Hold on Tight – It's a Rollercoaster of Change!

The Shifting Landscape of Skills Acquisition and Professional Development within the UK

The CPD Standards Office
Campaigning for Excellence in Lifelong Learning

Foreword

We are delighted to produce this whitepaper for government and members of the CPD Standards Office community. This paper aims to further contribute to the debate around training quality in the UK.

Over the past five years, the CPD Standards Office has been committed to exploring different aspects of CPD and workplace learning. Even across this short time period, we have seen new trends emerge around the consumption of online learning and changes are afoot in terms of the professional development opportunities available.

In 2010, the CPD Standards Office Research Project estimated that the collective individual membership of the 1600 professional bodies within the UK was approximately 5 million, which is approximately 15% of the workforce. With a growing workforce, this number is likely to have increased. Hence there has been a strong demand from individuals and employers across all sectors and industries to access and regularly undertake training and educational activities that are appropriate for CPD purposes.

The job market is changing too and many roles have continued to adapt to the digitalisation of skills needed to fulfil business challenges. This whitepaper highlights the need to implement practical - CPD requirements across all disciplines or job roles.

Although many CPD policies are adapting to the pace of change, CPD still has a negative reputation and still associated, by many professionals, with 'going on a one-day' course who struggle to record learning outcomes and think the delivery is of poor quality. The CPD Standards Office, alongside its Expert Advisory Board is working towards confronting these challenges in the CPD arena and promotes that if CPD is done well, it offers a wealth of benefits for employers and government including a more engaged and employable workforce.

Despite the challenges around reputation and provision, the overall practice of CPD is not likely to be discontinued anytime soon. Professionals are now undertaking CPD online and able to access a more personalised way of learning on-the-go from their smartphones and through various channels such as search engines, social media, webinars and podcasts.

The CPD Standards Office has answered some uncomfortable questions on how to keep CPD current in the face of change as the possibility of providing outdated CPD into a modern workforce can have a detrimental impact on the reputation of employers. For example, the millennial and younger generations, the most digitally 'savvy', will soon take over as the biggest proportion of the workforce and are searching for more than just economic value from their employers. Therefore, debates surrounding the apprenticeship levy must stay aware of rogue employer behaviour and the delivery of poor quality training schemes which can disenfranchise and disconnect young people from learning for work.

This paper is a call to action for the UK government and employers to recognise the challenge of providing credible and valuable training provision into the workforce. The CPD Standards Office can support the current need to assess the quality of CPD provision for a more engaged workforce.

Amanda Rosewarne, Founding Partner & Chief Executive, The CPD Standards Office
Susie Kay, The Professionalism Group, Member of Expert Advisory Board – The CPD Standards Office

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The Shifting Landscape of Skills Acquisition and Professional Development Within the UK

Today the United Kingdom has a complex, diverse and intelligent workforce. Comprising approximately 30 million individuals, the traditional paths for identifying work based learning and skills, providing work based education and learning are evolving exponentially.

This whitepaper looks at the shifting landscape within skills development and the undertaking of CPD (continuing professional development) and explores the current trends that are impacting this area and creating a rollercoaster of change.

Many believe that we are living in a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) world (Wikipedia 2017), affecting every organisation and individual in a wealth of different ways. Originally a military term, VUCA is beginning to be utilised in a variety of organisations' vernaculars.

The recent vote in the UK for Britain to leave the European Union, has demonstrated VUCA at its most extreme with political arguments, financial markets in turmoil, all creating further uncertainty about what may lie ahead.

V	U	C	A
Volatility	**Uncertain**	**Complex**	**Ambiguous**

The Big Challenges

Across the skills arena within the UK, there are some key challenges facing government, employers and other key stakeholders:

- The ongoing credibility and reputation of employers
- Employability and work prospects for 'anyone' within the work force, ensuring that disadvantaged or vulnerable groups are not disregarded
- Sustainable apprenticeship structures that employers can consistently adopt and support
- Valuable educational qualifications that have longevity and relevance

The impact of the leave vote for 'Brexit' on our workforce, leaves a question mark over future EU funding into our universities and education system and will add to the existing challenges within the skills area over the next decade.

There is no crystal ball available with a clear vision of the future. However, we have a learning process at our disposal which, although it cannot create certainty, can be a tool for all to use to prepare for the challenges ahead. It is critical in these uncertain times for our workforce to remain updated, educated and knowledgeable. Developing education pathways for younger or disadvantaged groups, and updates to keep abreast of ongoing developments, is also key.

