

Edge Commission of Inquiry on Future Professionalism

Summaries of Evidence Sessions

Session 3: 7.5.14
Society How can professionals working across the built environment and their institutions maintain relevance and deliver value to society?

Barry Clarke, Professor of Geotechnical Engineering University of Leeds, Past President Institution of Civil Engineers

Introduction

The Edge Commission on Professionalism has set out the hypotheses:

- Professionalism in the construction sector is undervalued and under threat
- The challenges of the economy and the environment require a change in the values and standards of professionalism in the sector

There are many definitions of professionalism but, in this instance, it refers to the competence of a professional. Competence is the ability to complete a task successfully, which requires an appropriate level of skill and understanding to apply knowledge effectively.

The International Standard of Classifications of Occupations (ISCO88) has defined ten groups of employment according to their skill level: managers, professionals, technicians, clerical, agricultural, craft, plant, elementary and armed services. Professionals include those working in the built environment such as architects and engineers, as well as those working in healthcare, teaching, science, business, and communications, legal, sport and social sectors. Professionals are classed at level 4, the highest level as they require complex problem solving, decision making and creativity skills based on an extensive body of theoretical and factual knowledge in a specialised field. Professionals usually have completed a degree and, possibly, experiential learning to become qualified.

The ISCO88 helpfully defines a professional in terms of competence and job description, both of which are recognised in the UK. Thus, those working in the construction industry who meet these descriptions can be called professionals.

The ISCO88 makes no reference to values and standards, which are particularly important in the construction industry which has a major impact on society's safety, health and well-being.

Professional Communities

UK construction professionals created institutions to develop their discipline for the benefit of society. Some of them can trace their roots back to the 18th century but most of the major institutions were founded as learned societies in the 19th century. They were different from the many learned societies that developed in the 18th and 19th century where a public thirst for knowledge was the driver. Membership of the construction related societies was restricted to those operating as professionals in the chosen discipline. Many achieved chartered status becoming self-regulatory bodies. Given their charitable status and the consequences of catastrophic failure in construction, it became evident that these institutions had to introduce a means of publicly demonstrating competence.

By the end of the 19th century, the concept of a professionally qualified built environment professional had emerged. Some UK professional institutions are both learned societies and qualifying bodies and some remained as learned societies. Internationally, the learned society and qualifying authority are often separate bodies.

In the UK, a professional institution is widely recognised as a community of experts which:-

- sets its own educational standards;
- has a means of dealing with conflict;
- has a means of dealing with disciplinary matters;
- operates a code of conduct;
- has a broader knowledge of the world in which its members operate;
- has a commitment to professional development;
- and a commitment to developing the knowledge of the discipline.

It is not possible for a professional to operate in a regulated environment unless they are licensed to do so. However, most built environment specialists in the UK can operate without belonging to a professional community where self-regulation applies. Many built environment specialists are members of learned societies even though they are not professionally qualified which implies they have a commitment to developing their knowledge.

In some countries, a licence to practice is required to 'sign off drawings'. However, not all specialists require that licence even though they practice. Those without a licence cannot 'sign off drawings'. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, within engineering communities, civil engineers are more likely to be licensed than other engineers because of the public safety issues associated with publicly funded infrastructure projects.

In the UK, the Engineering Council suggests that the number of engineers exceeds six million, whereas membership of the professional institutions is about two hundred and twenty thousand.

The Challenges

The professional institutions were founded during the Industrial Revolution at a time of great change driven by developments in technology, society's aspirations and the emergence of consumerism. 1829, the year of the Rainhill trials, was the year the world took off. It signalled the start of mass transport, allowing 50% of the UK population to live in urban areas. Much of the infrastructure created in this period still exists today, though it has been adapted to cope with changes in technology, regulations and the environment.

If 1829 was the year the world took off, 1945 was the start of the anthropogenic age when the world accelerated: the rate of increase of population, GDP and carbon emissions accelerated. The world entered an age when its future depends on what we do. The debate about climate change is the most visible evidence of this but pandemics, natural and anthropogenic hazards, population growth, resource security and urbanisation are placing greater demands on built environment professionals. For example, Engineering UK estimates that the number of professional engineers in the UK has to double by 2025.

The environment in which the built environment specialists operate is changing. Knowledge is growing exponentially, codes of practice and standards cannot be developed fast enough, design is moving from code based to risk to adaptive design. There is a move to evidence-based political decisions; the emergence of big data as a design tool as the concept of smart cities develops is creating opportunities to tackle the global challenges. Professional institutions are increasingly re-engaged in political and societal debate. Thus, the educational requirements and attributes of built environment professionals are changing.

