

## The latest research reveals that output-based learning and development systems are the future, says **Chris Peat**

**I**n the business world today, professionals are expected to perform a variety of different tasks, and technology is playing an increasingly vital role in managing the resource-intensive process of competency testing. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is one way of ensuring that individuals are equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge required for their particular job role.

CPD is now a mandatory requirement of many professional bodies and is also becoming more widely used within commercial organisations, especially those keen to develop a culture of lifelong learning and performance monitoring.

However, the level of competency testing, and the way in which it is measured and complied with, differs greatly between such organisations.

Most systems of measurement, although diverse, fall into two main categories – input-driven and output-driven.

Input-driven systems are generally based on counting the number of hours that people have been engaged in CPD activities. Frequently, they are supported by a learning-management system that provides a structure for the individual as well as monitoring information for the organisation.

Output-driven systems, on the other hand, are focused on the impact that CPD has actually had on someone's practice. They can also be self-managed by the people using them, which allows them to develop based on the needs of the individual's role.

The Institute of Continuing Professional Development (ICPD), in its recently commissioned research project *Regulating Competencies: Is CPD Working*, found that, although many professions use a combination of both the input- and output-driven systems, they are increasingly turning to the more effective output systems.

This has been borne out by our own experience here at Axia, having worked with many different professional organisations to implement output-based systems.

This shift to output-based systems is largely due to the introduction of more complex personal development plans, which have been designed to be responsive to individual work requirements and to ensure professionals engage in the CPD and training that is most effective in supporting them in their professional duties.

This not only makes CPD relevant to them, it also engages them more fully in the whole learning process.

However, with the migration to output-driven systems, the study found that some professional bodies are finding it increasingly difficult to implement an effective system of compliance within their organisation. This is primarily due to a lack of resources: output-driven systems have traditionally needed considerable resources in order to monitor people's CPD continually and properly.

But there are now web-based solutions available that have made implementing the output model, while enabling professional bodies to ensure compliance and maintain quality standards, viable. The advantage of using web-based systems is that they are extremely 'light touch' and require little upfront investment or in-house technical resources.

For example, the Society College of Radiographers (SCOR) has implemented an output-based system for its 19,000 members, most of whom are employed by the NHS. With only one full-time CPD officer, an electronic solution was the only practical and cost-efficient option for the SCOR. This ensures thoroughness of competency and performance testing, the ability to monitor levels of compliance and adhere to the documentation requirements of regulators and employers, and ensure members are complying with the Society's professional standards in a flexible and easy-to-use way.

This is also true of the corporate environment, where financial company Sun Life has used a similar system to ensure its financial advisors comply with the latest industry legislation, gain credits towards meeting the necessary licensing requirements, and can operate to the highest standards of quality and probity within a highly regulated market sector.

The message, as reinforced by the ICPD research finding, is clear – output-based learning is the most effective form of performance testing. What organisations need to do now is embrace the affordable technology that is readily available to realise the benefits it can bring them, their members and the wider community that they serve. ■

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