

EAB

Engineering Accreditation Board

EAB close out report

Background

The Engineering Accreditation Board (EAB) was formed in January 2006. This merged the Degree Accreditation Board for Chartered Engineers (DABCE) and the Joint Accreditation Board for Incorporated Engineers and Engineering Technicians (JAB).

DABCE managed the accreditation of degree programmes leading to Chartered Engineer registration. JAB led the accreditation and approval of programmes leading to Incorporated Engineer and Engineering Technician registration. DABCE and JAB both had PEI secretariat.

Membership of the Engineering Accreditation Board (EAB) was open to all Institutions licensed to accredit programmes under UK-SPEC (then in due course AHEP), and also to other appropriate bodies with an interest in the accreditation of engineering programmes which members would agree to admit. The original Terms of Reference highlighted the need to consider matters of mutual interest on the accreditation of programmes which provided both the underpinning knowledge and understanding for Incorporated Engineer and Chartered Engineer registration (as well as awareness of Engineering Technician qualifications and activities) and conform to the requirements of the respective PEIs. The role and responsibilities of the Secretariat were underpinned by the mission of the EAB:

- To encourage consistent accreditation processes and practices.
- To provide a single point of contact, where appropriate, to facilitate the accreditation of programmes.
- To ensure smooth running of the quarterly EAB meetings and any working groups that were established from time to time and liaise with the relevant Chairman on matters for consideration.
- To facilitate joint accreditation visits and contribute to their smooth running. In line with published procedures.

An Accreditation Review was initiated by the Engineering Council Board in May 2019 in response to perceptions that inconsistencies in PEI accreditation practice were posing a risk to the credibility of Engineering Council accreditation standards and processes. A recommendation from the Engineering Council Accreditation Review was to reframe EAB as a formal committee of the Engineering Council. EAB members agreed that they would like the Engineering Council to provide secretariat for a practice sharing forum. In July 2024 the Programme Recognition Forum (PRF) held its first meeting. Previous members of EAB and the Engineering Council's former Engineering and Technician Apprenticeships (EATQ) Forum were invited to join PRF.

Members of EAB agreed at their meeting on 14 March 2022 that future EAB visits would not be scheduled to take place beyond June 2023, and that alternative arrangements for accreditation visits involving multiple PEIs would be considered. This decision was due to ongoing challenges of resourcing EAB visits which had become increasingly complex since EAB was established, as well as recognition that the current EAB visit process couldn't accommodate an equivalent level of support to university departments to that some PEIs provide through non-EAB processes. This decision was made after considering the

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outcomes of two workshops held with Chairs of PEI Accreditation Committees in January and February 2022 and following significant discussion at two EAB meetings.

A joint visit Task and Finish Group was formed in July 2022 to agree a way forward. The TaFG received two bids to manage future joint accreditation visits, these being from the Engineering Council and the IET. The TaFG accepted the IET's bid to manage future joint accreditation visits. The IET agreed to discuss internally how the visits would be managed in line with their other priorities and to report back to the EAB which it did in September 2022 and June 2023 regarding the structure of the new Joint Accreditation Service (JAS) and its potential service to PEIs and HEIs.

The next steps for IET were to firm up the costs of setting up and providing the JAS and to seek views from the other PEIs for the IET to provide this service. IET also needed to make a formal internal decision on whether it could support the required business plan within its overall business activity, before it could make a firm offer to PEIs. This would need to be decided in order to support HEIs who wish to organise and arrange joint accreditation visits for 2024/25 onwards.

At a special and final EAB meeting on 17 July 2024 the IET presented a proposal to provide future joint visit Secretariat. A communication was issued to PEI CEOs.

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Summary history

The following sections of this close out report summarise discussions and decisions made year on year since 2006.

2006

All 21 of the PEIs that were at this time licensed by the Engineering Council to accredit academic programmes were members of the new EAB, with the Engineering Council providing its secretariat.

The former Chairs of DABCE and JAB respectively, both IET members, were elected as the Chairman and Vice-Chairman at the start of 2006. The Board's new Terms of Reference were shortly agreed soon after and a new website (www.engab.org.uk) was launched to coincide with the start of the new Board.

Various working groups were established which included a Framing of Accreditation Working Group to address the issues of backdating and how to denote accreditation periods. On the recommendation of both the EAB and Registration Standards Committee (RSC), a MSc Learning Outcomes Working Group was convened to consider several matters relating to outcomes from Masters degrees, including whether MScs should be accredited or approved.

A Documentation Working Group, was reconvened to review the EAB accreditation documentation, originally drafted under the auspices of DABCE in 2005, and, to consider the recommendations of the MSc Learning Outcomes Working Group.

Issues such as how compensation and condonement were being applied within engineering programmes and how this affected accreditation decisions was discussed, along with whether EAB should consider accrediting IPD schemes.

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2007

The EAB met four times in 2007 and the first EAB seminar, on Masters Learning Outcomes, was held after the September meeting.

The Documentation WG continued its work to discuss both the revision of existing documentation and the creation of new documents to be used on EAB visits.

