

# PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

**INFORMATION FOR DOCTORS NOT INVOLVED IN  
FRONT-LINE PATIENT CARE**

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## Introduction

In Ireland, your Medical Council Registration is also your licence to treat patients. This means that any doctor wishing to retain registration for any reason is obliged to fulfil their statutory duty to maintain professional competence.

There are no special requirements for doctors working less than full-time, or on an occasional basis. Once registered with the Irish Medical Council, a doctor has the right to practise medicine. From the public perspective, the responsibility to maintain professional competence must apply to all doctors, regardless of their working arrangements. Therefore, all doctors on the register have a duty to maintain and record professional competence by enrolling in a professional competence scheme and engaging in maintenance of professional competence activities as defined by the IMC.

It is important to remember the following:

- The requirement to be enrolled on a Professional Competence scheme is tied to your Medical Council registration and applies to all doctors regardless of employment status
- You should record CPD and Audit activities that relate to your current scope of practice,

If a practitioner is completely removed from practice and does not intend to do any medically related work in the foreseeable future, they may wish to consider [voluntary withdrawal from the Register](#). The current guidance on this topic furnished by the Medical Council can be found on the Medical Council website ([www.medicalcouncil.ie](http://www.medicalcouncil.ie) / [\(Existing Registrations / Manage your registration\)](#)) and it might be useful to contact the Medical Council Professional Competence Scheme section to discuss this (by email to [pc@mcirl.ie](mailto:pc@mcirl.ie) or phone (01) 498 3100).

For doctors who are involved in governance, academic or other non-clinical duties, the Medical Council requires that they fulfil their statutory duty to maintain professional competence. In cases like this, practitioners need to work within the current system to accumulate sufficient credits which reflect their scope of practice and also retain evidence of participation in learning activities.

The categories that often cause difficulty for doctors who are not involved in front-line patient care are the **Internal CPD Category** and the **Clinical (Practice) Audit**.

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## Suggestions as to how you can achieve your minimum requirements

### Define your scope of practice and do a Personal Development Plan

A key point to remember is that the Professional Competence Scheme framework is based on **self-directed learning** and that the activities you record must **reflect your current scope of practice**. Some activities may not be immediately identifiable as attracting CPD credit, but if you have clearly [defined your scope of practice](#) it should be relatively simple to map what you do in your practice to the Professional Competence scheme framework.

Effective from 1 May 2016, you may claim 2 CPD credits in the Internal category if you complete your Personal Development Plan before September 30 in the relevant PCS year.

See [Appendix 1 – Define your Scope of Practice for your Personal Development Plan](#)

### Relate your scope of practice to the Medical Council requirements

A total of 50 CPD credits are required per year within the four **Continuing Professional Development (CPD)** categories:

- External (maintenance of knowledge and skills) - minimum 20 credits per year (required)
- Internal (practice evaluation and development) - minimum 20 credits per year (required)
- Personal Learning - minimum 5 credits per year (required)
- Research or Teaching -2 credits per year (desirable)

Don't forget that you must also record at least one **Clinical (Practice) Audit** every year.

The Professional Competence year runs from 01 May to 30 April, and any claims must be for activities that took place within that period.

Each claim you make must reflect **one** of the Medical Council's 8 Domains of Good Professional Practice.

Doctors are best placed to choose the activities that reflect their educational needs and will be expected to make a judgement on the value of a particular activity based on their [scope of practice](#). They are expected to map their activities against the relevant Domain of Good Professional Practice and ensure that the activities undertaken during the course of a five year cycle encompasses all eight domains.

See [Appendix 2 – Medical Council's 8 Domains of Good Professional Practice](#)

## **Conduct an audit or quality improvement project related to your practice**

An audit does not need to be a *clinical* audit. Rather, you should audit whatever activity you are currently engaged in. While the audit would ideally consist of measurement, comparison with standards, an intervention and re-evaluation, this may not be practical for all.

For example, if you are involved in governance or academic practice, you could do an audit around this, comparing your activity to best practice guidelines.

The following suggestions may be adaptable to an individual's requirements:

- Quality Improvement project
- Measurement of individual compliance with guidelines / protocols
- Medico-legal practice audit (link to example completed audit form)
- Skills analysis
- Self-assessment
- Teaching role: An evaluation of teaching role
- Examining: An evaluation of examining role

### **Evidence of Participation**

The Clinical (Practice) Audit form in your ePortfolio for Professional Competence is designed to allow all audits to be recorded in a consistent way that is compatible with the Annual Verification Process. It is not necessary to attach any additional documents to the form.

### Further information about audit:

Viewing the following guides may also suggest some audit topics or approaches that are appropriate for you.

