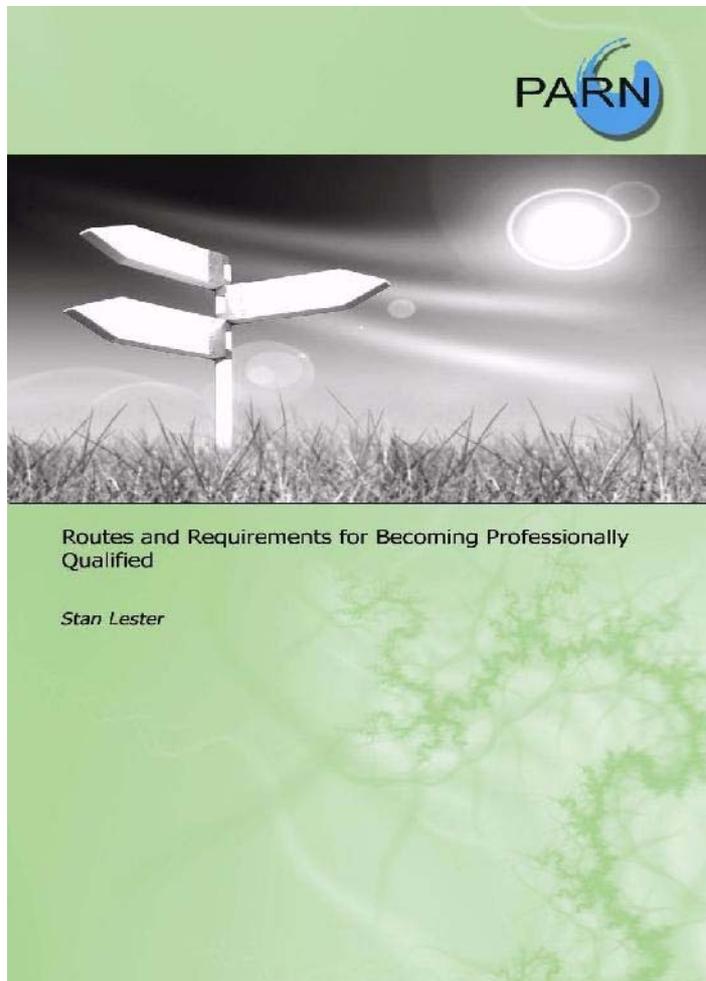


Routes and Requirements for Becoming Professionally Qualified

Stan Lester



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Summary

A wide range of socioeconomic, technological and educational factors affect professions and impinge on how professional bodies award the qualified status or licence-to-practise for the occupation that they govern or represent. Broadly speaking the main pressures are for increased rigour, in the sense of ensuring that qualified practitioners are actually up to the job, accompanied by greater flexibility both to meet the demands of more dynamic operating environments and to improve access for a more diverse range of entrants.

In practice and in spite of an increasing proportion of graduate entrants there is a strong and ongoing trend towards more diverse entry-routes. These may include non-graduate routes, experienced practitioner and paraprofessional pathways, work-based routes to degrees and post-graduate qualifications, and exemptions for members of cognate professions. There is also a move in some professions towards emphasising requirements rather than routes and making it easier for entrants to follow individualised pathways to qualified status.

Professions are increasingly focusing on the practice-based aspects of qualifying. Almost all require practical experience as part of the qualifying process, many assess it, and there is a trend towards methods of supporting and assessing practice that while robust can also be flexible and responsive to candidates' circumstances.

There is also a trend towards greater integration of theory and practice in professional development and assessment. This variously involves bringing practicum-based learning into academic courses, integrating courses with experiential learning, and developing a culture of enquiry and critical reflection in the workplace.

In some professions there is room for improvement in the way that non-standard entry-routes are promoted and in the level of support for candidates going through them. In places there is scope to make more use of developments such as work-based higher education and the accreditation of experiential learning, and there is also evidence of assessment processes and standards that need to be updated if they are to support ongoing trends in professional development. The range of approaches used for specifying and assessing the practice-based aspects of qualifying (including experienced practitioner routes) is currently very broad, and there is substantial scope for innovation and for learning from the best examples.