IRSE

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION

Introduction
This should be read in conjunction with the Continuing Professional Development Policy.

The IRSE seeks to promote for the public benefit the advancement of the science and practice of railway signalling and telecommunications and also to maintain high standards of practice and professional care amongst those working within the industry. The IRSE therefore recognises Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as an integral part of its mission and has adopted the recommendations of the Engineering Council Code of Practice in the development of its CPD Policy.

Definition
Continuing Professional Development is defined as the systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of relevant knowledge and skills, and the development of personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional duties throughout working life.

Council expects all members, regardless of level of Engineering Council Registration, to honour their professional obligation to take all reasonable steps to maintain and develop their professional competence.

Licence holders and potential licence holders are required to maintain and develop their professional competence as appropriate for their license categories.

Demonstration of Commitment
Commitment to CPD is shown through the maintenance of an up-to-date professional competence record and working with a mature understanding of the IRSE Code of Professional Conduct. Demonstration of this is through appropriate written records.

Members are required to:
- Identify professional, legal and commercial requirements for competence, and take appropriate action as necessary
- Be aware of useful sources and forms of evidence
- Have available and provide suitable evidence as required
- Understand the uses of evidence in the recruitment, employment and appraisal processes.

Self Management
The prime responsibility for CPD rests with each member. However, the Institution recognises that effective CPD relies on a partnership between individuals, employers, the Institution and training providers. It is therefore recommended that CPD is planned and implemented in partnership with an employer, preferably as part of an annual review or appraisal, where possible. Members are required to:
- Identify, record and prioritise their own development needs and opportunities
- Use appropriate guidelines and competence bench marks
- Plan, record and carry out development action using a range of appropriate learning opportunities
- Record development achievements
- Evaluate achievements and review against needs.

Supporting the Learning and Development of Others.
Council expects members to support the learning and development of others through one or more of the following activities as appropriate:
- Acting as a mentor or a coach
- Encouraging employers to support professional development
- Sharing their own professional expertise and knowledge
- Providing support for the learning of others
- Contributing to the activities of the IRSE or other professional bodies.

Why Undertake Continuing Professional Development

To maximise your potential for lifetime employability in engineering and associated disciplines, it is essential that to maintain high levels of professional competence by continually improving knowledge, skills and understanding.

The job market is forever changing. It may no longer be possible to rely on an employer to identify and satisfy all development needs, particularly with the possibility of changes to jobs and employers several times during the working life. Therefore each member needs to take *ownership* of their career and its continuing development.

The effect of such changes has increased the demands on people in all walks of life to maintain documentary evidence of their continuing competence. Nowhere is this more important than in engineering, where technology is advancing so swiftly. In each member's best interests, they should be developing a personal portfolio of professional activities and their relevance to their current job and continuing career as well as future ambitions.

By taking ownership of their career and focussing their professional development members will:
- Be better able to recognise opportunity
- Be more aware of the trends and directions in engineering and society
- Become increasingly effective in the workplace
- Be able to help, influence and lead others by example.
- Be confident of future employability
- Have a fulfilling and rewarding career
- Be more aware of their capabilities

By taking a structured approach to professional development members will be able to:
- Demonstrate continuing commitment to their profession
- Develop the good practice of regularly reviewing their needs and selecting appropriate learning activities to help fulfil them.

How Can The IRSE Help?

1.   CONFERENCES

The IRSE regularly holds conferences. A major conference, ASPECT, is held every 2-3 years, normally in London, whilst smaller ones are held in London and other major cities every year. These address a wide range of subjects within the fields of Signalling and Telecommunications. In addition, occasionally the Younger Members Section holds a conference particularly addressing an issue for those with limited experience of the field.

2.   CONVENTIONS

An annual convention is held with several days being spent on detailed technical visits and introductory lectures in order that knowledge of a country's practices can be acquired and best practices reviewed.

3.   TECHNICAL VISITS

Technical visits are arranged throughout the year to places of interest, such as new signalling installations or locations both in the UK and abroad, with new or novel systems. These visits can be particularly useful to gain exposure to environments that are outside the scope of an employer's business.

4.   SEMINARS

Seminars on various topical subjects are held across the UK throughout the year where leading professionals present latest thinking and best practice on specific topic areas. In addition, occasionally the Younger Members Section organises a seminar particularly addressing an issue for those with limited experience of the field.

