



From the office of the President / Du cabinet du président

January 17, 2017

Dear Colleagues,

RE: Accreditation – Update on Actions

I'd like to take this opportunity to give you an update on the actions that are taking place to make improvements to our accreditation system to better address the needs and aspirations of our owners—the regulators—as well as our partners at the higher educational institutions (HEI) that we accredit, and to move forward on the many positive recommendations that came out of the Accreditation Forum that we held in August 2016.

Underscoring the linkage between the Accreditation Board and the regulators

The Engineers Canada accreditation system exists to support the licensing activities of our regulators and their admissions officials. We must be aware that our regulators need to be informed, consulted and engaged as we work to evolve accreditation. And we must also understand that the HEIs are our partners in this evolution.

Joint meeting of the Executive and the Accreditation Board Policies and Procedures (P&P) Committee

On January 9, 2017, I convened a joint meeting between the Engineers Canada Executive Committee and the Accreditation Board P&P Committee. The purpose of this joint meeting was to discuss the progress to date on the Accreditation Forum recommendations, to have a frank and open brain-storming session to explore what factors are critical to the successful future of our accreditation system, and to plan for the upcoming special Board Workshop on accreditation on February 26, 2017.

Committed to the evolution of our accreditation system

The Executive Committee and the Accreditation Board P&P Committee agreed that we are absolutely committed to the purpose of our accreditation system: to support the licensing activities of our regulators and their admissions officials. We are also committed to addressing the very real concerns of the NCDEAS by reducing the workload for both the HEIs and the Accreditation Board visiting teams, and evolving the accreditation system to ensure that HEIs are not constrained nor inhibited from implementing educational innovations. We agreed that our accreditation system must clearly recognize student exchange programs and must better

accommodate the reality that engineering education today no longer relies on in-classroom instruction to the same degree as it once did. These were the principal concerns expressed by the deans at their meeting in November, and concrete progress, as described below, is being made to make meaningful improvements to address all of these issues.

Better engagement

Better engagement between the Accreditation Board, our regulators and their admissions officials and volunteers, and the deans and other officials at HEIs who are involved with accreditation was identified as a key priority. To that end, the Accreditation Board and Engineers Canada staff have prepared a draft communication and engagement strategy to better link with our regulators' admissions officials and the deans at HEIs. The strategy includes engaging Accreditation Board members over the next several months to make presentations to and solicit feedback from regulators' councils, boards of examiners, CEOs and staff. In the longer term, other stakeholders will also be engaged.

Furthermore, Accreditation Board representatives met with the National Admissions Officials Group in September 2016 and with the NCDEAS in November 2016. The Accreditation Board presented at the Graduate Attributes/Continual Improvement summit in Toronto on December 8, 2016, which was attended by the Ontario HEIs. Accreditation Board representatives will meet with the HEI program chairs regarding the upcoming 2017/2018 accreditation visits on February 12, 2017. The Accreditation Board P&P is scheduled to meet with the Deans Liaison Committee on April 27, 2017, and to present to the NCDEAS on April 28, 2017. There have also been discussions with the Canadian Engineering Education Association about a more formal and active role for the Accreditation Board in their annual conference. Two Accreditation Board members have annually attended this conference. This engagement strategy flows from one of the key recommendations of the Accreditation Forum.

Alternate measures of curriculum content

The Accreditation Board P&P Committee's work plan includes exploring alternate means of assessing curriculum content, including suggesting alternatives to the existing Accreditation Units (AUs). AUs measure contact hours, while other systems use credit hours, student workload hours or a combination of all three to measure curriculum content. The Accreditation Board has already conducted, and continues to conduct, a great deal of research into accreditation and educational best practices in other jurisdictions, with the aim of ensuring that our system evolves to meet the changing educational and regulatory environment in engineering, and incorporates the best practices found elsewhere while respecting the purpose of accreditation in Canada. The Accreditation Board has shared their research findings with the NCDEAS and with the regulators' admissions officials. It was agreed that it would be extremely informative to prepare a table that compares and contrasts the current accreditation criteria and the path to licensure in Canada with the other major engineering accreditation systems in the world, since all of our Washington Accord partners measure curriculum content.

Understanding constraints in current criteria

In the next couple of months, the Accreditation Board will be surveying the HEIs to understand the constraints that they feel they are under given the current accreditation system. The results of this survey will be discussed with the NCDEAS in April 2017. The Accreditation Board will consider the findings and identify and fix shortcomings in current criteria or, where possible, show how existing tools could be used or altered to meet the HEIs' needs.

Conditional approval of programs and program changes

At the February Board meeting, the Accreditation Board will present a new process whereby HEIs who wish to develop new and innovative programs using alternate means of delivery, or to make significant changes to their existing programs, can have these programs receive conditional approval prior to launching the proposed change. The Accreditation Board expects that the necessary changes would be made in 2017.

The Accreditation Board will work with the HEIs to help them innovate while still meeting the minimum path requirements of accreditation. This addresses a key concern expressed by the HEIs that innovative changes were being hampered by the risk that these would not be accredited.

Streamlining and reducing workload

At its September 2016 workshop, the Accreditation Board identified strategies regarding the streamlining of the process of accreditation, and reducing workload without compromising the quality of our accreditation decisions. This, too, flows from the recommendations of the Accreditation Forum. For this, the Accreditation Board needs the ongoing input from our regulators, our admissions officials, as well as from the HEIs.

Strengthening the linkage between the Accreditation Board and the deans

At the January 9 meeting, we also discussed methods to better connect the Accreditation Board to the Deans through re-kindling the linkage between the Accreditation Board and the Deans Liaison Committee. A meeting is scheduled for April 27, 2017.

Support to the Accreditation Board

The Accreditation Board has clearly identified that, although the staff support they do have is excellent, they are very much in need of additional staff resources. Much good work and progress has been stalled as the Accreditation Board deals with crises rather than executing a planned strategy. An additional staff member is in the budget and recruitment will occur in the near future.

Furthermore, the current accreditation portion of the Engineers Canada website needs drastic improvement. Plans are underway to make it a more effective resource for the Accreditation Board and the HEIs.

Next steps

I have called for a special Engineers Canada Board workshop to be held specifically to deal with accreditation. The workshop is scheduled for Sunday, February 26, 2017. It will be a workshop-style planning session for Engineers Canada Board members and Board Advisors to deal with the recommendations that came out of the Accreditation Forum, the concerns of our regulators and their admissions officials, and the issues raised by the NCDEAS. The intention is not to use this session to decide what recommendations we will or will not implement—it will be a session on what our next steps shall be, identification of resources required, milestones and deliverables, and to develop timelines for solutions. We need to make thoughtful progress while meeting stakeholders' expectations for improvements. We will also use the opportunity to look at how we deal with the two separate aspects of the important work that the Accreditation Board does: policy matters and the actual work of accrediting programs.

Rest assured this is not intended to revisit whether the Accreditation Board should be a Board Committee or an operational committee—that was already discussed at length and decided. The discussion now shall be to work on ways to ensure that the Accreditation Board has the resources and structure it needs so that it can both carry out its task of accrediting programs while also dealing with the policy direction for the future of the accreditation system as it evolves.

Please find attached a copy of a letter sent to me as President of Engineers Canada from Engineers Nova Scotia yesterday regarding their concerns with the accreditation system. I am grateful to Engineers Nova Scotia for expressing their concerns and for their commitment to seeing our accreditation system evolve and improve. I trust that the above serves to address some of the concerns raised in the letter.

Sincerely,

Chris D. Roney, P.Eng., IntPE, FEC
President, Engineers Canada