

COVID19: Information for higher education providers

Interruption to accredited programme delivery and assessment

The Engineering Council and Professional Engineering Institutions (PEIs) are aware that education providers are experiencing or planning for possible interruption to delivery and assessment during the COVID 19 outbreak.

It is expected that providers of accredited degrees will aim to maintain delivery of full programmes, but may need to make adjustments to delivery and assessment. This may include to delivery format, order in which modules are delivered, assessment methodologies, re-scheduling of learning and assessment into holiday periods, and possibly extension of end dates to enable work that has had to be suspended to be completed and assessed.

It is a condition of accreditation that providers inform accrediting PEIs of any changes to programme delivery and assessment. The PEI(s) must then satisfy itself/themselves that all the required learning outcomes at the required level will still be achieved by all graduates. Providers must therefore maintain a fully-documented record of changes, which demonstrates that all graduates will achieve the required learning outcomes, and keep accrediting PEIs informed.

The Engineering Council is not prescriptive regarding mode of delivery or assessment etc, although some PEIs may set specific requirements. Where a student is unable to complete a project that delivers required Learning Outcomes, the provider will need to set out the alternative mechanisms for assessing the achievement of those outcomes.

A more extreme situation may see an extended period of closure, with all delivery and assessment having to be suspended. In principle the above would still apply. If interruption to programme delivery led to a reduced number of credits or award of the degree without completing a project, PEIs would need to determine the scope of the evidence they would need to assure them that all graduates would still achieve all of the learning outcomes at the applicable level taking account of the changes.

Cancellation or changes to accreditation visits

During the Covid 19 outbreak it is anticipated that some accreditation visits may not be able to proceed as planned. This may be due to ability of accreditors (many of whom may be or live with people considered to be high risk) to travel to visits, unavailability of staff, students and/or industrial advisory panel members, or other factors.

Any provider that anticipates changes that may impact upon a forthcoming accreditation visit is asked to contact the accreditation PEI(s) as early as possible.

Professional Engineering Institutions may, at least initially, discuss arrangements with providers on a case by case basis. In some instances it may be possible to proceed remotely.

Engineering Council advice, at the time of writing, to Professional Engineering Institutions where a visit is not able to proceed in the normal way is:

1. The first consideration should be postponing the visit; if postponement is not a realistic option the reasons should be recorded, then;
2. Consider conducting a 'remote' assessment using video conferencing, videos and correspondence, taking account of the institution's previous accreditation history:

- If sufficient evidence is gathered award accreditation for a limited period then undertake a small-scale follow-up visit when possible.
 - If sufficient evidence is gathered and the locations unable to be visited are part of a partnership arrangement where the main campus is accredited, seek a visit exemption from the Engineering Council.
3. If 'remote' assessment is not possible, relevant, appropriate or does not provide sufficient evidence as above, consider awarding a one-year extension to accreditation.

The need for some visits to be rescheduled is likely to have an impact upon how soon new accreditation visits can be scheduled, as PEIs are limited in how many visits they and their volunteers can resource in an academic year.

We are aware that this is a difficult time for everyone, with rapidly changing advice. Providers are encouraged to maintain communication with PEIs regarding possible changes. We are aware that it is likely to be difficult for providers and PEIs to reschedule or adapt accreditation visits, and appreciate everyone's patience and cooperation.

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