

An evidence-based programme

The Dental Council's new recertification programme has been designed based on the best available evidence about effective professional development required for oral health practitioners to maintain and build their competence.

Several international literature reviews have been commissioned by regulators of oral health practitioners in different jurisdictions:

- The General Dental Council (GDC) in the United Kingdom (UK) commissioned the Faculty of General Dental Practice (UK) to prepare [The Impact of Continuing Professional Development in Dentistry: a Literature Review](#) published in 2011
- The Dental Council conducted our own review and published [A literature review: Recertifying our oral health practitioners](#) in 2017
- The College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia (CDSBC) prepared a [Quality Assurance Program Literature Review](#) published in 2018
- The GDC also commissioned the Association for Dental Education in Europe to prepare [A Review of the Literature on Continuing Professional Development](#) published in 2019.

This document sets out the key points from these reviews as they relate to each requirement in the new recertification programme.

Professional peer

The CDSBC concluded from its review of the literature:

“Research shows engagement provides more in-depth learning and sustained improvement... Purposeful interaction with peers is considered a higher form of learning, particularly when coupled with feedback”.

The GDC 2019 literature review found:

“Peer learning takes a number of forms including peer review, peer support, peer feedback, peer observation, peer audit, peer discussion groups, peer interaction, peer mentoring and coaching and use of peer facilitators. Peer learning facilitates sharing of best practice and promotes high standards of practice which can be especially valuable for lone practitioners. Working together and interacting was reported to be beneficial and more likely to lead to positive changes in practice. In addition, peer learning supports reflective practice and identification of learning needs. Peer review groups can enhance interprofessional and inter-practice communication, learning and engagement, and promote mutual understanding”.

Professional development plan

The GDC's 2019 review of the literature found:

“At the individual level, CPD choices are typically informed by self-assessment of learning needs. The ability to self-assess is a skill, and professionals may need help in reflecting on their strengths and weakness and identifying learning needs.

“There is consensus in the literature of the value of using a PDP or portfolio to document self-assessment of learning needs, plan CPD activity and reflect on its impact. E-portfolios have been recently used within the electronic environments of Colleges and regulators, aiming to facilitate members’ activities for registration and revalidation purposes”.

Professional development activities

The need for PDAs

GDC's 2011 literature review found:

“...both Schostak (2010) and Grant (2011) have described the weakness of using inputs, such as hours of CPD completed to measure CPD.... However, overall, both the dental and non-dental literature demonstrated the difficulties in developing effective and evidence-based recommendations for quantitative or qualitative measures of CPD”.

... and concluded:

“Evidence shows that active learning with purposeful interactions with peers promotes critical thinking, in-depth learning and lasting change.

The GDC 2019 review recommended an:

“emphasis on reflection and reflective practice, active learning, portfolios, peer (and mentor) interaction and feedback; development of online, user-friendly tools”

And concluded that:

“the approach to CPD should promote the concept of a responsible professional, who takes pride keeping up-to date and enhancing their clinical and professional skills and sharing their experience with others”.

Effectiveness of PDAs

The GDC's 2019 review of the literature found there was a case to be made for:

- Basing activity on adult learning principles, recognising that adults are self-directed, bring prior experience, are goal-focused and need learning to be relevant to real life / work
- Experiential learning and active (as opposed to passive) learning have greater appeal and effectiveness, particularly when the activity is directly related to clinical practice e.g. through the inclusion of real-life problems or real patients
- Interactive activities enhance confidence and strengthen clinical skills, and in addition, small-group activities increase interaction, reinforcing communication skills, teamwork, and networking
- Using multiple learning methods and repeated interactive activities are more beneficial than isolated one-off educational activities
- E-learning and blended learning (a mix of both face-to-face and online learning) being effective, particularly when they apply adult learning principles, are self-directed, interactive, relevant, visually attractive, include self-assessment exercises and provide feedback
- Best practice for designing a PDA including needs assessment, instructional design, evidence-based content development, assessment methods, implementation, and evaluation
- The benefits from PDAs that use a combination of methods and those aligned with learning needs relevant to a professional's scope of practice.
- Personal commitment, enthusiasm and a positive workplace environment contributing to the effectiveness of learning.

Written reflection

The GDC 2019 literature review found that PDAs and reflective practice are inter-related reflection can enhance the benefit of PDAs, and reflective approaches to practice can be promoted by PDAs. Reflective practice is increasingly prominent within current continuing professional development schemes across a range of professions and jurisdictions. Key points were:

- The ability to reflect is not inherent and practitioners may need to be educated on how to reflect. This ability increases over time and with practice
- The impact of reflection-on-practice is enhanced when it is undertaken willingly and shared with colleagues. Peer learning, group learning and mentoring appraisal enhance the professional's ability to reflect on their practice
- Portfolios can be used to record learning experiences and promote reflection.
- Questions remain as to whether current CPD systems really foster reflective practitioners. The portfolios and other reflective exercises need be real opportunities for practice improvement and not just a 'box to tick' exercise.

Professional peer confirmation

The GDC 2011 literature review found:

“Self-accounting with appraisal by an ‘independent’ professional peer is one technique for measuring CPD activity and is capable of addressing the diversity of practice”.

Key points from the GDC 2019 literature review included:

“Peer learning can support interaction across professionals at all levels of expertise. Peer review groups can enhance interprofessional and inter-practice communication, learning and engagement. They also strengthen relationships and promote mutual understanding”.