Qualifications in professional development:

a discussion with reference to conservators in the UK and Ireland

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Abstract

In the professions, qualifications are most widely associated with entry routes and qualifying to practise, although they are now playing an increasing role in the continuing development of experienced practitioners. The evolving profession of conservation (of historic and artistic works) provides a case-study where many questions about training, qualifications and practising requirements are still open. Using this profession as a lens, questions can be posed about the kinds of entry-routes and initial qualifications that are most relevant for would-be practitioners, what means are appropriate to approve practitioners as fully qualified, and how qualifications can play an effective role in continuing professional development.

Introduction

The idea of being a professional, or belonging to a profession, is partly associated with being qualified: both in the sense of educational achievements, particularly in the older professions, and in the sense of being qualified to practise. Therefore, while there are differences in types of entry route and means of qualifying in different countries and between professions, the association between qualifications and professions has principally been concerned with the entry-gate to becoming a qualified practitioner. In recent years there has also been a growing tendency for qualification-bearing programmes to play a role in the development of the experienced professional, and in-service and work-based programmes have emerged that are geared much more to the needs of ongoing development. In some professions initial and continuing development also overlap, for instance as practitioners qualify at an initial level or in a given area, then qualify at a higher level or in a different specialism some time later.

One occupational grouping where the relationship between professional development, careers and qualifications is visibly developing is that of the conservation and restoration of historic and artistic works. This field has undergone considerable evolution over the last thirty years or so to the point where it is now a recognisable and growing international profession, with professional associations and university degrees in many countries throughout the world (Scheißl, 2000; Lester, 2002). Conservation and restoration form the occupation of an estimated three to four thousand people in the UK and Ireland, split roughly equally between private practices and institutional environments such as museums and galleries (Museums & Galleries Commission, 1998). In the UK and Ireland there are eleven professional and trade associations under the umbrella of the National Council for Conservation-Restoration. Some of these are also members of a European network, the European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations (ECCO), which is working

towards greater commonality and mutuality of recognition in the profession across Europe.

The remainder of this paper uses conservation as a lens through which to view relationships between professions and qualifications. While in some respects the profession is relatively conservative in outlook, it is not yet fully developed as a formal profession, and many questions about training, qualifications and practising requirements are still open.

Initial training and qualifications

A working classification of approaches to initial development can be made following Bines (1992), who distinguishes three basic models. These are apprenticeship, where knowledge and skills are learned largely on the job; technocratic, where training focuses on the development of a knowledge-base through a formal syllabus or curriculum; and post-technocratic, where the focus is on knowledge-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1974) and capability in practice situations. Historically, the technocratic approach largely superseded the apprenticeship model over the course of the 20th century as the dominant mode of professional training, while the post-technocratic approach has gained some ground during the last two decades or so. The latter has also been accompanied by changes to the way that professional knowledge is viewed, so that the idea of a body of knowledge informed by research and codified by the universities and professional institutions (see for instance Schein, 1972) has given way at least partly to more constructivist epistemologies of practice which recognise the role of practitioners in creating the knowledge they use (e.g. Schön, 1983; 1987a).

Ignoring for the moment the apprenticeship model, most initial development routes fall into two broad types. The sequential route separates out initial development into acquisition of the profession's knowledge-base normally through full-time university or technical college training, followed by a period of supervised practice to learn how to put this knowledge and associated skills into use. In the parallel route, academic training takes the form of part-time or distance courses that are taken alongside work-based training. In theory the parallel route appears to lend itself to post-technocratic approaches to development, although in professions that make use of it (such as accountancy, surveying and personnel management) there are still few real-time linkages made between formal training and student-practitioners' experience. A third and more genuinely post-technocratic variant - what might be called an integrated route - is beginning to emerge, in which higher education overlaps with and draws on work-based learning; at present this most evident in principally public-sector professions such as teaching, nursing and social work.