#### *Guidance*

- [RCPI Guide to Clinical \(Practice\) Audit for Professional Competence](#)
- ["Start Smart" - Audit tool for antibiotic prescribing](#)

#### *Example Topics*

- [Obstetrics and Gynaecology](#)
- [Occupational Medicine](#)
- Paediatrics
- [Pathology](#)
- [Public Health Medicine](#)
- [Medicine](#)

#### *Example Audits*

- [Lower Back Pain](#)
- [Ethics](#)
- [Patient Experience Survey](#)

*(The above documents can be downloaded from [www.rcpi.ie](http://www.rcpi.ie) / [Professional Competence](#) / [How to maintain a good Professional Competence record](#) / [Conduct an Audit or Quality Improvement Project every year](#))*

[HSE Guidance for Clinical Audit](#) – the HSE has provided a guide for Clinical Audit which can be downloaded from [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) through its Quality and Patient Safety section

[Medical Council Guidance for Clinical Audit](#) – the Medical Council has made a series of videos on this topic available on [www.medicalcouncil.ie](http://www.medicalcouncil.ie) through its News & Publications section including a video with [information on undertaking an audit if not in practice](#) .

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## Engage in relevant learning

Learning activities are broken into four CPD categories: External, Internal, Personal Learning and Research or Teaching.

### 1. External CPD

Accumulating the required 20 External CPD credits is relatively straightforward. Credits in this category are calculated as 1 hour = 1 credit.

Below are examples of activity which are relevant to this category:

- Regional, national or international scientific meetings relevant to your scope of practice
- Educational activities organised by your training body, college or medical society
- Courses, workshops or seminars, diploma or other courses, including online learning\*, that are relevant to your scope of practice
- The annual RCPI St Luke's week programme contains a range of day-time and evening activities that attract CPD credit.
- Year round, RCPI delivers a wide range of live educational activities, including the Masterclass series which is also available to attend at webcast centres around Ireland
- Doctors enrolled on one of our Professional Competence schemes have automatic access to the RCPI Physicians Network. We offer a range of online learning courses; some can be completed independently and in your own time, while others offer a blended approach, combining online modules with practical group workshops
- There are many other educational meetings / lectures around the country approved by the six RCPI training bodies

**Tip:** You may claim CPD credit in this category for any educational activity that is relevant to your scope of practice, regardless of whether or not it is CPD approved. You simply need to indicate its relevance to you through the Reflective Notes section of your ePortfolio form and provide evidence that you attended.

### Evidence of Participation for External CPD:

Evidence of Participation for an External CPD Claim must carry your name and the name of the organising body and confirmation from the organiser that you did attend.

Invitations, programmes and agendas only indicate an intention to attend so they are not suitable to use as evidence of attendance.

**RCPI courses and events:** Be sure to check in when you arrive at RCPI Events so that we have a record of your attendance. The record of attendance allows us to send you your attendance certificate.

**\*Online learning:** educational websites such as BMJ, Medscape, NEJM offer a wide range of interactive learning activities that can be claimed in the External or Internal CPD categories depending on how the learning you gain from them impacts your daily practice.

## 2. Internal CPD

20 credits are required annually. Credits in this category are calculated as 1 hour = 1 credit.

Doctors who are not in hospital practice can achieve Internal credits by:

- Involvement with your RCPI Training Body, for example:
  - Exam question setting/writing
  - Mentoring trainees / recently appointed consultants
  - Participation in committees
  - Hospital/training site inspections
  - Meetings in connection with research projects
  - Meetings in connection with national guidelines or policies
  - Training/orientation sessions in connection with your RCPI role
- Involvement in volunteer or outreach activities
- Forming a Journal Club with other doctors in your area of practice. Articles relating to your activities could be discussed
- Regular Internal meetings related to your practice can be treated as the non-clinical equivalent of multi-disciplinary team meetings/case meetings
- If you are teaching or acting in a professional advisory capacity, then the meetings, presentations or reviews that relate to that role can be recorded in the Internal category
- Peer review groups
- Meetings to discuss patient incident reviews or medico-legal cases
- Chart reviews which commonly occur in medico-legal practice\*\*
- Attending case presentations
- Attending meetings that relate to practitioners current role
- Re-certification examinations such as:
  - Advanced Cardiac Life Saving (ACLS)
  - Advanced Paediatric Life Support (APLS)
  - Advanced Life Support in Obstetrics (ALSO)
  - etc..

**Tip:** Some activities which have been approved for External CPD may equally fulfil the Internal CPD category, depending on your scope of practice, and it is appropriate for you to record them in the Internal CPD category. Examples of such activities available through **the RCPI Physicians Network** are:

- [Medication Safety](#)
- [Patient Safety](#)
- [Principles of Antibiotic Use](#)
- [Healthcare Associated Infections](#)

If you take this approach and identify an activity more usually seen as External as falling into the Internal CPD category, you should clarify your reasons in the reflective notes section of your ePortfolio form



### **Evidence of Participation for the Internal CPD category:**

An evidence document for an Internal CPD claim must carry your name and the name of the organising body, and confirmation from the organiser that you did attend. The document should not contain other names or confidential information.

