



Ag Rialáil Gairmithe Sláinte
agus Cúraim Shóisialaigh

Regulating Health
Social Care Professionals

Social Workers Registration Board CPD Audit Trend Report

Social Workers Registration Board

Bord Clárchúcháin na nOibrithe Sóisialta

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Introduction

CORU

CORU is responsible for regulating health and social care professions. It comprises the Health and Social Care Professionals Council and the Registration Boards established under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended).

CORU's role is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, education, training and competence amongst the designated professions.

The designated professions under the Act are clinical biochemists, dietitians, dispensing opticians, medical scientists, occupational therapists, optometrists, orthoptists, podiatrists, physiotherapists, psychologists, radiographers, radiation therapists, social care workers, social workers, speech and language therapists.

Social Workers Registration Board

The Minister for Health and Children appointed the Social Workers Registration Board on 5 August 2010.

The Social Workers Registration Board has statutory responsibility for:

- › Establishing and maintaining the register of social workers
- › Recognising qualifications gained outside the State
- › Approving and monitoring education and training programmes for entry to the register
- › Setting the code of professional conduct and ethics, which give guidance to professionals on Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

CPD Portfolio Audit

The Social Workers Registration Board introduced their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Standard and Requirements for social workers on 31 May 2015 with the first CPD cycle completed on 31 May 2017.

Continuing Professional Development is a specified requirement in the Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics. CPD is an important tool for registrants to maintain their professional knowledge and skills and is a priority for the Social Workers Registration Board. The role of the Board is to provide support and guidance to registrants regarding CPD and as such, the Board determined the first audit of their registrants' CPD Portfolio's would be conducted on a voluntary basis.

This report highlights the key findings arising from the CPD Audit, as well as the learning outcomes achieved. These outcomes will inform the development of monitoring processes and CPD requirements for health and social care professionals regulated by CORU going forward.

The Board would like to acknowledge the registrants who voluntarily participated in this audit. The value placed on engaging in CPD was evident from those registrants who participated. Not all portfolios submitted for review met all the CPD requirements or standards of recording. However, the efforts made by registrants was evident. Of note, many registrants provided further information on receiving feedback, though not required to. This additional information demonstrated they were compliant with the Board's requirements.

Background

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a core element of CORU's regulatory framework, as specified in the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended). The Act requires a Registration Board to provide guidance and support to registrants concerning the practice of the designated profession and continuing professional development.

The Social Workers Registration Board recognises CPD as integral to professional social work practice. As such, the Professional Code of Conduct and Ethics for Social Workers requires that registrants participate in CPD on an ongoing basis. Therefore, once registered, a social worker is required to abide by their Professional Code of Conduct and Ethics.

The Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Social Workers (p.11, 2011) states that:

- a) You must make sure that your knowledge, skills and performance are of a high quality, are up to date and are relevant to your practice.
- b) You must:
 - > Maintain and develop your professional competence by undertaking relevant education and training to improve your knowledge and skills;
 - > Keep up to date with relevant knowledge, research methods and techniques so that your service, research activities and conclusions will help and not harm others. You can do this, for example, by reading relevant literature, consulting with peers and taking part in continuing education activities;
 - > Take part in continuing professional development (CPD);
 - > Keep clear and accurate records of CPD (CORU, 2011, p. 11).

The Health and Social Care Professionals Council, whose role is to oversee and coordinate the activities of Registration Boards, developed the Framework for CPD Standard and Requirements to ensure consistency among professions regulated by CORU. This framework was adopted by the Social Workers Registration Board after consultation with social workers, the public and other key stakeholders. The adoption of the Social Workers CPD Standard signalled the commencement of a 24 month CPD audit cycle, which ran from 31 May 2015 to 31 May 2017.

The CPD requirements set by the Social Workers Registration Board were:

1. A registrant must engage in a range of CPD activities on an ongoing basis.
2. A registrant must complete 60 CPD credits in a 24 month period.
3. A registrant must demonstrate that their CPD activities are relevant to their professional role and mindful of current and future practice. CPD should be based on a self-directed review of their knowledge, skills, performance and professional qualities in the context of their professional practice.
4. A registrant must maintain an up to date CPD portfolio. The CPD portfolio must include:
 - > Description of current professional role and practice setting
 - > Personal learning plan
 - > Record of CPD activities
 - > Reflections on a number of CPD activities
 - > Evidence of undertaking CPD activities.
5. A registrant must, upon request from the relevant registration board, submit their CPD portfolio (which must be their own work and supported by evidence) for periodic audits of compliance with the CPD standard and requirements.

Social Workers Registration Board rationale for voluntary audit

In preparation for the first series of mandatory audits due to commence in 2017, a legal review of the CPD process was sought. From the time CORU's CPD framework was first developed, there have been significant changes in the regulatory landscape arising from new legal judgements. One such case, *Corbally v Medical Council*, Supreme Court ruling, indicated and reinforced that a threshold level of seriousness in dealing with complaints must be met to uphold a complaint for poor professional performance or professional misconduct. This had implications for the enforcement of CORU's CPD Audit.

Furthermore, the Social Workers Registration Board conducted a survey on CPD engagement with registrants in 2016. The findings from this survey indicated that the majority of registrants were participating in CPD but many were anxious about the prospect of being called for audit. It highlighted that registrants were in the habit of engaging in CPD, but that the requirement to record learning was new and oftentimes considered burdensome.