The traditional means of training for conservators and restorers was through apprenticeship and indenture; particularly in conservation specialisms where there is a need for well-developed craft skills, this route survives today at least informally. The first formal courses in conservation appeared in the 1930s, and by the end of the century there were 44 qualification courses in the UK (Scottish Conservation Bureau, 2000), and two in the Republic of Ireland. Recent years have seen an increase in the emphasis placed on academic conservation education, resulting in courses being pitched at higher education level; of the 46 UK and Irish courses, 34 are at university or equivalent level including 14 master's degrees or postgraduate diplomas, six

undergraduate degrees, and 14 undergraduate diplomas. A sequential route involving degree or postgraduate entry has become the norm in several conservation specialisms and an option in most of the remainder.

There is currently a concern that while new entrants may be emerging with good academic qualifications, in many cases their depth of practical understanding may not be at more than the level of an advanced beginner. UK higher education has not generally provided more than an introduction to practical conservation; it is fairly common for instance for an arts or science graduate to complete a one-year master's degree in conservation, compared with practice in Germany and to a lesser extent France and Italy, where the would-be practitioner qualifying at master's level will typically have completed four or five years of academic and practical training, possibly with additional pre-course experience (Maresca & Sani, 2000; Banik & Pataki, 2001). There is substantial support within Europe for a norm of at least three if not five years' full-time higher education in conservation (ECCO, 1994; Bacon et al, 2000), with more recent calls for this to culminate in a qualification at master's level (Larsen et al, 2000). In response some UK universities have lengthened their postgraduate conservation courses so that two- and three-year master's degrees with a substantial practical component are now appearing, and from 2002 the Institute of Archaeology at the University of London is intending to introduce a part-time option. These nods in the direction of the parallel or integrated route are however in the minority at present.

In the UK and Ireland as in most of Europe there is no tradition of part-time academic conservation education, and few attempts to bridge between practical, apprenticeship-type training and academic learning. This means that the current options for would-be conservators and restorers are on the one hand apprenticeships or informal training alongside a practising conservator, without access to the academic qualification which is increasingly being regarded as part of the requirement for the profession, or on the other the sequential route. Similarly, there are no easy routes that can be used by experienced practitioners to gain academic awards in the conservation field; even the proposed Institute of Archaeology programme is expected to require 2.5 days attendance per week.

Current movement towards more standard entry routes in conservation raise some general issues about entry-gates to professions and their effect on the diversity of practitioners. If a five-year full-time course becomes the norm for entry in conservation (as for instance is the case in architecture and medicine), it is likely to limit entrants to those prepared to undertake (and who can afford) five years' higher education, and who have either made a relatively early career choice or can afford to forego working over a protracted period in order to make a career change. In turn this leads to a narrower pool of practitioners, and limits the options for people who have entered at technician or similar level and subsequently want to progress to attaining full professional status. The effects of limiting entry to the sequential route are visible in conservation, where it would have debarred or restricted the progression of many people who have entered by other means and are now highly capable practitioners. This dilemma has relevance to other professions that rely on single modes of entry, in that it consideration needs to be given to the loss of diversity and opportunity that result.

Secondly, it may be debated whether the current trend towards university education is driven by perceptions of professional status, or whether it is an appropriate response to a genuine need. The tendency for professionalising occupations to aspire to university-level training is well-known (see for instance Schön,1983), and more recently a desire to attract students has led universities to offer courses in fields that are viewed as potentially attractive occupations, though not always with a view to the opportunities available afterwards. On the other hand, there have been increasing calls from within the practitioner community for increased scientific, cultural and historic understanding to underpin practice. A potential tragedy - and one that affected many other professions in the middle to latter part of the 20th century (Schön 1987b) - is that the craft knowledge and artistry of practice become displaced by a more academic and less practical form of knowing, that favours technical problem-solving and decision-making within narrow areas of specialism over engaging with more complex and indeterminate practical issues. A more optimistic reading of trends in conservation is that the profession is already aware of the problems of the technocratic model, and is beginning to move towards a form of higher education that is more closely linked to practice. In this sense, conservation may be more successful in evolving its university provision into something resembling a post-technocratic model, in a way that established professions with courses that are already relatively standardised would find more difficult.

