

Returning to social work after a career break

For social workers who have taken a career break, it is necessary to complete additional study before they can re-register with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and return to social work practice. The amount of study of continuous professional development (CPD) required depends on the length of the career break.

For a 2-5 year break, the social worker needs to complete 30 days of CPD. For a break of more than five years, the requirement is 60 days. Each day must comprise seven hours of CPD study or related activities. The study days do not need to be consecutive.

How to evidence the CPD days

The HCPC does not specify exact CPD study or related activities as it recognises that the process of updating your skills and knowledge should be tailored to your individual needs and development in your particular area of practice.

The HCPC does outline three main categories through which you can illustrate continuous development, learning and updating of your skills and knowledge in practice:

- Supervised practice under the supervision of a registered professional. Examples include learning by case studies involving reflection and analysis; coaching from others; work shadowing; filling in self-assessment questionnaires; project work or project management.
- Formal study – a period of structured study provided by a person or organisation. This can include distance learning or e-learning, or any type of course or programme relevant to your practice. Examples include courses; further education; research; attending conferences; writing articles or papers; going to seminars; planning or running a course.
- Private study – a period of self-structured study, using resources like websites, library books and journals. The HCPC stipulates that private study evidence can only equal a maximum of half the period of updating. Examples include reading journals/articles; reviewing books or articles; updating knowledge through the internet or TV; keeping a file of your progress and voluntary work.

More detailed examples can be found in the HCPC booklet: Returning to Practice – Information for professionals returning to the register (HCPC, 2012).

Note that the list in the booklet is not exhaustive: there is some room for creativity providing the activities contribute towards your practice and developmental needs and can be set against standards of practice, conduct, performances and ethics as prescribed by the HCPC and the PCF.

If during your career break you undertook any activities that you could link to social work practice and provide substantiated/verified evidence for, they may be accepted providing they were carried out within the 12 months preceding your application.

Next steps

- Download an application form to re-register as a social worker from the HCPC website. The next renewals date is September 2014.
- Download a copy of the HCPC's CPD profile document. This must be completed in case you are audited by the HCPC for monitoring and evaluator purposes.
- Read The College's e-Portfolio document and begin the process for updating the requirements for registration.
- Read online samples of CPD portfolios, which will give you an idea of how to go about gathering and collating your evidence to obtain your registration.
- College members can log onto Knowledge @ The College for expert responses to specific return to work queries and more detailed information on CPD.