

Putting conservation's professional qualification in context

Stan Lester, Stan Lester Developments, Taunton, UK

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Abstract

The Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers (PACR) framework was introduced in 2000 to provide a qualification that would validate proficiency as a practitioner, as opposed to endorsing a particular entry-route to conservation. It is now established as a robust, valid and generally valued credential. With the second review of PACR having recently reported its findings, it is timely to reflect on how conservation's professional qualification fits both conceptually and practically in the wider arena of professional credentialling and validation in the United Kingdom and internationally. Such reflection suggests two broad conclusions. First, PACR withstands scrutiny in relation to the qualifying processes in other professions and in conservation internationally, and the designation Accredited Conservator-Restorer (ACR) can be promoted with confidence as denoting a fully-qualified, proficient conservation professional. Secondly, there is more that can be done to build bridges between entry-routes into conservation and the achievement of accreditation, so that ACR status becomes a natural goal for those entering the profession.

Introduction

Accredited Conservator-Restorer (ACR) was introduced in 1999 as the professional designation for conservators in the United Kingdom, and since 2000 it has been awarded through the qualifying process known as the Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers (PACR). A review of PACR took place in 2007 making it an appropriate point to take stock of what has been achieved, revisit the principles incorporated in the PACR framework, and consider where changes and further developments might be needed. It is also timely to consider how ACR status works as a qualification in relation to practice in professions more broadly, how it fits with qualifications more generally in the UK and Europe, and where it sits in relation to training and entry-routes in conservation.

Where we are now

The ACR designation and PACR process are now well-established and potentially familiar parts of the conservation scene in the United Kingdom. Less than a decade after its introduction ACR status has become quite widely recognised in the cultural heritage sector, it is increasingly appearing as a desirable or required credential in job advertisements and invitations to tender, and a growing number of employers are providing support for conservators to achieve PACR. The idea of a qualified professional conservator may not have filtered through to the general public to any real degree, but the situation in this respect is little different to that in other small professions that have limited interaction with the great majority of the population. Landscape architects and chartered water and environmental managers to name two are both well-established (their institutes date back to 1929 and 1895 respectively) and they have had qualifying processes for considerably longer than conservators, but neither are particularly prominent in the public consciousness.

Achieving the next step – moving to a position where ACR has the same type of instant recognition and standing within its field as are enjoyed by, for instance, solicitor, architect or chartered engineer – suggests not only increased awareness-raising, but also a need to convey a confident and robust view of ACR as a professional designation. Recent evidence suggests that the PACR process is itself highly robust and those who have completed it successfully are no less well-qualified than are accredited members of other professions, including those that link their qualifications to lengthy and demanding entry-routes.

In the United Kingdom there is little to suggest that ACR could become a legally required qualification, as except where there is an overriding reason connected to the public good the assumption under UK law is that professions operate in an open market. Equally conservation is not currently likely to achieve chartered status due to the pool of practitioners being too small. Nevertheless ‘ACR’ has similar legal status to the great majority of professional qualifications awarded in the UK, providing a marker of proficiency that is backed by a professional body. An individual who falsely uses the designation can be legally required to withdraw it, if in employment they could be dismissed, and in private practice they could be sued by anyone suffering a consequential loss; potentially they could also be prosecuted under the Trades Descriptions Act. In this respect conservation has achieved a clear marker for indicating qualified and proficient status to the community at large.

The next step is for PACR to move beyond the idea of an ‘accreditation scheme,’ with the lack of clarity and the sense of being optional or temporary that this can convey, and for ACR status to position itself more clearly as the recognised professional qualification in conservation.

PACR: background and development

PACR can be considered as part of the wider movement that has taken place in the United Kingdom and internationally to raise the profile and standard of conservation and improve its definition as a profession. Although graduate-level courses appeared in the 1930s the idea of a professional (as opposed to academic) qualification in conservation had to wait several more decades for any serious developments to take place. While in the UK and Ireland the idea of a qualification or accreditation system began to be considered in the 1970s, practical results were slow to emerge and they initially took the form of small-scale schemes applying to specific areas of conservation.

