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A Study on the Effectiveness of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) among Professionals in the Built Environment

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Abstract


All occupations require lifelong learning to advance and remain committed to their fields. This guarantees the professional's upkeep and competence in doing their obligations with competence while upholding consumer protection and responsibility. With the advent of Continuing Professional Development (CPD), which bridges the gap between formal education and practice via professional socialization, foundational courses in education offer information and abilities that are swiftly becoming outdated. Concerns concerning the pertinent and significant subjects, substance, and delivery of the educational curriculum are also brought up by the introduction of CPD. Construction, project management, property agency, valuation, engineering, and architecture are all included in the built environment profession. Every Australian state and territory has a variety of professional groups and regulatory authorities to oversee and enforce licensing and compliance regarding CPD education needs. This study explores whether the objectives of mandatory CPD for professionals working in the built environment have been achieved. For this comparison analysis, three occupations are chosen: property agency, project management, and construction. The study explores the fundamental distinctions between these professions and highlights several CPD-related concerns between professional groups, regulatory authorities, and individuals in the field. The claim made in this study that the goals and purposes of the mandatory CPD have not been fully met is supported by statistical and descriptive data about CPD. Recommendations for improving the present system for the chosen built environment professions are included in the conclusion.

Keywords: Construction, Professional development, Project management, Property agency, Valuation.

1 | Introduction

Construction, project management, property agency, valuation, engineering, and architecture are all included in the built environment profession. Every Australian state and territory has a variety of professional groups

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and regulatory authorities to oversee and enforce licensing and compliance regarding CPD education needs. To create and explain the CPD landscape, this article will concentrate on the state of New South Wales, national bodies, and several international standards. The state and territory Offices of Fair Trading oversee the licenses and certificates of registration for real estate brokers and builders.

On the other hand, for the past 30 years, the Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM), formerly known as the Project Managers' Forum, has played a significant role in advancing the field of project management in Australia. Consequently, more professional organizations have emerged to promote the integrity and code of ethics for project management; however, even though there aren't any compulsory licensing requirements, CPD is a part of the professional code of ethics for project management associations.

According to the Property Stock and Business Agents Act 2002 (the Property Act), occupational licensure and registration are required in New South Wales if one works in the real estate business and engages in the buying, selling, leasing, or negotiation of real estate transactions. Engineering construction, non-residential building construction, and residential building construction are all included in the construction sector. In the past, New South Wales implemented the Building Licensing Act in 1971, making licenses for all builders required. Licensing for related trades was added in 1977 and beyond. "Ensuring unqualified or inappropriate people do not undertake work in the areas of residential building and specialist trades" is the goal of mandatory licensing [1].

Subsequent years saw a variety of modifications enacted regarding licensing in the construction and real estate sectors, along with the addition of required formal education for first licenses. To "maximize consumer protection outcomes, maintain public confidence...raising the quality of building and construction standards, improved safety," the construction sector implemented mandatory CPD in 2004. [34]. The NSW Office of Fair Trading authorized an independent assessment of the CPD system in 2006 at its implementation. The evaluation led to a complete redesign of the curriculum, and in 2008, a wider variety of subjects deemed appropriate for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) were included. These were harmonized with a streamlined approach for CPD programs, and training providers and industry experts were included.

In September 2003, the Office of Fair Trading in New South Wales mandated CPD for property agency license holders and certificate holders. The property business had first implemented compulsory formal education in the late 1960s. With "significant intellectual or practical content, be relevant to property agency work and provide an educational outcome," continuing education for property agents and credential holders is the goal. Maintaining public trust in property professionals and optimizing consumer protection were the key goals of the mandatory CPD program.

The Minister of Fair Trading for New South Wales authorized an independent review of the CPD system in place at the time in 2007 and requested input from industry groups and training providers for suggestions on how to make the program better. After the evaluation, the curriculum was revised, and a wider range of subjects was accepted as appropriate for continuing education for property professionals. This study explores whether mandatory CPD for construction and real estate in New South Wales has achieved its goals, as stated by the Office of Fair Trading. It also compares mandatory CPD for project management.

