



Accreditation - A fixed point in a changing world

by Nick Hawkins CMF

I came into the Career Services profession in 1985 after some 25 years in production and technical positions in manufacturing industry - a very major change of direction indeed.

Back then, the company I joined, and so far as I could see most other career services businesses too, had the majority of its business in outplacement; quite simply helping redundant executives make the right next career move. It seemed to me then, and it still does now, that the essence of what career services professionals do is to help individuals to make the best of their careers, and indeed the best of their lives, at whatever stage they may be. Who can say whether it is more important to help a university student pick the right starting point for their career - after all a mistake at this stage can be rectified - or to help a 55 year old figure out the most efficacious route into active and fulfilling retirement over a five to ten year period.

What seemed to me to be strange, after a couple of years in this critically important profession, was that there was no universally accepted qualification or accreditation system, in the way that doctors, lawyers and even accountants have such systems. Happily I had personally been well trained by the owner of the company I joined, but that did not lead to any formal qualification. I started attending conferences, and was delighted to be in at the birth in 1989 in Chicago of the organisation which subsequently became the Association of Career Professionals International; but, still the holy grail of a recognised qualification eluded me.

Ten years on from 1985 and the profession was beginning to change. Coaching was starting to become important, perhaps partly because executives were tending to be promoted younger and younger, and therefore by definition were less experienced, and a growing number of career professionals were opting for independent practitioner status, rather than salaried employment with a major firm.

In the midst of all this, in 1994, an organisation came into being to provide internationally recognised accreditation of exactly the type I was searching for. This institute, after a couple of name changes, is now known as The Institute for Career Certification International and it confers accreditation at two principal levels, Career Management Practitioner (CMP) and Career management Fellow (CMF) by portfolio assessment methods which by now have stood the test of time. I have to say that the high point of my own professional career was becoming the first person in the UK to be

formally accredited as a CMF, and I am proud to have been an ICC International Governor since 2001.

The situation today, as I personally move into active retirement, on the surface is very different. Coaching has become a very major part of careers work. Outplacement has almost become a commodity with many individuals having now experienced outplacement and therefore not needing as much help as hitherto, organisational consulting has grown dramatically, and the trend for professionals to opt for self-employment has accelerated still further.

Two fixed points remain. One is that it is still the case that ***our profession, in all its manifestations, is there primarily to help individuals to make the best of their lives.*** It must surely be true that the users of career services and those who pay for them would prefer that the professionals involved are properly qualified and accredited. The second fixed point is that ICC International accreditation remains a genuinely independent, international, peer-reviewed accreditation body, relevant to all practitioners in this crucially important profession in an ever more rapidly changing world of work. We owe it to ourselves, and even more to the individuals we strive to help, to achieve just this type of accreditation.