

# **An International Comparison of Some Aspects of Freemasonry**

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## **Introduction**

While researching international practices in connection with testing Candidates for proficiency, it was thought that comparisons of other aspects/practices would be of interest. The assistance of the United Grand Lodge of Queensland Office was sought in April 2008 in relation to introductions to some selected recognised International Grand Lodges. Those selected are detailed in Appendix A. The Grand Lodge of Georgia was the only one which advised it did not wish to participate, while others indicated they would but no information was forthcoming despite reminders. Most of those approached did not acknowledge the invitation to participate. The Grand Lodges which participated were Chile; Israel; China; Philippines; Ireland; Sweden; Greece. That is seven out of twenty five approached for assistance. An Australian Mason living in Europe sought clarification that the information he had provided to his Grand Lodge was satisfactory. When he was informed that his Grand Lodge had not forwarded the information, he asked whether information sought from his wide range of contacts would be useful. He was informed it would be most welcome. A total of seven responses were received as a result of his efforts. They were from Lodges affiliated to, or active in, France, England, Scotland, Luxembourg, India, Belgium and Netherlands. However, they will not be formally acknowledged as they did not have the approval of their Grand Lodges to participate.

A questionnaire was prepared and forwarded to the Grand Lodges and the resulting individuals for completion, covering the following aspects of Freemasonry; Pre-entry assessment; Preparation of Candidates; Testing Proficiency; Education/Mentoring; Moving through Office; Social; Benevolence and Charity. (Appendix B). The comprehensiveness of the answers varied, but was enough to at least give an indication of practices.

## **Analysis of Responses**

### **1. Pre-entry assessment**

**1[a] If a potential member is known to a Freemason, how is his suitability assessed.**

In general practice, information about Freemasonry is provided and the potential candidate and partner are interviewed. The interview may take different forms and by different panels. It appears that the objectives of the interviews are universal; to establish a belief in a Supreme Being, financial ability to be a member, family support, past un-desirable activities such as irregular Masonry or criminal, community standing, reasons for wanting to join. Some jurisdictions require a formal Curriculum Vitae from the applicant. Additional information provided from Chile indicates that the panel is made up of three Master Masons who report separately in writing. In Sweden the judgment of the Proposer and Seconder are all that is required. In addition to the Lodge undertaking interviews to establish a position, the applications are more widely circulated. In Chile, The Netherlands and Belgium, the application is forwarded to all Lodges for report prior to Ballot. In Chile the period allowed for this is sixty days, in Belgium six weeks. All Grand Lodges appear to have a veto over balloting.

**1[b] If a potential member is not known to a Freemason, is his suitability assessed differently and if so in what way.**

The practice is generally the same as 1(a) except the examination in interview would be in more depth. In Chile and one District in India under the Grand Lodge of England, all applicants must be known to a Freemason.

**1[c] Are there any appeal mechanisms if an applicant for membership is rejected prior to the Lodge deciding suitability.**

Usually there is no appeal against a decision not to ballot, but in France no application can be rejected prior to a ballot in Lodge. In England and Ireland the applicant can try another Lodge. In Luxembourg if the reason for rejection is minor, the applicant can be advised to re-submit when it is rectified.

**. 1[d] What method is used within the Lodge to accept or reject a potential candidate e.g. secret ballot, show of hands.**

While a secret ballot using white cubes and black balls is common, some Jurisdictions employ a show of hands. This is so in The Netherlands, and India if the candidate is well known. It is usual with the Secret Ballot for two black balls to reject, while in Luxembourg five is outright rejection. However in the same jurisdiction if one black ball is found the member who voted that way is expected to confer with the Master and present his reasons. If these are judged to be valid, further investigation is carried out. If not considered valid, the application is accepted. In Ireland one black ball excludes. In Belgium the Grand Lodge regulations require a 90% approval vote, however Lodges can decide their own standard of a higher percentage.

**1[e] If a candidate is rejected within the Lodge, is there an appeal mechanism in place and how does it work.**

While there is no formal appeal mechanism in place for rejection by ballot, most jurisdictions permit a re-presentation to the same Lodge after varying periods of time, usually twelve months. In Israel this is six months. In England and Ireland the applicant can try another Lodge without a time frame, but in England he must advise of the rejection of his application at the other Lodge. In Greece and some Indian Districts, the rejection is final.