Familiar to many as an educational practice, CPD can be adopted to assist us in these changing times.

Background and Context to CPD

CPD is defined as '"Continuing Professional Development (CPD) involves intentionally developing the knowledge, skills and personal qualities an individual requires to perform their professional responsibilities successfully, and stay current and competent within their role and at work."(CPD Research Project, 2010) and is simply a structured approach to lifelong learning.

As a snapshot, CPD should be viewed as a trusted, sturdy mechanism for undertaking skills updates, and ensuring an individual remains professionally competent. CPD is expected from members of professional bodies and membership organisations, and is increasingly being used by employers as a performance management and appraisal tool.

In the UK alone, there are over 1600 professional bodies, regulators, societies and membership organisations all representing particular roles, disciplines or professions. Within this whitepaper we will refer to them as professional membership organisations, and many of them have a rich and long history. The UK is home to some of the oldest membership organisations in the world, founded several centuries ago as knowledge and scholarship became more prized and so required an organisational home. These "traditional professions" include medics, engineers, accountants, solicitors, and surgeons, all of which have formal educational routes from school, through university and post graduate qualifications to becoming a chartered or licenced professional.

As a result, CPD has long been an expectation of professionals in regulated sectors. Professions such as medicine or law have been mandated to keep their qualifications up to date and remain "licenced to practice" by undertaking a minimum amount of training and wider development for decades. There is a general acceptance by individual professionals that learning for the profession does not finish at the end of a university degree.

The CPD Standards Research project estimates that the collective individual membership of the 1600 professional bodies within the UK is approximately 5 million, which is approximately 15% of the workforce. Hence there is a strong demand from individuals and employers to access and regularly undertake training and educational activities that are appropriate for CPD purposes.

From Jobs
to Careers

Over the past century, many 'new' professional membership organisations have become established, and there is likely to be one in place for practically any discipline or role that can be envisaged.

For example, the Institute of Direct and Digital Marketing represents recently developed roles in Digital Marketing, the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association (BIGGA) promotes best practice in sports turf management, and the Chartered Institute of Library and Informational Professionals (CILIP) which represents those working within libraries and other specialist areas of 'information management'.

Through the establishment of these newer professional membership organisations, the organisation of different membership levels, and the introduction of appropriate educational qualifications, a wave of professionalisation has reached those working in roles that would not historically have been considered as a 'career' option.

Within today's knowledge economy, these organisations recognise that individual professionals must keep up to date and current and, as a result, most of these professional membership organisations also have a CPD or lifelong learning policy in place for their members. If they operate within a regulated sector, or offer chartered status, then the CPD policy is mandatory. That is, an individual cannot remain a member of the profession unless they undertake a certain amount of training and development activities within a given time frame.

The amount of CPD an individual has to undertake, as well as how they should record their learning, is dictated by each professional institute and the requirements can vary considerably. Some institutes ask individuals to undertake a set amount of learning 'CPD' hours per year and record their activities by collecting certificates and proof of education. Others expect individuals to set out personalised learning objectives, source appropriate training, and then comprehensively reflect on the learning achieved and how it could be applied within their role and professional practice. These different approaches are known as input, output or outcome based CPD schemes, and can even vary within certain disciplines, e.g. within accountancy there are several professional bodies including the ACCA, CIMA, CIPFA and AAT which all vary on the type of CPD scheme and expectations for members. In practice this means that an accountant registered with one professional body might undertake and record their CPD very differently from an accountant registered with another professional body.

There has been an ongoing debate for some time within the professional membership organisation community around which type of CPD scheme is most effective, with some arguing an inputs based CPD scheme, i.e. a set number of learning hours per year, is simply a measure of activity and does not guarantee positive learning results.

From a scientific perspective, it is notoriously difficult to measure learning impact and the tangible outcomes from individuals undertaking CPD activities. Hence, without hard empirical evidence, the input / output debate is indulgent, the simple requirement for an individual to undertake CPD - in whatever form or recording application - is a sensible, pragmatic approach that ensures that a level of ongoing training is undertaken by a profession, which in turn keeps their skills and knowledge up to date.

Continuing Professional Development - What do we Know?

Over the past seven years, our research has explored different aspects of CPD and workplace learning. We have interviewed and surveyed hundreds of individuals and professional bodies to understand what CPD really means within different contexts and professions. Even across this short 7-year time period, we have seen new trends emerge around the consumption of online learning and changes are afoot in terms of the professional development opportunities available.

