



This month, Alex Webster looks at how different educational formats suit different goals

# Exploring CET formats

As General Optical Council (GOC) registrants, we all have to complete a mandatory quantity of continuing education and training (CET) sessions to remain on the register and, therefore, be able to continue to practise. But, have you ever considered what may be the best format of CET session to complete? In this article, we will explore the different formats of CET that may be available and consider which might be suitable depending on what you want to achieve.

As busy professionals, I am aware that some members at some time or another complete a CET session 'just for the points'. However, as we have discussed earlier in this CPD series, although this enables you to gain the much coveted points, how much does this help serve the purpose of CET – that of confirming your competence and uncovering new learning to impact your clinical practice? Maybe sometimes, but it cannot be guaranteed.

In planning our continuing professional development (CPD), education and training, if we consider not only the content of any CET we may complete but also the format in which it is delivered, it may be possible to ensure all the hours we spend in this pursuit not only keep us on the register, but also serve our patients through excellence in clinical practice and develop us as healthcare professionals.

We will all be aware that CET is divided into 'interactive' and 'non-interactive' formats, and that we must complete a minimum of 18 interactive sessions in the three-year cycle. The GOC states that: *'Interactive CET is designed to prevent the risk of some registrants becoming professionally isolated and not interacting with their peers'*<sup>1</sup>.

Interactive CET involves either physical attendance or distance learning, which includes an interactive element, whereas non-interactive CET is that which we can complete without engaging with our peers.



There are many formats of interactive CET available

Conducting interactive or non-interactive CET is an important area to consider when planning our CET activities. Often non-interactive CET can be easy to access and ideal to complete in our own time around busy schedules. However, it may be perceived by some as not requiring as much input.

One example of non-interactive CET is completing the online multiple choice questions (MCQs) following reading a CET article in *Dispensing Optics*. Here a range of topics are presented throughout the year, all covering competency areas of the dispensing optician and often that of the contact lens optician and optometrist. I have, on occasion, heard or been made aware that some members find they can complete a set of MCQs having only skim read the article.

This cannot be completely viewed as negative; it depends on the purpose of the registrant in completing the session, as CET is there to not only further develop us but also to enable us to confirm our competency. However, if every piece of CET we pursued in a three-year cycle is only at the level of our individual experience and competency, and allowed no opportunities for new learning or input from our peers and their knowledge and experience, then how would the CET scheme benefit us and ultimately our patients?

So, although it may require more effort, in the form of travel or time taken to interact with peers, and potentially more financial expenditure depending on your employment circumstances, the completion of interactive CET should lead to us being safer and more aware eyecare practitioners.

## FORMATS OF INTERACTIVE CET



Many formats of interactive CET are available and, in this article, we shall have a look at some of the most common.

They vary in the level of interaction with peers that is required and this is reflected in the value of points given by the GOC to each session.

## LECTURES

Interactive lectures are those that require both the speaker and the lecture attendees to be present and interacting at the same time. It distinguishes from a recorded lecture, where the attendee will be watching a recording of the lecture and have no opportunity to interact with the speaker or have any requirement to interact with other registrants before completing the CET.

An interactive lecture may be experienced in person by attending an event, such as a conference or local ABDO CET event, or it

may be provided in a smaller setting such as your optical practice. There must be the opportunity to both ask questions and to listen to the questions and answers of others.

So why bother to attend lectures or webinars? They are a fantastic way to become aware of new or updated information, particularly in areas that are changing in practice due to research developments, technological advancements and expanding scopes of practice.

Lectures allow experts in their field to transmit their knowledge, as long as the receiver's ears are open. This is in some way similar to reading a journal CET article. However, the Q&A session of a lecture enables attendees to confirm their understanding and for the speaker to correct any errors in understanding that may be raised. Also, although it falls outside the CET session, it is my experience of lectures attended in person that the coffee and biscuit time after can be additionally valuable in picking up peer experiences linked to the lecture and beyond, and it may even be that the speaker has further time to interact.

What lectures don't automatically provide is a 'mental learning space' to enable the attendee to practice assimilating the knowledge gained into their real world of practice. This can be where case-based learning and skills workshops can be considered effective educational formats.

