

The development of a Register of Qualified Genealogists (RQG).
Webinar held on the 10th June at 3pm - 5pm (British Summer Time).
Chaired by Dr Ian Macdonald, Chair of the Steering Group, RQG

Purpose of the meeting

- 1) To explain the philosophy underpinning the development of the RQG
- 2) To outline the proposals for the development of the Register of Qualified Genealogists
- 3) To enable an online discussion on these proposals.
- 4) To assist the steering group in shaping the next stages of development of the RQG.

3pm	Welcome and introduction - Dr Ian Macdonald
3.10pm	The philosophy underpinning the Register of Qualified Genealogists and the results of the online survey - Dr Bruce Durie
3.30pm	Proposals on the qualifications needed for membership, categories of membership, membership fees, the cost of running the register and post-nominal letters - Toni Sutton
3.45pm	Options for the constitution of the RQG - Carol Bannister and Andy Douglas
4pm	The benefits of joining the RQG - Chair of the Steering Group: Dr Ian Macdonald
4.15pm	Shaping the Register of Qualified Genealogists - Discussion led by Dr Ian Macdonald
5pm	Close

See the Webinar at http://www.qualifiedgenealogists.org/?page_id=147

Comment at <http://www.qualifiedgenealogists.org/>

Interview with Bruce Durie - the Register of Qualified Genealogists (follows)

Interview with Bruce Durie - the Register of Qualified Genealogists

Q. A number of genealogists has inaugurated a register of Qualified Genealogists. So, the proposal is for a Register of Qualified Genealogists?

A. It has already happened. See www.qualifiedgenealogists.org

Q. What is the register?

A. It's actually very straightforward - there is no one place where anyone - members of the public, colleagues, anyone else - can find a list of genealogists with qualifications. So, let's have a list. That's it. It's AMAZING that it's caused so much angst about the place.

Q. Why should such a list exist?

A. Well, frankly, why shouldn't it? And anyone who doesn't like it, doesn't HAVE to take part.

Q. How did this come about?

A. A number of us held a symposium during WDYTYA Glasgow last year to tease out and explore some of the issues around this, and there was a lot of feedback. You can see the videos at www.strath.ac.uk/genealogy/symposium_2014/

Incidentally, just to correct an impression that has been given - often by people who weren't there - that symposium was not set up or organised by Strathclyde University - they just provided some facilitation. It was organised by a group of like-minded individuals with a desire to move the profession of genealogy forward.

Q. Subsequently, you put up an online survey to get more objective and quantifiable data.

A. You can take a look at the survey results at www.qualifiedgenealogists.org/?page_id=28 , but the shorthand result is overwhelming support for starting a Register, or wishing to find out more. Outright "No" was less than 5%

Q. What are some of the issues that you've encountered over the last year or so since proposing the establishment of a Register of QGs?

A. They have tended to be along these lines:

1. This all about Strathclyde and Dundee universities.

It isn't. But it's hardly a valid criticism of Dundee and Strath that no other university has chosen to run such courses. In fact, I'd welcome more universities - in the UK and abroad - taking the whole area more seriously.

Why don't they? Because Genealogy ISN'T taken seriously. Oh, there are lots of courses at the same level as Conversational Spanish and Watercolouring. I teach such courses, in fact, at a number of universities. But that's not professional training. And what I and most of you out there do for a living isn't just a hobby or an interest.

2. "Letters after your name don't make you a good genealogist".

Well, does that make you a bad genealogist? In any case, it's not "the letters" that count, it's the courses behind them. The post-nominal is a shorthand so that people seeing it know what they're getting. It's pretty clear what BSc (Maths) means, or BMus or PgDipEd. Same with PgDip (Geneal. Stud.) and, eventually QG for Qualified Genealogist.

3. A criticism I often get is that these courses are (in quotes) "Academic" as if that's the same as "Theory only" or "Non-practical". That's a bit like assuming that a university chemistry course avoids test-tubes, or no-one on an engineering course ever gets to use a spanner. Such courses COMBINE the practical and professional with a wide underpinning educational element.

These courses were all designed by working professional genealogists, with a large practical element included. I can only speak for Strathclyde, but anyone whose done the courses there will tell you - there is CONSTANT emphasis on doing things which are components of professional practice. There is NOT ONE assessment or assignment that says "Write me flowery essay on... such and such". NO. It's "Do this", "Explore this records source or archive", "Make genealogical sense of the following" and "Write this as if to a

client” and so on.