This article is divided into two sections. The first section covers the literature on CPD for professionals. The second section includes pertinent information on CPD for property agencies, construction, and project management in New South Wales. As a result, some contend that the goals and purposes of the mandatory CPD have not been fully met. Additionally, to enhance consumer protection and elevate the standing of built environment professionals, this study recommends modifications to the current CPD monitoring system.

2 | Literature Review

The term CPD has several meanings. CPD is described as the systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and skills, and the development of personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties throughout the practitioners' working life by the ARB/RIBA UK (2016).

The maintenance of knowledge, expertise, and competence of professionals throughout their careers [37] and the "lifelong learning function [2] are also included in CPD.

The literature does, in fact, quickly point out that CPD benefits all parties involved, including the society at large, by widely encompassing a lifelong learning process. To better serve the public interest and enhance each professional's reputation, several professions and professional associations have implemented mandatory CPD during the past ten years. [2] further supports this by stating that there has been a rise in the incorporation of continuing education into accountability systems for professional practice. Political motivations have also been mentioned [3] as the reason for mandatory CPD; nevertheless, it may be argued that the Australian government has good reason to implement mandatory CPD, given the rise in consumer complaints in the construction industry.

In addition, Young [3] noted that the public was worried about the professions and employers' inadequate abilities to supervise and teach their employees. Mandatory CPD was approved by a 1988 study [3] for several reasons, including protection against liability. Many insurance firms are of the view that most of the lawsuit claims might be attributed to CPD non-compliance. Professional associations, professional practices, licensing authorities, non-profit organizations, and commercial enterprises currently provide CPD services in America [4] for licenses and certificates of registration. This is like Australia, where universities, registered training organizations, and pertinent professional bodies may all provide CPD.

Likewise, a study on continuing education for secondary school teachers [5] suggested that universities be included in the CPD delivery process, citing the benefit of a stronger intellectual substance than commonsense and hard managerialism. Worldwide, mandatory CPD has been introduced in several professions, including engineering, law, medicine, and accounting [6]. A 1990 study [7] confirmed that CPD is a popular option for renewing licenses and certificates. When participating in CPD activities, the Australian educational system's learning environment has been recognized as a crucial factor [8].

Integrated problem-based workshop activities and industry interaction were suggested as a workable solution for professional development with multiple skill sets [9]. Many studies agree that developing decision-making ability and keeping up to speed on technology is an important goal. This logic is also evident in the South African real estate market, where the government has mandated education and licensing requirements to foster professionalism, ethics, expertise, and better stakeholder communication [10].

Advanced real estate qualifications are in high demand in New Zealand since the country's real estate industry is thought to consist of a more sophisticated, better-educated profile of vendors and purchasers [11]. For these reasons, in addition to being provided with a range of delivery options, including block style distribution, and an interactive learning environment reinforced and consolidated by the curriculum and academic rigour mixed with industry input, salespeople are involved in CPD. Studies show that some people are reluctant to engage in CPD programs, citing cost and value for money as among their objections [11]. On the other hand, knowledge must be up-to-date and current [9], [12].

Many professional associations began implementing CPD guidelines in the 1980s [11]. Nonetheless, it was not until the early 2000s that talks for mandatory CPD commenced, as construction professionals in Australia need a licence through a legislative framework. The requirement was finally implemented in 2004. There have been many different schools of thought aid the necessity of CPD as we approach the next decade. Does CPD, for instance, improve current knowledge? Where is the gain for each of the many stakeholders? Before mandatory CPD, did professional practice have any issues? Is the purpose of the benefit to benefit the training provider financially? Is there a belief, for example, that trainers have a stake in the outcome?

Fascinatingly, studies and literature show that governments, academic institutions, and professional groups all have a clear responsibility for creating and introducing CPD programs and techniques for general professions [6]. With ideas for activities like journals, joining a reading club, remote learning, and e-learning, among other methods, the significance of interprofessional skills, or a professional's ability to draw on resources from different professions, is emphasized [13]. Nonetheless, the argument also raised concerns over

the significance of quality of interaction and grounding in practice. Incorporating workshops that cover problem-solving strategies, seminars, conferences, courses, self-directed learning, etc., to create a blended learning environment seems to be a popularly recommended educational approach [14–18].

