

Professional Bodies' Advanced Designations and Awards

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Summary

A central function of most professional bodies is to operate a membership or registration system that as a minimum communicates whether a person is a member of the relevant body, often identifies qualified status, and may distinguish different grades or levels of membership. Around half have an advanced designation or award beyond that required for mainstream membership or qualified status, most commonly designated Fellowship. These advanced designations and qualifications can be grouped into four types:

- higher-level awards (permanent qualifications) made by the professional body itself that are independent of senior grades of membership (5% of 44 bodies participating in the study)
- advanced practitioner designations that perform a specific function in relation to members' careers (2%, i.e. one body, with three others actively considering this type of designation)
- other senior designations (normally Fellow) that are based on a reasonably definable level of achievement (referred to as type A fellowships) (73%)
- senior designations (again normally Fellow) that are based on a high level of contribution to the profession or (less commonly) to society more generally (type B fellowships) (23%).

The proportion of qualified members holding advanced designations or awards in individual professions varies from just over 1% to nearly a third. A few professions are taking steps to increase this proportion. The value to individuals of the majority of advanced designations is largely intrinsic, with a minority attracting some recognition from employers. Their value to professions is generally the encouragement they provide for members to engage in further development and take on wider responsibility.

Type A fellowships are typically awarded following a detailed application process that might involve for instance submission of a CV, referees' statements, more detailed evidence, and an interview. There is a trend towards using explicit criteria and assessment processes, though not at the detailed level often present for award of mainstream qualified status. Type B fellowships use more tacit criteria and make greater use of peer nomination or sponsorship to provide evidence of suitability. Overall trends suggest that advanced designations are moving away from the recognition of an elite, inner core of members and towards being a more widely-accessible marker that recognises achievement or contribution beyond that represented by the main qualifying grade.

Whether or not it is appropriate for professions to have advanced grades or awards appears to be up to the circumstances and resources of the individual professional body. Benefits might be strongest where there is a specific function that an advanced grade could fulfil, for instance to serve a specific

licensing or career function; to respond to a market or employment niche; to provide a higher-status designation where the main qualified grade isn't regarded as sufficiently distinctive or robust (although in the longer term this may simply be a route to raising the level of the qualified grade); or to encourage advanced development and contribution to the profession. They are likely to be less strong where the main qualified grade is well-regarded and there is already a culture of ongoing development.

1. Introduction

A central function of most professional bodies is to operate a membership or registration system that as a minimum communicates whether a person is a member of the relevant body, often identifies whether they are regarded as qualified within the profession, and may distinguish different grades or levels of membership. For many professions the main focus of attention and resources in membership terms is the fully-qualified level, along with the processes and routes for achieving it and to a lesser extent any intermediate grades that support progression or denote part-qualified status. However, driven to an extent by the increasing importance of continuing development and demands in some areas for more advanced, 'extended' professionals, some professional bodies are renewing their focus on advanced membership grades and higher-level development routes.

The most common designation that denotes a higher level of achievement (however defined) than the main qualified level is Fellowship. In their study of professional membership grades and structures Friedman *et al* (2002) use fellowship as a generic term for the most senior of four standard types of designation, defining a fellow as "a senior professional who has met a requirement of qualification and/or experience for higher membership level" (p19). Some professional bodies use other titles such as Advanced Practitioner or Companion, as well as profession-specific titles. A few bodies also award higher-level permanent qualifications (such as postgraduate-level diplomas) that are not membership designations. In Friedman *et al's* study, out of 147 professional bodies 51% had a fellowship or equivalent category of membership. The occasional use was noted of more than one fellowship grade, without further discussion. Typically bodies that didn't have a fellowship category of this type already had their main qualifying membership limited to experienced professionals; had a single category of qualified members; or already used the term Fellow for the main qualified or general membership grade.

This report builds on a 2007-8 study of routes and requirements for professionally-qualified status (Lester 2008, 2009), which focused on the pathways to the main qualified grade and the criteria and processes used to award it. The current study is concerned with identifying how advanced designations and awards vary between professions, with the criteria used for their award, and with any patterns and trends that are discernable. It focuses on designations and awards that act as a progression from the main qualification or qualified grade, such as:

- Fellowships
- Advanced practitioner or similar designations that indicate a higher level of attainment
- Postgraduate-type qualifications, beyond the main qualified level, that are awarded or governed by the professional body itself.

There are many other qualifications, accreditations and designations that can be achieved by professionals after gaining qualified status, either to gain access to particular kinds of work or to further their development or careers. These can include higher education qualifications, specialist accreditations, practising certificates, kitemarks or registration as an approved firm, as well as honorary awards or designations. However the decision was taken to limit the study to the three categories listed above as representing general progression to a grade or award controlled by the professional body.

