

Piloting the proposed Continuing Competence Programme

Introduction

The Continuing Competence Programme (CCP) as outlined in the 2007 consultation document consists of a continual cycle of self-directed learning. The CCP is based on a self reflective review to generate learning goals which are used to direct professional development activities, then an evaluation of progress towards those goals and the generation of further learning goals. The proposed CCP was widely approved of by those who submitted consultation responses. However the feasibility of doing the self reflective review which is at the core of the programme had not been tested. It was also unknown how much professional development activity individual practitioners routinely do without undertaking the self reflective review. Therefore the Board secretariat decided to pilot the self reflective review and alongside that, to do a small stock-take of the professional development activities already undertaken routinely by a representative sample of psychologists. In order to achieve these goals, a randomly selected sample from the Register of Psychologists was generated, to avoid the bias towards the more diligent members of the profession which may have arisen by calling for volunteers. The individuals who confirmed their willingness to participate were asked to record their professional development activities for the months of September, October and November 2008. Some were also invited to trial the Self Reflective Review. A questionnaire on professional self esteem and related measures completed at the end of the recording period allowed us to explore whether there was any relationship between the amount of professional development activity and professional self esteem or confidence.

The pilot study had the following objectives:

1. To ascertain what time is spent on professional development activities currently in a randomly selected sample of psychologists.
2. To gain feedback about the proposed self reflection exercise, to inform any instructions that may be given in future.
3. To explore whether self-ratings on measures of professional esteem and confidence show any relationship to the amount of professional development activity undertaken.
4. To gain feedback about any perceived constraints and barriers to continuing competence activities experienced by psychologists.

All participants were chosen randomly from the full Register of Psychologists. Participants were anonymous to the main project coordinator by maintaining a separation between the administration and the analysis of the information. The rationale was explained as trialling the intended CCP to identify any teething problems before full implementation, and to give a good baseline understanding of continuing competence activities that psychologists are already undertaking. All participants were assured that no consequences hinged on their participation or responses given.

Approach taken

How much Professional Development activity is being done currently?

A sample of 61 psychologists (all current APC holders) were asked to record all the professional development activities undertaken over a three month period. This allowed a stock-take sample of records of professional development activities to add to our understanding of what individuals currently do without the Board requiring any prescribed

level of PD activity (although some individuals may be influenced by requirements imposed by other professional organisations).

Specifically, all participants were requested to record the time spent on any professional development activities undertaken over a three month period (September, October and November 2008) on a recording sheet, which offered the following categories:

- Supervision
- Attend workshop
- Attend seminar
- Attend conference
- Deliver paper to colleagues
- Peer networking
- Reading
- Personal development
- Other

Piloting the Self Reflective Review

A subset of this group were also invited to trial the self reflective review (SRR) exercise proposed as a fundamental step in the proposed CCP. Those who agreed to pilot the programme (N=23) were given the following instructions:

“You are requested to undertake a review of your professional functioning with the assistance of your supervisor or an equivalent mentor or senior colleague. The manner in which this is conducted is to be determined between yourself and your supervisor. However it is expected that it should include a systematic review which allows you to self-assess your current competence and degree to which you consider yourself to be up to date with best practice.

It is expected that the review will enable you to identify gaps or weaknesses in your knowledge, skills and attitudes and thereby generate your current and long term learning objectives. Both the review and the learning objectives should be recorded so that you can assess your own progress at a later date.

The manner in which you undertake the review is not prescribed. However the following templates may be of assistance to you.

Template 1: Checklist of Competencies

This table is a guide only to prompt systematic review. You should not be limited to the questions raised as those suggested are examples of possible lines of reflection. Individual practitioners are free to adopt what ever frame work is suited to their individual context.”

[templates from the consultation document were provided]

The SRR Pilot group was also asked to complete a brief questionnaire to obtain feedback on the SRR process. The questionnaire asked for information on the method used to conduct the SRR, who was engaged to assist, time spent on the review itself, any difficulties encountered, rating for usefulness and any other comments.

Is Professional Development related to professional self esteem?

All participants were also asked to complete a brief questionnaire on their professional practice at the end of the information gathering period. This questionnaire included the following:

Self rating (1-10) of confidence that up to date

Self rating of professional self esteem
 Self rating of professional confidence (as compared to anxiety or stress about practice)
 Self rating of satisfaction with the amount of professional development undertaken
 Rating of opportunistic versus directed professional development activity
 Note any barriers or constraints to planning professional development activities

Results

Professional Development activity

The records for each participant were summed up, grouping the data into four categories:

- Time spent on supervision
- Time spent on reading professional literature
- Time spent on seminars and other PD activities (including seminars, conferences, workshops, delivering paper to colleagues, peer networking, relevant personal development, and other)
- Total time spent on PD, which consisted of the total of the above categories

Some participants interpreted the “Other” and “personal development” categories more broadly than encompassed by the criteria used for the purpose of the analysis, to include personal development activities such as playing music, meditation, and other life-work balancing activities. The criterion for inclusion was deemed to be any activity that contributes to a psychologist’s knowledge and skills, or their ability to judge complex professional contexts within areas of practice and professional activity. Therefore those activities that were less clearly linked to professional learning were discounted for the purpose of establishing a baseline level of continuing competence activity.