In light of these considerations, the Board decided to defer the introduction of the mandatory CPD audit subject to a review of the CPD Standard and Requirements and their monitoring processes. Notwithstanding this decision, the Social Workers Registration Board, in recognition of the significant efforts of their registrants to engage in and maintain records of their CPD activities over the previous 24 month CPD cycle, decided to undertake a voluntary, non-punitive audit.

The purpose of this audit was:

- › To provide feedback to participants on achievement of CPD requirements and standards of recording
- › To inform the review of CORU's CPD model and monitoring processes.

Selection for CPD Audit

The Social Workers Registration Board decision on the audit was communicated to registrants by email on 24 May 2017 and information made available on CORU's website www.coru.ie. This correspondence stipulated the criteria by which registrants would be selected and invited to participate in a voluntary audit.

The criteria were:

- › 10% of registrants would be invited to participate,
- › Only those who had been on the register for the full 24 month (May 2015-May 2017) CPD cycle would be eligible to be selected.

Registrants who were selected and invited to participate in the audit were advised that they had the option to opt in, or opt out, of an audit of CPD Portfolios. The Social Workers Registration Board assured registrants selected of the non-punitive nature of the audit and that there would be no consequences to their registration if they chose not to participate, nor would they be automatically called for audit in the future.

The deadline for submission of CPD portfolios was the 07 July 2017, although registrants were offered a time extension should they have required one. In total, 343 participants were randomly selected, which represented 10% of the social workers register during the relevant 24 month period. Further communication was issued to all registrants to advise that they could request to participate even if they had not been selected. Registrants were assured that this would be accommodated where possible.

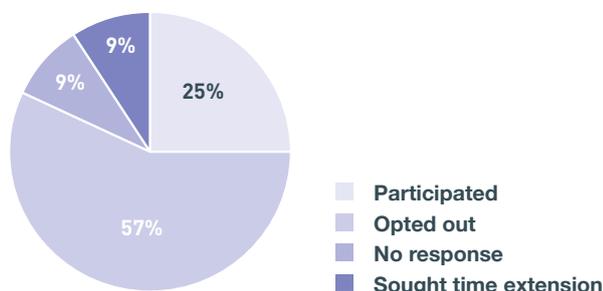
Participation and participant profile

Of the 10% of registrants (343) invited to participate in the CPD Portfolio Audit, 25% (84) chose to participate, with a further 9% (31) requesting a time extension to submit their portfolios. Fifty seven percent (197) opted not to participate in the voluntary audit. Nine percent (31) did not respond to the initial invitation or follow up emails regarding participation in the audit.

Indeed, 3% (8) have been removed from the register subsequent to the invitation to participate in audit, either due to non-payment of fees or request for voluntary removal.

Of the 9% (31) who sought a time extension, only 5 registrants submitted within the required timeframe to be included in the qualitative findings presented in this report. A further 4 registrants who had sought time extensions submitted after this period.

Figure 1 | Registrants selected for audit participation rates (n=343)



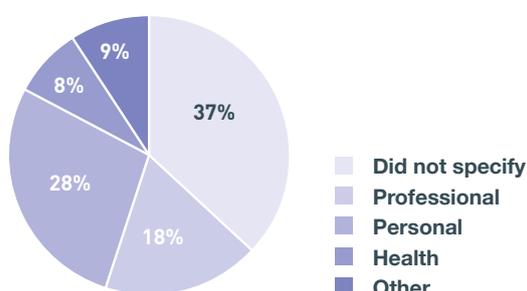
In addition to the 10% random sample called, a further 31 registrants not selected for audit requested to participate. These requests were accommodated. In total, 115 portfolios were received in sufficient time for inclusion in this report.

The registrants randomly selected to participate in the audit represented a broad geographical spread and range of work place settings in which social workers practice. The age range of the sample was 25 to 72 years of age, with an average age of 44. This is representative of the age profile of the social workers on the register at the time of audit.

Non-participation in Audit

Of those who declined to participate in the audit (197), 37% (73) did not specify a reason for non-participation. Twenty eight percent (55) highlighted professional reasons such as career break, changing role/job or current workload, while 18% (35) indicated personal reasons such as maternity leave, recent bereavement or ill health of a child or loved one. A further 8% (16) cited health reasons, with 9% (18) categorised as other, due to the variety of reasons cited.

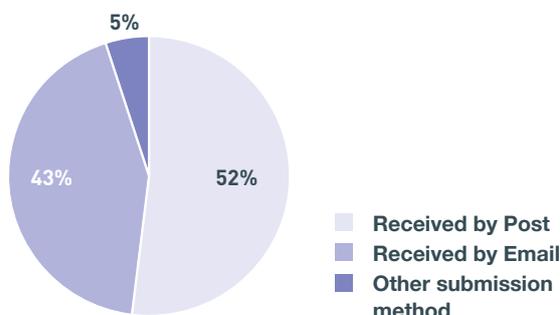
Figure 2 | Reasons for non-participation (n=192)



Of the 115 portfolios included in this analysis, 73% were received from registrants who were selected for audit and 27% from registrants who requested to participate.

Of note, 52% (60) of participants submitted copies of their portfolio by post, with a further 4% (5) using a combination of post for supporting documentation with soft copies of portfolio received by email. One registrant submitted their portfolio using a cloud based solution, with the remaining registrants 43% (49) submitting documents by email.

