
INTRODUCING AN AFAC PROFESSIONALISATION SCHEME

AFAC Council at its April 2011 meeting agreed to undertake preliminary consultation within its member agencies and key stakeholders. The consultation is designed to determine:

- *Stakeholder views on the need for a Fire and Emergency Service Professionalisation Scheme, and*
- *The degree to which there is a willingness by the sector to engage in such a Scheme*

It is important to note that fire and emergency service work is already highly respected in the community and by all those who work in the sector. Fire and emergency service workers are extremely professional in their approach to supporting their communities and each other. Considering a Professionalisation Scheme seeks to formally recognise the valuable contribution they make to public safety.

As well as explaining what is meant by a Professionalisation Scheme this consultation will be seeking input on why such a Scheme might be needed. Also, importantly the consultation seeks to obtain views on the following questions:

1. Do you think that fire and emergency service work should be an officially recognised and certified profession, and if so how important is this?
2. What opportunities and benefit do you believe you would get from such a Scheme?
3. How do you think it would benefit the community?
4. How would it assist the Sector into the future?
5. What are the barriers to a successful scheme? How might they be overcome?

Once all the consultation has been collated, the AFAC Council will be reviewing the results at its August meeting and deciding what the next course of action should be.

AFAC intends to engage with the following stakeholders as part of its consultation:

- All AFAC member agencies
- Volunteer Associations
- Industrial Bodies
- State Government Departments
- Federal Government Departments
- Education and Research Providers
- Other Professional Associations

The consultation phase will finish early August, so comments and feedback between now and then is strongly encouraged. If you want to be involved, keep an eye out for a focus group opportunity within your agency or undertake the survey or join the on-line discussion.

Transforming an Occupation into a Profession

For more information contact Jill Edwards: P: +61 3 9419 2388 or jill.edwards@afac.com.au

www.afac.com.au | www.afac-kw.com.au

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A PROFESSIONALISATION SCHEME?

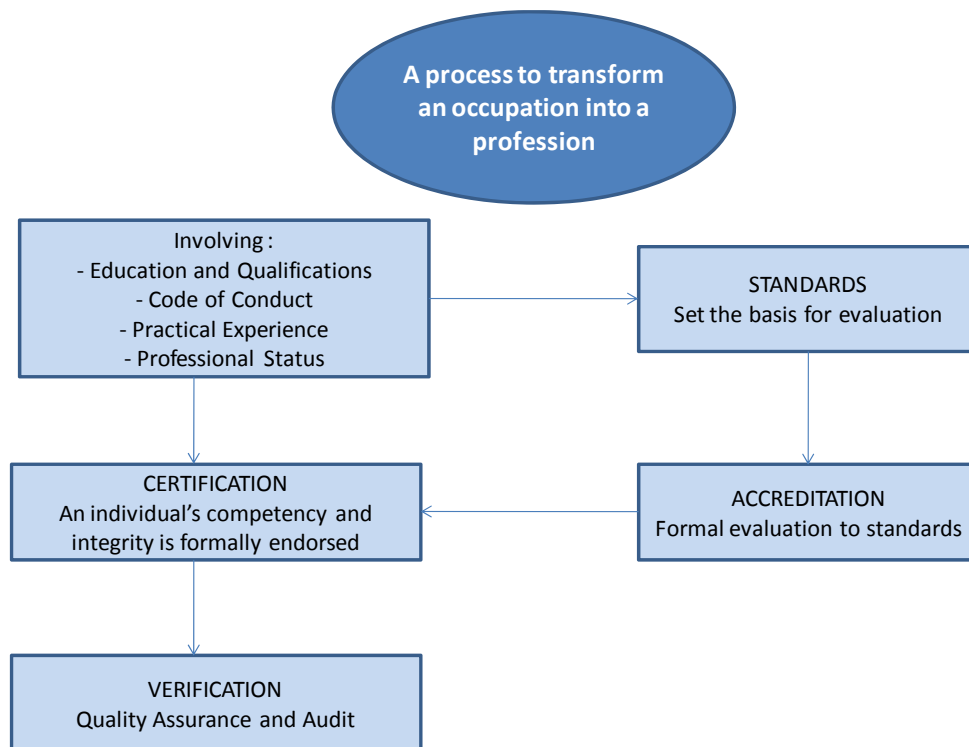
A Professionalisation Scheme is a series of standards-based processes to transform an occupation into a profession.

Looking at how other occupations have gone about introducing a Professionalisation Scheme we can see that there are a number of elements involved.

These elements are interrelated but really important to ensuring that an individual's competency and integrity meets agreed standards as determined by the sector. When an individual meets the required standards, then they qualify to be awarded the relevant credential and professional status.

