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COBRA 2010

The Construction, Building and Real Estate Research Conference of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors

Held at Dauphine Université, Paris, 2-3 September 2010

The RICS COBRA Conference is held annually. The aim of COBRA is to provide a platform for the dissemination of original research and new developments within the specific disciplines, sub-disciplines or field of study of:

Management of the construction process

- Cost and value management
- Building technology
- Legal aspects of construction and procurement
- Public private partnerships
- Health and safety
- Procurement
- Risk management
- Project management

The built asset

- Property investment theory and practice
- Indirect property investment
- Property market forecasting
- Property pricing and appraisal
- Law of property, housing and land use planning
- Urban development
- Planning and property markets
- Financial analysis of the property market and property assets
- The dynamics of residential property markets
- Global comparative analysis of property markets
- Building occupation
- Sustainability and real estate
- Sustainability and environmental law
- Building performance

The property industry

- Information technology
- Innovation in education and training
- Human and organisational aspects of the industry
- Alternative dispute resolution and conflict management
- Professional education and training

Peer review process

All papers submitted to COBRA were subjected to a double-blind (peer review) refereeing process. Referees were drawn from an expert panel, representing respected academics from the construction and building research community. The conference organisers wish to extend their appreciation to the following members of the panel for their work, which is invaluable to the success of COBRA.

Rifat Akbiyikli	Sakarya University, Turkey
Rafid Al Khaddar	Liverpool John Moores University, UK
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Anthony Hatfield	University of Wolverhampton, UK
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Mohammed Kishk	Robert Gordon's University, UK
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Patrick Manu	University of Wolverhampton, UK
Tinus Maritz	University of Pretoria, South Africa
Hendrik Marx	University of the Free State. South Africa
Ludwig Martin	Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa
Wilfred Matipa	Liverpool John Moores University, UK
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Robert Pearl	University of KwaZulu, Natal, South Africa
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Sam Zulu	Leeds Metropolitan University, UK

In addition to this, the following specialist panel of peer-review experts assessed papers for the COBRA session arranged by CIB W113

John Adriaanse	London South Bank University, UK
Julie Adshead	University of Salford, UK
Alison Ahearn	Imperial College London, UK
Rachelle Alterman	Technion, Israel
Deniz Artan Ilter	Istanbul Technical University, Turkey
Jane Ball	University of Sheffield, UK
Luke Bennett	Sheffield Hallam University, UK
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Paul Chynoweth	University of Salford, UK
Sai On Cheung	City University of Hong Kong
Julie Cross	University of Salford, UK
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Transition to Professionalism

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Abstract:

Graduate employment is being adversely affected by the current economic climate CBI [2009]. It is with this depressed labour market in mind that the project team set out to improve the employability chances of construction graduates from the University of Glamorgan [UoG]. The project evolved from policy steers from Leitch [2006], Welsh Assembly Government [2008] and the RICS [2009] Consultation Document on employability which emphasises the importance of soft transferable skills which are central to professionalism.

The work forms part of an inter-faculty study on professionalism. The faculties consisted of Advanced Technology and Humanities and Social Sciences. This was funded by The Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) as part of an Innovation in Learning and Teaching initiative.

To initiate the action research process it was considered necessary to establish a baseline of existing students knowledge of and attitudes to professionalism and how they compared to prospective employers expectations. The research analyses and discusses professionalism as a concept. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to elicit primary data. Students [n = 103] from first and final years of undergraduate awards were surveyed using a word association tool which included open ended questions. Three employers were interviewed to establish their expectations with regard to professionalism.

A 2 tailed T test was used to establish if there was any significance in group responses. This sample revealed none. Content analysis was used to interpret qualitative data indicating common themes and also highlighting the variation between students' knowledge and attitudes and employers' needs.

The results from the survey will inform ongoing curriculum development to facilitate the transition from undergraduate to professional, in line with institutional and employer expectations.

1   Introduction

1.1   Aims

- To improve employability of students on completion of their built environment undergraduate awards.

- To address the revised RICS employability threshold expectations.

1.2   Objectives

The objectives of the research were to:

- initiate an action research project

- establish baseline of students' knowledge and attitudes to professionalism

- establish what employers expectations are regarding professionalism from graduates

- establish any differential between students' knowledge and attitudes and employer expectations

- incorporate the findings into existing awards and utilise in the forthcoming validation of new undergraduate quantity surveying award

1.3   Rationale

The current economic downturn indicates that graduate employment for the future may well be similarly affected; especially in the construction sector (48,000 jobs have been reported as lost in the construction area since January 2009 (Boyd, 2009)). Two academic staff at the University of Glamorgan were concerned that employment rates on graduation from their courses in this depressed economy would suffer. In an attempt to improve their chances of employment in this depressed labour market, it seemed evident that Glamorgan graduates would need an extra competitive edge.