2. Process

The report is based on two studies, one (the 'main study') designed as a follow-up to the 2007-8 routes and requirements research and carried out in the early part of 2009, and the other (the 'member enquiry') an email questionnaire in June 2009 prompted by an enquiry by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

The main study was announced in outline at the PARN *Qualifications and SSCs* conference in December 2008, where volunteers were sought for a pilot phase. Five organisations volunteered, and desk research was carried out on them followed by email contact and loosely-structured telephone interviews. Five further organisations were also approached in the same way, using publicly-available information to identify potentially interesting cases. The information from the interviews was collated and structured, and used to develop a set of questions for email circulation to PARN member organisations (see appendix 1). Anonymised examples of results from the summary interviews were also posted on a web site to enable survey participants to see the type of information being sought.

The email questionnaire was sent to 135 organisations in April 2009, of which 22 responded. Six of these responses were 'nil returns' (no relevant awards or designations), five provided information on mainstream qualified status, and 11 were usable for the study. Of these latter, seven agreed to take part in further discussions and were contacted by telephone or email for additional information focusing particularly on the perceptions and value of their senior designation or award. A total of 21 organisations therefore provided information for the study (19 from the UK, one from Ireland and one from Canada).

The member enquiry was sent to all PARN member bodies in June 2009 (appendix 2). The questions were independent of the main study, and asked specifically about fellowship grades. Forty organisations responded, of which six had no fellow designation and two used the term 'fellow' as the main membership designation or fully qualified level. Of the remaining 32 organisations, nine had also taken part in the main study, leaving 23 additional organisations (21 from the UK, one from Ireland and one from Canada). In total therefore usable information was received from 44 organisations.

The main study provided information on 18 advanced grades, three permanent awards, and one designation having some features of both. One organisation that was approached as part of the initial sample currently lacks an advanced grade but has plans under discussion to introduce one. The member enquiry provided more limited information on an additional 23 advanced grades. Participating bodies are listed in appendices 1 and 2, and summarised by sector in table 1.

Table 1. Organisations providing data and information used in the studies, by sector

| Sectors* | Main study | Member enquiry (additional organisations) | Total |
|------------------------------------|------------|---|-------|
| Cross-sector | 1 | | 1 |
| Built environment | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Business & law | 4 | 8 | 12 |
| Education | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Finance | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| Health & psychology | 5 | 3 | 8 |
| Information & research | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Science, engineering & environment | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Total | 21 | 23 | 44 |

* Categories as used in Lester (2008).

3. Findings

While the number of participating bodies is too small to make any comments about practices across the wider population of professions, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions and identify a number of patterns and trends.

3.1 Types of designation

The most widely-used advanced designation among the bodies in the study is Fellow: this is used by 18 of the 21 main study bodies as an advanced or progression grade, as well as by two respondents not included in the final data set in respect of mainstream membership. The member enquiry asked specifically about fellowship; of the 24 further bodies that responded, 'fellow' was used as an advanced grade in 23, and as a mainstream qualified grade in one.

Fellowship is generally a membership category rather than a permanent qualification, in that it is only held for as long as the person remains a member of the professional body. Professions' usual rules about remaining in good standing normally apply to fellowships in the same way as to other qualified membership categories. The one exception is Fellowship of City & Guilds (FCGI), not technically a professional body designation although it has some of the characteristics of a generic professional fellowship. While in principle FCGI can be revoked, it isn't dependent on the holder paying an ongoing fee.

One other membership-type category was encountered, the Chartered Teacher designation used by the General Teaching Council (Scotland) (GTCS). Unlike the chartered titles of most professions this is not an initial qualified status or licence-to-practise, but an advanced practitioner designation linked directly to career progression. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is currently looking into advanced practitioner designations in relation to revalidation.

Three organisations in the main study offer or oversee permanent qualifications that do not carry a membership designation:

- The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) has a postgraduate certificate and diploma, with the Certificate now based primarily in universities and operated on a modular basis, while the Diploma, a more lengthy and demanding qualification than the usual postgraduate diploma in UK higher education, is operated directly by the College or by one of several specialist colleges (professional groupings) in Europe. The Diploma is not linked to fellowship, but provides a route to specialist recognition within the RCVS.
- The Organisation for Professionals in Regulatory Affairs (TOPRA) offers a modular postgraduate diploma and master's degree developed by the profession but validated by the University of Wales. The qualifications are not directly linked to membership and may be taken early-career or as ongoing development.
- The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) offers several stand-alone management qualifications that are not linked to membership. These may play a role in for instance applications for Chartered Manager status, they may be used for ongoing development, and they can be taken by non-members. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland CMI qualifications are generally accredited in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (for awards other than those made by higher education institutions), although they are often delivered in universities.

A distinction is made in this report between these qualifications and fellowship or advanced practitioner designations.

3.2 Function

The majority of advanced designations and awards serve simply to recognise a higher level of achievement, regardless of whether or not the profession operates a statutory licence-to-practise or not. In some cases – a minority at present, although the discussions suggest that this is a growing trend – fellowships are also associated with recognising a sustained commitment to continuing development or reflective practice. As discussed in more depth in section 3.8, the majority reflect reasonably defined academic or practice-based criteria, while a minority are concerned specifically with making a contribution to the profession.

