

WHY HAVE PROFESSIONAL REGIMES?

The following list of reasons, borrowed liberally from various international sister associations, underpin the *raison d'être* for professionalism;

For the Individual

1. The right to work in one's chosen profession in those jurisdictions where the profession is regulated;
2. Peer recognition of one's qualifications and experience;
3. Public confidence in professional competence and protection against incompetence;
4. Clarity of an individual's responsibilities and liabilities in terms of a code of conduct;
5. Marketability in the local and international employment market;
6. Statutory empowerment to perform defined work and protection of one's own profession and work;
7. Career long support of Continuing Professional Development systems and guidance;
8. International recognition and international portability of skills and qualifications, i.e. one's ability to continue a career elsewhere in the world. (This still developing and is more advanced in some jurisdictions, e.g. across Europe and within Canada, than in others). Benefit from reciprocity agreements where they exist. Mutual Recognition Agreements are being developed; and
9. Access to an association's services (including meetings, symposia and publications) and social and professional networks.

For the employer and /or client

1. Validation of an individual's qualifications and competence to perform work and confidence in the professionalism of staff;
2. Recourse in the event of improper conduct to a code of conduct, disciplinary processes and consequences;
3. Marketability of a firm or company based upon the professional standing of its employees;
4. Compliance with statutory requirements; and
5. Guidance on Professional fee structures.

For the Profession

1. Recognition amongst and across other professions; and
2. Public recognition of competence and adherence to minimum standards.

For the Country

1. Protection of the interests of society;
2. Preservation and enhancement of professional standards; and
3. International recognition.

BENEFITS OF FORMAL PROFESSIONAL STATUS

1. For your client or employer it is a source of independent validation that you are indeed what you say you are. In other words your qualifications have been validated and your track record is verifiable. But more importantly to you, your client can confirm that the bloke against whom you are competing for a contract is who he says he is (or not!). (Ask yourself - Would you give a contract to someone to build your house without first checking that they are indeed registered with an MBA or with the NHBC? Would you go to a doctor who can't prove he is registered with the Medical and Dental Council?)
2. Consultation fees structures are set by SACNASP as an independent body and you may on an entirely reasonable basis set your fee structure appropriately. You have your benchmark.
3. The CPD system will provide you with a way of validating to a potential employer or client that you are indeed current in terms of training and development

THE GSSA AND PROFESSIONAL AFFAIRS

Professional Affairs in South Africa is based on three fundamental concepts and obligations, namely *Registration*, *Professional Norms* and *Continuing Professional Development (CPD)*, which have the express purpose to protect the public and the community and which are discussed below.

Registration

In terms of the Natural Scientific Profession Act (27 of 2003) the South African Council of Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP), the Act is the registering authority for all natural science professions including Geology and the Earth Sciences in South Africa. You may not practice as a geologist or an Earth Scientist in South Africa unless registered in terms of this Act of Parliament. More information on SACNASP can be obtained from [SACNASP](#).

Essentially registration is the act of confirming one's qualifications and proving that they are indeed what you say or think they are. SACNASP carries out validation of an applicant's qualifications as part of the registration process, which makes it possible for potential employers and clients to know that a geologist is indeed qualified as claimed and capable of undertaking the work in hand. Registration helps to make geologists employable and gives clients and employers recourse to the law should unscrupulous individuals present themselves as being able to do work for which they are not qualified or competent. In this way registration protects the profession. The Act specifies minimum requirements for a Geology or Earth Science degree and provides suitable guidelines against which the individual may measure their qualification.

SACNASP includes GSSA members on its council, who are appointed by the Minister. The GSSA is a Voluntary Association of SACNASP, which is thereby tasked with certain responsibilities on behalf of Earth Scientists who register with SACNASP. These responsibilities include the setting up of the geology and earth sciences Continuing Development Points (CPD) system.

Professional Norms

The conduct of the professional geologist is governed by a set of behavioural norms that are defined in terms of a Code of Ethics. By applying for and maintaining your membership you undertake to meet those norms and to submit yourself to a Complaints and Disciplinary procedure. It should be pointed out from the outset that the GSSA encourages all of its members who practise their profession within South Africa to register with SACNASP as required by law. SACNASP has a code of ethics and as such all GSSA members are held to that as well as the GSSA Code of Ethics. These are not in conflict with each other and adhere to the same principles.

The GSSA Code of Ethics allows for a formal complaints procedure, preferably in writing, to be made to a standing committee, the Complaints Committee, which in turn may refer complaints to the GSSA's Ethics Committee. There are appeals processes and the GSSA can impose a set of defined penalties, including expulsion from the GSSA and by virtue of referral to SACNASP, potential deregistration. The GSSA may refer certain complaints to SACNASP.

Continuing Professional Development

Continuing professional development is a personal and career-long commitment. The GSSA Code of Ethics states that members shall continue their professional development throughout their careers and shall actively assist and encourage those under their direction to advance their knowledge and experience. It also states that members shall not take on the functions of an expert in fields other than their own or accept professional obligations that they are not competent to discharge. Following initial training and education, competence is developed during ongoing training and education as well as experience. To this end members shall continually develop their skills and competencies so as to develop the necessary expertise needed to carry out their professional duties.

The role of the GSSA is to support its members in this pursuit. It does this through its publications such as the South African Journal of Geology and through the courses, seminars and conferences it offers. The GSSA is developing a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) point system so that the member may manage their personal CPD records. This is mandated through the SACNASP Act and is becoming an international norm as well as an ever increasing number of professional societies offer such systems. After a benchmarking exercise comparing various international CPD point systems that exist in the world the following CPD point system was developed.