Numbers refer to hours spent over the 3 month period

Activity	Frequency (hours) of activity over three months
Supervision (n=61)	M (SD) =7.5 (6.1) Range 0- 30 Median 6 (including 3 at nil and 9 at less than 1 hour per month)
Reading (n=56)	M (SD)= 21.5(28.1) Range 0- 180 Median 12
Seminars and other activities (n=59)	M (SD)= 34.7(24.4) Range 3-100 Median 28
All activities (n=59)	M (SD)= 62.0 (42.3) Range 8 -218 Median 51

The number of participants varied as a small minority of records were incomplete in the sense that it did not state the time spent on a recorded activity.

Pilot of the Self Reflective Review component of the CCP

The questionnaire on the SRR was analysed for themes to gain information about the experience of this exercise. The time taken to complete and the usefulness ratings were averaged.

1) Methods of conducting the CCP self reflective review

Summary of activities (N=23 participants):

Activity	Percentage using activity (N)
Used template	30% (7)
Discussed with supervisor	83% (19)
Self reflection	39% (9)
Reviewed continuing education certificates issued	9% (2)
Discussed changing face of psychology	4% (1)
Reflecting on professional journey	4% (1)
Discuss/reflect on goals for future	9% (2)
Discuss with peers, colleagues, manager	9% (2)
Reviewed competencies	13% (3)
Reviewed current practice	22% (5)
Other, (documentation)	4% (1)

2) Who did you receive assistance from to conduct the SRR?

Twenty three undertook the pilot SRR exercise. Of these,

- 21 (91%) used supervisor
- 4 (17%) used colleagues, senior peers
- 1 (4%) used manager (also supervisor)
- 1 (4%) used mentor

3) How long did it take you?

The average time taken was 2 hours twenty five minutes approximately (not including the more extended self reflection noted by some). Only one participant took more than 4 hours to conduct the review. The minimum time taken was 30 minutes and the maximum was 10 hours.

4) What difficulties were encountered in undertaking the SRR pilot and what other advice was offered?

Type of issue	Specific details	Reported frequency
Issues with the template provided	Template "felt artificial", repetitive, wording not relevant, did not like ethics section, should be less prescriptive, template not suit as currently not doing traditional practice, form off-putting and onerous, questions difficult to answer, avoid jargon	43% (n=10)
Time issues	Hard to find time when already busy; burdensome; time with supervisor already busy; opportunity cost high	17% (n=4)
Unnecessary	Already aware before started so SRR did not add much	17% (n=4)
SRR useful	Endorsing value of exercise, good prompt to re-read important documents and firm up action needed, good reminder of things to be aware of in practice, good to review with supervisor	30% (n=7)
Other things that should be included in SRR	Start with clear statement of current practice, include how profession is changing and your place in it, should include some evidence of competencies	9% (n=2)
Difficulty with criteria for	Difficult to know if up to date when practised in an area for years, difficulty deciding whether supervisor and	22% (n=5)

adequacy	psychologist agreed on a particular criterion, not knowing if there is something missed, some vignette examples of what is a deficit and what is a strength would be useful	
Difficulty with goal setting	Hard to know where to focus efforts to improve practice, hard to operationalise the updating of some core competencies, set goals get overtaken by more pressing professional needs	13%(n=3)
Issues with recording the SRR	Easier to record online, not remembering to record PD activities	9% (n=2)
Scope divisions unnecessary	Clinical and psychologist (templates) should be the same	13%(n=3)
Other suggestions	Write Te Tiriti o Waitangi in full, useful to have summary of where resources can be accessed, employers need to make time for the SRR available	F=3
Final comments	"A useful start to ensuring competency but doesn't seem enough"; "the simpler the process, the better"; "who is it for?"; and a request for feedback on the adequacy of response to template*	F=4

* Participants were not requested to return the template sheets as it was intended only as an aid to their own SRR process. However most did return their templates with detailed notes recorded on it. These template notes have not been analysed.

5) Did you find it a useful exercise?

The mean rating (N=23) was 6.5, SD 1.6 , Range 3-10.

Self ratings on aspects of professional vitality

At the end of the time period participants were requested to complete a brief questionnaire in which they were asked to rate themselves on various measures of professional self esteem, the directedness of their PD activity and any constraints and barriers to planning or taking part in PD.

The relationship between total time spent on professional development activities and self-rated professional self-esteem, confidence in being up to date, professional confidence, satisfaction with PD activity level and the directedness of PD activity was then assessed by way of correlation.