Three more specific functions were encountered. Chartered Teacher status in Scotland is directly linked to career progression, enabling teachers to progress to a higher grade without taking on managerial responsibility. The advanced practitioner designations being examined by the Nursing and Midwifery Council could work in an analogous way, linked to roles such as nurse consultant, teaching practitioner and clinical academic. Finally, in the RCVS the role of the Diploma is to develop and confirm specialist expertise; it is one of the main requirements for registering as an RCVS Recognised Specialist.

3.3 Perceived value

Where discussions were held with professional bodies, one of the areas discussed was the perceived value or status of the award or designation both to members and to external stakeholders such as employers and clients. To take designations or awards that don't have a specific function first, the

main value to members was seen as being a mark of distinction or achievement beyond the initial qualification. One institute commented that fellowship had at one time been perceived simply as a marker of seniority, but with the introduction of more explicit achievement criteria and linkage to continuing professional development it has started to be seen as more aspirational and worthwhile as an achievement. Comments on advanced designations being seen as essentially a mark of achievement or distinction were made by nine further bodies, and three of these commented that the *process* of achieving the higher-level designation was perceived as a worthwhile exercise in itself. On the other hand two respondents appeared to have succeeded in making fellowship particularly attractive to members both through things such as additional benefits and through gaining recognition for it from employers and clients.

The member enquiry asked whether there were any benefits to the fellowship grade. Out of 32 respondents, twelve indicated benefits after discounting the designatory letters or enhanced membership status that can be assumed to apply to the majority of advanced designations. The benefits that were mentioned specifically were access to specific continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities (three); voting rights (two); access to committee membership (two); use of a logo and preferential listing in the association's directory; and free life membership.

In the main study majority of respondents reported advanced designations as having only limited recognition from employers and clients. Three had achieved a reasonable level of recognition, with one stating that employers recognise fellowship as the premier qualification in the industry, one reporting that some employers insist on staff achieving it, and the other indicating that it is well-recognised in the academic part of the sector as well as overseas. The discussions also suggested that fellowship was sometimes viewed positively as a commitment to personal professional development or simply as a marker of a higher level of achievement than the initial qualification. This was however far from universal and where it did occur it applied to employers rather than to clients.

Two respondents commented on the value of the designation to the profession. This was described as providing a form of recognition that encouraged members to develop as senior practitioners and to make a contribution to the profession whether through knowledge transfer or what one described as civic activity (committee membership, mentoring, organising conferences etc).

Where advanced designations and awards have a specific function, the value ascribed to them by both members and external stakeholders was described as closely linked to this function: Chartered Teacher Status for progression as a senior classroom teacher, veterinary surgeons' postgraduate certificates and diplomas to develop an acknowledged specialism, and the mooted advanced registrations in nursing for access to senior specialist posts. However, the intrinsic value of these fellowships and awards was also noted, with for instance the RCVS introducing a postgraduate certificate option for general veterinary practitioners that would not contribute to a specialist career pathway.

3.4 Uptake

The proportion of qualified members holding advanced grades and awards varied widely between respondents, without any particular pattern emerging relating either to type of institute or the function of the designation. Other than the recently introduced Chartered Teacher designation the lowest

proportions encountered were in the RCVS with 1.2% of qualified members holding Fellowship (plus 1.6% with the Postgraduate Diploma) and the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM) with 1.4% at Fellow level, and the highest in the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and Securities and Investment Institute (SII) (25.5% and an estimated 33% respectively). Table 2 shows the number of bodies with different proportions of members in fellow or advanced practitioner grades.

Table 2. Percentage of members in advanced grades

| Percentage of qualified members in advanced grade | <3% | 3-5% [note 1] | 5-15% | 15-25% | >25% |
|---|------------|------------------|------------|--------|------|
| Number of bodies (n=17) | 5 [note 2] | 3 | 4 [note 3] | 3 | 2 |

Note 1. Two bodies with 5%, one "<5%"

Note 2. Includes RCVS (1.2% with Fellowship , 1.6% Diploma, 6.7% Postgraduate Certificate)

Note 3. Includes GTCS (1% with Chartered Teacher plus 5% working towards, expected to increase quickly).

Efforts to increase uptake are being made principally among the bodies in the middle range, including the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) (currently at 8%), where increased interest is reported now that there is a stronger link to continuing professional development, the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) (11%) where a revised route to fellowship has recently been introduced, and the GTCS where uptake of the recently-introduced Chartered Teacher scheme is expected to increase rapidly. The RCVS has recently increased the popularity of the Postgraduate Certificate through moving to a largely modular approach, and there is an aspiration to increase the number of Fellows. Part of the perceived value of some fellowships appears to be their exclusivity, and it is unclear to what extent this may act as a discouragement to expansion.

3.5 Level

Levels in the UK qualifications frameworks are officially only given to permanent qualifications, rather than to membership designations or categories. However, professionally qualified status at chartered level or the equivalent can generally be compared with levels 6 or 7 of the UK (non-Scotland) or the European frameworks, i.e. broadly equivalent to the level of a bachelor's or master's degree respectively. A similar assessment of level can be attempted for advanced designations and awards.