However, the public has limited knowledge of the built environment and the professionals who create the world around them. Indeed, the image of the construction industry is often a low skill, low quality sector. It is only when it fails do the public begin to understand how reliant they are on a fully functioning built environment; how important it is for their safety, health and wellbeing.

The value of the built environment profession is realised at a strategic level but not necessarily at a community level. Adapting the built-environment to cope with a low carbon economy, population growth and the changes in society's expectations and technology are placing greater demands on the built environment professional which requires greater engagement with society in order to help society appreciate the world they live in and the difficult decisions they face in the future.

The future of the built environment depends on the ability of the specialists to deal with the pace of change and help create a resilient society. The specialists have to create expert communities that meet the characteristics of a profession and they have to publically demonstrate that they are competent to support society in the development of the built environment. Therefore the hypotheses are correct.

The existing professional communities, the professional institutions, may not represent all of the specialists working in the built environment but they are, currently, the only independent bodies that can meet the requirements of professional communities needed by society. They are undergoing change as democratic bodies but the pace of change may not be sufficient to meet the rising demands on the built environment. The institutions rely on the time and knowledge volunteered by their members who in turn rely on the goodwill of employers.

They also rely on income from their commercial activities and subscriptions. Balancing the income, voluntary contributions and output is challenging and, at a time of declining numbers, loss of experiential knowledge and a shift in attributes of the built environment professional, the value of the institutions to society may not be fully recognised.

Conclusion

It is imperative that a community of specialists exists in order to generate and disseminate knowledge. The community has a role to play in validating the knowledge. The community may be in its current form – numerous trade bodies, learned societies, professional institutions and umbrella organisations – or in a single institution as in the medical profession. Historically, knowledge dissemination included oral and paper processes which were validated by the community. The digital age has created a wealth of knowledge, but its value is variable; peer assessment is not applied. This is a role for the learned societies.

The public assumes that the built environment professionals are competent. Self-regulation has worked but it will be challenged as built environment professionals increasingly engage in societal and political debate.

Therefore, if professional institutions are to survive and meet their charitable objectives, they have to:-

- be clear about their strategic aims within the context of the emerging society;
- be clear about their value proposition that attracts the community;
- increase their engagement with society;
- develop their roles as learned societies to engage in knowledge generation and dissemination in a digital world;
- develop appropriate standards for the emerging built environment professional;
- recognise how the changes in education and training impact on the formation of the built environment professional;

and recognise how the low carbon, digital, knowledge-based economy impacts on the competency requirements of the built environment professional.

Additional points made in response to questions from the panel or the floor:-

On how society can ever value built environment professionals when the image of our industry is so bad, and society has little or no idea of what we do, let alone about what values we hold

It's curious. If you go back, Robert Stephenson built a railway line from London to Edinburgh and the missing link was the high level bridge on Newcastle, and when he opened that he could get on a train and six hours later be in Edinburgh which had never been done before. The Mayor of Newcastle held a dinner on the station platform and there were 800 guests; it was a headline in the London gazette. In the 18th century, our professions were valued, people knew exactly who we were and what we did, for many reasons. One major reason, of course, is that we transformed society, we allowed them to go places they couldn't go before. So moving onto today, one of the roles that the professions should pick up is how do we address the grand challenges such as climate change, resource scarcity and global poverty? We're going to need professional people to address that.

So perhaps in this time of change, we've got to stick our heads above the parapet, which we have failed to do in the last 50 years or so. And this may mean having an institutional point of view which is not be aligned with all of the members' interests.

On what the institutions are actually trying to do to get attention (for example through Twitter) and improve their role in society.

If this were a debate being driven by the engineering community, it would be very different. The engineering professional bodies work in a number of ways through collaboration. I have set up an organisation to support the CIC to try and bring the built environment professionals together. The professional bodies in the engineering institutions are tackling this business of raising the profile of engineering, because the engineering community works together. We as civil engineers have a real problem: we are engineers, so we are much further ahead than other built environment professionals in collaboration and influence, because we work as a team.

I think the other thing that might be worth thinking about is that it is estimated that there are 6 million people who call themselves engineers in the UK, but there are only 220,000 in the professional bodies. So the professional bodies are a subset of the whole community, and I suspect that that also applies in other areas in the built environment. There is a large number of people who are not part of an institution. So it's not answering your question directly, but it's giving you an indication of how we're trying other ways to engage.

