



Guidelines for Completing a Compliant CPD Record

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1. About CPD and the Society's scheme

Continuing Professional Development is how professional geologists and Earth scientists keep their skills and knowledge up to date.

CPD records learning, not time at work. A compliant record shows what you set out to develop, what you did, what you learned from it, and what you will do next. Hours matter, but only as a measure of learning time.

The Geological Society defines CPD as:

The systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and skills, and the development of personal qualities necessary for carrying out professional and technical duties throughout a working life.

In simpler terms, CPD is an organised way to maintain and improve your technical and professional competence, and to give assurance to others that you are professionally capable. It helps you stay competent in your work, grow professionally, and gives confidence to your employers, clients and the Society that you are capable and skilled.

The word that matters in that definition is **development**. The scheme is not a timesheet and it is not a record of what you have been busy with. It is a record of how you have grown as a professional, evidenced by what you have learned. Kept well, it is also a practical tool for charting your career pathway proactively, rather than just a look back at where you have been.

CPD recording is mandatory for all Chartered Fellows, CGeol, CSci and EurGeol, and for Fellows working towards Chartership, as set out in the Society's Codes of Conduct (Regulation FP/07 Section A4.16) and described in the CPD Regulations (FP/13). Recording CPD is also strongly advised for other Fellows who are professionally active. Reduced requirements apply in retirement and in other circumstances. See section 4.

Records are also auditable. Each year a proportion of Chartered Geologists, Chartered Scientists and European Geologists are selected for CPD audit, to ensure records are being maintained. If you are selected, you will need to provide a written account of your CPD activities that is compliant with the Society's scheme.

2. What counts as CPD

The scheme is deliberately flexible. It lets you record a wide variety of activities against your own goals, it is based on hours rather than a weighted points system, and activities are grouped into six categories.

The learning test

Before you record anything, ask yourself two questions:

- Does it improve my skills, knowledge or competence relevant to my work?
- Does it contribute to my career development or my personal development plan?

If the answer to either is yes, it can be recorded as CPD.

There is a third question that decides how much you record: **what did I learn that I did not know or could not do before?** If you cannot answer that, the activity is not CPD, however long it took and however important it was to your project.

Activity time and learning time are not the same thing

A two-day site investigation is two days of work. If the new part was learning to log a soil type you had not met before, and that took an hour of concentrated attention, then one hour is your CPD.

Record the learning time you honestly consider relevant, not the duration of the task.

What does not count

- Routine work you already know how to do, however long it takes and however well you do it.
- Attendance with nothing taken from it. Sitting through a webinar is not CPD unless you can say what you took away.
- Time spent producing the record itself. Writing up your CPD is administration. Reviewing your record against your goals and drawing conclusions from it is reflective CPD practice, and that does count.

The value of On-the-Job development

Some of the most effective learning happens at work, with support from colleagues or mentors. The style of support matters: tackling problems and meeting challenges as part of a cohesive team is particularly effective.

Work experience, whether in a structured or regulated setting or in situations requiring innovation and problem solving, is a very strong way to achieve CPD goals. Informal discussions with specialists or colleagues can be highly valuable too.

For these reasons the scheme requires On-the-Job CPD to make up a minimum of 33 per cent of your total annual hours.

3. The six CPD categories

Recording an activity in the right category matters for two reasons. It keeps your record consistent with the Society's scheme, and the spread of hours across categories is checked when your record is reviewed.

On-the-Job Learning

Training or instruction delivered in the workplace, such as inductions, supervised training and workplace-based courses. It also covers project work that expands your experience or presents a challenge: tasks you have not undertaken before, tasks requiring research or new learning, and tasks that present technical difficulty.

Typical activities: client meetings, multi-disciplinary and multi-professional project meetings, peer guidance and discussions, data analysis, modelling, geological skills, project management, contract preparation and management, managing staff and teams, teamwork and leadership, work shadowing, health and safety training and site inductions, professional and business development.

Watch for: this is the category where routine work most often gets recorded by mistake. The test is whether the task taught you something, not whether it was part of your job.

Professional practice

Activities that use and develop your professional skills, usually through contribution to the profession.