Given these economic conditions, the academic staff concerned decided to initiate a project within the curriculum that would enhance graduate employability through seeking to propagate a positive culture of professionalism.

There were several drivers out of which the rationale for this curriculum initiative developed. Recent policy steers at both National and Welsh Assembly Government level support the notion of bringing work place learning more specifically into the academic curriculum. Also, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), one of the key professional bodies for the construction industry, has changed and enhanced its requirements that RICS accredited degree courses develop graduates' employability skills and encourage greater employer/industry engagement.

1.4   Policy initiatives

1.4.1   National and Welsh Assembly

The Leitch Report (2006) and three Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) policy initiatives, the 'Learning Country Vision into Action' (2005) policy, 'Skills that Work for Wales' (2008) and the 'For Our Future' (2009) report, suggest it is now timely and in line with government policy, both national and Welsh, to enrich the higher education curriculum with greater awareness of the value of work based skills and learning through work.

One of the main recommendations of the Leitch Report is to increase an individual's aspirations and awareness of the value of skills and to raise the profile of vocational education. This has been echoed in Welsh policy through the Skills that Work for Wales (2008) document.

The National Assembly Government's policy document "Learning Country - Vision into Action" (2005) stresses the need for informal and work based learning to become a recognised and accredited part of the curriculum. This emphasis on work placements as part of the curriculum and the importance of graduate employability have been recently reiterated in the For Our Future (2009) policy.

1.4.2   Academic

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has published a report "Outcomes from Institutional Audit - Work-based and placement learning and employability" (2007). This report identifies that although not subjects for review in their own right, the issues of employability and work based learning are aspects that will be taken into account during institutional audits. Consequently, the QAA have issued good practice guidelines and exemplary practice from institutions already audited, which strongly

advocate the inclusion of employability and work related learning as part of the accredited Higher Education curriculum.

The Construction Industry Council (1997) document Higher education common graduate learning outcomes also emphasises the need for new graduates to possess professional knowledge and personal skills as well as technical knowledge.

1.4.3 *Professional*

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors has introduced changes in the way it assesses the degree courses for which it provides accreditation. The RICS discussion document re Threshold reporting [2009] puts emphasis on the focus of employability *"fit for purpose" from an employer's perspective*. The document also focuses on the need for closer engagement between business and higher education. The document refers to the terms professional development and professional practice thus stressing the point that being professional includes possessing soft transferable skills that are considered to be a necessary part of a professional's role.

Seeking to develop graduate success in gaining suitable employment is important on a professional, institutional and more importantly at a national level as clearly governmental thinking is focused on the work-related agenda; in a time of economic recession this is likely to become even more of a priority. Given this context, the Glamorgan staff involved have decided to research and address the issue of graduate employability, through an innovative curriculum initiative, focused on the notion of professionalism and the occupational specific codes of conduct.

2 Literature Review

2.1 *Professionalism*

Any discussion of professionalism and its associated values necessitates an exploration of the terms, profession, professional and professionalism.

The term 'profession' has been widely discussed in the literature (Jennings 2002, Carr 2000, Sockett 1993, Macmillan 1993 and Downie 1990, among others). There is a general consensus that professional attitudes and behaviour are a positive force.

Carr (2000) and Jennings (2002) discuss the idea that occupations traditionally classed as professions (e.g. Medicine and Law) usually have managed to acquire the major share of authority, prestige and wealth in society. Further, Sockett (1993) notes that a profession is usually regulated by an exclusive organisation that sets and controls standards of conduct, behaviour and entry requirements for its

members. Sockett suggests that one of the functions of belonging to a profession is that the conduct of its members should be regulated and the profession should be able to impose sanctions whenever a member is found to be corrupt or ineffective. One of the ways a professional body such as RICS does this is to produce a code of conduct and technical standards to which the members of that profession must conform in order to call themselves professional. The process of a regulatory body becoming the arbiter of a profession and regulating its members' conduct is the process of professionalization.

Not everyone views professionalization as a positive influence. Parkin (Haralambos and Holborn 2008) presents the counter argument that the occupational hierarchy arises from the moral judgements of those who occupy dominant positions in the class structure. Those highly placed in the class structure largely control important agencies of socialisation e.g. schools, media etc. Those in dominant positions promote elitism in order to legitimise their economic rewards through self protection thus maintaining the class structure thus inhibiting social mobility (Haralambos and Holborn 2008). Parry (Haralambos and Holborn 2008 p 48) defines professionalism as "a strategy for controlling an occupation in which colleagues set up a system of self government".

However in our modern litigious society professionalism and professional bodies are seen as necessary to ensure and maintain standards and protect the public. Appelbaum and Lawton cited in (Vee and Skitmore 2003) define a profession as "a group of people organised to serve a body of specialised knowledge in the interest of society".

