

Certification of conservation professionals

for Israeli Society for Conservation

1. Introduction and general comments

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Introduction

This paper introduces a series of documents that follow on from the August conference and workshops on certification, and comments on key tasks and issues relating to establishing a process of certification. The other documents are:

- Draft formal outcomes (ccp1.doc) – this is a draft statement of intent for the certification body reflecting the points agreed at the August workshop.
- Draft formal outcomes with work tasks and commentary (ccp2.doc) – this is the document above with my comments and guidance on tasks and implications.
- Model structures for the certificating body (ccp3.doc) – this provides three alternative starting-points for considering how the certificating body can be structured.

Commentary

The following commentary is based on an external consultant's perspective following email and telephone discussions over a period of two to three years, followed by participation in the conference and workshops of 2-4 August 2010.

The conservation community in Israel appears to have agreed, at a broad level, the need for some form of certification that provides a qualified status for conservation professionals and marks them out as proficient practitioners. There may be dissension or doubts about the need for certification among some members of the community, but no more than would be expected in any professional community that is considering introducing a formal qualified status where none previously existed. There also appears to be some agreement on the approach to be taken to certification, in that it should reflect the ability to practise proficiently, ethically and independently rather than for instance to be based on specified education and training routes.

A concern is noted that while certification is intended to embrace built environment professionals, these were under-represented in the August workshops compared with movable heritage conservators and it was unclear how much support there was from the built heritage sector and its professional bodies, whether for conservation-specific certification generally or for a process and set of standards shared with the movable heritage sector. At present this represents a significant unknown area which affects how progress towards certification can proceed. The model structures document (ccp3.doc) reflects different options for constituting the certificating body depending on the view from the built environment professions. If difficulties are encountered, different streams of development might be considered for movable and built heritage.

The August workshops resulted in further agreement about the format and process of certification, as reflected in the draft formal outcomes document (ccp1.doc). This model of certification shares many characteristics with those adopted in the United Kingdom both for movable heritage and built environment conservation professionals, while needing to reflect differences in culture and the smaller size of the professions in Israel. The level of agreement reached at this point can be regarded as highly positive, while recognising that modifications may be needed following consultation. After consultation the process will need to enter its development phase where the key components, processes and documents are developed and agreed.

The development process will be aided by the presence of existing national and international standards, definitions and codes such as those produced by ICOM-CC, ICCROM, ECCO, Icon, the Edinburgh Group, and AIC; while these may need some adaptation for use in Israel they appear to have wide international applicability. A similar situation pertains in terms of assessment principles, where there is emerging international agreement on minimum standards of practice for assessment and certification, with increasing formalisation particularly in Europe. A more tailored or individual approach will be needed in terms of organising the associated processes, principally due to the relatively small size of the profession in Israel. This has an obvious consequence in terms of the lack of economies of scale, but it also means that assessors, certification decision-makers and candidates are much more likely to be known to each other than they would within a larger community of practice.

Tasks required to put certification in place are outlined in the work tasks and commentary paper (ccp2.doc). Particular attention is drawn to:

- how certification is labelled and communicated: for instance UK experience (and not only with conservation) has shown for instance that the temporary and optional image of a 'scheme' can be difficult to overcome
- the scope of the standards in relation to practitioners involved in, for instance, advisory, management and teaching roles
- developing a workable, fair and robust assessment and certification process, and resourcing it including the critical co-ordination and management role
- deciding on the process for maintaining certification, e.g. whether this involves self-reporting of learning or evidence of application, and whether it is checked periodically or by random selection of a percentage of members
- developing the criteria for sanctions and withdrawal of certification in the case of default or where serious complaints are upheld
- checking the legal implications of refusing or withdrawing certification, with the aim of minimising the likelihood of legal action from aggrieved practitioners
- protecting against claims from clients of certificated practitioners that may attach to the professional body.

2. Draft formal outcomes

This document summarises the basic agreements reached at the workshops on 3-4 August 2010.

1. Definition

Certification is the process of assessing and approving conservation professionals as being able to practise proficiently and ethically.

Certification is a professionally qualified status that individual practitioners need to maintain through various means defined by the certificating body. A suitable designation for certificated practitioners (e.g. Certificated Conservation Professional) will be established.

2. Scope

Certification will be applicable to conservation professionals concerned with both movable and immovable material heritage who are working at the requisite level.

A fee will be charged (a) for assessment of candidates for certification, and (b) as an annual subscription to maintain certification. The fee will be set at a level that provides for ongoing maintenance of the certification process.