Historically, many individuals have pigeonholed CPD as 'going on a course'. There is a long standing myth that all CPD constitutes is attending live instructor-led training courses, delivered in a traditional classroom setting. Yet, this is not the message that a CPD policy carries; instead there is lots of emphasis within CPD requirements that many individuals are likely to be undertaking relevant CPD within their everyday work practices, so it is simply a question of recognising and recording it accordingly.

However, the 'going on a course' myth continues to prevail and, understandably, many professional institutes and membership organisations find this belief from their membership highly frustrating. The last thing they want promoted is the idea of undertaking expensive, time-consuming and possibly irrelevant classroom training as the only CPD option.

Over recent years, many CPD schemes have been repositioned, and the communications and guidance for undertaking CPD made clearer. Overall the message does seem to be getting through, with institutes anecdotally reporting that they see a broader range of learning activities on CPD records. However, other factors and challenges still exist:

Variable quality of CPD Provision

Almost every professional institute or membership organisation has a CPD policy which suggests a variety of acceptable types of CPD activities. However, the reality of what is available within the marketplace, and the quality of some educational and training content, can vary wildly. Unfortunately, the experience of poor quality or irrelevant CPD leads to individuals becoming further disengaged from the undertaking of regular CPD activities.

Many people struggle to record their CPD easily

Despite many individuals understanding that CPD can be more than going on a training course, they struggle to record their learning outcomes and identify tangible results when learning new knowledge or skills.
Our research findings have demonstrated that many individuals struggle with the concept of reflecting on their learning and articulating their learning outcomes, citing it to be 'too fluffy!'.

CPD can have a negative reputation

Our research has repeatedly found that the majority of individuals often think of the term CPD in a negative light.   Many find enforced rules around undertaking ongoing education a chore, and having to list learning outcomes often displaces the overall joy of learning.

The image of CPD is likely to be revamped slightly with some membership organisations tackling the problem by dropping the 'C' and adopting the term "Professional Development". Others have revised their CPD guidance and communications. Yet in many professions, CPD is an entrenched language, with no obvious benefits likely from the changes attempted.   Despite these best intentions, for many the undertaking of annual CPD activities remains a professional burden.

The Bigger Picture going Forwards...

Despite the challenges around reputation and provision, the overall practice of CPD is not likely to be discontinued any time soon. For many professions, CPD has been established as a cornerstone of professionalism and, whilst its current formula might not be perfect or scientifically measurable, it is broadly agreed that it is sound educational practice.

Whilst CPD will continue to be expected from individuals, the mechanisms for undertaking learning and the channels for delivery are beginning to change. Increasingly, CPD activities are being consumed easily online through standalone e-learning modules, webinars, podcasts, downloadable PDFs and structured reading, watching videos, and participating in online group forums.

The increased consumption of CPD online has seen a move away from the previously limited choice of CPD and training provision, to an endless choice of digital activities and up to date information available when live classes and seminars are running.

This has created a step change in how CPD is provided and delivered and has, therefore, enabled learning to become more personalised.

Personalisation of Learning

For the first time, compared to previous generations, individuals are now in the driving seat when it comes to learning and education. This change is predominantly linked to improvements in technology and how information is now shared.

The rapid pace of technological change and the development of the internet over the past two decades, alongside the ease with which we can connect and access the web, now means that 76% of adults in the UK use a smartphone or tablet (Deloitte, 2015) and are connected to the online world almost constantly. Not only the domain of adults is affected. Our younger generation of children and babies are growing up with parents using smartphones around them constantly, with children as young as three years old being given iphones and ipads as birthday presents. This has significant implications for how this new generation will consume information as they get older.

The statistics of our technological use are frightening - a recent study found that adults check their smartphones up to 85 times per day and are constantly ready to receive updates and new information (Andrews et al, 2015).

This has created a sea change in how we access information and news, and has led to a new breed of learning behaviours. The use of traditional print based media is declining, encyclopaedias and dictionaries especially, and sitting on public transport you will now see individuals glued to reading their phones as opposed to reading books or newspapers.

As a society, we now consume an increasing range of information types through online sources. Using a screen, websites, social media sites, and news apps, are now the "go to" mechanism to find out anything from today's news, an answer to a question, find out what friends are doing, update yourself on industry trends, or to simply check if your train is running on time.

Just Google It...