The question of whether accreditation should be chargeable was raised and it was decided to convene a Charging Working Group to look at the various issues involved. The Group met once and discussed various approaches to charging.

The Royal Academy of Engineering's paper *Educating Engineers for the 21st Century*, which suggested that accreditation practices might hinder course development and innovation, caused some debate among members.

Members were informed of the development of the new European EUR-ACE Label, which the Engineering Council could award to programmes accredited since November 2006 upon application (and payment of a fee) from the HEI. It was suggested that the PEIs might promote the Label as part of the accreditation process. It was noted that the market for the Label remained unproven due to the significant fees attached.

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The Chair of the Assessment of Learning Outcomes Working Group gave a presentation on the Group's work at the December meeting of the EAB. He discussed issues such as the different methods of assessment and the merits of universities using a matrix to demonstrate where the learning outcomes are achieved in each module of their programmes.

2008

The Foundation Degree Working Group (FDWG) met for the first time on 16th December 2008. The Group was formed following discussions at EAB on how to deal with the increasing number of Foundation Degrees (Fds) being put forward for accreditation. It was agreed that the Working Group would discuss the issues surrounding Fds and produce some guidance for member Institutions on how they might recognise these qualifications.

The new version of UK-SPEC was launched by the Engineering Council on 18th December 2008. The Standard built on the 2003 document, integrating the three categories of registration, Engineering Technician, Incorporated Engineer, and Chartered Engineer, into a format that emphasised the progression possibilities for those entering the profession. It also provided more detailed guidance on how to satisfy the requirements for registration and clarified educational benchmarks.

The updated version of the Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes (AHEP) booklet was also launched on 18th December 2008. None of the required learning outcomes (which had already been adopted by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for their Engineering Benchmark) had changed, but some of the guidance on procedure was improved in the light of experience. The QAA and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level descriptors were also included in a new appendix and the EAB Chair provided a new Foreword.

2009

A key element of EAB's work this year had been directed towards process improvement and a consideration of the issues that affected the accreditation of an increasing range of HE provision.

A major Engineering Council conference 'Accreditation of engineering degree programmes – current requirements and future challenges' was held on 14 October 2009 at IMarEST, and this helped to shape EAB's thinking.

A new EAB document 'Chair's brief' was produced. This was to help chairs of EAB visits to ensure that the EAB visit was conducted as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The EAB Foundation Degrees Working Group developed a statement about the accreditation of Foundation Degrees that was subsequently discussed and approved by RSC and published by the Engineering Council.

An EAB Distance Learning Working Group developed a guidance note on the accreditation of distance learning programmes. This was subsequently discussed and approved by RSC and published by the Engineering Council.

A new Engineering Council document 'Principles for assessing applications to waive the requirement to make an accreditation visit' provided guidance to members of RSC when

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considering applications from PEIs to waive the requirement to visit a provider. EAB contributed to this Engineering Council document and the final statement was noted by EAB.

2010

A meeting for Chairs of the PEI accreditation committees was held on 28 June at the Engineering Council. PEI chairs found this a very useful meeting and it was agreed that this meeting would be held annually. EAB members agreed that the number of EAB meetings could be reduced to 3 meetings a year.

Feedback forms from universities following an EAB visit resulted in the following:

- *“A single EAB visit was extremely useful to our Department. We provide a diverse range of degree programmes relating to Mechanical Engineering but also involving partner Departments both within the University (Aerospace Engineering) and externally (Glasgow School of Art). To arrange separate visits would have been very difficult to organise, in terms of staff and student availability on each visit day. Further developments towards a School of Engineering, and the provision of an increasingly diverse range of degree programmes, reinforce the benefits of an EAB approach”*
- *“It was of major benefit, in terms of time and effort, to have a single joined-up accreditation visit for which I thank the EAB. Last time around there were three separate accreditations, three for the IGDS and one for APC, which involved two sets of documentation. (InstMC used that submitted to IChemE) and two different visits (IET and InstMC). It is also good news that the future periods of accreditation will be aligned.*
- *We have found that the whole experience of having a joint visit organised by the EAB very positive. The initial communication from the EAB was very clear and the instructions on how to prepare the documentation were clear. It is especially positive to notice that much less information had to be provided as paper copies. We strongly support this and have found that using CDs and putting the majority of the documents on the CDs is a very positive move forward.*

International Accreditation was discussed by EAB as there had been an increase in the number of overseas accreditation requests received by the EAB Secretariat. EAB agreed to expand the initial data form (the HEI initial application form) to include details of staff and student membership of UK PEIs, the programme specifications and their facilities. The previous form did not provide adequate information to enable the PEIs to decide whether to participate in an overseas accreditation visit. EAB also agreed that once a visit was agreed in principle, the university should be required to attend a briefing meeting in the UK.

2011

EAB members contributed to the Engineering Council's work to raise awareness about the value of accredited status. Statements for use on an accreditation certificate issued by a PEI, in decision letters from PEIs, and by the HEI on its website or prospectus were made available.