Typical activities: mentoring, coaching and tutoring, examining, sponsoring and supporting, committee work including Society committees, formal roles in learned and professional bodies, assessing, reviewing and auditing, expert witness work, refereeing or peer reviewing papers and books, writing or editing papers and conference proceedings, presenting lectures and teaching, literature reviews and case studies, networking.

Watch for: mentoring someone else is Professional practice. Being mentored is Self-directed study. In both cases the reflection has to say what you learned, not what the other person gained.

Formal learning

Structured courses or training programmes, usually with a set curriculum.

Typical activities: conferences, external courses and seminars, internal courses, briefings and tested training, higher degrees, diplomas, academic research, study to develop specialist skills, foreign language study.

Watch for: the deciding factor is whether there is a defined programme behind the activity, not whether a certificate was issued.

Informal learning or training

Unplanned or less structured learning, typically organised by someone else.

Typical activities: lectures, lunchtime talks, technical meetings, workshops, toolbox talks, site inductions, job secondments, live webinars, watching training films or online presentations, sharing knowledge and skills with colleagues, preparing and presenting training materials.

Watch for: this category is often skipped, with everything pushed into Formal learning. A talk you attended without a set programme belongs here.

Self-directed study

Independent learning that you organise yourself.

Typical activities: reading books, technical papers, journals and textbooks, focused internet research, reviewing or summarising publications, distance learning and e-learning modules, recorded webinars watched in your own time, private study, being mentored, reflective CPD practice.

Watch for: reading technical papers and journals sits here. Reading newspapers and general magazines sits under Other.

Other

Activities outside your main role that develop transferable skills.

Typical activities: volunteering, STEM and WISE activities, RIGS, public outreach, talks to amateur societies, press interviews, newspaper and magazine articles, preparing and leading field courses and excursions, strategic thinking and planning, leadership development, negotiating, oral and written communication, IT and computing, financial skills including bidding and marketing, focus groups, forums and panels.

Watch for: this category exists deliberately, as a reminder that useful development happens outside your main role. It is not a place to put activities you cannot be bothered to categorise.

Choosing the right category

Where an activity could sit in more than one category, work through the following in order and use the first that applies.

1. Did the learning arise through your work or a project? On-the-Job
2. Were you contributing to the profession, or using your professional standing? Professional practice
3. Was it a course or programme with a set curriculum? Formal learning
4. Was it organised by someone else, but not formally structured? Informal learning
5. Did you organise the learning yourself? Self-directed study
6. Was it outside your main role, developing transferable skills? Other

Table 1 lists common activities with the category each belongs to. It is not an exhaustive list. The CPD Mind Map illustrates the full range of activities within each category and is available on the Society's website as a downloadable PDF.

Table 1: CPD categories, examples of activities

Activity	Category	Activity	Category
Academic research	Formal learning	Multi-professional project meetings	On-the-Job Learning
Being mentored	Self-directed study	Negotiating	Other
Client meetings	On-the-Job Learning	Networking	Professional practice
Coaching and tutoring	Professional practice	Reading newspapers and magazines	Other
Committee work, including GSL	Professional practice	Reading technical papers and journals	Self-directed study
Communication, oral and written	Other	Reading textbooks	Self-directed study
Contract preparation and management	On-the-Job Learning	Referee or peer review of papers and books	Professional practice
Courses, external	Formal learning	Reflective CPD practice	Self-directed study
Courses, internal briefings	Formal learning	Reviewing and summarising publications	Self-directed study
Courses, internal tested training	Formal learning	Site inductions and H&S training	On-the-Job Learning
Data analysis	On-the-Job Learning	Sharing knowledge and skills with others	Informal learning
Diplomas	Formal learning	Sponsoring and supporting	Professional practice
Distance learning	Self-directed study	STEM and WISE activities	Other
Examining	Professional practice	Strategic thinking and planning	Other
Expert witness	Professional practice	Study to develop specialist skills	Formal learning
Financial skills, bidding and marketing	Other	Talks to interest and amateur societies	Other
Focus groups, forums and panels	Other	Teamwork and leadership in your role	On-the-Job Learning
Focused internet research	Self-directed study	Technical meetings	Informal learning
Foreign language study	Formal learning	Toolbox talks	Informal learning
Geological skills	On-the-Job Learning	Training films and online presentations	Informal learning
GSL assessing, reviewing, auditing	Professional practice	Webinars, live and attended	Informal learning
Higher degrees	Formal learning	Webinars, recorded and watched later	Self-directed study
IT and computing	Other	Work shadowing	On-the-Job Learning
Job secondment	Informal learning	Workshops	Informal learning
Leadership development	Other	Writing or editing papers and books	Professional practice
Lectures, attending	Informal learning	Presenting lectures and teaching	Professional practice

