Professional standards, competence and capability

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Abstract

Standards and frameworks concerned with competence – broadly, the ability to do – are increasingly being used in professions, generally though not exclusively associated with the function of signing practitioners off as fit to practise. Current trends are towards a predominantly functional or activity-based, rather than skills or attributes-based, model of competence. There are however limitations to how well a purely competence-based approach of either type can capture the ability to cope with the changing contexts, evolving practice and ethical demands of professional work. The less tangible notion of capability offers some pointers for improving frameworks so that they better reflect the needs of professions, and evidence of a capability-based approach can be discerned in recently-developed sets of professional standards. These frameworks provide a more resilient approach to describing the essentials of what professionals do, as well as representing core attributes of professionalism in a way that is fully integrated with practice.

Key words

Professions; professional standards; competence; competency; capability.

Introduction

In the United Kingdom, 'professions' can be broadly identified as occupations that are at least nominally self-governing, require a level of knowledge at or above that represented by a higher education diploma, and have traditions of autonomy, ethics and independent judgement (cf Hoyle and John 1995). In return for the advantages of being a profession there is an assumption that professionals are adequately proficient, and that they exercise this proficiency in a fair and ethical manner (Marquand 1997). Professional governing bodies are therefore concerned among other things with the conditions for signing off members as fit to practise, and with maintaining a minimum standard of ongoing competence. The former function has traditionally been fulfilled by stipulated education and training routes, with a more recent trend towards defining the requirements for practice rather than insisting on specific routes for achieving them (Lester 2009). In turn this has begun to focus professions on what it is that practitioners need to be able to do at the point of sign-off, and therefore on what is variably and often imprecisely termed competence, competency, proficiency, or capability.

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In the UK the idea of competence as used in occupationally-related education, training and assessment is strongly (though not exclusively) influenced by the 'competence movement' of the 1980s and 1990s. This drive towards orienting vocational education and training towards the requirements of the workplace has its origins in government debates in the 1970s, and it was given impetus by the New Training Initiative (Manpower Services Commission 1981) which among other things sought to link occupational entry to 'standards' rather than to prescribed training programmes. Large-scale development of occupational competence standards and the associated National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) took place following the De Ville review of vocational qualifications (Manpower Services Commission 1986), focusing initially on semi-skilled, trade and basic administrative occupations. A summary of the main principles involved is provided by Mitchell and Mansfield (1996), and discussions from a policy perspective by Raggatt and Williams (1999) and Keep (2008) among others. Partly influenced by the extension of these principles into higher-level occupations, though generally diverging in terms of detailed approach, many professions have developed some form of competence framework that specifies (typically) the minimum standard of practice necessary at the point of sign-off. The continuing push for professional accountability and recent drives towards a wider range of routes into professional careers (including the extension of publicly-supported apprenticeships to professional level) both suggest that this will remain an ongoing trend, with potentially some pressure for professional and occupational competence standards to become more closely aligned. However, in attempting to capture the complex work typical of modern professions, limitations are apparent in the idea of competence or competency as normally constructed, and the more innovative examples take an approach which is suggestive of the less easily defined idea of capability.

The remainder of this paper discusses these uses and limitations in more depth drawing on my previous research into professional entry-routes and qualifying requirements: a 2007 study of entry-routes and requirements (Lester 2008, 2009a), a study of higher-level designations such as fellowships (Lester 2009b), and a 2012 study of professions' use of competence standards (Lester 2013). The evidence-base from these studies comprises 54 professions, consisting of ten in accounting and financial services, nine in law, business and management, ten in health and social services, eight in education, information and guidance, eight in science and engineering, six in the built environment sector, and three in culture and leisure.

The notion of competence

Competence is broadly concerned with what a person is able to do: Eraut and du Boulay (2000), capturing common usage in the UK, describe it as "the ability to perform … tasks and roles … to the expected standard" while the International Standards Organisation (2012) defines it as "ability to apply knowledge and skills to achieve intended results". Competence can also refer to the remit of a person or organisation, particularly in a legal context (as in 'a competent adult' or 'the competent authority'), although this usage is of marginal relevance here. The way in which 'able to do' is conceptualised differs between different traditions, with varying levels of emphasis between the skills and attributes of the individual and the quality of output of the task, and between prescription and interpretation. The following summarises the major traditions (and see table 1).

