



## **THE 2016 FORUM ON ACCREDITATION**

August 17-18, 2016, Toronto, ON

*“What do we need to do, together, to ensure that accreditation is done in a manner that brings greatest benefit to the profession?”*

### **Consultants' Report v3.2**

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Prepared by: Phil Culhane and Anne-Marie Parent



## 1 Summary

Engineers Canada engaged key stakeholders of the Accreditation System in a two-day collaborative transformation Forum to consider a shared vision for the future of accreditation in Canada and to discuss how that vision could be realized.

The Forum was held in Toronto, Ontario on August 17 and 18, 2016. Approximately 115 participants attended the Forum. They represented a diverse cross-section including members of the Accreditation Board, the Engineers Canada Board, Regulators, Universities, Industry (Employers) and Engineering Students.

The following intention question focused participants in their discussions throughout the Forum.

***“What do we need to do, together, to ensure that accreditation is done in a manner that brings greatest benefit to the profession?”***

Although one hope for this intention question was that it might bring participants to a shared vision for the future of accreditation, this hope was not realized during the Forum. Nonetheless, the Forum was highly successful at engaging all the stakeholders and therefore a significant step forward was made in enabling mutual respect and fostering the type of challenging dialogue that will be required to eventually make progress on a shared vision for accreditation.

The Forum was well received by participants and provided great recommendations and areas of focus to create a shared vision for the future of accreditation along with ideas on how best to implement this shared vision. Nonetheless, the success of this event is double-edged. While stakeholders left the Forum with a better appreciation of the various aspects of accreditation, they also left with expectations and hope that changes would be made to the accreditation system over the next 12 months. Both the President of Engineers Canada and the Chair of the Accreditation Board acknowledged that *status quo* was not an option and that the accreditation system needed to evolve to meet future requirements.

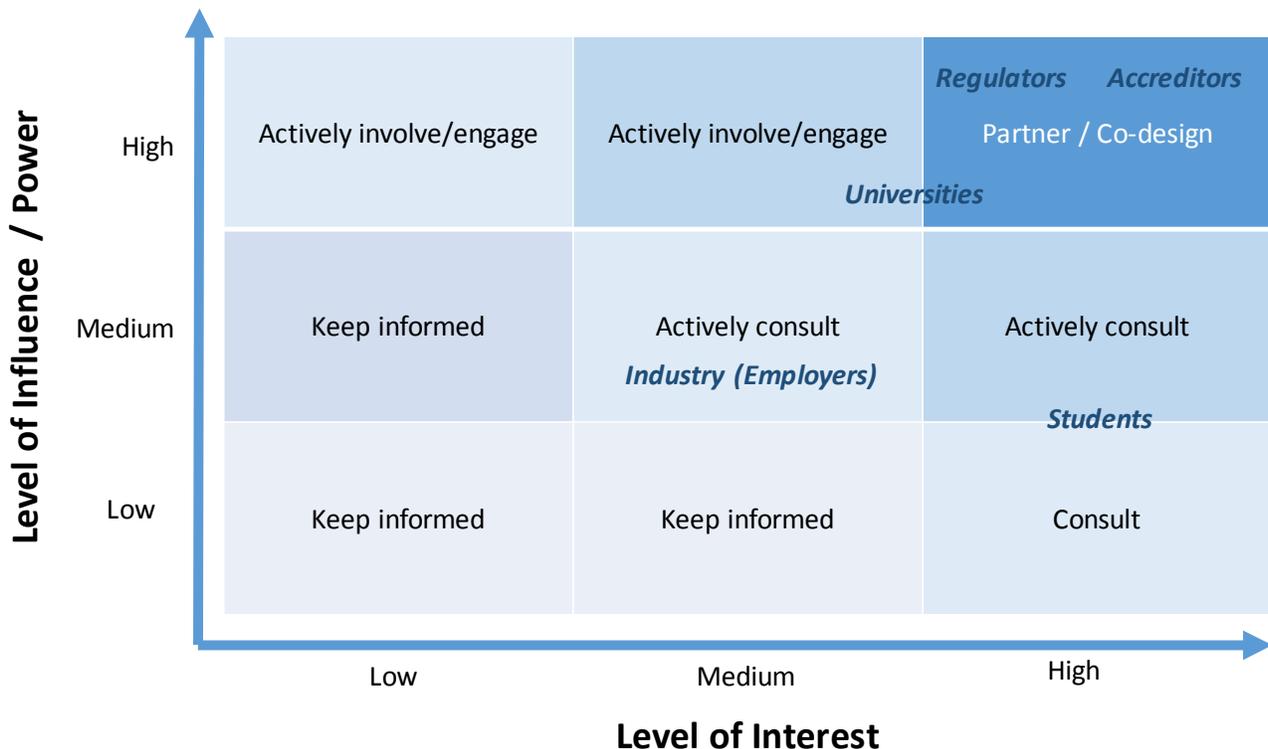
This report shares the insights and observations of the consulting team that planned and delivered the Forum. These comments are based on the experience of the consulting team as strategic change advisors for similar initiatives involving diverse stakeholder groups such as this one. The consultants also agree that a shift is required to transform the accreditation system and its associated processes into something that will provide greater value to all those involved as well as enough flexibility to meet the challenges and constraints of the future. This report is not intended for broader distribution until the ideas presented are refined by the Engineers Canada Board and AB leadership teams through further analysis.

