



**RTPI**

Royal Town Planning Institute

**RTPI  
Practice  
Advice**

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# **CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Advice and support on the RTPI's CPD scheme

# Advice and support on the RTPI CPD scheme

## Introduction

This RTPI practice advice is designed to support all RTPI members who are required to plan, undertake and record Continuing Professional Development (CPD). It includes advice on how to comply with the CPD obligation under the RTPI Code of Professional Conduct and provides advice on preparing your Professional Development Plan (PDP), especially around setting goals, objectives, and actions. We have also highlighted the types of CPD the RTPI provides and answered the most frequently asked questions about CPD.

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# 1. What is CPD?

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is defined by the RTPI as,

**‘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 the practitioner’s working life.’**

It is a structured and planned process to help you maintain and improve your excellence, skills, knowledge, and capabilities and is a commitment that sets you apart from non-chartered planners. CPD is not just formal courses or qualifications but can also include a wide variety of activities including research, work-based learning, and online learning. In 1992, the RTPI staff worked closely with members to develop our CPD scheme, which is embedded in our Code of Professional Conduct [www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/professional-standards/](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/professional-standards/). This was last updated in February 2023. Given the range of roles that planners undertake the RTPI has a deliberately wide definition of CPD to allow you considerable discretion in selecting the types of CPD best suited to your circumstances. We have set a minimum number of hours, averaging half an hour a week, which is realistically achievable for busy professionals, while still powerfully effective when added up over months and years. The RTPI CPD scheme is an annual cycle of reflective learning. Each year you need to write or update your Professional Development Plan (PDP) and carry out and record CPD activities to meet your professional development goals and objectives. At the end of each year, you should reflect on whether the CPD you have undertaken has helped you to meet the goals you set yourself and how well you have met them.

## CPD cycle



## 2. Why do we do CPD?

Planning is a varied and challenging profession with a fast pace of change, requiring all planners to continue to learn, develop their skills and keep up-to-date on current issues on an ongoing basis.

The RTPI's chartered object is:

**'To advance the science and art of planning for the benefit of the public'.**

Our CPD scheme is intended to demonstrate the profession's commitment to maintaining and improving expertise to the public; as well as offering formal recognition of individual members' commitment to the maintenance of their professional excellence.

Other benefits of undertaking CPD include:

- CPD helps you to direct your own professional development and career progression,
- It can help employers to justify resources for staff development,
- Helps you identify gaps in your planning knowledge,
- Helps you to identify the skills you need to develop,
- Reminds you of your achievements and how far you've progressed, which can be valuable when updating your CV or preparing for interviews.

**"CPD is not a problem as nearly every job sends you scurrying to find out something new."**

Independent Consultant

## Do I have to do CPD?

Yes. With over 27,000 members worldwide and more than 100 years of history, the RTPI is at the forefront of planning. Our members abide by the highest professional and ethical standards, which means employers, clients and the wider public trust them.

All RTPI members (except student members, affiliate members and retired members<sup>1</sup>) are required to plan, undertake, and record their CPD. The Code of Professional Conduct<sup>2</sup> requires you, as an RTPI member, to take all reasonable steps to maintain your professional excellence throughout your working life and to comply with the RTPI's CPD regulations as amended from time to time.

## How much CPD do I need to do?

To meet the RTPI's CPD requirements you need to:

1. At least once a year prepare or review your Professional Development Plan (PDP) for the next two years identifying your personal professional goals, objectives, and action plan.
2. In any two-year period undertake a minimum of 50 hours CPD activity to develop your skills and knowledge as a planner.
3. Maintain a written record of your CPD activity (using the online form on the RTPI website).
4. Submit on request:
  - a. A copy of your PDPs covering the previous two years.
  - b. A completed online record of your CPD activity over the same two-year period, with an assessment of the value to you of each activity and an explanation of the relationship between the CPD undertaken and the PDPs, taking into account any revisions to the PDP.
  - c. Where appropriate, an explanation of your reasons for not having complied with any part of this regulation<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> If you have retired from practice, but have not transferred to Retired Membership, you are still required to carry out CPD. If you wish to transfer to retired membership, please contact the RTPI [membership@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:membership@rtpi.org.uk).