All the universities visited either strongly agreed or tended to agree via feedback forms that the visit aims had been met in a well organised and constructive manner. Specific comments included:

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- *The detail with which the panel had reviewed the paperwork was very impressive.*
- *The Chairman of the panel was excellent at moderating and summarising the inputs from the various panel members.*
- *The level of support from the EAB secretariat was excellent and the institution staff members who accompanied the panel were excellent.*
- *Overall, the process was a useful external review that will help us improve the overall student experience at the Department.*
- *The School was very satisfied with the Engineering Accreditation Board (EAB) accreditation process, and especially with the professional management of the EAB Accreditation Board visit.*
- *The accreditation process was seen as a partnership between the University and the EAB. Consequently, the dialogue between the University and EAB over the period of time was first-class, and very worthwhile. Throughout the lead-up to the two-day visit, and on the actual two-day visit itself, the accreditation visit was seen as a developmental process which would constantly help improve the provision of the University programmes and awards for the future.*

EAB members participated in a workshop at the July EAB meeting. Topics covered included whether accreditation has the power to influence/change university systems, and to what extent it uncovers and shares good practice. The consensus of members participating in the discussion was that they believed accreditation did help to support universities in curriculum content, delivery, and resources. For example accreditation could influence curriculum innovation and change, notably the teaching of health & safety, sustainability, and ethics. Accreditation could bring positive influence to ensure that resources such as staffing, laboratories and technical support were adequate.

Members felt that accreditation would add value to the engineering programmes in the new higher university fees context.

Members discussed the perception that accreditation stifles innovation. PEI pre-accreditation briefings were cited as good practice in helping to deal with these misperceptions.

Members were keen for the sharing of good accreditation practice, a stated part of EAB's remit, to include sharing of examples of innovative programmes that have been accredited.

The Engineering Council published a new logo to denote accredited status. This was made available on the Engineering Council's website with a supporting statement aimed at students and their advisers which explained accreditation.

AHEP was reprinted to include the learning outcomes for Masters degrees other than the integrated MEng that were approved by the Engineering Council in July 2011.

EAB contributed comments on the Engineering Council's revised Guidance note on Academic Accreditation. This was published in October 2011 and was made available on the Engineering Council's Partner Portal.

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2012

Key Information Sets (KIS) were introduced in September 2012 and HEIs in England were required to return accreditation data for all undergraduate courses. EAB members raised significant concern over the accuracy of published information on KIS and the topic was discussed a number of times.

The Engineering Council continued to work with the relevant organisations to ensure the accuracy of KIS information. Specific wording was suggested and information for universities about wording and the use of the Engineering Council Accredited Degree logo was added to the Engineering Council website.

This activity subsequently supported the Engineering Council in raising concerns over the proposed Government plans to introduce a kite-mark for degree programmes in the STEM sector. The Engineering Council advised that it would continue to work with the relevant organisations to ensure that standard wording was used to indicate whether a programme was accredited. Through the support of EAB, the role of industry in setting the professional standards and participating in accreditation was demonstrated, thus eliminating the need for such a kite-mark in the engineering sector. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) subsequently accepted this position.

EAB members also supported the review and development of accreditation documentation and processes. Of significant importance, the Registration Standards Committee (RSC) approved a change in the Regulations for Registration (RfR) to list an accredited EngD as an exemplifying academic qualification for CEng for those holding an accredited Bachelor's degree with honours in engineering and technology. As a result, a number of EngD programmes were successfully accredited.

EAB Members agreed to provide examples of accredited innovative programmes and provision to counteract the view that accreditation stifles innovation and to share best practice. The intention was that examples would be aimed at universities but eventually this would also be useful for raising awareness to other audiences such as the government and employers.

Feedback from HEIs via the feedback form following an EAB visit continued to be positive:

- Compared to multiple single PEI visits we found the EAB visit beneficial given the large overlap between our different MSc programmes and our UG programmes.
- This is the second EAB visit to the School in the last 3 years. We believe a single EAB visit is better than separate visits by PEIs. A single visit eliminates the need for preparation of separate accreditation documents for each of the PEI as the same documentation is submitted to all PEIs on a single EAB visit.
- There is also a benefit of a single focal point, i.e. the EAB Secretariat, rather than having to communicate separately with individual PEIs. Further, an EAB visit enables more uniform application of UK-SPEC by PEIs.
- The pre-visit support, information and guidelines on how to complete all the various forms are excellent.
- We felt that the visit was very well organized and it was clear that huge efforts were made by the secretariat to integrate the perspectives and needs of the various institutions. There is a great benefit to us to be able to deal with nine institutions all in one exercise.