**2. Preparation of Candidates**

**2[a] What information is a candidate given prior to initiation and when and how is it given.**

All jurisdictions report that some general information about the ceremony and Freemasonry is given to Candidates prior to Initiation. The extent of this varies. In Chile in addition to extensive information, if the Candidate is a Catholic, he is informed that he may be ex-communicated if he becomes a Freemason. In Ireland he is informed of everything except the means of recognition. It was reported from India that when informed that he would be blindfolded and required to kneel, the Candidate refused to do so and the ceremony was aborted. This has happened more than once. Sweden uses family sessions in addition to general information.

**2[b] In what way is a candidate prepared for each of the degrees, in both information provided and the way he is dressed.**

While it was reported that preparation concerning dress was in accordance with the respective Rituals, it was disappointing that more in-depth information was not given. However it is thought that the principles of dress and accoutrements are Universal. No information about Degree(s) to come is given but information about the Degree conferred is available. The Questions to which Answers are expected also vary in intensity. Again this varies in intensity. In some jurisdictions the Candidate for the Second Degree answers Questions about the whole of the first Degree Ceremony, including repeating the Obligation, the Working Tools and Secrets. In Belgium a CD is used to explain the Ceremony plus suggested reading. In addition Lodges of Instruction are conducted for Candidates who cannot attend higher degree workings on the same night. In Sweden Seminars are arranged for Candidates about the Degree conferred. Candidates in Israel may present a Paper about the Degree experienced.

### 3. Testing Proficiency

3[a] If there are waiting periods between each degree, what are they.

3[b] What methods are used to test the candidate's proficiency prior to him taking the next degree.

3[c] Can a candidate be refused advancement until standards are met and are there appeal mechanisms in place and how do they work.

While the original questionnaire had three sections with regard to this topic, it was decided that a better comparison would be obtained by comparing each Jurisdiction with regard to the whole question of testing.

**Chile;** Candidates are expected to spend two years as Entered Apprentice (EA) and Fellow Craft (FC). This may be shortened if he is exceptional. The Junior Warden is responsible for EAs and the Senior Warden FCs. They are responsible for recommending advancement to a Master Masons Chamber. If a Candidate is refused advancement he is advised of the reasons and when they are rectified he can be advanced. There are no appeals against decisions not to advance a Candidate.

**Israel;** There is a three month minimum waiting time in each Degree but some Lodges extend this to one year. Advancement must be approved by the Master and in some Lodges, a vote in the Third Degree. There are no appeals.

**China;** A minimum of one month in each Degree applies, provided the Candidate satisfies his Coach that he is eligible to proceed. There is no appeal.

**Philippines;** The minimum period is fourteen days and the Candidate must pass proficiency exams to a standard. There are no appeals.

**Ireland;** The minimum period is twelve weeks and Grand Lodge does not require proficiency testing. Some Lodges implement their own. No appeal mechanisms exist.

**Sweden;** An EA is expected to remain as such for six months and FC ten months. This period may be longer. The Lodge Master of Ceremonies is responsible for the Candidates knowledge of signs, words and Ritual of the Degrees done. Lodges establish their own measures for advancement which include activity in the Lodge and seeking knowledge.

**Belgium;** While the minimum waiting time between Degrees is eleven months, the requirements for advancement may vary from Lodge to Lodge. The requirements may include knowledge of words, signs, Ritual and attendance at a variety of activities. The First Degree Proficiency test of one Lodge is attached as Appendix C.

**Greece;** An EA is such for twelve months and a FC for six months. Oral tests are administered to test proficiency for advancement.

**India;** The minimum period between Degrees is one meeting, with a question and answer test being applied in open Lodge. The Degree ceremony may continue even if the Candidate is not prepared for the test. There are no appeals.

**Netherlands;** The usual period for both Degrees is one year. This can be shortened if attendance at Lodge and Lodges of Instruction is excellent. Question and Answer sessions are conducted in the Lodge of Instruction. Advancement can be refused if attendance at both Lodges is not satisfactory.

**Luxembourg;** During a waiting period of fifteen months in each Degree, the Candidate is expected to be a regular attendee at all meetings and produce an address for presentation to the Lodge. There is also a question and answer session before advancement. If poor attendance is due to work travel the Master may take this into account. There are no appeal mechanisms.

**Scotland;** A short period of fourteen days is the minimum between Degrees but the actual time varies between Lodges. The question and answer session as in the Ritual may be conducted in private. The matter of proficiency is something of a formality and Candidates are rarely held back except for poor attendance.

**England;** The minimum period of four weeks can be extended by Lodges. The questions and answers used are as the Ritual but some Lodges require the Candidate to recite the obligation of the previous Degree or present a paper. There is no appeal mechanism for failure to advance.