So far the smartphone and tablet have replaced some traditional, physical educational tools and items, including books, calculators, maps, newspapers, train or plane tickets, academic journals, crosswords, videos, CDs.

It has also enabled us to easily access types of information which were less easy to measure or obtain, including GPS co-ordinates or health information such as "Calories Burned Today".

Not only are we able to receive reams of information, there is also the ability to socially and publically comment on news items, upload our own content, videos or photos and proactively become part of online communities, conversing with individuals from any corner of the globe.

As a result, we now have a compact, easy to access computerised tool on hand 24 hours per day, which provides a wealth of learning opportunities. We can immediately answer any question that might arise in conversation. "Hang on a minute, I'll just Google it" is commonly heard within professional and social conversations. As a result, there has been a 'personalisation of learning' as individuals receive immediate information on unknown topics or questions.

Many of these technological changes are regularly discussed within the training and L & D communities, with much ongoing comment about how organisations must keep abreast of these changes in order not to fail (Cook and Macaulay, 2016). However, personalisation of learning is posing real challenges for our traditional education systems in schools, colleges and universities. In addition, organisations are having to rethink how workplace learning is best facilitated and delivered.

Looking to the future, it raises uncomfortable questions about how the structure of our education provision can remain current in the face of such radical change in learning behaviours and social settings for education.

Right here, Right Now
Personalisation of learning also means that how we find and 'consume' our CPD activities has changed. As we are able to access relevant content or answer questions immediately, we need to tackle the challenges of how this change can be addressed here and now.

The Human Memory - What is Sticking?

Although we have a wealth of educational resources at our online fingertips, it does not mean that we are able to remember greater amounts of information. In fact, serious concerns from healthcare professionals and academics have been recently raised about the state of our memory and concentration. Indicative evidence suggests that with the increased use of smart phones and tablets, human concentration spans are becoming far shorter, as individuals flit from one task to another, with constant online interruptions from email or social media updates. As many cite these potential long term problems and debates are beginning about the detrimental effects of smart phone and tablet use on the human mind, it is worth questioning whether this is really the big problem overall? As our use of technology is unlikely to decline, so the way we access and use information within the workplace is likely to keep evolving.

Learning in this way presents the issue of superficiality, i.e. knowing a little about a lot of subjects rather than in-depth focussed knowledge in specific areas. Many would argue that this style of learning creates a generation of individuals that are 'jack of all trades, masters of none'. Hence it is important for CPD processes and structures which create deep knowledge bases for our younger generations are to be encouraged. As without being a 'master' of any particular area, we see the possibility of millennials being less marketable from an employability perspective and more likely to 'hop' roles, creating headaches for employers.

Learning FROM work not for work

Over the past few years, we have observed that for the first time ever, individuals are consciously learning FROM work and not for work. Although this is a generalised statement, it is clear that the way we use information and 'learning' has changed radically within the workplace. As a result, our educational and professional development requirements are currently in a state of flux. How can we prescribe a set curriculum within professional qualifications if we do not know what knowledge is needed within the workplace?

Learning and education is being inspired by work concepts, commercial opportunities and group discussions. The UK is predominantly a service based economy which means that, often, there is no end product per se. Instead, when an individual is now 'at work' (as opposed to having a day or weekend off), it essentially means that they have concentrated, and effectively "changed mental state" both personally and professionally. Whether in a workplace, or working from home, when 'at work' an individual is wired into their organisational and industrial communities online and offline, and often working away on laptops or PC's for long periods of time and perceive their email and other electronic communications and messaging to be 'work' as much as the work itself.

As learning at work has become more fluid, and knowledge less prescribed, it is interesting to consider the skills that workplaces really require and need... The "skills gap" has been an ongoing political concern for some time, and often used by policy makers and businesses to frame discussions.   A closer look at the term itself and the arguments surrounding it, reveals that it has a loose definition - "a growing gulf between the skills of the UK workforce, and the skills organisations require to work effectively" (SMF, 2015). This begs the questions - What skills gap? What is missing?

If the nature of industry and work in 2017 means that learning is inspired when individuals are in their "work state", then the skills gap becomes somewhat of a myth.