Wealth, prestige and self regulation comprise three indicators that both Sockett and Carr acknowledge denote an occupation to be a profession. In addition, Carr (2000), in line with Macmillan (1993) and Downie (1990), proposes that there are five additional criteria through which an occupation can be said to be a profession.

i.   "professions provide an important public service;

ii.   they involve a theoretically as well as practically grounded expertise;

iii. they have a distinct ethical dimension which calls for expression in a code of practice;

iv.   they require organisation and regulation for purposes of recruitment and discipline; and

v.   professional practitioners require a high degree of individual autonomy – independence of judgement for effective practice."

Sockett, like Carr, highlights a critical dimension in what it means to be a professional. Both believe, that a professional needs to be able to act autonomously, and these actions must be informed by

principled and intelligent professional practice. Further, Carr suggests that there is an ethical dimension in all of the five criteria defining a profession, whether explicit or implied. It is this ethical dimension of professional practice that Carr believes is distinctive of a practitioner operating within in a profession as opposed to working in an occupation.

Thus, being a professional as defined by Sockett means having moral vision, sense, and purpose, held together with the ideal of service. The essence of understanding the term professional for Sockett is that it denotes the calibre of a person's behaviour and performance and does not describe their status. Sockett in agreement with Maister (1997) would argue that "Professional is not a label you give yourself it's a description you hope others will apply to you" (Maister 1997 p17).

Applying MacIntyre's (2007) and Welchman's (2006) insight that professional values are culturally situated and can be identified through accepted practice led the researchers to look at what was accepted as professional practice in the construction industry. The public and explicit expectations of professionals within the construction industry are iterated through the codes of conduct of the professional bodies within the construction industry such as the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB). It therefore seemed to provide a useful starting point to look at the codes of conduct, and statements of professional values and practice developed by the professional bodies CIOB & RICS.

2.2   Codes of Conduct

Professional accountability is written in the format of Codes of Conduct which are derived from a combination of the law of the land and ethics.

2.2.1   Legal Issues

All professions are affected by laws which arise as a result of International [Kyoto Protocol], European [The Waste Framework Directive], United Kingdom or Welsh Assembly Government legislation [Building Regulations].

Laws derive from ethical philosophy and are enacted to provide society a framework to live within, to protect the majority and provide a means of punishing those who do not conform.

2.2.2   Ethical issues

According to Shillito-Clark, (2010) professional codes of conduct are a set of rules or a regulatory framework. These identify baseline standards of ethical behaviour and practice and are primarily designed to safeguard the public or clients with whom the professional works. Shillito-Clark

recognises the need for such professional codes but argues that there are inherent limitations posed by them. She (also Jennings 2002 and Carr 2000) argues that a code only provides a broad framework for ethical behaviour and is unlikely to be comprehensive enough to deal with subtle ethical conflicts of interest or to be able to provide guidance on how ethical dilemmas may be prioritised and resolved. Codes of conduct may be written from several perspectives: a prohibitive approach, an aspirational approach or a mixture of both. The prohibitive approach lists those behaviours, values and consequences deemed unprofessional and which must not be contravened. The prohibitive approach can often be seen to have its roots in the consequentialist ethical tradition as there is usually a list of consequences or outcomes that are forbidden. For example, the CIOB code prohibits the taking of bribes.

The idea behind this approach is to provide guidelines for possible ethical dilemmas or situations with which the professional could be faced. The difficulty with this approach is being able to anticipate and cover every combination of situations that a professional could face. It is for this reason that codes of conduct often combine parts of both the prohibitive and the aspirational approach.

The aspirational approach cites behaviours and values to which the professional must subscribe. This does not usually provide a list of forbidden activities but rather suggests a list of desirable professional behaviours, values and virtues to which the professional is asked to subscribe. The idea behind this approach is to equip a professional with a set of internal moral attitudes, values and parameters, a moral yardstick which they will be able to use and apply to resolve any ethical dilemmas they may face.

2.2.3   Codes of conducts - professions

The CIOB code of professional conduct has a mixture of prohibitions but is mostly aspirational in approach. The code advocates that construction professionals should subscribe to the principles of Integrity, fidelity and probity, confidentiality, fair and unbiased advice, work within the limits of own competence, meet Continuing Professional Development requirements, have regard to equal opportunities and serve the public interest. The code expressly prohibits the taking of bribes.

The RICS code of professional conduct advocates that professionals must hold the principles of integrity, provide a service, maintain commitment to lifelong learning and work within the boundaries of their own competence.

Many of the areas covered by the CIOB & RICS documents correspond to the areas that (Sockett, 1993) and (Carr, 2000) identify as being indicative of professionalism, namely working within the confines of your subject and technical knowledge, providing an important public service, and being accountable to your clients.

