

# Guidance for Candidates applying for Chartership

## A - Before the Chartership Assessment Day

### 1. Eligibility

You are eligible to register for a Chartership assessment day if you are a CIPR member currently recording CPD and if, after becoming a full member, you have completed at least three consecutive or five non-consecutive years of CPD, including the year immediately before the one in which you are applying to become Chartered.

If you hold the CIPR diploma or a Masters degree or equivalent course recognised by the institute, you are eligible if you are currently recording CPD and, after becoming a full member, have completed at least two consecutive or four non-consecutive years of CPD, including the year immediately before the one in which you are applying to become Chartered.

### 2. How to register for your Chartership assessment day

You may attend any Chartership assessment day you wish. Details of forthcoming days will be published on the CIPR website. You must register online, pay an assessment fee (indicating who the fee payer is – eg you or an employer), and submit a scan of your Masters degree certificate if you are using that as part of your application. Please indicate in your registration if you have any special requirements that the organisers or assessors need to take account of.

### 3. How to prepare for your Chartership assessment day

First, look at the Chartership assessment criteria that describe the competences expected of a Chartered Practitioner. If you are confident that you have a good level of ability in most of these, you are ready to become Chartered.

Second, prepare a CPD plan for the two coming years that addresses the main areas of competence where you feel you need the most development. Note where you want to improve your practice in future, and what activities you think you might do in order to help you develop (eg reading, mentoring, training, shadowing someone else). You will need to bring this plan with you to the assessment day.

In advance of the assessment day you have registered for, you will be sent a set of assessment questions and links to case studies, articles or other sources. The purpose of these materials is to provide a context within which you can demonstrate that you have an appropriate mastery of the assessed competences. They will help you satisfy the assessor that you understand the relevant issues, can identify appropriate options and describe the approach you would take to delivering solutions. You should anticipate that in each of the assessment sessions, the discussion will be evenly split between the material outlined above, and your personal experiences and perspectives on the topic being addressed.

## **B – On the Day**

### **4. Arrival**

At the start of the day, you will be asked to briefly introduce yourself to the other candidates. You do not need to bring a laptop, although you may bring items for reference if you find it helpful. You should expect to find yourself in a mixed group of candidates, with varying backgrounds and experiences.

### **5. Evidence of Identity**

On the assessment day, you must provide an official proof of identification that includes a photograph. This is expected to be a passport or photo driving licence. Original documents, not copies, must be brought to the assessment day and provided when you sign in. If you do not possess one of these documents, you should contact the CIPR office to discuss your options. If you arrive without photo ID, you will be photographed and your results will not be released until you have presented the original documentation or a notarised copy to the CIPR office. Photographs will be deleted and results released once identification has been verified.

### **6. Structure of assessment day**

The assessment day consists of three assessment sessions, and a peer review of CPD plans. It concludes with a presentation of Chartership certificates to those who have been assessed to proceed, and a short reception.

For each of the three assessment sessions, you will be put into a group of approximately five candidates who will be joined by one or two assessors. Each session will focus on one of the three assessed competences – ethics, strategy and leadership. An assessor will start the discussion, and as the discussion develops, the assessor will invite the candidates to talk more about their own experience and their own reflections on professionalism. During these discussions, you should listen to and engage constructively with what other candidates say, ask questions of them, and make contributions and suggestions that are relevant. The assessor may intervene in the discussion to refocus it, ask for clarification or detail, or to invite particular candidates to respond to particular points. Each discussion will last approximately 75 minutes.

### **7. Assessors**

The assessors are all CIPR members who have been Chartered Practitioners for some time – normally two years or more. They come from range of backgrounds and specialisms, and the CIPR does not seek to match them in any way with the candidates they will be working with on the assessment day. In addition to the assessors who are monitoring you and the other candidates, there may also be trainee assessors present during your discussions, shadowing the assessors for learning purposes. Other assessors may also be present at different times of the day to monitor how the assessment is going. One of the assessors will be designated as the Lead Assessor and they are responsible for running the day overall.