Activity	Category	Activity	Category
Literature reviews and case studies	Professional practice	Preparing and leading field courses	Other
Managing staff and teams	On-the-Job Learning	Press interviews and articles	Other
Mentoring someone else	Professional practice	Professional and business development	On-the-Job Learning
Modelling	On-the-Job Learning	Project management	On-the-Job Learning
Multi-disciplinary team meetings	On-the-Job Learning	Volunteering	Other
Peer guidance and discussions	On-the-Job Learning	Seminars, conferences	Formal learning

4. Recording CPD

Format

You have several options for recording your CPD:

- using the GSL Logbook
- using your company template
- using your own spreadsheet
- on the MyGSL Portal (*an option for existing Chartered Fellows already using it; not available to Chartership candidates*)

It is not mandatory for Chartered Fellows or Chartership candidates to use the Society's CPD Logbook or online portal. If you use your own or a company template, your record must still be fully compliant with these guidelines.

Please look at the GSL Logbook, which contains a worked example of a compliant record, including a plan, activities and reflections. Your record must also include a summary table showing the total hours completed in each category.

How to record hours

Record learning time, not elapsed time. The hours you record should be the amount of time you honestly consider to have been spent learning. For a conference that means the sessions you took something from, not the full day including lunch and travel.

Record activities individually

Each entry should be one activity, on one date, with its own description, hours and reflection. Do not group activities together into a single line.

Bulk entries are the most common reason a record is returned

A line reading "Site work, January to December, 60 hours" tells an assessor nothing. It cannot show what was learned, when, or how it related to your goals, and it will not be accepted.

The same year recorded properly might be eight or ten separate entries: the first time you supervised a rig, the ground conditions that did not match the desk study, the meeting where a design assumption was challenged. Each with its own date, hours and reflection.

Recurring activities

Some CPD genuinely repeats across the year, such as a quarterly journal or a monthly technical meeting. Record each occurrence separately, with what you took from that particular issue or meeting. Four entries of two hours each, with four different reflections, is a compliant record. One entry of eight hours covering the year is not.

How long should a single entry be?

Most individual entries fall between one and eight hours. There is no fixed ceiling, but a very large single entry usually means several separate activities have been merged, or that elapsed time has been recorded instead of learning time. If an entry is unusually long, check whether it should be split.

CPD hours

If you are in full-time employment you should record at least 90 hours of CPD per year, of which a minimum of 30 hours must be On-the-Job. The remaining 60 hours should be spread across at least two of the other five categories. Minimum amounts relating to employment status are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Minimum annual CPD by employment status

Work status of Fellow	Minimum annual CPD, total hours	Minimum hours On-the-Job	Minimum hours career development, excluding On-the-Job	Maximum annual carry-over of excess hours
1. Early career, pre-Charterhip Fellows	90 or more	30	30	20
2. All Fellows in full-time employment or on sabbatical leave	90 or more	30	30	20
3. All Fellows in part-time employment, for example job sharing	50 or more	16	16	10
4. All Fellows on extended leave: carers, parental leave, prolonged illness	40 or more	0	20	8
5. Retired Fellows offering occasional professional services, wishing to retain Chartered status, or unemployed Fellows	50 or more	0	0	10
6. Retired Chartered Geologists not offering professional services	Not mandatory	0	0	0
7. Retired Chartered Scientists and European Geologists not offering professional services	50 or more	0	0	10

When to record

The best time to record an activity is soon after it happens, while the details are fresh. This is not only about accuracy. A reflection written months later tends to describe what happened rather than what you learned, producing a non-compliant entry.