3. Level of certification

Certification will be set at the level of a practitioner who is able to work proficiently in his or her area of conservation, exercising effective and independent judgement in complex contexts. It requires study sufficient to develop a postgraduate level of knowledge and understanding, and experience sufficient to achieve proficiency in analysis, planning and implementation relating to complex conservation problems. Certification will equate to level 7 of the European Qualifications Framework.

A separate and clearly-distinguishable form of certification may be developed in the future for practitioners working at a technician or similar level.

4. Certificating body

The certificating body will be a competent, legally constituted not-for-profit body recognised by the professions and public authorities involved in the conservation of material heritage.

5. Award of certificated status

Certification will be awarded following a process where evidence and explanations relating to candidates' practice are assessed against an explicit set of professional standards and ethics agreed and published by the certificating body. The certificating body will develop and maintain:

- a) a set of assessable professional standards which reflect good practice in conservation in Israel and internationally
- b) a code of ethics for conservation which meet at least the minimum standards expected internationally
- c) guidance for candidates, assessors and certification decision-makers that makes explicit the assessment process and the standard required for certification
- d) an assessment and certification process that is fair, valid, consistent, robust and maintains confidence in the standard of certification
- e) a process, backed by relevant resources, for supporting practitioners who are aiming to work towards certification
- f) sufficient assessors and certification decision-makers to accommodate applications from all conservation specialisms
- g) a process for recruiting, selecting, training and maintaining the competence of assessors and certification decision-makers that is transparent and maintains confidence in the certification process
- h) a process for resolving fairly and economically any complaints about the way the assessment and certification process is applied
- i) a process for periodic review of the certification standards and processes.

6. Maintenance and withdrawal of certificated status

The certifying body will define the requirements for maintaining certificated status and the circumstances under which it can be withdrawn. The certifying body will also define and publish processes concerned with the maintenance and withdrawal of certification, including but not limited to:

- a) a process for monitoring the continuing learning and/or competence of certificated practitioners
- b) a process for investigating and responding to complaints about certificated practitioners
- c) a process for removing the certificated status of practitioners who are in default.

7. Establishing capacity for assessment and certification

The certifying body will build capacity through an incremental process of certifying experienced conservation professionals to act as certification decision-makers, assessors and mentors. The standards applied to these initial certificated practitioners will be the same as those applied subsequently in the certification process, and the assessment methods while they may differ from the final process will be equally robust and transparent.

8. Promoting certificated status and professional standards

The certificating body (or its constituent professional bodies depending on the constitution agreed) will promote the adoption of certification through various means including:

- a) gaining support from government bodies to incorporate a requirement for certificated conservation professionals into relevant legislation, policies, management plans and funding conditions
- b) encouraging heritage organisations to support certificated status in the recruitment of staff, in contract specifications and in management plans
- c) encouraging employers to support staff to achieve certification and to support the programme of certification through means such as releasing staff to act as assessors and mentors
- d) encouraging the wider conservation community beyond those individuals in scope for certification to follow the professional standards as applicable to their activities and act in accordance with the profession's code of ethics
- e) working with universities and similar institutions to make students aware of professional standards and certification, and to encourage the professional standards to be reflected in courses.

3. Draft formal outcomes – work tasks and commentary

1. Definition

Certification is the process of assessing and approving conservation professionals as being able to practise proficiently and ethically.

Certification is a professionally qualified status that individual practitioners need to maintain through various means as defined by the certifying body. A suitable designation for certificated practitioners (e.g. Certificated Conservation Professional) will be established.

This is probably uncontentious, but the title will need to be one that is agreed across the community eligible for certification.

2. Scope

Certification will be applicable to conservation professionals concerned with both movable and immovable material heritage who are working at the requisite level.

Requires agreement by architects and any other existing professions considered within scope: will need negotiation with built environment professional bodies. May need to include a clause that built environment professionals also need to maintain their primary professional status (as an architect, surveyor etc) in order to maintain certification.

A fee will be charged (a) for assessment of candidates for certification, and (b) as an annual subscription to maintain certification. The fee will be set at a level that provides for ongoing maintenance of the certification process.

Needs to be calculated to ensure that certification and associated tasks are sustainable.

3. Level of certification

Certification will be set at the level of a practitioner who is able to work proficiently in his or her area of conservation, exercising effective and independent judgement in complex contexts. It requires study sufficient to develop a postgraduate level of knowledge and understanding, and experience sufficient to achieve proficiency in analysis, planning and implementation relating to complex conservation problems. Certification will equate to level 7 of the European Qualifications Framework.