Drawing on Mansfield (1989) and Eraut (1998), a major distinction can be made between models of competence that concern the attributes and abilities of individuals, and those that focus on the

activities or functions that need to be performed competently. In a previous paper (Lester 2013) I summarised these as individual, internal or attribute-based, versus social, external or activity-based. In the internal version, competence "can be regarded as belonging to the person, and represented as a profile or set of attributes that tends to change over time as the person develops in one area and loses currency in another" (p2). The external perspective considers "what it is that the person does to produce a result that can be considered to be competent, whether in a study context, social situation, or more commonly at work. Competence in this sense belongs to the context, describing competent actions (sometimes termed 'competences' as opposed to 'competencies') rather than the skills or attributes that contribute to being able to carry them out" (*ibid*).

Table 1. *Approaches to competence*

Approach	Primary source(s)	Development methodologies	Format	Examples from professions
Internal, individual, attribute-based ('competency')				
Technocratic		Derived from knowledge-base or course syllabus	Tasks expressed as application of knowledge	Accountancy, partly present in surveying
Instructional design	Draws on Bloom *et al* taxonomy	Job analysis, learning needs analysis	Table of knowledge, skills and (often) attitudes associated with the job	Careers guidance
Behavioural	McBer organisation and associated authors e.g. McClelland, Spencer and Spencer, Klemp	Behavioural event interviewing, critical incident analysis, repertory grid technique	Behaviours, approaches and dispositions associated with effective job performance	Supplementary aspects of some frameworks e.g. personnel and development, civil engineering, project management.
External, social, activity-based ('competence')				
Task-based	Early MSC/Training Agency models	Task analysis	Descriptions of tasks and their component parts	Limited, some clinical procedures.
Role-based	Mansfield-Mathews Job Competence Model and subsequent developments	Functional analysis	Descriptions of job functions and detailed activities within them	Occupational safety and health, facilities management, most occupational standards.
		Job analysis, analysis of roles across profession	Descriptions of broad functions and key activities within them	Engineering, environment, heritage conservation, landscape architecture.

Within these basic approaches more specific traditions can be identified, all of which have influenced professional standards frameworks (see table 1). The internal perspective includes two major traditions, one stemming from work done on effective behaviours principally in North America from the 1950s onwards, and the other more loosely from the instructional design tradition drawing on the educational objectives work of Bloom *et al* (1956). The North American behavioural competency approach is most notably represented by the work of the (Hay-)McBer organisation (Hay-McBer 1996), associated authors such as Klemp (1977), Spencer and Spencer (1993) and McClelland (1998), and others working in a similar tradition (see Raven and Stephenson 2001). It is largely based on identifying effective or 'superior' job performers across the relevant context and using suitable methodologies – commonly behavioural event interviewing, but also critical incident analysis and repertory grid technique – to identify characteristics associated with competent performance. Typically although not exclusively these tend to be approaches and dispositions rather than discrete

skills and areas of knowledge. Attempts were made particularly in the 1980s and 1990s to produce systematic lists of competencies for some occupational areas in the United States, but outside North America the approach has been most successful in informing organisational competency frameworks.

The instructional design tradition is principally concerned with identifying curricula for training programmes, principally in the form of knowledge, skills and (sometimes) associated attitudes. This approach moves beyond the primarily knowledge-based syllabus that dominates technocratic models of professional development (cf Schön 1983), and has lent itself particularly well to the so-called 'learning outcomes' approach to education and training – i.e. placing the emphasis on what learners know and can do at the point of exit, rather than the content of teaching inputs – that gathered momentum from the 1990s onwards (Jessup 1991, Otter 1994). No particular methodologies or techniques are specifically associated with this approach although it tends to make use of job analysis and learning needs analysis; it is typically represented in the form of a table with knowledge, skills and attitudes arranged against activity headings. While the instructional design approach is fairly widely used in UK and to an extent European education and training, there has been little attempt to develop it systematically across occupations in the same way as the US competency approach or the functional model described below.

