



Third SER CPD Feedback Report - from 2009 CPD Returns

Background

Professional bodies in the United Kingdom generally require that their members keep up to date with continuing changes in regulations and technology. The method by which this is monitored is often by requesting that an annual return for CPD is submitted to the relevant professional body for assessment.

The two professional engineering institutions which support the SER Scheme for Scotland are currently moving in the direction of compulsory annual reporting of CPD training which will then be routinely assessed.

The requirement for compulsory submission of an annual CPD return has been part of the SER scheme rules since the scheme started in 2005. Because the SER scheme is solely related to the certification of the structural design of buildings in Scotland it follows that the CPD should be relevant to this process, ie technical CPD, and a minimum requirement of 20 hours in each calendar year has been agreed with the Scottish Government.

The SER CPD programme commenced in the calendar year 2007 and the results have been very encouraging; the majority of certifiers have taken a responsible approach to their annual CPD training and understand the importance of undertaking CPD on a regular basis.

It has been commented by some certifiers that as they progress in their careers it becomes more difficult to increase their knowledge. SER believes that all certifiers are able to gain new knowledge each year, particularly with ongoing changes to the building regulations and the introduction of the use of Eurocodes in the design of building structures.

Introduction to this report

During 2009 SER completed the third year of audited CPD Returns. This third report is being circulated to inform members of the scheme, professional institutions and other interested organisations regarding the outcome of the process. This report follows the first report issued in December 2008 and the second report issued in December 2009 and it is hoped that this information will continue to assist scheme members with the preparation and planning of CPD in future years and assist professional bodies and training organisations with the preparation of programmes and events.

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The 2009 CPD Programme

The 2009 CPD Returns were issued to the appropriate Certifiers in February 2010 with the request that they be completed online by 31 March 2010.

In February 2010 there were 468 Certifiers who were notified that they were required to make a CPD return for 2009. During March 2010 two e-mail reminders were also sent. Due to resignations and suspensions for other reasons the final number of expected CPD returns reduced to 434. Eventually 428 acceptable returns (98.6%) were submitted by members of the scheme.

The Results of the 2009 CPD Assessments

As in the previous years every CPD return was assessed by two members of the Scottish Registration Board but it was arranged that different assessor pairings would be selected to assess individual 2009 CPD returns. Where returns were considered to be borderline or confusing the certifiers were asked to supply further information and in some cases were referred for consideration by a full meeting of the SRB.

The breakdown of the outcome of these assessments is as follows:

CPD Approved	327	(356)
CPD Failed to meet standard 1 st time	89	(51)
CPD Failed to meet standard 2 nd time	5	(14)
CPD Not Approved	7	(11)
CPD Not Submitted	<u>6</u>	<u>(5)</u>
	434	437

The figures shown in brackets indicate the results from the previous year.

It can be seen that the number of returns that were classified as “CPD Approved” was somewhat less and the number of returns that were assessed as “CPD Failed to meet standard” for the 1st time was somewhat more than the previous year. This is probably a result of the more definitive guidance on the “relevance” of certain CPD activities. It can also be seen that there has been a substantial improvement in the categories of returns that were assessed as “CPD Failed to meet standard 2nd time” and “CPD Not Approved” compared with the previous year.

It should be noted that an assessment of “Failed to meet standard” for the 1st time will not result in any immediate action by SER, and it is hoped that the assessors comments will assist certifiers with their CPD returns for the following year.

There were twelve certifiers whose 2009 CPD returns were classified as either “CPD Failed to meet standard” for the 2nd time or “CPD Not Approved”. These certifiers were subsequently interviewed by members of the Scottish Registration Board to discuss areas of difficulty and then invited to re-submit a 2009 CPD return. Eleven of these certifiers were subsequently able to satisfy the panel regarding their re-submitted 2009 CPD returns. The other certifier declined to re-submit a return and

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was therefore suspended from the scheme until such time that he makes a satisfactory return.

In most of these cases the initial submissions were rejected because of insufficient information having been provided in the initial submission, particularly where there was some doubt as to the relevance of the CPD claimed to certification. The provision of a more detailed submission would have resulted in a significant time saving to both the SER assessors and the individual certifiers.

The 6 Certifiers who failed to submit a 2009 CPD return by the final deadline of 31 July 2010 were suspended from the scheme from noon on 6 August 2010 until such time that they make a satisfactory return.