If the meeting time for an Internal CPD activity is greater than 1 hour, information about the start and finish times should also be included.

If you are attending a series of recurring meetings, your ePortfolio for Professional Competence enables you to record a summary of attendances on a single form.

If you organise a Journal club or similar regular activity, you can find information on how to track attendance and provide evidence documents for Internal CPD activities in the Forum guide to Verification of Internal CPD. You can download this document from [www.rcpi.ie](http://www.rcpi.ie) [www.rcpi.ie](http://www.rcpi.ie) / [Professional Competence](#) / [How to maintain a good Professional Competence record](#) / [Record your CPD \(Continuing Professional Development\) activities](#)

#### **Tip:**

Invitations, programmes and agendas only indicate an intention to attend so they are not suitable to use as evidence of attendance.

Sign-in sheets contain other people's names, and meeting minutes can often contain information that is confidential. For this reason, it is not appropriate to use these as your evidence of attendance.

### **3. Personal Learning**

Personal Learning including reading journals etc. is easy to achieve. 5 CPD credits per year are required, The key is to remember to record your activities in this category.

Below are examples of activity usually recorded in the Personal Learning category:

- Self-directed education (eg Journal reading)
- E-learning including online journals, reviews, podcasts etc.
- Personal reading

### **Evidence of Participation for the Personal Learning CPD category**

As personal learning activities are largely unverifiable, no evidence documents are required for this category, however, we recommend that you record a brief reflective note outlining the activity and learning achieved for each claim. This would be helpful in the case of a verification process being conducted.

#### 4. Research or Teaching

The Research or Teaching CPD category is not mandatory, however, activity in this category is desirable and many of you will be easily able to accumulate credits.

Below are examples of activities which are relevant to this category:

- Article publication
- Contribution to a guideline or policy
- Poster presentation
- Postgraduate examiner or teacher
- *Undergraduate examiner or teacher\**
- Lecturer
- Research

*\* You may only claim credit for undergraduate teaching or examining by demonstrating the specific learning you gained in the Reflective Notes section of the relevant ePortfolio form.*

You may claim a standard 5 credits in this category for the first-time preparation and delivery of a publication, a lecture or a poster presentation.

#### Evidence of Participation for the Research or Teaching CPD category

**Publications/Guidelines/Policies:** Entering the PubMed (or equivalent) reference within your reflective notes on the relevant ePortfolio form is sufficient evidence for a publication. It is not necessary to provide the entire publication.

**Examining/Lecturing:** A certificate or other acknowledgement of your attendance as an Examiner /Lecturer, including title and date of the activity, from the relevant institution.

**RCPI Examinations:** If you have examined at RCPI Examinations we can verify your participation in house. In these cases, you simply enter the complete formal name of the RCPI examination in your ePortfolio form and the date the examination you are claiming for took place.

#### Acting as a Postgraduate Trainer

*Some specialty training takes place in a non-clinical environment.*

**RCPI Trainer:** If you are currently registered as an RCPI Trainer with the RCPI Medical Training Department, you do not need to provide evidence of your activities as an RCPI Trainer. You can check your RCPI Trainer status with Emma Coonan ([emmacoonan@rcpi.ie](mailto:emmacoonan@rcpi.ie)).

**Trainer for other Postgraduate Medical Training Body:** You should request a certificate or letter of confirmation from the relevant body.

## Record your Professional Competence claims in your ePortfolio for Professional Competence

It is very important that you regularly record your Professional Competence activities in your [ePortfolio for Professional Competence](#).

The information you enter in your ePortfolio forms will determine your Annual Statement of Participation in Professional Competence which the Medical Council may request from you as satisfactory evidence of engagement in Professional Competence.

A guide to using ePortfolio for Professional Competence is available on this page: [www.rcpi.ie / Professional Competence / How to maintain a good Professional Competence record / Keep your ePortfolio for Professional Competence up to date](#)

### Do you need help?

If you need advice on Professional Competence or what to record in your ePortfolio, please contact the RCPI Professional Competence Department, which is open Monday to Friday 09:00 – 17:00 GMT at + 353 1 863 9739 or [professionalcompetence@rcpi.ie](mailto:professionalcompetence@rcpi.ie).

To access your ePortfolio simply go to the RCPI website ([www.rcpi.ie](#)) and click on Login (top of the screen above Search). Enter your username and the password you use for RCPI Digital Hub. Choose “RCPI Services / Go to ePortfolio”.

If you have forgotten your password you can use our [Forgot Password service](#).

