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SHOULD CAREER DEVELOPMENT BE A CHARTERED PROFESSION?



**NICKI MOORE
LOOKS AT THE
PROCESS AND
THE PROBLEMS**



To receive a Royal Charter from the British Crown is perceived by many as the pinnacle of recognition for a profession. Over the last year the CDI has been exploring the possibility of a Charter for the career development profession. Although gaining Chartered status has much appeal, the process of achieving this is neither without challenge nor is it guaranteed. This article summarises the findings of research conducted for the CDI into chartered status. This is the start of a timely conversation about what a petition for a Royal Charter would mean and what the process might look like.

What does it mean to become chartered?

The history of the Royal Charter dates to the 13th century and today, the chartered title is reserved for lead bodies that work in the public interest, which can demonstrate pre-eminence, stability, and permanence in their field (Privy Council, 2021). For an institute or lead body to gain chartered status they must have successfully petitioned for a Royal Charter to the Privy Council, which is then granted by the Queen. In effect, being chartered is a form of government regulation and once chartered it is not possible for an organisation to make any changes to its articles or governance processes without consent from the Privy Council.

In the case of the career development sector, this would mean one lead organisation (the CDI), representing the interests of the majority of practitioners across all areas of provision, petitioning for a Royal Charter. To make a successful petition to become a chartered organisation, the CDI would need to demonstrate that:

- it comprises members of a unique profession and should have as members most of the eligible field for membership, without significant overlap with other bodies.
- members should be qualified to at least first-degree level in a relevant discipline.
- The Institute is financially sound and able to demonstrate a track record of achievement over several years, and
- there needs to be a convincing case that it would be in the public interest to regulate the CDI (and therefore the sector as a whole) in this way.

This is a tall order for the CDI. Crucially, it will require unprecedented collaboration across all members and organisations of this very diverse profession to establish the standards and processes required for all

levels of chartership. There are some big debates to have, leastways how we define our sector, who belongs and what we call ourselves! Together we will need to unify professional standards and ethics and decide on levels, names, and content of awards for professional qualification. Furthermore, we will need to come together to make a convincing case for the impact and outcomes of career development. This doesn't necessarily mean becoming one organisation, but we will need to show alignment of our standards and processes and demonstrate a vision of how individual organisational charters might work.

The benefits of chartership

On gaining a Royal Charter, the CDI would need to apply to the Privy Council to award individual and subsidiary organisation-chartered status. In both cases, applying to the CDI for individual or organisational charters would need to meet a specified set of criteria set out by them.

There are some clear advantages to becoming chartered but many of these advantages build on and strengthen existing practices across the professional associations. What's more, the difference in the benefits of belonging to a Chartered organisation versus becoming individually chartered are not entirely clear. The research suggests that the opportunity to achieve individual chartered status could:

- improve motivation for career progression, for example by providing opportunities for conversations and targets for professional development.
- stimulate discussion around new and developing professional practice and create an appetite for the development of new mentor roles.
- improve the employability of chartered individuals
- unify and improve the profile of the profession with both government and employers; and
- increase the level of professional pride we all take in our work.

For the lead body and organisations applying to them for organisational charters, it could provide an edge in competitive tendering processes and a ladder for professional development and progression.

There is a belief amongst some practitioners, that the existence of individual chartership will improve employment terms and conditions or, will protect the professional title of 'careers adviser' thus limiting the title to those who are chartered. In neither situation is this the case. There is no UK mandate concerning the pay and conditions of career development practitioners. These vary between the home nations, and between different areas of the sector. Practitioners employed in schools for example may receive a less attractive package than those working in universities. This is currently determined by market forces. Chartered status will not in itself change this, but it may provide the focus for conversations between professional organisations, unions, and employers.

The detractors for chartered status

Currently, there are many practitioner qualifications at



different levels across the UK which assess capability rather than competence. To overcome this, individual chartered status would be a unifying level of recognition of professional competence and excellence requiring a submission of work and an assessment process. This is likely to be at a minimum of Level 7 (Masters level). Because of the additional process there will be a cost to become individually chartered. Given that only a small percentage of the sector are members of one of the existing professional associations, there are questions about the extent to which a cost, in addition to a membership fee to gain chartered status will have an appeal. There are also questions about who pays for individual charters. This will only be resolved if employers raise their expectations of those applying for posts and will only occur if they are persuaded of the value of individual and organisational chartership to their organisation.

In conclusion

The career development sector is loosely defined with standards and processes which vary, dependent on where in the UK someone practices, their qualifications, and what roles they fulfil. Members of many organisations will all have a view of whether chartered status is going to be of value to the profession. Likewise, employers such as schools, colleges, universities, and guidance service providers as well as sole traders, will all need to come together for this debate. In the end, we may, as a profession, decide that the obstacles are insurmountable and the rewards too few. Many in the sector believe that now is the time to have the conversation and the CDI will be reaching out to partners to agree a way forward. Make sure that you are part of that conversation when you have the opportunity!

Reference

The Privy Council Office (2021) *Royal Charters*. [Online] Available at: privycouncil.independent.gov.uk/royal-charters/

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