In America the skills gap has centred on companies struggling to find good employees to fill their roles, but a closer look reveals that this tended to be fuelled by a resistance to pay the market rate or a good salary, as opposed to the individuals not being available and equipped with the right skills (Capelli, 2012)

Of course, it could be argued that getting individuals 'work ready' is an important part of the skills gap, as ensuring that an individual is able to work effectively within today's environment has its own challenges. Generic business skills such as teamwork, collaboration, professionalism, communication and negotiation enable individuals to thrive in fluid work environments. Strong technological skills and a natural digital aptitude provide the underpinnings for successful service-based organisations operating in digital economies. Indeed, it is not uncommon to see organisations present their working values by listing out how their colleagues work.

Many colleges and universities have seen this change, and include modules within degree qualifications that ensure individuals are 'work ready'.

"The CPD sessions strengthen our students' personal branding, and employability skills for the global environment, their CV and add as a key differentiator in their professional career profile, we strongly support the important value of the CPD accredited course and their valuable addition to the students' learning and development study journey." (April 2016)

Azam Ali & Dr Eric Chan
Programme Directors MA in Management & MA Global Management
Regent's University, London

Increased Opportunities for Young People

What does 'learning from work, not for work' really mean for young people and how is it linked to professional development and formal CPD policies?

Traditionally, the practice of formal CPD began once an individual qualified professionally and had finished school and university level education. This has begun to change over the past decade, with the CPD Standards Office seeing an increased provision of 'CPD activities' for the 16-25 year-old market. Often linked to "employability topics", or "business skills" in a certain context, there has been a growing awareness for some time that vocational skills are more valuable than academic qualifications (Newcome, 2013).

This has been partly driven by professional institutes opening up alternative membership routes for young people whereby a university level qualification is not necessary for admission to membership. For example, the Science Council provides the status 'Registered Scientist' for any young person who has been working with their employer from 18 years onwards, and provides professional recognition to scientists who do not have a degree, yet have plenty of relevant experience and training that constitutes them as a 'scientist'. Once they have achieved this status, CPD must then be undertaken annually in order to maintain the title whereby they must provide evidence that they have undertaken learning in at least three of the following categories:

- Work-based learning
- Professional activity
- Formal education
- Self-directed learning
- Learning outside of normal employment.

Schools and universities are also encouraging the practice of CPD. Following the trend that education is easily sourced online, many educational establishments are making young people aware that undertaking professional development in some capacity can boost employment prospects.

More generally, the work environment for today's young person is a vastly different world compared to previous generations. Much has been written about the increased expectations of 'millenials' within the workplace, the post era of a guaranteed 'job for life', and the factors and culture that need to be in place in order to retain young talent. Grovo (2015) notes that millenials are known for "rampant job hopping" as, despite being ambitious, tech savvy and confident, they often do not feel they are in a role that connects to their values or is worth the financial sacrifice of a low graduate salary.

5 Key Values Millennials Look For In An Employer: Grovo, 2015

- **Development.** Millennials are hungry for training, career advancement and opportunities for growth.
- **Meaning.** Nothing is more important to millennials than doing work that matters.
- **Autonomy.** Millennials have a natural entrepreneurial spirit and want to work on their own terms.
- **Efficiency.** There's always a better, faster and easier way to work. Millennials want to find it.
- **Transparency.** Information is essential to millennials—they want to be kept in-the-know on the job.

In some respects, the workplace has become more transactional from a millenial's perspective. They are the first generation carrying enormous student debt from increased university fees and are also faced with rising housing prices and travel costs.   Understandably, when offered a graduate salary (which typically has a low starting point) they are asking employers a bigger question... what will they also 'get back' from working with them. From their perspective, they've made an investment in their future, and have become more thoughtful about the quid pro quo.

Apprenticeships: Evolution or Revolution?

More recently there has been a renewed focus on Apprenticeships and employment opportunities for young people. This has been steered by the recent Government announcement of an apprenticeship levy for organisations who have a salary bill of over £3 million per annum. From April 2017, organisations have been required to contribute to a new apprenticeship levy, and there have been fundamental changes on how the Government funds apprenticeships overall (Gov, 2016).

Overall, the levy has been met with a mixed reception from employers, training providers and the further education sector.

In theory, if executed well in the long term, the levy should widen opportunities for young people, providing more employment options and potentially re-establish apprenticeships as a positive career choice. However, Fuller (2016) warns that the levy will overstretch the definition of apprenticeships, which could include re-skilling of older adults. She warns that this will potentially devalue the 'brand' and reputation of apprenticeships - especially if it includes standard learning and development, such as company induction training.

Regardless of how apprenticeships are branded, they will undoubtedly provide younger people with greater choice regarding work and career options. Moving forwards, if this new apprenticeship model is successful, we may look back and view the levy as a springboard towards solving the employment and education issues our young people currently face.

