

# Engineering Accreditation Board (EAB)

## 1. EAB 2006 Report

1.1. As required by the EAB's Terms of Reference, this report to the Board's constituent Institutions aims to summarize the actions and outcomes from the variety of significant accreditation-related issues that were discussed throughout the year.

## 2. Introduction

2.1. The Engineering Accreditation Board (EAB) was formed in January 2006 by the merger of the Degree Accreditation Board for Chartered Engineers (DABCE) and the Joint Accreditation Board (JAB). All 21 of the engineering Institutions that are licensed by the Engineering Council UK (EC<sup>UK</sup>) to accredit academic programmes are members of the new EAB, with the EC<sup>UK</sup> providing its secretariat.

2.2. Professor Bob Cryan and Mr Peter Cannings, both IET members and former Chairs of DABCE and JAB respectively, 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](http://www.engab.org.uk)) was launched to coincide with the start of the new Board.

## 3. Accreditation Visits

3.1. At each meeting, any new applications for accreditation visits through the EAB were reported on, along with details of both forthcoming visits and also final decision letters sent.

3.2. In 2006, a combination of BEng (Hons), MEng and postgraduate programmes were looked at during EAB visits to the following Universities:

- Strathclyde University (7/8 February)
- Cranfield University (20/21 February)
- University of Manchester (7/8 March)
- University of Bristol (16 March)
- University of Birmingham (21 March)
- University of Bath (9 May)
- University of Liverpool (7 November)

3.3. One of the main ongoing issues of 2006 was the consideration of the Open University's BEng (Hons). Following the main accreditation visit in October 2005, a Development Team, consisting of PEI representatives from the main accreditation team, was established to formulate a long-term plan to aid the BEng (Hons) become accredited, in line with the OU's proposed move to a more programme-oriented curriculum. Unfortunately, the OU was reluctant to

develop the BEng (Hons) as the Team suggested and has since decided to seek single Institution accreditation.

- 3.4. The subject of charging for overseas accreditation visits, an issue previously considered under DABCE, was raised. It was generally agreed that all costs, including staff time, should be calculated in full before the question of charging could be addressed properly. This is an ongoing issue, expected to be discussed further through 2007.
- 3.5. The accreditation of joint engineering programmes was looked at and it was agreed that, in general, two-thirds of a programme should comprise core engineering content for it to be considered for accreditation. However, the Board was keen to emphasize that, ultimately, delivery of the required learning outcomes would justify accreditation.
- 3.6. The issues surrounding the accreditation of distance learning programmes outside the UK, such as ensuring general quality assurance, were also discussed.
- 3.7. Looking ahead to 2007, planned EAB visits include those to Plymouth, Oxford, Cambridge, Leeds, Newcastle, Furness College and Swansea.

## **Working Groups**

### **4. Framing Accreditation Working Group**

- 4.1. The framing of accreditation, in particular the issues of backdating and how to denote accreditation periods, was explored in some detail through working group chaired by Mr David Long (IMarEST). This considered accrediting by output date, in line with most members of the Washington Accord, but rejected this, and the Board and later the RSC agreed that accreditation should continue to be by entry date. The working group supported both the backdating of accreditation (particularly to cover students on the programme at the time of the visit) and the accreditation of part-time and distance learning courses; these views were subsequently endorsed by the Board and by RSC.

### **5. MSc Learning Outcomes Working Group**

- 5.1. On the recommendation of both the EAB and the RSC, the MSc Learning Outcomes Working Group was convened to consider several matters relating to outcomes from Masters degrees. The Group met twice, on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2006 and 12<sup>th</sup> September 2006, and was chaired by Dr Daphne O'Doherty (EI).
- 5.2. One of the main issues was the matter of whether Masters degrees should be accredited or approved. The consensus reached was that accreditation was preferable to approval but that it must be made clear to students that an accredited Honours degree would be required in addition to the accredited Masters degree in order to fulfil the academic requirements for CEng registration.
- 5.3. The working group also recommended that, as set out in UK-SPEC, the QAA descriptors should form the basis of any output standards for MSc programmes. Furthermore, the group considered that there should be no

more than 25% of non M-level content in accredited MSc programmes and that HEIs should provide additional initial information to help Institutions decide if an accreditation visit was justified.

- 5.4. The group considered postgraduate diplomas, deciding that while it was not appropriate to accredit them in general, they could be shown on an individual basis to meet all or part of the requirements for further learning to Masters level as required by UK-SPEC.
- 5.5. The Board agreed to the working group's recommendations and these were subsequently agreed by RSC which added that the UK-SPEC competence statements should also be used in considering Masters degrees and that the non M-level content in such degrees should not exceed 30 out of 180 credits, in line with the Burgess proposal. The RSC also agreed that accreditation was preferable to approval for Masters degrees and endorsed the decision that postgraduate diplomas should not be accredited, as they were not exemplifying qualifications under UK-SPEC.

