Professional pathways
August 2022 bulletin
Move on to Member

Welcome to the August 2022 professional pathways bulletin for people who are working towards Member (MCIfA) applications. Professional pathways aim to support members through CIfA accreditation by signposting to useful advice, resources and training that will help you build on your existing knowledge and skills and reach the next stage in your professional career.

This bulletin will focus on professional review interviews and relating work strengths to the competency matrix.

In this bulletin:

- **Preparing for a professional review interview**
- **Professional profile – Joe Abrams, MCIfA**
- **What can you do next to prepare for your MCIfA application?**

Preparing for a professional review interview

The professional review interview is a new part of the application process for Member (MCIfA) applicants introduced this Spring. The review is designed to test applicants' ethical competence in more detail via a discussion with a panel of peers. For more information about the process and why it has been introduced, see previous Move on to Member bulletins.

Like any interview, sitting a professional review interview can seem a bit daunting but it's not there to trip you up. It's an opportunity to talk in more detail about your work and how you approach it, to demonstrate that you are up to date with current policy and thinking in your area of practice. It also helps to demonstrate that you understand, and have the tools to approach any ethical issues you may face in the course of your work, in line with the CIfA *Code of conduct*.

As always, preparation is the key to success. The interview should not be intimidating but it should be taken seriously – this is an important step in your professional development and some time spent preparing for the interview will ensure that you are able to do yourself justice on the day. So here are our top tips…

**Number one** – understand the criteria you're expected to demonstrate competence against.

These are set out in the main CIfA competence matrix. There are also supporting specialist matrices for different areas of practice. Performance criteria describing what you are expected to demonstrate to meet the four areas of the competence matrix will help you relate the competence requirements to your own role. The additional guidance we provide is there to help you. If you need any further help or support preparing your application email membership@archaeologists.net.

Number two – understand the ethical framework that you work within.

Start with the Code of conduct and the relevant Standards and guidance but don't stop there! Familiarise yourself with the ethics resources on the CIfA website; discuss them with colleagues and identify the areas that are particularly relevant to you and your work. If you haven't already done so, you may wish to work through the ethics elearning module and/or attend one of our regular ethics workshops.

Number three – understand your own competence
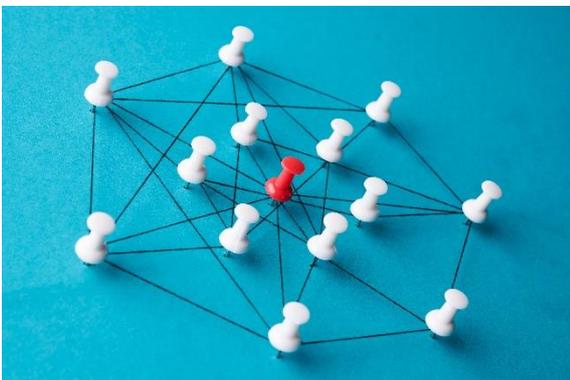
As obvious as it sounds be clear about how what *you* do and how *you* apply your skills and knowledge to your work demonstrates competence against the criteria. Map your evidence (your statement of competence, examples of work etc) to the criteria and decide on the best examples to use to show that you meet them. Question each example – why is it relevant? What does it demonstrate?

Think STAR: **S**ituation *or* **T**ask   **A**ction   **R**esult (and **R**eflection)

S/T – What was the situation? Describe the issues or challenges you faced. Who were the stakeholders and what were there needs? Were they compatible or did they need to be balanced?

A – Action: what did you do? What sources of information were available to guide you? What were the rules/policies you needed to work within? What steps did you take to achieve a good outcome and how did you define what good would look like? What skills did you need, and did you have them all at the beginning?

R – Results and reflection. What worked and what didn't? Was the outcome what you expected and what might you have done differently? Who benefitted and how? Were there any disbenefits, unintended consequences or unforeseen results? How did you reflect, capture and share the lessons learned?

Number four – practice!

Not all of us enjoy talking about ourselves and talking about your competence can feel a bit too like blowing your own trumpet for comfort! Ask a line manager or colleague – ideally someone who has some experience of interviewing – if you can talk through your examples with them in advance. Encourage them to ask you questions about your work but remember, the interview is focussing on your ethical approach and not the finer archaeological detail of what you did.

Number five – try to enjoy it!

Or, at the very least, don't panic! Write notes to prompt yourself about key points you want to make and have the examples you want to draw on to hand. The interview isn't a memory test so have copies of any reference material or relevant sections of the *Code of conduct*, Standards and guidance or good practice guidance with you. And remember, it's not a test of your public speaking ability either – the review panel's job is to provide you with the opportunities you need to demonstrate your competence. All you need to do is take them!