Figure 3 | Method of submission (n=115)



The majority of registrants used the CORU CPD Portfolio template. Of those registrants that did not use the template, the relevant information required was provided.

Methodology

The portfolio review was conducted internally by CORU’s executive staff within the education department. The review focused on two criteria:

- a) The achievement of CPD requirements
- b) Standards of recording

This review allowed for meaningful feedback to be given to registrants on criteria that was measured during audit. It also aided the individual’s learning to better articulate their CPD using a portfolio whilst demonstrating achievement of the Board’s CPD requirements.

Measurement of CPD Requirements

1	A registrant must engage in a range of CPD activities on an ongoing basis.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › A minimum of two different types of learning activities must be recorded, with at least one learning activity recorded every three months in the relevant period.
2	A registrant must complete 60 CPD credits in a 24 month period.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › The total number of CPD credits assigned to learning activities should equate to 60 CPD credits over the relevant 24 months. There must be sufficient supporting documentation to evidence engagement in each CPD activity for which CPD credits are assigned.
3	A registrant must demonstrate that their CPD activities are relevant to their professional role and mindful of current and future practice. CPD should be based on a self-directed review of their knowledge, skills, performance and professional qualities in the context of their professional practice.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › The CPD Portfolio must include a description of the registrant’s professional role and practice setting. The learning needs identified in the registrant’s personal learning plan should clearly link to their professional role. Learning needs must generally correlate to the learning activities listed on the CPD log with evidence of how learning achieved has informed and is relevant to the registrant’s professional practice.
4	A registrant must demonstrate that their CPD activities are relevant to their professional role and mindful of current and future practice. CPD should be based on a self-directed review of their knowledge, skills, performance and professional qualities in the context of their professional practice.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › All sections of the CPD portfolio are completed and submitted including a description of professional role and practice setting, a personal learning plan, a log of CPD activities and reflective practice reports. These activities should not be dated retrospectively, but evidence continuous engagement in learning and development over the relevant period.
5	A registrant must, upon request from the relevant registration board, submit their CPD portfolio (which must be their own work and supported by evidence) for periodic audits of compliance with the CPD standard and requirements.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › The Social Workers Registration Board had determined the first CPD audit would be on a voluntary basis.

Each portfolio was assessed with consideration of each individual CPD requirement to determine if sufficient information was presented that evidenced meeting each.

Measurement of Standards of Recording

The standards of recording expected referred to the inclusion of all required information.

As highlighted under the Social Workers Registration Board CPD requirements, a CPD portfolio must include:

- > Description of current professional role and practice setting
- > Personal learning plan
- > Record of CPD activities
- > Reflections on a number of CPD activities
- > Evidence of undertaking CPD activities.

Any missing information from a CPD Portfolio (for example, no personal learning plan) was considered not to have met the required standard of recording.

Furthermore, it was expected that individual learning achieved and how this learning impacted a registrant's practice would be detailed. In circumstances where learning was generalised (for example, a description of a learning activity) or where little information was provided to evidence or demonstrate learning attained, this was considered not to have met the standards of recording expected.

Each portfolio was reviewed and individual feedback was provided to each registrant who participated in the audit. It was recognised that learning from this audit would be beneficial to all health and social care professionals regulated by CORU. It was determined that a qualitative analysis would help to identify key trends that would be beneficial in order to share the learning outcomes from the audit. This would further enhance registrants' understanding of maintaining records to demonstrate achievement of CPD requirements set by their Registration Board.

Qualitative Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted of CPD Portfolios, although some portfolios were excluded as significant information was missing or insufficient information had been provided to allow analysis. In total, 64% (74) portfolios of the 115 portfolios submitted were determined to have sufficient information to allow thematic analysis. Thirty six percent (41) were excluded at this stage of the review. The qualitative review included portfolios that met all CPD requirements and standards of recording, as well as those that did not.

Results

Attainment of CPD Requirements and Standards of Recording

Of the total portfolios submitted for audit (115), 49% (57) met the CPD requirements set by the Board, while 51% (58) were deemed not to have achieved all CPD requirements. The most common CPD requirement not achieved was the demonstration of ongoing engagement in CPD activities (i.e. one activity recorded every three months) over the relevant 24 month period. It was evident from feedback from registrants who participated in the audit that achievement of ongoing engagement in CPD was not well understood.

In addition, the audit highlighted that almost two thirds of participants achieved standards of recording (71), although, over one third did not achieve expected standards (44). The most common reason for not achieving expected standards of recording was failure to record sufficient information that demonstrated learning gained and how learning was applied to practice.