Practical training

The sequential model of professional development necessarily includes a period of practical experience that assists the novice practitioner fresh from full-time education or training to develop into a competent professional. The longer-established professions typically have fairly standardised approaches to this period of learning, often formalised by training contracts at least nominally overseen by the professional or registration body. While there is no direct equivalent within conservation, the concept of the 'internship' or time-bound training post has become fairly widespread. Internships typically differ from apprenticeships or training posts in that they are shorter (sometimes for six months or less), are offered to new or recent conservation graduates and sometimes to experienced practitioners, and are not always paid. The number and length of internships are currently insufficient either to accommodate the output of the universities, or potentially to provide a sufficient flow of newly-qualified people into the profession. While some structured training routes do exist, many new graduates either have difficulty finding posts at all or work through a 'journeyman' phase of short-term and voluntary jobs, training posts and freelance work before finding more stable employment or setting up their own studios or workshops (Jagger & Aston, 1999).

At present there is no qualification or approved training programme associated with internships, although some institutions and practices devise schemes of their own. The development of a professional accreditation framework, discussed below, is beginning to influence internships in that some interns are being encouraged to work towards accreditation and take cognisance of the professional standards in their work. In 2001 two universities secured Graduate Apprenticeship funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England to develop practical routes for graduates in conservation, based on National Vocational Qualification targets and professional accreditation requirements.

Conservation has a particular set of problems that stem from an arguably ad-hoc approach to practical training coupled with low levels of funding and, initially at least, low practitioner salaries. However, there is a gradual concern within the profession to increase the coherence of opportunities for new graduates and provide clearer frameworks for early-career development. While many other professions have progressed much further along this road than conservation, it is noticeable that these frameworks are frequently provided at a general level, without translation into individual novice practitioners' contexts - such as their working environments, the focus of their work, and their interests and aspirations. An approach being investigated in one of the graduate apprenticeship projects that has promise for more general use is to develop a learning contract template, of the type discussed by Stephenson & Laycock (1993), that enables the graduate to negotiate an individual development plan with his or her employer within a broad framework agreed by the university and professional body.

National Vocational Qualifications

During the late 1980s the UK developed a system of National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (here abbreviated to NVQs). These qualifications are based on demonstrating practical competence against criteria set for each occupational area by government-recognised bodies (from 2002, Sector Skills Councils). They are offered at levels 1 to 5, with level 1 relating to basic, routine work and levels 4 and 5 to professional or similar occupations. Although many apprenticeships lead to NVQs, the qualifications do not need to be linked to training courses, and in some fields they are fairly widely used by experienced practitioners as a means of gaining credentials for their existing competence. While NVQs are explicitly about the ability to do and therefore fit in some ways with a post-technocratic approach to professional development, the model underpinning them stems from a technical-rational perspective in which it is assumed that work can be specified in functional terms and broken down into detailed and discrete outcomes.

NVQs at levels 4 and 5 were developed in conservation by the former Museum Training Institute, and introduced in 1996; they were revised in 2000, when the level 5 qualification was dropped due to lack of interest and a conservation option was introduced at level 3 for technicians and new entrants. By the end of 2000 only one conservation NVQ had been achieved at level 4 (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2001). The qualifications have not proved attractive to practitioners and cannot be regarded as having any real significance within the profession, although some of the principles on which they are based have been drawn upon to develop the accreditation framework discussed in the next section. The development of professional accreditation may have further reduced any potential appeal, although it may be possible for the level 3 NVQ to occupy a complementary niche as a qualification for conservation technicians and potentially also for new graduates.

