As ever in engineering, the challenge of becoming a Chartered Engineer in the UK starts with specification, in this instance called UK-SPEC (the UK standard for professional engineering competence). This sets out the required competencies which the candidate must demonstrate, according to the five categories of:

A: Engineering knowledge and understanding
B: Application of methods to the analysis and solution of engineering problems
C: Provision of leadership
D: Effective interpersonal skills
E: Professional standards & codes of conduct

Before I began the process, I thought I might require a chronological log of every engineering activity I had been involved in. There is no such requirement; rather there is a need to demonstrate, using evidence, that the candidate has met the sub criteria of each of the five areas of competency. The ‘Qualifying Report’ for the Professional Review and Interview (PRI) provides a structure under which this can be achieved simply. It is by far the most involved part of the application (I would estimate that over 80% of the time taken by my application was devoted to this form), and provides the basis for the assessors to conduct the interview. Attempting to complete this document was the best indication I found as to whether I was ready to consider myself suitable for chartership, and provided a useful viewpoint on missing areas in my professional experiences that I needed to address in any case. It also helped to remind me of activities that I had undertaken and completely forgotten; a situation that would of course have been avoided if I had kept a log.

I began my career by completing a four-year MEng degree in Aerospace Engineering, which included an industrial placement with Rolls-Royce. I then spent a short period on the INBIS (now Assystem) Graduate Training scheme before deciding that I wished to pursue a PhD. Subsequently, I remained in academia working on a succession of industrially-based research programmes. From this, it was relatively straightforward to demonstrate competency in areas A, B and to an extent E.

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Dr Stephen Liddle MEng (Hons) PhD CEng MRAeS

CASE STUDY

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As with any application form or interview, it is sensible to draw examples from as wide a range of experiences as possible, so against each sub-competency I attempted to find evidence from three of my work situations.

It would have been more difficult for me to justify enough evidence for section C and to some extent D (basically people management and leadership-based competencies) had I been relying on ‘day job’ evidence. I suspect many early career candidates may find themselves in a similar position, with a great deal of technical and project expertise but lacking the opportunity to be responsible for other personnel. Luckily, this is an area where it is possible to get some real value from institution or society membership. In my case, I have been involved in the work of the RAeS’s Young Members Board for some five years and currently chair it. This provides another strand of evidence in an aerospace industrial context: for example, I am ultimately responsible for the personnel and financial management of the YMB and, as part of the Council, the Society itself. Aside from the work that we do, the branch network will in general welcome with open arms any ‘younger’ members who are willing to get involved in their work, which provides a myriad of opportunities in leadership, financial and project management.

Having completed the required documents, you are asked to give your preferred date and venue for the interview which is confirmed once the Society has approved the application.

Having only been involved in my own, my experiences of this are somewhat limited, but I can report that I actually enjoyed it! The three assessors (two with an aerospace background and a trainee assessor) chose experiences detailed in my PRI document and asked me to expand on them in discussion. Having satisfied themselves that I had done what I claimed, the last ten to fifteen minutes of the session were spent on the chosen discussion topic. In this, the candidate must speak (no visual aids necessary) on a topic of their choice, that illustrates the role of the engineer in society. I chose to discuss how I believe the aerospace community must engage the public with facts rather than hysteria in the climate debate. The whole interview took around one hour, and after about two months I heard that I’d been successful.

This explains how I achieved CEng, but why did I want to go through the process? To practise as a solicitor, accountant, actuary etc, professional qualifications are required; an engineer has no such requirement. Recruitment advertisements will yield few roles that require chartership, although it does seem that the status is increasingly viewed as desirable in higher level roles. But from my point of view, having ‘CEng’ as a post-nominal means that others can be confident in my ability and that I should be taken seriously as an engineering professional. It is clearly a status that is earned based on both consistency and persistence, and has been awarded by respected fellow professionals. Probably more than any of my other qualifications, this one says, “I am a professional engineer”.

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