Training Quality Meets Apprenticeships....

More recently there have been reported concerns that the apprenticeship levy will erode the quality of training within organisations (Fairbarn, 2016). The CBI has called for a "radical rethink" on the flagship apprenticeship levy, and has warned that pressure to meet the targets will encourage 'rogue employer behaviour'.

It is interesting to consider what 'rogue behaviour' might be seen. Indeed, the categorisation and allocation of the training required to support the new apprenticeships programmes, is likely to cause hurried decisions and potential tendencies to populate new apprenticeship programmes with whatever is to hand, or cheap options bought within hurried time frames.

Undoubtedly, the apprenticeship levy opens up a wealth of new commercial opportunities to training providers, many of whom can easily rebrand and reposition existing training offering and programmes to be 'apprenticeship ready'. Of course, some of these options are likely to be sound investments but undoubtedly there will be opportunists who see a quick win for "selling old wine in new bottles". Online training content in particular, is extremely easy to rebrand and market as new training activities which appear to have been specifically developed for their customers, yet is actually old content with a new marketing 'wrapper'.

In turn, this is likely to lead to buying and procurement headaches for employers who will struggle to filter the good training activities from the bad.

Blurring of Boundaries

Elsewhere, skills acquisition and professional development are also being impacted by a number of other factors, mainly the ever growing informal online networks and communities that we are joining.

Historically, there have been clear guidelines on the remit and services delivered from authority organisations such as professional institutes and regulators, educational establishments such as schools, universities and further education colleges, to individual learners.

These recognised authorities were clearly distinct from the activities of commercial training providers or charitable organisations, so that individual learners could easily identify the type of education or professional recognition they might receive from these different organisations.

Over the past two decades, however, the boundaries between such authority organisations and other educational establishments have become blurred. Partly due to funding changes within the educational system, this has resulted in the academisation of schools, as well as universities beginning to offer a wide range of educational experiences, e.g. short courses focused towards businesses, which mirror the provision previously exclusive to commercial training companies.

It has become easier for commercial training companies to offer diplomas and qualifications that align to the national qualifications and Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), alongside their short online or face-to-face training options, which means that the individual learner now has huge choice in terms of where to undertake their formal educational qualifications, as well as their informal education.

We have seen charities use their knowledge about their cause or specialist area of knowledge to deliver training and education to relevant professions, e.g. Scope AND Dyslexia Action both offer training courses and CPD activities on their specialist areas to those working in teaching and social care. In this context, charities and not for profit organisations have positioned themselves as educational centres and knowledge hubs, distinctly different from schools, colleges or training providers, but with an educational offer that is both relevant and valuable.

Who is the Expert?

This blurring of the boundaries between different sources of educational offerings, leads to bigger questions around who are the real experts of today? An academic professor with years of research and teaching experience within a university has valuable knowledge and expertise and will be highly respected by their students and colleagues. Yet an individual who is an expert within a certain industry, or with a certain skill set, who hosts regular webinars and teaches is also seen as valuable to an individual learner.

There is also a newer expert in town - the online internet personality. Individuals such as Zoella Sugg and Chris Harris are popular online personalities / experts with huge numbers of online followers. Using YouTube, Twitter and blogging platforms to 'publish their work', Zoella Sugg has become known as a bona fide expert within the fashion and make-up industry starting online at the tender age of just 21. Chris Harris began his career in journalism within the automotive industry, and has principally used YouTube to engage with individuals about his passion for cars. However, such is his popularity, he is now considered an expert by engineers working within the automotive industry, and a valuable source of educational information (Wikipedia, 2016).

Such digital experts have created a new era for contributing to education and skills development. By simply utilising digital mediums to share their ideas, opinions and enthusiasm, individual learners have a growing number of 'experts' that they can choose to learn from.

Focus on Quality

An increasing range of topics and new experts available online has bought a greater spotlight on the overall quality of the information as well as the credibility of the training content.

Organisations and individuals want to be assured that any training procured and undertaken is fit for purpose, relevant and correct.   The blurring of boundaries between industry expert, academic author and online curator has also thrown an added layer of complexity on the sources of content and training materials and asked the question 'Is this any good?' So who can answer this question and how?

The Great Accreditation Debate

"Accreditation", "certification", "endorsement" are all terms applied where an official recognition from an authority has been issued to another party. Periodically, within the professional development world, there are debates around accreditation - should we or shouldn't we? What criteria and approach should official recognition take?