**France;** While there is no set minimum, a period of six to nine months is usual. The Candidate recites the Ritual to a Warden in open Lodge. If this doesn't meet the standard, advancement may be delayed.

#### **4. Education/Mentoring**

A wide divergence of practices was reported about this topic. While generally education material is prepared centrally, Lodges appear to have discretion about its use and may employ additional measures.

##### **4[a] What on-going education is provided in each of the degrees.**

The use of Lodges of Instruction is common. These may be formally arranged by the relevant Grand Lodge or by individual Lodges to cater for candidates who cannot attend the regular Lodge meeting because a higher degree is being worked. In most jurisdictions, material is prepared and distributed by Grand Lodges in addition to seminars being arranged. In Scotland and Ireland, the provision of education is at the discretion of the Lodge, while in Greece, the Junior Warden delivers lessons to candidates prior to the Lodge meeting. An example of the sort of material provided by Grand Lodges follows for Chile.

EA Degree; The symbol; Elements of General Philosophy; Elements of General Psychology; Study of the Symbols of the Degree; Philosophy of the Degree; Masonic History; Organization of Masonry and Masonic Legislation.

FC Degree; Symbols of the Second Degree; Philosophy of the Degree; analysis of opening and closing the Degree; Historical Analysis of the Degree; The Tylers Book; Regulations pertinent to the Degree; The Work and the FC and his preparation for external projection.

MM Degree; Symbolism of the Degree; Philosophy of the Degree; Philosophical and Symbolical Analysis of opening and closing; Masonic History; Masonic Jurisprudence and the MMs responsibilities both inside and outside the Lodge.

##### **4[b] How is the education material used devised. Is it common throughout the Jurisdiction or unique to each Lodge.**

Generally the material is developed by a central body, be it a Grand Lodge or other education development body. This material may be more or less extensive. In some instances research papers and speeches are used in addition to an emulation ritual. This latter may only be of use in relation to ritual work and not a more in-depth study of Freemasonry. The jurisdictions in Ireland, Greece, India, Luxembourg, Scotland and France rely on Lodges preparing and using educational material.

##### **4[c] Who is responsible for devising educational material.**

Where material is developed centrally, a variety of sources are responsible. These vary through Grand Lecturer, Grand Wardens, Grand Lodge of Instruction, Committees and Research Lodges. Where individual Lodges are responsible, material is sourced from such places as books, the internet and Research Lodges.

##### **4[d] If a mentoring system is in place, how many mentors are there in a Lodge.**

There is consideration underway in India and the Netherlands to implement a formal mentoring system. There is no formal system in Israel, Ireland, Scotland and England. In other places the Lodge mentor can be the Master, one of the Wardens, Proposer and Seconder or a senior Past Master.

## 5. Moving Through Office

**5[a] Are members capabilities assessed to a standard in each office held. Is there a process where they do not move upward until they meet a standard. How is this decided.**

A variety of methods are used to determine suitability for advancement, particularly to Master. There doesn't appear to be any particular organized procedures for assessment. All methods are subjective. The office of Master is filled by election, and other offices by different methods. Some involve the Master selecting officers in consultation and others autocratically. Greece has advised that the Master must have served a minimum of two years as an officer and had six years since being raised. Other officers must have had a minimum of one year since being raised. A successful vote for all is 50% plus one. In Sweden the Master is elected for six years and the appointment can be extended for the same period. Members of the Lodge nominate candidates and these are discussed by the Provincial Grand Master with Lodge officers. He makes the decision as to who is to be Master.

**5[b] How important is each of the following in assessing a member's ability to move upwards; ritual work; floor movements; compatibility with others; outside Lodge charitable activities or any other criteria.**

In most jurisdictions Ritual work and compatibility with others are the most important attributes assessed. Also considered important is leadership and overall contribution to the Lodge and regular attendance.

## 6. Social Activities

**6[a] What type of social activities are organized and how frequent are they.**

**6[b] What is a typical response rate to social activities.**

**6[c] Are social activities [a] used to raise funds; [b] subsidised by the Lodge; [c] fully paid for by participants.**

**6[d] Are social activities used to introduce potential members.**

**6[e] Are partners usually included in social activities.**

Cultural differences should be taken into account in relation to social activities. With this in mind, each Jurisdiction will be outlined.

**Chile;** Family and friends are involved in celebrating anniversaries and special occasions. Trips into other areas of the country are undertaken and social activities have a 50% response. Partners are included and some funds are raised at social activities and some are subsidised by the Lodge.

