

Exploration of the Potential Role of Professional Doctorates in Practitioner Accreditation within Professional Associations

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In this paper I ask whether Professional Doctorates (either through new research or through Public Works) have a role or contribution to make within individual accreditation by professional bodies at advanced (Fellowship) levels.

Context

Professional associations or bodies (Pas) have been variously defined as: "A group of people in a learned occupation who are entrusted with maintaining control or oversight of the legitimate practice of the occupation;" (Harvey 2004) or a body "representing the interest of the professional practitioners," and so "act [ing] to maintain their own privileged and powerful position as a controlling body."(Harvey, Mason and Ward 1995).

Needless to say there are clearly elements of both functions within the range of professional bodies and associations. But they continue to be supported by their memberships for the valuable contribution they provide through such activities and resources as: networking opportunities for practitioners, the regulation of ethical practice, gatekeeping for entry to the profession through credentialing and the acknowledgement of 'mastery' in practice through the bestowing of honours through higher credentials such as Chartered status and Fellowships.

The accreditation and credentialing role is made possible through the PA's perceived 'stewardship' of the body of knowledge for the professional practice. Training Course Accreditation is used by the majority of Professional Associations to control the curriculum of professional training in their field and monitor the standard of its delivery. The courses being accredited usually provide training for entry into the field and are often provided through academic institutions. The training provider must evidence breadth and depth of curriculum, robustness of delivery and assessment protocols as well as good practice in pastoral care and consideration of their students. Assessment of practice has been problematic in the past but there are also a number of established academic frameworks in professions such as nursing, veterinary practice and education (Lamont M, 2013). The focus of such frameworks is generally the robust and testable designation of a newly qualified professional as 'fit to practice'.

Individual professional accreditation however does not stop at entry level and many Professional Associations seek to provide a range of credentials for their

members indicating seniority in the field or specialisation. These are designed to identify the attainment of 'mastery' or higher levels of professional practice achieved as the members' careers mature. The use made of academic frameworks for assessment within such credentials lessens before or just after Chartered level in most professions. For many associations there is a requirement of a Masters degree before the member's professional practice is considered for Chartered status and at least one professional body equates the level with doctoral level work. The designations of Fellowship and Senior Fellowship are, in contrast, often assessed by practitioner committees within the Professional Association itself using their expertise with relatively few explicit criteria. It can be conferred for the longevity as well as level of the individual's contribution.

In this paper I am seeking to specifically identify the 'best practice' currently used by professional associations in the UK and USA for assessment of practice level within individual accreditation. Specifically the criteria used within professional associations to assess 'fellowship potential' of a member will be collated and compared. This review of the espoused criteria operating within professional associations will allow an exploration of their alignment with the academic criteria employed for higher degrees and specifically those applied within professional doctorates (Fillery-Travis 2012).

I then consider the case of the World Wide Association of Business Coaches; an established PA in a developing area of business coaching. The WABC have identified the Middlesex Transdisciplinary Professional Doctorate as its preferred doctoral route and part of a portfolio of training levels and credentials. I will consider if academic assessment criteria are considered as contributing to the overall assessment of practice and specifically whether it adds to the robustness of the assessment for Fellowship or does it privilege the 'academic perspective' in the highest professional credential available to Professional Associations?

References

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