There are claims that 'learning' and 'education' cannot be accredited. However, the increased focus on quality points to a need for external, third party 'filtering' or vetting, which in turn drives the need, and therefore explains the demand, for independent recognition of training and education providers in the professional development arena.

The Westernised accreditation approach follows traditional Anglo-Saxon thinking around formative education, and the notion that a central set of rules sets out a non-negotiable "golden path" to a single best way of working.

The British Standards Institute founded in 1901, delivered the first "kitemark of quality" in 1903, and established the practice of externally recognising consumer quality using a mark or motif. BSI kitemarks initially focused on products and engineering materials - for example, the BSI kitemark for copper pipe fittings was issued in 1945 and, at over 70 years old, is now the longest running BSI kitemark.

The International Organisation for Standardization (ISO) was later established in 1946 by the BSI and went beyond products to focus on systems, services, management practices. There are now over 21,000 international standards that ensure 'things work' by supplying a specification that ensures quality, efficiency and safety.   It is claimed that such standards and kite-marks facilitate international trade and it is hard to picture a switch to a different way of measuring quality within the next 50 years or so (ISO & BSI, 2016).

This is not to say that the accreditation models we are using are correct, just that the realising of radical change away from this way of thinking is likely to be slow. Hence, this leaves us with the models of accreditation and quality assurance that we currently have in place.

One thing is certain, as economic climate and social change are continuing to evolve at pace, so the accreditation models we do have in place must be regularly reviewed and questioned.

Looking Ahead

So where does this leave us and what should we be considering in order to ensure that we are able to work our way flexibly through the next few critical decades?

As well as the various trends we have discussed in this whitepaper, there are other discussion points and trends happening within education, skills and learning and development:

On the Horizon

• Gamification – what does it mean?

Increasingly organisations are using 'gamification' for learning and education, taking advantage of social learning. This trend is in its infancy but, going forwards, - should it become popular or 'the norm' – how might it impact on other types of education?

• Microlearning & bitesize learning – challenges for deeper skill development?

Bitesize and microlearning are currently buzz terms, encompassing the idea of accessing online information or videos and spending short dedicated time periods from 2 minutes to 2 hours on learning. Organisations are encouraging individuals to learn in these shorter bursts and, overall, this complements busy working lives – but it will still present challenges for deeper skill development.

• Neuroscientific understanding – learning how we learn:

Advances in science are providing us with a greater understanding of how the human brain 'works' from a learning and education perspective. As we 'learn how we learn', we will become more savvy in understanding how, when and why we are learning. For example, recent work on circadian rhythms has found that timings for lessons within the traditional school day should be changed to assist with the learning process. Will this type of science galvanise decisions around educational policy at government level?

Concluding Observations

Throughout this whitepaper, we have discussed the shifting landscape of skills acquisition and professional development and endeavoured to be both independent and observational. The next steps to consider should be:

• how we bring these identified trends together
• understand their impact on society at large.

Without question, the world of work has changed, our environments are evolving, and being 'online' is now woven into the fabric of our everyday experiences. How we work has advanced to a stage whereby we can assume that being 'at work' has simply become a way of being.

In the longer term, this begs the question of whether the current school, college and university pathways are now fit for purpose, as academic prowess can no longer be considered in isolation. Instead employers are increasingly asking questions about and prioritising areas such as collaboration, soft skills and relationship building in order to consider whether employees or potential future employees are rounded individuals, capable of contributing to the bigger picture and the organisation as a whole.

What is the government's role in quality assuring the skills that are required for employability?

It is apparent to most that there needs to be an enhanced focus on best practice in all educational and skills development activities, even while we continue to debate who is responsible for putting the necessary stakes in the ground.

The impact of the Brexit decision will mean a long period of adjustment and change across all sectors. While career and CPD advisers continue to work with employers and individuals to encourage formalising short, medium and long-term skills and development strategies, it is probably also true that employers may be increasingly unwilling or unable to assist employees materially in the process. So if individual professionals need to create their own learning pathways, then a trend to online personalisation may provide a fortunate collision of aspiration and real-world pragmatism. Evolution in delivery of CPD activities, enhanced understanding of outcomes and ease of recording for professional purposes as well as the establishment of robust quality oversight will all play their part in ensuring that professional development can assist in getting us all through the next few years.