This is not an entirely new concept for fire and emergency services as the Institute of Fire Engineers (IFE) has a similar scheme to certify Fire Engineering practitioners; the Fire Protection Association of Australia (FPAA) also has a similar scheme, certifying Workplace Emergency Response (WER) practitioners and Bushfire Planning and Design (BPAD) practitioners. The Institute of Foresters Australia (IFA) also certifies eligible individuals in the field of forestry (Registered Professional Forester).

It is envisaged that an AFAC Professionalisation Scheme would be complementary to the others that are administered by other Associations but specific to the needs of AFAC member agencies.



Transforming an Occupation into a Profession

For more information contact Jill Edwards: P: +61 3 9419 2388 or jill.edwards@afac.com.au

www.afac.com.au | www.afac-kw.com.au

WHY DO WE NEED A PROFESSIONALISATION SCHEME?

Professions do two important things.

They **accredit** their members and require high standards of personal conduct. They require specified standards of education and training and experience, all of which combine to enable a person to be certified as a professional in their field. It is also possible for a person to lose their accreditation should they demonstrate unprofessional behaviour or fail to maintain their skills.

They **validate** their members. Professionals are able to point to their status as proof of their skill and experience. Professional qualifications are portable between employers. They are also an assurance for the general public: the public can **have trust** that the professional is independently recognised as having skills and experience in their field and has been assessed against benchmarks.

Across Australasia there is no nationally accepted fire and emergency service worker profession, however, some specialist areas are covered, for example fire engineering (IFE), fire protection (FPAA) and forestry (IFA). In many cases, fire and emergency service workers with proven skills and many years experience have to start over if they want to move interstate.

Emergency management is a perennial feature of the Australasian social and governmental landscape. Emergency management agencies and government departments have now, and will continue to have into the future, a need to be able to identify suitable candidates for leadership positions. There is no professional framework that allows them consistently to do so. Nor, for the candidate ambitious to progress in the industry, is there any nationally recognised way for them to identify and gain qualifications that will make them attractive to employers across the country. A professionalisation scheme for fire and emergency service work will address these issues by:

- It would allow portability of qualifications between states and between the part time and full time branches of the sector
- It would allow endorsement of experts
- It would provide a benchmark for employers to recognise the candidates they want to attract to positions critical to public safety; and it would permit aspiring candidates to know, seek out and undertake the training and practical experience they require to fit them for given roles.

From doctors and lawyers in former times, through accountants in the last century, to nurses, allied health and human services workers in this, other occupations across Australia and beyond have seen the benefits of professionalisation, and self regulation. We propose that it might be time for the fire and emergency services sector to do so, too.

Transforming an Occupation into a Profession

For more information contact Jill Edwards: P: +61 3 9419 2388 or jill.edwards@afac.com.au
www.afac.com.au | www.afac-kw.com.au

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT TYPES OF CERTIFICATION

It's important to understand there are different types of certification processes that are used by Associations (for recognition of professional status) and by education providers (for achievement of qualifications). The diagram and information below explains these differences.

The different types of certification are:

- Portfolio-based – a peer reviewed process requiring extensive documentation to show competencies are covered either by previous training and or professional experience (sometimes referred to as recognition of prior learning). An exam may be part of the eligibility requirements. *An example is a Certified Emergency Manager CEM® as certified by the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM)*
- Competency-based – demonstrated mastery of the required body of knowledge through a combination of assessed qualifications, supervised and relevant practical experience and/or contribution to the industry. *An example is a Certified Practicing Accountant (CPA) who is required to demonstrate foundation and professional level education, plus practical experience as certified by CPA.*
- Curriculum-based – completion of subject based approved programs of study. *An example is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors course (GAICD) who has been assessed as meeting the minimum requirements of the course as certified by the AICD.*

