

Personal Development Plans – who, what, when, why, where?

Throughout your professional career, it is important to have a structured approach to your learning. Here, a team of experts reflect on how best to shape your future safely and successfully

During time as a trainee, your education was supported by educators within a carefully monitored environment. They provided feedback and guidance in order that you developed clinically. On qualification, there is then an expectation upon you to continue this process using different platforms, and a requirement by the GDC to formulate and demonstrate this. Keeping abreast of new skills and knowledge is at the heart of dentistry and a commitment to the regulatory continuing professional development (CPD) is only a part of this.

Keep a log

A reflective log is a way of thinking in a critical and analytical way about your work in progress. Self-evaluation is a key part of learning and keeping written reflective logs each time you take a new step is an essential part of your personal development activity. There is no standard format for a reflective log – but there are many templates available. Genuinely identifying areas for development means a dental professional needs:

- Focus – to pinpoint key areas for improvement
- Courage – to recognise when something is wrong, however uncomfortable this may be
- Honesty – to address the problem and, if needs be, share this with a mentor or trusted

Aims

- To identify strengths and weaknesses
- To improve and/or learn new skills
- To consolidate these skills
- To encourage self-awareness
- To improve performance and knowledge
- To reflect on pathways
- To offer respite from – and an outlet for – the stresses of a demanding workplace
- To share with others in order to build a culture of openness and improvement



PDPs make a lot of sense

Here, Susie Sanderson, dento-legal adviser at Dental Protection, explains why she thinks they enhance a dental career.

'Making the time to think through a PDP makes a lot of sense. It might be a process that is hard to start though. There are many resources available to help in the form of guidance, books and templates. An internet search or a phone call to your post graduate deanery will get you started. The first thing is to take some time for self-reflection. I don't mean by navel-gazing but exploring your own decision-making and professional judgement. Perhaps examples may come to mind where you can analyse and learn from your own practice. It might be that a recent complaint from a patient or comment from a colleague can give you a direction. Give yourself permission to be detached, objective and non-judgemental of yourself. Suspend resentment and be positive: in a recent clinical situation, what went well? And what could you do differently next time, what did you learn and how will it change what you do next time? To start to produce your PDP, consider the same questions, be honest about the gaps and start to plan the CPD you need rather than the CPD you fancy doing. Of course, you can work with your PDP on your own, and you may prefer that, but supporting each other in the creation and implementation of our PDPs could not be more powerful evidence of intention to act in our patients' best interests.'



What's the best way for me to learn?

Kathryn Marshall is Dental Practice Development Tutor and Professional Support Tutor at the School of Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education, Wales and Training Programme Director for the HEKSS RCS FGDP Diploma for Clinical Dental Technicians.

She explains: 'We all learn in different ways: this is described as our 'learning style'. Some of us prefer to study quietly on our own (for example, doing online CPD) while others prefer to learn by discussing issues actively with a group of people (for example, in workshops). We all have a preferred learning style and it is helpful to understand this when developing a CPD portfolio.'

CPD plan

'In order to be effective in our CPD, we need to identify those areas with which we have the most difficulty. Everyone knows that we often put ourselves forward for the tasks and courses with which we are most comfortable and shy away from those that are a struggle. Along with a more formal appraisal in the workplace, a chart can help to clarify these issues and plan a more effective path of study.'

- PDPs set out the actions people propose to take in order to learn and develop themselves
- Remember to prioritise and set reasonable timescales
- If you miss your target don't worry, just reset your target date and revisit.
- Be honest with yourself!



5 tips for choosing your PDP options

Glenys Bridges is owner of Glenys Bridges Practice Pathways. She bases her advice on the VAK learning styles.

She says:

1. Be aware of how you learn. Some people learn a great best from reading and so, for them, solitary CPD works well for these **visual** learners. If you are an **aural** learner, you get most from presentations and peer review, whereas others **kinaesthetic** learners need to 'dig in' and try things out to secure any real learning. If you're really lucky, you will have a blended learning style, with a good level of comfort in each zone. Why not complete a free online VAK Test to confirm your assumptions about your learning style and guide your learning choices
2. Make sure you have an overall plan, give your CPD purpose, and don't do it simply because you must. Set yourself goals and measurable outcomes
3. Avoid repeating the same type of CPD in subjects you enjoy. Make sure you cover a comprehensive range of topics – those you like and those that are of less interest to you.
4. Share your CPD. Cascaded learning is where the outcomes of learning are shared with your team colleagues for the benefit of patients
5. Always evaluate outcomes, reflective review is essential but meaningless unless you begin with a clear idea of what you hoped to learn, so that you can measure the results achieved to the original expectations.'



NEBDN recommends...

Phil Hughes is chief executive at the National Examining Board for Dental Nurses (NEBDN). His top tips include:

1. Identify needs

The best Personal Development Plans (PDPs) are those that are based on identified learning needs. You may use a range of sources to help identify your learning / development needs such as appraisals, patient feedback, peer review and self-reflection.