During the mid-1980s the International Council of Museums (ICOM) published an influential definition of the profession (ICOM 1984), and this coincided with interest in a number of countries - notably the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands - in describing occupations through standards of practice rather than through the qualities of practitioners or their training. In the UK this approach was taken up in occupational standards and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), represented in conservation by the work of the Museum Training Institute (MTI) and its successor Cultural Heritage National Training Organisation (CHNTO). It was also adopted in the European Union-funded Fulco project that aimed to agree common standards for conservators in Europe (Foley & Scholten 1998). Against this background three of the major conservation associations acted under the umbrella of the Conservation Forum and its successor National Council for Conservation-Restoration to develop a qualifying framework applicable to the profession as a whole. The result was the establishment of the

ACR designation and the development of the PACR qualifying process which is now managed by the Institute of Conservation (Icon) (see for instance Buchanan 2001).

The purpose behind setting up PACR was essentially twofold. Through establishing a recognised professional qualification it would help to improve the recognition of conservators and give them a stronger voice with heritage bodies and other heritage professionals, raise the profile of conservation as an activity, and hopefully effect an improvement in conservators' incomes. As an assessment of practice it would also act as a marker of proficiency and quality for clients, employers and commissioning bodies in an area where anyone with the slightest knowledge of the subject could in theory set up as a conservator.

When PACR was developed its basic principles were established through a series of consultations with the profession. It was to be a practising qualification, based on the ability to work proficiently as a conservator, as opposed to endorsing academic or other forms of training. It needed to be accessible to anyone with the understanding and skills needed to practise regardless of the route they had taken to arrive there. There was a strong view that it needed to be assessed through means that were both valid for the kinds of work that conservators do (not, for instance, using a paper-based portfolio, a written examination or a contrived project) and robust enough to withstand external scrutiny. And it was also clear that while the qualification needed to be based in part on descriptions of practice not too dissimilar to the occupational standards produced by MTI and CHNTO, these needed to be supported by the dimensions of ethics, understanding and judgement that had been identified as critical to good conservation practice in the Fulco project and are generally recognised as a central attribute of professionalism (Brown & McCartney 1995, Winter & Maisch 1996).

From these considerations emerged the essential format of PACR: professional practice standards underpinned and contextualised by a set of principles relating to judgement and ethics; the open-access philosophy, without linkage to entry-routes; a holistic and searching workplace-based assessment by two assessors; an accreditation committee who act as a moderation board and make the final decision; and an appeals procedure comparable with those used for public qualifications (Lester 2000). From the outset PACR was designed as a robust assessment of practice leading to a high-quality professional qualification, as opposed to being a formalised procedure for admission to a register. The qualification design and assessment methodology has been disseminated widely in the education and training arena and it has started to become a source of reference for assessment processes and qualifying procedures in other occupations and professions.

Following a trial with thirteen volunteer candidates the PACR process was introduced in 2000 as the sole route to accreditation. By summer 2007, 177 formal assessments had been carried out of which 149 led to the award of ACR status. A review was completed in 2002 leading to improvements to the format and presentation of the standards, as well as extending access to practitioners in preventive conservation; the resulting framework was generally agreed to work well, although limitations have become apparent in relation to its ability to accommodate the wide diversity of roles undertaken by conservators. The 2007 review (Lester 2007a) is aiming to address this by making the standards less function-specific and more accessible to conservators in a broader range of roles, including management, advisory work, consultancy and education and training. This latest review is also focusing on the positioning and communication of PACR, and has resulted in a number of general

recommendations to make connections between the professional practice assessment and courses and training opportunities while preserving the essential open-access philosophy.