<sup>2</sup> [www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/professional-standards/](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/professional-standards/)

<sup>3</sup> In very exceptional cases the Board of Trustees may be willing to exercise its discretion to relieve a member of the requirement in whole or in part.

## Making time for CPD

The CPD requirement for the RTPI averages at half an hour of activity per week. If you are struggling to find time to do CPD, break your CPD into manageable chunks by writing a clear action plan and setting aside short, but regular slots in your diary to undertake CPD. This could be reading at a particular time each week, completing an hour or two of online learning or attending a regular seminar.

# 3. Preparing a professional development plan (PDP)

One of the most valuable pieces of CPD you can do is carefully prepare a Professional Development Plan. It is also an assessed part of applications to Chartered, Associate and Legal Associate membership. You should spend at least an hour preparing it each year. The PDP represents the **planning stage** of the CPD cycle.

**“It is worthwhile to evaluate your career and identify where you would like to make improvements. I think that this can assist in providing a greater sense of purpose.”**

Planner, Local Government

Your PDP can be flexible and should allow you to take advantage of (and record) valuable, but unexpected CPD opportunities. It also allows you to evaluate all your CPD activities against your professional development goals.

There is no prescribed form for your PDP, and it may be the same as your work appraisal or PDP for another professional body, although it must meet the following criteria:

- Be unique to you.
- Cover a two-year period.
- Be reviewed at least once a year, rolling it forward to cover the next two years and amending it as necessary.
- Be in a form which allows you to relate your development objectives to your actual CPD activities and to respond to changing circumstances.
- Analyse your current CPD needs (this may be through a SWOT analysis), thinking about your current situation, any anticipated changes to your circumstances and your longer-term career aspirations. Use this to identify any skills or knowledge gaps which can be met through CPD.

- Identify at least one (and up to three) goals. Each goal should have two-four objectives which focus on skills and knowledge and two-three SMART actions per objective.

A template is available at: [www.rtpi.org.uk/education-and-careers/cpd-for-rtpi-members/recording-and-planning-cpd](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/education-and-careers/cpd-for-rtpi-members/recording-and-planning-cpd)

## Writing goals

Your goals should be a high-level strategic statement of what you want to achieve. Each goal should be clearly set in the context of furthering your planning skills and knowledge. It should specify the end result. Consider these questions:

- As a professional planner, what direction do you want your career to take over the next two years?
- Where you would like to be working (perhaps in terms of organisation, sector or even location)?
- What is the nature of the work you would like to be doing (e.g. type of role/specialism) and/or the level you would like to be working at?
- What challenges will you face at work?
- Are there any gaps in your knowledge or skills or any emerging trends that you need to be aware of? You may want to look at [www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/cpd/core-cpd-framework](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/cpd/core-cpd-framework) where the RTPI has identified learning needs for the profession.

Be aware that a goal such as ‘to obtain a promotion’ is, by itself, too broad. Instead, identify what type and level of work you will be doing.

**EXAMPLE GOAL: I will be working as a senior planner within a local authority dealing with large scale planning applications with minimum support.**

## Writing objectives

Objectives are sub-goals with focused and measurable outcomes that you expect to help you achieve your goals. They are therefore a way of breaking down your longer-term goals so that you can begin to work towards or prepare for them. They must relate to your goals. However, they do not have to be exclusively focussed on planning skills. Improvements in professional skills such as negotiation, presentation or management can all be included. You should aim to meet your objectives in the next 6-18 months. It is therefore important also to identify realistic action plan activities to achieve these in a set timeframe.

Some of your goals and objectives may be the same as those identified in your work-based staff development scheme. However, your overall ambitions are likely to be wider than meeting the requirements of your current role and you should use your PDP to plan your own professional development.

**EXAMPLE OBJECTIVE: Develop my presentation skills.**

**Writing an action plan**

Your action plan should be SMART:

- S** – specific (be precise in the ‘Action’ column below)
- M** – measurable (see examples under ‘How will I know if I have achieved it’ below)
- A** – achievable (can you achieve this or is it an unrealistic goal, given time and other pressures?)
- R** – relevant (to you in your work setting)
- T** – time-based (specific dates)

The PDP template has columns to help you to ensure your action plan is SMART. A good action plan should be detailed enough for someone else to implement.

