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The Role of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in Formal Higher Education

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Abstract
CPD is an important aspect of any professional person's development. It enables the vital issue of being a 'Reflective Practitioner' to be addressed and thus gain an improvement in professional performance. However, many professionals within the Construction Sector engage in CPD but do not have a degree. Their professional development/progress in many cases is linked to having a formal academic qualification.

This paper describes a Case Study of how a joint venture between a professional body and a UK university resulted in the validation of a BSc (Hons) degree built upon CPD activities and making full use of 'Work-based Learning'. The paper provides a useful model for future developments of CPD within the Construction Sector.

Key words:
Continuing Professional Development (CPD), Reflective Practitioners, Work-based Learning (WBL)

1. Introduction

It is arguable that continuous professional development (CPD) in the past has failed to be continuous, has not fully embraced the concept of Life Long Learning and has been overly vocational or professional in its focus. Furthermore it has often been fragmented and less than developmental. Concerns in the UK for CPD as a 'national need' has been acknowledged by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education in the report (NCIHE 1997).

"We believe that the aim of higher education should be to sustain a learning society". The four main purposes that make up this aim are:

- to inspire and enable individuals throughout life, so that they grow intellectually, are well equipped for work, can contribute effectively to society and achieve personal fulfilment;
- to increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and to foster their application to the benefit of the economy and society;
- to serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge based economy at local, regional and national level;
- to play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised, inclusive society."

The emphasis here is clearly placed upon continuity throughout life, on broader knowledge and intellectual skills as well as vocational skills, and on ownership by the learner through personal fulfilment. A wider set of social and economic benefits beyond merely those of employment should be considered. This concern is for a more comprehensive and holistic notion of CPD and a framework of opportunity that embraces early years schooling through further and higher education to include mid-career as well as pre- and post-retirement needs.

As the view of awards moves away from the traditional undergraduate/postgraduate taught course framework and towards one which can accommodate and respond to the needs of CPD, a new structure for making awards is required. Modular structures driven by credit-based learning and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CATS) have been the popular way of achieving these new building blocks. Credit based learning means that points can be earned from a wide variety of learning experiences. For such a modular credit based approach to work effectively, it has to be based on a common set of criteria with a standard metric. To this end a national system for credit accumulation and transfer, in which common and standardised tariffs are associated with a defined framework of awards offered within the higher education framework, has been developed.

The development of a key skills framework is fundamental to the accreditation of work-based learning. If each individual student programme is separately negotiated the key skills approach offers an effective way of ensuring comparability across and between programmes of work. There is, of course, no simple definitive answer to the question of what are the key skills and which are appropriate to the different levels of award within any programme of study.

2. Historical Development

The free market philosophy which characterised the 1980s encouraged numerous providers to offer CPD activities. Universities, consultants, private companies, colleges, in-company training departments and professional associations offered CPD activities to the markets. These key groups began to colonise CPD for their own ends and the commercialisation of CPD rapidly progressed. With the focus on profit generation, these providers began to find their market niche. Hemmington (1999) noted that a number of external pressures over the last decade had encouraged universities and colleges to look more closely at the commercial opportunities offered by the industry. A more critical consideration of the role of universities in CPD is that there had been a commercialisation of CPD by employers, professional associations and universities and that this had led to short-term approaches towards CPD provision. UK universities assumed a more neutral position by encouraging a critical dialogue between all interested parties and this provided a sound strategy for developing valid approaches for CPD provision.

Three major effects resulted from these developments. First, CPD began to take on a different definition. The emphasis shifted towards professional up-dating rather than the more holistic professional development. Some professional associations produced CPD policies which, in an attempt to focus all their members on the need for CPD, almost encouraged a competency-based, ‘tick-box’ approach in which CPD activities were easily described and measured for the purposes of continued professional membership, rather than activities that might be more appropriate and developmental but less tangible. It is easier to clock up the required number of hours attending a few up-dating courses than to keep the confidence of the public who use the expertise of these professionals and maintain the employability of professionals themselves. Construction Professionals should be ‘Reflective Practioners’ and this requires an engagement in relevant CPD activities and/or work based learning.

Secondly, the colonisation of CPD has also led to a greater segregation of professional associations at precisely the time when they should be working together to encourage inter-disciplinary approaches to provide client satisfaction. Differences in CPD policies and requirements, and vested financial interests also mitigate against shared CPD experiences across professional groups.