PACR in the context of professional development and qualifying processes

In the great majority of professions, both in English-speaking countries and across Europe, there is a clear link between training routes for those entering the profession and the process of qualifying. Broadly speaking this has developed in two ways: through the ancient and principally graduate professions such as physicianship, law, university teaching and the priesthood, where the possession of the degree or equivalent served as the entry-qualification (even if other initially less formal approvals were required to practice), and through the tradition in trade and technical occupations where entrants were signed off at the end of an apprenticeship. From the time of the Industrial Revolution onwards there has been a trend for many existing and newly-emergent occupations to take on what they regard as the characteristics of professions, often drawing on idealised types based on the older professions (Larson 1977). Part of this trend has involved the development of formal education programmes alongside or in place of the apprenticeship; initially this would tend to be in a technical college, training school or similar institution, then for those that could achieve it a university or university-level professional school (Schön 1983). To an extent this has been influenced by issues of status and parity, but it has also been driven by substantive matters including the growth of related research and the resultant widening and deepening of the professional knowledge-base, along with a desire for practitioners to be more broadly educated in order to appreciate matters beyond the technical focus of their occupation.

Out of this trend has emerged the two currently dominant routes of professional development and qualifying: drawing on Bines (1992), these can be termed the “sequential” and the “parallel” routes. In the sequential route new entrants take a full-time course, usually leading to the award of a degree or diploma, followed by a regulated or supervised period of practice that may lead to a further formal qualification or professional membership (or more simply the recognition that the person has completed their training). The parallel route has on- and off-job development running in parallel typically through day- or block-release courses, and although it is more common in trade occupations it is also used in professions such as accountancy, where it is the standard route for both graduates and non-graduates, and surveying and personnel management, where it forms one of several routes to qualifying. A major advantage of these now commonplace approaches is that would-be practitioners usually have a reasonably good understanding of the principles and theory underpinning the profession before they enter practice, as well as a grounding in the profession’s ethos and vocabulary. As a result the time needed to reach a proficient level in the work environment is often much reduced, although few academic entry-routes have completely replaced the induction or apprenticeship.

With a few exceptions where an apprenticeship-type approach still applies or practitioners move across from associated fields, a form of the sequential route is now commonplace in conservation. However, a genuine sequential route involves the new entrant moving on to a training post or sequence of such posts following formal education, allowing proficiency to be developed in a regulated environment as it is for instance in law, medicine and architecture. In conservation the availability of these posts is limited and there is no guarantee that a sequence of short-term contracts actually provides exposure to a sufficiently wide range of work. Some early-career conservators are

fortunate enough to gain a suitable range and depth of experience relatively painlessly, but for others the first few years after graduation are marked by uncertainty, short-term and volunteer posts, work of limited developmental value and possible unemployment (Jagger & Aston 1999). Specific initiatives by organisations such as Historic Scotland, the Institute of Archaeology at University College London and now Icon through its Heritage Lottery Fund bursary scheme illustrate how a regulated period of initial practice might work in conservation, but quantitatively they affect only a small proportion of entrants and the profession is a long way from having a widespread availability of structured training posts. For similar reasons it is proving difficult for a parallel or more integrated route to emerge, a notable exception being the Royal College of Arts / Victoria & Albert Museum programme which combines practical training with academic education at master's level over a period of two or three years.

Post-technocratic development

Considering the sequential or parallel development model more generally, a number of disadvantages have become apparent over the last thirty years or so to counterbalance the obvious benefits. Firstly, a tendency to focus on the academic course rather than the work-based phase has meant that while the former is assessed reasonably rigorously the same doesn't always apply to the latter. This can result in entrants being approved on the basis of an academic qualification plus a period of experience that may leave them some way short of being acceptably proficient; it can also discriminate against potentially good practitioners who struggle with the normal academic modes of assessment. Secondly, the adoption in some occupations of a scientific or quasi-scientific approach to knowledge and research has sometimes led to the pursuit of the technical at the expense of the practical, with a tendency to move practitioners towards detached expertise and technical problem-solving rather than looking more pragmatically and holistically at the issues they are asked to engage with. This issue has been explored extensively by Schön (1983, 1987), Argyris & Schön (1974) and Eraut (1994) among others, and the deficiencies of what they term the "technical-rational" mode of professional education are now fairly widely recognised even if not always particularly well-addressed. Finally, the dominance of the university route has also had an effect on the base from which professions draw their recruits, in some occupations resulting in a form of "homosocial reproduction" (Kanter 1977) where the profession reflects particular social groups with the consequent implications for diversity and renewal.