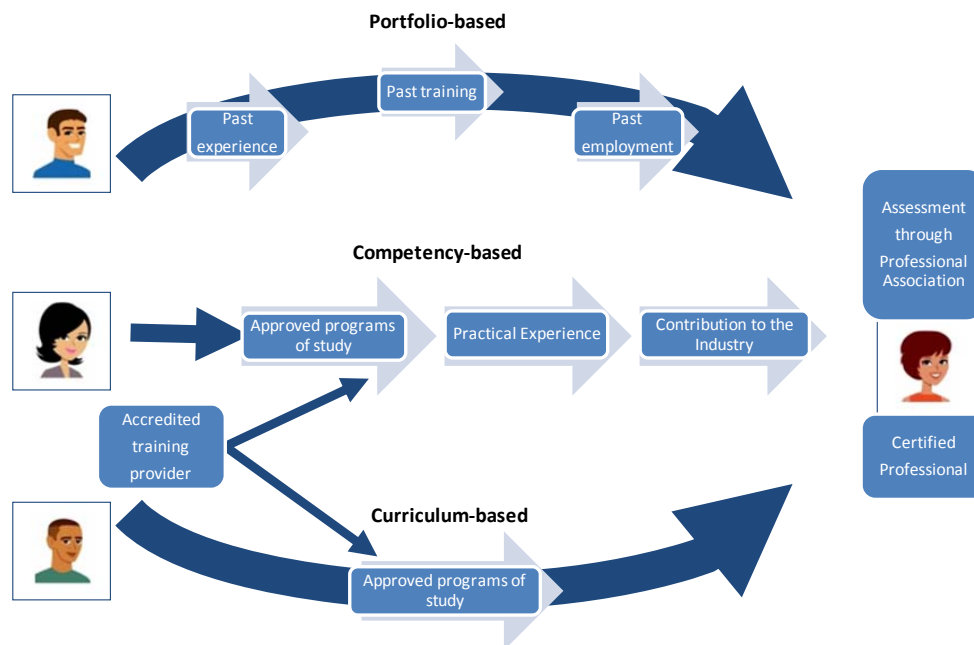


Figure1: Different types of Certification¹

Transforming an Occupation into a Profession

For more information contact Jill Edwards: P: +61 3 9419 2388 or jill.edwards@afac.com.au

www.afac.com.au | www.afac-kw.com.au

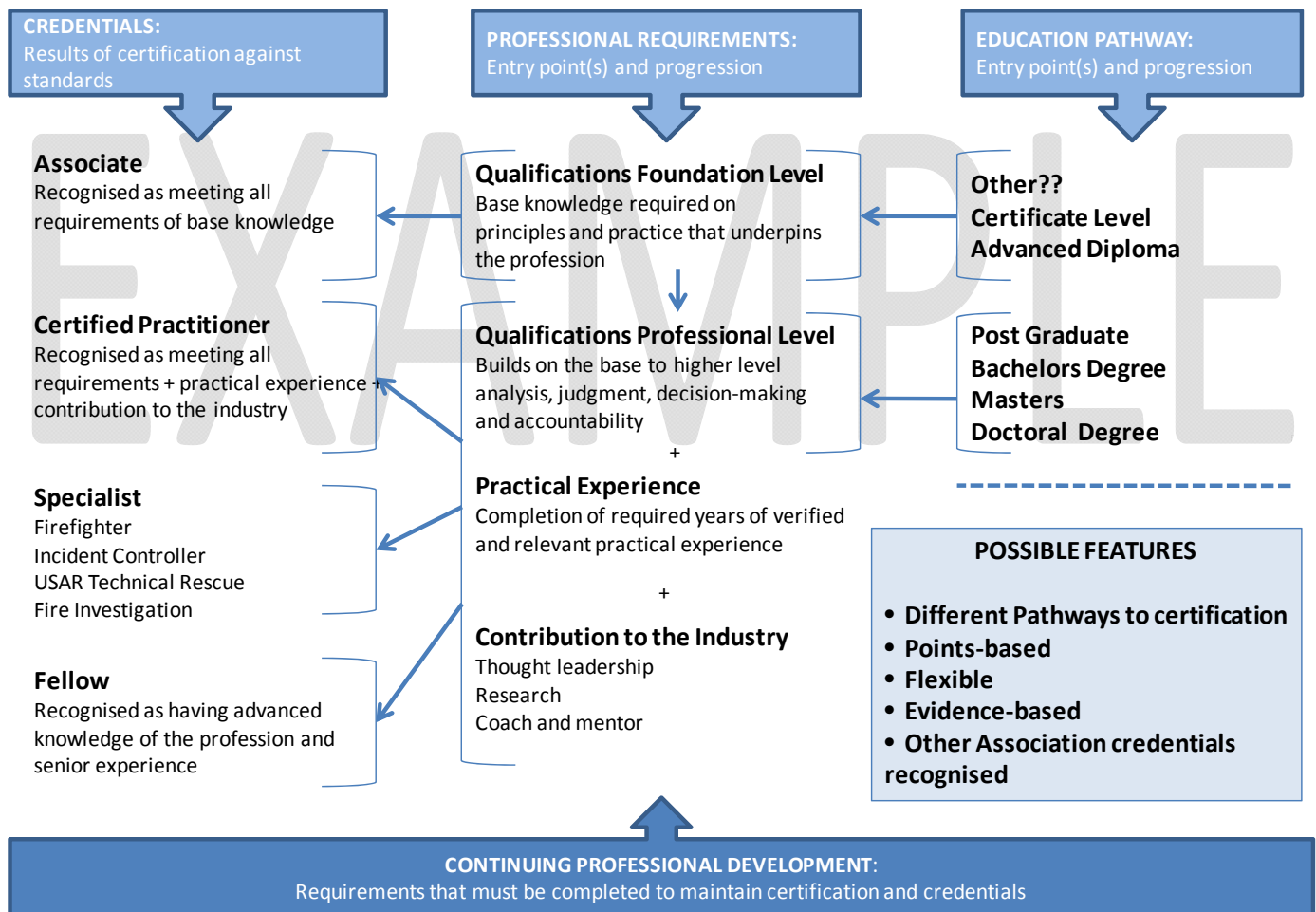
¹ Figure 1: adapted from ELRHA, Professionalising the Humanitarian Sector: a scoping study (2010), p.41

AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TO GET AND MAINTAIN CERTIFICATION

Most professionalisation schemes involve processes to assess and certify that an individual meets certain standards. Once these standards have been met, then the individual qualifies to be awarded the relevant certified professional status.

The individual is then entitled to use credentials to promote their professional status. Credentials are represented symbolically by using particular letters either at the beginning or the end of a person's name, for example, Ms Jane Citizen, CPA (Certified Practising Accountant) or Mr Jack Jones RPF (Registered Professional Forester)

Professional status is maintained by an individual undertaking continuing professional development; a requirement of all professions so that skills, knowledge and experience remain current and contemporary.



Transforming an Occupation into a Profession

For more information contact Jill Edwards: P: +61 3 9419 2388 or jill.edwards@afac.com.au

www.afac.com.au | www.afac-kw.com.au

DEFINITIONS

Word	Definition	Comment
Accreditation	To give official authorization to, or approve of, or recognise, or vouch for as conforming to a standard.	A formal evaluation process to assure conformity to general standards and expectations of the profession
Body	A group of persons associated by some occupation and regarded as an entity	Organisations or agencies
Certificate	An official document recording a particular fact, event or level of achievement.	Usually issued after participating in an event, or attending a course or achieving a result from an academic endeavour.
Certification	A formal declaration of a person's competency, based on passing specified criteria as determined by the professional group to which the person belongs.	Leads to awarding of credentials
Credentials	A symbol that indicates a person has been awarded certain status or authority.	Post-nominals (letters after someone's name) are the most common way of recognising credentials.
Endorse	To support, back, give ones approval, officially and by signature	Licensing of AIIMs & BWA RTO providers
Evaluate	To draw conclusions from examining; to assess against standards	
Industry	The people or companies engaged in a particular kind of enterprise	Emergency Management, Financial Services, Health Care, Industrials, Technology
Inspect	Examine carefully with the intent of verification	
Institution	An established organisation founded and united for a specific purpose	Mostly commonly used to describe learning and education bodies
Licensing	Giving official permission to do something	AFAC licenses RTO's to deliver AIIMS and WER training
Profession	'A disciplined group of individuals who adhere to high ethical standards and uphold themselves to, and are accepted by, the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised, organised body of learning derived from education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to exercise this knowledge and these skills in the interest of others. Inherent in this definition is the concept that the responsibility for the welfare, health and safety of the community shall take precedence over other considerations.'	Medicine, Law, Accountant, architects, nurses,

Word	Definition	Comment
Professional	A member of a profession founded upon specialised knowledge and education	Often used to describe a person's specialised status, as well as personal attribute
Professionalism	The attitude of individuals to adhere to and display the values and expectations of the profession	Mostly used to describe a personal attribute
Professionalisation	The process of transforming an occupation into a profession.	Includes different steps that make up a whole scheme, including accreditation, certification and verification.
Regulation	An authoritative rule to govern behaviour; the state of being controlled or governed to bring uniformity	A legislative act or self-regulation
Sector	A particular aspect of business activity	Emergency Services, Law Enforcement, Health Services, Banking, Mining, etc
Standard	A basis for comparison; a reference point against which other things can be evaluated	AIIMS and BWA comply with AQTF 2010 Standard
Uniformity	The state of being uniform, alike and lacking diversity	Absence of alternatives
Verification	Additional proof that something that was believed is correct	
Vocation	Occupational group: a body of people doing the same kind of work	

Source: Google Dictionary: Wikipedia: Oxford Dictionary

Transforming an Occupation into a Profession

For more information contact Jill Edwards: P: +61 3 9419 2388 or jill.edwards@afac.com.au

www.afac.com.au | www.afac-kw.com.au