## 6. Documentation Working Group

- 6.1. The 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 (as set out in Section 5).
- 6.2. Chaired by Prof Gordon Bull (BCS), the Group discussed the current EAB accreditation documentation, in particular the *Initial Data Form* and the *Full Submission Document*. As well as providing specific amendments to these two documents, the Group recommended that Guidance Notes should be drafted to accompany the EAB accreditation paperwork; it was suggested that these Notes should also include an explanation of the role of the EAB in organising accreditation visits.
- 6.3. The Group agreed that the same accreditation documentation could be used for all Masters programmes, with the only differentiator being the completion of the relevant output standards matrix. Additionally, members agreed with the recommendation that the amount of non-M level material should follow national guidelines, in line with the Burgess proposals above.
- 6.4. The Group will continue to meet regularly throughout 2007 with issues such as common visit timetables and the provision of information on CDs to be discussed.

## Accreditation Issues

### 7. Compensation

- 7.1. The issue of compensation (and condonement) being applied within engineering programmes and how this affected accreditation decisions was discussed. After much debate, EAB members approved the following guidance statements, to be used by accrediting PEIs on accreditation (note these statements are of guidance, not policy):
  - That compensation should be allowed
  - That the project should not be compensated

- That normally only up to 20 out of 120 credits, in the final year, could be compensated
- That compensation should not undermine the overall learning outcomes of the programme(s)

## **8. Accreditation of IPD schemes**

8.1. The Board considered whether the EAB's remit might be extended to include looking at accrediting IPD/company-based schemes, following BP approaching EC<sup>UK</sup>, and asking them to help manage a multi-Institution accreditation of their company training scheme. Board members discussed the feasibility of this but decided against it due to the current workload of the EAB. However, it was agreed to reconsider the issue at some point in 2007.

## **9. Higher Education Regulatory Review Group (HERRG) Concordat**

9.1. The possible impact of the HERRG Concordat, concerning HE quality assurance and data collection, on the accreditation process was discussed. Aiming to reduce the burden of regulation on the HEIs, it was suggested that accreditation visits be carried out alongside QAA audits. Members acknowledged the potential difficulties that could arise and felt that, whilst a Memorandum of Understanding between the EAB and QAA may be premature, developments should be monitored. A QAA representative is due to address the EAB on QAA activities at a meeting in 2007.

## **10. IEng Matters**

10.1. With the merger of DABCE and JAB, members were keen to emphasize that issues regarding IEng accreditation were not marginalized. Discussion of IEng accreditation focused on topics such as the need to more clearly define the academic pathway between IEng and CEng, the problems of a general decline in IEng registration and the perceived inferiority of IEng accredited degrees.

10.2. Particular Board deliberations late in 2006 included proposing to replace IEng with an alternative title (such as Registered Engineer) as well as a suggestion to accredit some Honours degrees as fulfilling both CEng requirements in part and/or IEng requirements in full. It was generally agreed that further discussion on this issue was needed and the Board noted the work being undertaken at the start 2007 by the RSC's IEng Review Group.

## **11. The Bologna Process**

11.1. As expected, the Bologna Process was discussed on several different occasions throughout 2006, with particular attention paid to its potential impact on the integrated MEng degree. Concerns were raised about whether the MEng would be accepted as an integrated first and second cycle qualification without the addition of extra components to increase the number of credits gained by students.

- 11.2. Members expressed different opinions on the issue. However, it was felt that a profession wide consensus should be reached if possible, particularly in light of the apparent lack of UK Government interest in the issue.
- 11.3. There were discussions about comparing programmes through learning outcomes rather than course structure and duration. The question was posed whether the UK should comply with Bologna or make MEng an exception to its rules. The influence of the climate of opinion was stressed because of the risk of UK qualifications being considered inferior on an international level.
- 11.4. Various opinions were put forward on the need to be Bologna compliant to preserve the status of UK qualifications, but also the desire to retain the MEng in its current structure rather than make a half hearted attempt to reform it. The problem of funding was highlighted, in the event of extra credits being added to the MEng. Again, this will be an issue that will be returned to throughout 2007.

## **12. Gateways to the Professions Project**

- 12.1. Further to EC<sup>UK</sup> securing DfES funding through the Gateways to the Professions Development Fund, members were briefed on the ongoing development of a model for work-based programmes, leading to professional registration. The proposal is based on developing some existing successful work-based learning models run by Kingston University, who would act as the main partner, to provide routes to professional recognition which will integrate education with supervised work-based professional development, thus potentially satisfying all the requirements for professional registration.
- 12.2. The Board was informed that the PEIs would be expected to an important role in the project and that the RAeS, IET and IMechE had been approached early on. Regular updates on the Project are to be provided throughout 2007, with the EAB possibly expected to play a role in the process of accrediting the programme(s).