As the deficiencies of course-dominated modes of professional entry have become more widely recognised attention has been focused on questions such as what practitioners actually do in the course of their practice, what it means to practise professionally and ethically, and how new entrants can be guided to develop work-based capability and proficiency. This has led in a number of directions, which include:

- greater emphasis on the professional as service provider and concern for the needs of the client or stakeholder, a particularly strong theme in medicine in recent years;
- an increased concern with professional ethics and values, an area often associated with people-focused professions but also one where conservation can claim a measure of leadership;

- attempts to codify both the attributes that make for proficiency (e.g. McClelland 1976) and the criteria that can be used to define competent activity (as in the UK occupational standards movement and the associated National Vocational Qualifications, NVQs); and
- a move towards models and philosophies of development such as reflective practice (Schön 1987), action learning (Revans 1980) and action research (Carr & Kemmis 1986) that emphasise learning and knowledge-generation through doing.

At the more mechanistic end of this spectrum there has been a tendency to produce codified bodies of practice that fail to recognise the dynamic and evolutionary nature of professional work and ignore the need for competent professionals to act on, rather than merely within, the systems where they work (e.g. Elliott 1991, Winter 1992). More constructively reflective practitioner and action learning traditions challenge the idea of predefined competence standards and codified knowledge-bases, and take a more situated, emergent and negotiated view of professional knowledge and competence (Lester 1995).

Despite the predictions of commentators such as Jessup (1991), these newer concerns have not challenged academic development routes so much as made clear the need for a greater focus on developing professional proficiency and achieving better integration between theory and practice. The results have included more attention to validated practical training and experience within degree and other professional courses, closer integration of academic development and work-based learning, and critically more attention to the standard of practice achieved before a practitioner is signed off as fully qualified. PACR is embedded very clearly in this “post-technocratic” (Bines 1992) view of professional development, drawing both on occupational standards approaches and on the reflective practitioner tradition. In relation to the sequential route PACR assessment sits a few years into the career of the new entrant, forming a post-graduate, post-experience assessment that confirms the conservator as having both a deep understanding of his or her field and the ability to apply it to produce proficient (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1986) and ethical practice. Alternatively, ACR can be viewed in isolation from any particular development route as confirming that the practitioner is a capable professional and a fully qualified member of the conservation community; this function has particular validity in the context of the diverse routes by which conservators have entered, and to some extent still enter, their profession.

Considering PACR in relation to the qualifications of other professions, it is misleading to make a comparison with the complete set of qualifying processes that an entrant might need to pass through. More accurately PACR equates to the final stage that endorses practitioners as fit to operate independently of supervision or oversight and represents them to the public as fully qualified. In most established professions there are one or more previous stages that candidates have to complete or gain exemption from before the final stage or professional practice assessment is reached. In conservation there is no standardised equivalent of these earlier stages, so at face value PACR appears to float free of entry-routes specifically or in general. This does not however mean that conservators have no need to go through equivalent processes to (to name a few) library and information professionals, engineers or veterinary surgeons: the ‘post-graduate level of knowledge’ asked for in the specification is expected to be demonstrated and applied in practice, and successful candidates will have a depth and breadth of experience which is probably rather more than that of newly-qualified members of comparable professions.