Straightforward; has implications for the level that the professional standards are set and assessed at.

A separate and clearly-distinguishable form of certification may be developed in the future for practitioners working at a technician or similar level.

4. Certifying body

The certifying body will be a competent, legally constituted not-for-profit body recognised by the professions and public authorities involved in the conservation of material heritage.

Further work is needed to explore an appropriate model and constitution for the certifying body, and agree it with all parties involved. Paper CCP3 outlines some 'templates' that could be used to develop the membership and structure of the certifying body. Getting this right is critical to applying a common standard across movable and built heritage professions.

5. Award of certificated status

Certification will be awarded following a process where evidence and explanations relating to candidates' practice are assessed against an explicit set of professional standards and ethics agreed and published by the certifying body. The certifying body will develop and maintain:

- j) a set of assessable professional standards which reflect good practice in conservation in Israel and internationally

Need to be developed; could draw on Icon standards, the forthcoming ECCO EQF-based statements, and the ICOMOS education and training guidelines (note only the first of these are written as assessable standards). The standards need to be written in a way that makes them applicable to all relevant roles within the scope of certification, e.g. if it is desired to include *bona fide* conservation professionals in advisory, management and teaching roles, the standards (and guidance on their interpretation) need to allow for this. Standards need to make it easy for assessors and candidates to understand what's needed.

- k) a code of ethics for conservation which meet at least the minimum standards expected internationally

Develop / review, referring to e.g. ECCO, AIC, ICOMOS, international charters etc.

- l) guidance for candidates, assessors and certification decision-makers that makes explicit the assessment process and the standard required for certification

This suggests developing (a) a handbook or similar resource reflecting the process in d. below, and (b) a definition of the level required (on the novice-to-expert scale) for certification.

- m) an assessment and certification process that is fair, valid, consistent, robust and maintains confidence in the standard of certification

Needs to cover the initial application process and how this is scrutinised; the application format; the forms of evidence candidates need to produce (e.g. to what extent workplace-based, portable or electronic); who carries out assessment at each stage, and who makes the final decision for certification; whether and on what grounds candidates can be prevented from proceeding to final assessment; whether and on what grounds candidates

can request an assessor is changed, assuming that assessment is not anonymous; how the final assessment is carried out; the format of assessors' reports; frequencies and timescales for each stage (including whether there will be distinct annual or more frequent 'rounds' for application and assessment, or whether they will be dealt with on a rolling basis); and process for informing candidates of results.

- n) a process, backed by relevant resources, for supporting practitioners who are aiming to work towards certification

This is likely to be based on a mentoring process supported by the handbook referred to in c. above. Need to establish how intending candidates identify themselves to gain support, e.g. through a registration process – and at what stage this happens e.g. in first job or training post, or closer to the expected date of assessment. Also need to consider what happens to unsuccessful candidates, e.g. if they are supported towards assessment at a later date, or have to reapply and pay another fee.

- o) sufficient assessors and certification decision-makers to accommodate applications from all conservation specialisms

A plan needs to be developed to relate assessor etc numbers to potential applicants in the initial and ongoing periods, taking into account the numbers of practitioners in each profession and specialism.

- p) a process for recruiting, selecting, training and maintaining the competence of assessors and certification decision-makers that is transparent and maintains confidence in the certification process

Needs to be developed. Must be transparent and equitable (including in the initial capacity-building stages). Established standards for assessment such as the Lifelong Learning UK 'A' units (shortly to be replaced by revised versions) should be used for guidance even if they are not fully applicable. Provision needs to be included to discontinue using the services of any assessor or decision-maker who does not work to a competent or ethical standard.

- q) a process for resolving fairly and economically any complaints about the way the assessment and certification process is applied

Needs to be developed in a way that enables genuine complaints to be investigated, but avoids abuse by candidates. The appeals/complaints procedure should ensure independence from people involved in the initial judgements and decision-making.

Because of the potential for litigation (suggest you check this under Israeli law) it may be necessary to ensure all candidates sign a declaration when they apply that they accept the decision of the certifying body as final. This will probably not protect the certifying body if it doesn't apply its own procedures properly, but it does provide a guard against vexatious litigation.

- r) a process for periodic review of the certification standards and processes.