The majority of advanced designations appear to have requirements at around level 7. In at least some professions therefore progression is viewed in terms of one or more of (a) developing from competence to proficiency and expertise, (b) taking on senior-level commitments and responsibilities, and (c) contributing to the profession, rather than progressing in terms of academic level. As an example CILIP has had both its chartered status and fellowship assessed by the Open University for academic credit: chartered status attracts 30 credits at level 7, and fellowship 75 credits at the same level.

Only three of the bodies in the study have designations or awards that appear to be above level 7. RCVS Fellowship is assessed through similar criteria to a doctorate, and therefore appears to be clearly at level 8 (doctoral or equivalent level, the highest level in the UK and European frameworks). The RCVS Diploma may also have its dissertation component at this level although this was unclear from examining the material available. The CMI Diploma, Certificate and Award in Strategic Direction and Leadership are currently the only qualifications listed in the UK Qualifications and Credit

Framework at level 8. Finally the City & Guilds Fellowship requires a particularly high level of achievement and contribution and could also be regarded as fitting with this level.

3.6 Eligibility

The main eligibility criteria (as opposed to assessment criteria) for fellowships and equivalent grades are to have a specific level of qualification (either to be professionally qualified or to hold an academic qualification at a given level, or both) and to have a minimum period of experience, normally in the qualified grade.

The majority of bodies require applicants for advanced designations to be already-qualified members, although over a quarter allow direct application for fellowship if the applicant also meets the criteria for the main qualified grade (which may include having a minimum number of years' experience). The Institute for Learning (IfL) provides a good example where, as a relatively new body, many of its applicants already have significant experience and higher academic as well as practitioner qualifications, making them eligible to enter at Fellow level. Some bodies specify a minimum period of membership but a longer period of relevant experience, while occasionally different periods are required depending on route: for instance the RCVS requires five years' full membership before starting on the thesis route to fellowship, but 15 years for achieving fellowship by publication. Between the main study and the member enquiry information was obtained on membership requirements for 40 fellow or advanced practitioner grades, as summarised in table 3.

Table 3. Length of membership required before applying for fellowship or advanced status (n =40).

| Number of years' membership | direct access | 2-3 | 5 | 6-7 | 10 |
|-----------------------------|---------------|-----|---|-----|----|
| Number of bodies | 13 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 7 |

The member enquiry asked specifically whether a position of seniority or responsibility was required for progression. Disregarding responses relating only to the seniority of the membership grade or qualification already held, 14 of 32 respondents (44%) stated that this was a requirement. While some bodies had a fairly specific definition of seniority (e.g. in a senior management role or as a fee-earning practitioner), the range of appointments or achievements that would satisfy this requirement could be quite broad. As an example one respondent listed:

- *Directors or senior managers in a large or medium-sized organisation*
- *Senior academic/research practitioners*
- *Sole practitioner providing a high level of expertise*
- *Senior posts in small organisation providing a high level of expertise*
- *Senior position in Police, Armed Forces and the like.*

The member enquiry also asked about any minimum age requirement for fellowship. Although age requirements were at one time fairly common, only one organisation quoted a minimum age: 35 for progression, and 45 for direct access. Several respondents thought that such requirements would be illegal under age discrimination legislation, although other requirements for award of fellowship tend to imply a normal minimum age at which it can be achieved.

Finally, academic qualifications can be regarded as part of the eligibility criteria for progression, or as part of the package of requirements that are assessed to award the designation. Out of the 19 advanced designations covered by the main study, two require a post-initial qualification to be held and for two others this is part of the main route to achievement. In the member enquiry two responses indicated that further academic qualifications could be substituted by high levels of experience and seniority or contribution, but they would be essential for less experienced applicants for fellowship.

3.7 Fellowships: evidence requirements

For fellowship-type designations the types and frequency of requirements (in the sense of the type of evidence) used by the bodies in the main study are shown in table 5. Table 4 shows the number of bodies in both studies having single and multiple requirements. As can be seen from table 5 the format of requirements varies widely, with a maximum of eleven out of nineteen bodies (58%) agreeing on any one requirement.

Table 4. Number of bodies with single and multiple requirements (n = 42)

| | | | | |
|------------------------|--------|---|----|-----|
| Number of requirements | single | 2 | 3 | 4-5 |
| Number of bodies | 9 | 9 | 11 | 13 |

Most bodies have multiple requirements (table 4), for instance an application form, referees and a portfolio of evidence. Where single requirements are used, these are (a) a relevant post-experience postgraduate qualification, (b) details of CPD, and (c) nominees only (the nominees make the case that would normally be put forward in the form of a detailed application form, statement of experience or portfolio). At face value the availability of alternative routes for achieving fellowship is limited (one body allows a thesis or as an alternative equivalent achievement by publication; one an academic qualification or a dissertation among other requirements; and one a modular academic route or, until recently, a portfolio and interview). However within the requirements of portfolios or statements of experience most bodies allow considerable flexibility to tailor the evidence and argument to the candidate's specific experience, role and achievements.