On whether it is time for institutions to address the big picture and really challenge global airport expansion

One of the things I have learnt in our institution is that we employ people who are experts in communicating with media and politicians, but they are professionals, not engineers. So in order to give a view, we have to undertake a public inquiry, if you like. For example, last year it was water, this year it's transport; looking at the nation's infrastructure, how many potholes have we got. We don't just get our people inside the building to do this, we call upon our members and people outside the profession to give their view; we call upon people to come and present their ideas. And from that we distil it down to a report based on hard evidence from the institution but written in language that people can understand.

As to whether we could actually form a view as an Institution that airport expansion is a good thing or a bad thing, we have done that in other areas, yes.

On the challenge of attracting young people into the industry, when much of what the institutions advocate or promote is not very appealing to younger people.

One thing that we do rely on is our members who are volunteers - so in a way we're talking about the survival of institutions. If institutions disappear all this activity we talk about goes with it. So there is a duty upon institutions to be forward thinking. As a whole, society adds to importance of the institution, of the membership, of what they do, and the good they do.

On what would be lost from the professions' conduct and standing if it was only about members having a marketing proposition for themselves, rather than professing a duty to the public interest.

Within the construction industry there are some 250 organisations, and most of those are not chartered bodies; most are set up to protect the industry, protect their particular section of the industry, and are therefore for the benefit of their employees and employers - not necessarily their clients or society; and the institutions, by virtue of their charitable status, have a responsibility to society.

On whether more and more conversations being held behind closed doors compromises the ability of the professions to secure public legitimacy.

Everything is not done behind closed doors. We have no problem challenging politicians in public, which we have done. So I think 'behind closed doors' is more about the proactive work to help inform political decisions. When you see government papers being released, you often see references to the institutions, so the evidence of our discussions is visible. Further, in developing our views, we consult widely, as explained above, so our views are based on the technical expertise of our members and others.

Sue Illman, President of the Landscape Institute

As landscape architects, we are required under our Royal Charter to 'protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for public benefit....'. So we can only deliver public benefit, and be relevant to society if people value what we deliver; and to value what we do, they have to understand what it is that we do, and therein lies part of the conundrum.

The older professions are more clearly recognised by the public, and whilst their perception of who they are, and what they contribute may not be completely correct, there is a basic understanding of their role in society. This value is diminished where the work of the professions is seen as elitist, whilst high quality but more populist work, can gain very strong support and recognition, a key factor being communication.

The younger professions often struggle to achieve a broad public recognition, and tend to only be understood in more specialist sectors, and by the professions with whom they most directly co-operate. Their value is therefore perceived as being less except to the 'informed minority'.

In recent years the number of professional organisations also seems to have mushroomed. Whilst an ever more complex world, with ever more complex problems to solve requires specialists, the professions in general appear to have responded not just by specialising, but by creating new institutions for each and every specialism. This compounds the problem of society understanding what they do, and therefore valuing it.

In the Landscape Institute we are trying to buck that trend, by becoming a broader church of professionals, where areas of expertise are defined, but any individual may work in 3 or 4 different areas depending on the project requirements, their own particular interests and skill set. This allows us to deliver a clearer message of who we are and what we do, to both the professions and public, although it may not make us either relevant or valued by them.

Over the last few months, we have seen an interesting example of how public relevance and value can be both enhanced and reduced very quickly. The flooding problems in Somerset gave high relevance to the various professions involved in the management of the levels, some being vilified for their work, or perceived lack of action, whilst calmer voices appreciated the longer term balanced approach. Ultimately, all recognised the need for specialist professional advice, and the professions recognised the need to articulate what they did and why. An important outcome has been that most people throughout the country now appreciate that inappropriate development can lead to downstream flooding, and are looking to the professions to assist them in understanding their local problem.

So society recognises the importance of 'big picture' issues and the need to get them right, like the prevention of flooding, public health, clean water and air, sufficient good quality food and housing, a properly functioning transport system; those are the easy subjects, and individual professions each stake their claim although the lesser contributors are frequently overlooked.

Society's appreciation of the longer term 'big picture' issues of sustainability is more tenuous, and whilst the professions at the institutional level are good at promoting a clear message, this isn't carried down through the ranks very effectively on a day-to-day basis, and even where it is, the rationale often isn't clearly articulated. Again we see public appreciation of the professions' contribution only when disaster strikes.