5.   TECHNICAL MEETINGS

Technical Meetings are held monthly in London and at provincial centres throughout the UK. They are also organised at centres around the world at less regular intervals. Topics range from historical background information, through current technologies and on to future developments for the industry. Topics associated with other industries are chosen on occasions, where they are seen to be of interest to the railway industry. These papers generally contain information which can only be obtained through the Institution.

6. PUBLICATIONS

The IRSE has a range of technical booklets, text books and technical papers which are an invaluable source of reference material. Copies of IRSE publications are held in the IET library and are available on loan to IRSE members on request. The IRSE also publishes a magazine 10 times a year called IRSE News. It brings members up to date on a wide range of topics and activities. Short technical papers, news and letters to the editor are all regular features.

7. PROFESSIONAL EXAMINATIONS

The IRSE Professional Examinations are designed to demonstrate that the Signalling or Telecommunications engineer has reached the necessary professional education standard required for Corporate Membership. The standard is typified by the exercising of judgement in the preparation, assessment, amendment or application of specifications and procedures, and is applicable to personnel engaged in the following activities:

- Signalling / Telecommunications principles, practices, rules and regulations for the safe operation of railway traffic;
- Design and development of Signalling / Telecommunications equipment and systems;
- Preparation and understanding of equipment drawings and specifications and / or design;
- Planning, site installation and testing of Signalling / Telecommunications equipment and systems;
- Practices related to assembly, wiring and testing of Signalling /Telecommunications equipment and systems;
- Maintenance and servicing of Signalling / Telecommunications equipment and systems.

The examinations are intended to test the main concepts of the subject material without bias to any one railway practice. It is necessary to obtain a pass in four of the following modules in order to meet the requirements for Corporate Membership of the Institution. Modules may also be taken individually for CPD purposes for those who wish to provide evidence of the Continuing Professional Development. The following examination modules are currently available:

Module 1   Safety of Railway Signalling & Communications (Compulsory)
Module 2   Signalling the Layout
Module 3   Signalling Principles
Module 4   Communications Principles
Module 5   Signalling & Control Equipment, Applications Engineering
Module 6   Communications Equipment, Application Engineering
Module 7   Systems, Management & Engineering

8. SCHOLARSHIPS

An award called The Thorrowgood Scholarship is given each year to the student who has shown outstanding achievement in the Institution Examinations. The award assists the holder to undertake a study of Railway Signalling usually in a foreign country. The Scholarship is funded from a combination of The Thorrowgood bequest fund, members' donations and Institution funds. Thorrowgood Scholarship Award holders are required to give a talk to the Institution's membership on completion of their study.

9. RECORDING CPD ACTIVITES

A Professional Development Record is available that has been designed to meet the requirements of the Engineering Council as well as the IRSE Licensing Scheme. Its purpose is to assist members to develop, implement and review their development action plans in partnership with their employers and to provide a recording mechanism for the CPD activities that they undertake.

What Should Be Done?

IRSE Members have a professional, legal and commercial obligation to become and remain competent - and capable of carrying out their work and duties in a proper and defensible manner. It is primarily the responsibility of the member for deciding what, where, when and how anything is done. Everyone's professional development is unique because it must meet their own and their employer's needs over a period of time. This section gives simple guidelines to help members achieve their desired outcomes. Most members will be familiar with the Plan - Do - Review cycle. CPD is best approached in this way in order to focus time and effort to best effect.

1. REVIEWING THE CURRENT SITUATION

To get started you will need to think about your future aspirations and your career path. Ask yourself these fundamental questions:

- Where am I now?
- Where do I want to be?
- What do I want to do?

Members are expected to keep abreast of new developments in science and engineering, relevant to their field of professional activity, and to encourage those working under their supervision to do likewise. Try to undertake an honest self-appraisal of current expertise and areas for improvement. Consider the future challenges and opportunities that might arise. This is the same type of thinking process that might be employed in preparation for an appraisal at work or for a job interview, such as considering strengths, weaknesses and any future opportunities or threats.

There may be someone who can assist with drawing up plans and any financial and time implications. A mentor may be of assistance, especially during the planning stage.

Tip: Rather than starting from scratch, why not use the notes from any previous appraisal, any preparation made for the recent job interview, a CV or job description as the basis for this stage.