Different versions of the external tradition are also apparent. The external version of competence in the UK was initially given impetus by the search to make qualifications for trainees on government programmes more informed by the needs of the workplace, later developing into the fully-fledged 'competence movement' referred to previously. The original approach used in the early 1980s was based on task analysis, breaking jobs down into component activities that could be taught, practised and later 'reassembled' in the workplace. The limitations of this for other than the most basic or procedural types of work were soon realised, and an alternative was developed: functional analysis, based on a more holistic conception of work roles (Mansfield and Mathews 1985, Mitchell and Mansfield 1996). The basic process of functional analysis is to start from the overall purpose of a work role and break it down deductively until manageable descriptions of activities are reached (Fennell 1990); initially this tended to be done in a mechanistic way that produced inflexible descriptions barely suited to roles with any degree of discretion. More recently the use of functional analysis has become more sophisticated and flexible, and alternative approaches to producing activity-based descriptions of competence have emerged that are based on research into what practitioners actually do (and which produce acceptably usable results). The main impact of the external competence tradition has been in UK vocational education and training, with a large proportion of occupational roles now having relevant competence standards; these formed the basis for NVQs and still underpin the majority of UK occupational qualifications.

Limits to competence

It is perhaps relevant that the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) and successor Training Agency, the bodies initially responsible for taking forward the UK 'competence movement,' quickly rejected internal models of competence, focussing first on task-based and later functional approaches and apparently ignoring the large body of research that had already taken place in the instructional design and behavioural competency traditions. Although this was interpreted by some as a case of 'not invented here', particularly in the light of the poor quality of many of the early occupational standards frameworks, there are some major issues with internal approaches which limit their

suitability both for the uses envisaged by the MSC and its successors and for the purpose of professional licensing or sign-off. Internal models of competence have largely arisen from an education, training or organisational development perspective, with an emphasis on finding out and specifying the most appropriate 'content' – knowledge, skills and/or desired dispositions – for developing effectiveness in occupational or organisational roles. When the emphasis is changed to assessing the ability to act effectively when already in a work role, simply having a set of identifiable attributes (however relevant) is not a guarantee of the ability to deploy them to produce effective results; other factors that are less easily assessed as discrete attributes, such as effective judgement and well-developed knowledge-in-use, come into play. Internal approaches therefore are highly relevant to development, but are less suited to assessment of practice.

A second issue with both the behavioural approach to competence and the use of attitudes in the instructional design model is that the connection between the attributes in the competency model and the reality of competent action can be, if not tenuous, at least unidirectional. To provide an example, a study of particularly effective insurance claims assessors will identify characteristics which correlate with successful performance, but it may also capture characteristics that are a strong feature of the population being studied while not actually being needed to do the job well. Similarly the study will miss characteristics that could equally contribute to effectiveness but happen not to be strongly present in the sample population. This is a particular issue when competency frameworks are based on a small sample, a single point in time, or are confined to a particular type of organisational or national culture. The result can be a focus on moulding or selecting a given type of person rather than on looking more directly at what the person is able to do, with all the consequences for embedding prejudice and undermining requisite variety. While this should not rule out using carefully-constructed attribute-based models for development purposes, it can become particularly invidious if unjustified behavioural or attitudinal characteristics become used for assessment.

Given the above, the current dominance of external approaches to competence, both in occupational standards and more recently in professions (in my 2012 study 35 out of 40 professions used a predominantly external approach), is unsurprising. Because external approaches are concerned with what the person actually does rather than with the characteristics or attributes that help him or her to do it, they are more directly suited to assessment (while admittedly from a developmental perspective leaving the process of becoming competent as something of a black box). Nevertheless external approaches also have limitations; the problems of standards based on functional analysis in particular are well-documented, with a large body of critique emerging in the 1990s (e.g. Elliott 1991, Hyland 1994, Hodkinson 1995). Allowing that some recent external competence frameworks have overcome much of the narrowness of early occupational standards, there are still issues with firstly the extent to which they assume that what practitioners need to be able to do can always be known in advance, and secondly how characteristics – such as ethical competence, sound judgement and wider aspects of professionalism – can be conveyed in a way that ensures they are embedded across practice.