Social sustainability is becoming increasingly important, with grass roots input facilitated by the professions often providing surprising and innovative outcomes. Here the value of the profession, and to society can be clearly appreciated at the community level, which though small scale, can ultimately be highly effective.

So in summary, the professions must work at all levels:

- Firstly, to understand and articulate the larger, longer term issues of sustainability that society needs us to address, and explain why and how they can contribute
- Secondly, to promote high quality outcomes across the built environment, that are relevant and meaningful to society, and deliver their needs
- Thirdly, to find effective ways of explaining their role and its relevance to people's everyday lives more clearly
- Fourthly, to work with communities to deliver locally important projects,
- And fifthly, be flexible and responsive to society's changing needs.

Delivering public benefit, and maintaining professional status amongst society is not about dumbing down our role, but through example and explanation, making our contribution recognised and valued as being important.

Additional points made in response to questions from the panel or the floor:-

On how can society ever value built environment professionals when the image of our industry is so bad, and society has little or no idea of what we do, let alone about what values we hold

As some of you may know, I wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister during the recent flooding. What was interesting was the outcome of that, with some 20 institutions getting together to talk about the problems of flooding in roundtable sessions attended by a mixture of the built environment professions and the environmental professions. That's now happened twice, and we are now looking at how institutions can come together on the subject of water and flooding. So we can do it; but somebody, ourselves as catalyst institution in this instance, must take on the issue, regarding it as so important that it can't be ignored, and enough people agree to join in – which thankfully they did.

On the challenge of attracting young people into the industry.

We certainly are in the process of looking at how we engage, because most universities have suffered huge depletion in the numbers, with the issues of fees, so a lot of the courses are having to consider whether they can carry on. So we are responding, as I think the RTPI are, by looking at things like alternative routes of entry into the profession, and how we can set up new educational models to allow people to come through different routes. But at the grassroots level we've got to look at part-time earning, working in practices, and putting that together with academic input to encourage young people into the profession.

Colin Haylock, Past President, Royal Town Planning Institute

The RTPI's chartered object is to advance the science and art of town planning which, as for many institutes, is to be for the benefit of the public. There is nothing there about our members and service to our members; it is about our service to the public. And a code of conduct about how we conduct ourselves professionally in doing that, a requirement to fearlessly and impartially exercise our independent professional judgment and to the best of our skills and understanding.

We've been doing some work with our members about what they feel about the code, and they feel it to be very helpful.

Looking at the challenges for professionalism as we head forward, I think there are a number of areas concerning respect and value.

There is a serious issue of respect for expertise and I find myself thinking in the age of the Internet it's terribly easy for a lot of people to think they are experts and terribly easy to challenge someone who claims expertise. It's probably even more of a problem for the younger professions than the older ones, but I know many people who will challenge their doctors on diagnosis in ways that they wouldn't have done before.

A core requirement is therefore commanding and accessibly applying expertise which is relevant and useful to society, its needs and concerns; and which effectively contributes to addressing the issues which its varied members are facing, and which they will appreciate and value - and essentially, in one way or another, be willing to pay for

And then there's the general professional respect to business in terms of values and partiality and independence in a fiercely competitive world. I am an architect as well as the planner and I find this remarkable situation that architects are asked to occupy in traditional contracts where they are the arbiter and administrator of a contract between a client and a contractor where they are paid by the client. If you really believe in those professional values of impartiality and independence, how could you ever go into a contract like that?

For planning there are particular issues around retaining respect and the value attached to the discipline and the professionals who practice it (by politicians, by central and local government, and by wider society) when it so often gets kicked around as a political football; and when so much high profile activity can be adversarial between planners representing differing interests.

And for many of the institutions, there's a real challenge in this business of commanding respect in a position where there is no protection of title, let alone the role. Non-chartered professionals in those sorts of situations can very easily bring professions into disrepute.

And in the built environment world, the really great difficulty of valuing the professions when you are working in an incredibly complex world with incredibly complex overlaps between professional disciplines (but with none of us able to cover everything or act in isolation); and with individual professional bodies protecting their territories (but with society distinctly unexcited by any spats around professional boundaries).

In response, it is important for institutions to hold to those things that distinguish people that claim professionalism, or chartered membership from those who merely act in the area and will represent themselves. This means

- communicating our expertise and the professional manner of its application;
- benchmarking and assuring the expertise and conduct of our members;
- pushing forward the boundaries of the first and ferociously patrolling the second.