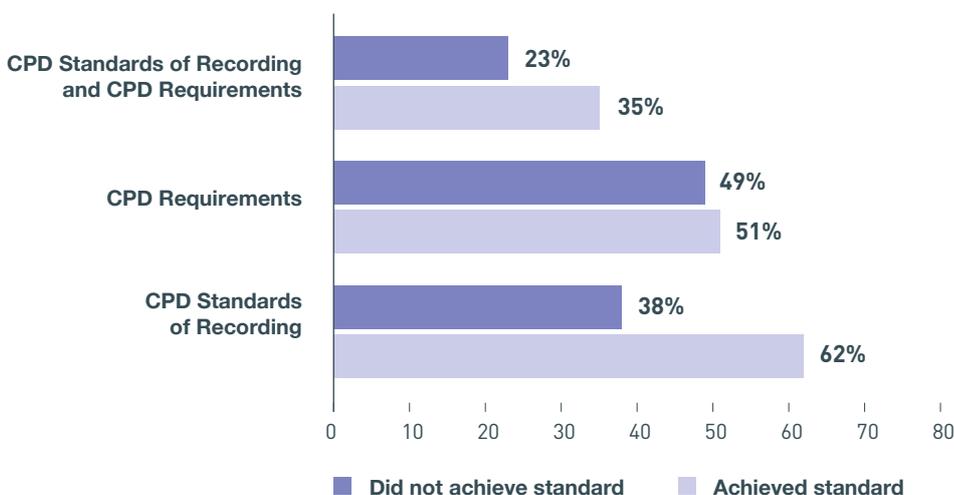
Often, the detail provided was a general overview of the activity (i.e. objectives of a training course), rather than a personal reflection on new learning achieved by the registrant.

It was evident that CPD credits assigned did not always demonstrate the learning achieved. This was due to describing the activity itself, rather than articulating individual learning achieved and how this informed or was applied to professional practice.

Overall, 35% (40) of the total sample (115) met both the CPD requirements and standards of recording. Twenty-three percent (26) did not meet the CPD requirements nor the standards of recording expected.

Upon receiving feedback on their portfolios, 19 participants submitted further information, though they were not required to do so. This increased the percentage of participants who met both the CPD requirements and standard of recording to 51%.

Figure 4 | Achievement of CPD Requirements and Standards of Recording



Qualitative Analysis – Achievement of CPD Requirements and Standards

The thematic review evidenced significant achievement across specific CPD requirements and standards of recording including;

1. Quality of detail in description of professional role and practice setting
2. Quality and depth of reflective practice reports
3. Clear association between learning needs, activities undertaken and impact on practice
4. Detail and consideration given to identifying learning needs in personal learning plan
5. Over achievement of CPD credit requirements through a broad range of CPD activities in which registrants had engaged

1 Quality of detail in description of professional role and practice setting

Standard: The information provided in the description of professional role and practice should focus on the registrants own personal duties and day to day activities as well as areas of specialism. The focus should then shift to the organisation function and size and provide a general anonymised overview of service user needs.

Overall, an analysis of the sample portfolios found an excellent standard with regard to description of registrants' professional role and practice setting. The descriptions included details of the registrants' area of practice, details of their role and function, their organisations purpose and size, as well as a general overview of their service user's needs. This allowed reviewers to appreciate the relevance of the learning achieved to registrants' current, and future practice.

2 Quality and depth of reflective practice reports

Standard: In the reflective reports it is anticipated that registrants would further develop the learning gained from an activity, reflect on their own practice and demonstrate how this learning has or will impact their professional practice to the benefit of the service user.

Overall, the review highlighted an excellent standard of reflective practice report writing from submissions. The majority of portfolios included in the qualitative analysis evidenced a clear understanding and value attributed to reflective practice by registrants. The quality of information provided highlighted the depth of reflection on learning achieved and how this learning had impacted or enhanced the registrant's practice.

It was noted that registrants could complete a reflective practice report on a CPD activity listed in their record on CPD activities, or may reflect on an entirely different learning activity.

Moreover, several reflective reports highlighted the impact that personal experiences can have on registrants' practice. In some cases, reflections focused on how personal experiences challenged their assumptions or enhanced their understanding of service users' perspectives. Reflective practice reports demonstrated how reflecting on personal experiences or day-to-day practice contributed to enhancing professional practice and quality of service delivery.

3 Clear association between learning needs, activities undertaken and impact on practice

Standard: It is expected that there be a clear association between learning needs identified, learning activities chosen to meet those needs and reflection on the impact this learning has on registrant's practice. The reflective practice report is intended to deepen the learning gained from an activity by reflecting on their own practice and applying this learning for the benefit of the service user.

It was evident from analysis of sample portfolios that there was a clear association between learning needs, activities completed and reflective practice reports. This demonstrated that registrants had selected activities that would enable them to meet their identified learning need. This learning was consolidated in the reflective practice learning reports which evidenced how the learning was or would be integrated into professional practice. This achievement was most commonly highlighted to participants in individual feedback provided by reviewers.

4 Detail and consideration given to identifying learning needs in personal learning plan

Standard: It is required that registrants complete a learning plan that informs what learning activities are chosen to meet stated learning needs. Rather than professional development being ad hoc or unplanned, the purpose of the personal learning plan is to allow registrants to identify areas of practice they would like to develop and to have a structured approach to addressing deficits in knowledge or skills.

It is expected that the personal learning plan would be completed at the beginning of a CPD cycle, not retrospectively. Registrants should identify learning needs, select the most appropriate activity (or activities) to meet their need and identify how this will be applied to their practice.

It was evident from the sample that learning plans were considered and well detailed. Registrants excelled in demonstrating how learning needs were related to activities selected. While some registrants listed numerous learning needs, for others, fewer, more concise learning needs were detailed. However, whether the learning needs identified were numerous or concise, the personal learning plans provided sufficient detail that evidenced how needs were relevant to the registrants context of practice. Moreover, in many of the submissions the registrants were clearly able to articulate what attainment of those learning needs would mean to their practice.

5 Over achievement of CPD credit requirements through a broad range of CPD activities in which registrants had engaged

Standard: Registrants are required to evidence attainment of 60 CPD credits achieved through a range of CPD activities.