If you need help logging in to RCPI Online Services or the ePortfolio, you can contact the RCPI Helpdesk, which is open Monday to Friday 08:00 – 18:00 GMT on Free phone 1800 303 574 (ROI only) or +353 1 863 9721 or [helpdesk@rcpi.ie](mailto:helpdesk@rcpi.ie).

If you need information about courses or other educational activities provided by RCPI, you can visit the RCPI Store on [www.rcpi.ie](#), or contact the RCPI Postgraduate Medical Education Centre, which is open Monday to Friday 09:00 – 17:00 GMT at + 353 1 863 9700 or [courses@rcpi.ie](mailto:courses@rcpi.ie)

## Appendix 1: Define your Scope of Practice for your Personal Development Plan

Before you begin each Professional Competence year, it is worthwhile to think about the activities you will engage in during the coming year and how they might map to your Professional Competence requirements.

Using this matrix will help you create a structured definition of your practice that you can update as and when your circumstances change. You can also use it to prepare your Personal Development Plan each year.

<b>Area of Practice</b> (tick all that apply)	Clinical/Laboratory/ Private Practice Administration/Governance Teaching, examining, mentoring etc. Advisor Volunteer Other [describe "Other"]
<b>Practice Environment</b> (tick all that apply)	Hospital/Laboratory Academic State Body Other Environment with/without Peer Support [describe "Other Environment"]
<b>Non-Clinical Roles</b>  <b>Examples include:</b>	Undergraduate and Postgraduate Medical Education/Examiner Protocol Development Examiner Assessor Reviewer/Editor Editor
<b>Type of Practice</b> (tick all that apply)	Full-time/Part-time Retired Other...[describe "Other"]
<b>Consider how the activities you engage in relate to your area(s) of practice</b>	It may be possible to assign some to a CPD category where you have previously found difficult to fulfil.

### CPD credit for creating a Personal Development Plan

If you complete your Personal Development Plan by September 30 in the relevant PCS year, you can claim 2 credits in the Internal CPD category. You do not need to add evidence to the Internal CPD form, your Personal Development Plan will be your evidence.

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## Appendix 2: Medical Council 8 Domains of Good Professional Practice

The Medical Council has defined 8 domains of good professional practice. Your Annual Statement of Participation in Professional Competence must show that you have engaged in activities that reflect all 8 domains over a five-year period.

These domains describe a framework of competencies applicable to all doctors across the continuum of professional development from formal medical education and training through to maintenance of professional competence. Since they describe the outcomes which doctors should strive to achieve, doctors should refer to these domains throughout the process of maintaining competence in line with the Standards. For example, the domains can be used to assess needs and plan maintenance of professional competence, and they can be cross-referenced with specific activities for maintenance of professional competence.

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### PATIENT SAFETY & QUALITY OF PATIENT CARE

Patient safety and quality of patient care should be at the core of the health service delivery that a doctor provides. A doctor needs to be accountable to their professional body, to the organisation in which they work, to the Medical Council and to their patients thereby ensuring the patients whom they serve receive the best possible care.

### RELATING TO PATIENTS

Good medical practice is based on a relationship of trust between doctors and society and involves a partnership between patient and doctor that is based on mutual respect, confidentiality, honesty, responsibility and accountability.

### COMMUNICATION & INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Medical practitioners must demonstrate effective interpersonal communication skills. This enables the exchange of information, and allows for effective collaboration with patients, their families and also with clinical and non-clinical colleagues and the broader public.

### COLLABORATION & TEAMWORK

Medical practitioners must co-operate with colleagues and work effectively with healthcare professionals from other disciplines and teams. He/she should ensure that there are clear lines of communication and systems of accountability in place among team members to protect patients.

### MANAGEMENT (INCLUDING SELF-MANAGEMENT)

A medical practitioner must understand how working in the health care system, delivering patient care and how other professional and personal activities affect other healthcare professionals, the healthcare system and wider society as a whole .

### SCHOLARSHIP

Medical practitioners must systematically acquire, understand and demonstrate the substantial body of knowledge that is at the forefront of the field of learning in their specialty, as part of a continuum of lifelong learning. They must also search for the best information and evidence to guide their professional practice.

### PROFESSIONALISM

Medical practitioners must demonstrate a commitment to fulfilling professional responsibilities by adhering to the standards specified in the Medical Council's "[Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners](#)".

### CLINICAL SKILLS

The maintenance of Professional Competence in the clinical skills domain is clearly specialty-specific and standards should be set by the relevant Post-Graduate Training Body according to international benchmarks.

**Appendix 3: Further Reading:**


- [www.rcpi.ie](http://www.rcpi.ie) / [Professional Competence](#) / [How to maintain a good Professional Competence record](#)
- [www.medicalcouncil.ie](http://www.medicalcouncil.ie) / [Existing Registrants](#) / [Professional Competence](#)





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