

The Geological Society

PROFESSIONAL STANDING COMMITTEE

Meeting at Burlington House, at 11.30am on Monday 23rd June 2008

MINUTES

Present: D Manning (Chair), R Allington, V Banks, A Carbray, M Culshaw, M de Freitas, B Gaskarth, L Hollick, J Lewis, E Nickless, D Shilston, G Tuckwell, J Venus, A Douglas.

Item	Minute	Action
1	Apologies for absence Apologies were received from T Berry, A Collins, A Law, P Maliphant, P Nathanail, J Palmer, D Payne, M Rivett and P Thorn.	
2	Introduction DM began by explaining that this was an extraordinary meeting of the Professional Committee, called to discuss a single item of business – the new arrangements for Chartership Applications and Interviews, and the Committee’s discussion would therefore be based on the draft document circulated to committee members on 20 th June. As Council have already accepted the new criteria, and the broad proposals put forward as a result of the working groups, it was established that these parts of the document be taken as agreed in order to give a starting point for the rest of the meeting.	
3	Benchmarks	
3.1	The extent to which benchmarks that went beyond the accepted criteria should be incorporated into the new Chartership process was discussed. As the Fellowship of the Society covers a diverse and complex set of abilities and skills, DM proposed that it would be impractical to develop a set of benchmarks that covered all these different abilities and skills, and emphasis should instead be placed on the applicants to demonstrate how their individual abilities relate to the criteria in their own professional life. Mdf believed that Scrutineers themselves needed some sort of uniform minimum standards that candidates would be expected to have attained. It was generally agreed that some form of outline/guidance should be produced for Scrutineers as to what level of skills candidates needed to demonstrate (in their Professional Report and at interview) against each of the criteria. AC felt that some form of guidance was also needed for the candidates, and suggested that a series of examples be given on the website of what the Society would expect from applicants from various specialties, and the skills they would be expected to demonstrate during their interview. DM added that CIWEM do this at present by posting examples of completed draft applications on their website. More detailed guidance was also needed for applicants on what they would be expected to do professionally in the five or six years after graduation before they apply for Chartership. It was felt that the Training Guide for Engineering Geologists was one example of how this problem could be addressed, but to write training guides for all the different specialties would take many years so an interim solution was clearly needed.	DM to lead on for both documents

JV agreed, as many young geologists she speaks to have commented on the fact that they would like greater guidance and more readily available information on the skills they should be attaining in the years between graduation and chartership. BG felt this highlighted one of the main problems at present – the Society needs more academics to become Chartered in order to proactively advocate the Chartership process to students before they leave University.

MdF felt that some form of list of what candidates' required knowledge should consist of should therefore be created so that candidates could easily see where the gaps in their knowledge were and work towards filling them.

However RA felt that every geology graduate should already know what they need to do to gain chartership. DS also felt that a competent professional should be able to look at the criteria as they currently stand, research and work out for themselves what they needed to do, and did not think the Society should be 'spoon feeding' applicants to such an extent that they are not capable of thinking for themselves.

EN believed that a balance between over-mentoring people and providing them with next to no information could and should be found.

It was agreed that the expanded criteria as detailed in the discussion document be accepted. The main question was therefore how prescriptive the Society should be in the application of the criteria to individual applicants. Agreed that some form of guidance about the criteria is needed without being too prescriptive.

- 3.2 JL felt that many candidates were unsure of how to present themselves during the interview, often simply waiting for scrutineers to draw things out of them. He believed candidates should be encouraged to be more proactive, and perhaps this could be done by asking them to give a much more structured and focused presentation than they do at present which would show clearly how they felt they met the individual criteria.

Scrutineers, on having read through an application should be given the right to ask candidates to focus on/address specific matters in their interview presentations.

- 3.3 It was agreed that the 'grandparenting' route for applicants would be abolished immediately, EN to establish if this is possible under the current regulations or would need some alteration.

- 3.4 It was generally felt that employers also had some form of responsibility to ensure that their staff were undertaking CPD and working towards Chartership, and that some of the onus should therefore be placed with companies to give their employees the opportunity and the time to undertake appropriate CPD activities etc and to prompt them to applying for Chartership.

RA disagreed and pointed out that there are a significant number of companies where this does not and can not happen, and it was therefore the Society's role to help Fellows by mentoring them from graduation through to chartership.

JL stated that some employers are happy to employ unchartered geologists and the Society should be aiming to educate employers as to the benefits of hiring Chartered geologists, with higher levels of competency. He believed that by

publicising the Chartership criteria to industry, the Society could show employers what competencies uncharted geologists may lack. BG believed employers also needed to take some responsibility to find out whether or not individuals they employ have specific detailed skills in certain areas, rather than expecting attainment to be definitive proof that they have.

