

HEALTH PROFESSIONS COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA

LEARNING PORTFOLIOS

Preamble

“The purpose of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is to assist practitioners to maintain and acquire new and updated levels of knowledge, skills and ethical attitudes that will be a measurable benefit in professional practice and enhance and promote professional integrity. ... All registered health professionals are required to complete a series of accredited continuing education activities each year.”¹

There are 3 Levels of activities. At Level 3, ‘Structured Learning’, learning portfolios have been included. Engaging in this activity will earn 30 Continuing Education Units (CEU’s).

A practitioner can elect to prepare a learning portfolio as envisaged below for submission to ... *(to be confirmed)* ... , in order to be credited with 30 CEUs in any CPD cycle.

Learning Portfolios

A portfolio² argues for professional and personal growth during practice. It assists in documenting learning over time in a variety of contexts while making the practitioner engage in reflection, self-monitoring and self-evaluation. It further enhances professional identity and skills through a conscious learning cycle.

It is a record of a practitioner’s learning experiences, supported by whatever evidence can be presented to verify the statements made. It documents a practitioner’s learning and development in a structured, reflective manner.³ Further, it has been argued that portfolio development will increase a practitioner’s involvement in, responsibility of and ownership for their learning.⁴ In conclusion, a portfolio has come to mean a collection of evidence that demonstrates that learning has taken place.⁵

What should the Learning Portfolio look like?

There is no set guideline for what this learning portfolio should look like. It can take any format from a notebook, diary to an A4 folder with loose page entries. The question to ask is not what should it look like, but rather, what is the purpose that this exercise? A portfolio is essentially a ‘container’ for planned and systematic collection of evidence over time, in support of a learning objective(s) or outcome(s) set by the practitioner. It therefore caters for individual style and technique and is highly flexible in terms of composition and construction.

Purpose of the learning Portfolio

¹ HPCSA, 2006. CPD Guidelines for the Health Professions. Final document of the HPCSA Council CPD Committee.

² A purposeful collection of work that exhibits a practitioners efforts, progress and achievements over time (Järvinen and Kohonen, 1995), mirroring the practitioners growth and accomplishments in a variety if contexts (Bastidas, 1996).

³ Brimer, A. 1999 Academic Registrar, University of Durban-Westville. Draft RPL proposal for the institution.

⁴ Järvinen, A and Kohonen, V. 1995. Promoting Professional development on HE through Portfolio Assessment. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher education*. **20**(1), 25-36.

⁵ Snadden, D. Thomas, M and Challis, M. 1999. The use of portfolio-based learning in medical education. AMME Centre for Medical Education, University of Dundee.

The purpose⁶ of the Learning Portfolio is to serve as a means of enhancing a practitioner's professional identity and skills. The compilation of the Learning Portfolio promotes professional growth and the ongoing exercise of having to organize and share one's learning assists the practitioner to gain a deeper understanding of themselves as professionals.

Constructing the Portfolio

Within the portfolio, a practitioner would need to provide⁷ the following;

1. The identification of an individual learning need(s) supported by an argument as to why/how it has arisen.
2. A learning plan with specific learning objectives, in relation to the learning need identified, that the practitioner believes they would need to meet. This could include, but is not limited to, the identification and development of strategies to meet these identified learning needs. What does the practitioner think they need to do/undertake/master in order to meet their identified learning need(s)?
3. Structured reflection on their engagement in the identified learning strategies, and the subsequent application of their new learning in practice. This can take of the form of using a protocol for reflection as suggested by Alsop (1995);

A protocol for reflecting⁸

- What was the nature of the event or experience?
 - What aspects went well, or what was good about the experience?
 - What aspects did not go well, or what was not good about the experience?
 - What were my feelings about the experience?
 - What were the feelings of others?
 - What have I learnt from the experience?
 - What did others think that I should learn?
 - How can I use what I have learnt in professional practice?
 - What happened when I used what I learnt in professional practice?
 - What would I need to do next?
4. Recording of significant events in application of the new learning, demonstrating how this has led to the formulation of new, revised, learning objective(s) with a subsequent revision of the original learning plan identified at point 2 above.

This section of the portfolio should include valid (ie it answers the question posed), reliable and current evidence from a variety of sources that conveys to the reader (evaluator) the qualities, abilities and capacity of the practitioner to now act more competently as a practitioner in their field⁹.

Evidence¹⁰ can include the following;

⁶ Järvinen, A. and Kohonen, V. 1995.

⁷ Snadden, D. Thomas, M. and Challis, M. 1999.

⁸ Alsop, A. 1995. The Professional Portfolio – Purpose, Process and Practice. BJOT **58**(8) 337-340.

⁹ Alsop, A. 2002. Portfolios: Portraits of our Professional Lives. BJOT **65**(5), 201-206.

¹⁰ Barton, J. and Collins, A. 1993. Portfolios in Teacher education. Journal of Teacher Education. **44**(3), 200-210.

- Documents produced during a short learning course for example. Writings on reading done during the short course. Further exploration and personal interrogation of literature, etc, on the topic.
- Documents about typical daily events not usually captured in written format, for example, a transcript of a recorded feedback session with the client/caregiver/referral agent that would demonstrate newly acquired technique(s) or the use of newly acquired knowledge. This could also include exploration of practice, for example a written treatment guideline with a subsequent reflection on how the intervention proceeded.
- Documents about the work of the practitioner prepared by someone else – peer evaluations, testimonials, for example.
- Items specially prepared for the portfolio like notes, journal entries, drawings and sketches, photographs, action plans, reflections on experience using, for example, Alsop's protocol for reflecting (1999). This could also include research undertaken, or a proposed Journal article from the practitioner.

5. A self-appraisal of their learning during the past year with a proposal in terms of what the practitioner plans to undertake in the following year in terms of their newly identified continuing learning objectives.

(PROPOSED) Evaluation of the learning portfolios, and evaluation criteria

As the HPCSA CPD Registration Department will only conduct compliance checks on a randomly selected sample of individual health professionals¹¹ every year, the Board has instituted an additional accreditation process. (a process whereby the practitioner can have his/her portfolio accredited for the required 30 CEUs).

This process will take the following format, and any practitioner wishing to have their learning portfolio accredited, needs to submit their portfolio to ... (*to be determined*)... , ... (*by date*)... . This accreditation will provide the necessary certification of having achieved the required 30 CEU's.

The following evaluation criteria are proposed:

- Has the practitioner demonstrated having completed a learning cycle? (identified learning need(s), establishment of learning outcome(s), evidence of having achieved the outcome(s), reflections on the implementation of newly acquired learning, the formulation of new/revised learning need(s) and outcome(s) with a future learning plan in place.)
- Has the practitioner demonstrated the ability within their reflections to identify and question the assumptions and beliefs underlying their own practice?
- Has the practitioner demonstrated the ability to creatively explore/create opportunity to meet their learning objective(s)?
- Did the practitioner meet their initial learning objectives? And were they able to establish further learning objectives from their subsequent practice?
- Does the practitioner demonstrate some understanding of the learning process?

¹¹ HPCSA. 2006. Final Document. CPD. Guidelines for the Health Professions.