**Israel;** Similar to Chile.

**Philippines;** As above plus monthly fellowship dinner.

**Sweden;** All social events are paid for by participants. Open house evenings are held for potential members.

**Ireland;** A variety of events are organised by individual Lodges.

**Greece;** A minimum of two social events are held each year, paid for by participants. Partners are included and these can be used to raise funds.

**India;** The Master and Secretary have an effect on social activities. Some Lodges have an annual Ladies night. This may be part subsidised and used to entertain potential members. Other Lodges have partners, family and potential members present at cost to members. Ladies nights have a good response and include widows of deceased members. Some fundraising may occur.

**Netherlands;** An annual Ladies night is held which may raise funds and involve potential members and partners.

**Luxembourg;** It is not a practice to recruit through social events. These are fully paid for by members and may be used to raise funds. Activities include social golf days and visit to Masonic events or locations. An adequate response is experienced.

**Scotland;** At least one Ladies night a year is held, but more informal events such as Bar-B-Qs and Burns night are also popular. Partners are included in some activities and activities are generally paid for by participants. Lodges may pay for small gifts to Ladies and distinguished visitors to the Lodge.

**England;** An annual Ladies night is the usual social activity, but some Lodges will hold other events. Funds may be raised from social events and Lodge funds cannot be used to subsidise those activities. Some Centres organise events for all Lodges meeting there. Partners and potential members and partners are included.

**France;** Ladies are welcome at Installation and one or two ladies nights a year. Social meetings at a Brothers home are well attended. All events are paid for by participants and potential members and partners are included.

## **7. Benevolence and Charity**

**7[a] Is there a distinction between benevolence and charity, and if so how is each defined.**

**7[b] Is support for charitable causes decided centrally or locally, and how is that done.**

**7[c] How are funds raised for charitable work or other donations.**

**7[d] What are typical charitable causes which are supported e.g. medical, children, aged etc.**

It will be interesting to consider each jurisdiction separately.

**France;** No distinction is made between benevolence and charity. Monies are paid from alms and raffles, and recipients are decided locally. Funds go towards Doctors without Borders and children appeals.

**England;** United Kingdom Law provides for all fundraising to have a defined purpose. If it raised towards a charity, monies must go to that charity. If raised for benevolence it can be used for that purpose or can also be donated to a charity. Lodges decide where their funds go. Funds are raised through events, bequests or donations. The United Grand Lodge of England has its own charity fund which attracts a higher interest rate and a tax rebate.

**Scotland;** No distinction is made and most Lodge benevolent funds are donated to the Grand Lodge of Scotland or individual appeals. Amounts are decided by local vote. Funds are raised through collection, social occasions and sale of a variety of items. The Scottish Grand charity has widespread aims and includes cancer research and matters to do with children.

**Luxembourg;** All funds collected in Lodge meetings are remitted to Grand Lodge where the Grand Master decides distribution. Other funds raised are discussed and recommendation made by the charity Steward. Approval is by the Master. Lodge funds go to local causes as well as internationally to third world countries.

**Netherlands;** Benevolence for poor and distressed Brethren is decided locally. International assistance goes towards assistance to women in poor countries and medical research.

**India;** Different approaches are made in different areas. In one, the view is taken that benevolence is directed to members and charity to outside the Lodge. Money is raised through voluntary donations from members, there is no public fund raising. The decision on distribution is made by the Lodge. There are a number of desirable projects and joining with Rotary and Lions is common. In the other, central use of monies from alms collections and donations is made. One stream is for non-Masonic Social Service and the other Masonic families, particularly for Medical reasons or educational assistance for children of Masons. Social Service assistance is provided in kind, not cash.

**Greece;** Here benevolence is considered to have a broader meaning than charity. The distribution of funds is usually decided centrally from donations by members. Funds for scholarships for poor students is popular,

**Sweden;** It is considered that benevolence is to be directed to Brethren and charity to wider needs in society. Distribution is usually decided locally but international events such as earthquake or tsunami are exceptions. Funds are raised by collections at meetings and Foundations. Typical causes supported are the medical care of children and the aged as well as other causes.

**Ireland;** Benevolence and charity is decided by each Lodge.

**Philippines;** No distinction is made between benevolence and charity. Funds are raised by alms collection and donations and may be distributed centrally and locally. A wide variety of worthy causes are supported.

