

# What is professionalism?

It is sometimes said there are only two professions, the law and medicine. By this people have meant that these two skills or arts require long study of the past corpus of knowledge, stiff professional exams, continuous professional development once qualified, and supervision by a professional regulatory body.

In practice today many other skills have come to be seen in the same light as these professions. Accountants, Investment experts, property specialists, opticians, architects, structural engineers and many others have a similar pattern to their lives. They too need to learn, pass exams and then accept some continuous professional training and supervision. You could widen the definition further to include gas heating engineers, plumbers and other important skilled trades where there is now a system of learning, exams, and regulatory expectations.

There is a general trend to add professions to the list under this definition, and to upgrade the level of qualifications people need to practice. Investment specialists now, for example, typically have a degree level qualification where a decade ago they may have held an A level equivalent, and thirty years ago may have been unqualified or have just passed the Stock Exchange exam.

There should, however, be something more to a profession than passing some exams and ticking boxes for the regulator as the individual seeks to keep up with any requirements for Continuous Professional development or regulatory checks on his or her actions. A true professional is someone who has genuine skill or knowledge that he or she takes pride in. They keep it up to date not because they have to but because it is part of being professional and doing the job well. A professional does not work a 9 to 5 day, but does the hours necessary to meet the demands of his patients or clients. If the person is employed they will be on a good salary and expected to work longer hours or at week-ends when needed. Military officers, for example, have to be available for duty as needed. Investment bankers pursuing deals may work all week-end to see it through to time. A professional goes the extra distance, strives for continuous improvement, and upholds high standards of integrity and honesty. A bent lawyer or a dangerous doctor should be struck off.

Today there is a bit of reappraisal underway over these ideals or standards. At the same time as the Regulators and law makers trust the professionals less, there is a danger the professionals respond by being less professional in some ways. If the Regulator checks up on how much professional development someone undertakes, some so called professionals respond by gaming the Continuous Professional Development system. If the regulator sets minimum hours for such additional study there is the danger the minimum becomes the maximum. As the professional standards become more and more codified, so more and more professionals just implement the protocols or standards whether they are optimal or not, as it is the safe thing from the career point of view to do. It can cramp challenge and reform of the standards which may be needed

for overall improvement. As the concept of work life balance becomes more entrenched, so more professionals want to go part time or limit their commitment to their discipline. How big a limit can you place on your profession before you are no longer sufficiently professional?

I would be interested in your thoughts. Do you think the tightening of requirements on professionals mean modern professionals are better than before these changes? Or are the professions becoming too bureaucratic, gripped by group think, to the detriment of their clients and patients?

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## [South Sudan: UN official calls for unfettered relief access to avert further catastrophe](#)

28 February 2017 – With hundreds of thousands in need of assistance in famine-struck parts of South Sudan and rising insecurity hampering relief work, a senior United Nations relief official in the country has called on all parties to ensure that humanitarians have immediate, safe and unhindered access across the nation.

“The people of South Sudan are suffering beyond measure. [The famine] represents only the most extreme tip of the iceberg of needs in this country,” said Eugene Owusu, the Humanitarian Coordinator in the country, in a news release issued by the UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

On 20 February, famine was formally declared in parts of the country. A formal declaration means people have already started dying of hunger.

“To avert further catastrophe, it is imperative that humanitarians are able to act swiftly and robustly,” Mr. Owusu underlined.

The UN official’s call follows a series of recent events which have hampered humanitarian operations and placed civilians at risk. For instance, during clashes in Jonglei state, humanitarian compounds were looted by armed actors and community members; and 28 humanitarian workers were forced to relocate from Mayendit County, one of the two counties hit by famine in Unity state, due to insecurity.

Aid workers were also denied access last week to key locations outside of Lainya town, in Central Equatoria, where tens of thousands of people in need have not been reached with aid in months.

