

LEADERSHIP AND ARBORICULTURE – THE SAME OLD STORY?



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EDUCATION

In this sector there has been tremendous progress since the days of the old OND Arboriculture, the NC Arboriculture and the Surrey Certificate; all based at Merrist Wood; the City & Guilds Certificate in Arboriculture; and the Arboriculture Option on the OND Amenity Horticulture at Askham Bryan. Now we have HNDs Foundation Degrees, a BSc (Honours) Degree Programme and as of 2007 an MSc in Arboriculture and Urban Forestry, the first of its kind in Europe. Although it must be said that the current ND Arboriculture has been „dumbed down“ considerably and the value of the EDEXCEL NC Arboriculture is questionable to say the least.

The development of higher qualifications did not come via any of the trade associations, but came through the vision and foresight of the educators who were interested in furthering Arboriculture. By introducing HND and Degree Programmes, they ensured (a) graduate entry to the Arboriculture industry; and (b) that all graduates had the grounding in the basic sciences that underpin Arboriculture, which was lacking up to that point and it showed. The culmination of this educational effort is seen in the number of Arboriculturists now gaining Chartered status through the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF). For its part the ICF has responded to the influx of Arboriculturists to its membership by adopting a name change that allows the Arboricultural members to refer to themselves as „Chartered Arboriculturists“. This would not have happened without the effort and dedication of arboricultural educators and I doubt that it would have happened had the matter been left to the initiative of the industry trade associations. It is significant that the ICF holds the Charter for Arboriculture from both the Privy Council in the UK and from the European Parliament and is the only Institute that holds the Charter for Arboriculture.

What then is the problem? Well the problem is the response of one of trade association to the availability of Chartered Status to Arboriculturists. Rather than embracing the development, it decided to seek Chartered status for its members via an alternative route. It offers Arboriculturists the opportunity of becoming Chartered Environmentalists via the Society for the Environment (SocEnv). Why? Membership of the SocEnv does not confer a Charter for Arboriculture, the only body that can do that is the ICF. In adopting this course of action the trade association concerned has, in my opinion not only failed its membership in a most fundamental way but it has also failed the wider arboricultural industry. It offers a Charter that has only very limited relevance to Arboriculture; it

certainly does not confer the title „Chartered Arboriculturist“ upon those who obtain it.

Rather than lead on behalf of its members, what seems to have happened is that a diversionary tactic has been adopted, offering a Charter that is of little or no use to professional Arboriculturists who practice as Consultants. It is analogous to a Chartered Architect (RIBA) putting him/her self forward as a Chartered Town Planner, (MRTPI). Whilst it is true that architects are required to be familiar with planning, (as incidentally are Consultant Arboriculturists), they are not Chartered Town Planners. Architecture is an allied profession to that of Planning, but it is not Planning. Similarly work in the area of the environment may include working with trees but SocEnv certainly does not hold the Charter for Arboriculture.

To be positive, there have been some trade association contributions. For example in the late 1980s the Technician's Certificate in Arboriculture was introduced, which was conceived as a qualification on the route to the Professional Diploma that the Royal Forestry Society (RFS) offers. This was conceived in the days before higher education qualifications were available. It remains today an excellent self study qualification. But it must be remembered that the Tech. Cert. is not a higher level or degree equivalent qualification, whereas MICFor is degree equivalent.

In recent years the Professional Diploma in Arboriculture has been re-vamped and developed such that it is now a Level 6 Degree Equivalent qualification that qualifies candidates for the ICF Charter. This is due to the work on one man and his training agency who has worked tirelessly to achieve this for the good of Arboriculture.

One trade association offers a range of certifications, from Certified Tree Worker through Certified Arborist to Certified Utility or Municipal Certification to Board Certified Master Arborist, through the local Chapter, which has worked with the European Arboriculture Council (EAC) to facilitate cross qualification at certified and tree worker levels. But these are essentially craft and junior management self study qualifications and are not degree equivalent.

To conclude on education, there has been a lot of progress in recent years up to and including the „Holy Grail“ of Chartered Arboriculturist. But the progress has been slow and driven not by trade associations and their leaders, but by educators and practitioners who saw the need and drove it forward.

So the question at this time is why should a professional Arboriculturist join the any of the trade associations when s/he can become a Chartered Arboriculturist? In the great scheme of things, working in the industry and with allied chartered professionals including Architects, Engineers, Planners, Surveyors, Solicitors & Barristers, the Charter is what really matters and carries weight, and this is only available from the ICF.

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The content of this article represents Dealga O'Callaghans personal views.

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