The review evidenced that a large proportion of registrants had surpassed the required amount of CPD credits during the relevant period. Seventy percent (52) had demonstrated greater than 60 CPD credits achieved between 31 May 2015 and the 31 May 2017. The average number of credits in excess of requirements was 53 credits. Many registrants had evidenced over one hundred hours of learning undertaken during the relevant 24 month period.

Qualitative Analysis – Areas requiring further development

The thematic review evidenced areas that required further development to attain all CPD requirements and standards of recording. These included:

1. Demonstration of engagement in ongoing CPD throughout the CPD cycle,
2. Articulation of personal learning gained,
3. Application of CPD credits to record of learning gained,
4. Number of reflective practice reports submitted,
5. Insufficient supporting documentation to evidence engagement in each CPD activity.

1 Demonstration of engagement in ongoing CPD throughout the CPD cycle

Standard: It was anticipated that at least one learning activity would be recorded every three months in the relevant period to demonstrate ongoing engagement in CPD throughout the CPD cycle.

The qualitative analysis highlighted the attention given by registrants to attaining required CPD credits, with less understanding of the requirement to demonstrate ongoing engagement in CPD. Ongoing engagement in CPD was measured by recording a minimum of one CPD activity every three months during the relevant period. It was the most common requirement not achieved.

Of those registrants (51%) who did not meet the CPD requirements, 89% (52) did not meet the requirement for ongoing engagement in CPD. The average interval in the recording of CPD activities was six months, with 52% of registrant's (30) having more than one interval between activities recorded.

Feedback from participants indicated that this requirement was not fully understood. Indeed, many registrants submitted further information, though not required to, of learning activities in which they had engaged though not recorded in their portfolios, thereby demonstrating that they had achieved this requirement.

A point worth noting is that recorded CPD activities which tended to focus on formal learning only, such as attending training, resulted in registrants being less likely to articulate informal or work based learning that would have demonstrated meeting ongoing engagement in CPD.

CPD is a continuous, cyclical process of learning that often occurs and is reinforced through day to day practice. Recognition of learning that occurs though a variety of contexts may be overlooked if focus is given to formal learning activities only. Yet, given feedback from participants regarding measurement of ongoing engagement in CPD, it is an area that warrants further consideration.

2 Articulation of personal learning gained

Standard: It was expected that registrants would articulate the personal learning gained from engagement in a CPD activity and how this learning was applied to their practice.

Oftentimes, registrants who did not meet this standard of recording provided a general description of the learning activity (for example, participated in supervision or listed the objectives of a training) rather than reflecting on their personal learning achieved. The information recorded did not demonstrate to reviewers how the registrants' learning was applied or would be applied to their practice.

Registrants would frequently recount the events and topics covered in a learning activity without stating what it is they personally learned from the activity. In other cases, participants provided too little information or had stated 'please see reflective report' as their learning gained.

This was a common omission for those who did not meet the required standards of recording. Indeed, 90% (64) of those who did not meet the required standards of recording failed to articulate personal learning achieved.

Of those who did articulate personal learning achieved and application to practice, common terms were identified such as 'I learned', 'I gained exposure to' or 'I deepened my understanding'. Thus, these phrases articulated how the learning informed their professional development.

3 Application of CPD credits to record of learning gained

Standard: The CPD Model is a self-directed, self-appraisal of learning. Registrants are expected to assign CPD credits for the achievement of new or enhanced learning. The guidance provided highlighted that 1 CPD credit equated to 1 hour of new or enhanced learning.

The reviewers noted that it was common for a high number of CPD credits to be assigned to an activity on participants' CPD logs, yet little information was provided of new learning achieved. For example, a high number of CPD credits might be assigned to supervision, yet the learning achieved was described as 'participated in supervision'.

The learning gained from an activity should adequately detail the registrants' own personal learning. Learning achieved should be reflected in the CPD credits applied, rather than the time spent on an activity. The higher the number of CPD credits applied, the greater the detail of new learning achieved would be expected.

For example, if 1 or 2 CPD credits were applied a short paragraph may suffice to articulate personal learning gained. However, for activities where 10 credits were applied, the record of learning gained should be reflective of ten hours of new or enhanced learning gained from the activity. In this way it is anticipated that an activity which accounted for a high number of CPD credits would also have a higher level of detail provided for the learning achieved and the impact of learning on practice.

4 Number of reflective practice reports submitted

Standard: Social Workers CPD requirements state that reflections must be provided on a number of activities, with the Social Workers CPD Portfolio template listing eight reflective practice reports which should be included in registrants' portfolios.

It was anticipated that registrants would submit eight reflective practice reports for activities in which they had engaged during the period of the CPD cycle (31 May 2015 to 31 May 2017). In a number of instances, registrants omitted to submit eight records or failed to provide any reflective practice reports.

The social workers portfolio template indicated the requirement to submit eight records. However, when feedback was provided, a small number of registrants who failed to provide eight reflective practice reports indicated that this was not fully understood.

It was also anticipated that four reflective reports per year would have been recorded. This would have provided clear evidence of ongoing engagement in CPD and maintenance of CPD records.

5 Insufficient supporting documentation to evidence engagement in each CPD activity

Standard: It was expected that registrants would include supporting documentation for each CPD activity to evidence their engagement.