Table 5. Requirements used in assessing members for fellowship status (n = 19)

| Requirement | Use at all | Use with other methods | Use exclusively | Use as an option |
|---|------------|------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Referees, nominators, sponsors | 11 | 9 | 2 | |
| CV or narrative describing experience | 10 | 10 | | |
| Portfolio or evidence of practice, research etc | 10 | 10 | | 1 |
| Panel interview or presentation | 6 | 6 | | 2 |
| CPD record | 5 | 5 | | |
| Application form (as part of assessed evidence) | 4 | 4 | | |
| Additional academic qualifications | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Dissertation or thesis | 2 | 1 | | 1 |

Actual requirements were discussed in detail in the main study. In the member enquiry, options were given to choose from five types of requirements: a CV, evidence of CPD, referees, a personal

statement, and evidence of holding a position of seniority. Because the findings are not directly comparable, the main study findings are summarised here and evidence from the member enquiry is introduced where relevant.

Application forms are indicated by four bodies (21%) as providing part of the assessed information (e.g. summaries of experience, specific achievements or projects, or required qualifications), as opposed to simply confirming eligibility to be considered.

Referees, nominators or sponsors are used by over half the main study's participants (53%), and by the majority of organisations responding to the member enquiry (78%). In most cases their function is to provide confirmation additional to the evidence or statements provided by the member. Three bodies in the main study and four in the member enquiry have what can be termed nominated routes to fellowship (six exclusively, one as an option): in these cases the nominators or sponsors provide the rationale and evidence rather than the candidate. The nominated route is the one practice at fellowship level that does not appear in the award of mainstream qualified status, and it is generally associated with awarding the advanced designation based on contribution to the profession or to the wider community ('type B' achievements, see section 3.8 below) as opposed for instance to demonstrating an advanced level of practice.

A *CV or statement of experience* is required by 53% of respondents in the main study, and 57% in the member enquiry. None use it as the only form of evidence (it is most commonly backed by a portfolio, project narrative or other work evidence), but three rely on either a CV or statement of experience as the only *documentary* evidence submitted by the candidate.

Portfolios or other evidence from work are used by 53% of main study respondents, all along with at least one other requirement, typically a CV, referees or an interview. Most bodies appear to be open as to the type of evidence provided that it demonstrates what is required; the majority also require some form of narrative or summary statement. One organisation provides a more structured format for the portfolio, which is related closely to practice, while two require evidence to be cross-referenced to moderately detailed sets of professional standards. In two instances the portfolio provides an alternative route, one for highly experienced practitioners to use published works as an alternative to a thesis, and the other to demonstrate criteria directly rather than through following a modular programme.

Academic qualifications, generally at postgraduate level, are required by four bodies over and above the minimum qualifications required for the main qualified grade. One body uses them as the only criterion for fellowship provided the mainstream membership criteria are met, while another adds to this a satisfactory CPD record. Of the other two organisations one normally requires a higher academic or professional qualification as one of its requirements, with a dissertation as an alternative, while the other builds the achievement of advanced practitioner status around a modular master's-level qualification that incorporates the relevant professional standards.

CPD records are required explicitly by five bodies in the main study, and twelve (52%) in the member enquiry. In the main study CPD is always used in conjunction with other achievement or evidence, while two respondents to the enquiry appear to use CPD evidence exclusively although there is no information about what specifically is examined. Many of the other bodies will have a requirement for

CPD that goes with being a professional member (or at least an assumption that it takes place), and two indicated that this is likely to play a larger role in progression to fellowship or advanced practitioner level in the future.

A thesis or dissertation is used by two respondents: one uses a doctoral-style thesis as its main route to fellowship (with an alternative by publication), while the other provides the opportunity to submit a dissertation as an alternative to an additional qualification.

Interviews or presentations are used by six bodies (32% in the main study), normally following the submission of a portfolio or other evidence. In four instances this is routine, in one it is part of a minority option, and in another the professional body may interview if it considers it necessary. The use of face-to-face methods appears considerably less common than found for mainstream qualified status; while the samples used are not directly comparable, the entry routes and requirements study (Lester 2008) found that 65% of the bodies that assessed practice-based elements use interviews, presentations or visit-based assessments routinely in addition to any ongoing review by workplace-based assessors or mentors .

3.8 Criteria for awarding senior designations

The criteria used for assessing applications for fellowship and similar designations can be considered in two ways: the type of achievement that is required, and the type of criteria that are used. Types of achievement fall into two broad categories: (A) those that relate to specifiable attainments such as academic qualifications, meeting practice standards or demonstrating advanced aspects of practice, and (B) those that relate to making a contribution to the profession or to a wider community. Type A achievements have affinity with those used for awarding the main qualified status, while type B achievements are largely confined to fellowship-type designations. Type A requirements were more common among the professions in the main study, with eleven out of 17 bodies (65%) having principally type A criteria, four (24%) principally criteria based on contribution, and two a balance of both types or the option to emphasise one or the other. Of the 23 additional respondents to the member enquiry, four emphasised contribution (type B criteria).