1. IDENTIFY OBJECTIVES

As in all planning, the first step is to identify what is to be achieved – the objectives. These should be balanced to include:

- The immediate requirements for a job
- Business and career aspirations (including professional membership)
- Targets for self-improvement
- Family and personal considerations

Although both medium and your long-term objectives should be considered, concentration should be given to those objectives that can be achieved in the short term – probably within the next 12 months. These short-term objectives are likely to be much more detailed than any longer term ones.

Some people prefer to take opportunities as they arise rather than work towards planned objectives, and either method can work well. However, the people who are best placed to develop their careers are those who know and understand the 'building blocks' needed for their development and can recognise opportunities as they arise. Most people have plans even if they are informal and short term.

Do not make short-term objectives vague; it will be much easier to achieve them if they are SMART. This stands for:

Specific   state exactly what the aim is
Measurable   it must be possible to identify when the goal is achieved
Achievable   there must be a reasonable chance of success
Realistic   the goal should be realistic, but at the same time challenging
Timed   a completion date for the goal must be identified

Be realistic. It is better to set some useful, achievable objectives and exceed them than it is to set impossible goals. Whilst objectives should be set to address capabilities, the failure to achieve them can adversely affect motivation.

2. DETERMINE THE SKILLS YOU NEED

For an engineer, many of objectives are likely to be concerned with technical areas. However, interpersonal skills should also be considered. Very often improving inter-personal skills, such as the ability to influence people, can bring considerable benefit.

If one of the objectives chosen is a move into a different position then there is a need to analyse what competencies are required in that new position. Obtaining relevant job specifications may prove useful in working towards obtaining those competencies. Similarly, if the aim is to perform better in a particular aspect of the current job, this will allow the identification of which aspects of knowledge or skills need to be worked on.

To achieve the objectives set, it is necessary to acquire specific knowledge and skills. It is helpful to think in terms of competencies rather than just in terms of knowledge and skills gained. Expressing development in terms of competencies will help to explain to others what has been achieved and why it is important.

3. SELECT APPROPRIATE COMPETENCE STANDARDS

Competence is a combination of knowledge, understanding, experience, attitude and skill. All five aspects must be present if someone is to be effective in the workplace. Improving competence requires not an increase in knowledge, but also its application and the skill to apply it.

Many organisations now use the concept of competence to measure and enhance employee development and also in selecting personnel in recruitment. Some of these organisations use the language of competency frameworks in their own way, so it can be very easy to become confused by the terminology.

Many professionals use standards to be able to observe / measure their improvement rather than to obtain a particular competence qualification. It takes time to develop competence it may be appropriate to develop some to a very high level, while others advance to a lower level. It is a good idea to concentrate on only a few areas at any one time, so choose only those competencies immediately relevant in order to be able discern and measure progress and consolidate your learning.

4. PRODUCE A DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

For professional development to be effective, it must be part of a structured plan. Development Action Plans should be subject to continual review in the light of changing circumstances. Most importantly, they should be written down. Candidates seeking transfer to a higher class of membership are required to provide documented evidence of a Development Action Plan.

Many people fail to recognise or take advantage of all the learning opportunities that already exist in the work place. Undertaking new tasks or projects can involve learning. Working closely with, or work shadowing, a colleague may be advantageous. Both can provide a way of increasing specific knowledge and awareness, as well as improving inter-personal skills such as listening and questioning.

Courses are available from employers, professional bodies, local colleges and a wide range of specialist training organisations. If a plan indicates the need for a training course it is necessary to research what is available. The choice should take into account the preferred learning style, the time available, the location and of course, the course will cost.

Professional and specialist magazines and journals often contain valuable articles, features or series. Attending local events, such as lectures, can aid understanding, and provide a chance to meet with other professionals. For many reasons it is important to build up a network of contacts, both locally and wider afield. They can be a source for obtaining learning support and also a source of informed opinion on current trends and directions.

Open, flexible or distance learning has become a very powerful way for busy professionals to develop new skills. Materials come in a variety of media – printed matter, audio tapes, videotapes, interactive video, CD, interactive CD-ROM, computer programmes and more recently via the Internet. The main benefit is that they can be used at any speed. Feedback on progress usually comes from the materials and/or from tutors reviewing assignments.