Professional Profile – Joe Abrams, MCIfA

Photo credit: Abrams Archaeology

Joe has worked in the commercial archaeological sector since the 1990s. He became a Member (MCIfA) in 2005, having progressed through the PCIfA and ACIfA grades. Joe has been a responsible postholder for a Registered Organisation and has managed teams of archaeologists working as field archaeologists, specialists and built heritage consultants. He has also mentored Project Managers and Directors helping them to implement systems for management of their teams and of the individuals making up those teams.

The route through the CIfA professional accreditation grades mirrored my career progression. PCIfA accreditation while working as a field archaeologist employed by various contracting organisations. ACIfA accreditation while working as a team supervisor and project officer; with increasing responsibility and autonomy as more straightforward projects were completed and written up, with supervision from various project managers. Then progressing to MCIfA…..

One of the specialist competence matrices, I used to apply for the MCIfA grade, covers Project Management and this is the pathway that I took as it matched most closely with my experiences. Current guidance on this is available on the CIfA website. As with the [matrices for other specialist pathways](#), this one provides applicants with an opportunity to explain how their experiences to date have led to the development of technical knowledge (sometimes called hard skills) and people skills (sometimes called soft skills). Then to articulate how that experience demonstrates they are a suitable candidate to hold the grade.

Knowledge*

- Authoritative understanding of recognised project management processes and how to adapt and improve processes if necessary.

- Responsibility for producing the business case and (recommending) sign off of project documentation.

- Authoritative knowledge of risk management processes.

- Responsibility for reporting and benefits review.

- Knowledge of how to be a mentor to others in project processes.

The technical skills, in my case, were often learned through doing various tasks, by being mentored by more experienced managers. Also, by attendance at specific training courses, or seminars, dealing with the relevant topic. These were sought out, and requested, as a good match for my aspirations and included courses on the preparation of risk assessments and online management. Fortunate to have supportive managers in well run organisations, I was able to acquire, through training and mentoring, many of the skills needed to progress.

Having never developed a specific link to a certain kind of activity (e.g. surveying) or a certain chronological period or type of find, I felt slightly anomalous and short of answers when asked 'What's your specialism?' Instead, the organisation of tasks and time and the alchemy needed to predict how and when a project would be completed became my specialism. Anticipating the ways in which different people with different skills and productivity levels may perform, all while the weather and quantity and quality of archaeological remains shifted around me. This became an absorbing and challenging activity. I needed to supplement the training and mentoring I received at work, specifically to accelerate and improve my communication skills (written and verbal). This was necessary for successful team

working, line management and for negotiating, and selling, to external parties. To do this I read around the subject, paid for courses and asked my employer/s to put me on training, and into situations, where those skills could be tested and developed.

To encourage others on their own pathway to Member, I note that the richest material, for me, towards making an application for MCIfA would be drawn from the more challenging periods on my career rather than from the occasional high points and easier wins. I tend to work right to left through the specialist competence matrix and have encouraged those I mentored to do the same.

Autonomy*
• Ability to compile project documentation and set direction of projects.
• Ability to delegate to project team and communicate with Client directly.
• Ability to assign roles and responsibilities and set limits of authority.

Starting with Knowledge, I often feel this is the most technical end of the matrix. Perhaps here we are acquiring knowledge of systems and procedures, showing proficiency with risk management processes. Here we are in the relatively predictable area of technical knowledge. As we move across, through Autonomy, we are into people management. The direction of projects requires effective communication skills, delegation of tasks and the assigning of roles even more so. What techniques have we acquired to communicate with people? How effective have they been and where have we learnt to approach these tasks in different ways? I would encourage applicants to feel able to say such activities can be a challenge – how did they meet it and how have they learned from the experiences? *[this is relevant to Joe's path but people management also relates to working with volunteers, colleagues or clients]*

When we are describing *coping with complexity* the words project change and different environments come in. Change management seems to define much of what an archaeological project manager does. After all, we deal with a subject which is most often buried and only partially understood, a certain amount of change management is built in. Of course, the resources available to us in terms of people, and equipment and the changing timescales and priorities of those working near us or needing to access land introduce some of the other factors which prompt change. We should have much to say on how we manage change and, over time, should build up a range of different environments, one of the most frequent environment shifts being the office where our organisation is based versus the site/s we are temporarily located.

Coping with complexity*
• Ability to manage complex projects in a range of different environments
• Ability to address project change using innovative means if necessary.