This involves both agreeing a timescale for review (provisionally this could be set for instance at years 1, 3 and 5 then at 5-yearly intervals), and a methodology for gathering and interpreting information. Points to consider include:

- What to review at each stage? In year 1 this is likely to be processes, in year 3 processes and standards, and in year 5 processes, standards if necessary (but may be able to wait until year 10), and initial impact.
- How to ensure consistency between reviews but also enable relevant new information and viewpoints to be considered? This could be achieved by having a basic review framework and set of questions, but also using flexible methods (asking for freestyle comments, using focus groups etc.).
- Publishing the review results and identifying the actions that have been taken as a result.
- Not over-reviewing – the certification process and standards need to be able to evolve, but there should also be consistency and constancy of purpose.
- Building data-gathering into the certification process. This includes encouraging applicants and assessors to review the process as they go along (possibly by including review questions in application forms and assessment records), and holding on to data, comments and notes of significant incidents.

It can be helpful to consider each review as the end of an action research or soft systems cycle that starts with the current development phase (more about soft systems here: <http://www.sld.demon.co.uk/ssm.pdf>).

The overall process for managing assessment, certification and maintenance of certification also needs to be determined and the necessary resources agreed,

6. Maintenance and withdrawal of certificated status

The certifying body will define the requirements for maintaining certificated status and the circumstances under which it can be withdrawn. The certifying body will also define and publish processes concerned with the maintenance and withdrawal of certification, including but not limited to:

- d) a process for monitoring the continuing learning and/or competence of certificated practitioners

This needs to be considered and developed. My advice is to focus on the outcomes of learning rather than the inputs. Points to consider are:

- Are you principally aiming to encourage updating and development, or check continuing competence? The former might favour a learning-cycle CPD model with random call-up of self-reporting (the Icon or Institute for Learning system) and the latter a periodic reassessment model (e.g. to require documentary evidence and references for additional projects, cf. the AABC/Edinburgh Group system).
- What resources (in terms of assessors or CPD reviewers) can you devote to the process? Some professions review a tiny fraction each year, others (like Icon) a relatively high percentage.
- What happens if the material submitted is judged to be inadequate? Where do you give advice, set conditions, suspend subject to a satisfactory outcome, withdraw certification? CPD as a principle is widely accepted, but bureaucratic systems for monitoring it can produce alienation (among leading practitioners as well as those who are lagging behind).

- e) a process for investigating and responding to complaints about certificated practitioners
- f) a process for removing the certificated status of practitioners who are in default.

Both of these need to be transparent and fair to complainant and practitioner, involve impartial investigation and questioning, maintain privacy until a decision has been reached and communicated, and ensure action is quick and clear. It's normal to include an appeal process, but this should not be available automatically (i.e. the practitioner must demonstrate processes and criteria were not applied correctly), and it shouldn't be able to delay the withdrawal of certification.

Also need to consider how the certifying body can protect itself against claims by clients of certificated practitioners' services, e.g. by requiring private-practice members to have professional indemnity insurance and taking out insurance itself. Legal advice is suggested here.

7. Establishing capacity for assessment and certification

The certifying body will build capacity through an incremental process of certifying experienced conservation professionals to act as certification decision-makers, assessors and mentors. The standards applied to these initial certificated practitioners will be the same as those applied subsequently in the certification process, and the assessment methods while they may differ from the final process will be equally robust and transparent.

The process discussed at the workshops can be summarised as:

Stage 1: initial group under the guidance of one or more experienced professional assessors (e.g. Icon assessors or assessors from another profession in Israel)

Selection criteria for Stage 1 agreed and published.

Initial applications invited from experienced practitioners who will undergo peer-review assessment and become the first group of assessors and certification decision-makers. Initial group of c. 15 selected.

Entire group undergo assessment training (including familiarisation with the professional standards). Assessment process carried out to the professional standards, with each candidate being assessed by two or more of the group, with the assessment decisions checked by the whole group.

Assessment decisions published along with a precis of the evidence put forward for assessment. Successful candidates are certificated and roles (assessor / certification decision-maker) allocated. (What happens if any of the initial group don't meet the standards? Do these move to becoming Stage 2 candidates?)

Stage 2: early applications from experienced practitioners.

Selection criteria for Stage 2 agreed and published.

Applications invited from experienced practitioners following self-assessment against the professional standards. Early applicants commit to being mentors and/or assessors for future candidates.

Applicants are assessed against the professional standards by the assessors from Stage 1, possibly using a more streamlined version of the final assessment process (e.g. examining remote evidence and using references rather than workplace visits).

Assessment decisions published along with a precis of the evidence put forward for assessment.

Successful candidates are certificated and added to the list of mentors. (Unsuccessful candidates presumably remain registered for assessment, but move to the stage 3 process).

Stage 3: normal operation

Applications from all practising conservation professionals invited, with assessment according to the normal process.