5. RECORD YOUR LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Records should be kept of what has done, but it can be even more useful to actually record what was learned. The process of generating a record helps to organise thoughts and experiences, so they can be built on. It also aids recall by transferring the experience from short-term to long-term memory.

The format of records should be simple, but should include, as a minimum:
- What was done
- When it was done
- What was learned
- How it can be applied
- What follow-up activities may be useful.

Opportunities to learn come from many sources, including small day to day experiences. Everyone learns from experience and the greatest benefits are often achieved from risky situations or from failure. It is important to identify success as well as the lessons learned in any situation, however apparently negative, and to consider how to improve your competence.

6. COLLECT EVIDENCE OF COMPETENCE

A professional development folder should be a working document. Sometimes only the holder will see its contents, but on occasions, it may be necessary to provide proof of competence or a summary of development, for example, at a job interview or performance review, or working towards professional membership. Accumulating evidence of what has been done and how it was done is the best means of demonstrating competence.

When undertaking a formal training course or academic studies, certificates of achievement give demonstrable proof of attainment. But often performance is improved during daily work without externally provided proof or assessment of activities or achievements. By identifying and keeping evidence of work completed satisfactorily it can produced at a later date.

Evidence may take different forms including business/project plans, internal memos, letters, reports, minutes of meetings, employer assessments for pay and/or promotion reviews, etc., and also testimonies from others witnessing attainment.

7.   REVIEW THE DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

A Development Action Plan should be reviewed regularly as this serves to demonstrate how original objectives have been met. The objectives should then be re-evaluated and modified as necessary.

There are many systems and frameworks for recognising training needs and recording learning achievements. Suggestions are available in the IRSE CPD folder, but any format that records the necessary information is acceptable.

The most important records are not the experience or event. The aim is to recognise and record the benefit and change in experience and abilities. Analyse each Learning Experience against the objectives. It is important to record progress in the context of the objectives to give the opportunity to adjust direction.

Personal circumstances play a big part in determining the objectives set in terms of career path and degree of professionalism. Bear in mind that any change in circumstances may trigger a review to revise objectives. Other triggers may be a significant achievement, a new job, a new customer, a promotion or redundancy.

IRSE

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION

Introduction
This should be read in conjunction with the Continuing Professional Development Policy.

The IRSE seeks to promote for the public benefit the advancement of the science and practice of railway signalling and telecommunications and also to maintain high standards of practice and professional care amongst those working within the industry. The IRSE therefore recognises Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as an integral part of its mission and has adopted the recommendations of the Engineering Council Code of Practice in the development of its CPD Policy.

Definition
Continuing Professional Development is defined as the systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of relevant knowledge and skills, and the development of personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional duties throughout working life.

Council expects all members, regardless of level of Engineering Council Registration, to honour their professional obligation to take all reasonable steps to maintain and develop their professional competence.

Licence holders and potential licence holders are required to maintain and develop their professional competence as appropriate for their license categories.

Demonstration of Commitment
Commitment to CPD is shown through the maintenance of an up-to-date professional competence record and working with a mature understanding of the IRSE Code of Professional Conduct. Demonstration of this is through appropriate written records.

Members are required to:
- Identify professional, legal and commercial requirements for competence, and take appropriate action as necessary
- Be aware of useful sources and forms of evidence
- Have available and provide suitable evidence as required
- Understand the uses of evidence in the recruitment, employment and appraisal processes.

Self Management
The prime responsibility for CPD rests with each member. However, the Institution recognises that effective CPD relies on a partnership between individuals, employers, the Institution and training providers. It is therefore recommended that CPD is planned and implemented in partnership with an employer, preferably as part of an annual review or appraisal, where possible. Members are required to:
- Identify, record and prioritise their own development needs and opportunities
- Use appropriate guidelines and competence bench marks
- Plan, record and carry out development action using a range of appropriate learning opportunities
- Record development achievements
- Evaluate achievements and review against needs.

Supporting the Learning and Development of Others.
Council expects members to support the learning and development of others through one or more of the following activities as appropriate:
- Acting as a mentor or a coach
- Encouraging employers to support professional development
- Sharing their own professional expertise and knowledge
- Providing support for the learning of others
- Contributing to the activities of the IRSE or other professional bodies.

