

Article in the Autumn 2008 edition of Alert, the journal of ICDDDS (now incorporated into ICPEM)

August 2008

Continuing Professional Development

An introduction ... what is it? Why do it? How? What is the PRICE?

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Emergency management in the UK has a multitude of qualifications, at various levels. There is scope to rationalise these, and this could be the subject of a separate study. However, just as important as having a qualification is being able to show that practitioners remain competent. There is currently no mechanism in the UK for monitoring on-going competence in the field of emergency management. Given the crucial nature of the work of emergency planning and management practitioners, this is something which should not be put off any longer. In many other professions, monitoring competence is done by means of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) schemes. Some of these have been in operation for years.

What is CPD?

The Institution of Structural Engineers defines CPD 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. Attaining a professional qualification is not the end of the road and is just one stage in the process of lifelong learning. Structural engineers need to change and develop in order to remain competitive in an evolving industry.*" It is not hard to see how this statement applies equally to emergency management.

Why is CPD so important and who needs it?

PRICE, a term coined by the author, is a useful mnemonic when considering reasons for establishing and undertaking CPD.

Professional Body - it is often the professional body which initiates a CPD scheme, especially in sectors where the number of professionals in any firm is relatively small in relation to the total workforce. For example, a local authority may employ several thousand people, but only have a handful of Environmental Health Officers. Professional bodies therefore generally have the combined expertise on which to draw when determining what is necessary and relevant for practitioners to remain competent. Thus they have a huge responsibility when contemplating such schemes, and setting them up.

Regulator - in the case of emergency management in the UK, for the most part there is no regulation, either by Government or anyone else. This is doubtless of concern to the Government. A CPD scheme established, run and regulated by the profession will give the Government confidence in its EM practitioners, and avoid the need for intervention.

Individuals - ie those employed in the profession, whether in the public or private sectors. Being up to date not only allows individuals to do their job better, but makes their skills more transportable and hence makes them more employable.

Customers - local communities, indeed the public generally, are entitled to believe that they will be looked after should a major incident occur in their borough.

Employers - in general, employers are not experts on emergency management, and rely on their staff to advise them. What is of major concern is the reputation of firms when an emergency occurs. It is widely recognised that failure to employ competent staff is a reputational risk. To have staff who are, and are seen to be, competent, can provide firms with what the author has termed 'reputational opportunity', a chance to enhance reputation.

What activities can be included?

Depending on the individual scheme, any activity which assists professional development can, in theory, be included. Such activities include training, conferences, writing plans, managing incidents, giving presentations, holding an officer post in the individual's professional body, reading the 'trade' press, mentoring of junior staff.

CPD schemes sometimes have targets which may be annual or biennial (or cover some other period). These targets may be represented by hours or points attributed to activities. The latest thinking is that CPD activities should reflect what is good for an individual's development, rather than a generic scheme which calls for attendance at a certain number of events irrespective of their relevance. This is known as an 'output scheme'. There are various ways of determining what is relevant.

Should CPD be voluntary or mandatory?

Many professional organisations approach CPD cautiously. After all, suddenly to impose a scheme can result in the haemorrhaging of members. That is why many start with a voluntary scheme. The incentive for individuals to take part in a voluntary scheme is that it can help set them apart from those who do not, which is good for their standing in a firm and for career progression. Once the majority of members are 'on board', professional bodies can move to mandatory schemes, in other words a situation where membership, at least full membership, depends on participation in the scheme.

Emergency management has reached the stage in its maturity where all stakeholders expect not only that practitioners be suitably qualified, but remain competent. A CPD scheme is becoming overdue.

Peter Brodie is Vice Chair (acting) of ICDDDS. He has researched CPD extensively, and has written a number of articles on the subject.