Numerous academic sources continue to voice concerns about the techniques available for evaluating performance measurement; as a result, several strategies, including self-reporting, oral examinations, observation, peer review, and consulting, are advised [19]. The difficulties in measuring success were emphasized by numbers 6, 21, 28, and 40. According to research conducted in the USA, CPD is offered by professionals, educational outcomes are most beneficial when course quality is upheld, and participants feel like they received value for the money they paid to attend [20]. All jobs require a commitment to lifelong learning. This guarantees their upkeep and ability to perform their responsibilities and uphold consumer protection.

To properly discharge their occupational roles, knowledge expansion is required [20]. Although a foundational course of study can be provided via licensed education, students' perspectives, abilities, and knowledge change quickly [21–23]. To guarantee that education is more than just a mass production of accrued hours or points to meet licensing criteria alone, the CPD's richness is essential. The adoption of specialization will improve education and training beyond the basic professional degree of license [24–26] and acknowledge that CPD can close the gap between formal education and practice through professional socialization [21], [22], [27] and the application of problem-solving skills to perform effectively [28], [29].

Researchers [30] have further summarized this by arguing that CPD should be based on practitioners' own experiences, such as problem-solving through self-evaluation and reflection, identifying knowledge gaps, participating in relevant learning activities, applying newly acquired skills to day-to-day professional practice, and regularly evaluating performance. The introduction of CPD also begs concerns about the pertinent and significant subjects and material included in the curriculum. For instance, a report on real estate education and practice in Nigeria [31] found that the educational curriculum did not adequately address the business and accounting skills needed for professional activities and suggested significant legislative changes.

Studies conducted for CPD in the real estate industry also established the significance of pertinent themes within particular businesses. [4], [5], [37–40], [17], [18], [24], [32–36]. Consequently, CPD offers the information and resources needed to develop sound decision-making abilities. It is supplemented by a range of educational opportunities and is organized within a system that tracks and logs CPD, with pertinent subjects covered in the curriculum [12].

3 | Methods

This article focuses on three professions—construction, project management, and property agency—and investigates mandatory CPD for the built environment business only in New South Wales. The study highlights the fundamental distinctions between these professions and finds several CPD-related disputes between professional groups, regulatory authorities, and individuals in the profession. Additionally, descriptive and statistical statistics on CPD are given. To assess the previous studies, a thorough literature analysis has been conducted and will be paired with action research and action learning techniques, as well as regulatory controls. The paper's contention that certain professions have not fully embraced the purpose and objectives of mandatory CPD is reinforced by data about consumer protection.

According to published research, CPD should include action learning as an integral part of their professional practice [41]. Professionals engage in action learning as a teaching and learning technique in Western Australia [42]. Learning from experience, being cyclical, involving action and reflection on that action, having to learn as one of their goals, and being intended to improve practice are the commonalities between action learning and action research [41]. In addition to problem-solving and personal professional problems, action learning and action research also take regulatory restrictions in the built environment business into account for CPD.

Furthermore, the action research process is crucial and involves inquiry or investigation and reporting on the problem, which is then reflected to support knowledge and professional growth. Through action research, researchers and practitioners work together to research and learn [43]. Moreover, CPD was summarized by [43], [34] as measurable professional learning, and [44] concluded, based on action research, that learning is voluntary and learner-directed.

All occupations require lifelong learning to advance and remain committed to their fields. This guarantees the professional's upkeep and competence in doing their obligations with competence while upholding consumer protection and responsibility. The introduction of CPD bridges the gap between formal education and practice using professional socialization. Foundation courses in education provide information and skills that are no longer in use. The introduction of CPD also calls into question the syllabus's delivery method, substance, and pertinent and significant issues.

4 | Construction

Under the Home Construction Act of 1989, CPD in New South Wales aims to satisfy legal criteria for the renewal of licenses and certificates, maximize consumer protection, uphold public trust, and minimize conflicts in the construction sector. Specialized subjects are also covered for the various kinds of licenses and certificates, as they are deemed high-risk areas by the OFT. For instance, sustainability, compliance duties, safety, building technical difficulties, communication strategies, conflict resolution, and business management abilities are some of the current suggested risk areas for CPD.