The first point about predictability is an issue for functional descriptions of competence particularly if they go into large amounts of detail. While closely-defined *occupational roles*, even those with moderate levels of complexity and discretion, may lend themselves to fairly detailed functional descriptions, within *professions* it is more common for practitioners to potentially cover a range of roles and develop their careers in various directions; adopting a functional approach is likely to result in complex core-and-options frameworks that need frequent updating, that practitioners may need to

revisit at different stages of their careers, and that are likely to be contested from within the profession. The second point, about generic or across-the-board themes such as ethical practice and intelligent judgement, is something that competence models have struggled to express effectively without excessive repetition or making them appear as discrete rather than pervasive attributes (e.g. Steadman *et al* 1994).

A fairly common response to the limitations of any particular competence model has been to adopt some form of hybrid. UK occupational standards, while being principally functional descriptions, have also often included lists of relevant knowledge. Similarly for some European applications a tabular competence framework is sometimes used that (drawing on the structure of the European Qualifications Framework) includes knowledge, skills and what is generally called competence but is often more a description of the level of autonomy and responsibility expected of the practitioner. A less common variant is to combine a functional framework with key behaviours, as was done notably (and not without controversy) in the early occupational standards for management (Management Charter Initiative 1992). The success of these hybrids has been variable; some have been used reasonably successfully to underpin development programmes as well as assessment, but others are either highly muddled (for example confusing process knowledge, skills, and activities) or have been used inappropriately (for instance requiring experienced practitioners to give expositions of propositional knowledge instead of appraising their knowledge-in-use). On balance however it is apparent that the idea of competence is being stretched to the limit in the context of professional occupations, and a certain amount of reconceptualisation is needed.

What professions look for

The studies previously referred to, as well as other research studies and development projects relating to professional competence (e.g. Eraut and Cole 1993 and Winter and Maisch 1996), indicate that the primary use of competence frameworks or standards in professions is for assessment, typically at the point of licensing or admission to the qualified level of membership, but also sometimes for award of subsequent designations such as fellowships. Secondary uses include guiding the content of courses; as a framework for ongoing development; and as a set of minimum standards for practice in general. Arguably the standard for practice is replacing the body of knowledge as the profession's defining text, particularly given the concerns with accountability previously mentioned and the gradual trend to move from focusing on defined routes to qualified level to emphasising the criteria that need to be met (Lester 2008). My later study (Lester 2013) indicated that where competence frameworks are used in fairly closed, well-understood contexts (for instance all entrants are relevant graduates or attend a conversion course, take the profession's own course, and follow a defined training route) they do not need to be particularly sophisticated; but where a variety of routes are possible, entrants can come from a range of different backgrounds, and in particular direct access to assessment is offered, the quality of the framework is critical.

This latter study indicated that in general, most professions' standards or frameworks look for some sort of activity-based competence – effectively, is the person able to do the job? – as well as a certain amount of generic professionalism, some of which can be expressed in activity-based terms (e.g. managing own work and development) and some of which is embedded across practice (e.g. professional judgement, ethical decision-making, effective communication). All but one of the external-type frameworks included in the study (and all of those used for assessment) included at

least some generic aspects; these comprised on average 41% of the content of each framework. This suggests that on balance professions place a strong emphasis on generic aspects of professionalism at the point of sign-off, in addition to confirming ability to do the work of the profession. There is also evidence in these descriptions that many professions are looking for what might be termed 'Model B' characteristics (Lester 1995), i.e. the ability to interpret situations, be reflective, be creative, use established norms as reference-points but go beyond them where appropriate, and act with intelligence and ethical literacy (Lunt 2008), as well as the more technical 'Model A' abilities relating to professional expertise and problem-solving. Among the professions that were particularly strong on generic aspects of professionalism, some commented that at the point of sign-off they are at least as concerned with abilities such as making sound judgements, recognising and resolving ethical dilemmas, and recognising and coping with complexity, as with the technical aspects of the profession.

While some professions have tried to express these needs through a hybrid-type competence framework or even through purely activity-based standards, the best interpretations go beyond this and while usually maintaining an activity-based approach to profession-specific activities, they take a more transcendent approach to the generic aspects which sees (and assesses) them as pervading the functional aspects of practice. The kinds of frameworks that are emerging as a result can be seen to have as much in common with the idea of capability as that of competence.