ACR, qualifications and levels

The idea of a ‘qualification’ carries with it the notion of being qualified to do something, whether it is to pass to the next stage of an educational process, enter an occupation, practise in a profession, or carry out a specific task or range of tasks. Strictly speaking not all education or training certificates can be regarded as qualifications and until fairly recently it was more usual to talk of university and school awards simply as degrees, diplomas or certificates. In setting requirements for membership or admission to a register of approved practitioners it is the stricter definition of qualification that usually concerns professions. Practitioners might have the relevant or prescribed degrees or diplomas, but without completing the profession’s approval process – in conservation, PACR – they are (at least from the professional association’s or regulator’s viewpoint) not fully qualified.

A rather different distinction is sometimes made between qualifications that once awarded (and barring discovery of fraud or other exceptional circumstances) are the permanent property of the person achieving them, and ‘qualifying memberships’ or ‘memberships by assessment’ (of which ACR is an example) that are assessed and awarded in the same way as qualifications but are effectively on loan from the organisation awarding them. Unlike permanent qualifications qualifying memberships can be revoked for various reasons such as non-payment of subscriptions, malpractice and failure to keep up-to-date, and they can also be resigned or retired from. Both the UK Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA *et al* 2000) and its counterpart in the Irish Republic make this distinction, approving only permanent qualifications for inclusion in their frameworks. Some professional bodies offer qualifications in the sense recognised by the qualification authorities, but for most their main qualifying activity is based on qualifying memberships.

As discussed previously ACR differs from the majority of qualifying memberships in that it is awarded following a stand-alone assessment of practice rather than being linked to a process of education or training. Traditionally the great majority of qualifications have been based on courses at education and training establishments, to the point that certification and certificated learning have up to a point become associated with taking a course at or through an institution. Although there is a long history in some areas of certificates that are independent of any course or training programme, where these have amounted to a significant qualification they tend to have been assessed through methods that follow traditional college practice: generally written examinations, set projects or assignments, and sometimes practical tests, regardless of whether these were particularly valid for what was being assessed. With the development of NVQs in the late 1980s and early 1990s came greater recognition of detaching assessment from education and training – NVQs are in essence assessment specifications, not courses – as well as methods that are more relevant to assessing practical capability and competence. NVQs themselves tend to suffer from inappropriate use of paper- or file-based evidence and some embody a view of competence that is too restricted to reflect what is needed for professional practice. Nevertheless they have established the principle that the most valid way of assessing working competence is often through the kind of process used in PACR – examining real-life work activity and its outputs supported by associated discussion and questioning.

Evidence from work-based activity is now accepted for a much wider range of qualifications than NVQs, including in higher education and among a wide spectrum of professional bodies. The acceptance of learning from outside of formal education towards degree and other university programmes has long been present in the practice of accrediting prior experiential learning (APEL),

and the emergence in the 1990s of university programmes that draw partly or wholly on work-based learning (e.g. Boud & Solomon 2001) has meant that it is now possible to achieve a qualification at any higher education level by using work-based learning and evidence. Some universities are now extending this principle by developing means to allow candidates to achieve significant qualifications through presenting appropriate work activity, in a parallel way to the long-established PhD by publication; the DProf by Public Works at Middlesex University is an example at doctoral level. A recent study (Lester 2007b) explored how a similar approach might be applied to projects used for PACR, enabling candidates to re-present them as the basis for university postgraduate awards. British higher education has to an extent led the field in developments of this kind, although there is emerging agreement on APEL across Europe and in some respects the French system of *validation des acquis de l'experience* (VAE) takes a more revolutionary (and legally required) approach to enabling people to gain qualifications based on their experiential learning (see for instance Haeringer 2006).

