

# ACTUARIAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA

## GUIDE TO THE DIFFRACTION DISCUSSION

Dear Colleague

Thank you for helping one of our actuaries maintain their Professional Promise.

This Promise in the Actuarial Society's Code of Professional Conduct requires members to develop and maintain the ability to deliver a quality professional service in their chosen field. Our new Continuing Professional Development ('CPD') requirements give us guidelines for remaining professionally competent. Cycles of professional development support us in our career. "You decide where you need to improve, do it, and then assess yourself."

### How does it work?

Members work through cycles of Professional Development on a regular basis, at least yearly.

- 1 you list the various professional roles that you perform, as well as any new areas you would like to grow into
- 2 consider what capabilities you should have for these roles and assess where you have development needs
- 3 select and carry out activities that may meet these needs
- 4 reflect on the progress made or the outcome of each activity
- 5 *diffract* your reflections with another professional person, mentor or coach.

This last step leads to the beginning of a new cycle of planning, acting and analyzing.

### What is Diffraction?

It's a term borrowed from physics, as is Reflection. Diffraction is the interaction of waves, in which two approaching peaks combine to make a bigger peak. We use the term for the insights that should occur when the actuary discusses their reflections on their professional development with you. Our research showed that although reflection is an essential part of a development cycle,

the reality check of a discussion with another professional person, mentor or coach was also necessary.

### **What do I have to do?**

The Actuarial Society would like you to meet with your actuary friend at a convenient time and place. The actuary will take you through their development cycle. Your role is best described as a business coach – being ‘present’ and ‘mindful’ as they explain, and commenting on whether the actions are helping the actuary to meet their objectives. The nature of the diffraction discussion will of course vary from person to person, and from time to time.

The discussion is confidential between you and the actuary. You are not required to whistleblow to the Actuarial Society, and nor is it a peer-review of the quality of any particular item of the actuary’s work. The actuary will need to confirm to the Society each year that a diffraction discussion with you has taken place.

### **Where can I find out more?**

On the website of the Actuarial Society ([www.actuarialsociety.org.za](http://www.actuarialsociety.org.za)) under the CPD tab, there are, amongst others

- is an explanatory video of the new CPD process;
- an audio role-play of a diffraction discussion; and
- a document, Quick Guide to Outcomes-based CPD

A quick summary of the ideas behind the new CPD process is set out in the attached annexure.

CPD Committee

Actuarial Society of South Africa

July 2019

## ANNEXURE

### ***The Professional Development Cycle – Key to Quality Service Delivery***

The Actuarial Society commissioned Lowther & McMillan (2014) to review current thinking on how professionals develop throughout their careers. They noted ...

#### HOW PROFESSIONALS DEVELOP

- They make their own interpretations of issues, rather than acting on the purposes, beliefs, judgments or feelings of others
- They are not passive recipients of claimed wisdom
- They strive for continuous improvement and adaptation in their own practice
- Professional development involves critical reflection on assumptions, validating contested beliefs through discussion with others, taking action on one's reflective insight, and critically assessing it
- Professional development occurs in the context and dilemmas of daily professional life.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT CYCLE

- Traditional hours based CPD focusses mainly on activities
- Development cycles add prior planning and subsequent analysis and application
- Sometimes also, without planning, we learn from our mistakes – what one of the sources dubbed 'CPD on the run'
- Attendance at seminars may be necessary, but won't be sufficient until the content is reflected on and applied or rejected in practice.

#### ROLE OF THE EMPLOYER

- Work-based CPD requirements happen in the employer's domain
- There is potential for delegating the CPD process to accredited employers who use a similar understanding of professional development.

#### WHAT SOUTH AFRICAN ACTUARIES SAID

- They have continued to develop throughout their careers, irrespective of new techniques or changes in the environment
- The majority of their development has happened at work, not at seminars

- Learning is not complete until tried out in practice

The new CPD system was launched in 2017, and has been well received. Members commented:

- “It has been immediately helpful to me, despite 30 years post-qualification experience.”
- “You really need to think about what you need to know.”
- “This system is ideally suited to actuaries, who have a good understanding of feedback systems.”
- “I now see CPD as an integral part of my life, rather than chore.”