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Statement for Universities and other HE Providers on top-up Degrees

This statement:

- sets out the expectation of the Engineering Council and professional engineering institutions (Licensees of the Engineering Council) that HEIs with accredited programmes or seeking accreditation of their programmes must ensure they clearly differentiate between top-up degrees and full duration programmes that permit direct entry to later years of study

Higher education institutions (HEIs) may offer 'top-up' bachelors degree programmes (with or without honours). These are designed for students who have completed a foundation degree or HND who wish to progress to achieve a bachelors degree. They are usually equivalent to the final year of a full duration degree and permit the conversion of an existing qualification to a bachelors degree.

Top-up degrees differ from direct entry to a later year of a full duration programme (following an assessment of prior learning) because they are designed to build upon outcomes from a prior qualification. Full duration in this context refers to a degree designed as a cohesive programme for which students usually study the full duration and number of credits required to be awarded the degree.

If the same or a similar title is awarded for full duration and top-up programmes, students will only be considered to have completed an accredited programme if they have completed a variant for which accreditation is confirmed.

If a HEI awards a top-up degree which it believes to be identical and equivalent to the final year of an accredited full duration degree, it should seek specific accreditation for the top-up degree. A graduate from a top-up degree that has not specifically been accredited will not be considered to hold an accredited degree, even if the HEI offers an accredited full duration variant of the same degree.

Graduates from a top-up degree that has been accredited must also have completed a first qualification (eg foundation degree or HND) that has been appropriately recognised (accredited or approved for IEng with further learning required) by a professional engineering institution to be considered to hold an accredited degree.

Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes (AHEP) 4.0 permits accreditation of top-up degrees as standalone programmes of further learning for IEng. Many top up-degrees are designed to support progression from a specific foundation degree or HND. Where this is not the case, the accreditation process may seek evidence of how students admitted to the top-up programme are supported to bridge any gaps in discipline-specific knowledge.

A candidate admitted directly into a later year of an accredited full duration programme who graduates with a cohort from an accredited intake is considered to hold an accredited degree.

If accreditation is sought for a degree programme or programmes where full duration and top-up variants are delivered with the same award and title(s), HEIs must either:

- ensure that the full duration and top-up programmes are both accredited for intakes graduating at the same time

or

- agree with the accrediting professional engineering institution(s) a means of clearly differentiating the accreditation status of each degree awarded, and make it absolutely clear in any material referring to the programmes where such programmes have not been accredited. If the words 'top-up' are included in the title of the top-up variant and will appear on degree certificates that would be accepted as clear differentiation.

Please note that it is not acceptable to some professional engineering institutions for information differentiating programmes to be referred to only on the graduate's degree transcript or the back of degree certificates as these are not used in their membership processes.

Professional engineering institutions may refuse to accredit programmes if they believe that HEIs (or their partners) are not being sufficiently clear about the non-accredited status of degree programmes.