### PEER DISCUSSION AND PEER REVIEW

Peer discussion and peer review are formats of case-based learning CET. GOC approved sessions allow registrants to gain three interactive points – two more than lectures. The higher level of peer-to-peer interaction enables this weighting and it is here that the 'risk' element is really taken into account.

In a risk analysis conducted prior to the introduction of the Enhanced CET scheme, the GOC determined that there were some clinical areas, such as glaucoma and detached retina, that should receive more attention, and the profession of dispensing optician was identified as low risk<sup>2</sup>. For these reasons, attending a peer discussion and peer review session in the CET cycle is not compulsory for dispensing opticians, unless they are on the speciality register as a contact lens practitioner. However, though not compulsory, GOC-approved peer discussion and peer review are widely available for dispensing opticians to take part in.

Although both formats use cases and discussion in an attempt to positively impact a practitioner's clinical practice, there is a difference between peer discussion and peer review. Many of you

will have experienced peer discussion, maybe at an ABDO CET event or a session provided by an optical manufacturer. Here the CET provider uses pre-approved cases for the discussion. These may be based on real life cases but may also be theoretical to highlight a particular learning area.

These sessions may be delivered in small table groups with a facilitator on each, or may be facilitated from the front with an attendee as table-lead to feedback the discussion to the room. Peer review differs in that the registrant applies to the GOC for approval and real-life (anonymised) cases from their, and other attendees', practice are used for the discussion.

This format runs in small groups with a maximum of 10 delegates per facilitator. Peer review can be an excellent way to share unusual and interesting cases with your direct peers and to share experience and best-practice in the management of patients and conditions.

All case-based discussion requires every single attending registrant to take part in the discussion. All questions are valid and varying opinions should be respected. It has been shown in the optical professions that case-based discussion is perceived by GOC registrants to increase self-confidence in referrals and impact on clinical practice<sup>3</sup>.

### DISCUSSION WORKSHOP

Completion of this discussion format also provides three interactive CET points, but the presentation of information may vary slightly. Here the discussions may be presented in the form of a 'case', but it may also be a topic or relevant issue that is to be discussed. Additionally, here rather than the discussion being 'facilitated', the presenter may provide specific questions or discussion points. Summary points to the discussion may also be provided. This format works well to engage the attendees in peer-to-peer discussion, but also allows new knowledge to be disseminated and confirmed in a way that peer discussion and peer review do not. It may be that you have some knowledge on a subject but are interested in a specific CET provider in giving further educational direction, whilst also having the opportunity to discuss and learn with your peers.

The GOC approve two other types of discussion workshop that provide two interactive CET points; a lecture with discussion workshop and a demonstration with discussion workshop. Here the discussion section is reduced in time but the transmittance of new information or a new skill is provided.



An ABDO CET skills workshop in action

### SKILLS WORKSHOP

Another three-point interactive CET format is the skills workshop. These are conducted in small groups with a maximum of six delegates to one facilitator. This is an excellent format of education when you want to experience and practice a new skill, or revisit an old skill, in a safe learning environment. The facilitators should be experts in the skill and will provide direct feedback and support in the session.

The small-group nature of these sessions and the ability to significantly interact with peers, and the facilitator has the potential to really have a positive impact on the development of clinical practice. The delegate to facilitator ratio, and often the need for specialist equipment, means this format of CET can be significantly more expensive to provide and may not be as accessible as other forms of CET.

To summarise, when contemplating your next CET endeavour, consider exploring in advance not only the subject matter of session but also the method of delivery to ensure you get the most out of your time and effort.

*Next month, Joanne Abbott will explore the concept of learning from experience – both good and bad.*

### REFERENCES

1. General Optical Council. Continuing Education and Training (CET): A guide for registrants in the 2019-21CET cycle. 2019. Available at: [www.optical.org/en/Education/CET/index.cfm](http://www.optical.org/en/Education/CET/index.cfm)
2. General Optical Council. Risks in the optical profession. Final report. 2010. Available at [www.optical.org/en/news\\_publications/Publications/policy-and-research-papers.cfm](http://www.optical.org/en/news_publications/Publications/policy-and-research-papers.cfm)
3. Bullock A, Barnes E, Ryan B & Sheen N. Case-based discussion supporting learning and practice in optometry. *Ophthalmic & Physiological Optics* 2014. 34(5):614-21.

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