Uncertainty is uncomfortable. People, their attitudes and the context within which they work will continue to evolve. CPD is certainly a tool we can use to keep ahead in these changing times.

Hold on tight – there might be a rollercoaster ahead!
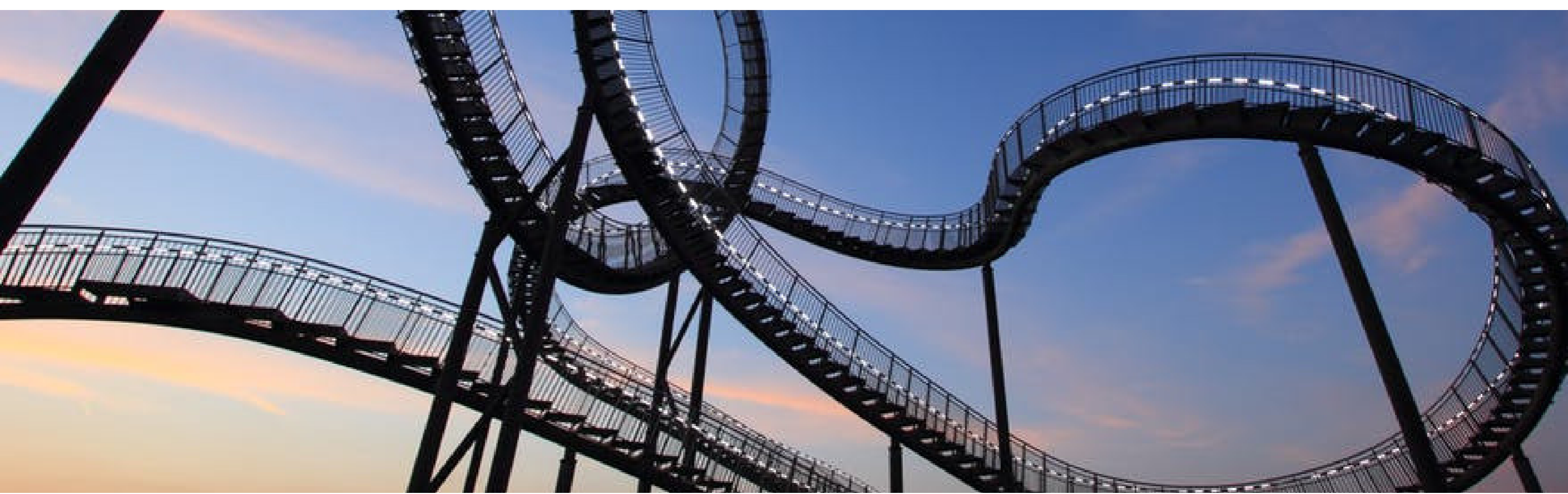
Authors

This whitepaper has been compiled by Amanda Rosewarne and Susie Kay, colleagues at the CPD Standards Office.

Amanda Rosewarne is a founding partner, and Chief Executive. With a background in occupational psychology, she has worked within CPD and lifelong learning extensively and advised hundreds of organisations on CPD provision, best practice and policy.

Susie Kay is an active member of the CPD Standards Office Expert Advisory Board as well as founder of The Professionalism Group. Also with a first degree in psychology, she has spent many years advising individuals on their professional development and developing standards for organisations.

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Thank you

If you have any questions about this whitepaper, please contact one of our Client Advisers on 0203 745 6463
or email: info@cpdstandards.com

The CPD Standards Office,
The Courtyard,
59-60 Church Street,
Staines
TW18 4XS
www.cpdstandards.com

The CPD Standards Office
Campaigning for Excellence in Lifelong Learning

About the Professional Development Consortium

Founded in 2010, The Professional Development Consortium was developed from a large-scale university research project based at Kingston University Business School. The research explored professional development, adult education and training, and provided the strong academic platform for the consortium

The consortium works with a range of educational organisation, training providers, professional bodies, associations, and third sector organisations, and has accredited over 700 organisations and individuals.

About the CPD Standards Office

The CPD Standards Office award independent CPD accreditation to training and learning activities across all professions and sectors. The unique organisation was founded with the vision of understanding and enabling positive and successful CPD and learning experiences.

As a highly specialised expert team, our university led research has equipped us with extensive expertise on all things CPD; including a thorough understanding of professional CPD and the use of CPD Certificates for formal CPD.

> Get in touch

0203 745 6463
www.cpdstandards.com
info@cpdstandards.com