In short, defending those things about professions which make them hard to get into and hard to stay in.

But that all sounds terribly elitist. It's very important that that elite stuff gets done unchallengeably well in a world where people will readily challenge. That elitist side, though, needs to be played out in a world where it is accessible to people and where professionals are approachable

Finally, society would expect the professional bodies to collaborate. They would expect the professionals in the built environment to understand that they work in a complex multidisciplinary world, and they would expect us to find mature ways of working with each other. And that's really quite challenging in a situation where our insurers would probably tell us to limit our liabilities, very carefully control what we do, and lay off as much risk to others as possible.

Additional points made in response to questions from the panel or the floor:-

On how we restructure ourselves to be able to pass on experience, give good cross-disciplinary advice, and become a recognised font of knowledge (at say six hours' notice)
It's quite interesting about that speed of response thing because each individual institution has probably grappled with that and each has probably found its own way of dealing with things. You know do we have a collection of experts in particular topics on hand ready so that they can make a response; but do we have a way of filtering it to make sure that it isn't a completely wacky response?

But to try and do that across the disciplines is really challenging. I would like to think that if we recognise these things as cross-disciplinary, and our built environment professions work out things collectively with regard to the longer term agenda, then it becomes easier to deal pertinently and appropriately, with appropriate consideration and reflection, on the things that come up that require reactive response. The proactive builds the base to deal sensibly with the reactive.

On the short time that people at the head of institutions have to form relationships with each other and politicians, and then pursue their objectives; and whether the status quo means that the relative longevity of the permanent secretariat results in them becoming the voice of the institution, changing the balance of power between members and secretariats.

I think there's another layer in here, which is that you'll have a president for one or two years, and these people have profile and influence during that period, but they have probably been embedded in the organisation for quite some time. It is a group of active and heavily committed members who stay there for a considerable length of time - the sort of people who get drawn on for the expertise across the various sectors, and have reasonable relationships, not just inside their own institutions but probably with people working in overlapping disciplines. So there are a number of planners I know well who know quite a lot of Sue Illman's team quite well, and that relationship lasts a lot longer than Sue's two years or my one year.

On the challenge of attracting young people into the industry.

From the planning perspective, there's always been a long history of involvement in environmental education. And this year, the Institute's hundredth anniversary, we produced a programme of planning ambassadors. Every man and his wife and little children want to be architects, and a lot of architecture courses are bursting at the seams - and I'm thinking, what is it? We probably need some smart ways at universities that teach architecture and other things to capture those people, and then get them interested in the broader built environment over the first year - actually turn them on to other disciplines, where they probably have better prospects.

On the professions and the public interest.

One thing that we haven't quite touched on here is that whilst we have been talking about what professionals do for society, there's also this business about what professions and being professional does for us as professionals. I have to say I derive very considerable comfort from a feeling that I'm part of a family of people whose commitment runs beyond simply serving the client. It might be terribly difficult to define what that wider public interest is, but it's something that motivates you to do more than absolutely necessary; it motivates you to talk hard to your client about things that the client might not immediately want to do but might be encouraged to do, or might be encouraged to do next time and so on; and it is this delightful feeling that I'm not on my own in doing it.

Keynote speaker: Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive RSA

I want to suggest a theoretical framework through which we might look at this question of professionals and professional associations.

The theoretical framework is very simple – it is to think of social power as having three dimensions to it: leadership and followership, which is about things like authority, bureaucracy, strategy, those things; then solidarity which is about membership and shared values, community, those kinds of things; and then individualism, which is to do with acquisitiveness, but also enterprise creativity, risk and the like.

Obviously they are rough categories, but I would argue that those are fundamentally where social power is derived from, and therefore there is an obvious thing that one is searching for when one thinks about an organisation, a nation, or even a human being - which is how to combine these three sources of social power.

So, there are these three very simple kinds of dichotomies when it comes to the domain of leadership and authority; and I think the choice is between a model of control and power versus a model of influence and convening, and that forms of leadership and authority that work in the modern world are more to do with influence and the capacity to convene than to do with raw power and exercise of control. That relates to all sorts of things that are changing in the world, and to the pace of change.