The consulting team shares the following observation for consideration by the leadership teams:

1. Establish an annual accreditation Forum.
2. Determine and formalize methods for ongoing engagement with regulators, industry, universities and engineering students.
3. Clarify and communicate the purpose and objectives of accreditation.
4. Adopt a structured change management approach to guide next steps.
5. Follow-through on the key recommendations.
6. Develop a plan for the future of accreditation.

## 2 Consultants’ Recommendations

1. **Establish an annual accreditation Forum.** The priority recommendation to reconvene the Forum annually is further confirmation of the progress made during this first Forum. An annual Forum provides the opportunity to continue to build trust with all the stakeholders by responding to or acting on their input and recommendations. It will be important to continuously remind stakeholders that the Forum is a consultation and engagement method and not a decision-making platform.
2. **Determine and formalize methods for ongoing engagement with regulators, industry, universities and engineering students.** The effort to broaden the conversation beyond engineering deans and AB members to five stakeholder groups was a positive step towards loosening tightly held views and establishing a greater context within which new possibilities for accreditation can emerge. Including Regulators as the third party in the dialogue appeared as a logical and essential next step, but continuing to include industry and engineering students is highly recommended. The five stakeholder group approach broadens and deepens the value of accreditation beyond the strongly held traditional views that were so apparent during the Forum. We understand that it may not be possible to always engage all five stakeholder groups; however, it would be important to consider all five groups and engage them as appropriate over the evolution of the accreditation system. We have found the following stakeholder analysis matrix useful in determining the best approach to engage stakeholders.<sup>1</sup>



3. **Clarify and communicate the purpose and objectives of accreditation.** During the Forum it became

<sup>1</sup> <http://innovationforsocialchange.org/stakeholder-analysis/?lang=en>

apparent that two distinct lines of thinking were impacting the discussions. The traditional view (largely held by Regulators) is that the purpose of accreditation is to ensure academic qualifications for licensure as a professional engineer are met. The emerging view (largely held by Universities and Industry) is that the purpose of an engineering education is to prepare aspiring engineers to be ready to meet the challenges awaiting them in the workplace. These two views blur the ability to arrive at a shared understanding of the purpose of education, and by extension, accreditation. The effort to understand how they might evolve into mutually supporting views would be worthwhile. Failure to achieve alignment between these two views could result in an impasse that is not in the best interest of a viable and useful accreditation system. While the accreditation system on its own can likely not meet all the requirements of its stakeholders, other parts of the licensure process may be able to address this gap. Somehow a new, flexible, adaptable playing field needs to emerge if agreement on the value of and the process for accreditation is to be agreed upon by all the stakeholder groups.

4. **Adopt a structured change management approach to guide next steps.** Given the diversity of views on a large number of topics that would be foundational to the definition of a shared vision, the Accreditation Board has a formidable change management challenge ahead. Similarly, the complexity that surrounds any next step suggests that a structured change management approach should be guided by change management professionals. What can be accomplished through a communications strategy is different than what can be accomplished with a structured change management plan. Both are necessary. A communication plan will help identify key messages and increase the level of understanding with respect to accreditation. For example, throughout the Forum, there were individuals who presented their opposing views as irrefutable facts. A communication strategy should directly address this type of positioning and provide the finesse to shift these views from perceived facts to well-considered opinions. Additionally, a change management plan should focus on how to engage those stakeholders in buying into the proposed changes and encouraging stakeholders to help co-design the required solutions.
5. **Follow through on the priority recommendations.** It will be important to also follow through on the priority recommendations identified by the Forum participants. At a minimum it would be prudent to address the expectations of participants by reporting back on the intended approach to address these priority issues. For example, streamlining the existing accreditation process and offering electronic tools to facilitate the exchange of information between universities and accreditors were two important priorities for the Forum participants. Those participating in the Plan-To-Plan discussions about offering electronic tools felt there were low hanging fruit that could be achieved relatively quickly and therefore significantly reduce the efforts required for universities to submit their information. It might be useful to consider implementing some of these simple to implement solutions, in order to further increase trust in the consultation mechanism. If participants do not hear or see the results of their discussion emerge from this Forum, it will become more difficult to engage them in future engagement processes.
6. **Develop a plan for the future of accreditation.** We are fully aware that it would be difficult (if not impossible) to achieve all 8 recommendations within the next 12 months, as may be expected by some participants. In our experience, using these recommendations to develop a refined strategy and plan to improve the accreditation process will go a long way. Once a new plan has been developed, stakeholders can be kept informed about the progress made on the plan as opposed to progress made on the Forum's eight priority recommendations. Essentially, the plan includes broader consideration of the Forum's priorities along with further analysis done by both the Engineers Canada Board and Accreditation Board to determine what is feasible and what will have the highest impact in improving the accreditation system.

### 3 Immediate Next Steps

In addition to our six recommendations, we also suggest that the Forum's leadership team proceeds with the following immediate next steps.

- **Review, finalize and distribute the Forum's Book of Proceedings (BoP) to all participants.** Ideally, the note accompanying the BoP should thank participants once again for their input and state that the Engineers Canada Board and the AB leadership teams are considering the recommendations and will follow-up with a more detailed plan later.
- **Mining the Book of Proceeding for gems.** In addition to reviewing the BoP for distribution, we also recommend assigning Engineer Canada staff members to review the BoP in detail to identify gems. Gems are ideas or thoughts in the notes that may not have bubbled up as priorities but that offer possible insights into what might be done next.
- **Identify how updates from this Forum will be provided at upcoming sessions.** Many stakeholders present during this Forum will likely be present at upcoming sessions held by the Board, AB or Engineers Canada. Engineers Canada should pro-actively develop key messages and updates to provide to these stakeholders with factual and timely information about what is happening with the accreditation process.