A common omission related to the provision of sufficient supporting documentation to evidence participation in CPD activities. While copies of course notes or leaflets were included, these alone without further information were deemed insufficient to evidence engagement in a CPD activity. Inclusion of a certificate of participation, or an email confirming participation would be sufficient for formal activities.

However, it was noted that provision of sufficient supporting documentation to evidence engagement in informal or work based learning proved more challenging. In these instances, confirmation by a manager or colleague would have sufficed.

It was notable that requiring supporting documentation to evidence engagement in CPD activities appeared to reinforce registrants recording of formal activities only, as these could be more easily demonstrated. This is an area for consideration on review of the current CPD model to ensure that engagement in informal or work based learning can be more easily evidenced by registrants.

Request for further guidance

The reviewers noted the value that registrants attached to attainment of CPD requirements and standards of recording. Of the individual feedback provided to participants, 35% (40) sought further clarity and guidance from reviewers. Of note, many registrants indicated that they met the requirement for ongoing engagement in CPD, but had omitted to record all the learning activities undertaken. It was evident that this often related to a lack of understanding how to articulate informal or work based learning, such as team meetings, or discussions regarding complex cases. In many cases this also related to the challenge of providing supporting documentation for informal work based activities that occurred in the context of practice.

Moreover, many registrants were anxious to submit further information or supporting documentation to demonstrate their engagement in CPD and attainment of the CPD requirements set by the Registration Board. Given the voluntary nature of this audit, this was not a requirement, yet many requested to submit further information for review. While not within the scope of this audit, reviewers considered any further information submitted and confirmed attainment of CPD requirements for those registrants.

Hence, although the audit evidenced that two thirds of participants did not meet one requirement or more on initial review of portfolios, many were able to demonstrate achievement of both CPD requirements and standards of recording when feedback was provided. Although not required, 19 participants provided further information on receipt of feedback from reviewers. This increased the percentage of participants who met both the CPD requirements and standard of recording to 51%.

Discussion

The findings from this audit highlighted a number of considerations that will inform a review of CORU's CPD model and monitoring processes. The most significant finding related to ongoing engagement in CPD. Although this requirement had the lowest compliance rates, it was acknowledged that this resulted from a lack of clarity on measurement of attainment (i.e. one CPD activity recorded in each three month period), as well as a difficulty articulating and evidencing engagement in informal or work based learning activities. It was clear when feedback was given that registrants were able to verbally articulate learning activities in which they had engaged during those periods; with some providing further information or supporting documentation when the requirement was fully understood.

Of interest, attainment of 60 CPD credits through a range of CPD activities was often the focus of registrants, with less attention given to ongoing engagement in CPD. Indeed, many indicated that they understood that evidence of 60 CPD credits and a range of activities in their portfolios would in turn ensure that they met ongoing engagement requirements. The parameters for measuring ongoing engagement in CPD are an area requiring further consideration. Indeed, enhanced guidance on measurement of attainment of each CPD requirement during an audit would prove useful for registrants to understand. This would enhance skills to articulate and demonstrate attainment of CPD requirements set by a Registration Board.

Further to this, it was evident from the qualitative analysis that registrants tended to favour more formal learning activities due to the challenges of providing supporting documentation for informal or work based activities. Moreover, it was noted by reviewers that the quality of learning achieved was best articulated in participants CPD log or reflective practice reports. The inclusion of supporting documentation such as leaflets, photocopies of book covers or sign in sheets did not evidence learning achieved.

Moreover, registrants indicated that providing supporting documentation proved to be the most burdensome requirement in many cases. For some this perpetuated a preference for recording formal rather than informal or work based learning. This contributed to registrants not meeting the Board's requirement for engaging in a range of CPD activities. It should also be noted that the provision of supporting documentation was the most significant concern raised by registrants prior to submission of their portfolios. For many who expressed concern, they requested time extensions to allow them to collate supporting documentation for each CPD activity. The inclusion of supporting documentation also prompted the majority of registrants to submit portfolios by post.

The burden of recording was evident for registrants, particularly with regard to collating and presenting supporting documentation. It was highlighted prior to commencing the audit as well as in feedback received by registrants who participated. The findings from this audit raise a query regarding the value of inclusion of supporting documentation that do not serve to evidence learning, as well as place an added burden on registrants recording informal or work based learning. This is an area that should be carefully considered during review of the current CPD model and monitoring processes.

A further area highlighted by this audit related to registrants' ability to articulate personal learning gained and application of learning to practice. It was evident that some registrants struggled to articulate personal learning gained, but rather tended to describe the activity itself. In many cases, a failure to articulate learning achieved corresponded to a registrant's failure to adequately demonstrate assignment of CPD credits.

In other instances, failure to provide an adequate description of professional role and practice setting, limited correlation to learning activities chosen and their relevance to enhancement of professional practice. Further to this, limited detail provided on reflective practice reports failed to evidence how learning achieved was applied to practice or how it would enhance service delivery. All of which highlight a need for further guidance on recording and maintaining a CPD Portfolio, as well as reflective practice.

It should be noted that engagement in CPD is a requirement which each registrant must adhere to under their Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics. CPD is recognised as integral to professional practice and quality service provision. Yet, it was highlighted that this was not fully understood by all registrants. Indeed, many who opted out of the audit cited extended leave or non-practising as a reason for non-participation. This was also cited by many who had significant gaps in CPD activities recorded. It is essential that registrants fully understand that while registered they have agreed to adhere to their Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics, including engagement in continuing professional development. The audit highlighted that some selected for audit were no longer practicing but remained on the register, thus were subject to their Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics which required them to engage in CPD.

