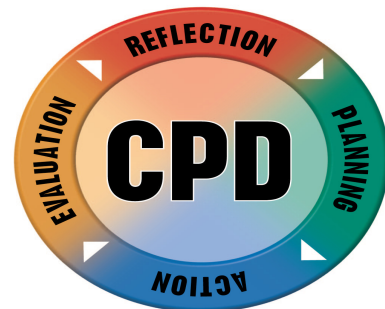


**CPD assessors' feedback on
their experiences of assessing
2008-09 portfolios**

A report prepared for the Education Committee of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland

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November 2009



Summary	4
Acknowledgements	5
Section 1	
Introduction	6
1.1 Assessment of CPD portfolios in Northern Ireland	6
1.2 Pharmaceutical Society CPD Assessors	
1.2.1 Assessor Training	6
1.2.2 Confidentiality agreement	7
Section 2	
Aims	8
2.1 Objectives	8
Section 3	
Method	8
3.1 CPD Assessors' Experience of Assessment	8
3.2 Evaluation questionnaire	9
3.3 Data Analysis	9
Section 4	
Results	
4.1 Assessors' views and feedback	9
4.1.1 Data from Questionnaire responses	9
(a) What has gone well	9
(b) Observations as a result of this assessment round	9
(c) Online and paper-based assessment	12
(d) What has not gone so well	13
(e) Suggestions for system improvement	14

Section 5:

Conclusions	36
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Section 6:

Recommendations	37
------------------------	----

References

Appendix 1: Evaluation Questionnaire	38
--------------------------------------	----

Summary

Participation in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) became a professional requirement for all pharmacists registered in Northern Ireland from June 2005. Thereafter formal assessment of registrants' CPD portfolios commenced using evaluation criteria and a process which had been developed during an initial pilot phase in 2004. Since its formal adoption by the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, the system has been developed and refined, with the further introduction of a system of reassessment in 2008.

Assessors acting for the Pharmaceutical Society of NI are all qualified pharmacists from various spheres of practice. The experiences they gain as a result of assessing CPD portfolios help to inform the Society and its policy decisions on CPD. Their feedback is therefore an invaluable source of information on which reliable decisions can be made in order to make improvements to the system. This report summarises their feedback and concludes with recommendations for future actions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all assessors who took time to respond to the questionnaire and for their contacts to the Post-registration Unit throughout the year with comments and suggestions.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Assessment of CPD portfolios in Northern Ireland

In June 2005, the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (PSNI), as the regulatory body for registered pharmacists, introduced the professional obligation to participate in and provide documentary evidence of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Mandatory principle 6 of the 2009 Code of Ethics¹ states that a pharmacist must maintain and develop professional knowledge and competence. As CPD is likely to form a significant element of the revalidation process that may be introduced in the future, the PSNI has made progress in refining its CPD assessment mechanisms. As the prime focus of any regulatory body is protection of the public, the PSNI has introduced a public safety element to the CPD record keeping template, which requests all pharmacists to indicate how their CPD links to public safety.

Portfolios are assessed by trained pharmacists (n=18). The breakdown for their pharmacy background is as follows:

Sphere of Pharmacy Practice	%
Community	38.9%
Hospital	33.3%
Academia	11.1%
Administration	11.1%
Health & Social Care Board	5.6%

1.2 Pharmaceutical Society CPD Assessors

1.2.1 Assessor Training

All assessors have been trained formally in assessment procedures. Training involves a formal presentation by the Post-registration Facilitator on the assessment process and the criteria² used for evaluation of cycles submitted by pharmacists. Assessors are trained to use an online system for assessment of both paper-based and online-based CPD portfolios and for uploading comments

and feedback in order to provide the necessary information required ultimately to generate the feedback report that is issued to a pharmacist.

In addition, all potential assessors must complete the assessment of “test” portfolio cycles during a formal session overseen by the Post-registration Facilitator. Their evaluations are compared to expected “model” responses and if satisfactory the pharmacist may then be confirmed as a CPD assessor.

A guide to CPD portfolio assessment is also provided for each CPD assessor. Since the introduction of reassessment processes, a guide has also been issued covering this area of assessment procedure.

Assessors are required to attend a minimum of one annual CPD assessor meeting to discuss issues and provide feedback. Work to ensure consistency of assessment is also undertaken at these meetings.

1.2.2 Confidentiality agreement

All assessors must sign a confidentiality agreement with the following stipulations:

The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland is the statutory and regulatory body for all registered pharmacists in Northern Ireland. Since 1 June 2005, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has become a professional requirement for all registered pharmacists. **As a consequence of my being a CPD Assessor**, confidential information relating to other pharmacists’ CPD portfolios may come into my possession.

I agree to treat all such identified information as confidential and not to disclose it to any third party.