Set a weekly reminder. Ten minutes a week produces a far better record than a day spent reconstructing the year in December.

Keep any evidence of participation. Supporting evidence is not required as part of a Chartership application, where we ask only for the record itself, but you must have it available in case you are audited.

Chartership candidates: three years of records

This requirement applies to Chartership candidates only

A CPD record submitted with a Chartership application must cover at least your last three years of activity, and those three years must be the most recent three, including the current or most recently completed year. Annual records can run to calendar years or to an alternative 12-month period, but your submission should include records up to the date you apply, even if that means the final year is pro-rated.

Records covering an earlier three-year period, or fewer than three years, are returned for updating and delay the review of the application.

Fellows recording CPD outside a Chartership application are not affected by this. The annual requirements in Table 2 apply.

Other forms of Chartership

- Chartered Scientist (CSci): the Science Council requires annual confirmation that professional standards are being maintained through CPD. The Society supports CSci Fellows by tracking CPD and conducting annual audits.
 - Retired Chartered Scientists must continue recording CPD to maintain their Chartered status, although reduced minimum hours apply. See Table 2.
- European Geologist (EurGeol): the Society maintains CPD records in line with European Federation of Geologists requirements, and conducts annual audits.
 - Retired European Geologists must continue recording CPD to maintain their status, although reduced minimum hours apply. See Table 2.

Exceptions

The scheme recognises that working patterns change, making it harder to meet the usual targets. Table 2 covers part-time working and extended leave. In addition:

- If you are retired or temporarily out of work, alternative requirements apply. Retaining Chartership titles in retirement assumes you may still consult, sit on Chartership panels or engage in professional activities, so some CPD is still expected although no longer mandatory for Chartered Geologists.
- If you are on extended leave, row 4 of Table 2, 50 per cent of these hours may exceptionally be allowed with pre-arranged dispensation from the Society. In this case please contact membership@geolsoc.org.uk.
- If you think your situation warrants an exception, for this or any other reason, please contact membership@geolsoc.org.uk. Exceptions are considered and approved by the Vice President, Professional Matters.

Make sure you do a mix of activities

Making the most of On-the-Job learning and taking the initiative with self-directed study is strongly encouraged. The Other category is there to remind you that you can develop useful transferable skills outside your main role, in both your professional and personal life.

Think about all aspects of your career when planning. Do not focus only on technical skills. It is also important to develop:

- your understanding of the wider sector you work in
- interpersonal skills, such as teamwork and leadership
- knowledge of processes that help you work effectively, such as problem solving, decision making and performance review

5. How to complete a compliant CPD record

The scheme follows a simple cycle of plan, act and reflect, built around experiential learning. A compliant record has four elements:

1. A five-year Career Aspiration Plan
2. PLAN: an annual CPD plan, separate for each CPD year
3. ACT: a record of your CPD activities, separate for each CPD year
4. REFLECT: an annual CPD reflection, separate for each CPD year

Create a five-year Career Aspiration Plan

Your Career Aspiration Plan sets out your key professional goals for the next five years. Think of it as the big picture view of where you would like your career to go. It might include completing a postgraduate degree, changing roles, gaining experience in a new area, achieving Chartership, or becoming a Chartership assessor.

The plan is not fixed and can be adjusted as your circumstances and interests change. Its purpose is to guide your development, keep you focused on long-term goals, and give you a framework for reflecting on progress.

PLAN: your annual CPD plan

Your annual plan sets specific goals for the year, breaking the bigger aims from your Career Aspiration Plan into smaller, achievable steps.

For example, if your five-year goal is to achieve Chartership in 2028, your annual plan might include scheduling regular meetings with your mentor or supporter, attending a Society Chartership talk, and developing your portfolio of projects.

Your yearly goals do not all need to be completed within a single year. Breaking them into smaller steps makes them achievable, provides structure, and gives you a clear sense of progress.

ACT: record your CPD activities

This is where you record the activities you complete through the year. Each activity should link back to a goal in your annual plan and, ultimately, to your Career Aspiration Plan.

