

FAQ for HFESA Maintenance of Certification

A. General Questions on the Program

1. What is maintenance of certification – is it requalifying to be an ergonomist?

Maintenance of certification should be thought of as a demonstration of continuing professional practice and professional competence on an ongoing basis. The primary purpose is to confirm that a person awarded certified status is continuing to perform professionally at the same or better level than was required for the initial certification as a CPE. Just as many businesses use the term 'continuous improvement' to show that they are continuing to review their past performance and plan for the future, many professionals are also working to the same goals. For CPEs, this may include the opportunity to review 'learning' and development to maintain currency with research and changes in the professional knowledge base or practice.

2. Why have maintenance of certification?

The IEA is requiring recertification of professional ergonomists by the member societies. Most other 'developed' countries that are members of the IEA either have or are working towards a recertification scheme. Based on feedback, the Professional Affairs Board is using the term 'maintenance of certification' instead of 'recertification' for CPEs in Australia. The maintenance of certification program has been designed to meet the IEA criteria, as well as considering the ongoing administration of the scheme.

3. Who else has maintenance of certification in Australia?

Other professional groups have had requirements for mandatory continuing education for several years in Australia. For example medical practitioners, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, engineers, and other disciplines have had a requirement to undertake courses, attend conferences, read journals, as a way to maintain their currency of knowledge, and the assumed ability to maintain competence in updated standards, good practice and research applications.

In addition, the Safety Institute of Australia has formalised their scheme of maintenance of certification, using a log book and points system that needs to be maintained every 3 years. While not precisely the same as the maintenance of certification proposed for CPEs', this emphasis on "continuing education" reflects a general professional awareness of its importance. Other organizations, such as the Quality Society for OHS Auditors actually require members to have their log book signed off by clients, but the PAB is using an 'honour' system for members.

4. Is maintenance of certification going to ensure competence?

The PAB has set certain expectations of CPEs to maintain professional competency but the working party has found the idea of professional competency meant different things to different people. Setting minimum expectations for continuing professional development provides a pathway to maintenance of competence, but does not ensure it. The scope of ergonomics has changed over many years, as has the expectations of OHS regulators and many clients. From the website of the Human Factors & Ergonomics Society of Australia (HFESA), “practicing ergonomists must have a broad understanding of the full scope of the discipline, taking into account the physical, cognitive, social, organisational, environmental and other relevant factors”. It is expected that ongoing commitment of CPEs to learning in the broad scope of the discipline, and reiterative assessing of their professional practice will ensure competence.

5. Is the PAB challenging my right to practice as an ergonomist?

The simple answer is “No”. However, the PAB is reconfirming the original rules that required CPEs to demonstrate periodically that they are continuing to meet the expectations imposed on them by the status the Society has awarded. There have been previous programs for maintenance of certification and many discussions on recertification for those ergonomists. The right to practice as a CPE does come with expectations to share and contribute to the aim of the professional as well as provide a professional and competent service as an ergonomist.

B. Questions on the Record Sheet and Maintenance process

6. I am already keeping my knowledge up to date and ensuring my competence. Why do I have to go through this process?

If you are already keeping your knowledge up-to-date and ensuring competence, this process will not require more than documenting this every three years, using a simple-to-use Excel record sheet containing a broad range of activities. The record sheet will allow for total hours of activities to be calculated for you, with a maximum of 50% of total hours (150 hours in a 3 year period) for ergonomics practice, including academic practice or ergonomics policy.

As other organisations have found it very difficult to quantify the value of some activities compared to others, each hour of any activity in the record sheet will count 100% towards the total number of hours required.

7. Why does the Record Sheet and process allow only 50% of the hours to actual ergonomics practice?

The IEA requires societies offer a recertification process that addresses both competence and continuing work in ergonomics. To encompass the need for professional competency, a key consideration was that not all ergonomists can maintain currency of knowledge in the ever expanding discipline of ergonomics and human factors only by ‘working’. The other activities in the Record Sheet allow for a range of activities designed to allow for ongoing learning, development, sharing, and contribution or participation in the broad ergonomics profession and the community. The other components of the activities in the Record Sheet include:

Update (Ongoing learning and professional development)
Share (Ergonomic skills, knowledge and experience)
Serve (Serving the profession and the wider community)
Develop (Proficiency, expertise and adjunct skills)
The other 50% of hours of activity will come from a combination of these activities.