I agree not to make use of any of the confidential information for any purpose other than evaluating CPD portfolios.

I agree that on request and in any case on termination of my role as a CPD Assessor I will return all confidential material to the Society.

2. Aims

To obtain feedback on Northern Ireland CPD assessors' experience during 2008-09.

To use this to inform future approaches of the assessment system and prepare any further guidance for pharmacists in Northern Ireland

2.1 Objectives

- To prepare an evaluation questionnaire for distribution to assessors
- To evaluate assessors' experiences and feedback as a result of participation in the first period of assessment for 2008-09
- To prepare recommendations for future CPD assessment and guidance for pharmacists
- To respond to concerns and/or issues raised by assessors to improve their future experience of assessment

3. Methods

3.1 Evaluation questionnaire

An evaluation questionnaire (Appendix 1) was devised in order to collect information and feedback from assessors. This comprised of 5 sections with the headings listed below. Open responses were sought under each heading.

- What has gone well on this round of assessing?
- What observations have you made as a result of assessing?
- Feedback on online and paper-based portfolio assessment
- What has not gone so well?
- Recommended changes to improve the system for assessors and pharmacists

The questionnaire was mailed to all assessors involved during the first period of assessment of 2008-09 portfolios. A stamped addressed envelope was included for ease of response.

3.2 CPD Assessors - other feedback

The Post-registration Unit is contactable by pharmacists and assessors Monday to Friday during office hours by telephone and at all times via email. CPD assessors frequently use email during the course of an assessment period to seek clarification on issues, particularly when new scenarios present. Telephone contact with the unit usually involves direct contact with the Post-registration facilitator either for advice and support or also when seeking feedback on their own performance in comparison to that of other assessors.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data from open responses to the evaluation questionnaire were collated and thematically analysed.

4. Results

4.1 Assessor responses

Fourteen assessors were involved in the first period of assessment of the 2008-09 sampled CPD portfolios. A total of 12 responses were received on completed evaluation questionnaires. This gave a response rate of 85.7%. Two other assessors provided feedback verbally or via email.

a. What has gone well on this round of assessing?

Three areas were identified by assessors in their responses to this question.

Standard of portfolios submitted

“General Standard appears to have improved – most portfolios were excellent”.

“Most pharmacists getting to grips with the information to be recorded within each stage of the cycle, however the major problem is that cycles lack specificity”.

“Better standard of portfolio. Many more pharmacists achieving 1 or 2, with high % excellent, easy to assess portfolios”.

“More candidates achieving option 1, overall higher standards, even in option 4s”.

Proportion of online and paper based portfolios

“Lots of online which are easier to mark”.

“Mostly on-line, and easier to read than handwritten”.

Growing confidence in assessing

“With experience I am finding it easier”.

“The paper-based portfolios were well presented, getting more confident in my assessing”.

b. What observations have you made as a result of assessing?

A large number of assessors’ observations centred on documentation of cycles:

Documenting scheduled learning in unscheduled cycles

“A number of cycles have been written up as unscheduled cycles, when the learning is clearly scheduled i.e. have identified learning needs. For assessment purposes, these cycles meet the requirements and therefore pass – I strongly feel, however, that ‘passing’ these cycles (even with relevant feedback) is inappropriate and unfair to those who have documented correctly. It also gives the pharmacist the idea that they can continue to document that way (because it’s so much quicker) and still pass”.

Assessor Guidance

“The guide for assessors provides examples of statements that are not acceptable for all stages except ‘evaluation’. It would be useful to have more direction on what is/is not acceptable in the ‘evaluation’”.

Number of cycles

“Is it worth giving pharmacists any guidance on an average number of cycles in a portfolio? (Some portfolios had a very large number of cycles and they might have been able to submit fewer)”.

Submitting assessor comments using the online system

“I sometimes had difficulties ‘copying & pasting’ my cycle comments into the summary section of the feedback part of the cycle and had to resort to retyping the comments”.

“If a candidate has submitted a large quantity of cycles that do not meet the assessment criteria, there is often not enough room in the ‘Cycle Notes’ section, to critique each portfolio. I think candidates would like to see how they did not meet the assessment criteria for each cycle”.

Hours of learning

“Number of hours recorded in activity part 2 the action – sometimes I would query what has been put down. Unscheduled learning – would attending a NICPLD course not be scheduled in that it was necessary to book onto the course?”

Cycle documentation

“Most people are clear cut option 1 or 4 but there is still the odd person who doesn’t know how to write up a very large piece of work i.e. break into 2 or 3 specific cycles and end up option 3 even though work excellent”.

“Cycles submitted outside the dates of the portfolio – always check – have a means of not marking these i.e. – highlight as outside the date”.