4 Advisory, Audit and Chartership Panels

The need for three new panels to help ensure transparency of the whole of the chartership process, especially to the candidate, was outlined and agreed. However, it was agreed that the panel names were not accurate and that therefore the following changes should be made: Advisory Panel renamed the Appeals Advisory Panel; Audit Panel renamed the Chartership Audit Panel.

4.1 Appeals Advisory Panel (AAP)

MdF commented that the AAP simply mirrored the Professional Committee, and therefore felt that in effect its duties should be carried out by the PC, or else the AAP should sit purely as an appeals panel. However, EN pointed out that Council itself was the final court of appeal and the AAP would be the body Council would consult for information and advice on any appeal that was brought before them. The AAP's role would therefore be to prepare cases for the Council. AAP's advice to Council would include options, including a recommendation that Chartership Panel might reconsider an application.

GT asked if members felt that Council was actually qualified to make decisions on appeals (given the emphasis the Committee was now putting on experience and training at all the other stages in the application process). RA felt that it was, but added that it was incumbent on the AAP and the PC to provide it with all the relevant information.

It was suggested that the chair of the Chartership Panel should sit on the AAP. However this is not possible as the CP chair would already have been involved in the application process at various stages leading up to the appeal. They would, though, be consulted and spoken to in the course of investigating an appeal. This potential conflict of interest led to the inclusion of the Professional Secretary on the AAP being questioned. However the Professional Secretary's involvement was seen as vital as they were the only guaranteed link between the AAP and Council. BG wondered whether the Regional Groups Committee chair should also be a member of the AAP. However, the importance of having an odd number of people on the Panel to avoid tied decisions was stressed.

Full terms of reference for the AAP needed to be drawn up, (to include exactly, what information it would need to gather, how it would feedback information and to who etc). DM to lead on

4.2 Chartership Audit Panel (CAP)

The primary role of the CAP would be to ensure the whole Chartership system was working as the Society wanted it to, was fulfilling the needs of candidates, and to see if any on-going improvements to the system could be made. A simple system of anonymised reporting for each interview must therefore be set in place, and these reports should be drawn together once a year for the CAP to produce a report for the Chartership Panel and the Professional Committee. It was also agreed that candidates should be provided with a feedback form to complete after their interview to help monitor Scrutineers' performance.

As the accreditation, CPD and CGeol processes were all interlinked Mdf felt this was an ideal opportunity to bring all three together in some way. It was agreed that the CAP's brief should therefore be extended to look at CPD and accreditation processes too. CPD has been looked at in the past by the Professional Committee, but no one person has ever really taken on responsibility for improving it within the Society. Mdf felt that there should at least be a named person responsible for CPD and DM informed him that at present this was, in effect, the Professional Secretary but that this could be delegated to another individual. AD to provide DM with the last reports written on CPD by Rachel Bonning in 2007. AD

The suggested date of 2011 for the first audit was felt to be far too late to start the process, especially as thought would be needed as to how all the anonymised data would be collected and reported on. It was therefore agreed it should be put in place immediately, and should report at least annually, or sooner if something important came to its attention. As current chair of the F&V Committee, Mdf was asked to draft a framework for a reporting system that the CAP would use, and the supporting structures for this system should be in place by September. Mdf

Final composition of CAP to be agreed via email discussion. All

4.3 Chartership Panel (CP)

DM informed the committee that the new CP would be analogous to the current Fellowship & Validation Committee. A suggested membership of 12-15 was proposed, however Mdf stated that the CP would need to be able to cover all disciplines, and that it would be advantageous if the panel contained two members from each discipline. All agreed that the panel should contain a mixture of ages not just 'senior' geologists as originally suggested.

BG felt that 12-15 was a reasonable number, but did think a larger 'pool' should exist in order to cover all the areas of expertise. Members of this larger pool could then be called upon to form the Panel as and when the need arose (similar to the Accreditation Panel). It was therefore agreed that the CP would initially be drawn from those members of the current F&V who wished to play a part in the process, and additional members would be recruited to fill in gaps in any particular areas. DM to lead on

It was agreed that the length of service on the CP would need to be longer than the usual three years, and should probably be at least five.

It was suggested that the CP would meet on (or the day after) the Chartership Application deadline submission dates (this would give 5 meetings per year).

Full terms of reference for the CP needed to be written. DM to lead on

4.4 With the development of these new bodies, Mdf wondered what value the Professional Committee itself added to the whole process. DM stated that the PC could, in future, delegate some of its remit to these new panels and would therefore be free to pay more attention to other matters that are equally important to the profession, for example he would like to see the PC promote the profession of geology much more widely than it does at present. The PC would also have more time to enable its sub committees to report to it more formally and in a more robust manner than they do at present (ie simply table the minutes of the last meeting held)

5 Chartership Officer

It was proposed that in order for the new Chartership process to be seen in a more professional light a Chartership Officer needed to be appointed. It was thought that such a post would suit a recently retired, experienced Geologist with a broad bank of knowledge who could perform a role in the Chartership process similar to that undertaken by the Accreditation Officer.

