

SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETING YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REPORT (PDR) - A PERSONAL VIEW

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Having recently heard that my PDR has been accepted by the Library Association to become Chartered, I feel qualified to comment on the pros and cons of the Route I took and the methods I used. Remember that this is purely a personal view and those embarking on their own PDR, or the new formats (Portfolio or Proforma), should consult as many different candidates and/or Chartered librarians as possible for alternative comments, help and advice.

Getting started

Once I had completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Information Studies, I secured a position as a library assistant in a Post Graduate Medical Centre in London. At this point in my career I was not sure how long it would take to obtain a professional posting, so I promptly decided to register on Route B of the Library Association's Routes to Chartership. For those of you who don't know, this means that my PDR had to cover a period of two years' work experience; I did not have to be in a supervised or professional post. This did not present a problem for me as I am fairly self motivated and do not have to be forced to work independently. For those of you who are not this way inclined, I advise that you choose to have a mentor who can act as your supervisor. Making the wrong decision at this point could mean the difference between success and failure.

Keeping going

Having registered on the LA Route B, I attended one of the Chartership Study Evenings/workshops at the LA headquarters in London. This session was most informative; amongst other things I gleaned that one ought to maintain a diary of events over the period in question (in my case two years). In hindsight I can now say that, yes, keeping a diary, of sorts, is essential. However, I would advise anyone embarking on this activity to avoid writing one in the same way I did. From July 1993-July 1995 I documented every activity in which I was involved. If I went on a workshop, whether in-house or external, I wrote up the experience; if I had an awkward situation concerning staff I recorded my pragmatism, and so on. Each day I entered some event, situation or achievement in my records. What I didn't do is analyse, or even decide how, I would use these events in the end PDR!! I discovered at the end of my two years' experience that I had so many pages of material, I did not know where to start. It was a very daunting experience to be faced with over fifteen thousand words of wisdom, discussing details of different events and having to whittle it all down to a coherent analysis of activities in report form, to result in no more than five thousand words. The lesson I learnt is that merely keeping a detailed record of events is NOT enough. One should not only be selective but should start to place each item under a manageable heading or area which can be edited at a later date.

Planning ahead

Bearing the above in mind, my advice to those about to embark on a career in the Information/library world of work and submit a PDR for LA assessment is

to plan the chapters. Instead of meticulously typing/writing your thoughts in diary format, try to imagine the end report and add your experiences under the relevant section. For example, one of my Chapter headings was Management Skills, so I used examples of managing my staff, the budget, the students and so on, but when I actually started to type the report I had to wade through pages and pages of what, to the untrained eye, would appear as waffle. After a period of searching, I found various activities in which I had been involved over the previous two years, proving my ability to manage effectively. If only I had used the method I describe above, I would have saved a great deal of time and energy. One may feel that in following this revised method, one will end up with a report so long it becomes unwieldy and unmanageable. I beg to differ: it is far easier to edit material on the screen, which has already been sorted into distinctive headings than it is to sort through two years of scribble, as I had to do. I did not have the sense to put my thoughts on a PC/Mac as I did not have access to one at home and could not fit the time in at work. My diary was recorded on paper and ended at 78 pages long. If you start to compile information and examples of competence in the early stages of your work experience, by the end of that period, the task of completing your PDR, Portfolio or Proforma, will not seem so daunting.

Professional Awareness

I am aware, through discussing this topic with various candidates, that it is the one area where many individuals panic. How does one know how to demonstrate Professional Awareness and what does the term actually mean.

Well, one doesn't have to read every issue of every journal concerned with librarianship or their job related field; equally one should not merely read the LA Record each month once it has fallen through your letter box. The first would be ridiculous and the second just lazy. Instead, one should be on the lookout for material which is of interest to them and their specialist field. I concentrated on health and welfare information paying special attention to Libraries for Nurse Education, in addition areas of concern to all librarians and information workers. I found this area of preparation for writing my PDR fairly straight forward, BUT I did have help.

After working for an initial five months as a library assistant at the Tavistock and Portman Clinics Post-Graduate Library in London, I secured a position as a Subject Librarian for Nurse Education at the Southend Site of Anglia Polytechnic University. In this new and challenging professional post I discovered the benefits of working for such a large organisation. The University has many sites, with many other professional librarians working within them. It is in all our interests to keep abreast of the current issues in our given fields, therefore, professional journals are circulated regularly via our internal courier service. If a journal interests you, your name can be added to the circulation list. Using this method it has been relatively easy to keep abreast of the current literature, so if you work in an area where this would be possible and it does not already happen, I suggest you set up a similar procedure. However if this is not possible, then making several trips to the LA library, to browse relevant journals, would not go amiss. One should not rely on others to point out interesting or relevant material as everyone has different areas of concern. Use your own judgement, and above all, remember that this part of your professional development should be ongoing not merely an activity in which you demonstrate knowledge of a given

period of time. Being a professional means being aware of the issues which the profession faces, for example, new developments, new services, new publications and new theories. It also means knowing how the world outside affects the world inside your working environment not to mention the others working around you. An overall appreciation of the wider social context helps to gain an appreciation of what being a professional is all about.

Getting Involved

I am the sort of person who likes to get involved in as many groups and committees as possible, both in and outside of work. Joining special interest groups, either through the LA or outside, provides ample opportunity to develop your professionalism. There are so many to choose from, so look out for groups which interest you. By being a member of the LA Essex and Home Counties Group, I managed to get involved in organising a Medical Health and Information Day aimed to inform and support library assistants/paraprofessional library staff. This activity proved a huge challenge to myself and my colleague and provided prime examples of the need for interpersonal skills, pragmatism and an overall ability to manage difficult situations. One must acknowledge that not everyone wants to get involved in such events and not everyone wants to speak at public meetings but every candidate, which ever route one takes, can improve their involvement in professional activity. Writing letters, articles, reports and newsletters demonstrates the ability to communicate with a wider audience. No one should remain isolated and no one should ignore their responsibilities to the profession as a whole. There is nothing to stop you getting involved with other people in your area, joining discussion groups, using E-mail on the Internet, visiting other institutions or getting out there and getting known. The possibilities are endless.

Conclusion

Once you have decided your Route and format for submission, start to plan and use a word processor in the early stages of development. Although I felt that I was well prepared for writing my PDR I found that once I actually started to put the whole thing together, I had gone about it in a stupid way. It is never too early to put finger to keyboard (try not to put pen to paper as it only prolongs the procedure). Remember that your professional efforts should not end on completion of your PDR. Being a professional does not end at Chartership. Once one has collated evidence spanning one or two years of experience in the profession, to prove one's professionalism, it should become a part of one's everyday working life to seek opportunities for CPD (Continual Professional Development).

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