CPD Content

Both the Guidance Note 7 and the CPD Return clearly state that the submission should only include CPD that is directly relevant to the role of an Approved Certifier and their certification activities. The CPD Return also clearly asks for details of learning points to be included. Although there has been an improvement in this respect for 2009 returns some Certifiers still appear to misunderstand these basic requirements. Certifiers should understand that “learning points” are in fact details of the new knowledge gained from the CPD activity.

The layout of the 2010 CPD Returns has therefore been modified in order to make it easier for correct completion. Learning points have been re-titled “Description of new knowledge gained (learning points)” and a separate box has been provided for this information which has to be completed. The box titled “Further CPD information” has been re-titled “Further information request to clarify CPD activities submitted”. There is now a facility for assessors to send back a CPD Return in those situations where the submitted return is clearly not acceptable. In order to help certifiers with their CPD record keeping a “CPD Activity Notepad” facility is now available and certifiers are able to electronically transfer this information to the actual CPD Return at an appropriate time.

CPD is a holistic activity, not just relating to attendance at courses, and should contain an appropriate balance of activities including attendance at meetings / courses / seminars, private study, work based learning etc. Certifiers should be aware that CPD returns which are overly reliant on one topic, or type, of learning may be marked down on this basis.

In the current economic climate SER understands the difficulties that some certifiers have experienced in attending courses and seminars during the calendar year 2010. Certifiers should however be aware that other forms of CPD are acceptable and that it is the “learning points or new knowledge gained” that is considered to be of greater importance than the method of delivery.

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Assessors Guidance – this guidance generally repeats that included in the previous CPD Feedback Report and is included again for readers' convenience

In order to provide Certifiers with some advice regarding the assessment process the following guidance notes have been prepared by the Scottish Registration Board. It is hoped that these guidance notes will assist Certifiers in the completion of future CPD returns.

1. Absence of sufficient detail of Learning Points:

Where insufficient detail of learning points has been provided within the return assessors will seek to have this clarified by activating a “Further information request to clarify CPD activities submitted” via the online system. If this does not produce the necessary information then the assessment will be completed on the basis of the information submitted with the return even if this involves rejecting the stated CPD training.

2. NCE / Journal General Reading:

Where CPD hours are submitted in respect of reading IStructE Journal, ICE proceedings, NCE and various similar technical magazines assessors will consider the amount of detail provided in the learning points to assist in their judgement of the validity and quality of the CPD.

If reference is made to specific articles and papers (which are relevant to certification) and learning points are stated then the hours claimed will be allowed in full (unless they appear to be grossly disproportionate to the topic).

Where only a vague and general statement about reading magazines is made with little or no detail or learning points stated then the benefit the certifiers will have obtained from such CPD will be considered to be limited and only part of the time claimed may be considered justified.

3. Training / Mentoring/Lecturing

In many cases certifiers have included mentoring junior staff, assisting in staff training or lecturing to staff, students and school children as part of their CPD. Once again these items will be considered in respect of the relevance of the topic and the level of information and detail provided, with particular emphasis on any new knowledge or benefit the certifier may have gained as a result of these activities.

Where lecturing or providing training is being carried out in respect of a topic which will involve the certifier in a significant level of research and the development of additional knowledge then the hours claimed will be allowed in full (unless they appear disproportionate to the topic).

Where a lecture is being prepared based on the certifiers existing knowledge and experience he/she will personally achieve limited benefit (although it is

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recognised that preparing a lecture usually involves a beneficial clearing and ordering of the mind from which the certifier may gain further insight into his/her topic and in feedback from a general discussion by an audience).

In respect of mentoring junior staff the “acceptable” hours will be discounted unless the certifier has demonstrated a strong case for personal learning from the exercise.

Certifiers must clearly demonstrate the increased knowledge they have gained from these activities to enable the assessors to make a judgement as to how much relevant time should be credited to such activities.

4. CDM / Safety Training

Whilst an up to date awareness of the requirements of the CDM Regulations and General Health and Safety obligations is obviously an essential requirement for designers as certifiers we are confirming the compliance of the buildings with the Scottish Building Regulations and Technical Standards and except where specifically included or implied in these documents certification does not require assessment of the Health and Safety Risks during construction or operation of the building.