Social Workers were the first profession regulated by CORU to be subject to a CPD audit. The primary purpose of the Social Workers Registration Board decision to conduct a voluntary audit was to provide support and guidance to their registrants. In addition, the findings of this report highlight learnings that will prove beneficial for all health and social care professions regulated by CORU. Furthermore, these findings will help to inform a review of CORU's CPD model and monitoring processes going forward.

Appendix 1

Sample Feedback provided to participants

Detailed and personalised feedback was provided to each registrant who submitted a portfolio for review. There were common omissions by registrants that informed a qualitative review. Some of the key learnings have been detailed below as well as a table of general feedback information. Please note that all identifying information has been redacted to assure anonymity.

Achievement of CPD Requirements

CPD requirements	Feedback given to registrant
Ongoing	Please note that the CPD requirements specify that registrants must demonstrate an ongoing commitment to CPD. There appears to be a [X] month gap from the dates recorded for activity. This would not allow you to meet the requirement for ongoing commitment CPD. You may wish to record activities that were informal/ work based learning, which may have contributed to you meeting the requirement for ongoing engagement. If you do have evidence of any additional CPD activities that may account for these gaps, please contact us so that we may review this feedback for you if necessary. In the future, you may wish to consider undertaking a CPD activity once every 3 months to ensure you meet the requirement for ongoing commitment to CPD.
Range of activities	<p>You failed to complete a range of learning activities as specified in the CPD Standard and Requirements.</p> <p>Although we note you have covered a range of topics in your record of CPD activities, you have not evidenced the undertaking of a range of activities. All the activities listed and evidenced in the portfolio appear to be formal training courses. You may wish to consider other learning activities such as informal or work based learning in the future and going forward identify opportunities for informal work based learning in your practise.</p>
Reflective reports	<p>Please note that you have only provided X reflective reports in your CPD portfolio. It is anticipated that registrants would complete 8 reflective pieces for the CPD period of 31/05/2015 to 31/05/2017.</p> <p>You have not provided any reflective reports with your CPD portfolio and as such your portfolio could not meet the CPD requirements. For the period of 31/05/2015 – 31/05/2017 it is anticipated that you would provide 8 reflective reports.</p>
Credits	The Registration Board have specified that registrants should accrue 60 CPD credits in each cycle. You have accumulated insufficient credits to meet this requirement. However, you have met the requirement for ongoing commitment to CPD and have completed a range of activities.
Supporting documentation	You have not provided supporting documents for every activity recorded and this would not meet the CPD standard and requirements. Please also note that some supporting documents could not be linked to the activities you recorded.

Feedback in relation to the standard of recording

Please see below for examples of feedback given to registrants in regard to the standard of recording.

Standard of Recording Section	Feedback given to registrant
<p>Section 1 – Description of Professional and practice setting - role, main duties</p>	<p>With regard to your professional role, please note it is unnecessary to detail your previous employment. You are only required to detail the professional role you hold during the cycle period i.e. May 2015 to May 2017 in this case. The description you have provided for your professional role was very informative with regard to the expectations for the position of social worker. However, this information was generalised and it was not clear in your portfolio what you personally do day to day. In the event of a future audit you may wish to include further details regarding your personal day to day main duties and areas of specialism.</p> <p>Registrants are encouraged to detail their role in their own words rather than including a job description.</p>
<p>Section 2 – Learning plan</p>	<p>It is anticipated that the learning plan would be completed at the beginning of your CPD cycle. This should include a review of your practise, identify areas in which you could further your knowledge and skills and then plan activities which would achieve these learning needs. It would appear that your learning plan was completed retrospectively and does not adequately identify learning needs, the desired learning outcome and planned learning activities to achieve these outcomes. Please note that this does not contribute to your portfolio meeting the CPD standard and requirement and this feedback is based around how you may wish record this information in the future.</p> <p>When articulating learning outcomes, registrants are encouraged to consider what achievement of the learning need would look like in practice. What will you know or be able to do when you have accomplished this learning need?</p>
<p>Section 3 –Record of CPD Activities -Learning gained</p>	<p>With regard to the standard of recording, please note that the description you have provided for the learning gained is very brief and does not adequately detail the learning you personally gained from each activity. In this section it is anticipated that you would detail the learning that you personally gained from the activity, providing a higher level of detail for activities which were allocated higher amounts of CPD credits. Please note that this feedback relates to how you may wish record this information in the future and does not have an impact on your portfolio meeting the CPD requirements.</p>
<p>Section 3 –Record of CPD Activities - Credits for maintenance of portfolio</p>	<p>The activities listed in your record accumulate just 53.5 CPD credits. The 8 credits for maintenance of your portfolio have been added to allow you to meet the 60 credit requirement. Please note that maintenance of a CPD portfolio should be included in your record of activities.</p>
<p>Section 4 – Reflective reports</p>	<p>You may wish to consider providing more information in your reflective reports. The information you have provided in these reports is quite brief. In this section it is anticipated that you would further develop on the learning gained, the context of the learning, evaluation of practice and the impact this new learning would have on practice. Some of the reflective reports are generalised, and describe the impact on practise overall, it is anticipated that these reports would be written from your own perspective i.e, how this reflective learning would influence your own practise.</p>

Appendix 2

Examples of Recording

There was a wide variety of recording styles presented in the CPD portfolios submitted. Some examples have been provided in the table below to demonstrate this. Please note that identifying information has been redacted or changed to assure anonymity.