The types of criteria used vary from the highly general to the fairly detailed and specific. Of the main study bodies with type A requirements four use professional standards or the equivalent to guide assessment (although none of these are as detailed as the most detailed examples used for initially qualified status), compared with six that use more general guidelines that are typically limited to a short paragraph or a few bullet-points. The more detailed criteria tend to be used in situations where achievement is expected in a particular area of practice, for instance in teaching and medical general practice, as opposed to professions where career progression could lead to a more diverse range of roles. For type B contribution-based requirements the (published) criteria are confined to general and sometimes fairly vague statements. Discussions suggested that there would be an acceptably consistent notion of what's needed among the fellowship board or equivalent and perhaps in the senior ranks of the profession, but it may be difficult to communicate this to members more generally.

Overall the majority of bodies have a reasonably transparent and criterion-based approach to granting type A designations, generally consistent with the way that mainstream qualified status is awarded though normally with broader and more flexible criteria. For type B fellowships the processes do not

always appear to be as transparent; in places this may suggest something closer to an honorary award.

3.9 Responsibility for assessment and award

In all cases where a fellowship or advanced practitioner designation is awarded, responsibility for the final decision rests with the professional body. This is often though not always delegated to a specific board or committee, which may be the general accreditation or professional standards board or one set up specifically for the purpose. Alternatives are for decisions to be made directly by the main board or council (generally in small institutions with low numbers of applicants) or, as in one body where judgements simply involve checking membership details and the eligibility of qualifications, by staff members.

Assessment or review for fellowship-type designations is most commonly carried out by the professional body, either by the relevant committee (which in practice may mean individual members examining applications and conferring on borderline cases), or by assessors individually or as a panel. For Chartered Teacher status the major route to the designation is linked to achievement of an approved university or awarding body qualification, making the university the *de facto* assessor for the designation. Nevertheless it appears that there is much less use of this third-party type of arrangement at advanced level than for initial qualified status.

For award of free-standing qualifications various practices were encountered including assessment and award by the professional body, assessment by a university or college and final award by the professional body, and assessment by the professional body with validation by a university (i.e. to provide a university qualification). In all cases the professional body maintains control of the standards either through an awarding or a partnership arrangement.

3.10 Fees for advanced designations

Granting advanced designations requires as a minimum a certain amount of administrative work, often backed by more detailed assessment and deliberation by paid and unpaid personnel. Unless this process is subsidised from general membership fees or expected to be recovered from a higher fellowship subscription, it would be expected to be charged for at the point of application. Of 32 organisations responding to the member enquiry, 17 charge application or upgrading fees while 15 do not. The fee level ranges from £15 to £200, with the median at £73 and interquartile £50 to £100.

While the member enquiry asked for the annual subscription for fellow grades, no comparator was requested for the main membership grade. Where subscriptions were recorded incidentally in the main study, practice appears divided between charging a premium for fellowship (e.g. Institute for Learning, BIFM and by £5 CIWEM) and charging the same rate as the main grade (e.g. CILIP, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development), the rationale for the latter being associated with encouraging members to apply for upgrading without penalty. Insufficient data was recorded to suggest which practice was more prevalent.

3.11 Recent and planned changes

The main changes or plans reported by participants in the main study, either within the last ten years or planned for the immediate future, were:

- Moves to encourage greater uptake (five organisations): two had taken steps to achieve this while for three it was an aspiration without definite plans. Particular issues that were identified were encouraging members to see progression to fellowship as relevant and worthwhile, and ensuring that the criteria and support available were fully explained.
- Introduction of a more specific criterion-based approach to awarding fellowships (three organisations). This reflected a move to seeing fellowship as a worthwhile and attainable credential rather than as a reward for long service or vaguely-defined contribution.
- Removal of requirements based on length of membership (two organisations), with one removing all reference to length of experience in favour of a criterion-based approach. This reflects a similar approach taken by some bodies at the main qualifying level, reflecting increasing confidence in (and sophistication of) an approach based on practising or similar standards.
- Consolidation of different routes to fellowship or advanced practitioner status into a single more widely applicable approach (two organisations). Again this mirrors the practice of some bodies at the main qualifying level, emphasising the requirements needing to be met rather than the pathways taken to achieving them.
- Plans to introduce new designations: two planning an advanced or accredited practitioner designation between current ordinary member and fellow grades, two with single levels of membership considering introducing advanced practitioner designations, and one (a 'nil return' respondent not included in the main study) planning to introduce a fellowship grade primarily to encourage advanced development and practice.
- More formal links to CPD schemes and requirements (planned by two).

4 Conclusions

The studies indicate that advanced designations and awards, while not made by all professional bodies, are sufficiently common to be considered a major practice in the professions. Of the respondents to the main study email questionnaire and the member enquiry, 64% had advanced designations or awards; however, because organisations without such awards are less likely to respond, this figure is likely to be an overestimate of the actual proportion. While the study suggests that additional bodies are considering introducing advanced designations, as a general trend this needs to be treated with caution because of the lack of information on any that might be deleting them in favour of a single qualified grade.