### **8. Conflicts of Interest**

The CIPR takes steps to minimise the chances of candidates being assessed by an assessor who is known to them, but because the assessment day is a group activity, this is not always possible. Assessors who have any relationship with any candidate are obliged to declare it in advance of the assessment day. All notified potential conflicts will be indicated to the candidates at the start of the day. If you become aware of any additional potential conflict at any time during the day, you are obliged to declare it at once to your assessor. Examples of potential conflicts of interest include having an assessor:

- who is a current or former employer, employee or colleague
- with whom you have a personal relationship of some kind
- with whom you have had a dispute of some kind
- whom you have previously interviewed, assessed or judged in some capacity
- who has previously interviewed, assessed or judged you in some capacity

At any time during the assessment day, if you feel that a potential conflict with an assessor makes it inadvisable for you to proceed, you may elect to withdraw and register for a later assessment day without paying an additional fee.

### **9. What will the assessors be looking for?**

- Active participation in discussions
- Active listening to other candidates and engaging constructively with what they say
- Evidence of thorough preparation
- Respectful communication with others
- Coherent, organised thinking
- Evidence of a reflective approach to professional practice and self-development
- Evidence of satisfactory level of abilities in the three key competences
- Reference to concrete examples of your own practice during the discussion, as well as to the practice of others where appropriate

### **10. What will cause the assessors to mark you down?**

- Not participating actively in discussions
- Not actively listening to or engaging constructively with the points other candidates make
- Showing evidence of not preparing for the discussions
- Attempting to dominate discussions or treating others with disrespect
- Failing to show sufficient awareness of ethical dilemmas and how to approach them
- Failing to show sufficient evidence of reflective practice
- Failing to show evidence of satisfactory level of abilities in the three key competences
- Taking calls, checking emails, and fiddling with hand-held devices

### **11. Assessment and Feedback**

As the group discussion proceeds, the assessor will rate you as 'clear proceed', 'borderline' or 'cannot proceed'. If you receive a single cannot proceed in any assessment area you will not be able to proceed. If you receive three borderlines, you will likewise not be able to proceed. If you receive two 'borderline' assessments, your case will go to deliberation by the assessors who will decide whether you can proceed or not. This decision will be made by vote of the three assessors who have met you, and will be decided by a majority vote.

If you are assessed as cannot proceed, you will be informed after the peer review of CPD plans. You will be told the outcomes of each assessment, but will not be given any detailed feedback on the day. The CIPR will send you written feedback as soon as possible after the assessment day, focusing on what you need to do in order to proceed in the future. The decision of the assessors on the day is **final**. If you do not proceed, you will be allowed to attend one future Chartership assessment day without paying a further assessment fee.

### **12. Withdrawal**

During the day you may feel, for one reason or another, that you have not presented yourself as you intended and that you wish to withdraw from the assessment. The conclusion of the assessed parts of the day (ie the end of the third assessment session) is the deadline for withdrawal. That is the last point during the day at which you may withdraw. (You may not seek informal guidance as to

whether you have been assessed as able to proceed or not before withdrawing). If you withdraw up to this point, you may register for a later assessment day without paying an additional fee. You may only exercise this right once only. If you withdraw, you will not receive any feedback from the assessors.

### **13. Peer review of CPD plans**

Your CPD plan is not formally assessed, but if you do not bring one to the assessment day or do not peer-review it with other candidates, you cannot proceed. You will share your CPD plans with others in your group, discuss the development areas you wish to focus on, and offer suggestions to each other about useful learning materials and opportunities. At the end of this session, two of the other candidates in your group will sign your plan to verify that they have discussed it with you.

### **14. When do you become chartered?**

If you are assessed as able to proceed, you will become chartered right away and your certificate will be presented to you at a short ceremony at the end of the assessment day. You may normally invite two guests to the ceremony and reception, but this is dependent on the capacity of the venue and will vary from occasion to occasion. You should not make any public announcement until one week after the assessment day to enable the first announcement to be made on the CIPR website.

### **15. What if you cannot attend the assessment day you have registered for?**

Places on assessment days are in high demand and there are normally waiting lists for each session. The following policy on refunds will apply:

Withdrawal ten working days or more before the scheduled Assessment Day – 50%

Withdrawal five –nine working days before the scheduled Assessment Day – 25%

Withdrawal less than five working days before the scheduled Assessment Day - no refund

No refunds will be made to candidates who begin an assessment day but leave before completing it. If you attend the assessment day late, the Lead Assessor may admit you at their sole discretion, or may allow you to defer to a later assessment day without additional charge.

