

# How you can address your learning and development needs

The key points you need to remember about this section are:

- Any approach to learning and development is valid as long as you can demonstrate it contributes to how you remain competent to deliver a proper standard of service
- You can tailor learning and development to suit your learning style
- It is important to turn your learning into doing something differently in your job.

This section outlines ways to address your identified learning and development needs. This is not an exhaustive or prescriptive list; you have freedom and flexibility to choose how you ensure that you remain competent to deliver a proper standard of service. [#address-video]

## *'Formal' training*

Formal training can be delivered in a variety of ways, for example, face-to-face or online, externally or in-house. You can consider formal training in different, innovative and flexible formats as long as you can demonstrate it meets your learning and development needs.

## *In-house training*

In house training can be effective in addressing learning and development needs. Individual solicitors, teams or departments have the skills, knowledge and capability to deliver training that is targeted and relevant. Some in-house training will be mandatory and linked to the business objectives of your organisation.

We conduct "legal tradecraft skills sessions", which are mainly internal 'know-how' sessions. The 'know-how' training sessions are more discretionary, but if any is missed, the individual must pick up on what they have missed. Seminars are now available online to make this easier.

## *Shared learning*

Employees who attend formal training often feed back to their colleagues on what they have learned and how it can be applied to their practice area, role, unit or department. This can be formal (for example, a presentation) or informal (for example, a summary email from the person attending the training with their key learning or 'take away' points, inviting informal one-to-ones with anyone interested in learning more). You can also be proactive about this to address your learning and development needs and directly contact a colleague you know has attended training that is relevant to you.

## *'Informal' training*

The remainder of this section looks at informal ways you can adopt to address your learning and development.

Informal learning plays "a big part" in our learning, training and education activity. There

are always at least two people to an office, so that the less experienced member of staff has someone to learn from, this means that "associates learn directly from the partners" and can receive on the job feedback for their work

## *Research, reading and discussion*

### *'General' research, reading and discussion*

One way to remain up-to-date with legal knowledge and developments in your practice area is through reading publications, case reviews, journals, articles, blogs from "thought leaders" and receiving email updates.

### *Assigned reading and monthly update meetings*

Some departments and teams assign reading particular publications or updates to specific individuals who then present the most relevant content to colleagues. This can help create a more dynamic learning environment (i.e. discussion and debate with colleagues) than just reading alone.

### *Targeted' research, reading and discussion*

When you have identified gaps in your knowledge, perhaps in the context of a question in a particular case, targeted research or reading can be an effective way of addressing that gap. Discussing your findings with your colleagues may help further develop your understanding of a particular issue.

### *File reviews*

File reviews are a vehicle for suggestions, ideas, feedback, advice or other input between colleagues, they also provide a platform for reflection: by their very nature they encourage discussion and thinking around alternative approaches or lessons learned.

### *Colleagues*

Learning and development needs can be addressed by speaking to the people you work with. If you have a specific knowledge or skill gap, a colleague may be able to share advice, experience or knowledge that helps you address that gap.

### *Peers*

Your colleagues may not always have the answers. An external perspective from a peer can help you address gaps or further your learning and development.

Not only can you learn from the peer group within your own organisation, you can learn from your counterpart... my skill set has been able to improve through working with partners on transactions at other firms"

### *Networking*

Many solicitors use networking opportunities to address identified learning and development needs, be they around knowledge, skills or identifying good practice.

We use networking to pick lots of people's brains and to speak to other law firms who are good at sharing information"

With the right network in place, addressing an identified learning and development need might be as simple as a phone call, an email or a chat over coffee.

This presupposes you have a network to access. The most obvious approach is to make use of local, regional or national groups or associations but it can also include making your own contacts on a one-to-one basis, for example on the back of external training or other events.

### *Learning and development networks*

Regional affiliation or referral networks provide an opportunity for you to address your learning and development needs. These networks may be appropriate for smaller organisations or sole practitioners and typically involve a larger firm providing learning and development in return for referrals of work the smaller firm is not in a position to advise on.

### *Observation*

Observing how others go about their work can help you address identified learning and development needs. This approach is particularly relevant for 'behavioural' or 'softer' skills, for example communication and relationships with others, which cannot easily be learned by reading or formal training alone.

The caveat to this is that simply observing how others work can be a passive experience that does not lead to concrete changes or developments in your own learning or behaviour. Three important elements underpinning effective learning by observation are:

- 1) Clarity around your learning and development needs
- 2) Reflection
- 3) Application

### *Clarity around your learning and development needs*

Being clear about your learning and development needs and having them 'front of mind' will enable you to observe fellow practitioners with these needs in mind, helping you to identify examples of specific skills and behaviours you see in their approach.

### *Reflection*

Taking a moment to reflect on what you saw can then help 'cement' that experience and enable you to articulate exactly what it was that you saw, what was good about it and how you could adopt those skills or behaviours.

### *Application*

Practising the skills or behaviours yourself is essential in order to turn the experience from an academic exercise into something pro-active, hands-on and more likely to result in changes in approach on your part. Adopting new skills and behaviours successfully is rarely achieved in one take. It will usually involve further reflection on what went well and what could be improved with further practice - all of which is part of the ongoing learning and development process.

### *Mentoring*

Mentoring schemes connect a mentor with a mentee on a 1-2-1 basis with the mentor

providing ongoing support, encouragement, advice and feedback on work. This approach can help you actively assess your learning and development and obtain knowledge, advice and expertise to help you address gaps.

Associates are assigned their own 'Development Partner', who will jointly work with them on their development; they act as "a sort of mentor", and have discussions throughout the year. Development partners can often pick up training needs and ensure that they (individuals) are still progressing"

Not all mentoring needs to be formal; in smaller firms it may not be practical. You can address your learning and development needs by talking to senior or more experienced colleagues on a one-off basis or via informal arrangements.

### *Coaching*

Coaching involves a dialogue in which the coach helps an individual to develop their own action points to address identified goals and objectives, having first helped that person to raise their levels of 'self-awareness' and understanding of the issues or challenges they currently face.

### *Secondments*

Secondments involve a temporary movement of an employee to another part of an organisation or to an external organisation for a defined period and provide exposure to environments and situations that can help address learning and development needs.

### *Social Media*

Following blogs and Twitter accounts provides access to a wide range of information, experiences and views. This is a cost effective way to address gaps in your knowledge. Some solicitors ensure that their knowledge of their practice area or of the wider legal profession remains up to date by writing on line articles or contributing to online discussions and debates.

### *Video: How do you address your learning and development needs?*