Higher-level NVQs have only really succeeded in a small number of occupational areas, principally in business and management and in occupations such as waste management and the management of care facilities where they have specific roles and have not been challenged by existing qualifications. In most professional fields as in conservation they have either attracted little attention or proved largely unworkable. Partly this is likely to be due to the perceived lower value of a 'national vocational'

award vis-à-vis a qualification set and awarded by a professional institute or a university, but there are also issues about the ability of the functionalist approach taken in NVQs to reflect the complex and sometimes uncertain nature of professional work (see for instance Burgoyne, 1989; Elliott, 1992; Hodkinson & Issitt, 1995). Nevertheless, experience in conservation indicates that even where the qualifications themselves are not appropriate, some of the underlying principles may be capable of adaptation for use in professional practice assessment (see Leigh, 1996; Lester 2000).

Professional accreditation

In the UK and Ireland a feature of most established professions is that entry to fully qualified status is overseen by a professional or registration body, as opposed to being conferred purely by possession of a relevant university degree or completion of a public training programme. A range of means are employed by professions to confirm professional status, including any or all of recognising university or other external awards plus a minimum period of experience, requiring completion of a defined training scheme or period of indenture, and operating a final examination or assessment. Generally, methods can be divided into those based on inputs (such as time served or training completed) and those using output measures (demonstration of practical proficiency or success in examinations); some use a combination of both.

Until recently, the small size of the conservation profession, its fragmented and multidisciplinary nature, and its variety of entry routes have all worked against establishing an entry-gate of this type. Following some false starts an output-based system of accreditation was developed in the late 1990s, based on proficiency as a practitioner as assessed in the field against common professional standards (see Lester, 2000). This approach partly corresponds to the post-degree, post-experience professional practice examination used in architecture and some of the other construction professions, while also drawing on some of the principles of NVQs.

In the UK, the Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers (PACR) framework has recently replaced short-life 'fast-track' schemes that were set up to qualify practitioners with at least ten years' experience (see Buchanan, 2001). PACR is operated by three individual professional bodies while being overseen by the National Council for Conservation-Restoration (NCCR), acting as a professional standards council. PACR candidates make a detailed application referenced to the NCCR professional standards and verified by two referees. The application is scrutinised by an accreditation committee before going forward to full assessment in the workplace by two assessors, and finally the assessment records are returned to the committee for moderation. Success in the assessment leads to the designation Accredited Conservator-Restorer, which is gradually becoming recognised as conferring professionally qualified status; it is not a qualification in the educational sense, but a qualifying membership that can be revoked or resigned from similar to those in professions such as accountancy, surveying and architecture. A broadly parallel approach has been adopted by the Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works in Ireland; this is based on references, a portfolio of work, and a studio or workshop visit by two assessors monitored by an 'external' assessor.

PACR provides both a postgraduate, post-experience confirmation of proficiency marking out the developing practitioner as a competent professional, and (at least in

the UK and Ireland) a route to full professional status for non-graduates - thus in principle at least overcoming some of the problems of increasingly graduate-oriented entry routes previously discussed (although this is likely to be of limited value if training routes disappear outside of full-time higher education). PACR provides a contrast and potential alternative to the professional practice examinations used by construction and some other professions before conferring fully-qualified status. While these latter tend to be knowledge-based assessments of fields that need to be covered for independent practice, such as contract and project management in the construction field, PACR aims to assess professional practice across a range of activities. The potential weakness of PACR is that it is effectively a snapshot of practice as at a particular date, and while it does more than look at performance on the day of assessment (the assessors examine evidence and records relating to work from a period spanning typically a year or two) it may engender less confidence than assessment over time on a structured training scheme or period of experience. Although there are no plans to restrict access to PACR, it is increasingly being viewed in the profession as the final stage in initial development, following university training and a period of (ideally) initially structured and subsequently more self-managed practice.

As professions come under pressure to be accountable and to operate to visible standards of proficiency, the approach used in PACR may offer a way forward that ensures at least that practitioners are able to operate to a proficient standard before they are approved as fully qualified or licensed to practise. The assessment process will need to be adapted to suit the needs of the individual profession, but the principle of assessing practice and the results of practice, and associated contextual knowledge - as opposed to decontextualised knowledge and skills - is likely to be relevant to a wide range of occupations where a relevant confirmation of ability is needed before conferring final approval. In the UK and other countries that have developed competence-based qualifications along the lines of NVQs, there is also experience that can be transferred back from developments such as PACR into competence-based awards, in particular to increase the validity of award specifications (occupational standards in the UK), assessment methods, and credibility with graduates and professionals (see Lester, 2001).