The idea of capability

Capability, like competence, is concerned with being able to do, but if competence is reasonably easy to define and possible if slightly less straightforward to assess, capability is less directly amenable to either: there is a sense in which it is only apparent "in its reflection" (Brown and McCartney 1999), i.e. it has a know-it-when-you-see-it property that cannot easily be translated into standards and specifications. Capability has variously been described as about having the potential to become competent, as being similar to competence but less normative or prescriptive, as being virtually synonymous with a broad version of (internal) competency, and as encompassing competence but going beyond it in a number of ways. This last is akin to the view adopted in the UK Higher Education for Capability movement (HEC) in the 1990s, itself born out of a Royal Society for the Arts (RSA) initiative that sought to expand education from a perceived narrowly academic focus to place more emphasis on doing, creating, making, entrepreneurship and active participation (RSA 1980, 1991).

HEC's main concern was with higher education in general, in particular to raise the profile of skills development, active learning and personal responsibility in higher education (e.g. Stephenson 1992). Its substantial output (see www.heacademy.ac.uk/heca/) indicates a fairly eclectic approach, but a more coherent picture of professional capability emerges through some of the key texts produced towards the end of the organisation's lifespan as it came to focus on, among other things, the idea of capability as applied to professional development. Stephenson (1998) describes capability as being about intelligent judgement, ethical practice and self-efficacy as well as competence; a high level of capability does not necessarily mean being comprehensively competent, but it does imply being able to know what level of competence is needed and to exercise it wisely. In their discussion of the 'capable practitioner' O'Reilly *et al* (1999) include the ability to go beyond what would normally be considered competent into excellence, creativity or wisdom and to be able to exercise constructively sceptical judgement about the 'right' or 'best' ways of doing things. Lester and Chapman (2000)

comment that while competence "is typically concerned with fitness for purpose (or getting the job right), capability infers concern also with fitness *of* purpose (or making judgements about the right job to do)" (p2), again suggesting a conceptually higher level of operation than that typically captured in most notions of competence. Nevertheless, in all these accounts the capable practitioner is also expected to be functionally competent, while also being aware of the limits of his or her competence – and potentially how to overcome them – in any given situation.

An advantage of the capability approach is that it is generally perceived as an open model, supporting continuous development: there is a spectrum of capability as opposed to either a threshold of 'capable or not yet capable' or a neat scale of progressively increasing capability. The corresponding disadvantage is that this creates a problem for assessment: capability as described above represents a different way of looking at 'ability to do' compared with the various models of competence or competency discussed earlier. Nevertheless there do appear to be ways that a capability approach can be incorporated into professional standards frameworks without undermining their assessability.

