

Peter Richards IEng FRAeS

When I joined British Airways as an Electrical Technician Apprentice in 1962, little did I know that this was to be the start of an enviable career spanning nearly 40 years.

After successfully completing my five year apprenticeship, I became a Licensed Aircraft Maintenance Engineer on the Boeing 707 aircraft whilst also continuing to study for a Full Technological Certificate (FTC) at college. On completion of the FTC, I became a graduate member of the Society of Licensed Aircraft Engineering and Technologists (SLAET), which would later, by amalgamation, be known as the RAeS.

Professional registration was always strongly promoted by SLAET and I was encouraged to apply for Technician Engineer (now known as IEng) with the Engineering Council (EngC). I am convinced that gaining professional registration at this level was the reason my career took off (quite literally).

Once registered, I went on to become an avionic instructor at the newly formed Air Corporations Engineering Apprentices School, where I taught years 1 and 2 basic aircraft avionic theory and practical lessons. Many of my students recognised my professional status from my post nominals and I would always attempt to guide them to join SLAET and attend the lectures. Some of my former students remain colleagues through RAeS to this day, having achieved professional status in their own right.

Four years later, I was head-hunted into flight operations and spent the next 27 years, until retirement, as a flight engineer officer flying a variety of long range aircraft. This was a wonderful job, as I was frequently 'my own boss' when overseas with a technically unserviceable aircraft. It would be up to me to coordinate others to achieve sufficient serviceability to enable onward flight with passengers on board, or in some cases, without. Many times, I rectified the defects myself. Some of my passengers had very high profiles, including various members of the Royal Family. On one occasion, HRH Prince Charles borrowed my aircrew sun glasses during a flight into Nassau!



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Having retired in 2000, at the age of 55, I now spend much of my spare time as a volunteer for the Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS) and the EngC. Within the RAeS, I am currently the chairman of the Non-Corporate Grading Committee, which handles all applications for EngTech and IEng as well as applications for membership of the Society. This appointment also requires that I sit on the Society's professional standards board, giving me the additional responsibilities of supplying IEng registration assessors. In addition I am a member of the Quality Assurance and Audit Committees at the EngC.

Over the years, my confidence in risk assessment and engineering judgment was continually 'tested' and as I gained experience I felt able to handle ever more complex defects. So, as you can see, I have a great deal of experience and expertise within the world of aeronautical engineering which I can reflect upon when reviewing and assessing today's engineers and technicians' experiences and competences.

I honestly believe that my upward mobility from apprentice to electrician to instructor and finally flight engineer was facilitated by registration as an IEng, and although now retired, I still believe this professional qualification can help today's young engineers progress through their career.

The hallmark of all professionals, not just engineers, is the acceptance of competence and commitment as the driving force for personal quality. When I am interviewing for IEng, I always address the commitment requirement first, as this will show me whether or not the applicant has grasped these demands sufficiently. Enthusiasm for the profession is only good for a short while and needs to be refreshed, in all sorts of ways, throughout an individual's professional life.

My enthusiasm for aeronautical engineering has never waned. I have recently been awarded the Flight Operations Group Medal in the RAeS' Specialist Groups' Awards in recognition of my contribution to the Society's specialist Flight Operations Group, to which I regularly provide feedback from the UK Flight Committee. Even now, twelve years after leaving the profession, I am still a committed and proud Incorporated Engineer.

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Registered March 1970