## Appendix: Guidance Note from Assessors - Preparing for Chartership Assessment

*The CIPR Assessors for Chartership have issued the following guidance notes to assist candidates preparing for their assessments in 2016. This guidance broadly summarises themes that have come up during the assessors' deliberations. Candidates should read these guidance notes in conjunction with the assessment pack and with any more recent guidance notes from assessors.*

**1. Meeting the eligibility criteria does not make it likely that you will pass.** If you have completed 3 years of CPD as a CIPR member (or 2 years if you also hold the CIPR Diploma) , you are eligible to come forward for assessment as a Chartered Public Relations Practitioner. However reaching this eligibility threshold does not necessarily make it likely that you will be successful. In practice, successful candidates have generally tended to have more experience than this minimum before applying. Whatever your level of experience, thorough preparation and reflection is strongly recommended for anyone putting themselves forward.

**2. Experience.** Beyond the eligibility requirements, no specific length or type of experience is required in order to become chartered. On the assessment day, you will find yourself in a group with a random mix of other candidates with different backgrounds, lengths of experience and sector expertise. Having more years of working in the sector does not mean you are more likely to become Chartered, and having fewer does not necessarily put you at a disadvantage. The assessors are looking for your ability to draw on whatever experience you have and relate it to the issues under discussion; and to talk in an informed and thoughtful way about things of which you do not have direct experience.

**3. The assessment is about you.** Everything in the assessment process is designed to give you the opportunity to answer the question – whether it is explicit or implicit - ‘What would you do?’ The assessors want to get a strong sense of how you would conduct yourself in different situations, how you would respond to certain challenges, and how you would analyse problems and develop solutions. If they have a good sense of what you would do, they can decide whether you can proceed or not. However if you do not give them a strong sense of what you would do, they cannot allow you to proceed.

It is important that all candidates take a full turn to speak during the assessment sessions. If you cannot clearly articulate what you would do in a given situation, and why you would do it, the assessor cannot allow you to proceed. If you give generic answers about ‘good practice’ rather than saying what you have done or would do in similar situations, the assessors likewise cannot let you proceed.

**4. Grounding in practice.** Some candidates offer what the assessors call ‘text book answers’ - in one instance the assessors said that listening to the candidate talk was like listening to someone reading aloud from a textbook. Evidence of reading, discussing and thinking about the topics under discussion is viewed very positively by the assessors, but what they want is to gain a sense of how you would apply what you have read or thought about in practice.

**5. Grounding in theory.** The assessors have observed that some candidates would benefit from doing the CIPR Diploma before attempting Chart.PR. Some candidates appear to be unfamiliar with commonly-used models and approaches which all Chartered Practitioners would be expected to know about, even if only to explain why they were applying some different model themselves. Completing the CIPR Diploma earns 60 points; if you hold the Diploma, you are therefore only required to complete two years of CIPR CPD rather than three before you are eligible to be assessed for Chartership.

**6. Preparation.** You need to spend time reading and reflecting on the materials sent in the assessment pack, as well as referring to other reading or learning you may have done. Making a note of your thoughts, ideas and questions is definitely recommended. You may bring your notes with you to the assessment day if you wish, and refer to them during your discussions with the assessors.

**7. The questions in the assessment pack are just the beginning.** The purpose of the questions is to ensure that all the candidates in the session have a common starting point for their discussions. However, the whole discussion is not going to be about the material provided in the assessment pack or covered in the sample questions. You must be able to discuss the issues presented in the materials in the context of your own work, experience and perspectives.

**8. Ethics.** The assessors want to gain a clear sense of your moral compass and the approach you will take to new and unexpected ethical dilemmas as they arise in the future. They are not looking for ‘the right answer’, although they will definitely be alert to wrong answers. A good understanding of how the CIPR Code of Conduct applies to everyday professional activities is essential.

**9. Strategy.** The assessors have commented that some candidates do not seem to have a strong grounding in strategic working. They are able to discuss campaigns and tactics, but not able to articulate how an organisation or team determines its longer-term purpose and objectives, what the role of a public relations practitioner might be in this context, and what they as a Chartered Practitioner would be able to contribute to this process. Evidence of ability to research, plan, analyse and provide management advice is what the assessors are looking for.

**10. Leadership.** Leadership is a quality that can be demonstrated in different contexts and at different levels. It does not necessarily require you to be in a management or director position, although that would be likely to give you an advantage. If you have no formal role in leading others, you should be able to satisfy the assessors that, for example, you are able to consider and deal with diversity issues and tackle complex problem solving in ways that support the needs of a business or other organisation.