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2013

A number of topics regarding the changes and challenges to the UK Higher Education accreditation landscape were addressed by EAB during 2013. Topics discussed included:

- Review of EAB Documentation
- Accreditation of innovative programmes
- Ethics in the curriculum
- Development of statements for use by HEIs for the Key Information Set (KIS)
- Review of Engineering Council Key Documents
- International Matters

A key element of EAB remained the opportunity to share good practice, discuss matters of mutual interest and address emerging topics that impacted on engineering accreditation collectively. Topics this year related to good practice included:

- Increase in the use of electronic decision making and teleconferencing to reduce delays in the accreditation process.
- IET policy changes such as the 'requirement' of a 50% pass mark for M Level modules now changed to 'guidance'; removal of a requirement that projects have to be passed at the first attempt. This has helped produce a consistent approach across all PEIs which improves the external view of them as a collaborative group of professional bodies working collectively to ensure that the UK accreditation process is internationally recognised and supports the development of engineering education in the UK.
- JBM decision-making procedures streamlined so that each JBM institution (ICE, IStructE, CIHT, IHE) does not have to approve individual decisions made by the board.
- Growth of Higher Apprenticeships, some of which included a degree which may be accredited.

This year saw a range of academic programmes from disciplines such as Biomedical, Nuclear Science and Technology, Design, Renewable Energy, Mechanical, Electrical and Aerospace Engineering, being looked at during seven EAB visits. This was compared to eight EAB visits in 2012, three in 2011, seven in 2010, ten in 2009, four in 2008, and seven in 2006 and 2007.

The Engineering Council undertook its periodic review of several key documents: UK-SPEC, the Accreditation of HE Programmes (AHEP), *ICTech* Standard and the RfR. EAB members were well represented within the review working groups and also contributed to the review through the EAB meetings and the online surveys.

It was clear that the PEIs interpreted the Engineering Council documents in different ways. Some of these were discipline specific but there are a number, which show a lack of consistency between the PEIs. Examples of this were discussed on a number of occasions and action has been taken, where possible, to produce a more consistent approach.

EAB Members noted that Kite Marking would not be imposed on the Engineering Sector. It was agreed that EAB and the PEIs needed to increase their engagement with Sector Skills Councils (although the future of SSCs was not certain).

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2014

The annual meeting of the Chairs of the PEI accreditation committees took place on 9 September at the Engineering Council.

There was a total of eight accreditation visits in 2014, and 156 programmes were awarded accreditation. The programmes were varied and included Bioengineering, Sound and Vibration, Space Systems Engineering, Military Construction Engineering (Civil, and Electrical and Mechanical), Maritime Engineering and Science, and Sustainable Energy and Environment.

Development of an Engineering Council single database of approved and accredited programmes began in 2014. It was reported that the need to bring the Technicians Database (TechDB) and the Academic Courses Accreditation Database (ACAD) closer together was identified by the EngC Apprenticeship and Technicians Forum Working Group, and PEI staff who use ACAD also informed the discussion. It was the view that the amalgamation of the two databases should help to alleviate the pressure on PEIs to update multiple databases and would also address the issue affecting ACAD and its operation on older architecture, which limits its functionality. The development partners started the development phase in December 2014 and continued this work into 2015.

The EUR-ACE label re-authorisation review was carried out in 2014 and the Engineering Council was authorised to award the label until the end of 2016, to be extended to 2018 subject to conditions being met. Both RSC and EAB were to be consulted with before the Engineering Council responded to the final decision from European body, ENAEE. The Engineering Council continued to be fully supportive of ENAEE believing that the EUR-ACE label is a valuable tool in promoting recognition of UK accredited engineering degree programmes in Europe.

2015

A number of issues regarding the changes and challenges to the UK Higher Education accreditation landscape were addressed by EAB during 2015. Topics discussed included:

- Open University degree accreditation.
- Conversion courses as announced in the BIS plan for growth: science and innovation. This document set out the government's long-term strategy to make the UK the best place in the world for science and business.
- Wakeham Review of STEM degree provision and graduate employability.
- EUR-ACE.
- Accreditation periods, including extending and backdating accreditation, resulting in RSC reviewing the Registration Code of Practice (Regulations for Registration).
- Misleading claims about the accreditation of programmes delivered internationally.

A key element of EAB continued to be the opportunity to share good practice, discuss matters of mutual interest and address emerging issues that impact on engineering accreditation collectively. Topics discussed related to good practice included:

- Activities to support implementation of AHEP 3rd edition

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- Use of IET's Academic Database and Management System (ADAMS) was discussed for an EAB visit. EAB members agreed that a pilot joint visit would utilise ADAMS without involving the EAB Secretariat or documentation, as adapting ADAMS to use EAB submission formats would require a significant resource commitment.
- Promotion of the value of accreditation

2016

A number of issues regarding the changes and challenges to the UK Higher Education accreditation landscape were addressed by EAB during 2016. Topics discussed included:

- The Wakeham Review of STEM degree provision and graduate employability.
- Higher Education and Research Bill which was intended to create a new regulatory framework for higher education, increase competition and student choice, ensure students receive value for money, and strengthen the research sector.
- The White Paper – Success as a Knowledge Economy, Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice and associated Consultations.
- Degree Apprenticeships, including professional engineering institution (PEI) involvement in employer consortia, and the future potential for accreditation and/or approval.
- Waiving the requirement to visit and clarifying the circumstances under which this is permitted.
- Misleading claims about the accreditation of programmes delivered internationally.