“Several candidates inflated their learning time by including time spent on subsequent outcome (e.g. preparation of SOP, presentation) I have also noted confusion about what constitutes an unscheduled cycle. A number of candidates seem to use unscheduled cycles for learning conducted outside of a formal course even when learning needs have been identified. It seems they are equating scheduled with attending a course, completing a DL and unscheduled with poking about themselves for the answers (e.g. looking up SPCs etc)”.

“Poor standard of referencing learning (e.g. reading article on’ But no information on publication reference)”.

“Lack of understanding that [the pharmacist] can break down learning from one source (e.g. large DL pack) across more than one cycle. Single cycle for each course – means some candidates put an unrealistic number of learning needs in a single cycle. Description of learning is then too brief”.

“Poor understanding of activities which are learning activities and those which are application of learning – would be useful to explain this with examples on the CPD website”.

Still seems to be confusion [amongst pharmacists] about completion of the Action & Evaluation stages.

“Don’t feel that the quality of the portfolios is improving any and there is still a lot of confusion re: scheduled v unscheduled learning. WCPPE are currently running CPD “drop-in” centres – perhaps these could be offered in different locations in June 2010 when pharmacists are completing their CPD portfolios?”

c. Feedback on online and paper-based portfolio assessment

Several assessors suggested it was time to remove the facility to submit paper-based portfolios.

Paper-based Portfolio

“Paper-based – much harder – in putting online – questions would be a useful prompt”.

“Paper based – time to withdraw facility allowing paper submission or would that be too draconian?”

“Paper-based portfolio – Should be told that any additional notes cannot exceed the character that’s allowed for online and should consider changing the template so there is sufficient space in the ‘boxes’ to write up ‘stand alone’ cycles as per online (i.e. no need for ‘additional notes’). Consider only permitting online submissions”.

“Paper-based portfolio assessment – need to see the assessment criteria on screen when assessing these. Taking a long time to enter in – could some of this administrative task be done by PSNI so assessors are simply assessing?”

Online portfolio

“Online portfolio assessment – need more characters in general comments (feedback) – feel feedback is limited due to lack of space”.

“Standard of grammar, syntax and spelling can be very poor in either form”.

“Online portfolio – no ability to correct inflated time spent learning”.

d. What has not gone so well?

“No real problems”

Time commitment to assess portfolios

"Ideally, could have done with a bit more time to assess the large number of portfolios".

"Twenty portfolios at one time was too many, wouldn't take so many again – my own fault".

Paper-based portfolio assessment

"Still lots of handwritten portfolios. Don't photocopy very well and much more difficult to assess than those on-line".

"Handwriting on paper portfolio poor".

"Paper-based portfolios – impossible (virtually) for candidate to write stand alone cycles in space provided in templates. Only encourages, candidate to submit reams of 'additional information' with expectations that assessor will read all of it".

Frustrations

"Scheduled learning being recorded as unscheduled learning & meeting assessment criteria even though recorded incorrectly. Assessing a portfolio in non-PSNI format is challenging and difficult to find the relevant information. When assessing this portfolio I had to read each cycle completely and then link pieces of information to our stages of cycle/assessment criteria".

"To date the way in providing feedback I have to scroll up and down so I can read my comments made on each specific cycle is frustrating".

"Lots of people still think reading the PJ can be used (as one cycle) which is really frustrating".

"Portfolios that were difficult to assess generally had problems with the evaluation stages of the cycles. Some pharmacists insist on stating that they 'can do' something rather than stating that they actually 'do' it".

e. Recommended changes to improve the system for assessors and pharmacists

Four main areas of change were suggested:

- Cycle number guidance
- Website improvements
- Facilitation and Support
- Payment

Number of cycles within a portfolio

"It would be useful to have an agreed or recommended minimum (& Maximum?) number of cycles. One pharmacist submitted 1 x 25 hour unscheduled cycle and 5 hours CPD completion!"

Improvements to website

"Some of my feedback won't fit into the comments section e.g. when a pharmacist has documented a number of cycles e.g. >10 and the types of issues/problems vary, so feedback is necessary for each cycle. I've saved this into word document with the portfolio ID, that I will email you to forward to the pharmacist – is this ok? Maybe the comments section could be expanded to allow more characters for the future?"

"It would be good if we could edit the 'ready made' feedback comments – sometimes I want to replace a word to make the comment more accurate e.g. insert 'usually', or add a note at the end of a comment."

"There is a comment in the 'stages' section under 'Planning & Action' which relates only to one, not both of these stages. It would be good if these stages were expressed separately, rather than grouped together."

"For assessors – have the questions on screen for the paper-based portfolios. But really that is a very minor issue and not a significant problem."