These areas defining professionalism identified by Sockett and Carr, together with the RICS and CIOB codes of conduct were used by Glamorgan staff as a means of generating key words concerning values and professional behaviours. These key words were used to develop a questionnaire survey which assessed student opinion with regard to professionalism. The purpose of the questionnaire was to assess whether there was a gap in student knowledge regarding professionalism. In addition, these initial keywords were used to form the basis of semi-structured research interviews with three human resource professionals and graduate recruiters in the construction industry.

3   Research Methodology

3.1   Research design

The methodology used was designed to elicit attitudes and knowledge of students in regard to the concept of professionalism.

The authors wished to establish the attitudes and knowledge of students on the undergraduate built environment courses as a base line, in order to provide a course curriculum which would provide them with the knowledge and skills to enter the job market and then further develop the courses in line with the needs of employers. Focussed interviews were used with an opportunistic sample of local employers to establish their needs in relation to professionalism.

In order to establish the students' knowledge and skills, a structured tool assessing their understanding of the concepts associated with professionalism was used. This tool was derived from a number of sources. These sources had used particular terms in their definitions of professions and professionalism. This tool tested both the students' knowledge of the terms and their attitudes to professionalism.

A structured tool, relating words to concepts, was devised to reveal knowledge of aspects of professionalism thus creating a baseline of students' attitudes and knowledge. This tool incorporated nine areas which related to professionalism [refer to Appendix 1]. These common themes were

generated from many sources including (Oxford Dictionary, 2009), (Fewings, 2009), (Maister, 1997), (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008) and the RICS and CIOB codes of conduct.

A quantitative approach was felt appropriate to establish a base line of students' skills and attitudes in relation to professionalism. The method also allowed the majority of students in the population to be surveyed thus maximising the efficacy and validity of the study.

It was decided to supplement the quantitative data with three qualitative research interviews with human resource and surveying professionals in different types of construction organisation. A semi-structured funnel interview technique was used (See Appendix 2 for interview questions schedule). The interviews commenced by asking the research participant about their job role and organisational context. The idea behind these questions was twofold: to get the participant to feel comfortable doing most of the talking; and to gather information concerning their responsibilities and involvement with new graduates joining their organisation. Using a funnel interview technique necessitates that the interview starts with general very open questions on non-threatening, impersonal topics. The participant is not at this stage asked to disclose any personal information or views as a means of helping develop rapport and trust between the researcher and participant.

The codes of conduct for the construction industry (RICS and CIOB) were then used as a basis for discussion of how professionalism in the construction industry could be defined. Again, the questions were still not personal or threatening, giving a chance for rapport to develop as the discussion progressed. Here interviewer judgement was vital in assessing whether more specific questions were appropriate at this stage. If rapport and trust had developed the interview could then be made more specific. The respondent could then be asked to think of and describe examples of professional behaviour, or the lack of it, from their own experience and observations of dealing with graduates joining their organisation. The important thing here was for the participant to feel comfortable enough to trust the researcher with actual incidences and practice that may or may not show the respondent or their organisation in a positive light. The attitude of the researcher is of crucial importance at this stage, as for the rapport to deepen the participant must feel accepted and not judged by the researcher. When the attitude of the researcher is demonstrably non-judgemental and encouraging (Rogers, 1959) the researcher can follow the leads and concerns freely presented by the participant, often resulting in unexpected research data being gathered.

Finally, the interviewees were given the questionnaire administered to the undergraduates on construction courses at Glamorgan to comment upon. Their views were elicited on whether they thought graduates new to their organisation would understand or struggle with some of the terminology used in the questionnaire.

3.2   *Population.*

All students registered on the first and final year of the full time and part degree undergraduate awards in Quantity Surveying, Project Management [construction] and Real Estate and Development at the University of Glamorgan. Students on other courses and or other colleges were not included as the focus of the research did not warrant this approach.

3.2.1   Sample

Students were surveyed three months into the academic year. They were fully informed of the project's aims and objectives and were given the opportunity to opt out of the survey. The questionnaires were completed anonymously.

Table 1 Questionnaire sample

Cohort	Population	Sample	% of population
First year	108	59	54
Final year	60	43	72

The interview sample consisted of people who had direct responsibility for the employment and development of graduate recruits from a variety of universities for their particular organisation. Three qualitative research interviews were conducted with human resource and surveying professionals in different types of construction organisation. These ranged from a well known international contractor, a large housing association and a specialist construction/development company. There were two main reasons for this purposeful sample; the sample provided a range of opinion across different sectors of the construction industry and used contacts known to the researchers. According to (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007) an important factor in generating good qualitative research data is the need for trust and rapport between the interviewer and the research participant. Using contacts known to the researchers facilitates the establishment of trust within the research relationship.