The Engineering Council was aware of growing interest in Higher Apprenticeships and Degree Apprenticeships amongst several of its partners and stakeholders. Factors likely to impact upon demand for Higher Apprenticeships and Degree Apprenticeships included the forthcoming introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, the Government commitment to create 3 million apprenticeships by 2020 and changes to university funding and fees along with the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF, in which Degree Apprenticeships would be measured).

Several PEIs were involved with developing Apprenticeship Standards and were keen to participate in end point assessment (EPA). Whilst one could accredit a degree within a Degree Apprenticeship there was at that time no Engineering Council process for approving/accrediting Degree Apprenticeships or Higher Apprenticeships for IEng or CEng equivalent to the process for approving Apprenticeships for EngTech or ICT *Tech*. A Task Group, comprising members of both EAB and EATQ (Engineering Apprenticeships and Technician Qualifications) Forum, would meet in 2017 to discuss the Engineering Council position on the issue and suggest possible ways forward.

A Task and Finish group met in April to discuss the issue of waiving the requirement to visit. This followed identification that a number of PEIs had developed policies or proposals for waiving visits which the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) believed went beyond what was permitted within the Registration Code of Practice (Regulations for Registration), and

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that universities were increasingly creating new qualifications that included existing modules from existing programmes. The recommendations of this group were reviewed by EAB and subsequently RSC was invited to consider additions to the Registration Code of Practice and guidance documentation. The proposal was discussed at RSC on 10 November. RSC agreed in principle to the proposed changes to wording on waiving a visit but requested that PEIs maintain clear documentation on how they decided to waive a visit and this would be considered as part of their Licensing Review.

A lot was learnt during work to date to develop a new Qualifications Database to replace the current Database of Technician Qualifications (TechDB) and Academic Courses Accreditation Database (ACAD). As a result of this it became apparent that delivering a quality product was more complex and costly than Engineering Council staff and the IT contractor first anticipated. Therefore, after careful consideration the decision was made to defer the project. A revised schedule would allow a project review to be completed in 2017, with the expectation that a quality product be delivered in 2018. A workshop was held on 12 January 2017 with PEI staff who use either of the databases.

2017

A number of matters were discussed by EAB during 2017. Topics discussed included:

- New Model in Technology and Engineering (NMiTE), the proposed university that would only deliver engineering degrees.
- Location of study not being clear on degree certificates and associated concerns about clarity of accreditation status on websites and other materials. Following the advice of a working group, a Statement for Universities and other HE Providers on Location of Study was published on the Engineering Council website and circulated by PEIs to their university contacts.
- The evolving Higher Education quality assessment regime, with particular reference to the Higher Education and Research Act (2017).
- Higher apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships.
- Accreditation of programmes in which PEIs or their partner organisations have an interest.
- EAB visit processes, including the increasing difficulties the EAB Secretariat had been experiencing in arranging hotels and other logistics.

A key element of EAB was the opportunity to share good practice, discuss matters of mutual interest and address emerging issues that impacted on engineering accreditation collectively. Topics discussed included:

- Compensation and condonement. This resulted in an invitation to PEIs to complete a survey on their policies and guidelines relating to compensation. Findings were to be discussed at EAB in 2018.
- Information about the accreditation status of programmes in Key Information Sets (KIS).
- The approach to be taken by institutions to accrediting their 'own-course' provision.

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- Making decisions to not award accreditation following a visit.
- Notifying universities of forthcoming expiries to accreditation.
- Certificates confirming programmes' accreditation, which could usefully include a link to ACAD.

A higher apprenticeships workshop was held on 11 May 2017 hosted by IOM3. Delegates discussed the challenges and opportunities that existing standards, and the models they present, might create for PEIs and the Engineering Council. Delegates were asked collectively to identify key learning points from universities' experiences that the Engineering Council and PEIs needed to consider when reviewing processes, regulations, standards and guidance. Delegates were invited to discuss key questions regarding the accreditation of degrees that sit within degree apprenticeships and how to support the wider recognition of higher apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships.

The Engineering Council set up a working group to discuss how higher apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships would be recognised. The working group first met on 5 October 2017.

The proposed New Model in Technology and Engineering (NMiTE) was for an entirely new University that would only deliver engineering degrees. A key aspect of this was to offer MEng programmes in three years rather than the standard four, with learning through themed projects or problem-based blocks of learning. Although the University was still in development and not at the point of formally requesting accreditation, EAB discussed a number of concerns they had about the model, including staff and student workloads, the ability to deliver group design projects in a shorter time period, implications for international recognition and the popularity of accelerated degrees amongst students given the limited potential for part-time jobs.

2018

A number of matters were discussed by EAB during 2018. Topics discussed included:

- EAB visit processes, including the compilation of panel member questions in advance of the visit, materials available for review during visits and that any institution-specific meetings should be arranged between the PEI and the HEI and that these meetings should not clash with the visit schedule.
- Recommendations highlighted by the Washington Accord review report following the visit in 2017, particularly with regard to PEI inconsistency in practice, the strengthening of EngC guidelines on compensation and condonement, and the assessment of learning outcomes.
- Compensation and condonement.
- PEI consistency in practice regarding accreditation documentation and processes.
- Sustainability of programmes.
- The Washington Accord.
- Electronic sharing of EAB documentation.
- The Standards review, particularly the review of AHEP and the development of policy on recognition of higher apprenticeships.