Facilitation and support

"I think for some pharmacists – using facilitation could easily turn an Option 4 to an Option 1 before they submitted their portfolio".

"Pharmacists perhaps need the opportunity for one-to-one feedback with assessors. I believe that if 30 minutes was spent with each pharmacist (option 4 portfolio), the areas for improvement could be explained to them and they could easily recognize their errors. However, I appreciate this is labour intensive and costly.

Re: unscheduled cycles. The first assessment criteria should be: Is this cycle recorded appropriately and if not, the cycle should fail (i.e. Fails if it is scheduled learning recorded as unscheduled learning). Need to give some thought to assessment of non-PSNI format portfolios".

"Additional guidance for pharmacists: - (i) Time allowance, spend time learning, not applying learning. (ii) One long course or DL pack can be used in more than one cycle (total time cannot exceed time of course/DL pack) (iii) Description of learning – certain amount of detail expected, not just stating high level learning (e.g. "learned about side effect" not sufficient but "learned about side effects (e.g. dry mouth, urinary incontinence) is acceptable".

"Written portfolios – The 4 portfolios I marked used the old CPD paper record with questions that differ from those on the online based format".

e.g. Action Stage – what didn't I learn that I expected to learn? In some cycles I noticed this question caused the individual to ramble on about new learning and occasionally not even provide any summary about their identified learning needs. Given the limited space for paper based recording can the paper based record sheet be updated and can we get this out to pharmacists intent on paper based recording?"

"Evaluation – How has my practice changed as a result of this learning? In some cycles I reckon this question has encouraged people to discuss how they intend to change their practice rather than how it was applied?"

Payment

"I was just wondering if the other assessors would think it fairer if we were paid per cycle assessed, rather than per portfolio, as portfolios vary greatly in cycle number (1 of mine had 22 cycles compared with another of only 5!) Also considering you get paid £xx to mark each reassessment portfolio, consisting of only 3 cycles."

"We get paid £xx for 3 Re-assessment cycles and £yy for 8-20 cycle for assessment portfolios. Can the number of cycles be limited to 8?"

"Can we not do away with paper assessments or at least make format identical to online. Really promote online system, if writing is so bad it will not be marked as assessors cannot read it – takes up a lot of time trying to decipher it."

5. CONCLUSIONS

Feedback from PSNI CPD assessors suggests that the standard of cycle documentation is improving for many pharmacists, with online portfolios being the preferred format for assessors due to fewer difficulties deciphering handwriting. There are however a number of issues which could be addressed in order to improve the system for assessors e.g. improvements in the space (number of characters) available for assessors to provide feedback using the online system.

A number of suggestions made by assessors may be helpful in order to improve pharmacists' experiences of CPD assessment. These include further guidance of the number of cycles to be submitted and information for those pharmacists who wish to continue submitting paper-based portfolios. It would also appear that ongoing support and reinforcement of key messages regarding the documentation of CPD cycles would be beneficial for pharmacists. This should

include information on documenting unscheduled CPD cycles as some pharmacists appear to have been confused about this.

If further guidance is formulated and circulated to pharmacists, particularly in relation to the expected number of cycles per annual portfolio, this may have a subsequent impact on the time commitment in order to process each portfolio.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of this work, the following recommendations have been made in order to improve experiences of CPD assessors and registrants in Northern Ireland:-

- A proposal should be brought forward to the Education Committee regarding CPD cycle numbers with a view to a suggested maximum per annual portfolio.
- A proposal should be brought forward to the Education Committee regarding paper-based CPD portfolio submissions.
- Further support and training should be made available to those pharmacists who require assistance in order to document their CPD to meet the standards set by the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland.

Key messages

- Overall, assessors' have reported improvements in the standards of CPD portfolios they assess.
- Some improvements to the online CPD assessment site should result in an improved experience for assessors, and ultimately benefit pharmacists through enhanced feedback.
- With experience, assessors are becoming more confident with the assessment system but as new scenarios continue to arise, even experienced assessors require support and clarification occasionally from the Post-registration Unit.

REFERENCES

1. The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (2009). Code of Ethics: Professional standards and guidance. PSNI: Belfast.
2. The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (2009). CPD evaluation criteria <http://www.psni.org.uk/professionals/continuing-professional-development/cpd-evaluation.php> PSNI: Belfast.

Appendix 1



Feedback on Assessing Period 1 2008-09

ASSESSOR NAME:
What has gone well on this round of assessing?
What has not gone so well?
What observations have you made as a result of assessing portfolios this time? (i.e. anything worth noting for other assessors or by PSNI?)
Do you have any other feedback or comments on the <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online portfolio assessment• Paper-based portfolio assessment
Are there any changes you would recommend to improve the system for assessors and/or pharmacists

Thank you for completing this feedback. It is appreciated!