

January 8, 2006

**MINORITY REPORT BY BUD LONG**  
**with respect to Professional Designations for Evaluators**

I feel regretful, but also duty-bound, to submit to the CES National Council a minority report on the subject of professional designations for evaluators. I have been a fairly active member of the consortium, involved in the total project, especially the questionnaire preparation and interviews. I realize that my colleagues are highly respected evaluators, and I believe that Gerald Halpern, who took the initiative in creating the consortium, has provided fine leadership in dealing with a truly challenging issue.

However, I have some rather profound disagreements with the recommendations in the consortium's report. They can be summed up as follows:

1) As the Action Plan's Annex C states, a professional designation's purpose is to confirm that a person possesses the type and amount of knowledge required to perform certain functions competently. But in my view, if it is to do that properly, it must have as its foundation a clear definition of the functions of the profession (including its "products"), a complete description of the body of knowledge (including skills) required to perform those functions (the BK), and a valid means of testing for the possession of that knowledge. To the extent that a designation is without such a foundation, then to that extent it will be an illusion, one that at best will provide little benefit to the profession and at worst will seriously harm it. True, as the consortium asserts, there has been progress in working towards a proper foundation. The consortium believes that this progress provides an adequate basis for the introduction of designations. I disagree: there has been far too little progress to permit the proposed designations to serve their purpose.

2) I believe that, while there is still a long way to go, the consortium estimate of five to eight years to develop a proper foundation is much too high. With a different approach, the required time would be substantially less. Seemingly at the root of the consortium's estimate is the diversity that is found within the profession. The consortium expects (likely with good reason) that this will engender much time-consuming dispute about the set of functions that, for the purpose of the two proposed designations, will constitute "evaluation". People will want included the functions that they themselves perform, but not the others. But this difficulty can be met by a different approach. A basic designation and a few advanced specialized ones would accommodate the diverse types of evaluation without requiring all evaluators to become competent in all of them. There is no need for a Procrustean solution.

Consider each of these two points in more detail.

## The Proposed Approach

The consortium proposes two CES designations, the Credentialed Evaluator to be awarded by accreditation-credentialing<sup>1</sup> and - at least in the next several years - the Certified Professional Evaluator by peer review.<sup>2</sup> However, these designations are to be introduced before the development of a proper foundation. Criteria for the awards are to be developed by the two boards. Yet, in the time available to the boards, those criteria will almost inevitably range from vague to the arbitrarily specific. The vaguer the criteria are, the more the award of the designations will in reality be in the hands of the large number of individuals administering the accreditation-credentialing activities or acting as peer reviewers. Reflecting practitioners as a whole, these individuals will have very diverse views about evaluation functions, required knowledge and valid tests. The result will be the award of the designations to people with equally diverse amounts and types of knowledge. On the other hand, if the boards, in their limited time, attempt to make the criteria specific, it is unlikely they will also be able to make them valid (i.e., “valid” in the sense of including all the relevant, and excluding all the irrelevant, criteria). Further, even if, by some magic, the boards’ criteria were both specific and valid, it will be difficult to ensure they are followed under arms-length arrangements like accreditation-credentialing and peer review.

In short, the consortium’s proposals will not serve the key purpose of designations: to confirm that a person possesses the type and amount of knowledge required to perform certain functions competently.<sup>3</sup> This presents three problems.

First, it’s hard to see what real benefit will come from such designations. Once their weak foundation becomes common knowledge, the designations will enhance the standing of neither the profession nor the individuals who possess them. Worse, being illusions that promise much more than they deliver, the designations might well damage the Society’s reputation. If one accepts the consortium’s assertion that the Society has a “responsibility to provide professional designations”, this responsibility surely applies only to designations that truly serve the purpose of designations. The interim arrangements proposed by the consortium will not discharge this responsibility. Certainly, illusory designations will not be of much help to evaluators in staking out their

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<sup>1</sup> By accreditation-credentialing is meant the credentialing of individuals who have completed accredited courses or who are judged to already have the same knowledge those courses provide.

<sup>2</sup> As an aside, it is not clear how these two designations will differ in the only thing that counts, competence in performing evaluation. The only *concrete* differences seem to be that the Certified Professional Evaluator, but not the Credentialed Evaluator, will require at least five years experience in evaluation and a graduate degree (apparently in any discipline). However, those qualifications can easily be verified directly by any employers or clients who consider them to be important; there is no need for a designation to confirm them.

<sup>3</sup> Consider in this connection what must surely be two of the consortium’s major findings. First, among the organizations interviewed there is only very minimal reliance on accreditation-credentialing and none at all on peer review. Second, nearly all of those organizations had a body of knowledge and awarded their designations on the basis of tests for its possession. At the very least, these findings give cause for doubts about proceeding down the road recommended by the consortium.

territory and thereby resisting the incursions of auditors, management accountants and management consultants; indeed, they are bound to invite unfavourable comparisons with those professions, all of which now have highly developed, well-founded designations.

Second, the establishment of the interim arrangements will divert resources away from the creation of a sound foundation for the designation. Again, if the CES has a “responsibility to provide professional designations” the best way to discharge it is by focusing its time, money and volunteer effort in doing things right in the first place.