This idea of parallels between academic and practitioner qualifications raises the issue of qualification comparability and levels. In the UK, as now in Europe and in many other jurisdictions including Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, public qualifications are being placed into a system of levels to help users compare them and to promote progression between them (an overview of some of these is provided by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland [2002]). The system recently adopted in England, Wales and Northern Ireland has eight main levels plus three 'entry' levels for basic skills. In this system level 1 equates to a low pass at GCSE (the leaving certificate at the end of compulsory schooling), level 3 provides entry into higher education and is also the exit level of many apprenticeships, level 6 is the level of an honours degree, and the upper level, 8, represents doctoral and equivalent achievements. A similar system of eight levels is used in the recently-developed European Qualifications Framework (EQF), a meta-framework designed to enable awards made in different national systems to be compared (Commission of the European Communities 2005).

Professional qualifications in the UK have generally not been given levels, partly because they are often not part of the public system and partly because they tend to be qualifying memberships and therefore outwith the jurisdiction of either the universities or of qualifications authorities such as QCA. Arguably there is also less benefit in giving a level to an award that has a very clear end in itself rather than forming a stepping-stone to other qualifications. Nevertheless the level criteria used in the qualification frameworks can be used to give an idea of where a qualification might fit. Using UK and EQF criteria suggests fairly unequivocally that PACR sits at level 7, the same as postgraduate (i.e. master's-level) qualifications; this agrees with informal discussions with universities and the study referred to above (Lester 2007b).

This comparison of level is however misleading on its own, as PACR has a very different function to a master's degree in conservation. Most conservation master's programmes are designed to be taken end-on to a first degree or alongside entry to work in order to provide a route into the profession. As a professional practice assessment PACR does not seek to assess academic learning *per se*, but it does require it to be turned into practical understanding and judgement and applied into a working context in a mature and accomplished way. Clearly, this level of application is most unlikely to be demonstrated by a new master's graduate with little work experience, so in the dimension of practice-based capability PACR is logically positioned further along a continuum than is a master's degree designed for professional formation, even though in the dimension represented by the qualification

framework it is at the same level. Continuing along this experiential continuum there are master's programmes that are designed to support professional extension and mid-career development, and they tend to assume a level of experience and immersion in the profession that is greater than that needed to achieve ACR status.

ACR and PACR in an international context

Until fairly recently it was probably sufficient to consider the majority of professional qualifications in the context of a single jurisdiction, leaving the matter of acceptance in other countries to negotiation between individual practitioners and the relevant overseas authorities. Nowadays this is less acceptable, both because of the increasingly international nature of work and careers and because of moves within the European Union towards formal cross-border recognition of qualifications. In conservation the latter is a potentially pressing issue because some European jurisdictions have moved or are in the process of moving towards a licence-to-practice approach in respect of certain types of heritage. There is potentially also a converse problem of accepting what would be in the UK's terms too low a standard of practice-based proficiency for mutual recognition, as has arisen in architecture where the European standard falls short of the level required for chartered status in the UK.

One of the major differences between the UK and much of continental Europe is in the British system of self-regulating professional bodies, which typically either do not exist at all, are present in a much weaker form, or are substituted by state authorities. Conceptually it can be argued that whereas the British (and to some extent Irish and Dutch) ideal of profession is of a grouping of practitioners sharing a commitment to a set of values and ethics and operating under the umbrella of a self-governing association in an otherwise free market, the continental (and particularly French and Italian) model is more one of elite office-holders whose posts depend on their academic qualifications (Collins 1990). To take the French model as an example, professional licensing is generally a function of completing the required degree or other form of approved training and then registering with the relevant state body, not dissimilar to the approach used for regulated health professions in the UK; comparable systems operate in Italy and Germany among others. There is therefore on average far more emphasis on academic development (see for instance Schei l 2000 in the context of conservation) and less on the formal approval of early-career practitioners as occurs in the UK and Ireland.

This difference in approach is apparent in the recently-overturned proposal by the European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations (ECCO) to establish a common profile for conservators. The ECCO profile included a requirement for "a period of *full-time* study in conservation-restoration of no less than five years at a university (or at a recognised equivalent level) ... includ(ing) well-structured practical internships" (ECCO 2002, my emphasis). There is no mention of any form of professional qualification or professional practice requirement, and at a time when some of the longer-established UK professions are beginning to open their doors to entrants from a greater diversity of sources (see for instance Friedman *et al* 2002), the emphasis on a very specific and restrictive academic entry-route is particularly retrogressive.