Rating on scale of 1-10	Mean (sd)	Range	Correlation with total time PD
Qa (n=61) Confidence that you are up to date with your professional psychology practice	7.4 (1.1))	3-10	0.42 Significant at 0.01 level
Qb (n=61) Your general professional self-esteem	7.4(1.3)	3-10	0.35 Significant at 0.01 level
Qc (n=61) Your professional confidence (high score indicating low anxiety or stress about practice, low score indicating high stress or anxiety)	7.4(1.2)	4-10	0.17 Not significant
Qd (n=61)	6.8 (1.8)	2-10	0.35

Satisfaction with the amount of professional development you are undertaking			Significant at 0.01 level
Qe (n=60) How opportunistic versus directed is your PD activity (high rating indicates highly directed PD activity)	6.4 (1.6)	4-10	0.22 Not significant

The data collected showed that those who recorded higher total number of hours of professional development also rated higher on the ratings of confidence of being up to date, of professional self-esteem and satisfaction with the amount of professional development activity respectively, with the correlation coefficient being statistically significant on each of these.

No association was found between the total number of hours of professional development and the ratings on professional confidence and the directedness of professional development activity.

Q f) Constraints to engaging in Professional Development activities

Information from participants (n=61)

Constraint	Frequency
Cost (funding, cost benefit analysis)	41% (n=25)
Availability of relevant seminars and courses, difficult to plan PD activities if rely just on local opportunities	28% (n=17)
Courses not sufficiently advanced to offer extension of knowledge	16% (n=10)
Geographically distanced from course, increasing time, cost to attend	26% (n=16)
Time constraints, without elaboration	18% (n=11)
Work pressure, therefore insufficient time, including work taking priority over longer term view of PD needs, making the time to keep up to date, events clashes with scheduled work, need to plan around staff constraints	36% (n=22)
Insufficient knowledge or notice of forthcoming events	16% (n=10)
Part time status exacerbates time and cost constraints	8% (n=5)
Private practice means need to fund oneself, training takes away from paid work	8% (n=5)
Insufficient PD leave/ funds, have to argue each case with employer	13% (n=8)
Financial constraints re overseas courses, including workplace resistance	10% (n=6)
Employer only funds courses directly relevant to work, there is a clash between personal aspirations/ preferences and what organisation dictates	7% (n=4)
Lack of managerial support, difficult to organise	5% (n=3)
Life/ work balance	7% (n=4)
Family responsibilities restrict time available	3% (n=2)
Difficulty choosing what most useful, direction for PD	3% (n=2)
No access to web-based search engines	2% (n=1)
Isolation as a private practitioner, few opportunities to network	3% (n=2)
Training providers are not using video conferencing which	2% (n=1)

would make training more widely available	
Not proactive enough to seek out opportunities	2% (n=1)
Training providers are deterred from providing courses by standards for professional competency accreditation	2% (n=1)
Not able to plan far ahead in current job	2% (n=1)
Workshops sometimes coincide with other conferences	2% (n=1)
Shyness	2% (n=1)

Conclusions

The Professional Development records

The Professional Development records showed wide variation between individuals. Most participants showed themselves to be relatively diligent about PD activities, with a small group showing low activity.

Feedback on the SRR exercise

Most participants who piloted the SRR found this to be a useful exercise, although a small minority reported that they did not find it useful, due to it being considered unnecessary or superfluous, given that the exercise was deemed to not add to those individuals' awareness or alternately, due to frustration with the template. Despite the instructions that the template (which systematically prompted consideration of practice against the core competencies) was only one approach and that it was not compulsory, it seemed most gravitated to using the questions/ prompts provided. The feedback on difficulties experienced included a lot of comments on the template. That, and the advice to "keep it simple" suggests that it is preferable to not attempt to structure the SRR for individuals by providing any list of prompts.

The time spent on the review averaged at almost two and a half hours. Given the high demands on time for most practitioners, it is imperative that any required SRR is tailor made for each individual to maximise usefulness and efficiency.

Questionnaire on professional self esteem

Most participants showed good professional self esteem and confidence that they were up to date, with a smattering of respondents rating themselves lower.

The assumption that PD is helpful to maintaining "professional vitality" was explored by looking at the relationship between total PD activity and the ratings as captured in the brief questionnaire completed at the end of the information gathering period. Within the constraints on interpretation (that this pilot study involved only a small sample, the rating scales were not validated and the professional development recording period was of short duration), this exploratory study shows a positive association between professional development activities and professional esteem, confidence of being up to date and satisfaction with the level of professional development undertaken.

Further study of the relationship between components of the CCP and the maintenance of aspects of professional wellbeing is warranted, as well as the relationship between professional wellbeing and the quality of care for the recipients of services.

Constraints on professional development activity

Feedback from participants indicated numerous constraints on their freedom to optimally direct their professional development activities. This was reflected in the relatively low rating of directedness of PD in the questionnaire. Individuals are constrained by many factors including limited availability of optimal learning opportunities, the cost, and competing demands for their attention or time. Some experience their employment situation as constraining for a variety of reasons. All of this will need to be taken into account when auditing of the CCP occurs.

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Thank you to those psychologists who were willing to participate in this information gathering exercise and the pilot of the SRR. The information obtained has been very useful in adjusting our instructions as we roll out the Continuing Competence programme to the profession, so your willingness to be involved is very much appreciated.

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