**EXAMPLE ACTION PLAN**

Action	How will I know I have achieved it	When will it commence and finish?
Attend the internal presentation skills course on 12 December. This has been booked and agreed with my line manager.	My increased confidence in speaking will be noted by my manager at our weekly team meetings.	12 December
Agreed with my manager to give a presentation on changes to planning law at our staff CPD event on 24 January.	Feedback forms will show that my colleagues understood and learnt from the session.	24 January

The RTPI has undertaken a survey of the learning needs of the planning profession and identified CPD priorities for the profession. You can find these priorities and resources to help you to learn more about them at [www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/cpd/core-cpd-framework](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/cpd/core-cpd-framework).



## 4. Choosing a source of CPD

CPD is more than training courses and seminars and can come from a wide variety of activities. When you are recording your CPD you should ensure you have a mixture of different activities.

- CPD events/workshops with clear learning objectives e.g. RTPI Nations and Regions events, RTPI Training, in-house training. Use the RTPI events calendar to find CPD events [www.rtpi.org.uk/events/events-calendar/](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/events/events-calendar/).
- Conferences e.g. RTPI Planning Convention, Young Planners' Conference, NAPE conference.
- Online learning, including podcasts and webinars, e.g. completing the free RTPI Learn modules <http://rtpilearn.org.uk>.
- Structured reading around a specific topic e.g. online or paper technical press or RTPI publications [www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/publications/](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/publications/).
- Work based learning to develop your professional skills and knowledge e.g. work shadowing, project work or undertaking a new area of work.
- Preparing and delivering training or teaching to colleagues, students, and other planners.
- Mentoring to support and guide other planners where this helps you to develop as well as your mentee e.g. as part of the RTPI APC scheme, [Nurture mentors](#) or [Chief Planners of Tomorrow](#)
- Research e.g. academic research.
- Qualifications that have a strong link to your goals e.g. a specialist masters degree.
- [Volunteers](#) help to shape our work and to promote the profession to a new generation. There are opportunities with [Planning Aid England](#), involvement in [RTPI Nations and English Regions](#) or as an [RTPI Ambassador](#) or work to support your local community e.g. as a school governor.
- Developing your professional skills and knowledge through a non-executive director role.
- Coaching sessions.
- Updates from colleagues or discussions with technical experts.

The main test of what counts as CPD is to refer back to the goals and objectives which you identified in your PDP. Ask yourself, 'has this helped me to meet my goals'? Or if it was unplanned,

has it helped you to gain new or strengthen existing knowledge and skills which improve your excellence as a planner. Your goals and objectives are not rigid, and you may wish to revise them as your circumstances change.

**“Think broadly and be creative with how you have expanded your horizons in the last two years. It's not just about the courses and seminars you have completed”.**

Planning Policy Manager, Local Government

Nothing should be automatically accepted as CPD. Even a training course on a mainstream planning topic may not be CPD for you if you already knew everything that was covered. Only you can judge whether an activity has improved your excellence as a planner.

## 5. How do I keep a CPD record?

CPD can be added on-line, within the member login area. This allows recording and reflection on the progress of your CPD.

Your CPD record should include:

- A record of those activities that have helped improve your excellence and expertise as a planning professional.
- A reflection on what you have learnt from each CPD activity.
- The date(s) on which each activity was undertaken.
- The number of hours attributable to each activity.

At the end of each year, you should reflect on the extent to which you have met your PDP goals and objectives through your CPD activities. This will feed into your new PDP.

### How do I decide how many hours of CPD to record for each activity?

The RTPI will be assigning hours to RTPI events moving forward. However, different CPD activities (self-directed or non-RTPI events) will not be assigned hours, because we think you are the best person to recognise how much you have learnt from an individual activity.

However, when you are recording an activity, you should ask yourself how many hours of learning did I get from this? For example, where someone has attended a six-hour conference but already knew the material that was covered during half of the conference they would record three hours.

Another example would be where you have taken on a new area of work and need to develop the skills and knowledge to do it. You may want to count the hours of research and on-the-job learning that you do until you have developed the skills and knowledge that you need, and the work becomes part of your day-to-day job.

## 6. Will the RTPI monitor my CPD?

Every year, the RTPI will confidentially monitor compliance with the Code of Professional Conduct of a randomly selected sample of our membership.