8. How much time will it take me to keep these records?

The working party is encouraging the HFESA to allow for automatic allocation of attendance hours whenever a CPE attends a HFESA event. These attendance hours would appear in an individual CPE record sheet in the members' section on the HFESA website. In addition, until this automatic allocation occurs it is recommended that members update the record sheet after they attend an event.

CREE (Centre for Registration of European Ergonomists) has found that it takes less time to record each event in the record sheet as soon as it is completed (10 minutes maximum per event or activity) rather than wait until the maintenance of certification documentation is due and have to go back to find the information.

9. I live in a regional area and can't attend meetings, professional development and conferences – isn't this process unfair to those of us in regional areas?

Regional members have definitely been considered in the maintenance of certification process – over half of the working party members were also based in regional areas, some for many years. The initial maintenance of certification scheme has allowed a generous system of allocating hours for activity and many ways to incorporate continuing professional development and contribution to practice and the profession. For example, many regional members will be able to accumulate activity hours for community presentations on ergonomics, writing papers for newsletters and other publications or study by distance.

CPEs will also be able to explore the possibility of activities such as mentoring, and participating in the Maintenance of Certification panel. In addition, the HFESA is considering ways for regional members to participate in online professional development activities.

10. Are there any additional fees for Maintenance of certification?

No. For anyone unable to meet the requirements of the Maintenance process, their CPE status will be revoked. Membership of the HFESA will revert to being a Full member.

C. Questions on the Maintenance of Certification Panel and the audit process

11. How will the Panel be selected and how will conflict of interest issues be addressed?

The Panel of three CPEs will be recruited by nomination, with representatives selected from different states. As panel members will be able to generate hours of activity for their own maintenance purposes, it is hoped that there will be sufficient volunteers. The PAB reserves the right to appoint CPEs to the panel if there are not sufficient members.

As the PAB already has an established system of excluding panel members from reviewing applications from their home state, a similar process of ensuring that panel members do not assess maintenance of certification applications from their own state will also be followed. Panel members will receive training in the Maintenance of Certification process and the requirement to declare conflicts of interest.

12. How will the random audits of 10% of applications be dealt with?

The random audits will be based on random number generation. As there will be a maximum of 10% of all maintenance applications assessed, the numbers audited will be very low on an annual basis.

Panel members will audit the applications to ensure details provided correspond to the relevant activities of the CPD record sheet. As part of the audit, the panel may also request evidence of the activities claimed. Examples of verification could consist of:

- copies of a registration form or certificate of attendance for a conference or seminar
- copy of the PowerPoint front slide for evidence of a training presentation delivered
- a summary of recommendations (de-identified) for an ergonomics consultancy, or
- referee for a project or mentoring.

The audit will not be a major component of the Maintenance of Certification process, and there is no requirement for a meeting or interview with the applicant.

D. Questions on the process when CPEs may have difficulty or not meet requirements

13. What happens if I work part time, am on maternity leave, or medical leave or retired?

Even working part-time, or on leave for a number of months, most people will reach the activity level required over a 3-year period. The 150 hours of 'work' (for 150 points in a 3-year period) equates to only 50 hours of work related ergonomics practice (on average) per year. This would allow, for example, a CPE to have two years of maternity leave, and then work 4 hours per week for less than 40 weeks in the final one year period.

As CPEs can also attain points for a wide range of the other competency activities, many people could still participate in activities in just one of the three years to achieve the requirements. There is also the provision for those with a longer period of inactivity from practicing as a CPE to be involved with mentoring and self-directed activities.

Many retired CPEs spend some of their time at least on activities that could achieve the required hours by mentoring, voluntary projects, reviewing journal papers or writing articles.

In the unlikely event that a CPE cannot achieve the required number of activity hours in the three year period, contact will be made with them to determine if this is an indication of temporary difficulty in achieving requirements. Extension of timeframes would be negotiated in some circumstances.

14. What happens to my CPE post nominals and membership category if I can't meet the requirements set by the HFESA?

Several working party members have tried the proposed system to determine the ease of achieving the required number of hours of activity. The consensus of the working party is that CPEs participating in typical professional or work activities (including consulting, public service and academic responsibilities), as well as engaging in some professional development activities or other activities will easily meet the maintenance of certification requirements even in a one year period.

If the CPE still cannot satisfy the Panel that there is a commitment to meet the requirements, then the PAB has no option except to revoke the CPE status. HFESA Members who are CPEs will revert back to full member status. The CPE will have the option to appeal the decision.