Why Undertake Continuing Professional Development

To maximise your potential for lifetime employability in engineering and associated disciplines, it is essential that to maintain high levels of professional competence by continually improving knowledge, skills and understanding.

The job market is forever changing. It may no longer be possible to rely on an employer to identify and satisfy all development needs, particularly with the possibility of changes to jobs and employers several times during the working life. Therefore each member needs to take *ownership* of their career and its continuing development.

The effect of such changes has increased the demands on people in all walks of life to maintain documentary evidence of their continuing competence. Nowhere is this more important than in engineering, where technology is advancing so swiftly. In each member's best interests, they should be developing a personal portfolio of professional activities and their relevance to their current job and continuing career as well as future ambitions.

By taking ownership of their career and focussing their professional development members will:
• Be better able to recognise opportunity
• Be more aware of the trends and directions in engineering and society
• Become increasingly effective in the workplace
• Be able to help, influence and lead others by example.
• Be confident of future employability
• Have a fulfilling and rewarding career
• Be more aware of their capabilities

By taking a structured approach to professional development members will be able to:
• Demonstrate continuing commitment to their profession
• Develop the good practice of regularly reviewing their needs and selecting appropriate learning activities to help fulfil them.

How Can The IRSE Help?

1.   CONFERENCES

The IRSE regularly holds conferences. A major conference, ASPECT, is held every 2-3 years, normally in London, whilst smaller ones are held in London and other major cities every year. These address a wide range of subjects within the fields of Signalling and Telecommunications. In addition, occasionally the Younger Members Section holds a conference particularly addressing an issue for those with limited experience of the field.

2.   CONVENTIONS

An annual convention is held with several days being spent on detailed technical visits and introductory lectures in order that knowledge of a country's practices can be acquired and best practices reviewed.

3.   TECHNICAL VISITS

Technical visits are arranged throughout the year to places of interest, such as new signalling installations or locations both in the UK and abroad, with new or novel systems. These visits can be particularly useful to gain exposure to environments that are outside the scope of an employer's business.

4.   SEMINARS

Seminars on various topical subjects are held across the UK throughout the year where leading professionals present latest thinking and best practice on specific topic areas. In addition, occasionally the Younger Members Section organises a seminar particularly addressing an issue for those with limited experience of the field.

5.   TECHNICAL MEETINGS

Technical Meetings are held monthly in London and at provincial centres throughout the UK. They are also organised at centres around the world at less regular intervals. Topics range from historical background information, through current technologies and on to future developments for the industry. Topics associated with other industries are chosen on occasions, where they are seen to be of interest to the railway industry. These papers generally contain information which can only be obtained through the Institution.

6.   PUBLICATIONS

The IRSE has a range of technical booklets, text books and technical papers which are an invaluable source of reference material. Copies of IRSE publications are held in the IET library and are available on loan to IRSE members on request. The IRSE also publishes a magazine 10 times a year called IRSE News. It brings members up to date on a wide range of topics and activities. Short technical papers, news and letters to the editor are all regular features.

7.   PROFESSIONAL EXAMINATIONS

The IRSE Professional Examinations are designed to demonstrate that the Signalling or Telecommunications engineer has reached the necessary professional education standard required for Corporate Membership. The standard is typified by the exercising of judgement in the preparation, assessment, amendment or application of specifications and procedures, and is applicable to personnel engaged in the following activities:

- Signalling / Telecommunications principles, practices, rules and regulations for the safe operation of railway traffic;
- Design and development of Signalling / Telecommunications equipment and systems;
- Preparation and understanding of equipment drawings and specifications and / or design;
- Planning, site installation and testing of Signalling / Telecommunications equipment and systems;
- Practices related to assembly, wiring and testing of Signalling /Telecommunications equipment and systems;
- Maintenance and servicing of Signalling / Telecommunications equipment and systems.

The examinations are intended to test the main concepts of the subject material without bias to any one railway practice. It is necessary to obtain a pass in four of the following modules in order to meet the requirements for Corporate Membership of the Institution. Modules may also be taken individually for CPD purposes for those who wish to provide evidence of the Continuing Professional Development. The following examination modules are currently available:

Module 1   Safety of Railway Signalling & Communications (Compulsory)
Module 2   Signalling the Layout
Module 3   Signalling Principles
Module 4   Communications Principles
Module 5   Signalling & Control Equipment, Applications Engineering
Module 6   Communications Equipment, Application Engineering
Module 7   Systems, Management & Engineering

8.   SCHOLARSHIPS

An award called The Thorrowgood Scholarship is given each year to the student who has shown outstanding achievement in the Institution Examinations. The award assists the holder to undertake a study of Railway Signalling usually in a foreign country. The Scholarship is funded from a combination of The Thorrowgood bequest fund, members' donations and Institution funds. Thorrowgood Scholarship Award holders are required to give a talk to the Institution's membership on completion of their study.

