

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF THE HORTICULTURAL PROFESSIONAL

James Hitchmough*

ABSTRACT

The characteristics of professions, and the need for professionalisation in the landscape and nursery production sectors of horticulture are discussed, and the relationships between professionalisation and professionalism investigated. When compared with the broadly accepted vital attributes of professions, horticulture as a discipline can clearly not be considered as such. The vast bulk of people who currently describe themselves as horticulturists are involved at the occupational or semi-professional level, only a few sub-groups satisfy the criteria associated with true professions. Horticulture contains so many disparate sub-groups both in terms of sector of activity and secondly educational level that it presents the community and other disciplines involved in the landscape with a very confusing picture. This is a particular problem for degree graduates as it "greys" the distinctions between themselves and horticulturists with much more basic levels of training. If horticulture as a discipline does not embrace increasing professionalisation, then it faces the possible loss of management positions and skill areas, traditionally occupied by horticulturists, to more educated disciplines.

The present and future role of educational institutions, the horticultural industry, and professional bodies in influencing the development of professionalisation, and professionalism in landscape and nursery production horticulture is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

This paper has its origins in the growing awareness that as we move towards the 21st century, a range of issues that horticulturists have traditionally not paid too much attention to, will ultimately determine the role of and nature of horticulture as a discipline in the future. Some of the most significant of these issues are education and training, relationships with other disciplines also involved directly or indirectly in the landscape, their role in the community and their professional status.

If horticulture is to continue to develop as a discipline, and become more effective in the landscape, it is necessary to look closely, and ask ourselves some difficult questions. Until we have a clearly articulated view of what horticulture has been, currently is, and might be in the future, it is extremely difficult to make headway on the issues mentioned earlier. In this paper these deliberations are targeted at the sectors of horticulture that broadly deal with the management of the urban landscape and the production of ornamental plants.

The starting point for this self examination is to look at those very loosely applied words profession, professional, professionalisation, and finally professionalism. Many of the horticulturists I know consider themselves to be members of the "profession" of horticulture.

* Dr James Hitchmough, Senior Lecturer in Environmental Horticulture, VCAH-Burnley, Swan Street, Richmond, Victoria, 3121

I myself, (Hitchmough, 1988) and my colleagues, for example (Aldous, 1988), have referred to horticulture as such in previous papers. The question remains however, is horticulture really a profession and are the people who work in the discipline area professionals?

The traditional view of what a profession is can be found in work of Shaw (1985) who defines professional status as: "an aspiration or a claim to enjoy certain privileges, social esteem, a level of salary, a style of relating to other people who are seen as clients and not customers together with a degree of autonomy in the workplace". As previously mentioned this is a fairly conservative view of what constitutes a profession and excludes a number of occupations. A more effective way of deciding whether workers in a discipline are members of an occupation, or a profession is to apply the criteria in Table 1.

Table 1 A comparison of the characteristics of occupations as opposed to professions

Characteristics:	In occupations:	In professions:
Theory/intellectual technique	absent	present
Training period	typically short	typically long
	non specialised	specialised
	involves things	involves ideas
	sub-culture unimportant	sub-culture important
Relevance to social values:	Not relevant	relevant *
Motivation	self interest	service *
Workplace autonomy	typically absent	typically present
Commitment	short term	long term
Sense of community	low	high
Code of ethics	under-developed	highly developed

(O
R
A
P)

Many so-called professionals do not

(adapted from Murphy 1984)

As one evaluates the discipline of horticulture against this model, it becomes obvious that horticulture does not consist of one relatively cohesive (in terms of the value set they share) group of individuals as does for example landscape architecture, planning, architecture or civil engineering. By virtue of the extremely wide range of training of people who call themselves a horticulturist (from none to those with PhDs) horticulture as a discipline is a very multi-headed beast composed of numerous sub-cultures, the values and views of which are strongly divergent (in some cases positively antagonistic) to those of other sub-cultures.

Some of the sub-culture groups within horticulture can, by applying the criteria of Murphy (1984) be considered as worthy of professional status whilst many clearly can not. In the minds of the community at large there is clearly a well accepted link between professional status and tertiary education at the level of degree and above. The reasons for this view are clearly demonstrated by reference to Table 1, for example, the education of true professionals pays attention to ideas rather than just things, and develops a strong sub-culture based on a long term view of the discipline, its community context and ultimate development. In most disciplines, education at degree level is generally the reference point for these ideas to be strongly developed; however it is clear that in horticulture some individuals who have pursued less academic training develop the professional values previously alluded to during the course of their careers.

Ignoring for a moment the question of the adoption of professional values versus experience in the work place, it would appear inappropriate to consider many of the sub-cultures in horticulture as members of a profession, simply on the basis of level of educational attainment, as the vast majority of those who describe themselves as horticulturists have not been trained at degree level or above. Table 2 illustrates the relative numbers of graduates with various levels of training in 1986.

In view of the fact that in most states the higher levels of education in horticulture are a fairly recent phenomenon, degree level and above graduates make up only a tiny percentage of the total Australian workforce in horticulture. It is also worth noting that most of the Masters, and Ph.D level students shown in Table 2 are not pursuing research in the sectors of horticulture under discussion.

Table 2 Numbers of students enrolled in various levels of horticultural training-education Australia wide in 1986 (from Greenhaulgh, 1986)

<u>Level of training/education</u>	<u>Numbers of enrolled students:</u>
Ph.D	18
Masters Degree	39
Post-Graduate Diploma	31
Bachelors Degree	439
Diploma	70
Associate Diploma	830
Horticultural certificates	3600
Trade Certificate	3000
Non certificate	5148

Taken as a whole, it is therefore apparent that by the accepted criteria, horticulture cannot be considered to constitute a profession. From a numerical perspective, most horticulturists are involved in an occupation, with a significant number of para-or semi-professionals, and a much smaller group who could form the nucleus of a profession.