Advanced designations and awards are of four types:

- higher-level awards (permanent qualifications) made by the professional body itself that are independent of senior grades of membership
- advanced practitioner designations that perform a specific function in relation to members' careers
- other senior designations (normally Fellow) that are based on a reasonably definable level of achievement (referred to as type A fellowships)
- senior designations (again normally Fellow) that are based on a high level of contribution to the profession or (less commonly) to society more generally (type B fellowships).

For the first three types, awarding practices can be described as broadly analogous to those used to confer initially qualified status, although they are generally based on more generalised and flexible criteria. Only in a few professions where practitioners' careers are reasonably well-defined do detailed criteria or professional standards appear. There has however been a wholesale move away from timeserving and seniority as the key criteria for fellowships and similar designations, and while minimum lengths of experience or membership and levels of responsibility or achievement are still fairly common requirements, these tend to be prerequisites for applying for upgrading rather than the basis on which decisions are made. Emerging trends are towards opening up senior grades to direct application (i.e. from non-members who meet the requirement for fellowship as well as for qualified status), and more tentatively to remove any set requirement for experience in favour of criteria based on achievement and competence.

For type B contribution-based fellowships there is greater use of peer nomination, and the criteria for award are typically tacit even if they are well-understood within the group who award them. Using more explicit criteria would be in keeping with current trends in awarding processes more generally, although given the purpose of these fellowships as conferring recognition rather than providing a status that affects the ability to gain work there are unlikely to be any valid legal challenges to current practices.

Links between upgrading and continuing professional development are less explicit than might be expected given the emphasis being placed on CPD by many professional bodies (e.g. Friedman 2005). CPD is in many bodies a general requirement for qualified members, so simply meeting a CPD requirement would not be expected to contribute to gaining an advanced designation other than as a basic prerequisite. However, approaches to CPD that recognise for instance contributions to the practice and knowledge of the profession and developing extended professionalism or specialist expertise could be linked more creatively to upgrading.

Overall trends suggest that advanced designations are moving away from the recognition of an elite, inner core of members and towards being a more widely-accessible marker that recognises achievement or contribution beyond that represented by the main qualifying grade. Other than in a small minority of professions the advanced designation does not perform a specific function or appear to have a great deal of external recognition, so its value to the practitioner is more likely to be as a validation of further achievement and development than as a qualification that has an extrinsic career or commercial value. From the profession's viewpoint, advanced designations may also act as a milestone that is linked to and encourages further development, extended professionalism and involvement in taking the profession forward.

Whether or not it is appropriate for professions to have advanced grades or awards appears to be up to the circumstances and resources of the individual professional body. While the study indicates that there can be benefits both to members and to the profession as a whole from having a fellowship grade, these are not sufficiently conclusive to suggest that it is universally worthwhile to do so, and there are also professions that have a single qualified grade and see no benefits in introducing an advanced designation. Benefits might be strongest where there is a specific function that an advanced grade could fulfil, for instance:

- to serve a specific purpose in licensing or providing recognition for advancement to a particular type of job
- to respond to a market or employment niche where a designation beyond the main qualified grade would provide distinctiveness
- to provide a higher-status designation where the main qualified grade isn't regarded as sufficiently distinctive or robust (although in the longer term this may simply be a route to raising the level of the qualified grade)
- to encourage members to advance their development or careers, develop advanced practitioner skills, or contribute to taking the profession forward, where this needs additional encouragement.

In principle advanced designations may be expected to lack significant added value where the main qualified grade is held in high regard and there is already a culture of ongoing development. The presence of other means of gaining advanced status, for instance through postgraduate qualifications or specialist accreditations, can also complicate matters and restrict the appeal of any generalist advanced designation.

Finally, the direct involvement of professional bodies in awarding advanced permanent qualifications is understandably limited. The space for these kinds of qualifications to develop is constrained by on the one hand the dominance of higher education qualifications at this level, and on the other the potential disadvantage to professions of certificates that could appear to denote qualified status but carry no obligation to remain in good standing. Between these limitations, possibilities are likely to be confined to particular niche markets that are not accommodated by universities or where there is a specific function that needs to be met, such as qualifying in a specialism. The flexibility now available in the university system, coupled with widespread insistence on professionals being accountable, suggest that advanced awards made by professions independently of either qualified levels of membership or collaboration with universities will have a very limited role in the future.

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About PARN

The Professional Associations Research Network (PARN) is a membership organisation dedicated to the support of good practice among professional bodies. See the PARN web site at www.parnglobal.com.

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Appendix 1: main study

Email questionnaire: Progression designations and awards

This enquiry is a follow-up to the qualifications and entry-routes study of 2007-8. We are looking at designations and awards that act as a progression from the main qualification or qualified grade, such as:

- 'Fellow' where the main qualified grade is for instance 'Member,' 'Associate' or a chartered or similar title
- Other general designations that indicate a higher level of attainment
- Postgraduate-type qualifications, beyond the main qualified level, that are awarded by the professional body itself.

We are not looking at:

- University qualifications, unless these have a specific role in contributing to a designation awarded by the professional body
- Specialist accreditations e.g. to practise or gain recognition in a specific area of the profession
- Honorary awards and designations
- Practising certificates, kitemarks or registration as an approved firm.