Consequently, the demand for more regulation of the building industry has grown over the past several decades, but this is because better consumer protection is the goal. The patterns before and during the implementation of CPD are covered in this portion of the report, along with statistics on licenses granted, complaints filed, and compliance actions taken, such as prosecutions. The total number of licenses granted under the Home Building Act since 2001 has been the subject of an analysis [34]. According to the findings, there were 171,254 registered builders as of June 30, 2011, compared to 162,043 on the same day in 2003.

This amounts to a 5.6% gain, roughly. The introduction of mandatory CPD in the 2004/2005 financial year may have forced many inactive builders to surrender their builders' licenses rather than pursue further education, as evidenced by the apparent decline in growth in two of the most recent financial years—the 2006 and 2008 financial years. Furthermore, the 2006 fiscal year saw the fewest new building licenses issued. This tendency may be explained by removing the need for 20 years of experience to be eligible for a builder license. On January 1st, 2006, this abolition went into force. A few years later, competency-based learning exams were added to expedite the process and indirectly acknowledge skills experience in the pertinent areas.

The number of complaints made against the construction sector, the total number of penalty letters issued, and the success rate of prosecutions (about 86% in the 2010–2011 fiscal year) were all subjected to additional study [1], [45]. Additionally, the study revealed little information available for complaints, making it impossible to analyze the causes of these complaints within the construction sector. The number of complaints reaches its peak in the fiscal year 1998/1999 at 2,000. The following year, complaints swiftly decreased and then continued to rise modestly until 2003/2004, when they reached a record 6,275.

According to the OFT, complaints are driven by supply and demand, with fluctuations in the supply and demand for building works as well as the collapse of building enterprises. [1], [45]. Legislators will always put plans into action to increase consumer protection and satisfaction. Recent trends show a decline in the number of penalty notices issued and a levelling of the value attached to this infraction; the quantity and value of successful prosecutions have similarly declined. On the other hand, compliance enforcement increased steadily starting in 2002 and reached a high in 2006–2008. As past data also indicated a high from 2003 to 2005, followed by a decrease, and then another peak, it is now impossible to determine if the decline will continue.

The statistics do not show a consistent upward trend since mandatory CPD was implemented in 2004; instead, they seem to favour cyclical peaks and declines [1], [45]. As a result, there seems to be a discernible rise in complaints related to the construction sector, and it is debatable if the CPD has enhanced consumer protection. On the other hand, government policy aims to preserve a suitable degree of consumer protection while cutting red tape and compliance expenses. The government offers a variety of learning activities that are all intended to help people acquire the necessary information, skills, and competencies for pertinent subjects.

Like real estate, learning activities are assessed using different techniques, including time allotted for the task and diary entries for time spent on reading published resources like scholarly publications and journals. Concerns are raised regarding these educational standards, as well as perhaps the improved monitoring of CPD themes since the implementation and monitoring of CPD seem to be a reflection of the calibre of training and the acceptance of the National Training framework.

5 | Project Managers

Virtually all industries, including defence, construction, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, banking, accounting, advertising, law, state and government agencies, and the United Nations [46], began to use project management in the 1970s. A prerequisite for each job is legal duty as well as accountability to society through insurance. Currently, public indemnity insurance is a requirement for project managers working in some businesses, but not all of them. Many insurance companies still place everyone who identifies as a project manager under the same rate category, regardless of what the person does, and do not distinguish between good and poor project managers.

Due to this, there is now a problem in the Australian market: project management is not yet recognized by the Federal Government as a separate occupational type on the employment census. The question of who oversees project managers and project management has become unclear. There isn't presently a regulated licensing structure in place in Australia for project managers, even though insurance and legal accountability both control a project manager's degree of expertise. One of the advantages of licensing project managers is that those who are "purchasing" their services can be guaranteed that the work they do will adhere to the set standards, which are regularly supervised by a representative body like a chartered association.

