

STANDARDISATION OF THE QUALIFICATIONS AND CERTIFICATION OF SURVEYORS?

Readers are hopefully be aware of the activities of ISO Technical Committee 211 on Geographic Information/ Geomatics - it is producing a set of about 20 standards covering everything from metadata through reference frames to terminology. Many of these documents are now in a late draft stage, and some should fairly soon see the light of day as ISO191xx. These standards will largely supersede the European work managed by CEN TC287.

Much of the driving force behind TC211 has been provided by Canada. In early 1998, they proposed a widening of the work of the committee to include an item on the qualifications and certification of personnel; a detailed proposal recommended three levels of competence (technologist; engineer; manager), managed by national certifying bodies. This proposal was in response to the difficulties Canadian surveyors have in getting their professional qualifications recognised in other countries. Understandably, the international professional bodies involved with TC211 (FIG, ICA, ISPRS, IAG etc) expressed strongly their view that this was a matter for the professions, and that the creation of an international standard would 'fossilise' the qualifications process. Interesting debate took place at the March 1998 meeting of TC211 in Canada, and a follow-up meeting was held during the FIG Congress in Brighton in July 1998.

As a result of the July meeting, the Canadians resubmitted their proposal, recommending an investigation leading to an advisory (Type 3) report on the current situation on certification of personnel, possibly then leading to standardisation activity. This proposal went through the procedures of ISO Technical Committees (vote by national standardisation bodies) and was passed by 12 votes to 9, with many of the most active members (UK, USA, Germany) voting against, and several questioning whether the work was within the agreed scope of TC211.

The March 1999 meeting of TC211 in Vienna again saw discussion on the proposal, although the debate was now centred on whether the item was within scope. Other organisations such as the Open GIS Consortium were also questioning the work item, feeling that it would distract attention from the technical standardisation work. Political manoeuvring was designed to gain concessions from Canada in return for not for not formally questioning the scope issue (whoever said standards activity was pure or dull?!) This was achieved, with the Canadian delegation leader agreeing to start afresh in the work, rather than starting from the detailed proposals submitted by Canada. A full-blown row was therefore averted - just.

Canada then provided a team leader (Bob Maher of British Columbia) for the task, and member associations and liaison members (the international professional bodies) nominated members of the team. The team has been generally very small in size – three at the latest meeting in early 2001. One of these is a member of the FIG Task Force on Standards.

The team has continued with its work, which has the aim of producing an informative report in late 2001. In 2000, they circulated a questionnaire on certification and standardisation activities in different countries. Response was limited, but included a reply from FIG including papers from the Task Force on Mutual Recognition.

The ISO team then turned to drafting a report. This currently exists in draft form, and includes several national case studies, following the style of a model study inserted by the Canadians. FIG submitted a case study, which drew on international work within the Task Force on Mutual Recognition. The current draft ISO report recommends that ISO considers whether it wishes to continue to work in this area, which has caused friction with professional bodies and others and, if it does, whether it wishes to be a certifying body or to take a coordinating role.

In its latest response to ISO (Spring 2001), FIG has proposed a Round Table discussion in Washington (following the publication of the ISO report), including all of the main parties, to see what the most appropriate way forward might be. FIG recognises the need to facilitate movement of professionals across borders, but is firmly of the view that an international standard is *not* the way in a rapidly changing environment.

The next move is with TC211, in producing a report.

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