Towards a capability-informed professional framework

While it is probably correct to say that no current professional standards framework can be described as fully informed by a capability approach, several professions in my 2012 study had frameworks reflecting at least some of the principles discussed above. These include the Institute of Conservation (Icon) professional standards (Icon 2007); the Landscape Institute (LI) elements and areas of practice (LI 2011); to an extent the generic standards for Chartered Engineer (CEng, Engineering Council 2011) and Chartered Environmentalist (CEnv, Society for the Environment 2007); and again to a certain extent the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's (CIPD's) profession map (CIPD 2012). In some other professions, particularly in the integrated academic and practice pathways common in the health sector, a capability-based approach is in evidence in the way entrants are prepared for practice, though less so in the professional standards used for sign-off.
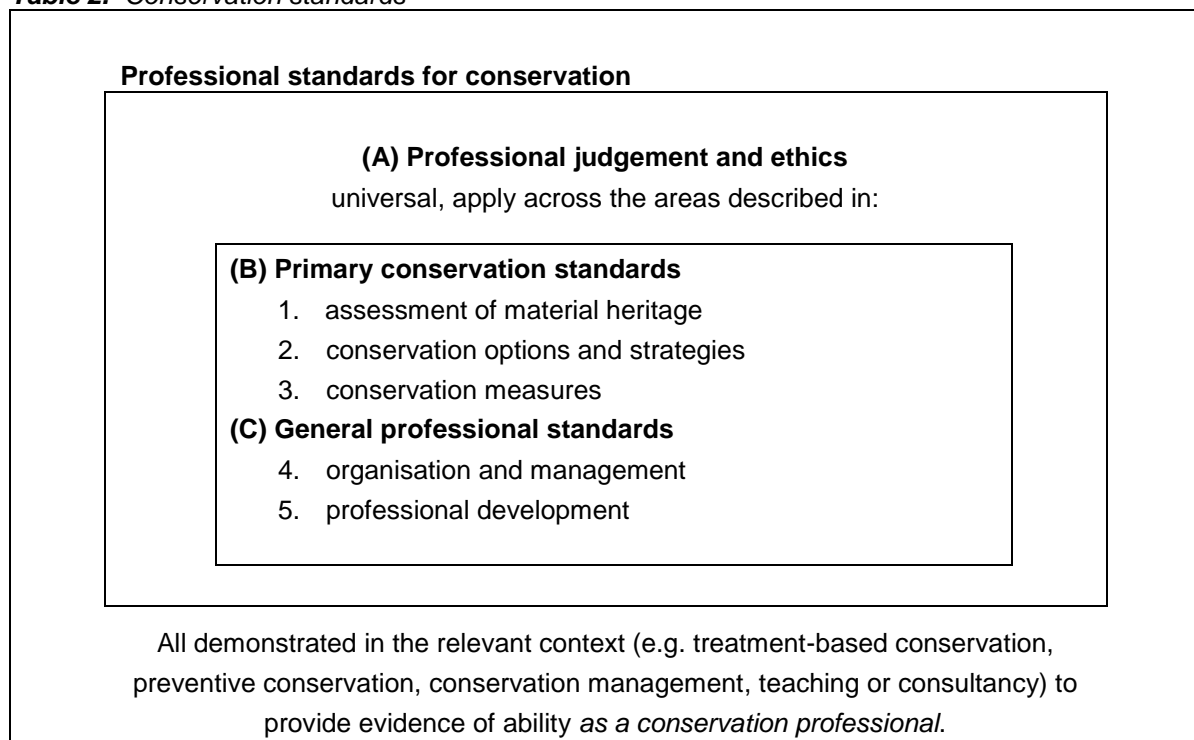
Of the five frameworks mentioned above, none are designed for use only as assessment tools for sign-off. Both the Icon and LI standards are written to represent a general level of practice, with assessment in conservation taking place around five years into practice using the standards directly, and in landscape architecture after typically a two-year mentored period through use of subset criteria based on the standards. The CIPD standards are again written to apply to the level of normal practice and are used at a broad level for admission to relevant membership grades, while the two generic frameworks are designed to be interpreted into more specific contexts by bodies subscribing to the overall designation (the CEnv framework in particular is also used directly as a set of assessment criteria). The frameworks are influenced by capability concepts in one or both of two ways: firstly the way that activities are described, and secondly the way that important but less tangible factors such as ethics, judgement and general professionalism are treated.

A typical functional competence framework describes work functions in a way that is reasonably detailed, applies to specific contexts of practice, and is designed to attest to competence in those contexts. Frameworks that include a capability-based perspective diverge from this in two important ways. Firstly they are less limited in terms of context, assuming not only that the practitioner could be working in any of a variety of contexts, but that they may need to apply to unanticipated situations and allow for evolving approaches to practice. The LI standards for instance could be applied to a

practitioner working in planning, design, landscape management or in scientific and environmental applications, who could be a general practitioner, consultant, or head of practice, or may be in a teaching or management role where the practical expression of competence in the primary profession is normally achieved through others. This requires the standards to pick out the things that are essential to being effective in the profession, rather than describing detailed activities that would represent competent practice in context. The second aspect that follows from this is that the standards endorse the person who meets them as able to work effectively in the profession, not merely in a particular occupational role; the normal caveats apply about not working unsupported outside one's area of competence, but there is an assumption that while the practitioner will need to be competent in a specific field and role, s/he will also have the basic tools to develop into another. Capability-informed standards are generally looking for a depth of practical understanding, even if expressed tacitly, which indicates potential to work effectively across the profession and to evolve approaches as opposed simply to being competent at current practice in a known role; they therefore have a predictive function, reflecting the idea of 'ability to become competent' mentioned earlier, that goes beyond being able to provide similar performances in slightly different contexts.