When we reach the *perception of professional context section* of the matrix we are asked to reflect on our ability to use lessons learned from past projects to inform project planning. A key skill for any improving project manager and a huge benefit to the organisation we are with. This implies the ability to recognise lessons, and linked to this, to see how often these flow from mistakes made. If not mistakes, then at least from experiences where we could have made better choices. My experience was that I had no shortage of such experiences to draw on. It may seem counter intuitive to admit mistakes when applying for an upgrade; but when done in this 'lessons learned' format, it is a strength and not a weakness. Definitely an area to draw on when applying at this level as it shows a healthy level of self-awareness in someone who is willing to learn and knows they still need to.

The terms professional judgement and, specifically ethical behaviour, are described here. In a similar vein to admitting we had to learn lessons, it can seem awkward to run through situations in which we felt a conflict of interest. The popular understanding of ethics and, even more so, the popular usage of terms like 'unethical behaviour' can leave people feeling nervous about admitting they

Perception of professional context*

- Ability to develop Stakeholder/Client relationships, and work within external project delivery teams.

- Understanding of the implications and benefits of a project well enough to suggest new projects or processes for the organisation, client and the wider sector.

- Ability to use lessons learned from past projects to inform project planning.

- Demonstrates professional judgement and ethical behaviour across a wide variety of complex situations, supporting and encouraging others to do the same. Can anticipate, recognise, and resolve potential conflicts of interest. Promotes the values of the Institute to work in the public interest with colleagues, clients, and stakeholders.

were once, or twice, placed in situations where they felt a conflict of interest. These can come up in meetings, in emails, over the phone. They can be instantaneous, and they can be experienced over a period of time. In my experience, the more extreme behaviours we may think of as instantly 'unethical' are rare. When they occur, they tend to fall within Human Resources systems and occasionally legal frameworks; in effect removing the need for us to experience an ethical dilemma as the matter goes beyond that.

However, the more everyday situations where the fulfilment of our professional procedures are challenged by conflicting demands are quite common:

- The quantity of time available (or needed) to complete a certain task, the level of detail needed (or not) in completing a specific type of report.
- The often quite reasonable pressures associated with time and money (separately and interwoven) which come from our own companies and from external players. Such scenarios are very common and create a conflict of interest just as frequently as they occur.

I would urge applicants to consider when they experienced a conflict of interest and how they applied the CIfA *Code of Conduct* to resolve their course of action. There should be no awkwardness over people experiencing such a dilemma; we should expect this and be surprised when it is not the case. However, we should also, as potential MCIfAs, be well able to articulate how we recognised the ethical dilemma and how we used the *Code of conduct* as a way of helping us decide the most appropriate course of action.

*PLEASE NOTE: This is an excerpt from the **specialist competence matrix intended to support applicants who work in project management** All applications will be assessed against the main competence matrix (P6 Applicant's Guide) with the specialist matrix as an advisory document only.

Any questions? Please ask

If you've got a question about CIfA or careers please send it to anna.welch@archaeologists.net or for application enquiries contact lianne.birney@archaeologists.net You'll get a confidential answer but if the information could help others it will be included in an anonymised FAQs section.
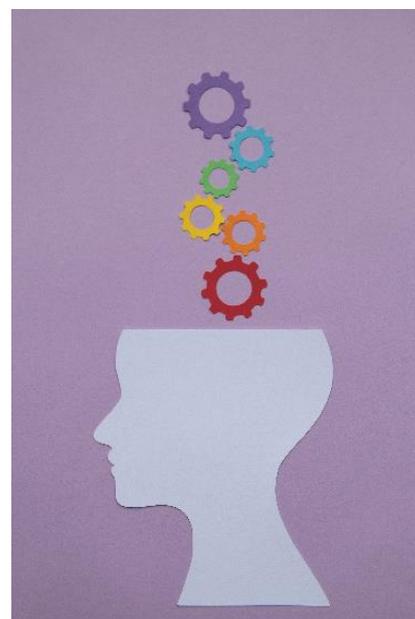
What can you do next?

An Ethics workshop is planned for 24 August and [there are more details here.](#)

Our next Innovation Festival will be held on 10 - 14 October 2022. This fully digital event will offer a mix of short sessions as well as opportunities for open discussion, CPD and knowledge transfer. The call for papers is now open. For [more details see our website.](#)

We're continuing our Zoom digital breaks in rotating morning, lunchtime and evening time slots. The next is a lunchtime chat at 12.30pm on 8 September and you can [find out more details here.](#)

If you have any questions or suggestions for the next bulletin please send them in.
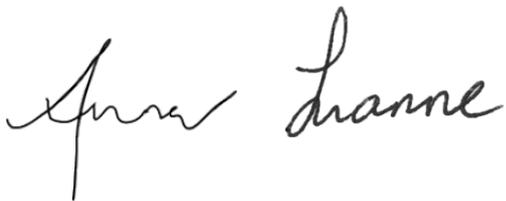
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