Accreditation in Conservation: Towards Professional Status

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The issue of accreditation or certification of professional conservators is discussed in relation to various definitions of a “profession,” reasons for the emergence of professions in our society, and criteria for “professional status.” The provision of professional services entails the protection of “vulnerable interests” including those of the professionals themselves, the client, and the general public who may ultimately be affected by the quality of that service. Distinctions are made between “licensing” and “certification or accreditation,” with respect to mandatory qualifications in order to practice in the former, and voluntary assessment and self-regulation in the latter. The status of the conservator relies to a large degree on the public perception of the profession, depending upon a reputation for both integrity and high standards of practice. The importance of a self-regulatory professional body is underlined. Some of the benefits and problems associated with accreditation are presented.