3.2.2   Research Strategy

Phenomenologists criticise the positivistic approach to amassing information, especially on attitudes (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). McGrath (Amaratunga et al 2002 p 20) feels there is no ideal solution to a research strategy but "only a series of compromises". Logical positivists view the double blind randomised control trial as top of the research design hierarchy but as Yin 1994 (Amaratunga et al 2002) postulates a strategy "should be chosen as a function of the research situation". However the authors felt that a qualitative approach in future research may highlight more in-depth information in

regard to these issues and thus add to and compliment this study. This multiple approach to data collection is referred to as triangulation (McNeill and Chapman 2005).

The project involved the development and change in a practical setting, in particular the development of the new undergraduate degree curriculum. In order to increase the match between the expectations and needs of employers and students' attributes in a dynamic setting, action research was employed.

Action research is a research strategy to enable researchers and practitioners to work together to achieve an optimal outcome (McNeill and Chapman 2005). (Lewin 1946) first described this structured cyclical process to enable change to occur within a controlled environment. The process involves different methods of data collection including surveys, interviews meetings etc. These results are fed back to the stakeholders to assess the impact changes have had on their practice and if any further changes need to be made, thus refining the process until an optimum outcome has been achieved. Similarly (McNiff 2002) describes action research as "a term which refers to a practical way of looking at your own work to check that it is as you would like it to be".

Figure 1 Model of action research
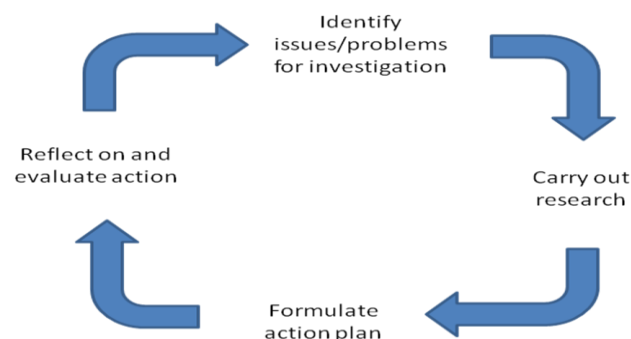
Adapted from (Anon 2008)

4   Results

4.1   Questionnaire results

4.1.1 Knowledge of concepts associated with professionalism

The raw data from the questionnaire survey is presented in Appendix 1

Overall the results show that:

- Part time [PT] students score higher in the majority of areas [6/3]
- Full time [FT] students show signs of development from first to final year
- Older students show increased knowledge/awareness in the majority of areas [8/1]. The 36+ group showed more knowledge and awareness in 8 out of the 9 areas.
- Gender – the main deficits in awareness knowledge were evident in three areas.
- Females showed little awareness knowledge of minimum standards as a concept [9%]. Males also scored low [25%] in this concept
- Females scored low [32%] in awareness knowledge of a profession promoting autonomy compared to males [52%]
- Males had poor awareness knowledge of the concept of a profession protecting its members [23%] compared to females [45%].

The results of the analysis by individual concept are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Results of analysis of individual concept

Provide a service	58% answered correctly. Data show little variation in age, gender etc
Possess body of knowledge	77% correct. This concept provided the highest score. Data show little variation in age, gender etc
Self regulation	24% correct. This concept provided the lowest score. Data show little variation in age, gender etc. However final year and part time students showed little knowledge awareness of the concept of self regulation.
Protect service users	45% correct. Data show little variation in age, gender etc
Protect members	28% correct. Majority of data showed little variation however as expected the 18-22 age category showed little knowledge awareness of a profession protecting its membership.
Promote autonomy	48% correct. Data show little variation in age, gender etc
Control membership	65% correct. Data show little variation in age, gender etc
Promote innovation	36% correct. Data show little variation in age, gender etc
Minimum standards	36% correct. Little variation except for female respondents who showed little knowledge of this concept.

A 2 tailed T test was used to establish if there was any significance in group responses i.e. part time/full time, age, gender.

No student answered all correctly for all concepts. In six out of the nine areas tested for less than 50% answered all correct, thus showing a deficit in respondents' knowledge.

4.1.2   Results of questionnaire qualitative data

Two questions were included which asked the students to reflect on:

- What does being a professional mean to you?

- Why are you studying for your award?

