When IAPCO came into being 50 years ago it answered a crying need for education in what was then a new profession. Ever since, education has been one of the Association’s main pillars, and continues to be so. Now that congress organisers are increasingly delivering services that demand new ranges of knowledge and skills, IAPCO’s role in professional development is more critical than ever.

Some of these skills can be readily transferred from other business environments. However, learning to apply them in the meetings world, and acquiring the industry-specific knowledge to do so effectively, is still vital. These practical applications are best learned from those immersed in PCO businesses and working at the leading edge of the profession.

Two clear examples are marketing and sponsorship management. The mechanics of marketing can be learned in other contexts, but knowing how to deliver a highly effective conference campaign – one that not only provides volume but also the right audiences to meet a client’s aims – is a different matter. Similarly, knowing exactly what will resonate for a company evaluating a sponsorship offering is crucial to a sponsorship sales team’s success.

Professional education may sound like ‘business as usual’ for an association, but what makes IAPCO’s approach special is the focus on keeping that learning highly relevant, even as the marketplace changes around us. That’s what keeps us stretching ourselves, searching out topics that need to be aired and well understood, not just by those of us working in the profession, but by our clients too.

As meetings experts, we have an important responsibility to guide our clients, and guide them well. Central to that is ensuring we’re tapped into the broadest possible marketplace discussions and debates. IAPCO has a close working relationship with PCMA, which sees us teaming up on stage and learning from one another. We’re very enthusiastic about a recent agreement with SACEOS and the collaborative opportunities that presents. We also welcome external speakers to bring fresh thinking to our training programmes.

Today, many senior practitioners in the meetings world credit IAPCO’s education programmes for piquing their interest in a stimulating profession, and giving them the insights and tools to reshape event formats and business practices. It’s exciting to still be doing just that, and continuing to build capability at all levels – just as our many great client associations are doing in their own fields.

Fifty years on, IAPCO continues to provide cutting EDGE education.