Executive Summary

The rapid pace of change within the IT industry, compounded by the increased pressures resulting in uncertain economic times, has made Continuing Professional Development (CPD) even more important both to the IT industry and the individual IT professional. The ability to react quickly to changing market conditions, client requirements, and the influences of government policies, has focused the need for professionals to plan and fully own their CPD.

Despite this need, the pressures of time, work and training budgets mean many IT professionals struggle to plan and execute focused career development tasks. This presents a challenge for the profession, as short-term needs are driving a longer-term change in how individuals and employers approach personal development.

This paper will discuss in detail the findings of the CPD Trends and Challenges survey, and set out the specific challenges being faced by IT Professionals in the planning and execution of their professional development objectives. We will also discuss how BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, believes these challenges can be mitigated or overcome.

Key findings:

- 91% of those surveyed recognise the importance of CPD
- Age and/or career stage affects personal relevance; earlier career stages see CPD as more directly relevant to them personally
- Two thirds believe they do not do enough CPD
- Financial and time constraints are a barrier, and the situation is worsening for many
- Many struggle to set goals and plan how to meet them

The BCS response:

- A more personalised, outcome-focussed approach to CPD is needed
- A broader view of what ‘counts’ as CPD is essential, again focussed on outcomes
- The market shift from employers to individual’s having responsibility for their own CPD, and a need to maintain continuity across changes in role and organisation, together signal that the Institute should step in to better support members in their CPD.

The findings of the survey identify there is a need to better empower IT professionals to identify the different activities that, as long as they bring benefit, can be considered to be CPD activities, including some that may often be considered as business-as-usual tasks. The new CPD Portal from BCS has been designed to help IT professional easily identify their potential development goals (through the Skills Framework for the Information Age) and presents activities that will help achieve those goals, and is a step on a journey to better empower the IT profession to define what CPD means to them. It can be accessed at www.bcs.org/CPD.
Introduction
BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, has a long history of driving professionalism within the IT industry through its chartered statuses, certifications, networking, specialist group activities and CPD initiatives. It has long recognised the importance of professional development, and BCS is now reinvigorating its approach to CPD to make it more effective and more accessible for its members and the entire IT profession.

A survey conducted by BCS in August 2012 identified the perception of CPD within the IT profession and quantified the scale of key challenges that IT professionals face in maintaining their professional development in the current economic climate.

The survey was conducted by BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, between Friday 3 August 2012 and Wednesday 22 August 2012. 736 workers within the IT profession took part in the survey. For profiling, the respondents were asked to indicate their age, employment status and position. The declared ages of respondents were Under 25 (2%), 25-34 (15%), 35-44 (29%), 45-54 (31%), 55+ (23%). 76% of respondents identified themselves as in full time employment, 11% as self-employed, 4% in part time employment, 3% retired and 1% in full time education. The remainder identified they were not currently working. Respondents, who identified they were working, were requested to identify their position (within a range of choices). Rounding has been used within the results of this survey.
Perception of CPD

BCS asked if survey respondents agreed with the statement “CPD is important to ensure you build on your skills and grow your potential”.

Over 90% of respondents believe that CPD is an important factor in building on skills and growing potential. Consultants and IT Managers represented the majority who strongly agree.

Of those who disagreed there was no age, position or employment status distinction, but the majority of those stated they commit to no CPD.

There are differing views regarding which activities constitute valid CPD activities, as supported by the evidence obtained by BCS at a series of focus groups, and the textual feedback of this survey. This can influence the benefits that are perceived to be delivered by CPD. Traditionally time away from the office, such as courses and seminars, have often been considered as the totality of CPD, and not positively.

The BCS approach is to recognise that CPD is not just the narrow activities of some time away from work to attend a training course, but the wider sphere of any activity that develops your competencies and capabilities. The important factor is the output or effect; how the activity has benefitted you, and how the collection of activities have resulted in your enhanced capabilities and competencies.

What is essential is to identify the benefit as a result of the CPD activity, and to place this in the context of career aspirations and goals. To measure this, there is a need to reflect on what has been learnt and the benefit it has brought, as that is the true measure of worth.
To further gauge the potential of good CPD practice, BCS then asked if survey respondents agreed with the statement “CPD is important to me at my stage in my career”.