Third, doing things wrong at the start will make it harder to do them right later on. Those authorized to award designations and those who receive them under the interim arrangements will develop a vested interest in the indefinite continuation of those arrangements. They will not want the introduction of a proper foundation, because that will make the earlier awards distinctly “second class”. This vested interest will be an obstacle to the foundation’s development and acceptance. How serious an obstacle? That will depend on the extent to which, before the fact, the CES warns education providers, potential peer reviewers and Society members that the initial arrangements are to be temporary. The weaker the warning, the smaller the number of people who will take it seriously and thus the greater the number of people there will be who will thus resist the development and approval of the foundation. On the other hand, the stronger the warning, the smaller the number of people who will want to become involved in awarding or being awarded the designations - with the result that the interim arrangements will not be effective even on their own terms.

For these three reasons, I believe that any designations awarded without a proper foundation would be worse than nothing. And that would be true regardless of whether the time needed to develop such a foundation were one year or ten. There should be no interim arrangements under which the designations will be little more than an illusion of the real thing.

### **An Alternative Approach**

This brings us to my second point: the consortium estimate of five to eight years to develop a proper foundation is much too high. Yes, the diversity of evaluation presents a problem, but I believe there is a solution. The general design principle is that practitioners will be able to be designated in, but only in, the types of evaluation that they wish to practice.

First, there will be a basic designation, requiring *only the knowledge that is needed for the large majority of evaluation functions and that is therefore likely to be readily accepted by the large majority of practitioners*. This knowledge will be sufficient for much evaluation work, as well as for the identification of situations requiring more specialized knowledge. Holders of this designation will be in position parallel to that of a medical general practitioner.

Second, there will also be a number – perhaps three or four? - of advanced designations. Each will require certain specialized knowledge needed only for certain

types of evaluation. A specialized designation will be an asset for only those evaluators who want to conduct the types of evaluation to which it is relevant.

In brief, this approach recognizes and accommodates diversity. There will of course still be cause for some contention, for example, about the scope of each designation, and about the exact knowledge that is needed for each. But in not requiring everyone to become an expert in all types of evaluation, it will greatly reduce the potential for conflict. Unlike the consortium's plan, it does not try to make all designations fit all evaluators.

Also, what I propose will facilitate much quicker progress. First, in removing much of the cause for conflict, it reduces the time needed for its resolution. Second, it divides up the total designation workload by type of evaluation, thus making it much more manageable. Different teams will be able to work concurrently on the development of the foundation for each of the different types. Third, most volunteers will not have to deal with all types of evaluation, but rather will be able to concentrate on the particular type(s) of interest to themselves. Thus many more volunteers will likely come forward to assist, thus permitting more work to be done in a given period.

A system composed of a basic designation plus a number of specialized designations will meet not only members' interests, but also the precise needs of clients and employers. To illustrate, if the federal Treasury Board wanted federal evaluation resources to concentrate on summative studies, it could require that federal employees and contractors have the basic CES designation and the one or two specialty designation(s) relevant to such work; however, any designations relevant only to formative evaluation would be unnecessary.

The foundation for each of the designations could be derived from surveys of three different groups. CES members would be asked about the nature of the projects they have been carrying out and the knowledge that they have applied to them (an approach used by the large and thriving Institute of Internal Auditors). Clients (the federal and provincial treasury boards, for example) would be asked about the future emphasis that they wanted in evaluation. And educators at post-secondary institutions and elsewhere would be asked about the knowledge that is necessary for each type of evaluation and the best method of testing for it. Again, these surveys would accommodate - indeed, would embrace - the diversity of the profession. If repeated periodically, they would also ensure that each of the designations is based on a foundation that is up-to-date in terms of client needs, actual practice and new academic thinking.

The first task for each team should be the development of the designation's foundation. Only when that is finished should the team address the issue of the method of the award: accreditation-credentialing and/or certification (as defined by Altschuld). Indeed, it would make that choice in light of the decisions that it had already taken regarding the foundation. The best method of award for one designation may not be the best for all the others.

The team responsible for the basic designation will have to define its functions before serious work could begin on the advanced specialized designations. For the latter must start where the former stops.

Further, the teams will work under the broad direction of a steering committee. The committee will first organize the surveys, from which it will draw tentative conclusions about the number of designations and the scope of each. In light of these conclusions, it will appoint volunteers to each of the teams, and will assign each its respective terms of reference. It will monitor the teams' progress to ensure that either there is compliance with the terms of reference or that there are good reasons for departures from them. Throughout the project, the committee's broad purposes will be to ensure that all types of evaluation are addressed and that there are only minimal gaps and overlaps between the designations. Subject to the steering committee's direction, the development of the specialized designations can proceed independently, with the result that some will be completed and be ready for award before others.

### **A Parting Shot**

Regardless of the decision on professional designations, a soundly-conceived set of functions and a related body of knowledge are in any event essential to coherent and vigorous advocacy and professional development programs. It is hard to convince the world of the importance of a profession if the profession has been unable or unwilling to specify what functions it performs and what products those functions create. And it is hard to design the most efficient professional development programs if it is unclear what the profession is supposed to profess.