Content analysis was used. The results provided a variety of statements which were grouped into key words. Results are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2 Meaning of Professional
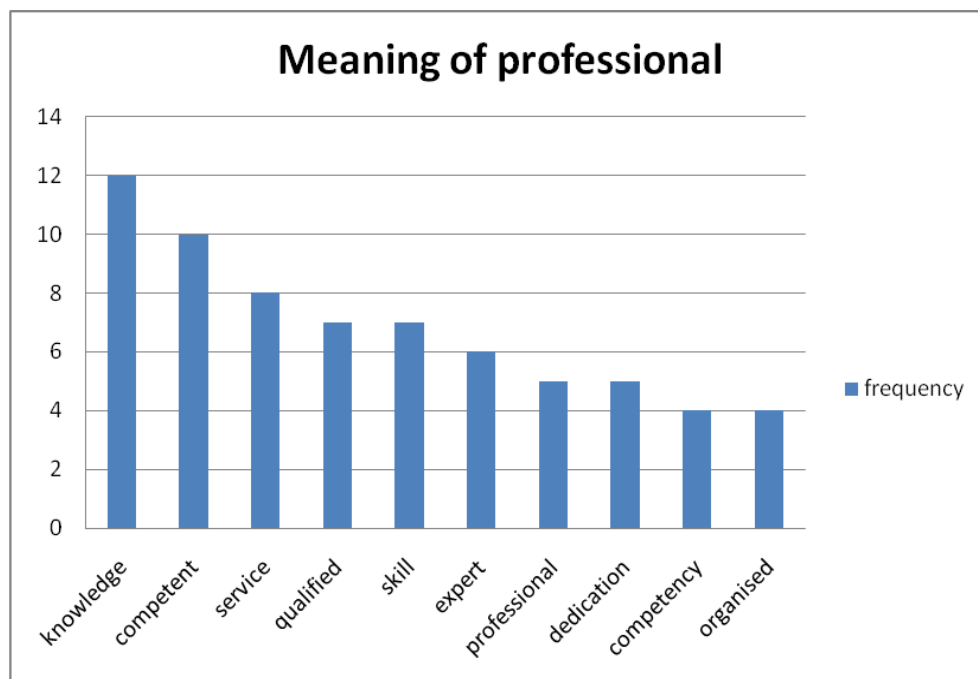
The qualitative data establishing the students' attitudes to professionalism indicates that *knowledge, skill, expertise* and *qualifications* are the most recurring themes in their expectations of professionalism with the theme of *competence* coming next.

The more transferable soft skill of being *organised* did not feature strongly. 13 students overall mentioned the concepts of *service* and *dedication* were of importance to professionalism. Of these 13 the concept was mentioned proportionally more frequently by the part time students.

Figure 3 Reasons for studying
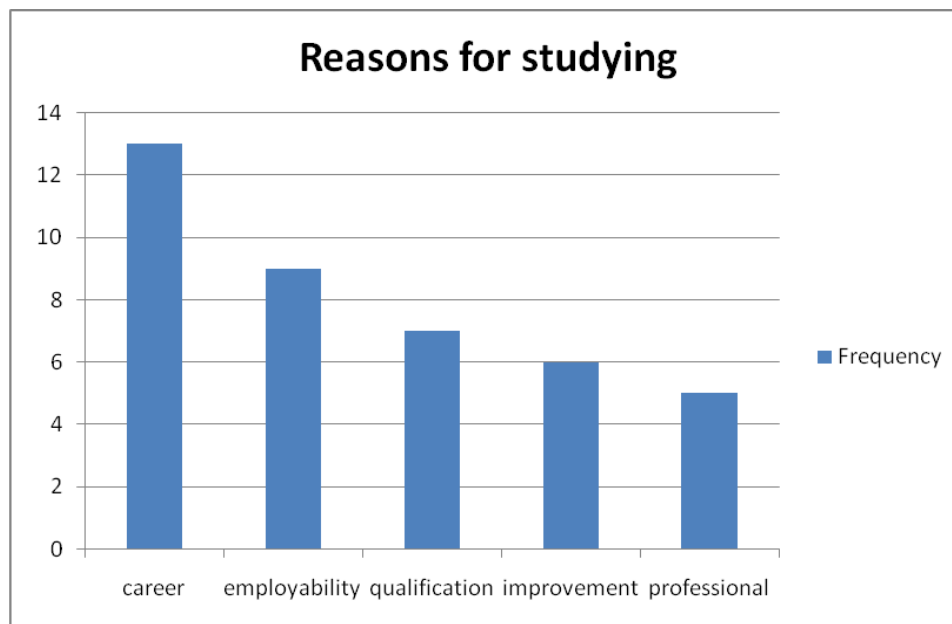
When asked their reasons for studying their chosen award 34% students [n = 35] answered in terms of their *career*, *employability*, *qualifications* and *self-improvement*. *Becoming professional* was only mentioned by 5% of respondents.

4.2   Interview results

All of the interviewees agreed that graduates straight out of University were deficient in terms of professionalism in several key areas; confidence, leadership, assertiveness and communication skills. All of them agreed that it took between two to three years for graduates new to their organisations to become autonomous and to be able to be fully functional in their job. All of the interviewees supplemented the skills of new graduates joining their organisations by either formal or informal training programmes.