The second major feature of capability-informed frameworks is that wider aspects of professionalism run through the whole of the framework in a way that cannot be sidestepped. This is illustrated particularly well by the Icon framework (table 2), which begins with a heavy emphasis on judgement and ethics; it is made clear that this applies across all the areas of practice, and assessment is carried out in a way that checks candidates' understanding of the principles involved, but more importantly requires them to be followed wherever relevant across the breadth of work that is considered for assessment. In practice this is far from unique in professional assessments and it appears to be a strong tacit criterion applied by many assessors, but it is rarely made explicit in the framework itself.

Table 2. *Conservation standards*

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Professional standards for conservation

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(A) Professional judgement and ethics
universal, apply across the areas described in:

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(B) Primary conservation standards
1. assessment of material heritage
2. conservation options and strategies
3. conservation measures

(C) General professional standards
4. organisation and management
5. professional development

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All demonstrated in the relevant context (e.g. treatment-based conservation, preventive conservation, conservation management, teaching or consultancy) to provide evidence of ability *as a conservation professional*.

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Content sourced from Institute of Conservation (2007).

To summarise, a framework informed by capability principles is likely to be pitched at the level of ongoing practice rather than designed for a specific point-in-time assessment, it will focus on activities at a broad level that apply across the profession (though not ruling out more specific guidance relating to different contexts or current conditions), it will allow for evolution in both the nature and context of practice, and it will incorporate general aspects of professionalism in a way that ensures they run through practice. Assessment, from this perspective, becomes more than a matter of signing the practitioner off as able to meet the criteria pertaining to the context in which s/he is assessed; it is as much about using evidence from the specific context to judge whether s/he is able to act capably across an evolving range of situations envisaged as within the scope of the profession. Similarly it will look beyond things such as knowledge of ethical codes and expected behaviours to identify whether professionalism and ethics are understood intelligently and lived through the practitioner's work.

Conclusion

The idea of competence has come to the fore in the UK over the last three decades, informed by a variety of models though most significantly by the functional approach adopted by the 'competence movement' underpinning the creation of national occupational standards and NVQs. Notions of competence as used in many occupational standards and particularly as articulated in professions have moved beyond early limitations stemming from the search for qualifications for trainees on government programmes; however it is still apparent that competence standards and frameworks – regardless of the tradition in which they are based – lack a certain amount of adequacy both for application in complex and evolving work contexts and for supporting the licensing or sign-off process used by professions. The idea of capability as articulated in the later stages of the Higher Education for Capability programme provides an alternative and more open approach to the 'ability to do' that is particularly relevant to professions, and some of the principles involved are already appearing in leading-edge examples of professional standards.

Because capability has a less tangible nature than competence, it is unlikely that 'capability frameworks' will emerge to take the place of competence standards and frameworks. More realistically, a capability approach is able to inform and modify competence frameworks so that they represent something that better reflects professional work, taking account of things that characterise the working environments of many professions such as emergent contexts, evolving and contested practices and the need for intelligent judgement and lived ethical practice. As a means of supporting professionalism and accountability, this would appear to be far preferable, more effective, and less bureaucratic than seeking to define competent practice through context-limited detail.

At a practical level the main implications of capability-informed frameworks are for the period of experiential learning that sits in many professions between completing initial training and being signed off as professionally qualified, as well as critically for any final, practice-based assessment. The effect is typically to increase the focus on the generic aspects of professionalism and give more attention to ensuring that they are pervasive, as well as moving from emphasising sign-off of individual tasks and functions to more holistic assessments (both formative and summative) of practice. The emergence of this more systemic dimension in the generally utilitarian area of competence frameworks is particularly welcome as efforts are made to increase professional entry through apprenticeship-type routes, where there can be a risk that entrants are simply trained to do the job in hand rather than aided as well to develop as capable professionals; it also sits better with the involvement of

universities in these routes. Perhaps interestingly, it is likely that professional apprenticeships will increase contact between professional and (national) occupational standards, with implications for both; while poorer examples of the former are likely to be influenced towards the functional version of competence common in the latter, a completion of the circle can also be envisaged where the better professional standards influence occupational standards towards a capability-informed model.

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