Thirdly, a re-focusing on the quality of CPD provision should be advantageous to universities who are monitored on their quality of provision. Also universities, with their strong research base, can support employers and individuals in cutting edge development. The development must be based on a sound understanding of the application of CPD in the workplace. They should aim to assist organisations and individuals to discover what they need, not simply deliver what they seem to want or have ready to deliver.

Given the debate relating to work based learning, it is interesting to explore the role of universities and colleges in CPD. The challenge seems to be one of meeting the needs of the construction industry in terms of identifiable benefits and flexibility of learning and yet ensuring academic quality. It could be argued that the industry does not want traditional academic qualifications at all, and the problem for universities is to re-focus on valid professional competences.

The emphasis on CPD is forcing both institutions of higher education and professional institutions to re-examine their methodologies for developing and delivering programmes of study. If CPD is to be genuinely continuous, then the traditional approaches adopted by universities must change. There is no longer time for the traditional routes on undergraduate programmes to provide professionals with adequate tools and experience to deal with these new challenges. For institutions, key client groups are no longer the 18-25 year olds wishing to take traditional undergraduate or master's programmes. More frequently they are mature, experienced people wishing to enhance their existing qualifications to meet changing circumstances; most importantly they wish to combine these with work based activities and thus truly attain the status of a "Reflective Practitioner"

3. CPD Credit Bearing Example Case Study: A Joint Development between a Professional Body and a UK University

The School of Environment and Development at Sheffield Hallam University, UK, has traditionally delivered four year full-time and six year part-time degree awards. The part-time awards require students to attend for one day every week; this can prove to be prohibitive for people who find it difficult to obtain time off from work. Further some of the traditional awards do not offer the flexibility of assessing relevant industrial experience obtained by students. From this background the School was approached by the Association of Building Engineers (ABE) with regard to investigating the possibility of developing and providing a specifically tailored, professionally-relevant degree for its non-graduate membership. As such, the School proposed a new award of BSc (Hons) Building Engineering. The award was designed to be delivered in a part-time award bearing CPD mode. A further innovation was incorporated into the degree in that it was a part-time award aimed at practicing professionals from a broad geographical area. It was proposed that modules be delivered off-site in suitably equipped accommodation facilitated by the ABE. Thus, the final form of delivery has been agreed as block workshops delivered at weekends at ABE head office in Northampton, UK. On-line and telephone support is a key aspect of the learning and teaching strategy. The course induction programme includes Life Long Learning and Study Skills Workshops. The following sections of the paper describe the process of development and the key issues encountered in this new innovative collaborative venture.

3.1 Proposal and Supporting Rationale

The proposed award sought to accept mature, professionally and academically qualified candidates for advanced entry (to level 6, final year of BSc Hons Degrees) based on the equivalent of skills, qualities and

knowledge gained in professional practice and formally assessed by the ABE and an appropriate HNC/HND.

This proposal supported the University's corporate plan 2003-8 strategic aims in that:

- the University mission is to provide opportunities for the development of intellectual, professional and practical skills and qualities; to encourage national, regional and international access to higher education;
- it was based on an extensive relationship with the professional body (the ABE);
- it provided for the expansion of CPD and is founded on a long standing University emphasis on the support of the professions and business.

Continuing Professional Development or life long learning has been defined as "the systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and skills, and the development of personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties through a practitioners working life" (RICS 1993). In short, the development supported a key distinctive feature of the University's Corporate Plan for academic development and the ABE's desire to assist members in engaging with CPD.

3.2 Course Developmental Process

The first stage of the developmental process was to establish a course planning team. The team consisted of:

- the Subject Group Leader for Construction, Cost & Environmental Management;
- a Course Leader and Chair of Planning team;
- the Course Leader for BSc (Hons) Quantity Surveying;
- the Course Leader for BSc (Hons) Building Surveying;
- the Built Environment Programme Leader.

The team had extensive experience of course development, management and delivery. In undertaking this development, the planning team consulted and were guided by the Association of Building Engineers' Chief Executive and the Association's President. The ABE's contribution was most valuable, especially in the key areas of curriculum content and delivery mode.

The planning team further consulted and received much support and guidance from the School's Student Support Manager, Senior Staff Administrative Officer and Secretary to the Quality Committee. Curricula design, in general aims to improve the learning experience of students, adopt a programme structure and delivery that enhances quality and learning and to use assessment methods as an integral part of the course delivery rather than a mere tool to measure students' performance.

