

The role of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in enhancing professional competence

David Gilbert¹

¹CEO, British Institute of NDT, United Kingdom

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is understood across most professions as the systematic acquisition of knowledge and skills and the development of personal qualities to maintain and enhance professional competence. All members of professional engineering institutions have an obligation to undertake CPD and to support the learning of others. CPD can take a variety of forms. At its heart is informal learning through the challenges and opportunities of working life and interaction with others (e.g. colleagues, customers, suppliers), including professionals from other disciplines. However, this may be supplemented by structured activities such as courses, distance learning programmes, private study, preparation of papers and presentations, mentoring, involvement in professional body activities or relevant voluntary work. While most engineering professionals undertake CPD, this is often on a casual basis, without any deliberate planning, recording of activities or conscious reflection. Whatever its purpose or nature, learning through CPD should be reflective and should relate to specific objectives, even if these are only to maintain professional engineering competence. Individuals are best placed to determine their needs and how to meet them. Often, employers or experienced colleagues will play a significant part in this, but individuals should be responsible and proactive in seeking professional development opportunities. For a CPD plan to work best it should be a joint venture between employee and employer. There must be commitment from both parties and time must be set aside, at least annually, to consider the performance of the employee and the way the role of the employee is likely to develop.