Over 70% of respondents recognised that CPD is important at their current stage in their career, with 100% of the total respondents under 25 supporting this and 90% of all aged 25-34. This drops consistently as the age band increases, supporting the perception that CPD is considered most applicable in the earlier career stages of an IT professional, or that attitudes to CPD are not consistent across generations.
Of those who indicated CPD was important to build on skills and grow potential, but expressed it was not important to them at *their* stage in *their* career, 76% were aged 55 or over (although only 17% of those who are 55 and over who took part responded in this way, so it is not a majority view in that age band). This supports findings from recent BCS run Focus Groups.

The results indicate that although CPD is considered important for growing potential and building skills, this is thought to be less personally relevant by those who are at a later career stage or higher age.

![Perception of CPD](image)

Over a career and between different individuals and roles the specific needs for CPD will vary. BCS believes that a reflective learning approach is therefore vital, where goals, past outcomes, and future plans are considered by the individual; success is easily seen (and the experience can be more powerful and rewarding), and gaps can be analysed. The result is that some will want and need to invest more than others in CPD at different stages, and the types of activities will naturally vary a great deal.

BCS also sought to establish how much CPD the respondents perceived they were conducting, from their own perspective of what they need as opposed to against a prescribed minimum requirement. The respondents were asked “How much CPD are you currently able to commit to?”
Of the 89% who indicated they committed time to CPD, 69% felt it was less than they would like, with only 4% stating they believe they committed to more than enough CPD.

There was no significant distinction of position or employment status in who represented the majority of those who identified they committed to more than enough CPD, although only 11% of those who specified this were under 35. None of the software engineers, web developers or software testers considered they committed to more than enough CPD. Heads of IT/CIO/IT directors had the largest percentage of those who considered they committed to more than enough CPD.

Those who are service management practitioners, programme managers, education managers and IT managers represent the largest share (within position profiles) of those who believe they commit to less than they would like.

The next section discusses the challenges that IT professionals face in being able to commit to CPD, in terms of time, finances and planning.
Challenges to CPD

BCS asked four questions to identify key challenges respondents faced in planning and executing their CPD.

This raises questions such as:

What is an effective measurement of CPD in the current climate?
What are the most financially viable CPD activities and resources?
How can we find time to develop ourselves?

In the survey, 59% of respondents stated financial constraints were a challenge to planning and executing their CPD activities. Of those, 21% of all respondents stated available finances are now limiting the number of courses, networking events (and similar activities) they can attend compared to previous years. Even for those who did not experience general financial constraints, a further 15% reported available finances for such activities were less now than they had been, indicating more than 1 in 3 of respondents have seen such budgets cut or restricted. No position was immune from such budget constraints, with programme managers, training managers and heads of IT/CIO/IT directors reporting the highest levels. Service management practitioners and security practitioners, by contrast, were the least impacted positions, with 22% and 28% (respectively) of respondents within those positions identifying such reductions in available funds.

The most common approach to CPD has been to collect points on the basis of CPD hours; attending an accredited seminar or training course for instance. This approach was easy to administer and quantify, giving assurance that an individual
had done enough of the right type of CPD activity. However, this approach has no intrinsic link to outcomes or personal need.

The most important aspect is the effect of these CPD activities on skills and competencies. That is the focus of the enhanced BCS approach through reflective learning. Whilst training courses and seminars can prove to be a very valuable element of CPD, this needs to be goal and outcome driven. There are also a great many CPD activities available that carry little or no cost that can help to meet goals alongside more traditional solutions. An outcome-focused approach that makes use of a variety of methods is likely to be both more cost-effective and lower cost.

Within the IT profession, as with many others, there is often pressure to do more in less time. This drives the need to have a fresh look at which actions bring the most professional development benefit.

57% of all respondents stated that committing time to CPD is difficult. Of these, 25% reported that there is less time in their working day to commit to their development than there has been in previous years. In total 36% of all respondents (with project managers and IT managers being the worst affected; almost half in each position surveyed) feel there is less time now than in previous years to commit to CPD activities during the working day.

Performance in the current role, and stretch tasks within it, may include elements of CPD. Working with different technologies, in a different application area, in a different department, or maybe in a larger team or with international aspects can constitute CPD; this could also include elements of greater complexity. The effort and actions required to adapt could potentially be classed at CPD activities; activities from which benefit can clearly be identified as gained. Instances of this (for some in the IT profession) have increased, but this is often overlooked from a CPD perspective and incorrectly considered to be just “business as usual”.