Throughout the planning process reference was made to the UK's Quality Assurance Agency's Building and Surveying Benchmarks and professional and academic requirements of a Building Engineer graduate. Assessment procedures and classification of outcomes follow the University's Assessment Regulations.

The result of this extensive consultation process was the establishment of the curriculum content. At SHU it is University practice to develop learning outcomes for each module in line with the University's Learning and Teaching strategy. Thus, modules were developed containing specific learning outcomes. These learning outcomes provide a focus for module delivery and setting appropriate assessment criteria.

Table 1 outlines the programme structure for a student completing within the minimum three semester period (18 months). Students do not have to complete within the three semesters. One of the major

advantages of this course for professionals is that they can 'build-up' credits leading to the degree over a longer timeframe.

3.3 Reflection on Industrial Experience

For most students this new degree represents the first formal educational process they have engaged with for many years. However, they have years of accumulated relevant valuable experience. The new course sought to utilise these experiences by providing academic credit for mature experienced students. The credit is based on their ability to actively reflect upon occupational experience. The work based learning element cemented the notion of the value of the practical application of knowledge in the work place (Billett 1999) and further developed the situational skills (Hinchliffe 2002) or contextual knowledge (Portwood 2000) that these authors opine as being essential for the performance of an occupational role.

Therefore a module was designed around 'competences', this module being 'Reflection on Professional Experience'. The language of competences has similarities to the language of academic learning outcomes. The extensive work undertaken by Drew & Bingham (2001) was used to interpret the professional competences into academic learning outcomes. Assessment of this new approach to providing academic credit was considered and it was decided (guided by the fundamental principle that assessment must be linked to learning outcomes) that students should provide a 'Portfolio of Evidence' covering the required learning outcomes/ competences. For the students it provides a focus for their learning and in addition it also provides an accelerated means of obtaining credit towards the degree.

Having established the course content and timeframe the course planning team had to produce the necessary documentation to satisfy the University's Validation Panel. Most of this demanding work was undertaken by the Course Leader. One of the key components of the Validation Submission document was the section on 'Student Learning Experience'. It is not possible to identify all aspects of the development within this paper; however, it is worth noting that the new award conformed to the School's Assessment Strategy by:

- using diverse methods of assessment that are consistent, practicable, timely and effective in helping students demonsrate the achievement of intended learning outcomes;
- specifying clear assessment criteria to help ensure standards are enhanced and to let students know what is required to improve their performance;
- utilising formative and summative assessment to drive the students' learning process;
- aiming to provide consistent, constructive and prompt feedback on both coursework and exams to students, focussing on how to improve their work.

Table 1: Module Information Guide

Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 3
Research Methods 26-6734-00 - (Yearlong) (10 credits assessed)		**Research Methods 26-6734-00 (10 credits assessed)**
Reflection on Professional Experience 26-6735-00 - (Yearlong) (10 credits delivered)		**Reflection on Professional Experience 26-6735-00 (10 credits delivered)**
Principles & Practice of Management 26-6736-00Y (20 credits)	**Project & Site Management 26-6738-00Y (20 credits)**	**Health & Safety at Work 26-6737-00Y (20 credits)**

	Advanced Building Control 26-6732-00Y (10 Credits) (Option (2 of 4 to be taken))
	Fire Studies 26-6728-00Y (10 Credits) (Option (2 of 4 to be taken))
	Environmental Engineering 26-6742-00Y (10 Credits)(Option (2 of 4 to be taken))
	Appraisal & Management of Buildings (10 Credits) 26-6740-00Y (Option (2 of 4 to be taken))

The teaching, learning and assessment strategy of this Building Engineering award is congruent with that of other construction-related awards within the Faculty of Development and Society. The LTA at level 6 of the Building Engineering award is one focused on a strongly student-centred approach, an approach requiring high levels of independent, deep learning. Unlike levels 4 and 5 where recall and comprehension strongly underpin assessment - the level 6 modules of this part-time award are characterised by application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation of complex vocationally-related data and processes.

With regard to the School's learning resources, this course seeks to utilise established on-line learning support facilities such as blackboard, Sheffield Hallam's student intranet, on-line discussion forums and various Adsetts Centre (Learning Centre) on-line databases.

The validation event was a success and the course has been validated for five years. The course became operational in October 2004.

