

Scheme for Certification of Design (Building Structures)



Guidance Note 7 – Revision B

Continuing Professional Development

SER Approach to CPD

The need to undertake regular Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has become part of the fabric of the professional engineer's life. CPD is regarded by SER as a key indicator of whether a member of the scheme continues to maintain the knowledge and understanding necessary to fulfil the role of a certifier.

In approving the SER scheme for structural certification the Scottish Government has demonstrated considerable confidence in the ability of the engineering professions to protect public safety. With this responsibility comes a duty to maintain knowledge and skills at a level necessary to discharge the duties of a Certifier throughout the engineer's working life. The certifying engineer has to operate against a background of an increasingly litigious business culture. If a Certifier is to become involved in such litigation, they are likely to have to prove their current competence and will be at risk professionally if he/she does not maintain – and is able to produce – adequate CPD documentation when it is needed.

Through CPD monitoring SER is able to demonstrate to the Scottish Government and to the public that engineers licensed under the scheme are ensuring that their knowledge and skills are up to date and relevant to the duties of a certifier. The scheme agreement with Scottish Government requires that Certifiers record CPD annually.

Under the Scheme, Approved Certifiers are required to keep themselves up to date with developments in structural engineering design, the Building Regulations and other relevant documentation. They are required (see section 4.4.2 of the Scheme Guide) to submit an annual return of relevant Continuing Professional Development activity. Approved Bodies are required (see section 4.5.1 of the Scheme Guide) to make provision to promote the CPD of Approved Certifiers in support of their certification activities.

Approved Bodies are reminded of their commitment to support the CPD of Certifiers in their employment.

Professional Institutions

SER is underpinned by both the Institution of Structural Engineers (IStructE) and the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) and is mindful of the arrangements that these Institutions have in place to monitor CPD.

SER CPD Monitoring Procedure

Each year in February Approved Certifiers will be contacted by SER, by e-mail, requesting that they complete a standard online form summarising their CPD activities for the previous calendar year. Standard ICE or IStructE CPD forms may be uploaded as an alternative to part of the SER form. Information must be submitted by no later than the end of March each year (for those who do not meet this deadline the ability to create certificates will be disabled until such time as they make a return). The SER return includes a section that requires the certifier to explain how his/her approach to CPD has met their personal requirements.

Monitoring of CPD will be carried out as part of the Audit Process. CPD returns submitted during the previous three years will be discussed with the Approved Certifier in the course of the audit. The outcome of this discussion will be recorded in the audit report and will be reviewed when the audit outcome is being considered.

The amount of CPD (number of hours) that is appropriate to an individual may vary from year to year depending on such things as workload requirements, changes to codes and standards and changes to legislation.

Certifiers must undertake sufficient CPD to develop and maintain the professional knowledge, skills and competence appropriate to the type of work that they certify and their existing level of knowledge.

As a guide SER consider that 60 hours over a three-year period is appropriate, and in line with the requirements of other professions, for Certifiers who undertake work on a variety of projects of different types, sizes and in different materials. Describing the target in this way will allow for peaks and troughs in requirements and supply.

There may be circumstances where a reduced requirement of say 30 hours over 3 years may be appropriate for Certifiers operating in a restricted field of projects, such as small domestic work, on which they have worked exclusively for a number of years.

It will be up to the Certifier to demonstrate to the auditors that the amount of CPD undertaken and its relevance to the range of projects being certified is appropriate.

Certifiers should be aware that the outcome of a CPD review may be made available to any disciplinary hearing or investigation that may arise regarding certification practice.

Content of CPD

Professional engineers must continue to develop skills across a wide range of topics that will go beyond knowledge of structural engineering. SER however requires that an Approved Certifier undertakes CPD relevant to the specific skills required by an Approved Certifier of Design. These topics will include such things as the need to keep up to date with changes to design codes and standards, changes to construction methods and keeping abreast of building standards legislation.

CPD must be relevant to the type of work being undertaken and Certifiers should be able to demonstrate that they have taken the necessary steps to remain up to date with developments that are relevant to their chosen areas of work.

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 difficult to justify at audit.

SER will continue to issue guidance and feedback on matters that are considered relevant to Certifiers.

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