**China;** Lodges do not get involved, charity being carried out by the Shrine.

**Israel;** No distinction is made between benevolence and charity. Each Lodge has a fund as does the Grand Lodge for which a committee decides distribution. Funds are raised through alms collections, donations and social events. The general use of funds is for medical purposes and the needy.

**Chile;** Again no distinction is made between benevolence and charity. Each Lodge has its own causes and Grand Lodge becomes involved with international causes such as earthquakes and tsunamis. In these cases funds are sent to the relevant Grand Lodge. Funds for these purposes are raised by a levy on membership. Assistance for children is popular with local distribution.

### **Conclusions;**

A copy of these results has been forwarded to those who participated. It is interesting to note both the similarities and differences reported across the subject matter. It appears to be a matter of process and culture and not differences in Masonic Philosophy that gives rise to these differences. It is hoped that those exposed to these differences may appreciate that others do things differently to them for good reason and perhaps their methods could be copied or improved upon.

## **Appendix A**

### **Grand Lodges Approached to Participate**

#### **United States of America**

Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of California

The Grand Lodge of Georgia, Free and Accepted Masons

The Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of New York

The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons in the State of New Hampshire

#### **Canada**

The Grand Lodge of Alberta, Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons

The Grand Lodge of Quebec, Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons

#### **Southern America**

The Grand Orient of Brazil

The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Chile

The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Panama of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons

The Grand Orient of Haiti

The York Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Mexico

#### **Africa**

The Grand Lodge of Gabon

The Grand Lodge of South Africa

District Grand Lodge of Nigeria [SC]

#### **Europe**

Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Ireland

Grand Lodge of Sweden, Swedish Order of Freemasons

Regular Grand Lodge of Belgium

Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Germany

#### **Mediterranean**

Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Greece

Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Turkey

Grand Lodge of the State of Israel

#### **Asia**

Grand Lodge of India

District Grand Lodge of the Eastern Archipelago [EC]

Grand Lodge of the Philippines

Grand Lodge of China

#### **Oceania**

Grand Lodge of Hawaii

## **Appendix B Questionnaire**

### **1. Pre-entry assessment**

- 1[a]** If a potential member is known to a Freemason, how is his suitability assessed.
- 1[b]** If a potential member is not known to a Freemason, is his suitability assessed differently and if so in what way.
- 1[c]** Are there any appeal mechanisms if an applicant for membership is rejected prior to the Lodge deciding suitability.
- 1[d]** What method is used within the Lodge to accept or reject a potential candidate e.g. secret ballot, show of hands.
- 1[e]** If a candidate is rejected within the Lodge, is there an appeal mechanism in place and how does it work.

### **2. Preparation of Candidates**

- 2[a]** What information is a candidate given prior to initiation and when and how is it given.
- 2[b]** In what way is a candidate prepared for each of the degrees, in both information provided and the way he is dressed.

### **3. Testing Proficiency of Candidates**

- 3[a]** If there are waiting periods between each degree, what are they.
- 3[b]** What methods are used to test the candidate's proficiency prior to him taking the next degree.
- 3[c]** Can a candidate be refused advancement until standards are met and are there appeal mechanisms in place and how do they work.

### **4. Education/Mentoring**

- 4[a]** What on-going education is provided in each of the degrees.
- 4[b]** How is the education material used devised. Is it common throughout the Jurisdiction or unique to each Lodge.
- 4[c]** Who is responsible for devising educational material.
- 4[d]** If a mentoring system is in place, how many mentors are there in a Lodge.

### **5. Moving through office to Worshipful Master**

- 5[a]** Are members capabilities assessed to a standard in each office held. Is there a process where they do not move upward until they meet a standard. How is this decided.
- [b]** How important is each of the following in assessing a member's ability to move upwards; ritual work; floor movements; compatibility with others; outside Lodge charitable activities or any other criteria.

### **6. Social Activities**

- 6[a]** What type of social activities are organized and how frequent are they.
- 6[b]** What is a typical response rate to social activities.
- 6[c]** Are social activities [a] used to raise funds; [b] subsidised by the Lodge; [c] fully paid for by participants.
- 6[d]** Are social activities used to introduce potential members.
- 6[e]** Are partners usually included in social activities.

### **7. Benevolence and Charity**

- 7[a]** Is there a distinction between benevolence and charity, and if so how is each defined.
- 7[b]** Is support for charitable causes decided centrally or locally, and how is that done.
- 7[c]** How are funds raised for charitable work or other donations.
- 7[d]** What are typical charitable causes which are supported e.g. medical, children, aged etc.