Section	Example that met the standard of recording	Example that did not meet the standard of recording
Personal Learning Plan of portfolio	<p>Example 1</p> <p>Learning need was to develop skills in delivering specific training.</p> <p>Desired learning outcome: “I will have a much greater understanding and be able to deliver such a programme to individuals with different levels of autism and training to provide a theoretical foundation as well as hands on opportunities to adolescents with ASD in vocational and community settings.”</p>	<p>Example 2</p> <p>Learning need was to gain training in supervision.</p> <p>Desired learning outcome: “As a result of attending and through interactive learning, group work, role play, individual reflection and analysis we explored and integrated 4x4x4 model developed by Tony Morrison. I developed a greater understanding of the four critical functions of supervision: management, development, mediation and support.”</p>
Explanation	<p>Example 2 did not meet the standard of recording as it has been written retrospectively. With regard to the learning plan, it is anticipated that this would be completed prior to engaging in the activity. A learning plan should be developed at the beginning of a CPD cycle.</p> <p>In example 1 we can see that the registrant is completing the learning needs prior to engaging in the learning activity. This is indicated by use of the future tense language. They are stating what it is they will learn from an activity to meet their learning need.</p> <p>In example 2 it would appear that the registrant returned to this section once an activity was completed. This did not meet the standard as the learning gained from an activity should be completed in the relevant section in part 3 of the application form.</p> <p>The purpose of a learning plan is to reflect on learning needs and identify learning activities to meet those needs. It ensures that CPD is planned and structured, rather than occurring in an ad hoc manner.</p>	

Section	Example that met the standard of recording	Example that did not meet the standard of recording
Record of CPD Activities Part 3 of portfolio	<p>Example 1</p> <p>6 CPD Credits allocated -</p> <p>Learning gained:</p> <p>“This training helped me gain a better understanding of structuring, writing, analysis and evaluating assessments and reports which I compile during the course of executing my social work duties for various functions i.e. Child in Care Reviews, Fostering Assessments and Update Assessment and/or Court Reports for Child/Family proceedings. This training provided me with an opportunity to recognise the importance of compiling and maintaining accurate records in accordance to current agency policy and procedures, National standards and guidelines, as well as information in regards the current agency guidance in relation to case reporting and recording of case notes. This training also provided me with an opportunity to increase my skills and confidence in recording more accurately, precisely and competently, as well as providing me with an opportunity to deepen my knowledge and understanding of the difference in distinguishing between factual judgement/accurate recording and professional judgement and provided me with an opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the importance of data protections and become more familiar with TUSLA guidelines in respect of care reporting and recording.”</p>	<p>Example 2</p> <p>6 CPD Credits allocated -</p> <p>Learning gained:</p> <p>“Supervision and training of MSW 2 Student”</p>
Explanation	<p>Please note that the same amount of CPD credits had been applied to the activities of each of these sample. As 1 CPD credit is equal to 1 hour of new or enhanced learning we would expect to see a greater detail that accounts for a higher amount of CPD credits allocated to the activity. It should be noted that time spent on an activity alone should not account for credits applied, but rather the achievement of new or enhanced learning that contributes to professional development.</p> <p>In example 1 we can see a high amount of detail which adequately articulates the new or enhanced personal learning the registrant has gained from the activity. The registrant also used language which clearly demonstrates that this was new learning to them. Phrases such as “gain a better understanding” highlight enhanced learning in a specific area. The registrant also uses phrases such as “provided me with an opportunity” which highlights new learning.</p> <p>In example 2 it cannot be determined that the registrant gained any new or enhanced learning from the activity. The information provided does not adequately convey 6 hours of learning.</p> <p>When completing the learning gained it is important to use phrases such as ‘I learned’, ‘I gained experience’, ‘I recognised’, ‘I gained further understanding’ in order to adequately convey the personal learning you gained from an activity.</p> <p>It is also worth considering whether the amount of information you have provided adequately reflects the CPD credits applied to the activity.</p>	

Section	Example that met the standard of recording	Example that did not meet the standard of recording
<p>Part 4 of portfolio</p>	<p>Example 1</p> <p>With regard to the impact this learning has had on professional practise:</p> <p>“This learning impacts on my professional practise and delivery of service to my service users as I was able to expand my knowledge on the theory of mindfulness for supporting service users to relax. I also practised mindfulness which is beneficial to my own self-care as well as enhancing my skills to support my services users to engage in mindfulness.”</p>	<p>Example 2</p> <p>With regard to the impact this learning has had on professional practise:</p> <p>“This refresher training is very important in maintaining a competency level for the service user in this specialist area.”</p>
<p>Explanation</p>	<p>In example 1 we can see that the registrant has provided insight into how this piece of learning has affected their own personal practise. The language is personalised and the registrant goes on to give examples as to how this has impacted their own practise and mentions how this is of benefit to their service users.</p> <p>In example 2 the information provided is generalised and does not adequately demonstrate the impact this reflection has had on their own personal practise. The registrant has mentioned the service user but does not mention how this training benefits the service user.</p> <p>It is anticipated that in a reflective report the registrant will reflect on their own personal practise and demonstrate how the training or situation they are reflecting on has benefited their own practise and in turn the service user.</p>	



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