These needs may be linked to weaknesses in practice or knowledge, they may link to a desire for promotion or they may lead to an improvement in services offered in your workplace.

2. Prioritise

It is likely that there will be a huge number of things you want to learn or think you could do better. When developing you PDP it is important not to overwhelm yourself trying to do too much at once. Focus on the important things first, decide which of your needs should be met as a priority and which can wait.

3. Be realistic

Set realistic, achievable timescales to achieve your objectives. If you try doing too much too quickly you will lose motivation and may end up not achieving anything at all.

4. Research

Look at all the options available to you to enable you to meet your goals. Think about how you learn best and choose the option that supports your learning style. You may prefer working with others or you may learn better when you are in a quiet area. You may prefer having things explained to you or you learn better from being active. There are a huge variety of learning opportunities available whether they are face-to-face, online, hands-on or didactic.

5. Record keeping

You will probably want to review your plan regularly and will need to update it as you achieve your objectives. Think about storing your PDP so that you can access it from anywhere. This can be achieved in several ways e.g. as an editable file on your smartphone, in your cloud storage file or in an online portfolio. There are a few free open-source portfolios you can use. You may want to think about storing it in a place where you can keep records of your development alongside it too so that you have a whole development portfolio.'

colleague and find a solution together.

Reflective learning is an on-going process, but there are key moments when this may prove fruitful.

When with colleagues. Making time to reflect with others on what you have learned, what you will do the same or differently as a result and whether your learning needs have changed is essential. As well as developing your performance, it also fosters a confident, safe and competent dental team

When considering your next step. There is a propensity by many of us to learn what we already know and sit tight in our comfort zone. A reflective log is useful in identifying strengths and weaknesses and highlights the clinical skills with which we are less familiar or use less often. Seeking courses in these latent skills will only serve to develop you as a clinician

During research. The internet has opened up our access to knowledge – not always for the greater good. Auditing what you have read is an important part of the learning process and a reflective log aids in our assimilation of clinical information. Just like information accessed in books and journals, be sure to dispense with anything found online that does not have its roots in current scientific thinking as it is, therefore, not evidence based.

Increasingly, regulators are expecting the dental team to use a Personal Development Plan (PDP). A PDP can identify goals for the forthcoming year and methods for achieving these goals and can work in tandem with a reflective log. Ideally a good PDP should be completed for a five-year period, and should be reviewed and revised on an annual basis during that time.

Although not currently a requirement of the GDC (unless the registrant has had conditions placed upon them following a GDC inquiry), it is nevertheless a recommendation. The GDC maintains: 'You are highly recommended to use a Personal Development Plan (PDP), to help you make good CPD decisions, and review it regularly, ideally with an appropriate colleague. Sample plans can be provided by the postgraduate deaneries and some employers and professional associations.'

A PDP will enable you to decide in advance what CPD can most effectively advance your professional development and is relevant to your practice or intended practice.



Society of British Dental Nurses hears from the GDC

Fiona Ellwood is the patron of the Society of British Dental Nurses that has a central focus of education, learning, development and training.

She says she spoke to the GDC and they told her:

‘We are in the process of shaping its guidance and PDP template.

But the PDP really is for the profession to use and shape it for optimal use, and we are going to be emphasising this. However, some

key elements that need to in the PDP are as follows:

- The areas, skills or knowledge that you have identified to maintain or develop, and how they relate to your current or future field of practice
- The CPD activity that you plan to do that will address your identified learning needs, and the GDC’s learning outcomes that will map to each activity. (see below)
- The timeframes which you expect to complete your CPD over your cycle.
- There is also an emphasis on adapting the PDP as needs change throughout a cycle for a professional.
- The GDC’s learning outcomes are below: (they are written into the rules)
 - A. Effective communication with patients, the dental team, and others across dentistry, including when obtaining consent, dealing with complaints, and raising concerns when patients are at risk
 - B. Effective management of self, and effective management of others or effective work with others in the dental team, in the interests of patients at all times; providing constructive leadership where appropriate
 - C. Maintenance and development of knowledge and skill within your field of practice
 - D. Maintenance of skills, behaviours and attitudes, which maintain patient confidence in you and the dental profession and put patients’ interests first.’

Holding and maintaining a PDP will also enable you to identify your learning needs and consider them in a structured way. This should be in relation to your scope of practice and also to the work you do; the team in which you work; the patients you treat; and your contribution to safe and good quality dental care in the UK. A PDP will also help you to prioritise your CPD activity, and set out your actions to meet each need during your CPD cycle.

We also recommend you make time to reflect individually or with others on what you have learned following each CPD activity, what you will do the same or differently as a result and whether your on-going learning needs have changed.

Confidence

It’s the aim of the dental team to provide high quality oral healthcare to patients who are confident in their standards and are acting in their best interests at all times. A programme of CPD – together with comprehensive reflective practice and a well-considered (but flexible) PDP – supports this.