

Open Letter to Geoscientists, from the President of the Canadian Council of Professional Geoscientists

Hamid Mumin, PhD, P.Eng., P.Geo.

As I commence my role as 2007-2008 President of the Canadian Council of Professional Geoscientists (CCPG), I wish to extend a warm greeting to all geoscientists across Canada; - professional members, geoscientists who have not yet registered, and students. Personally, I have enjoyed a great first part of the summer field season in the Northwest Territories at Great Bear Lake, and hope to make other trips to the field in northern Manitoba and South America, before our summer is over. We have entered an era of unprecedented demand for geoscience in the resource, environmental, government and academic/research sectors, and are enjoying levels of prosperity not seen in recent memory. While we enjoy the good times we need to stay aware and prepare ahead for the usual downturns in the sectors we serve. However, with the increasing positive impact of professionalism in geoscience, we should be able to mitigate some of the extremes we've witnessed in the past, and this is especially true for registered members whose talents and credentials are sought after and respected worldwide.



CCPG President Hamid Mumin, P.Eng., P.Geo. (right) with NWT-CCPG Director Gary Vivian, P.Geo. at Great Bear Lake, Northwest Territories, July 2007

The advent of self-regulation of the geoscience profession in Canada has not been without its challenges and these have affected most of us in some way or other. Particularly problematic to geoscientists are the difficulties surrounding registration and mobility. In my travels across Canada, when colleagues come to know of my association with CCPG and especially now that I serve on the CCPG Executive, their comments are consistent "You guys at CCPG need to get your act together" (meaning fix the registration and mobility hassles). OK folks, here it is. Your CCPG Executive and its Board of Directors are well aware of the difficulties and apparent slowness in making progress on these issues, which are considered by many of you to be fundamental to the health of Canadian geoscience practice. Particularly challenging to geoscientists, is the provincial/territorial segmentation of regulation and accountability for a profession that is not just national, but truly global, in scope.

Registration and mobility challenges for geoscience largely arise as a consequence of the complex legal framework in which all the professions in Canada are regulated. And the same complexity that exists and effects geoscience also exists and effects all of the other regulated professions in Canada ...be it forestry, agrology, engineering or architecture... not to mention all the professions in the health sector! Another complexity that is unique to geoscience only, is that in eight of the eleven jurisdictions with licensure, geoscience is co-regulated with engineering - under the same act and in a joint professions association. While co-regulation and joint associations have many advantages, it does however mean that geoscience regulation in a large part of the country must intimately co-exist with the regulation of another larger and different profession - engineering. Co-regulation has thus led to the approach that, whatever may be agreed for the regulation of geoscience must equally apply to the self-regulation of engineering, and vice-versa.

So what, you may ask, has been achieved and what is CCPG focusing on? We have now reached a point where most professionals involved in geoscience (and engineering) self-regulation and public accountability are in virtual agreement on the important issues. We recognize the need for consistent and equivalent registration requirements and admissions procedures, and the simple and timely transferability of licensure between jurisdictions, based on mutual recognition of prior licensure qualification. We have identified that barriers to this lie to one extent in inconsistent licensure requirements between the jurisdictions and to another extent in differences in admissions

procedures among the various regulatory bodies. We also acknowledge the overarching current legal framework to which we are all bound, and which places regulation of the profession and public accountability under the jurisdiction of each province and territory. This means the ability to practice geoscience anywhere in Canada on the strength of a professional license from only one jurisdiction is not a workable option, without: 1) appropriate mechanisms for the efficient transfer of that license to other jurisdictions – difficult, but we are working on this, or 2) significant and fundamental changes to Canada’s legal framework – an unlikely happening! CCPG and its Constituent Associations - the regulatory bodies - have therefore agreed to tackle all the challenges they face while working within the current legal framework and the accountability mechanisms that exist, and have set out to do so by seeking to ensure that consistent registration requirements, harmonized procedures and appropriate inter-association agreements are in place and accepted by all regulatory bodies, and that there is an appropriate high level of trust among all concerned.

Most of you may not be aware that the Federal and all the Provincial and Territorial governments across Canada have also stepped up the pressure on the labour mobility file. Our governments have recently mandated that all the regulated professions must be compliant by April 1 2009, with Chapter 7 - the labour mobility chapter - of Canada’s “Agreement on Internal Trade” (a document signed between the Federal government and all Provincial and Territorial governments). Compliance with Chapter 7 requires that barriers to labour mobility for registered professions moving between provinces and territories be removed. In step with this development, CCPG, on behalf of its Constituent Associations, applied for and received a grant of \$140,000 from the government of Canada to assist with its mobility related initiatives. The funding , which began in March this year, has already assisted the Canadian Geoscience Standards Board address consistency in registration requirements. It will now focus its support on the work of the CCPG’s “IAMA Task Force” (a special working committee of CCPG, which I chair), which is seeking to tackle mobility issues in advance of renewal of the IAMA (Inter-Association Mobility Agreement) - the mobility agreement signed between CCPG’s Constituent Associations, which comes up for renewal in June 2008. We expect to be signing a new IAMA in June of 2008, and while the new IAMA will in all likelihood appear similar to the existing IAMA, the IAMA TF is seeking to solve the many underlying issues of process and procedure that are the true barriers to effective mobility, transferability and registration. Trust is the key, supported by consistent registration requirements and harmonized admission and transfer procedures based on mutual recognition of substantial equivalency.

So what else are CCPG and your individual CAs doing to enhance public accountability and improve the situation for geoscientists? In addition to the initiatives outlined above on registration requirements and admission procedures, the IAMA Task Force has also identified a number of other barriers that it is exploring solutions for with CCPG and its Constituent Associations. These include: on the issue of unregistered practice and across jurisdictional discipline - a Memorandum of Understanding on Enforcement and Compliance; a common application form; possible mechanisms for pre-screening and pre-approval for highly mobile professionals; harmonized Codes of Ethics and the concept of a single central office for the processing of registration applications.

Thus there are a number of important issues that are being and must be resolved in order to achieve the level of mobility required for geoscientists working within the multi-jurisdictional provincial/territorial based legal framework that exists in Canada, while at the same time maintaining full public accountability. Our goal is to have as many of these issues as possible resolved in advance of the new IAMA in 2008, with remaining issues to be implemented as soon as possible to ensure that processes are in place to achieve long term solutions. We realize these challenges have been facing the profession for many years, but at present there is momentum and substantial consensus amongst CCPG and its Constituent Associations to address the issues, and make consistent registration requirements and effective professional mobility a reality for all geoscientists.

CCPG is the national organization of the 10 professional associations that regulate professional geoscience across Canada. Working together with the associations, CCPG facilitates dialogue at the national level to allow development of guidelines and common approaches that address national issues effecting the regulation of our profession. As a geoscientist, I would encourage you to get in touch with your individual professional associations to learn about the effort that is being made on your behalf, express your views and contribute to the discussion, or alternatively contact me at CCPG directly.

At CCPG we are building mutual trust and respect between associations and are focusing down on the big challenges of registration and mobility.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Hamid Mumin". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a light grey rectangular background.

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President
Canadian Council of Professional Geoscientists

Hamid is Associate Professor of Geology at Brandon University, Manitoba. He specializes in mineral resource exploration and development and mineral deposits geology, and actively consults for industry. His web site is www.brandonu.ca/Geology/mumin/hamid/hamid.html.