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- NMiTE, the new university that would only deliver engineering degrees. IET representatives and Engineering Council staff separately met with NMiTE representatives during the year.
- Sustainability of programmes. This was raised by the Washington Accord review team and EAB members confirmed that they would set requirements or recommendations if any issues were identified.
- GDPR and retention of documentation to support accreditation visits.
- Changes to HE regulations and TEF.

The AHEP working group was established and met twice during 2018. Key proposals from the working group and supported in consultation feedback included to reduce the overall number of learning outcomes specified for each accreditation type and to specify learning outcomes for level 5 programmes partially meeting the requirements for IEng and top up degrees as further learning from accredited level 5 programmes.

The Higher Apprenticeships working group continued to meet in 2018 to discuss issues around the development of an Engineering Council policy to recognise apprenticeships with and without accredited/approved qualifications. Initially, the working group had three meetings by itself, but owing to an overlap in areas under discussion by the Approval of Qualifications and Apprenticeships Handbook (AQAH) working group, the two working groups held two joint working group meetings. A policy statement on recognition of higher apprenticeships was approved by the RSC at its meeting on 4 October then added to AQAH as annex A. Joint meetings continued to be held during 2019.

2019

A number of matters were discussed by EAB during 2019. Topics discussed included:

- EAB visit processes and documentation; in particular the review of the visit report template and the suggested definition of 'recommendation', the EAB Committee Chair and members' brief, and the information HEIs were to be asked to include in their welcome presentation.
- Compensation and condonement; in particular the implementation of the compensation and condonement rules which were to be implemented for new cohorts starting from September 2022, and the associated guidance note.
- PEI consistency in practice with regard to accreditation documentation and processes.
- Accreditation of accelerated degrees.
- The Standards Review, particularly the review of AHEP.
- Promotion of innovative provision, including the template for innovative practice case study.

The AHEP working group oversaw the review of AHEP, with Edition 4 expected to be published during 2020. Key changes included to rationalise the learning outcomes, specify

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learning outcomes for foundation degrees (and equivalent) and top-up degrees, and incorporate some of the information previously presented in the Guidance on Academic Accreditation.

The Approval of Qualifications and Apprenticeships Handbook (AQAH) Working Group, and the Higher Apprenticeships Working Group, merged in 2019. This followed a number of joint meetings and agreement that the scope of AQAH be widened to include higher apprenticeships. Other changes were proposed to widen the scope to include apprenticeships and qualifications (other than those covered by AHEP) to support all levels of Engineering Council registration, accreditation as well as approval, and a change of title to reflect the revised scope. The new document was expected to be published during 2020 with supporting guidance documents to follow.

In response to concerns raised by stakeholders including Board Members and the Engineering Professors Council, as well as the Washington Accord Review team, RSC initiated a review of accreditation to mitigate the risk of perceived inconsistencies in PEI accreditation practice leading to loss of credibility of EngC standard and process. The review aimed to:

- Ensure that Engineering Council accreditation remained rigorous, robust and met stakeholder needs.
- Mitigate the risk to the reputation of Engineering Council accreditation.

The Accreditation Review Working Group, which included representatives of PEIs, EAB, AHEP WG, Royal Academy of Engineering and Engineering Professors Council first met in May 2019, and interviews and focus groups were held by the Project Manager with a wide range of stakeholders involved in the accreditation process either as accreditors or when a programme at their university was reviewed for accreditation. Interviews also took place with external regulators for the purpose of comparison and to identify good practice.

The issue of implementation of the incoming rules on Compensation and Condonement was discussed; it was recommended that the rules should apply to students entering the first years of an accredited programme in 2022. From 2019 to 2022 accreditation visits, HEI would have the option to adhere to the existing rules or the new rules. Programmes reviewed on visits from September 2022 could not be accredited if the HEI regulations were not in line with the rules on compensation and condonement.

2020

The first meeting of the year which was to have been held in March was cancelled due to the country having gone into lockdown due to the Covid pandemic. The following meetings were therefore held online via Zoom.

The issue of confidentiality had previously been dealt with asking HEIs to remove confidential information from the documentation on review. The question was whether PEIs would benefit from having some form of EAB Non-Disclosure Agreement template, statement, or agreement. It was highlighted the risk to end up creating additional work in

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order to satisfy the requirements of a minority of HEIs. IMechE were in support of a generic statement, but under no circumstances would they sign a confidentiality agreement. It was viewed that volunteers should not be liable for their work on behalf of the institution, and they were already subject to GDPR rules.

PEIs shared practice around virtually held visits with varying degrees of success but in the main these worked well. EAB discussed the feasibility of remote EAB visits and the following points were raised:

- It was suggested to limit EAB visits to 3 PEIs.
- It would be better to ask HEIs before making a decision.
- It was advised PEIs should gain more experience in holding remote individual visits before considering an EAB visit.