Post-qualifying: the role of qualifications in continuing professional development

The need for continuing professional development (CPD) is now fairly widely accepted in one form or another across the majority of professions, although it did not start to become a recognisable feature of the professional landscape until after the 1960s (Houle 1980). Professional bodies' rationales for promoting CPD have tended to centre on ensuring that members keep up-to-date and maintain their competence, sometimes in a way that is visible and publicly verifiable, while individual practitioners' rationales are often more concerned with just-in-time and project-led learning, gaining access to training opportunities, and career development and self-actualisation. Some more recent professional body CPD schemes have moved closer to a practitioner-centred model, geared more to supporting development that is relevant and useful than to provide measures of publicly visible updating.

Various types of qualifications frequently feature in the CPD goals of individuals and may be promoted by associations' CPD schemes, but the relationship between CPD and awards is largely informal. While qualification modules, units and credits are sometimes used as means of updating, the main roles for full qualifications in CPD have been as vehicles to support specialisation, career extension and practitioner research. Following Bines' notion of technocratic and post-technocratic initial development routes, a similar distinction can tentatively be made for post-initial awards; briefly, a technocratic approach might be associated with gaining specific knowledge and skills for movement into defined specialist or managerial roles, while a post-technocratic model can be linked with programmes designed to support the development of extended professionalism (Stenhouse, 1975; Lester, 1995) and mature capability (Lester & Chapman, 2002). These latter are likely to involve agendas that are led or negotiated by the practitioner, and to focus on taking forward a specific project or field of interest.

The UK and Irish conservation associations began to take an active interest in CPD from the mid-1990s. In 1999 the NCCR published a framework for reviewing and planning CPD (see Lester, 1999), which came into force for new applicants in 2000 and accredited practitioners in 2002. It is not explicitly linked to further qualifications, and like many of the more recent approaches to CPD it recognises the important role of informal learning in updating and further development (Gear et al, 1994). There is also interest both within the profession and within the corresponding academic community to promote practitioner research, and capture and disseminate the often private knowledge built up by practitioners through informal learning and investigations carried out in the course of their practice. The major professional associations encourage members to publish findings either as 'information notes' or as more detailed articles, and international networks also encourage sharing of methods and experience.

Although the NCCR recently identified a need to "to develop links with universities and promote research activities among practising conservators" (NCCR, 2000), the conservation profession is currently at no more than an embryonic stage of exploiting postgraduate qualifications to support the development of extended professionalism and practitioner research. As in many other professions a distinction is emerging between scholars or researchers working within the profession's academic community, and scholarly professionals or researching practitioners (Bourner et al 2000). The work of some conservators particularly in large institutions is indeed partly academic in nature, involving research, careful recording and documentation, and publication; for these practitioners an academic research degree may provide an appropriate framework for further development, and a few conservators particularly in the major museums have registered for MPhil or PhD degrees. However, for the majority of conservators, traditional research degrees are likely to be impractical and probably of limited relevance. Nevertheless, practical research and development forms part of the work of many of these practitioners, and closer dialogue between this and academic research is likely to bring benefits both to individual practitioners and to the profession as a whole.

Meeting the kinds of needs currently being identified in conservation is likely to depend on there being available a wider range of post-experience awards than those based on traditional taught courses and academic research. The UK, together with

Australia, has over recent years pioneered the growth of part-time and work-based programmes geared to enhancing the professional capability and careers of experienced practitioners. The leading edge of these developments has progressed from modular models which provide (in addition to the usual project or research dissertation) credit for prior learning, selection from a range of taught and distance-learning courses, and opportunities for independent study, to work-based models where the degree or diploma is built around projects and issues from the practitioner's work (e.g. Osborne et al, 1998; Boud & Solomon, 2001).