Your record must include the following for each activity:

- ✓ Event date
- ✓ CPD category
- ✓ Brief description of the event, including the provider if it was a course, and what you learned from it
- ✓ Time spent, meaning the learning time you consider relevant, not the duration of the activity
- ✓ What you learned, and what you will do differently as a result
- ✓ Evidence of participation. Keep a record. Chartership candidates do not need to submit evidence, but must have it available for audit on assessors' request.

Writing a description that demonstrates learning

This is the part that most often lets a record down. A description that says what happened is not enough. It has to say what changed for you.

A useful structure is three sentences: what the activity was, what you learned from it, and how it affects your practice.

	Example
Not enough	Attended two-day geotechnics conference. 13 hours.
Better	Attended the geotechnics conference, day two, covering seismic design, hydrogeology and case histories of failures. The failure case histories were the most instructive: in two of the three, the ground model was adequate but the risk was not communicated in terms the client acted on. I have started including a plain-language risk summary at the front of my reports as a result. 6 hours.
Not enough	Site supervision, various dates, 40 hours.
Better	First time supervising a cable percussion rig without a senior colleague present. Learned how much of the role is managing the driller's time rather than logging, and that I needed to agree the day's targets before the rig started rather than during. 6 hours.

Note that the better examples are shorter in hours than the weak ones. That is usually what happens when you record learning time honestly rather than elapsed time, and it is not a problem. A record of 90 well-evidenced hours is stronger than one of 200 unevidenced ones.

REFLECT: your annual CPD reflection

At the end of each year, look back at the activities you completed, assess how they helped you progress towards your annual goals and your Career Aspiration Plan, and consider what you have learned.

Reflection is also about identifying gaps, challenges or areas where you would like to grow further. This helps you adjust your plans for the coming year, so your CPD stays purposeful, balanced and relevant.

A good annual reflection is honest about what did not happen. An objective you did not achieve, with an explanation and a revised plan, is stronger evidence of professional judgement than six objectives all marked as achieved.

6. Why records are found non-compliant

These are the issues we see most often when checking records submitted with Chartership applications or conducting CPD audits. Checking your own record against this list before you submit will usually save you a round of correspondence.

- **Activity recorded instead of learning.** Entries describe what was done but not what was learned. This is the most common reason of all.
- **Bulk hours.** Long periods grouped into a single line, such as site work across several months, or a year of reading as one entry.
- **Routine work recorded as CPD.** Day-to-day tasks you already knew how to do, recorded because they took time.
- **Fewer than three years of records, or records that are not recent.** Chartership candidates only. See section 4.
- **Missing On-the-Job hours.** Records made up entirely of courses and reading fail the 33 per cent minimum however high the total.
- **Everything in one category.** Usually all On-the-Job. The remaining hours must be spread across at least two of the other five categories.
- **Categories used inconsistently.** Use the Society's definitions in section 3 and Table 1, not your employer's categories or your own.
- **No plan or no reflection.** A list of activities is not a compliant record. It needs the plan-act-reflect cycle, with aims and objectives for each year.
- **No summary of hours by category.** Your record must include a summary table showing total hours in each category.

7. CPD at a glance

- **Learning, not activity.** Record what you learned and the time spent learning it, not the length of the task.
- **Plan, act, reflect.** Set goals, carry out activities, reflect on what you learned.
- **Four parts of a compliant record:** a five-year Career Aspiration Plan, an annual plan, a record of activities, an annual reflection.
- **One entry per activity.** Each with its own date, category, description, hours and reflection. No bulk entries.
- **Six categories:** On-the-Job, Professional practice, Formal learning, Informal learning, Self-directed study, Other.
- **Balance.** At least 33 per cent of annual hours from On-the-Job, and the rest spread across at least two other categories.
- **Consistency.** Update your record weekly, while activities are fresh.
- **Think big picture.** CPD is not just technical training. It includes sector knowledge, leadership, teamwork and transferable skills.
- **Flexibility.** Your plan can change. Stay purposeful, structured and reflective.

Downloads

- CPD Logbook, containing a worked example of a compliant record
- CPD Mind Map
- CPD Regulations (FP/13)