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I'VE JUST QUALIFIED... NOW WHAT?



**DEBBIE DYMOCK
OFFERS USEFUL
ADVICE FOR
NEWLY QUALIFIED
PRACTITIONERS**

It is a great moment and a significant milestone when qualifying as a Career Development Professional.

After months, sometimes years, of balancing work, placements, family and study, many new practitioners reach the end of their training with a mixture of pride and relief, and also a whispering question: 'Now what?'

Career development work can be deeply rewarding, but it can be lonely. Many practitioners work in small teams, on satellite sites, across large geographical areas and, more often than not, alone. The isolation of our roles is a common but often unspoken experience, but it doesn't have to be.

With the right networks, support systems and habits, your first year can be one of connection, growth and increasing confidence in your practice. This article explores practical ways to stay connected, continue learning, and build a sense of belonging to help you take your first steps as a qualified practitioner.

The good news is that there are plenty of opportunities to build meaningful professional networks if you know where to look.

The CDI offers a range of Communities of Practice on LinkedIn and Facebook, as well as regional online and in-person meet-ups which you can access via the CDI website. These provide a welcoming space for practitioners to meet, share resources, gain practical insights, offer support with work challenges, and receive supervision assistance. Regular attendance will help you to develop relationships, stay up to date with the sector and feel part of the wider professional community.

Many local authorities, enterprise partnerships and regional groups, such as the various CEC Careers Hubs, host events, webinars and networking sessions which are especially valuable for new practitioners, because they offer local labour market insights, partnership opportunities and introductions to organisations you may later collaborate with.

Online networking has become a huge and vital part of the modern career professional's toolkit, bringing the world a little closer to home. LinkedIn hosts numerous discussion groups, while both Facebook and LinkedIn have active communities of practitioners who share resources, articles and experiences. By engaging with these platforms, you gain access to a daily stream of conversation and sector updates.

Of course, if you can't find a network that fits your needs, create one. A simple monthly video call with two or three fellow practitioners can provide invaluable support – maybe set this up with your fellow graduates so you can continue your journey together.

Another way to reduce isolation and enhance your learning is to undertake mentoring. The CDI and other sector-based organisations offer mentoring schemes, but you can also approach someone informally. Many experienced practitioners are generous with their time and happy to support colleagues in their early careers.

Networking doesn't need to feel intimidating; think of it as building connections rather than forced integration. As luck would have it, you have just entered the most friendly and supportive sector I have ever known, where (virtual) doors are always open for a chat.

CPD is at the heart of maintaining professional integrity and confidence, but for new practitioners, the sheer volume can feel overwhelming. It is important to find the right kind of CPD for you, one that suits your learning style and also fits in with your workload.

Structured CPD includes formal training such as CDI webinars and accredited courses. You can focus on key areas to specialise in, or even learn about something new if it has sparked an interest. Informal CPD is often overlooked but can be valuable. It includes reading articles (like this one), listening to sector-based podcasts, watching related videos, or following thought leaders on social media. These small, regular moments can help keep you up to date, rather than demanding long-term commitments. Experiential CPD is all about job shadowing, observing experienced practitioners, attending employer events, or simply experimenting with a new technique, method or approach. These can lead to huge leaps in confidence because they are grounded in real situations and real clients.





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Attending sector events in your first year can be enlightening. Conferences such as the CDI's annual conferences, regional Careers Hub events, or more specialist gatherings for specific client groups can expose you to new ideas, research and people, making you feel part of a larger community.

For private practitioners, volunteering as an Enterprise or Industry Partner for your local Careers Hub is a great way to be involved in schools and FE, and to make strong connections in your area.

From a personal perspective, the best thing I ever did was to join LinkedIn and become part of a global community where everyone is accepted, knowledge is shared, and achievements are celebrated. Some of those connections are now people with whom I have worked, and many have become friends. Doors of opportunity, things that wouldn't normally cross my path, have opened up for me through these networks and communities of practice. Taking the first leap is worth every atom of nervousness you might initially feel.

It is normal (and human) to question your abilities once you have qualified, and many new practitioners experience imposter syndrome – the feeling of not being 'good enough', or the fear of being exposed as inexperienced. Just remember that confidence develops through practice and every practitioner, no matter how experienced they are, started somewhere. One of the best antidotes to imposter syndrome is connection with

others; talking openly with peers can help with reality checks and to recognise your growing competence. Imposter syndrome is a sign that you care about the quality of your work, so with support, practice and connection, these feelings will quieten down as your confidence grows.

Qualifying is not the final step in your development; it's the beginning of a rich professional journey. You're stepping into a profession built on connection and shared purpose. The early days may feel uncertain at times, but you are not alone. Every webinar you join, every conversation you have, every small act of CPD helps you build the confidence and community you need to thrive. This sector welcomes new voices, fresh ideas and enthusiastic practitioners, and your presence enriches it. So, become connected, stay curious and trust that each experience is shaping you into the practitioner you are becoming. The opportunities ahead of you are wide open, and the community around you is ready to support you every step of the way.

Useful links

CDI (2021). CDI Career Development Professional Community of Practice. [facebook.com/groups/CDPCoP](https://www.facebook.com/groups/CDPCoP) (accessed 20 February 2026).

CDI (2026). CDI Communities and Networks. [thecdi.net/communities-and-networks](https://www.thecdi.net/communities-and-networks) (accessed 20 February 2026).

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