4. Conclusions

Within the paper an overview of the developmental process of CPD has been provided, this has set the historical context for new developments. To this end an outline has been provided of the development process of the new BSc (Hons) Building Engineering award. The development is innovative in the UK by forging links with professional bodies built upon CPD activities in a flexible learning model. The provision of a Reflection on Professional Experience credit bearing module based on Work Based Learning provides a new and useful dimension in CPD development. It is expected that as the course becomes common knowledge in the UK, other professional bodies will seek similar developments.

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Appendix 1

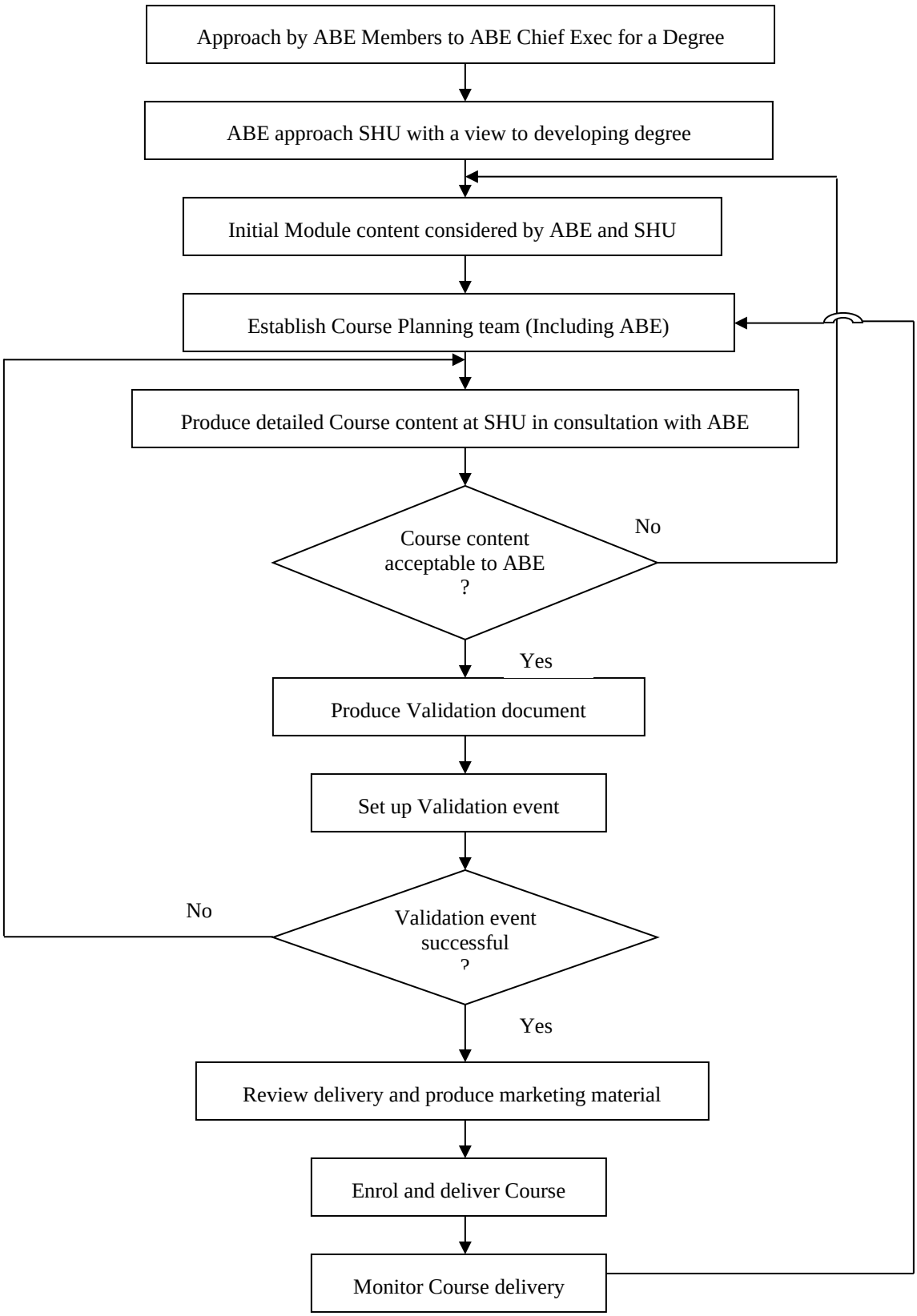

Figure 1: Developmental Flow Diagram