

Update on chartership: May 2016

Chartership: what next?

At the SfEP council's strategy day in 2014, I suggested chartership and it was an idea that we wanted to revisit. In 2015 we invited Professor Andy Friedman from the Professional Associations Research Network to give a presentation on chartership, and that convinced us. On 12 April 2016 council voted unanimously to adopt it as our aim.

What do we need to do?

To gain a royal charter you have to petition the Sovereign in Council, and many professional bodies have done this, but first they had to satisfy the Privy Council Office that a charter would be in the public interest. This involves specific criteria.

We have to show that we are 'a unique profession', that the SfEP has the field to itself and that most people who could be members *are*. This last is problematic: no one knows how many editors and proofreaders there are – and do we count people who only occasionally do such work? The petitioning body is 'normally expected' to have at least 5,000 members, unless we could show that there weren't that many editorial professionals in the UK. We think there are more. Clearly we need to persuade more people to join the SfEP.

All full members should be qualified to degree level or equivalent (Level 6) – there may be some leeway on this – in a relevant subject (all subjects are relevant in editing). We have to be financially sound (not a problem) with a long record of achievement. In the years since 1988, the SfEP has achieved a great deal but there are some significant gaps.

How will the Privy Council decide?

There is evidently much discretion in the way these criteria are interpreted, so how does the Privy Council reach a decision? It sets up a committee, usually of just two people, to consider the evidence supplied by the Privy Council Office, which does its own research and digests the evidence of other professional bodies and government departments. The committee considers all this alongside our evidence.

What has already been done?

One of my first tasks has been to establish contacts and set up meetings with government departments. The most relevant are the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Innovation, Business and Skills, along with Creative Skillset, which oversees vocational training. As a first step, I attended a Westminster Forum on book publishing, and made useful contacts there while raising the SfEP's profile a little. If any members carry out work for government (central or devolved) or for a parliamentary body, it would be a great help if they could get in touch with me.

There is a lot to do and a long way to go, and it will take time, possibly five years or longer. I hope to return to some of these points in my next article, by which time I should have had a first meeting in Whitehall. I have bought a new suit.

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