Work-based programmes at master's level may have potential attractions to conservator-restorers who are professionally accredited but lack a graduate or postgraduate qualification, and provide useful vehicles for promoting extended professionalism and practitioner research. However, two obstacles to this kind of development currently exist. One is that currently there are no master's programmes of this kind where a conservation or restoration focus could easily be incorporated (although a solution is present in linking process expertise in work-based learning with a specialist supervisor from a different institution or from the profession). The second is that in many conservation specialisms master's degrees are increasingly being seen as entry qualifications, rather than as relevant to experienced practitioners; while this is largely a perceptual issue created by the breadth of awards covered by the master's title, it does suggest that master's degrees - at least those with titles such as MA and MSc - will have a restricted appeal as extended development routes in professions where master's awards are widely taken as part of the initial development route.

The other development that has relevance to conservation and to CPD more generally is the growth over the past decade of professional doctorates. Until recently the great majority of doctorates awarded in the UK were either research-based PhDs, or a small number of older-established awards such as DSc, DLitt and LlD awarded for substantial and significant contributions to the relevant academic field. Professional doctorates, as with PhDs largely an American innovation, have been introduced from the 1990s to meet the development needs of senior practitioners who are not professional researchers. The most common form of professional doctorate both in the UK and USA has a field-specific title such as EngD (engineering), EdD (education) or MD (medicine), and consists of a taught part followed by a dissertation; by 1998, 108 such doctorates were offered by 38 UK universities in nineteen professional fields (Bourner et al, 2000). An alternative model, the generic Doctor of Professional Studies or of Professional Practice (DProf/ProfD) pioneered in the UK by Middlesex University, is based on work-based research and development rather than taught units or traditional academic research, and offered in any field where suitable mentors can be found (see Portwood & Thorne, 2000). While the DProf is a generic award like the PhD, specific streams are emerging around professional communities through partnerships between the university and various specialist organisations.

Future directions and opportunities

The preceding sections point towards several ways in which the relationships between professional development and qualifications are changing, as well as opportunities for award structures and programmes that are better matched to the needs of practitioners and professions.

While the example of conservation appears to be moving in the direction of more convergent entry routes, the distinction that is increasingly being made in UK higher and further education between course or programme on the one hand and qualification on the other means that there is scope to require consistent entry qualifications, while at the same time promoting a greater diversity of routes to attaining them. This may be through the acceptance of different awards as nominally equivalent - as is done for instance by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development - or through ensuring that there are different routes to achieving the stipulated award. The development of integrated routes, in which practitioners can undertake academically-recognised programmes and achieve awards based on existing and new work-based learning, offers a step forward from traditional parallel or sequential routes; this may be particularly relevant to overcoming the 'silo effect' where experienced practitioners find themselves blocked from further progress without costly and unproductive backtracking. In conservation, there is an currently an opportunity to complement the current trend for convergence towards degree or postgraduate entry with divergence in the routes available to achieve the favoured qualification. In many established professions also, recent developments in higher education beg the question as to whether there are benefits to would-be practitioners and to the profession as a whole from adopting more diverse means of qualifying.

In parallel with movement towards globalisation and international regionalisation in their various forms, it is becoming increasingly desirable and necessary for professions to facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications across national boundaries. Experience in conservation suggests that while a measure of commonality is possible, the extent to which it can be pursued can relate to overcoming perceptual differences and sometimes significantly different national approaches to qualifying. The Bologna proposals for Europe (European Higher Education Area, 1999) currently relate to higher education frameworks only at a very broad level, and some quite major developments are not well understood across national boundaries; university-accredited work-based learning, for instance, has made limited inroads in Europe other than in the UK and to a lesser extent Ireland, and the acceptance of awards based on workplace competence is far from universal in Europe. Practically, this means that the scope for change will be less in some countries than others; the resulting challenge suggests ensuring an acceptable level of comparability at qualification level, while maintaining diversity of means of qualifying as appropriate to national contexts and cultures.