If you are selected for monitoring you will be asked to complete a form and, if appropriate, submit your PDPs covering the previous two years and your current PDP.

Your online CPD record covering the previous two years, including your reflection at the end of each year will also be reviewed.

If your plans and records meet the requirements of the Code, you will be excluded from random selection for the next two years.

If your PDPs or CPD records do not meet the requirements we will contact you to explain why. This could be due to incomplete information, and by supplying more information you may meet the requirement. In other cases, it may be due to a misunderstanding of the requirement or to genuine difficulties in meeting it. In such cases we will offer additional advice or help.

Our experience has shown that when we provide advice, assistance, and a review of progress it has been helpful in overcoming the real or perceived difficulties that members have faced.

Failure to supply a plan or a record, without an acceptable reason for not doing so, is likely to constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct and to lead to disciplinary action being taken. Under Byelaw 20, if any member is found to be in breach of the Code the RTPI has the power to warn the member as to their future conduct, to reprimand the member, to suspend the member from membership of the RTPI or even to terminate their membership.

It is extremely unlikely that disciplinary action would be taken against a member whose record, whilst failing to meet in full the requirement of the Code, showed evidence of a real attempt to do so.

**“The easiest way of being prepared for the RTPI’s CPD monitoring programme is to keep all of your information up-to-date. This makes the monitoring a straightforward exercise and ensures that you don’t have to gather all of the information over a single, short period of time.”**

## 7. Advice for particular groups

Based on our experience of supporting members in a wide range of circumstances we have the following advice for members who have concerns about their ability to meet the requirements.

### Maternity/paternity leave and members under temporary domestic pressures

We have agreed that parents are exempt from CPD Regulations for six months following childbirth/adoption if they are taking maternity leave, shared parental leave or adoption leave during that period.

You should review and amend your PDP to reflect your circumstances and focus your objectives on subjects or themes that will help you maintain your excellence as a planner.

We recognise that whilst you are taking a break to look after your children or to care for a relative you may have limited time and resources for CPD. Useful sources of CPD may include reading and research to keep up to date, keeping in touch days with your workplace and formal and informal discussions with other planners either face-to-face or through online networks. You may find it useful to use the resources on [www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/cpd/core-cpd-framework](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/cpd/core-cpd-framework) and <http://rtpilearn.org.uk>.

**“So much had changed in planning during my maternity leave. I knew I had to get up to speed as quickly as possible to feel comfortable being back at work. Luckily my employer was supportive in helping me do this.”**

Planner, Professional Institute

### Members taking a career break for travelling/study etc.

If you are taking a career break for whatever reason, you are still required to meet the CPD obligation. If you are going to be away from home, you need to plan how you will be able to maintain your excellence and expertise as a planner whilst you are away. Members have undertaken site visits in the countries they are visiting. You could also consider online learning or joining an RTPI Network. The resources at [www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/cpd/core-cpd-framework](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/cpd/core-cpd-framework) and <http://rtpilearn.org.uk> may also be useful.

If you are studying for a planning related qualification this is likely to make up the majority of your CPD requirements. If you are studying a course that is not related to planning, you will need to find additional sources of CPD.

## Members approaching retirement

Unless you have transferred to retired membership<sup>4</sup> you are required to meet the requirements of the CPD obligation. No matter how near retirement you may be, you need to maintain your professional excellence. Your clients and stakeholders will expect you to maintain your professional excellence and be up to date with changes in policy and legislation regardless of the fact that you are retiring.

On approaching retirement, you should draft your PDP to reflect your plans. If you intend to use your planning skills and knowledge once you have retired, perhaps through giving talks or working on a voluntary basis, address how you will make this transition. Ask yourself if there are any additional skills you need to develop. You can also use your PDP to set yourself a timescale for retirement.

## Members no longer employed in planning or unemployed

If you are not working in planning your CPD will need to be clearly related to planning, so that you continue to maintain your excellence as a professional planner. You need to judge how best to comply with the obligation, and to justify this in your PDP and CPD record having regard to your own circumstances.

Sources of CPD that you might find useful include: the general planning press, RTPI Networks about a subject of interest to you, online research, online learning and attending our CPD events where unemployed members are often offered a discount. The RTPI website and particularly the [www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/cpd/core-cpd-framework](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/cpd/core-cpd-framework) pages and [www.rtpi.org.uk/publications](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/publications) can help you to identify the key areas that you need to keep up to date on.