A way forward is likely to be found in respecting the traditions of different countries but in a manner that enables them to be put in context to each other. A more constructive profile might include information about the depth and breadth of theoretical understanding that the conservator would be

expected to have (perhaps with a specific linkage to level 7 of the European Qualifications Framework), along with the breadth and scope of practice that s/he should be equipped to undertake; this could then form a benchmark for the first phases of initial professional development, however undertaken. The final phase, equivalent to achieving ACR status in the UK, could then be specified in terms of a set of core professional standards and ethics. That something like this phase becomes written in to a European profile is now less unrealistic than it was when the previous ECCO proposals were developed, and there is already interest in countries outside of the UK and Ireland – including Portugal and Germany – of setting up a practice-based assessment.

The missing piece: from entry to ACR

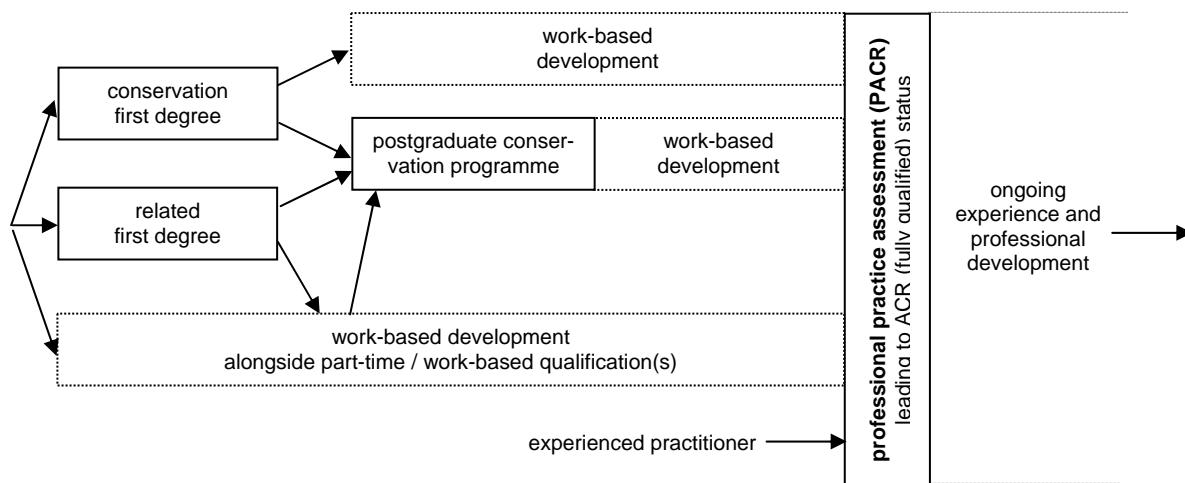
When PACR was first developed the main concerns were with establishing professional standards and putting in place assessment processes that were demonstrably robust and valid. The open-access conception of PACR, coupled with the large population of highly experienced but non-accredited conservators present when it was developed, meant that making a link between entry-routes and accreditation was not an initial priority and accreditation was generally viewed a stand-alone qualification. A few occupations (waste management, project management and the running of care homes are examples) use this kind of accreditation process as their main or only qualification procedure, and there is a gradual trend in established professions to introduce broadly parallel processes for non-standard entry and to enable experienced practitioners to become qualified. However it is more common for a practice-based assessment to form the final step in a process that typically includes a degree or other academic programme and a period of work-based development.

