

## FACT READING

### Definition:

A profession is something a little more than a job, it is a career for someone that wants to be part of society, who becomes competent in their chosen sector through training; maintains their skills through continuing professional development (CPD); and commits to behaving ethically, to protect the interests of the public.

### Why you need a profession....if you want...

- an occupation which will help you to build your skills and develop your expertise in a field which interests you;
- to keep learning, be challenged and stay up to date with the latest developments in your chosen area;
- to solve problems, do good work, and be involved in making decisions which help to improve people's lives.
- to earn more money. Professionalism pays: people with professional body membership will earn more than those without.

Professional bodies are organizations whose members are individual professionals. In some professions it is compulsory to be a member of the professional body, in others it is not. This usually depends on whether or not the profession requires the professional to have a 'licence to practice', or to be on a professional register, in order to do their job. This is related to how the profession is regulated i.e. who is responsible for making sure that professionals are doing their jobs properly.

The professional body may have a number of functions. They may:

- Set and assess professional examinations
- Provide support for Continuing Professional Development through learning opportunities and tools for recording and planning
- Publish professional journals or magazines
- Provide networks for professionals to meet and discuss their field of expertise
- Issue a Code of Conduct to guide professional behaviour
- Deal with complaints against professionals and implement disciplinary procedures
- Be enabling fairer access to the professions, so that people from all backgrounds can become professionals. Find out more at our Fair Access section.
- Provide careers support and opportunities for students, graduates and people already working.

Not all professional bodies have regulatory functions. In some professions it is necessary to be registered with the regulator but not the professional body, who may

provide a set of services to their professional members without regulating them (an example of this is the Nursing and Midwifery Council which is the regulator, and the Royal College of Nursing or of Midwifery which are the professional bodies for that sector).

Most professional bodies offer a way to climb up the membership ladder towards being a 'Fellow' or in some cases a 'Chartered' professional.

### **What is a regulatory body?**

**A regulatory body is like a professional body but it is not a membership organisation and its primary activity is to protect the public. Unlike professional bodies, it is established on the basis of legal mandate.**

Regulatory bodies exercise a regulatory function, that is: imposing requirements, restrictions and conditions, setting standards in relation to any activity, and securing compliance, or enforcement.

Not all professions are regulated. Some professions are self-regulating in that the same body both represents and regulates the profession. However, within these professional bodies there is a clear separation between the two functions. For those that are regulated there is a restriction on your right to practice based on evidence of your qualification. With unregulated professions there is no restriction on your right to practice. This does not mean you are not qualified, just that you do not need to be registered with a regulatory body in order to do your job.

Individuals practicing a regulated profession need to be able to show evidence of registration with the appropriate regulatory body. Those in unregulated professions demonstrate their competence through evidence of experience or regulated education and training. Recognition is also given to those holding a 'protected title' in an unregulated profession; you need to demonstrate the right to use such a title.

## **THE FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROFESSION:**

### **1. Great responsibility**

Professionals deal in matters of vital importance to their clients and are therefore entrusted with grave responsibilities and obligations. Given these inherent obligations, professional work typically involves circumstances where carelessness, inadequate skill, or breach of ethics would be significantly damaging to the client and/or his fortunes.

### **2. Accountability**

Professionals hold themselves ultimately accountable for the quality of their work with the client. The profession may or may not have mechanisms in place

to reinforce and ensure adherence to this principle among its members. If not, the individual professional will (e.g. guarantees and/or contractual provisions).

**3. Based on specialized, theoretical knowledge**

Professionals render specialized services based on theory, knowledge, and skills that are most often peculiar to their profession and generally beyond the understanding and/or capability of those outside of the profession. Sometimes, this specialization will extend to access to the tools and technologies used in the profession (e.g. food production or service equipment).

**4. Institutional preparation**

Professions typically require a significant period of hands-on, practical experience in the protected company of senior members before aspirants are recognized as professionals. After this provisional period, ongoing education toward professional development is compulsory. A profession may or may not require formal credentials and/or other standards for admission.

**5. Autonomy**

Professionals have control over and, correspondingly, ultimate responsibility for their own work. Professionals tend to define the terms, processes, and conditions of work to be performed for clients (either directly or as preconditions for their ongoing agency employment).

**6. Clients rather than customers**

Members of a profession exercise discrimination in choosing clients rather than simply accepting any interested party as a customer (as merchants do).

**7. Direct working relationships**

Professionals habitually work directly with their clients rather than through intermediaries or proxies.

**8. Ethical constraints**

Due to the other characteristics on this list, there is a clear requirement for ethical constraints in the professions. Professionals are bound to a code of conduct or ethics specific to the distinct profession (and sometimes the individual). Professionals also aspire toward a general body of core values, which are centered upon an uncompromising and unconflicted regard for the client's benefit and best interests.

**9. Merit-based**

In a profession, members achieve employment and success based on merit and corresponding voluntary relationships rather than on corrupted ideals such as social principle, mandated support, or extortion (e.g. union members are not professionals). Therefore, a professional is one who must attract clients and profits due to the merits of his work. In the absence of this characteristic, issues of responsibility, accountability, and ethical constraints become irrelevant, negating any otherwise-professional characteristics.

## 10. Capitalist morality

The responsibilities inherent to the practice of a profession are impossible to rationally maintain without a moral foundation that flows from a recognition of the singular right of the individual to his own life, along with all of its inherent and potential sovereign value; a concept that only capitalism recognizes, upholds and protects.

It is our sincere hope that you found these documented facts useful and that you will contribute to the development of your profession in a more vibrant way.

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