The government or chartered association must confirm that the project manager possesses the necessary training, credentials, and work experience before granting a license. If licensed project managers deviate from the recommended course of action, they may be sued for professional negligence. Due to the unique needs and project environment, project managers seldom use their knowledge and abilities in the same manner for every project, which poses a significant risk when licensing them. Consequently, to fulfil the necessary brief, a project manager can interpret and apply any number of scenarios.

Consequently, member-based professional associations are in charge of providing project managers employed in the built environment with a formalized method to CPD. Numerous of these groups have created CPD programs, which include program management, implementation, and operation. These associations also conduct frequent reviews of the framework to ensure it remains current. The AIPM, the Association for Project Management (APM), the International Project Management Association (IPMA), and the Project Management Institute (PMI) are the four recognized project management associations.

Enhancing the knowledge, abilities, and competence of project team members, project managers, and project directors is the main goal of CPD programs. These individuals are crucial to the accomplishment of business goals as well as project goals. For instance, one of the goals of AIPM is to guarantee that people in the community and at various organizational levels are aware of the critical role that project management plays in modern society. Similarly, PMI members adhere to a Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (PMI 2008) that sets out standards for project managers in their personal, professional, and community service endeavours.

To jointly improve the integrity of project management, the Code outlines the standards to which members should strive, as well as the behaviours that are required in the industry and volunteer positions. The APM Code of Conduct lays down the components of ethical and professional standards that the association expects of its members and pertains to appropriate, suitable behaviour. In line with the association's professional standards and qualifications supported by the APM Body of Knowledge, all members must affirm in writing that they will abide by the code of conduct for professionals and that they will exercise applicable competence (APM 2006). Since the IPMA is an umbrella organization that includes a variety of project management groups, it should not be included in the discussion. It seems that the professional associations' code of ethics serves as the foundation for the CPD programs.

6 | Property Agents

The objectives of CPD for the building sector and the Property Act in New South Wales are the same. Since the OFT views this as a high-risk sector, specialized issues are also covered for the various licensing and certificate of registration categories. For instance, trust accounting and audit standards, risk management, stratum, stock and station agency, legislation, ethics, and professional responsibility are some of the risk categories that are now advised for CPD. Because of this, there is now more regulation for those in the property industry than it was a few decades ago, but this is because consumer protection needs to be improved. The ethical responsibility and duty of care of agents concerning the correct record-keeping of trust funds are covered in this portion of the study, along with the shortcomings of CPD on this subject.

The money that an agent has accumulated on behalf of their principal is known as trust account money. Deposits from sales, rent from renters, bonds, and pre-paid advertising are a few instances of trust funds. The recording, categorization, reporting, and analysis of all trust funds received by an organization acting on behalf of its principal is known as trust accounting. Trust accounting encompasses not just mathematical aspects but also regulatory compliance. Because of this, an agency's books and records have to comply with the requirements of the applicable laws [47]. The ethical responsibility and duty of care of agents concerning the correct record-keeping of trust funds are covered in this portion of the study, along with the shortcomings of CPD on this subject.

Therefore, it would seem that the government recognizes the necessity to safeguard the trust accounts, given the substantial quantities of money involved in real estate transactions. This is to give the customer confidence and recourse. Nonetheless, a study conducted in 2008 also found that there may be a risk associated with trust accounting if people do not know enough about trust accounting and do not have adequate financial systems in place to monitor and review trust accounts regularly do not monitor the actions of staff," or "do not comply with audit requirements and fraudulent conduct [36]. In New South Wales, for instance, the number of consumer complaints rose by 38.95% from 1,756 in 2005 to 2,440 in 2009 [34].

This resulted in revising the 2003 CPD criteria, which now include an understanding of trust accounting. Before 1998, trust money concerns accounted for 18.49% of consumer complaints. Later figures, on the other hand, do not break down the complaints into percentages, which makes it difficult to determine if the complaints are evenly distributed across the many categories of complaints or predominantly related to trust issues. The Office of Fair Trading estimated in 2007 that around \$1,089 billion in money was in danger, and payments from the statutory compensation fund for failing to account for funds fell between approximately \$362,000 and \$1,024,000 between 2003 and 2007 [1].

