Continuing professional development (CPD) can be defined as ‘a planned systematic on-going process which allows individuals to maintain, update and enhance knowledge and expertise in order to ensure that they are able to carry out work safely and effectively’¹. It has always been an integral part of good practice, and a commitment to life-long learning is included in the Standards of Proficiency for Dietitians². Dietitians - like all registrants of the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) - must commit to continuing professional development (CPD) in order to remain registered and call themselves a Dietitian.

Relevance of CPD to registration
The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), formerly the HPC, replaced the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine (CPSM) in April 2002, and part of its remit was to set standards for CPD as the basis for re-registration requirements. The HCPC defines CPD³ as ‘A range of learning activities through which health and care professionals maintain and develop throughout their career to ensure that they retain their capacity to practise safely, effectively and legally within their evolving scope of practice.’ A consultation exercise was undertaken in 2004, and in 2005 CPD Standards were approved by the HCPC (then the HPC). Every renewal of registration since then has required signed confirmation from the registrant that these standards have been met.

Since 2008 the HCPC has set in place a process to randomly audit a proportion of all of the 16 health and care professions on the HCPC register. Every 2 years, in line with the registration period, a random sample of 2.5% of the profession will be selected. Those chosen are asked to submit evidence to show how their CPD meets the required 5 standards. The next audit for Dietitians will be 2014, and any Dietitian selected for audit must demonstrate their CPD activities for the previous two years. Importantly, this two years covers the actual registration period, which currently runs from July 1st to June 30th for Dietitians.

The BDA’s contribution
The BDA has developed a guide which is available now on the members’ area CPD section of the BDA website (http://members.bda.uk.com/profdev/education/cpd/index.html).

Continuing Professional Development
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This will enable all members not only to meet these requirements but also to plan and prepare for future CPD needs.

This guide includes:

1. The BDA Policy on CPD¹ – see below.
2. A tool for reflection. Reflective practice has been a key part of the Professional Standards it underlies both the principles of CPD and the standards of the HCPC. This is the process that we go through following any interaction with a patient or client. This tool helps us to formalise the process by demonstrating a staged method of learning through reflection. For those members less familiar with it, refer to the article on CPD for freelancers on the website and published in Dietetics Today, Vol.40, April 2005.
3. A guide to portfolio compilation. A concise guide to compilation, including an example of a portfolio based on NHS work but easily adapted to the freelance situation. A short course on portfolio preparation is regularly run by the BDA Centre for Education and Development.
4. A pro-forma for a personal development plan which will help you formulate objectives and identify training needs.

The BDA has also developed a Professional Development Award scheme. The 5-year structured award will help you to ensure Dietitians are up to date with collecting CPD evidence and writing the important reflective statements for the HCPC CPD audits. More details on the award is available on the website http://members.bda.uk.com/profdev/education/cpd/pda/index.html

In addition, multiple-choice and other questionnaires are included regularly in the Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics, Dietetics Today and other publications. It can be completed after reading a selected article and then returned to the BDA, or other organisation for marking. If a marking or similar evaluation is not available, self-evaluation is equally valuable. This initiative may be particularly useful for Dietitians who may not have access to formal educational or developmental activities.

**BDA Policy on CPD**

The BDA Policy on CPD is embodied in five guiding principles. These are listed below together with their application to freelance work:

- CPD is the responsibility of the individual. It applies to all members, whether or not they are involved directly in patient care, working independently or as part of a team. It must be resourced and therefore included in overheads and costings for project work. Potential employers must be made aware of resources required, and independent practitioners need to set aside time regularly for planning and engaging in CPD.
- CPD activity should be planned and based on identified outcomes rather than undertaken at random. For instance, to undertake advisory work for a charity, you could arrange to spend some time on a helpline listening to the kind of problems encountered by sufferers.
• CPD should lead to enhanced quality and delivery of care. There is a perceptible link between CPD and quality. Engaging in CPD activity should involve reflection and self-evaluation both, of which are crucial to the process. (See HCPC Standard 3, below)

• Recognition of a range of learning activities. CPD is not just about learning hours or course attendance, and should reflect both formal activities and the informal activities, which can often go unrecognised. Working on an exhibition stand can be as much a learning activity as researching evidence to compile fact sheets.

• Compiling a portfolio. This is a necessity for freelance work but it also can encourage a structured approach to CPD. Planning and evaluation of learning and its impact on practice is essential. A portfolio will provide evidence of previous learning activities as well as showing how standards are being met. Submission of appropriate evidence will help to meet the requirements for re-registration with the HCPC.

The HCPC Standards in detail
To meet the HCPC Standards the registrant must:
1. Maintain a continuous, up-to-date and accurate record of their CPD activities. (Gaps of more than 3 months duration should be explained – e.g. sickness, maternity leave, as any gaps would mean that the CPD activity is not considered ‘continuous’).

2. Demonstrate that their CPD activities are a mixture of learning activities relevant to current or future practice.

3. Seek to ensure that their CPD has contributed to the quality of their practice and service delivery.

4. Seek to ensure that their CPD benefits the service user.

5. Present, on request, a written profile (which must be their own work and supported by evidence) explaining how they have met the standards for CPD.

It is proposed that the profile will be made up as follows:
• a summary (maximum 500 words) of practice history over the previous two years.
• a statement (maximum 1500 words) of how the HCPC Standards for CPD have been met.
• evidence to support this statement.

The HCPC provides guidance on fulfilling the registration requirements on its website. Examples of profiles, types of CPD activity and evidence are also included.

Points of particular relevance to freelance Dietitians
Standard 2 requires that Dietitians demonstrate that their learning activities are relevant to current practice. If you are practising in both the NHS and the private sector and the scope of your practice is different in each, you should ensure that your CPD is relevant to both. You should consider which CPD activities best reflect both areas of your practice. As an example, you may see
children with allergies in a local private hospital and specialise in obesity and diabetes in your NHS post. Your CPD could include researching an article on allergy for an in-house Consultant Newsletter and taking part in a parents’ workshop at a local allergy support group, as well as attending and reporting back on a diabetes conference.

Other work may not involve any patient contact. In this case, the service user needs to be clearly defined so that standard 4 can be evaluated, based on the benefit of carrying out the CPD activity, to the client, organisation, population or company.

In the freelance world there is considerable potential for the scope of practice to change, but your CPD must show how you have prepared for that change and are aware of your scope and its limits. This is linked with ‘fitness to practise’, which is covered by the HCPC Standards of Proficiency.

Standards 3 and 4 both include the phrase ‘seek to ensure’ because ‘ensuring’ may be out of your control. The HCPC quote the example of a professional undertaking a learning activity to improve practice, but then on reflection finding that it was not as relevant as expected. This is still considered to be meeting the Standard because you have tried to make your CPD contribute to the quality of your practice. Similarly, you may decide to initiate changes to benefit service users, but then find that there has been no benefit, or that the benefit has been difficult to demonstrate. The Standard has still been met if you show that the changes were carefully considered.

Finally, there is no hard and fast rule as to the correct order of combining evidence and standards, but it seems to be generally agreed that taking a learning activity and then considering which Standard is evidenced by that activity is probably the easier method.

References
3. Health and Care Professions Council, Continuous Professional Development http://www.hpc-uk.org/utilitarians/cpd/

Fact Sheets are a valuable resource for members of the Freelance Dietitians Group and are available on request from the Group administrator: admin@freelancedietitians.org

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