As the CO would have an extensive geological background they would be able to give CGeol candidates application and career progression advice, unlike the Fellowship Office at present who can not be expected to provide applicants with any kind of detailed, industry related answers to questions they might have on the criteria they have to prove etc. A CO could also prevent applications being submitted by candidates who clearly are not yet at the required level for Chartership, and could be instrumental in helping applicants find suitable sponsors and mentors.

The CO would also have a key role to play in liaison with the Chartership Panel and would be a key ambassador for the new scheme, especially with industry/employers/academia, and would help promote the new chartership concept nationally.

The need for a CO was agreed by all. The new post should be salaried, and should be initially for at least 1/3 pro rata of a year, however this may need to be increased in the future as it was impossible to say exactly how much work the role may involve at the moment. A job specification should be written as a matter of urgency so that recruitment could commence as soon as possible. – DM and EN to discuss further, finalise job description etc and begin recruitment process as soon as possible. DM EN

6 Scrutineers, Mentors and Sponsors

6.1 Scrutineers

It was agreed that the references requested for potential scrutineers would only be taken up if the candidate was considered borderline, and that the wording on the application form should be changed to reflect exactly what was wanted from the referees. Modifications to the draft scrutineers application form to reflect this and other minor alterations to the wording were therefore needed. AD

It was agreed that the performance of the Scrutineers should be monitored by the Chartership Panel, and that the Chartership Advisory Panel should then be asking the CP to provide details of the scrutineers it recommended be struck off the register for poor performance on an annual basis.

LH was in favour of Scrutineers being better classified in terms of areas of expertise in order for them to be able to have a better understanding of what each applicant was doing. However, RA felt that although appropriate matching of scrutineers and candidates was important but she believed it should be possible for an experienced Scrutineer to conduct an interview with a candidate from any background. She therefore felt the main key was effective work amongst the scrutineers to enable them to do a more professional job and to develop trust amongst applicants that they would receive a professional service which ever scrutineers they were allocated.

All current CGeols to be written to inviting them to apply to become scrutineers. It was agreed that the letter should be written by the Prof Sec but signed by the DM to lead on

President, and a more personal letter should be written to those who were currently scrutineers already. It was felt that those people in the current pool of scrutineers but who had never been used should be written to, apologizing for not using them and asking them to re-apply if they would still like to be involved. Professional Secretary to write new job description for Scrutineers, application forms should be returned by mid November. If the Chartership Officer was in post by then the applications could simply be sent directly to them electronically

6.2 Mentors

DM believed that those geologists who were already Chartered have a vital role to play in providing effective mentoring that works for all candidates, in providing them with networking opportunities with people who occupy positions to which they aspire to be (and who can give an idea of what is needed to that position), and in generally inspiring the younger generation of geologists.

It was agreed that the Regional Groups could and should play a part in helping with this, and would be an ideal forum for applicants to be included into the geological community.

6.3 Sponsors

It was agreed that the role of Sponsors in the application process needed to be re-defined. In the past some sponsors have tended to take their sponsorship of an applicant lightly, and have even seemed surprised that they have been asked to confirm applicants capabilities, and some have treated the role as a simple 'box ticking' exercise. It was therefore felt that Sponsors should increasingly be seen as and act as advocates of applicants they are sponsoring. A guidance note for Sponsors would therefore need to be written.

DM to lead on

Fellows who sponsored applicants who were clearly not at a high enough level for Chartership should in future be called to account.

RA felt that candidates could register as 'working towards CGeol' with the Fellowship Office a year or two before they actually applied. This would enable the Society to ascertain if they have appropriate sponsors and mentors in place already, and to help find them if not. These 'pre-applicants' also be put in touch with their local RG meetings and given some form of framework and network to work within.

7 Timetable

7.1 A transition period where a parallel process was run would be needed to deal with the existing backlog of applications under the current system. The cut off point for applications under the old system would be 31st December 2008. It is hoped to be possible to use the new scrutineers to help work through the backlog, but it was felt that for the whole process to work the Chartership Officer would need to be in place as soon as possible.

7.2 Articles, written by the Professional Secretary will be published in Geoscientist in Sept and October, with a small mini announcement in August if there was space available.

7.3 New body of scrutineers recruited and in place end of 2008.

7.4 First new style CGeol interviews to be held in April 2009. This would mean the first new style applications would need to be received by end of January 2009.