

TAX TALKS

Australia's Tax News Podcast - The Podcast for Australian Tax Professionals

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Continuing Professional Education is something we all need to do to stay registered as tax practitioners. But there are many common misconceptions about CPE. At least our understanding of CPE was fuzzy at the best, and wrong at the worst of times.

Continuing Professional Education

So we went to see Ian Taylor, the Chair of the Tax Practitioners Board, that reviews our CPE. We had 10 light bulb moments during this talk with Ian. Here is what we learned.

To listen while you drive, walk or work, just access the episode through a podcast app on your mobile phone.

1 Assessed over three years

Continuing Professional Education is assessed over a three year period with a certain minimum per year. So there is flexibility and we can go hard in one year and then take it easier in another.

The big milestones are 90, 45 and 60 hours over 3 years with a minimum of 10, 5 and 7 hours per year for tax and BAS agents and tax financial advisers respectively. For quantity surveyors and fuel tax credit specialists it is 6 hours over 3 years with a minimum of 2 hours each year.

If you do CPE for a professional association the TPB recognises as such, then the CPE you do for them will count towards your hours.

2 Board Approved Courses are not CPE

A course completed to obtain registration does not count as Continuing Professional Education. So none of 2,604 Board Approved Courses we might do to qualify for registration count as CPE.

A course that has been completed to obtain registration or renew registration will not generally constitute a CPE activity.

3 No accredited providers of CPE

There are no accredited providers of CPE. Any presentation, training, course, webinar can count as CPE.

The TPB do not propose to accredit or approve CPE activities.

As long as it is provided by somebody who knows what they are talking about. Or as the TBP puts it.

CPE activities should be provided by persons or organisations with suitable qualifications and/or practical experience in the relevant subject area.

So CPE providers need to know what they are talking about but there is no accreditation.

This is different to the courses we do to qualify for registration. To register for the first time we can only do certain courses by certain providers, so called Board Approved Courses. But once we are registered and move into the CPE regime, there are no accredited providers for those CPE activities.

4 You don't have to pay

We don't have to necessarily pay for CPE. Yes, many courses require a fee and there is no such thing as a free lunch. But whether something qualifies as CPE or not is independent from the fact of whether we paid for it or not.

We need to keep a record of the CPE activities we undertake. And when we pay, we usually get an invoice and that could be treated as a record.

But we can prepare a record of CPE activities ourselves. We just need to note what learning we did when and where and how this was relevant to our work. It doesn't require an invoice. And so we don't have to necessarily pay for CPE activities.

5 Focus on the outcome

The TPB doesn't prescribe the activity, but the outcome. It is the outcome that is important.

Any education activity relevant to the tax (financial) advice, tax agent or BAS services you provide that maintains, develops or promotes your skills, knowledge or attributes, is considered to be a continuing professional education (CPE) activity under our CPE policy.

How we achieve this outcome is up to us as long as we get there and stick to CPE activities the Board considers appropriate. Here is their list.

Seminars, workshops, webinars, courses and lectures – Structured conferences and discussion groups (including by phone or video conference) – Tertiary courses provided by universities, registered training organisations (RTOs), other registered higher education institutions or other approved course providers – Other education activities, provided by an appropriate organisation – Research, writing and presentation by a registered tax (financial) adviser, tax or BAS agent of technical publications or structured training – Peer review of research and writing submitted for publication or presentation in structured training – Computer/internet-assisted courses, audiotape or videotape packages – Attendance at structured in-house training on tax related subjects by persons or organisations with suitable qualifications and/or practical experience in the subject area covered – Attendance at appropriate Australian Taxation Office (ATO) seminars and presentations – Relevant CPE activities provided to members and non-members by a [recognised professional association](#) – unit of study or other CPE activity on the [Tax Agent Services Act 2009 \(TASA\)](#) including the [Code of Professional Conduct \(Code\)](#) – Cyber security awareness training

6 25% limit on technical or professional reading

There is a limit on technical or professional reading for CPE purposes.

No more than 25 per cent of CPE should be undertaken through relevant technical or professional reading.

So reading has a red flag on it.

7 Tax services are not CPE

The provision of tax services is not in itself a CPE activity. So our usual work doesn't count as CPE. And you will probably say that this is not a particular big leaning. You already knew that before. But we had thought that if we run into a technical issue and then read up about it to find a solution, that this might count as CPE. But the answer is that it doesn't, since it was part of our usual work.

The provision of a tax (financial) advice, tax agent or BAS service will not, of itself, constitute a CPE activity.

8 Podcast is CPE

Listening to a relevant tax podcast counts as CPE. And even more important is that it counts as a structured activity, so it is not subject to the 25% limit – the red flag they put on reading. So you can listen to tax podcasts while driving to see a client and literally earn CPEs on the way. You can't drive or walk while you attend a webinar or read an article, but you can while you listen to a podcast.

9 No minimum length

In the past we had heard this strange rumour that a podcast or webinar or anything else needs to be at least an hour long to qualify as CPE. But this rumour is not correct. It doesn't matter how long an individual episode is. You just add up the minutes of all the episodes you listened to. So let's say you listened to five episodes of Tax Talks of different length and they add up to 300 minutes. So you get a CPE of 5 hours. It doesn't matter that some or all of the episodes might be less than 60 minutes.

10 Keep records for 6 years

We need to keep a record of the CPE activities for 6 years. That is a long time and hence important to keep in mind and comply with. We hadn't realised that it is that long.

Records of your CPE should be kept for six years, unless you are a member of a relevant recognised professional association in which case records should be kept in accordance with the requirements of the relevant association.

So these were our 10 light bulb moments re CPE.

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