9.   RECORDING CPD ACTIVITES

A Professional Development Record is available that has been designed to meet the requirements of the Engineering Council as well as the IRSE Licensing Scheme. Its purpose is to assist members to develop, implement and review their development action plans in partnership with their employers and to provide a recording mechanism for the CPD activities that they undertake.

What Should Be Done?

IRSE Members have a professional, legal and commercial obligation to become and remain competent - and capable of carrying out their work and duties in a proper and defensible manner. It is primarily the responsibility of the member for deciding what, where, when and how anything is done. Everyone's professional development is unique because it must meet their own and their employer's needs over a period of time. This section gives simple guidelines to help members achieve their desired outcomes. Most members will be familiar with the Plan - Do - Review cycle. CPD is best approached in this way in order to focus time and effort to best effect.

1.   REVIEWING THE CURRENT SITUATION

To get started you will need to think about your future aspirations and your career path. Ask yourself these fundamental questions:
- Where am I now?
- Where do I want to be?
- What do I want to do?

Members are expected to keep abreast of new developments in science and engineering, relevant to their field of professional activity, and to encourage those working under their supervision to do likewise. Try to undertake an honest self-appraisal of current expertise and areas for improvement. Consider the future challenges and opportunities that might arise. This is the same type of thinking process that might be employed in preparation for an appraisal at work or for a job interview, such as considering strengths, weaknesses and any future opportunities or threats.

There may be someone who can assist with drawing up plans and any financial and time implications. A mentor may be of assistance, especially during the planning stage.

Tip: Rather than starting from scratch, why not use the notes from any previous appraisal, any preparation made for the recent job interview, a CV or job description as the basis for this stage.

1.   IDENTIFY OBJECTIVES

As in all planning, the first step is to identify what is to be achieved – the objectives. These should be balanced to include:
- The immediate requirements for a job
- Business and career aspirations (including professional membership)
- Targets for self-improvement
- Family and personal considerations

Although both medium and your long-term objectives should be considered, concentration should be given to those objectives that can be achieved in the short term – probably within the next 12 months. These short-term objectives are likely to be much more detailed than any longer term ones.

Some people prefer to take opportunities as they arise rather than work towards planned objectives, and either method can work well. However, the people who are best placed to develop their careers are those who know and understand the 'building blocks' needed for their development and can recognise opportunities as they arise. Most people have plans even if they are informal and short term.

Do not make short-term objectives vague; it will be much easier to achieve them if they are SMART. This stands for:

Specific   state exactly what the aim is
Measurable   it must be possible to identify when the goal is achieved
Achievable   there must be a reasonable chance of success
Realistic   the goal should be realistic, but at the same time challenging
Timed   a completion date for the goal must be identified

Be realistic. It is better to set some useful, achievable objectives and exceed them than it is to set impossible goals. Whilst objectives should be set to address capabilities, the failure to achieve them can adversely affect motivation.

2.   DETERMINE THE SKILLS YOU NEED

For an engineer, many of objectives are likely to be concerned with technical areas. However, interpersonal skills should also be considered. Very often improving inter-personal skills, such as the ability to influence people, can bring considerable benefit.

If one of the objectives chosen is a move into a different position then there is a need to analyse what competencies are required in that new position. Obtaining relevant job specifications may prove useful in working towards obtaining those competencies. Similarly, if the aim is to perform better in a particular aspect of the current job, this will allow the identification of which aspects of knowledge or skills need to be worked on.

To achieve the objectives set, it is necessary to acquire specific knowledge and skills. It is helpful to think in terms of competencies rather than just in terms of knowledge and skills gained. Expressing development in terms of competencies will help to explain to others what has been achieved and why it is important.