## Members living in remote areas

Members who live in remote areas may have difficulty in getting to CPD events, but there are many other ways of undertaking CPD. Sources of CPD that you may find useful include the RTPI Networks, online learning, including RTPI Learn <http://rtpilearn.org.uk>, reading technical planning publications and the RTPI website, and particularly the [www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/cpd/core-cpd-framework](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/cpd/core-cpd-framework) pages and in-person nearby CPD events.

## Members of other professional bodies

If you are a member of more than one professional body (e.g. RICS, the Law Society etc.) you will have to meet the CPD requirements of each professional body. It may well be that some of the CPD undertaken may be equally appropriate for more than one professional area, and if so, there

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<sup>4</sup> If you wish to transfer to retired membership, contact the Membership team at [membership@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:membership@rtpi.org.uk).

is no reason why it should not be included on your RTPI CPD record as well as on the CPD record for your other professional body. The test of relevance should be whether it meets your PDP objectives or provides an unforeseen opportunity to improve your excellence as a planning professional.

### Members working part-time

If you are working part-time or job-sharing, you will need to be equally competent to those in full-time work and will be expected to undertake the full 50 hours CPD over any two-year period.

### Members working outside of the UK and Ireland

Sources of CPD which you may find useful include online learning such as the free modules on <http://rtpilearn.org.uk> or the World Town Planning Day Online Conference. You can also attend local conferences and events near where you live, including those organised by other related built environment professions, read planning publications, including RTPI research and policy publications and in Planning Theory and Practice, [www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/publications/](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/publications/) and participate in the RTPI Networks, especially the International Development Network. See [www.rtpi.org.uk/the-rtpi-near-you/rtpi-international/](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/the-rtpi-near-you/rtpi-international/) for more information.

### Academic members

If you are working as an academic, valuable sources of CPD can include the preparation of teaching materials and undertaking research if it has helped you to develop your planning skills or knowledge. Learning new skills, in-depth study of areas of expertise, and developing new areas of knowledge, are also all relevant CPD.

Academics may also want to undertake CPD through job exchanges, voluntary work (such as involvement in the RTPI's Partnership and Accreditation Panel), through the RTPI Nations and English Regions or involvement in RTPI Networks.

### Former members who want to reinstate their membership

Former Chartered, Legal Associate and Associate members whose membership lapsed more than 12 months ago must provide evidence of CPD when applying to reinstate their membership. This is demonstrated by submitting a CPD recording showing 25 hours of relevant CPD in the last 18 months and a forward-looking PDP.

### Employers and managers

Although the responsibility for meeting the CPD obligation rests with the individual member the RTPI Code of Professional Conduct requires members who are employers or managers to

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encourage and support their employees in the maintenance of their professional excellence through CPD.

Employers and managers should support staff to review their personal development on an annual basis. This could be through an organisational performance development review scheme which may identify the same objectives as the staff member's PDP, or it could be by giving staff time to prepare their PDP.

Employers and managers can support planning staff by providing a training budget and time for learning. As a rough guide, it is suggested that employers should spend at least one percent of their total salary costs on staff development. Some EU countries have even adopted this by statute. Where this responds to the objectives and needs identified in PDPs this activity is also CPD.

Organisations are also likely to benefit from conducting a learning needs analysis for the whole department or organisation to identify learning needs. Although this may be done by your human resources training department, managers are increasingly being required to do this. Using the results together with individual development plans can help you to balance the learning needs of individuals with the priorities of the organisation.

Some employers are very good at supporting their staff and many have had this recognised by gaining RTPI Learning Partner status. This status recognises the excellence of learning and development for planning employees and offers a number of benefits. Your organisation can achieve Learning Partner status by submitting a portfolio of evidence demonstrating a commitment to professional development. For more information see: [www.rtpi.org.uk/education-and-careers/information-for-employers/learning-partners](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/education-and-careers/information-for-employers/learning-partners).



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**For more information about CPD**

[www.rtpi.org.uk/cpd](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/cpd)

**For more about the Code of Professional Conduct**

[www.rtpi.org.uk/professionalstandards](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/professionalstandards)

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