Both being a Mentor and being mentored can carry significant CPD worth, whether this is within the department, the organisation or beyond, as potentially can writing or delivering learning and development material, presenting at a conference, or writing a paper or presentation. Coaching can bring CPD benefit to those coaching and those being coached. Reading and benefitting from publications and articles, learning from audio/visual content, reading books and researching a variety of content online can all potentially be beneficial to someone’s CPD.

A good approach is to ensure overall CPD activities contain a balanced variety from the mix of different activity types that benefit professional development. This approach gives a more rounded experience on the road to achieving professional goals, and can also help provide the maximum benefit from time and money.

No matter what the activities undertaken, or the types of activity, it is the benefit identified upon reflection that is the real measure of successful investment. There may be benefit in attending a training course, but there may also be benefit in reading a book on the way to or from work, watching an online video
presentation/interview, or indeed from a work assignment that stretches thinking and introduces new challenges that are overcome through learning and adaptation.

BCS were interested to discover to what extent challenges were faced in identifying development goals and then identifying the CPD activities needed to achieve those goals. The survey showed that whilst 29% of respondents faced challenges in defining their goals, 44% of respondents have difficulty identifying CPD activities that will enable them to reach their goals. With more than 40% in each position profile, software engineers and team leaders have identified themselves as having the most difficulty identifying their development goals; heads of IT/CIO/IT directors, training managers and project managers, by contrast, have the lowest percentage.

Almost 45% of respondents experienced difficulty in identifying actions to satisfy their development goals

Service management practitioners, business analysts and software testers indicated they faced the most challenges in identifying actions that would enable them to meet their development goals. Trainer/instructors, web developers and project managers were the most prominent group that found it easier to identify the CPD activities they need to develop their careers.

Participants in the survey were also asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement “My employer helps me in my continuing professional development planning”. 35% of those surveyed disagreed, with 40% of training managers and over 29% of programme managers and team leaders being the position profiles that expressed this most, with those in software development close behind them. Service management practitioners, education managers and software testers were identified as the most supported by their employers in planning their CPD. In total, only 36% of the total respondents agreed with the statement, with 27% indicating they neither agreed nor disagreed.

With many employees feeling their employers do not assist them in the planning of their CPD, it is important for employees to take control of their own CPD to ensure they stay up to date, and to make the most of the resources available to assist them in their planning and progress to reach their objectives.

Working within a skills framework can enable the identification of development goals and, within the structure that such a framework provides, can lead to easier identification of the activities that can be undertaken to achieve those goals.
As part of the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to provide free text feedback in regards to CPD. Their responses are represented in this word cloud:
Conclusion
There is a need to better empower IT professionals to identify the different activities that, as long as they bring benefit, can be considered to be CPD activities; a mix of both traditional training and seminars, and other networking, self-study and in-job tasks. This will allow limited funding to be committed to the cost-carrying elements that bring the most targeted benefit – so helping to mitigate financial constraints.

Depending on the development goal, the associated CPD activities that bring real benefit may not involve large amounts of time away from the normal working environment. Smaller bursts of high benefit CPD activities may bring real and evidential benefit – so helping mitigate time commitment challenges.

SFIA (Skills Framework for the Information Age) can help IT professionals in a wide range of disciplines to identify their career paths and, using Browse SFIAplus from BCS, it is easy to identify goals for further self-advancement. Browse SFIAplus also offers managers and employers a tool to help identify potential goals and development activities for their employees.

For those who have a personal or professional commitment to CPD, BCS has developed a new CPD Portal, specifically designed to help those working within IT. It provides guidance in potential types of CPD activities that IT professionals can consider, how they can locate or source resources and CPD activities to help them meet their development goals, and career pathway guidance to help identify potential career goals (for those who need guidance in this area). The CPD Portal can be accessed at www.bcs.org/CPD.

“...all need to change how we view CPD”

David Evans, Membership Director at BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT commented: “Economic pressures, shifts in attitudes, and changing working practices mean we all need to change how we view CPD. Individuals need to be empowered to set and meet their own goals, and employers need to explore with their teams new ways of working that support professional development. One of the hallmarks of a true profession is that those in it continually develop and share good practice. This is a call to action for the profession to meet these new challenges."