That’s what universities are for and what they were set up to do - to provide training for those wishing to join, and to lead, the various professions. Doesn’t matter what - archaeology, the ministry, teaching, medicine, psychology, business studies - all of these combine theoretical and educational background with practical work and - crucially - a wider perspective on the field as a whole.

Over time, it has come to be the case that almost all professions are qualifications-only, and history shows that head-in-the-sand attempts to prevent that are just doomed to failure.

4. “Why not just join such-and-such a membership body?”

There are some membership and certification organisations out there who like to pretend they are in some way the “gatekeepers” for the profession. Well, who made them so? No names, but have any of these bodies subjected their certifications, their assessments and their assessors to objective, external, third-party scrutiny or validation? Has any of them been looked at by the NCQF, OFQUAL or the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, or the Scottish Qualifications Agency, NARIC and so on? No.

Does any of them actually know what level equivalent their certifications are at, compared to, say, the Dundee or Strathclyde or IHGS courses and qualifications?

NO. They’ve just made it up, frankly. And these days, that wouldn’t even happen with a Cycling Proficiency Certificate or a Bronze Medal in Lifesaving.

5. Do university courses go through such scrutiny? BY GOODNESS YES! All the time, and at all sorts of levels - Course team, Programme Board, Department, School, Faculty, University Senate, government and ultimately the Privy Council. And Strathclyde genealogy courses, at least, have external examiners, and external members on the Programme Board - including representatives from AGRA and ASGRA, specially invited on so they can see the clockwork going round. Dundee doubtless has similar procedures.

6. And the killer - “I’ve been doing this for 20 years”, or whatever. So what? You may have been doing it well or badly for 20 years, but how is anyone to judge?

I’ve been fixing up old cars for 45 years, and I’m hardly a professional and certainly not a qualified mechanic.

I’ve been playing the guitar at least half an hour a day since I was 12, and I’m still rubbish. There’s a local handyman where I live who’s been doing that since time immemorial, and he’s useless at anything more than painting a skirting board.

No - objective evidence of ability, from an appropriately-constituted body is what’s needed - and that’s what a university qualification is.

Q. So, you are saying, is genealogy so unimportant that you don’t need to be able to say to the public, your peers and other professions - “THIS is where we stand vis-à-vis other professions, THESE are the qualifications standards, THAT is what our professionals are capable of”?

A. That’s it! And you don’t test that with a few wee assessments designed, delivered and overseen wholly internally by some group of people resistant or unwilling to have all of it audited and verified by outside agencies, whose job it is precisely to do that.

As one lawyer said to me recently: “That puts such organisations on a level, frankly, with the Tufty Club”. A bit harsh, perhaps, but her perspective was that, if she wants to hire a genealogist for probate work etc., due diligence, as she sees it, requires that the person hired would have an objective qualification, and a university qualification is exactly that. So, from now on, her firm - and the network her firm takes part in - will ONLY be using genealogists with a minimum standard set of university qualifications or their accepted equivalent. Except, as she said, there IS no accepted equivalent.

Q. You come across as a bit impassioned about all this.

A. Well, I am. I don’t run the Strathclyde courses any more - better people than I do that now! - but I started them precisely because there was no educational/professional qualifications framework at that time.

Is this all about two particular universities controlling everything? NO. Take the example of psychology - the British Psychological Society - which IS the gatekeeper to the profession - accredits courses and degrees from a number of universities, and these universities in turn are constantly developing and modifying their courses in partnership with the profession. It's elliptical and it's collaborative.

Q. What about all the working genealogists out there who don't have a qualification?

A. Get a qualification! These tend to be the same people who say "I am a Certified This or an Accredited That". And I say, "So how do I become a Certified/Accredited Thing?" And they say: "You have to pass a test".

Fine. To be a Qualified Genealogist, you have to pass a test - it's called 'Get A Qualification'.

Or, get your certifying/accrediting body to have its tests equivalenced against a proper qualification. And in the meantime, please stop complaining that you can't join one body that has what you perceive as a barrier, while you yourselves put up a barrier to joining, but one that isn't universally recognised.

Q. So, where is this all heading?

A. We are, inevitably, heading for that happy day when genealogy will be a graduate profession, just like Engineering, Nursing, Psychology and Accountancy. It may take a generation, but so what? It took Dentistry a generation, but now, who goes to an unqualified dentist who has "been doing it for 20 years"?

There's no point standing on the beach and telling the tide to go back.

Frankly, this IS going to happen.

Better to learn to swim. And get a proper swimming qualification.

Q. Can anyone contact you?

A. Register of Qualified Genealogists, <http://www.qualifiedgenealogists.org>, and various members of the Inaugural Group have email addresses listed there.

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