3.   SELECT APPROPRIATE COMPETENCE STANDARDS

Competence is a combination of knowledge, understanding, experience, attitude and skill. All five aspects must be present if someone is to be effective in the workplace. Improving competence requires not an increase in knowledge, but also its application and the skill to apply it.

Many organisations now use the concept of competence to measure and enhance employee development and also in selecting personnel in recruitment. Some of these organisations use the language of competency frameworks in their own way, so it can be very easy to become confused by the terminology.

Many professionals use standards to be able to observe / measure their improvement rather than to obtain a particular competence qualification. It takes time to develop competence it may be appropriate to develop some to a very high level, while others advance to a lower level. It is a good idea to concentrate on only a few areas at any one time, so choose only those competencies immediately relevant in order to be able discern and measure progress and consolidate your learning.

4.   PRODUCE A DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

For professional development to be effective, it must be part of a structured plan. Development Action Plans should be subject to continual review in the light of changing circumstances. Most importantly, they should be written down. Candidates seeking transfer to a higher class of membership are required to provide documented evidence of a Development Action Plan.

Many people fail to recognise or take advantage of all the learning opportunities that already exist in the work place. Undertaking new tasks or projects can involve learning. Working closely with, or work shadowing, a colleague may be advantageous. Both can provide a way of increasing specific knowledge and awareness, as well as improving inter-personal skills such as listening and questioning.

Courses are available from employers, professional bodies, local colleges and a wide range of specialist training organisations. If a plan indicates the need for a training course it is necessary to research what is available. The choice should take into account the preferred learning style, the time available, the location and of course, the course will cost.

Professional and specialist magazines and journals often contain valuable articles, features or series. Attending local events, such as lectures, can aid understanding, and provide a chance to meet with other professionals. For many reasons it is important to build up a network of contacts, both locally and wider afield. They can be a source for obtaining learning support and also a source of informed opinion on current trends and directions.

Open, flexible or distance learning has become a very powerful way for busy professionals to develop new skills. Materials come in a variety of media – printed matter, audio tapes, videotapes, interactive video, CD, interactive CD-ROM, computer programmes and more recently via the Internet. The main benefit is that they can be used at any speed. Feedback on progress usually comes from the materials and/or from tutors reviewing assignments.

5.   RECORD YOUR LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Records should be kept of what has done, but it can be even more useful to actually record what was learned. The process of generating a record helps to organise thoughts and experiences, so they can be built on. It also aids recall by transferring the experience from short-term to long-term memory.

The format of records should be simple, but should include, as a minimum:
*   What was done
*   When it was done
*   What was learned
*   How it can be applied
*   What follow-up activities may be useful.

Opportunities to learn come from many sources, including small day to day experiences. Everyone learns from experience and the greatest benefits are often achieved from risky situations or from failure. It is important to identify success as well as the lessons learned in any situation, however apparently negative, and to consider how to improve your competence.

6.   COLLECT EVIDENCE OF COMPETENCE

A professional development folder should be a working document. Sometimes only the holder will see its contents, but on occasions, it may be necessary to provide proof of competence or a summary of development, for example, at a job interview or performance review, or working towards professional membership. Accumulating evidence of what has been done and how it was done is the best means of demonstrating competence.

When undertaking a formal training course or academic studies, certificates of achievement give demonstrable proof of attainment. But often performance is improved during daily work without externally provided proof or assessment of activities or achievements. By identifying and keeping evidence of work completed satisfactorily it can produced at a later date.

Evidence may take different forms including business/project plans, internal memos, letters, reports, minutes of meetings, employer assessments for pay and/or promotion reviews, etc., and also testimonies from others witnessing attainment.

7.   REVIEW THE DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

A Development Action Plan should be reviewed regularly as this serves to demonstrate how original objectives have been met. The objectives should then be re-evaluated and modified as necessary.

There are many systems and frameworks for recognising training needs and recording learning achievements. Suggestions are available in the IRSE CPD folder, but any format that records the necessary information is acceptable.

The most important records are not the experience or event. The aim is to recognise and record the benefit and change in experience and abilities. Analyse each Learning Experience against the objectives. It is important to record progress in the context of the objectives to give the opportunity to adjust direction.

Personal circumstances play a big part in determining the objectives set in terms of career path and degree of professionalism. Bear in mind that any change in circumstances may trigger a review to revise objectives. Other triggers may be a significant achievement, a new job, a new customer, a promotion or redundancy.