

Engineering Gateways Flexible Pathways to becoming a Professional Engineer

Stakeholders' Group meeting, 21 May 2010

Meeting notes

This was the second meeting of the Stakeholders' Group, chaired by Wendy Laynton, Chair of the Engineering Gateways Steering Committee. The thirty participants represented a range of stakeholder groups including universities, colleges, professional engineering institutions, Sector Skills Councils, employers and employer organisations.

Deborah Seddon, Engineering Council, gave an update about the Engineering Gateways programmes and reported on an independent evaluation of the initiative so far. The general picture is very encouraging. There is a high level of satisfaction and continuing commitment to the pathway from each of the stakeholder groups. The first MSc Professional Engineering graduates are expected in 2011.

Presentations were made by each of the three initial PEI participants (IET, IMechE, RAeS) focusing on the individual's documentation. The programme, list of attendees and presentations are available on the Engineering Gateways website www.engc.org.uk/http://www.engc.org.uk/engineering-gateways/stakeholders-group.aspx

Key points arising from the presentations and the discussion

Although the programme documentation stresses that achieving CEng status is not guaranteed, expectations from the participating employers are high. Further attention may need to be given to managing expectations. The type of workplace activity and how the individual is employed will have a bearing on how close s/he is to achieving CEng status at when graduating from the MSc Professional Engineering.

The initial tripartite discussion and mapping exercise (academic, employer, individual) is key. Academic supervisors can play an important on-going role in advising the employer about the type of activity/experience that their employee may need in order to be successful on this pathway.

The requirement for early PEI feedback on the individual's learning agreement and other supporting documentation, as set out in the Protocol with the Engineering Council, is proving to be valuable.

It is assumed that a company supporting an individual on this pathway has also planned for the individual's future, and concern was expressed if this is not the case. Employers may have differing motivations from their employees, for example to gain a commercial advantage by having a professionally qualified workforce.

Targeting particular sectors, eg nuclear, with focused employer engagement was suggested, but first there would need to be an assurance that there is HEI capacity.

The PEIs confirmed that they view this as another pathway to registration, not a replacement for existing pathway(s). It would appeal to certain individual in particular circumstances.

There was support for a progressive approach ie eligible individuals registering first as IEng. More could be done to promote this approach, which can be beneficial for the individual.

Translating an individual's work into an academic programme at Master's level can be challenging. This may be due to the faster pace of change in the workplace, though the learning agreement should be seen as a live document, re-drafted as required. Another example cited was the offshore industry, where employers felt that there was insufficient opportunity for Master's level work. Individuals working on maintenance contracts would still need to undertake a significant amount of lower level work.

Individuals need to be aware that they will need to take responsibility for their learning and development, however they may need help in developing skills for learning at Master's level. At least one of the participating universities (Northumbria) includes a module 'how to learn in the workplace'. Encouraging the integration of professional development from the undergraduate stage would be helpful.

The PEIs' documentation requirements are different. Rather than striving for common documentation, greater sharing of experience and clear explanations about why information is being sought, are important.

Summary - Richard Shearman, Director of Formation/Deputy CEO, Engineering Council

The PEI's presentations revealed much in common in terms of their aims, objectives and requirements. The documentation fits with other CEng documentation and within the overall context of professional registration.

Significant numbers of potential registrants are considered as individual cases, and the basic requirements in this pathway are no different than for any other pathway to registration.

Individuals need to have a firm handle on how they are developing, and need to engage in critical reflection. Use of professional development recording tools was suggested.

More work is required to establish clear and common aims and objectives.

Way forward

It was agreed that:

- each PEI will provide a brief summary of what they expect to see within an individual's documentation
- greater involvement of employers is needed to steer this development in the future.