge and understanding

B – Design, development and solving engineering problems

C – Responsibility, management and leadership

D – Communication and interpersonal skills

E – Professional commitment

Importantly, CPD is not just technical development; UK-SPEC also includes non-technical competences and anything that increases an individuals' skills in management; communication; or community involvement can, and should, also be recorded as valid CPD.

Activities such as on the job learning, projects, problem solving, research, conferences, mentoring, volunteering, technical learning, management training all count as valid CPD.

Reflection

While most engineering professionals undertake CPD, this is often on a casual basis, without any deliberate planning, recording of activities, or conscious reflection. Whatever its purpose or nature, learning through CPD should be reflective and should relate to specific objectives even if these are only to maintain their professional engineering competence. Having a regularly reviewed development plan will facilitate learning, although there will always be a place for unplanned activities. Registrants should record both their CPD activities and what they have learned or achieved through them, and relate this to any planned objectives. UK-SPEC may serve as a framework for setting personal development objectives. Doing this will help them to determine their future needs and plan accordingly, as part of a cyclical process. It will also encourage an outcome-based approach which is more appropriate to professional learning than relying solely on quantitative measures such as hours or points.

Reflective Practice/Critical Reflection can be considered as the process of answering the following sequence of questions:

- Did I benefit from the activity through increased knowledge and/or understanding? Consider strengths and weaknesses of the activity.
- How did I benefit?
- How could I have benefited more?
- How will I be able to use this experience constructively and further build on its effect in the future by application or further learning?

Reflection on a particular activity is personal and should demonstrate critical analysis skills, with the aim of self-improvement based on the learning experience. Not only should you reflect on past learning, but it should also set the direction for your next Goals, helping you decide which areas you want to develop next.

Further guidance on Reflective Practice can be found on the Institution of Mechanical Engineer's website, [3].

Evidence of CPD

Recording evidence of CPD undertaken is a requirement of professional registration. In the annual audit, the Institution is looking for evidence that all Registrants are carrying out a structured programme of CPD, each year, consistent with their role.

The Institution's approach to CPD is about learning outcomes; the appropriate extent of CPD activity will vary depending on individual circumstances. Quantitative measures of CPD activity completed (i.e. hours spent, points-based system) are not required.

The expectation is that there will be evidence of each individual having carried out a range of activities over the year. These activities are expected to, over time, cover most of the UK SPEC competency areas. It is however recognised that it is not practical, or necessary, to cover all competencies, every year.

For a Company-based CPD recording process to adequately address the Engineering Council expectations for Registrants, it will need to include the following records:

CPD Activities Undertaken
As noted above, the Company-based system will be required to identify both formal and informal learning gained throughout the year. There should also be provision for an individual to record relevant out-of-work related learning, including voluntary committee and STEM outreach activities.

Reflection
The Company-based system will need to allow individuals to record their reflection on each activity undertaken in accordance with the guidance given above.

Sensitive Information
It is recognised that, in some instances, information will be sensitive in nature, and therefore can not be reported in full, or submitted for external audit. The information included in the CPD log should not include a level of detail that would allow sensitive information to be determined, or breach any security requirements.

Exemptions
All Registrants who remain active in an Engineering related role will be required to provide evidence of their CPD on request. Registrants who are no longer professionally active (e.g. retired or no longer active in an Engineering related role) would not normally be expected to provide evidence of their CPD activity.

Where an individual is temporarily no longer active in a professional engineering capacity, e.g. maternity, long-term sickness etc, and where there is an expectation that the individual will return to an active professional engineering role, then evidence of ongoing CPD activity would be expected.

Portability
In recognition of the fact that members are likely to change employer in the course of their careers, it is important that a version of their CPD record can be retained by the member on their departure. As noted above, it is not expected that sensitive or security related information will be included within the CPD log.

References
[1] EngC CPD Policy Statement, Issue 2.1, September 2020, Engineering Council
[2] UK-SPEC, 4th Edition, 2020, Engineering Council
[3] EngC CPD Code for Registrants, October 2013, Engineering Council
[4] Continuing Professional Development – Reflective Practice, IMechE, https://www.imeche.org/docs/default-source/1-oscar/membership/cpd/cpd-reflective-practice-guide---update-2018.pdf?sfvrsn=2