CDM and Safety training should therefore not be considered relevant as part of an SER CPD submission except where detailed and relevant learning points are stated in the submission. Once again the assessors’ judgement of the relevance of the CPD will be based on the information provided in the submission.

5. IT / Software Training

A fairly wide variety of IT and software issues have been submitted as part of certifiers CPD ranging from researching purchase of new software to updating/uploading previous software, learning or familiarising new programmes or training staff on the use of programmes.

The first test of relevance is what is the programme and is its use relevant to certification activities? General “office” software, use of library search programmes, and/or design programmes unrelated to the scope of certification will be discounted in full. Programmes meeting this test, including Structural design and Analysis programmes, will then be further considered in respect of the following:

Researching the purchase of new programmes and updating / uploading previous software will again be discounted as there will be limited relevant benefit obtained.

Where the certifier is gaining familiarity with analysis / design programmes, whose primary use will be in the role of designer, it is recognised that the certifier must be familiar with the workings and the limitations of the programme to enable him/her to assess the suitability of the designs produced.

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Some allowance may be made for such activities where they are included within a submission however such activities should only form a limited proportion of the overall CPD and once again the assessor's judgement will reflect the level of detail/justification provided and any clear benefits which have been gained from such activities.

Again clear learning points should be stated and the assessors will base their judgement on these.

6. SER Audits (including preparation for and response to)

Whilst certifiers will obviously gain considerable benefit from the audits this will be considered as the normal execution of their certification duties, rather than CPD, and a maximum of 2 hours will be permitted (reflecting the fact that there would be some benefit gained against such activities).

7. Sustainability

This heading covers a wide variety of topics included in CPD returns and whilst generally it is not directly related to certification the impending increases in energy standards to be incorporated in the Technical Standards from 2010 will have significant impacts on structural design and lead to developments which the certifiers will require to be aware of.

Where the CPD submitted has clear relevance to the structural engineering aspects of buildings, and detailed learning points are provided, CPD under this heading will be allowed only where the certifier has demonstrated its relevance and where the hours claimed are considered to be commensurate with any benefits gained, for example a 1 day sustainability seminar may only have 1 hour which is relevant to structural certification / engineering.

All other cases of general reading or course attendance related to sustainability where there is no specific linkage to structure and certification, either in the topic or the stated learning points, will be discounted in full.

8. Waterproofing / Gas Protection

Again whilst these may have implications on the structural design of buildings the scope of SER certification does not cover these issues therefore they are of little relevance and the assessors' judgement will be based on the justification provided.

9. Seismic Design / Loading

Whilst Seismic effects may be considered for some categories of structure this is not a requirement of the Building Regulations or Certification for Building Warrant. On the other hand developing an understanding of structural response to Seismic loading brings in useful structural concepts of dynamics and energy.

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It is therefore considered appropriate that some allowance for CPD relating to Seismic activities should be allowed where submitted, however this will be limited in respect of the relevance of the benefits in understanding gained from these activities.

10. Foreign Projects / Standards and Codes

This was a feature of a number of submissions in the 2008 CPD assessment and given the current economic circumstances it is likely that more certifiers employed by the bigger practices will become involved in the design of projects overseas which will require them to learn about alternative codes of practices, building regulations and practices.

Such activities have no obvious relevance to certification in Scotland and will therefore be discounted in full unless clear and relevant learning points are stated.

11. SUDS / Flooding

Although these topics may be relevant to Planning Applications, and in some cases Building Warrant Applications, these are clearly outwith the scope of certification and any CPD submitted in respect of these topics will be discounted in full.

12. Work Based Learning

The 2008 and 2009 submissions saw an increased reliance on work based learning and given the current economic conditions it is anticipated that this trend will increase into 2010 submissions, and probably beyond, as companies training budgets are reduced.

It is recognised that project related work based learning can be a valid and valuable part of an individual's CPD, however this only applies where the certifier is working on something new to extend his/her knowledge and capabilities or updating his/her knowledge in a given field.

In judging the value and relevance of such activities assessors will rely heavily on the stated learning points to make a judgement on whether or not the certifier will have learned anything new and beneficial through the activities registered or whether he/she is more likely to have just been carrying out his/her normal duties using existing knowledge and experience.

Assessors will make a judgement as to the benefits gained and decide on how much of the recorded CPD to allow as valid, if necessary requesting further information from the certifiers.