Secondly, in the domain of solidarity, often when I talk to people who are left wing they think this is a left wing idea. It's not left-wing at all: UKIP is about powerful solidaristic voice, for example. Solidarity is about membership, it's about tribes. So the critical question is whether it is an exclusive or inclusive form of solidarity, and this goes to the point that Colin made: is this a kind of closed shop solidarity, the solidarity of those within, or is it a solidarity which invites other people to participate if they share the values of the organisation? That's part of the journey the RSA has been on.

And then the third dimension, of individualism, at the risk of sounding pious, is really a notion of individualism as being positioned in professional creativity versus a notion of individualism positioned in commercial acquisitiveness.

This is not to say that I'm against commerce at all, but I think in as much as professionalism is about some notion of public interest it should be that the promotion of the peak of professional success lies in the expression of creativity rather than the achievement of great wealth. I'll just close by saying that my sense is that these questions, the kind of questions you are facing here, are big questions.

And they probably require systemic reform, and a rethinking of the very heart of what professionalism is about and what professional institutions are about. I don't think the kind of shifts that I'm talking about are accomplished by a set of piecemeal reforms. Well, they may be piecemeal reforms but with a very clear and very different destination in mind. I think that the ground is shifting beneath our feet very rapidly and we therefore need to be equally able to think quite radically.

Additional points made in response to questions from the panel or the floor:-

On what the institutions are actually trying to do to get attention (for example through Twitter) and improve their role in society; and how we might restructure ourselves to be able to pass on experience, give good cross-disciplinary advice, and become a recognised font of knowledge (at say six hours' notice)

I think you're getting fixated on the wrong thing. It depends what it is; it could be six seconds if it's one kind of question, six years if it's another. It depends what it is people are asking for, and

I wouldn't get too hung up on the daily news agenda. This is about developing a story, a narrative, a way of being - and that will take a long time to evolve. And the important thing actually is not pace, it is alignment - whether or not everything that you do lines up with what you say; so, for example, in the corporate sector of those companies that talk about corporate social responsibility, the only ones you should listen to seriously are those that have fundamentally rethought their business model. I wouldn't worry too much about speed, I would worry about whether or not all the messages you're giving out are messages which reinforce a core story of public value

There is also the unusualness factor: as the cliché goes, dog bites man isn't a story, but man bites dog is a story. One of the problems in terms of public opinion and public interest is that it is interesting when professionals say things which sound difficult for themselves, but professional organisations are profoundly averse to ever saying anything which is going to be challenging to their members, because they don't want to lose the members. So most of what professional associations pump out is of absolutely no interest to anybody else, because it is entirely predictable

On whether it is time for institutions to address the big picture and really challenge global airport expansion – particularly when, unlike the flooding issue, it is neither a neutral thing for them nor a possible source of work for their members, but rather a potential threat to those members who would get their work from them

Where there is a choice, it's a perfectly reasonable position to adopt to say "if you believe A, the consequences are B, C, and D, and if you believe B, the consequences are E, F and G"; and you can take a position which says "if you care about these things, this is what you do, and if you care about these things, that is what you do - and we as a profession can tell you the consequences of the options you choose". That's a perfectly reasonable and important role to play.

So the way forward for professions in regard to difficult issues is to seek to identify the possibility of new solutions. The assistance you give to your members is not to help them live in a world of black and white, or right and wrong, which puts them in an untenable position, but to identify the possibility of them as professionals providing leadership, and identifying new ways of doing things.

On what would be lost from the professions' conduct and standing if it was only about members having a marketing proposition for themselves, rather than professing a duty to the public interest.

Legitimacy is what is lost. And legitimacy is an incredibly important attribute. Your legitimacy is derived from the fact that you believe you're in the business of balancing professional interest and public interest, and if you abandon that, or even the pursuit of that, you abandon your legitimacy, and you become simply a trade association. Trade associations have their functions to play, but they don't have the legitimacy that we're talking about here: they are explicitly in the pursuit of the interest of their members and nothing else, and wouldn't pretend to be about anything else. Whether or not this balancing act is done well is another matter, but if you give up on the very idea of pursuing that balance, you give up your public legitimacy. And that is in short supply. You have to keep refreshing your mandates, and how you achieve that balance changes all the time.

The Police Federation is an example of a professional association which completely lost sight of any notion of public interest, with absolutely disastrous consequences for the reputation of the police force. So if you can know what it isn't, that implies that you might also know what it is. And what it is, is an institution that takes seriously the question of how to balance public and professional interest. And while that might not mean that the rubber hits the road in terms of what you tell people to do now, it may do so in terms of the climate of opinion that you create which shapes future patterns of business and behaviour.