One of the interviewees from the housing association sector said:

"… It takes a lot of our resources to get them up to speed and to get them to a level where they can show a little bit of initiative, things like self-management and they can work alone and come back to us for support and advice. That comes with nurturing them, so that they have that confidence with the academic experience, with the hands on experience and the experience with their coach or mentor in-house…"

The interviewee from the contractor/developer agreed that new graduates took up much resource to be brought up to speed and as a consequence had devised a two year training programme to develop and

allow their graduates to acclimatise and internalise the values of the organisation. The purpose of the programme is for the graduates to be able to learn and apply the organisations' values during their work with clients both external and internal to the company.

5   Discussion

This study establishes a base line to an ongoing action research project with its main aim of improving the employability of undergraduates on built environment awards. The results of the student questionnaire will be noted and compared with information gained from focussed interviews of local employers. These results will then be used to develop existing and future courses on an ongoing basis.

The results of the questionnaire used to establish students' knowledge of professionalism indicate that there is a general deficit across the board of respondents' knowledge of professional concepts as no student had all concepts correct.

The qualitative responses testing students' attitudes to professionalism indicate that their attitude is mainly predicated by a specialist body of knowledge/skills which promote competence and thus indicate professionalism to them.

Examination of results from qualitative data from students indicate that part time students in the study recognise the concepts of *service* and *dedication* as being more important than their full time counterparts. This may be as a result of the greater understanding and context of the work environment due to them already being in employment.

It was clear that all the organisations researched were spending a great deal of time, effort and money in trying to plug the gaps in the knowledge and professionalism of the new graduates they had recruited. This supports the supposition of the researchers at Glamorgan that more needs to be done at the university stage of a graduates' development to promote greater understanding of professionalism.

The gaps in a student's professionalism that the interviewees identified were: confidence due to their lack of practical hands-on experience, lack of ability to innovate or be creative, lack of leadership and assertiveness, insufficient IT and literacy skills (e.g. report writing) and not being able to manage relationships inside and outside of the organisation. Further, all agreed that understanding and having integrity was crucial, and for two of the organisations researched the concept of partnering was one that was vital for new graduates to understand.

For two of the interviewees the RICS and CIOB definitions of professionalism were not considered important as their organisations had their own set of values which were used to govern the behaviour of all members of staff in their organisations. For these two organisations the concepts of integrity, partnering and collaboration and protecting the environment were key aspects that their staff needed to observe. For the other interviewee the RICS code of conduct was seen as an essential guide for the professionalism of his staff, although the organisation did also have its own set of values within which staff were required to work.

One of the interviewees took issue with the RICS list of graduate skills deemed necessary for employability within the RICS threshold document. This HR manager thought the RICS skills needed to be explained more fully and proceeded to give examples of how they would interpret these skills within their organisation.

For instance Self-Management was seen to include good organisational skills, being prepared and having good planning skills. Teamwork was seen to include partnership working and working collaboratively, while Thinking and Problem Solving was seen to include using your own initiative, being able to think on your feet and having a logical and methodical way of working.

All three interviewees agreed that collaboration was a key concept that graduates needed to understand in the context of the organization in which they worked. For two of the interviewees collaboration was centred on the idea of partnering with their clients whilst for the other participant collaboration was about customer care.

6   Conclusions and recommendations

In summary this collaborative work formed part of an interfaculty study into professionalism and its importance to employers when recruiting graduates.

Students completed questionnaires to elicit their knowledge and attitudes of professionalism and qualitative interviews were conducted with employers to establish their perceptions of professionalism.

This formed the base line to Action Research to enable teaching professionals to adapt ongoing and new courses in line with employability strategies expounded by Government, academic and professional bodies.

The results of the questionnaire indicate a deficit in student knowledge of professional concepts although many mentioned recognised attributes of professionals when asked what the term professional meant to them.

All the interviewees agreed that:

- graduates straight from university lacked many skills and qualities that were vital for professionalism

- it took two to three years for graduates to become autonomous professionals

- the skills and qualities most often lacking were: confidence, leadership, assertiveness, communication, integrity, enthusiasm, and drive

- new graduates would probably struggle with understanding several terms contained within the Glamorgan questionnaire which may be due to a lack a context within which they could picture and understand these terms.

One of the interviewees found the RICS and CIOB definitions of professional behaviour useful whilst another thought the skills and qualities in the RICS Threshold document needed to be explained in more detail.

One of the respondents suggested initiatives that universities could implement in order to better prepare graduates for the world of work by encouraging students to:

- participate in volunteering in community projects

- become mentors to disadvantaged younger people.

- find a role model to emulate

- take part in work shadowing

- participating in a small live project

- practising presentations

The employer concerned believed that such initiatives would improve the confidence of new graduates, enable them to put theory into practice more easily, improve their knowledge of what really goes on in the construction industry and consequently make the journey to professionalism more quickly.

From this first stage of the action research it is evident that that to increase employability there is a need to incorporate the guidance in the RICS (2009) Threshold Consultation document which states "it is essential that graduates are prepared for employment and are 'fit for purpose' from an employers' perspective".