During the 2007 review a clear desire emerged to make closer links between PACR and entry-routes, while maintaining both the established open-access philosophy of PACR and the independence of course curricula. Conceptually there was support for rebranding the process ‘professional practice assessment’ and communicating it as the final stage of becoming professionally qualified. Practically there was a desire for better information for students and new entrants, greater continuity between university studies and preparation for accreditation, and practical support - particularly in the form of the kind of progress records or profiles used in internship schemes - to help recent graduates assess their progress and identify relevant opportunities for development. At the same time it was recognised that a minority of conservators would continue to enter through non-university routes, notwithstanding the predominance of graduates among recent applications (out of 55 applicants in 2005-6, 71% were graduates, while of the more recent entrants - those with ten years’ or less of practising experience - the proportion of graduates rose to 91%). Adding to this the fact that many experienced practitioners currently remain unaccredited there is no question of restricting PACR to graduates, though as time moves on it will increasingly be appropriate to view it as the final stage in a process rather than as a free-floating assessment.

As previously mentioned many UK professions are gradually adjusting their entry procedures to accommodate entrants with a greater diversity of experience and educational attainment. Against this background it would be incongruent for conservation to move in the opposite direction, for instance along the lines that were until recently proposed by ECCO. There is room however to provide exemplars of pathways to accreditation, for instance as illustrated in figure 1. The diagram depicts some of the more common entry routes taken by recent PACR candidates, plus one - an example of an integrated, post-technocratic route (Bines 1992) - that has not yet been fully realised in

conservation. Beyond this, there is scope to be more specific about the type of theoretical underpinning and the depth and breadth of experience needed before taking the professional practice assessment. This has two main advantages. One is that it neither dictates entry-routes nor requires the expensive and possibly contentious process of the profession validating conservation and collections care courses, but it makes clear both the kind and level of knowledge and understanding required by the profession (likely to be particularly valuable to non-graduate entrants as well as potentially to educational institutions). The other is that it clarifies what needs to be covered by pre-assessment experience as opposed to the current vague guidance on its length (something likely to be valued by graduates entering the profession, as well as potentially the designers of internships and training posts). Should the conservation community want at any point to stipulate formal requirements that need to be met in order to proceed to the professional practice assessment, this kind of profile will be more in keeping with emerging thinking - and with the realities of how people actually start their careers in conservation - than a more restrictive approach to entry-routes would be.

Figure 1. Examples of entry-routes



Finally, it is worthy of comment that PACR is currently being achieved much later into practitioners' careers than are the fully qualified or licensed-to-practice levels in almost all other UK professions. Assuming that a conservator enters with a postgraduate degree or diploma and gains the advocated minimum five years in practice before assessment, at least nine years are needed to qualify after leaving school or college with A-levels or the equivalent. This compares with seven years for architects and veterinary surgeons, six for solicitors and five to six for accountants (or seven to eight if the chartered accountants' practising certificate is used as the benchmark). In practice the minimum period has been ten years and the average 17.5, meaning that new ACRs are typically well into their thirties by the time they qualify. Up to a point this is understandable given a comparison of conservation degrees and early-career training with the more structured and integrated processes in professions such as medicine and architecture, but there is more that can be done to encourage new graduates to begin working towards accredited status at an earlier point in their careers.

Conclusion

After seven years in operation PACR can be considered a robust and valid qualifying process that has a sound theoretical grounding and works well in practice. The conservation community can have confidence in its qualification internationally and in relation to those of other professions, and move ahead to promote ACR status as a robust professional qualification and marker of practitioner quality.

The community needs also to develop further structures and guidance around PACR, particularly to help new and aspiring entrants to develop to professionally qualified level whether or not they enter via higher education. An advantage that conservation has over many of the longer-established professions is that it has not wedded itself to a specific sequential development route, so it is not having to unpick established entry processes in order to broaden access. Nevertheless there are challenges involved particularly in creating a high-quality, accessible work-based route into the profession and ensuring that new graduates have clear and effective pathways to attaining the standards associated with being a fully-qualified conservation professional.

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Stan Lester can be contacted at s.lester<at>devmts.co.uk.

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