The updated Standards were published on 1 September with the implementation period to the end of the 2021 calendar year, with the exception of the AHEP and AAQA learning outcomes. The expectation was that PEIs would update their documentation and processes to reflect the new Standards by 31 December 2021.

For the new learning outcomes, the primary aim of the transition period was to allow the flexibility for HEIs to update their curriculum at different times. Originally the transition period for the learning outcomes was proposed to be until the end of August 2023. An extra year was added to the transition period as the Engineering Council was aware that universities had more urgent considerations due to the Covid crisis making it 31 August 2024 to coincide with the end of the academic year.

The Engineering Council had drafted updates to various EAB documents to create versions for submissions against AHEP 4.0. The intention was that during the transition period, the documentation for AHEP 3 and AHEP 4.0 would be on the EAB webpage, so that the HEIs could select whether they wanted to make a submission against AHEP 3 or AHEP 4.0.

It was agreed that no face-to-face EAB visits would be held in the 2020-2021 academic year, after a number of PEIs including IChemE, IET and JBM confirmed that they would not be participating in any face-to-face visits during that time. The EAB Secretariat would follow up with universities with visits scheduled before the autumn.

The Accreditation Review Working Group had been looking at the role of the EAB and the relationship with the Engineering Council. EAB had an advisory/consultative/practice sharing role, and an operations role to provide various workshops and collaborative accreditation visits. EAB had been supported by the Engineering Council which provided the secretariat. The review had identified that it would be useful to look at whether some of those roles should be split and/or whether EAB should have a closer or more formal relationship with the Engineering Council.

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2021

Seven EAB visits took place remotely in 2021.

The Engineering Council asked whether the PEIs would be ready to accredit programmes against AHEP 4 learning outcomes for visits in the next academic year. IET advised that they were ready, and their first AHEP 4 accreditation visit was planned to take place in March. IET had a working group to support their implementation of AHEP 4. IET suggested that the university and panel had perhaps underestimated how much change there was from AHEP 3 to AHEP 4. They agreed to share their experiences at the next meeting of the EAB.

IMechE were also participating in the visit with the IET and had done a lot of work in the background and put together interim measures to get up to speed with AHEP 4 standard.

IMechE were targeting the summer to publish new versions of their submissions, guidelines etc to meet with AHEP 4 standards. They planned to have a soft launch of their documents in the autumn of 2021 and to make a full shift by January 2022. JBM were happy to start accrediting against AHEP 4.

Engineering Council agreed to organise an AHEP 4 workshop for EAB members and PEI accreditation committee Chairs before the next academic year. This event was held on the afternoon of 12 July 2021.

It was agreed that EAB visits for the remainder of 2021 would be virtual, and that for visits being held in 2022 it would be prudent to ask for as much information in advance as would be necessary for a virtual visit in case visits had to move online.

EAB members requested that RSC be asked to permit virtual accreditation visits during the 2022 calendar year. EAB members requested that RSC also be asked to:

- Confirm a continuation of the allowance for virtual visits.
- Review or delay the requirement in the new Registration Code of Practice. (Regulations for Registration) that authorisation be sought for all accreditation extensions.
- Support a risk-based approach, so that degrees that have not previously been accredited could be prioritised, and extensions awarded for programmes with a strong track record of accreditation where the PEI(s) were happy to extend accreditation.

PEIs were encouraged to consider, and where possible action:

- More use of joint and multi-PEI non-EAB visits to share workload.
- Enrolling and training more accreditors.
- Extending accreditation (noting that if they wanted to do this in bulk it was best to contact the Engineering Council EdSkills team before updating database records)

The Lakes College visit was the first virtual EAB visit. It was also the first EAB visit to consider accreditation of Higher National Diplomas and Foundation Degrees, as well as top-up degrees; and the first where the provider was not the awarding university. The Approval and Accreditation of Qualifications and Apprenticeships (AAQA) allows approval and accreditation of apprenticeships. The College would have liked the apprenticeships

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accredited as a whole and in future EAB will need to think about such accreditations against AAQA.

Related RSC decisions were noted:

- Accreditation extensions of up to one year were permitted.
- Virtual visits were permitted during 2022.

RSC had requested details of what EAB would like a risk-based approach to accreditation to look like. It was agreed that given current changes to assessment due to the pandemic and the new AHEP, that there was not currently an appetite for a risk-based approach currently beyond the changes already agreed by RSC to allow 1-year extensions and virtual visits.

It was agreed that guidance should be created on when students who complete their degree over a different study duration to that presented on the Engineering Council's course search database (QuaD).

Members were reminded that the EAB involvement ended at the point the visit report is signed off to go to the university, and each PEI individually looks at the action plan. After the EAB visit to Cambridge, some of the PEIs felt some of the proposed actions were not sufficient to allow accreditation but at the same time other PEIs had confirmed decisions to accredit. This was an example of why there was a need to look at the EAB visit process if EAB visits were to continue and how they were resourced because there needed to be additions to the process to ensure appropriate consistency going forward.

In terms of the future of EAB it was suggested that discussion focus upon the two primary functions of EAB as stated in the terms of reference which were:

- Joint visits.
- An independent committee sharing best practice and expertise among PEIs, which is often consulted by the Engineering Council on accreditation related matters.

