

Four types of professional member in terms of CPD

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I will start with what I consider to be two totally reasonable assertions.

Firstly that we only deserve to call ourselves a professional if we make continuous and tangible efforts to maintain and record developing competence and knowledge.

Secondly, Professional Bodies should be much more than a rest home for passive 'professionals' unwilling to do anything to keep themselves up to date beyond passing exams decades ago.

For me, the two totally reasonable assertions suggest a lot needs to be done by many Professional Bodies to differentiate, reward and sanction members, and critically, to enforce even minimum standards of Continuous Professional Development (CPD), as clearly stated in their own codes of practice.

In addition, I personally would like to see the expulsion of those who feel payment of fees is sufficient provide long term protection from any attempt to enforce those professional standards.

So here are my thoughts on four broad types of professional member in terms of a desire, or otherwise to engage positively in CPD...

The undeserving

This lot are a problem.

They basically want to be left alone and not asked to anything other than pay their fees, which many begrudge as they feel they don't much for the cost.

If only they were even a little more active, and made use of facilities and services they might feel differently, but they can't be bothered.

The biggest problem is that there are so many of them, and if the heat was turned up on them they would leave in very large and financially painful numbers. A large number of the undeserving are long term passive members, in senior grades of membership, so feel secure and protected from being asked for any proof of activity of professional development.

What can be done about them? Frankly I regret to say, probably not a lot, unless the courageous decision is made to take the financial hit and enforce published standards, driving most of the undeserving out, and going for a leaner, quality over quantity of membership.

The compliant

These are far less of a problem.

The compliant will do what they asked regarding proof of CPD. They are likely to be a significant group within the membership, and within what they consider reasonable parameters, they will make an effort to provide evidence of post-qualification professional development.

They are unlikely to be active members, rarely if ever attending branch meetings, and making little or no use of the added value services and opportunities membership provides, but can be depended upon to retain membership and engage in CPD if asked.

The enthusiast

These are the gold dust members every professional body wants.

Any or all of energetic, committed, ambitious, they are the bedrock of every branch, providing committee membership and seeing real value from active membership of their Professional Body.

They are however, typically a small minority of any branch, and carry a disproportionate responsibility for the creation and maintenance of a vibrant professional environment at local and national levels.

The enthusiasts see value in CPD and engage positively in this to a level that the undeserving find hard to comprehend.

For a long time the enthusiasts can maintain their own energy and will to show tangible evidence of professional development. This can after a time wane, so other equally enthusiastic members tend to take their roles thus creating a self-sustaining core of essential and high value activity.

The big problem is that there are too few enthusiasts.

The frustrated

Two types of these, the resentful and the disappointed.

The resentful I have covered above – leave them alone to do little or nothing, and at least they will stay on and be an income stream, if doing nothing whatsoever for the quality of membership.

The disappointed are a very different group, they over time, develop a growing dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of will to enforce CPD rules, and that so many undeserving sit safely doing nothing when they, perhaps current or former enthusiasts, do so much more, without differentiation or reward.

These are valuable members, with the potential to make significant future contributions. Ironically, and worryingly, they are far more likely to leave their Professional Body than the undeserving, and in so doing, dilute the post-qualification value, of the remaining membership.

In conclusion

I would love to see the undeserving sorted out, but realise that is very unlikely given the cost in lost membership fees. The compliant can be left alone, as so long as the expectation of recording and reporting CPD activity does not increase onerously they will stay and comply. The enthusiasts need to be nurtured and rewarded for their efforts. Typically much more can be done during and prior to achieving professional status to set would-be enthusiasts on the 'right' path, and avoid them joining the lazy legions of the undeserving.

Then there are the frustrated – identify them, listen to them, retain them if possible, as they are often influential capable people whose contributions together with the enthusiasts, over the long term will ultimately counter the negative effects of the undeserving, and provide a far more positive future state.