6.1 Recommendations

Maintain the proposed action research cycle to adapt course content to:

1. integrate transferable skills into new courses in line with professional bodies express wishes (RICS 2009)

2. reflect the current and ongoing needs of employers via professional forums

3. incorporate more case studies to help students reflect on the principles and practice of professionalism.

Appendix 1 Results of questionnaire responses to meaning of concepts

	all correct	incorrect	male	female	18-22	23-35	36+	first yr	final yr	FT	PT
provide a service	58	42	58	59	49	63	83	54	61	56	65
possess body of knowledge	77	23	74	86	79	75	58	75	80	79	69
self regulation	24	76	25	23	33	18	25	32	16	30	8
protect service users	45	55	47	36	41	45	50	40	52	43	50
protect members	28	72	23	45	10	35	50	25	35	25	38
promote autonomy	48	52	52	32	51	41	62	46	50	53	31
control membership	65	35	65	64	54	71	77	58	75	62	73
promote innovation	36	64	36	36	28	41	39	39	32	32	46
minimum standards	36	64	25	9	18	20	39	26	16	19	27
all correct	0	100									

% of those that answered correctly

Appendix 2 Copy of the questionnaire

The Transition to Professionalism

We are trying to improve your chances of employment after gaining your qualification from the University. To assist with this we may need to adapt the course to provide you with the appropriate skills to make the transition to being a professional.

Please complete the following questions in relation to your background and the studies you are currently undertaking by placing an X in the appropriate box.

Your replies will be completely confidential.

Your Gender

     Male ❑   Female   ❑

Your Age

     18-22 ❑   23 – 35 ❑   36 – 50 ❑   51+ ❑

The award you are studying

     HNC ❑   Foundation degree ❑   Honours degree ❑

Year of your studies

     1 ❑   2 ❑   3 ❑   4 ❑

Your mode of study

     Full time ❑   Part time ❑

The following nine statements are seen to be components of being a professional. For each statement please ring the 3 words/phrases you feel best represent the aspect of professionalism being described.

Provide a service to users/ clients

subservient	Beneficial act	Repair	Obligation	Dedication

Possess a specific body of knowledge and skills

Expert	know all	excessive	excellent	competent

Self regulation

Intelligence	disciplinary measures	dominance	responsibility	educational standards

Protect service users

Accountability	confidentiality	De-regulation	code of conduct	organisation

Protect their members

collusion	best practice	indemnify	collaboration	withhold information

Promote autonomy of its members

Automated	self governing	wealthy	self determination	independent practice

Control membership of the institution

professional qualifications	dominant	Continuing Professional Development	segregation	shared values

Promote innovation

Visionary	implementation	critical analysis	administer	flexibility

Provide a minimum standard of behaviour

impartiality	enthusiasm	code of conduct	determination	ethical behaviour

In your own words what does being a professional mean to you?

_____

_____

_____

Briefly indicate the main reason(s) why you are studying for your award

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for participating in this research

Appendix 3 Interview Questions

1. What is your name and job title?

2. What organisation do you work for?
   - How long have you worked here?
   - Have you worked anywhere in a similar role?

3. Tell me a little about your background and training?
   - What qualifications or experience did you need in order to obtain your current post?

4. Tell me about your job role?
   - Do you deal with new employees who join you straight from University?
   - Are there any common problems that these new employees encounter when making the transition into work?

5. I have used the RICS and CIOB codes of conduct as a starting point for my exploration of professionalism – do you use these documents at all in your work/
   - Do you use these documents with new graduate entrants to your organisation? If so, please can you explain how you use these documents?

6. Are there any initiatives or training offered by your organisation that foster or encourage professionalism?

7. The RICS and CIOB do not provide a definition of professionalism, but suggest that there are several qualities/attributes that a professional should have – E.G. integrity, fidelity etc. What do you think of this approach, is it helpful?
   - Would you find it helpful for RICS and CIOB to provide a more full definition of professionalism?

8. In your opinion, what characteristics, qualities and attributes are essential for professionalism in the Construction industry?

9. Can you give some examples from your work where the qualities you have identified have been used?

10. The RICS threshold document suggests there are seven key competencies for graduates which will ensure their employability and professionalism:
(Self-Management, Team Work, Business and customer awareness, Thinking and problem-solving, Communication and Literacy, Numeracy and IT.)

-Would you agree with these areas?

 -Would you add any qualities/attributes/areas that graduates also need to this list?

11. The RICS code of conduct lists four areas: Integrity, Competence, Ideal of service and Life-Long learning. Do you agree with these areas?
    - What does integrity mean in the context of construction work?
    - How do you understand the concept of having an ideal of service within the construction industry?

12. Using the questionnaire we have used to survey our graduates please would you comment on whether you think the new graduates to your organisation would understand any of the terms and words used?

M.Hall – University of Glamorgan March 2010

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