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I implore all parties to this conflict to uphold their responsibilities under international humanitarian law, place the plight of the people first, give aid workers unfettered access, and protect civilians," Mr. Owusu added.

Time is of the essence, and lives are in the balance, so it is critical that these words be translated into concrete actions on the ground immediately."

The news release also noted that President of South Sudan provided reassurances that all humanitarian organizations will have unimpeded access to needy populations across the country.

According to OCHA, insecurity and lack of access have complicated an already worrying situation: more than 100,000 people face starvation in the famine-declared parts of the country, and a further one million are on the brink of famine. There are also fears that by the height of the lean season in July, some 5.5 million people could face severe food insecurity across the country.

Additionally, since December 2013, about 3.4 million people have been displaced, including about 1.5 million who fled as refugees to neighbouring countries.

Against this backdrop, humanitarian organizations have appealed urgent funds to respond to the escalating crisis, with \$1.6 billion required to provide life-saving assistance and protection to some 5.8 million people across South Sudan in 2017.

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## [Chinese power plant becomes world's largest fossil fuel power plant](#)

Togtoh Power Plant in China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region officially became the world's largest operating fossil fuel power plant after two of its 660MW ultra-supercritical units were put into service, said China Datang Corporation, parent company of the power plant.

Currently, the plant has a total capacity of 6,720MW.

Located near a major coal field, the plant is able to convert about 17 million tons of coal into clean energy each year. The plant generated 339 billion kWh during 2016, or 30 percent of the total energy demand in Beijing.

Thanks to an increased focus on environmental protection, the company has successfully achieved ultra-low emissions. Ten of the plant's generating units had been denitrated by July 2014, cutting 40,200 tons of nitrogen dioxide emissions. In addition, the plant plans to perform denitration on 10

more units in the future.

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## [China removes age deadline for primary school entrance](#)

China's central education authorities have cancelled a deadline for determining children's ages when applying for primary school entrance. The move has now given provincial authorities the flexibility to decide the date to determine children's ages for primary school entrance.

September 1 was set as the first day of a school year in 1992. The Law on Compulsory Education stipulated that all children who are six years old before August 31 should go to primary school on September 1 of the year.

Many insiders believe the cancellation of the August 31 deadline will not matter a lot since the age to receive compulsory education has remained the same.

Xiong Bingqi, deputy dean at the 21st Century Education Research Institute, suggested the introduction of a flexible age for primary school entrance, as children in other countries can start school between the ages of five and seven based on their intelligence and family situations.

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## [Officials in Lijiang suspended over Weibo posts](#)

Two officials in the Old Town of Lijiang in Yunnan province have been suspended over comments made on Sina Weibo on Sunday, which appeared to attack users of China's Twitter-like social media platform.

The deputy head of the publicity department in Gucheng district, where the scenic spot is located, and the head of the district's international communication office have been suspended from their duties, while the publicity department has been urged to examine its actions, the district government said in a statement on Sina Weibo on Monday.

The Old Town of Lijiang is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a national 5-A scenic spot.

However, in recent years, there have been many reports of tourists being

overcharged or being forced to shop in the city. In one incident, a tourist lost her purse and was disfigured after being beaten by a dozen people at a restaurant.

For its failure to maintain services and facilities akin to a top-rated scenic spot, the town was given a warning by the China National Tourism Administration on Saturday and told to rectify issues within six months.

Gucheng's publicity department posted a statement on Weibo on Sunday, saying it was willing to accept punishment and work to resolve issues with the services it provides.

However, when a user commented, "I will never go to Lijiang", the official account replied, saying: "You'd better not come to Lijiang! We don't need you!"

Another comment read, "Is there any risk of being beaten in Lijiang?", to which the official account replied, "It takes two to quarrel."

The replies were deleted soon after being posted, with the publicity department denying knowledge of them and promising an investigation into the case.

The replies triggered a flood of criticism among netizens, with many questioning whether the scenic spot has any desire to improve its services.