8. Promoting certificated status and professional standards

The certificating body (or its constituent professional bodies depending on the constitution agreed) will promote the adoption of certification and professional standards through various means including:

- f) gaining support from government bodies to incorporate a requirement for certificated conservation professionals into relevant legislation, policies, management plans and funding conditions
- g) encouraging heritage organisations to support certificated status in the recruitment of staff, in contract specifications and in management plans
- h) encouraging employers to support staff to achieve certification and to support the programme of certification through means such as releasing staff to act as assessors and mentors
- i) encouraging the wider conservation community beyond those individuals in scope for certification to follow the professional standards as applicable to their activities and act in accordance with the profession's code of ethics

This could include various actions e.g. encouraging the use of the standards to inform specifications and promoting appropriate standards in the conservation of intangible heritage. A register of conservation craftspeople was also discussed and may be an appropriate project for the certificating body.

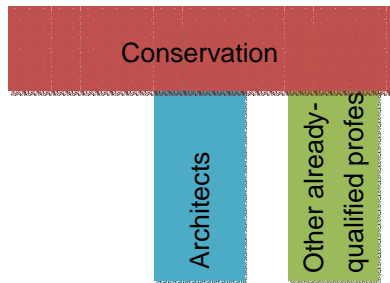
- j) working with universities and similar institutions to make students aware of professional standards and certification, and to encourage the professional standards to be reflected in courses.

Throughout, this will require:

- Careful positioning and communication of what 'certification' is – getting this right from the outset can save much time later
- Clarity about the benefits of certification to cultural heritage
- Having a clear 'offer' when approaching stakeholders – whether this is a preliminary outline e.g. when gaining support from practitioners and government agencies, or having certificated practitioners in place when asking organisations to employ or commission them
- Being clear about the benefits of certification for each type of stakeholder, and engaging with them appropriately.

4. Model structures for the certifying body

(1) A single conservation body

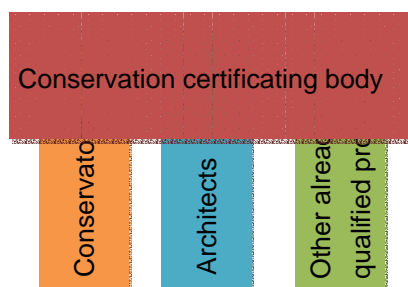


In this model there is a single body for (material) cultural heritage professionals. The conservation body would serve as the primary professional and qualifying body for conservators and a secondary body for conservation architects, surveyors, engineers etc. (who would of course remain members of their primary bodies). This supposes that (a) the other professional bodies support this model – i.e. acknowledging that conservation expertise is lodged in an organisation other than their own, and (b) their members who wish to become conservation-qualified are prepared to join a second body. For this body to be accepted it would need to have fair representation from all the professions involved on its governing board. A possible disadvantage could be that movable heritage conservators feel they no longer have a professional body geared specifically to their interests.

Membership: individual practitioners plus possibly organisational members or appointed representatives

Control (voting rights): certificated members or possibly all *bone fide* individual members.

(2) An overarching or joint certifying body



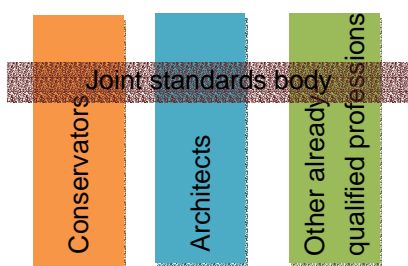
This model involves the creation of an additional body that is not a professional membership body in the normal way, but acts more like a registration body separate from (but supported by) individual professional bodies. The model allows for a wider range of constitutional formats because it doesn't need to be governed by individual members: its members could be organisations (including but not necessarily limited to the subscribing professions). As above it requires a high level of support from the individual professions; it does however avoid the need for practitioners to be a member of more than one body, though they will be *registered* with the certifying body.

(The diagram shows equal proportions of conservators, architects and 'others' as being certificated, but in practice it is likely that a higher proportion of conservators will be certificated than the other professions where many members won't be involved in conservation).

Membership: subscribing professional bodies / associations and possibly other organisational members e.g. government heritage bodies

Control (voting rights): probably subscribing professional bodies only.

(3) Individual profession certification with a joint standards body



In this model each participating body (ISC, architects etc) is responsible for carrying out certification, subject to common standards and quality assurance procedures being overseen by a body that would be governed jointly by the professions (and possibly with external representation).

Membership: subscribing professional bodies / associations and possibly other organisational members e.g. government heritage bodies

Control (voting rights): either subscribing professional bodies or all member bodies.