Within conservation, there has been a fairly consistent desire over the past twenty years or so to base fully-qualified status on explicit forms of practice-based accreditation. It is currently unclear whether this will become a more widely-used model in other professions, particularly those with well-established entry routes, but interest is apparent from other professionalising occupations in fields as varied as occupational rehabilitation, university teaching and environmental management. As drives towards greater professional accountability increase, the PACR model or something equivalent to it does appear to offer greater confidence than either an unassessed period of approved training or a knowledge-based examination, and the direction taken by conservation offers one way forward - possibly in conjunction with existing methods of managing early-career development - that can be adapted by other professions.

In the area of continuing development, a key opportunity lies in the potential for qualifications to act as vehicles for development - in a sense as the 'glue' that binds a sequence of development activities and enhances their value and impact. On the one hand this requires professions, and individual practitioners, to regard award-bearing programmes as potentially relevant and seek value from them over and above the value of the award. On the other it also requires an imaginative and flexible approach from universities and other providers, where programmes are seen more as vehicles that add value to practice-driven development than as product offerings that reflect the academic expertise and comfort-zones of the institution. The expansion of negotiated work-based learning and learning agreements in universities offers much here, particularly as facilities are enhanced by on-line access and networking (including inter-institution and profession-institution networking to provide learner support). As a footnote, while much accredited CPD activity is likely to be at postgraduate or master's level, a wider variety of awards are likely to be needed than at present to provide a better match with the needs of ongoing development; this may for instance include awards the size of the postgraduate certificate and diploma but at first degree level, and the facility to accredit work at doctoral level that is smaller in size than the standard doctoral undertaking.

Concluding comments

Conservation in the UK and Ireland is illustrative of a professionalising occupation that does not (yet) have a standard approach to qualifying or entry routes, and so illustrates different patterns in the way that qualifications play a role in practitioners' development and careers. Its experience suggests three questions that need to be asked about the relationships between professions and qualifications.

First, what kind of education and training, and associated qualifications, should would-be or novice practitioners be asked to gain en-route to becoming fully-qualified professionals? Associated with this it can be asked what effect the agreed route or routes are likely to have on the kind of people who enter the profession, and thence the effect on the profession's diversity of outlook, breadth of capability, and future direction and development.

Secondly, what means are employed to accredit or approve practitioners, formally or informally, as being fit to practise? The type and level of formality of approval may vary widely, and depend on factors such as the perceived rigour of entry routes as well as the need for public confidence and the criticality of professional competence; but the method(s) adopted need to be appropriate for the intended purpose if they are to be effective and credible.

Finally where appropriate, what kinds of qualifications, and qualification programmes or pathways, are needed to form effective and attractive vehicles for ongoing development and the development of extended professionalism and mature capability? In meeting what appears to be an emerging or growing need in this area, consideration is needed that existing qualification structures do not adequately reflect the needs of the CPD arena. Tensions also need to be recognised between the extrinsic purpose of credentialling - in particular, gaining a qualification at a higher level than the practitioner has already - and the more intrinsic one of using the qualification programme as a framework for further development.

The answers that professional communities find to these questions inevitably vary between occupational areas and across international boundaries. However, the forces that connect professions and qualifications are essentially dynamic, so that even in occupations that have had an apparently stable approach to entry and qualifying it will be necessary to re-evaluate the fitness for purpose of the systems they subscribe to, particularly as both pressures on practitioners and professional communities change, and new approaches to development and accreditation emerge. Conservation provides an example of a hitherto relatively open and unregulated profession where qualifications are now beginning to play a more central and defining role; as this process proceeds, care is needed to ensure that the means chosen reflect fitness for purpose, and the profession maintains a diversity of practitioners appropriate to the context of its work.

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Acronyms

CPD Continuing professional development
DProf Doctor of Professional Studies
ECCO European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations
NCCR National Council for Conservation-Restoration
NVQ National Vocational Qualification
PACR Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers

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