Questions

(If you do not have any progression designations or awards as described above, please say 'none')

Name of organisation:

1. What is the name of your designation / award?
(If you have more than one, please choose the most widely used or answer a separate set of questions for each)
2. If it has a formally agreed or generally accepted academic or qualification level, please state what this is: [] 8 / doctoral [] 7 / master's [] 6 / graduate [] 5 or below [] none
3. What are the main criteria for being eligible for it?
(e.g. qualified member with x years' experience, particular academic qualification, x years' CPD, etc)
4. What evidence does the member need to produce / what assessment processes does s/he go through in order to achieve the designation / award?
5. What proportion of your qualified members hold the designation / award?
6. If there are any changes planned or expected to criteria (q3), process (q4) or uptake (q5) over the next few years please outline them very briefly:

If you are willing to be contacted in May / June for a follow-up discussion, please include your name, telephone and email details here:

For some (anonymised) examples, visit www.sld.demon.co.uk/progawards.pdf [now removed].

Organisations providing information on progression designations and awards

| <i>Organisation</i> | <i>Abbrev.</i> | <i>Sector [1]</i> | <i>Type of grade or award</i> |
|---|----------------|------------------------------------|--|
| British Institute of Facilities Management [2] | BIFM | Business & law | Fellowship |
| Certified General Accountants Association of Ontario | CGAA | Finance | Fellowship |
| Chartered Insurance Institute [2] | CII | Business & law | Fellowship |
| Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals | CILIP | Information & research | Fellowship |
| Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management [2] | CIWEM | Science, engineering & environment | Fellowship |
| Chartered Management Institute | CMI | Business & law | Awards |
| City & Guilds of London Institute | CGLI | Cross-sector | Fellowship as a permanent award |
| General Teaching Council for Scotland | GTCS | Education | Advanced practitioner status |
| Institute of Credit Management[2] | ICM | Finance | Fellowship |
| Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management | IEEM | Science, engineering & environment | Fellowship |
| Institute of Healthcare Management [2] | IHM | Health & psychology | Fellowship |
| Institute for Learning | IfL | Education | Fellowship |
| Institute of Scientific & Technical Communicators [2] | ISTC | Science, engineering & environment | Fellowship |
| Nursing and Midwifery Council | NMC | Health & psychology | Advanced practitioner status under discussion |
| The Organisation for Professionals in Regulatory Affairs [2] | TOPRA | Business & law | Fellowship (also have permanent postgraduate awards) |
| Psychological Society of Ireland | PSI | Health & psychology | Fellowship |
| Royal College of General Practitioners | RCGP | Health & psychology | Fellowship |
| Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons | RCVS | Health & psychology | (a) Fellowship (b) Awards (two) |
| Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors | RICS | Built environment | Fellowship |
| Securities and Investment Institute [2] | SII | Finance | Fellowship |
| Society of Indexers [2] | SI | Information & research | Fellowship |

[1] Categories as used in Lester (2008)

[2] Organisation also responding to the member enquiry (see appendix 2).

Appendix 2: member enquiry

Email questionnaire

Hua Meng at the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales would like to ask PARN members about their experiences with awarding Fellowship to members.

1. Do you have a Fellow Member grade? (Y/N)

If yes, please answer questions 2 – 5.

2. Do you have any restrictions with regards to
 - a) Previous duration of membership? (Y/N. If yes, please state the number of years.)
 - b) Age? (Y/N. If yes, please give details)
 - c) Status? I.e. does the applicant have to hold a certain position of seniority or responsibility to qualify for fellowship? (Y/N. If yes, please give details)
3. Do you require the following to be submitted with any application for Fellowship?
 - a) Curriculum Vitae? (Y/N)
 - b) Proof of Continuing Professional Development? (Y/N)
 - c) Referees? (Y/N)
 - d) Personal Statement? (Y/N)
 - e) Evidence of their position of seniority e.g. an organisation chart (Y/N)
4.
 - a) Is there a fee charged when applying for Fellowship? (Y/N)
 - b) If so, how much?
5.
 - a) What is the annual subscription fee for Fellow members?
 - b) Is there any enhanced benefit to members of this grade? (Y/N)

Organisations providing information on fellowships (usable in the context of advanced designations and awards)

Association of Accounting Technicians
Association of Chartered Certified Accountants UK
Association of International Accountants
British Institute of Facilities Management *
British Psychological Society
Canadian Association of Management Consultants
Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors
Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport
Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
Chartered Institute of Public Relations
Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply
Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management *
Chartered Insurance Institute *
College of Occupational Therapists
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales
Institute of Credit Management *
Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment
Institute of Healthcare Management *
Institute of Internal Auditors
Institute of Legal Executives
Institute of Paralegals
Institute of Scientific and Technical Communications *
Institute of Translation & Interpreting
Institution of Civil Engineers
Institution of Highways & Transportation
Irish Institute of Training & Development
Landscape Institute
Materials Research Society
Securities & Investment Institute *
Society and College of Radiographers
Society of Indexers *
The Organisation for Professionals in Regulatory Affairs *

* Also took part in the main study.