It was not anticipated that final decisions would be made immediately, but views from EAB were sought to inform ongoing discussion. The question was asked should EAB visits continue in the current format. The view was that the terms of reference did not mandate this activity it just required facilitation of joint visits from PEIs. It was emphasised that PEIs were relying upon the goodwill of the Engineering Council to provide EAB visit secretariat which may not be able to continue without additional funding to support this activity.

The Chair proposed that EAB visits continue to be planned until 2022-2023 but should not continue in the current format thereafter. The Chair suggested that a PEI could volunteer or be identified to lead and support continuing EAB visits in a revised format.

Plans were being developed to hold a Chairs of Accreditation Committee workshop to discuss the future of EAB, which would inform discussions with PEI CEOs. EAB views would also be useful to inform the implementation plan following the Accreditation Review.

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2022

Four EAB visits took place in 2022. EAB meetings continued to take place online. Topics for discussion included:

- The future of EAB and who would manage joint accreditation visits if not the Engineering Council.
- The future of EAB practice sharing via an Engineering Council led forum.
- Incidence of problematic module mapping where Universities were overclaiming the learning outcomes that modules, particularly projects address.
- Assessing LOs for AHEP 4 at output level, understanding that a Learning Outcome (LO) could be delivered and assessed in an earlier year rather than at level 6 or 7.
- Asking RSC for permission to agree to having virtual/hybrid accreditation visits beyond 2022, developing a risk based approach.
- Dual accreditation to be permitted as long as Universities mapped LOs to both IEng and CEng.
- Duration of study, where students should not be penalised because of the withdrawal of accreditation.
- Production of a common submission template for use by PEIs.

2023

EAB visits took place in person for the first time since the pandemic. There were 6 EAB visits this year. Topics for discussion included:

- Ongoing future of EAB and outcome of the Joint visits working group. Both Engineering Council and the IET put forward bids to manage future joint visits. The IET bid was accepted by the working group.
- Student integrity and Artificial Intelligence. An AI working group was established to take discussions forward on this subject. This was supported by three Task and Finish Groups (TaFG) on standards, registration and ethics and the impact of AI.
- Engineers without Borders work on a reimagined engineering degree map to help engineers understand the challenges and how to navigate their global responsibilities
- Industrial action at universities – marking and assessment boycott. EAB issued a statement to ensure that the Learning Outcomes would continue to be met for all students.
- Survey to universities on the Impact of compensation and condonement policy and disruptors
- Volunteer shortage - It was identified through volunteer recruitment activities to support Engineering Council activities, such as those utilising Working Groups (WG), and Task and Finish Groups (TaFG), that it was increasingly difficult to secure volunteers to support EngC work. This was also noted and discussed at an internal Volunteer Management workshop. Additionally, PEIs also identified that volunteer recruitment and retention was an issue.

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It had become unsustainable for the Engineering Council to continue to provide EAB secretariat without dedicated funding for this activity, and the Engineering Council explained to EAB members that it was unable to continue to provide secretariat support without additional resources.. This was due to the growth in workload and expectations, and increasing complexity of visits.

A Joint Visits Working Group was formed to move discussions forward. Three organisations indicated that they might be willing to provide future joint visit secretariat, if appropriate arrangements including for funding from PEIs could be agreed. The Engineering Council was one of the organisations that put itself forwards, alongside a commercial organisation that the JBM had worked with and the IET. EAB members agreed that the IET proposal would be their preferred option. The IET then confirmed that whilst they had presented an outline proposal they would need to conduct significant additional work internally before submitting a formal proposal to PEIs.

2024

The Engineering Council continued to provide Secretariat to three EAB visits in the spring, having agreed to do so up until end of the academic year 2023/24. PEIs had agreed that 2024-25 would be a transition period of one year where joint accreditation visits will be shared between the participating PEIs.

A final EAB meeting was held on 17 July to discuss proposals from the IET to provide joint visit secretariat. The first meeting of the Engineering Council's Programme Recognition Forum was held on 17 July, which replaced the practice sharing element of EAB activity.

Conclusions and thanks

An important lesson learnt was that it is inadvisable to volunteer for such a significant activity without any formal service level agreement, which made it difficult for the Secretariat when expectations increased and also when other participants in EAB activities did not adhere to timelines

It is clear from each year that the practice sharing element of the EAB has been highly valued by its members. Recurring discussion topics over the years have included:

- The requirement to waive a visit to a provider (even before the COVID pandemic).
- Whether accreditation hinders innovation in developing degree programmes.
- Compensation and condonement policy.
- Perceived inconsistencies in PEI accreditation practice.
- review of EAB processes and documentation

Members have also shared their experiences on implementing the degree accreditation standards, have provided valuable inputs to Engineering Council policy and Standards, and helped with responses to external consultations related to Higher Education.

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The Engineering Council would like to thank all Chairs, Deputy Chairs, PEI volunteers, PEI staff and indeed Engineering Council staff who have contributed to EAB over the years for their support which has been invaluable.