Consequently, an examination of the claims made against the compensation fund was done due to the scarcity of comprehensive data for complaints. Data has been taken from OFT publications published between 2003 and 2007, inclusive. Since September 2003 saw the introduction of the new Property Act, 2003 is the chosen base year. The yearly data show that between 2003 and 2007, there was a 153.56% growth. About the number of claims filed against the compensation fund, the number of claims increased by 654.28% in 2007 from 35 in 2003 to 264 in 2007.

Presently, there is no comparable data on trust accounting fraud about a rise in license issuance or educational standards. Even though the last seven years have seen changes in the requirements for education and the removal of the two-year experience requirement before obtaining a real estate license, the property act still mandates ongoing professional development, and the Office of Fair Trading continues to conduct sporadic audits and quality control visits to agency locations. Agents who commit fraud are subject to additional disciplinary actions. Remarkably, the Office of Fair Trading reports that a good percentage of agents were found to have committed trust account fraud when they neglected to turn in a trust account audit report within the authorized time frame.

However, from 2003 to 2009, there appeared to be a notable increase in the number of new applications for licenses and certificates annually, which might explain the growth in trust accounting fraud. Between 2005 and 2009, there was an increase in licenses and certificates of registration, but there was no discernible correlation between this growth and the number of new applications. Between 2003 and 2007, the compensation fund had a 153.56% rise in claims; \$1,024,000 was distributed altogether in 2007.

The two-year minimum work experience requirement before granting a license was removed by the new Property Act, which was created in 2003. Additionally, the educational qualifications for holders of licenses and certificates were significantly revised. The findings of this study suggest that there may be a connection between fraudulent trust accounting and the application for new licenses and certifications. Additionally, since trust accounting is a high-risk field, professionals in the field must undergo ongoing education. To prove if educational requirements play a part in trust accounting fraud, more investigation would be necessary.

This would include details on the agent's length of license held at the time of the fraud (whether it was done by an employee or by the licensed individual), their educational background, the time it took them to realize the crime, and other relevant information. Many hypotheses and concepts have been put up in an attempt to comprehend the reasons behind trust accounting fraud; nonetheless, further data is required for ongoing research into this topic.

7 | Conclusion

To properly serve their clients and operate within the parameters of current governance and professional standards, professionals in the built environment have a duty of care to maintain their professional knowledge and abilities. The last ten years have seen a progressive growth in the requirement for CPD for professional regulation. The industry's intense competition has also raised the pressure on professionals to live up to the public's high standards, which helps to preserve public trust.

To determine the causes of the rise in customer complaints, several theories and notions have been proposed; nevertheless, further information is needed for continued investigation. In conclusion, various aspects of the mandatory CPD have not produced the intended results or served the original intent. Thus, there is no meaningful connection between the implementation of mandatory CPD, better customer service, and complaints filed with the OFT. A variety of learning activities, including e-learning resources, workshops, seminars, conferences, courses, and distance learning, are part of the CPD collective practice. Although the OFT conducts sporadic investigations, and it is the professional's duty to keep correct records for CPD compliance, the data presented in this paper points to a high level of consumer risk and the necessity for expanded CPD topic areas that ought to be addressed.

Online submissions to the OFT for CPD compliance and mandatory subjects to be covered within a predetermined time window are two recommendations for better CPD monitoring. Additionally, there is minimal relationship between the job description, title, and duties; thus, it is advised that the required CPD be matched to these skill sets. Gaps in the pertinent knowledge areas can be filled in with the use of a reflective diary, and the OFT should compare the online CPD compliance entries with the declarations submitted for license renewals. In Australia, a formal licensing framework for project managers consists of a mix of a CPD program supported by adherence to the code of ethics of professional groups. Since there is no procedure in

place to make sure all project managers adhere to uniform standards of practice, there is a great deal of risk involved.

Author Contributions

Segun Stephen FOLORUNSO conceptualized the study and led the research. Godwin Iheanacho UDEH contributed to the literature, and empirical Adetayo Olaniyi ADENIRAN assisted with the overall coordination and writing of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the literature review and approved the final manuscript.

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Data Availability

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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