

Engineering Accreditation Board

(EAB)

EAB accreditation visit: visiting panel Chair's brief

Overview

A degree accreditation visit provides an important opportunity for the engineering profession to present itself to academia in a positive way, to act as a critical friend and to build positive links. An EAB accreditation panel comprises members from several PEIs who may not have met before and who may have slightly differing expectations. The panel Chair therefore plays a key part in the success of a varied panel and where there is a large panel, the Chair will normally be appointed solely to carry out this role and is not expected to be involved formally as the PEI's representative. This is to provide sufficient time for the Chair to carry out this important role.

The Chair is responsible for ensuring that the visiting panel presents itself to the academic institution in an appropriate manner, adopting a constructive approach, presented in a coordinated way. This can be challenging when there are more than 3 or 4 institutions participating in a visit.

The Chair is also responsible for ensuring that the visit schedule is adhered to, and that the panel's private discussions stay on track, are relevant to the matter in hand and cover current UK-SPEC requirements.

The Chair will be supported principally by the EAB Secretary who will act as your key link with the department staff should you require further information. Staff from other PEIs may also attend.

Prior to the visit

The accreditation submission documentation will be forwarded to you and the rest of the visiting panel members approximately eight weeks before the visit. All panel members are expected to have reviewed the material in advance of the visit. It would be helpful if you could highlight any areas for discussion/concern and email these to the EAB Secretary. This will enable us to establish specific areas of concern and, importantly, seek any necessary clarification from the HEI prior to the visit. Where appropriate, the areas you highlight will also be forwarded to the panel members.

Day 1

Chair's introduction

You should remind the panel about:

- The positive and constructive ethos of the visit as outlined above
- The need to leave the university with a favourable impression of the profession

- Their responsibility to maintain standards but also to encourage and assist the university staff wherever possible
- The focus of UK-SPEC being *output standards* and *learning* outcomes and therefore panel members should not spend an excessive amount of time focussing on input standards
- UK-SPEC does not include qualifying phrases such as 'provisional accreditation' and 'partial accreditation'; the term 'condition' must be used with care and not to mean that accreditation is being granted on condition that a university takes action to meet a specified requirement(s).

You should ensure that adequate time is allocated within the visit schedule for the review of material. Panel members are encouraged to arrive at 11.00 when materials will be available for review before lunch. As not all panel members will arrive for this 11.00-13.00 slot adequate time for the review of material should be allocated during the rest of the visit as necessary.

Day 1, from 14.30 to 16.00 is flexible. During this slot, time will need to be allocated for a full panel meeting and discipline specific meetings. You should agree the timings for this session with the panel members as the time required will vary between visits. Some panel members may also wish to use some of this time to review material.

Preliminary meeting with the Head of Department and course team

This is a relatively brief session and is primarily to enable the panel to get an overview of the department. However you should introduce EAB and the visiting panel, and thank the department for inviting EAB.

Private panel meeting

During the panel discussions on day 1 you should:

- Aim to sign off any previous action plan quickly and concentrate on the current visit right at the beginning. (The submission document and initial presentation from the university should highlight any changes that have taken place since the last EAB visit and give you feedback on the completed actions from the last visit.)
- discuss the main the issues of concern (ideally these will be emailed to the panel in advance), identify any questions requiring responses or specific information that the panel needs to elicit
- identify areas of apparent good practice that may require confirmation
- agree what the panel needs to probe from each of the meetings with academics and students
- agree who will take the lead on specific areas during the meetings with academics and students

With the EAB Secretary, you will finalise the list of issues and areas for discussion to present to the Head of Department at the end of the day.

Meeting with students

You should:

- introduce EAB and the visiting team
- set the scene, explaining why we are there and what we are seeking
- explain that everything will be non-attributable
- establish a constructive atmosphere
- explain that a panel member will lead on an issue, with contributions from others.

Meeting with the Industrial Liaison Committee

You should:

- ensure that only external members of the Industrial Liaison Committee are present
- introduce EAB and the visiting team and explain the role of the institutions in the accreditation of courses
- comment that the role of the visiting panel is to help the academic establishment and that you aim to work together with the HEI for the mutual benefit of students
- say that the institutions appreciate the work undertaken by the Industrial Liaison Committee and would welcome their suggestions for any changes or programme development.
- Ask about provision of industrial placements including short summer placements, their input into curriculum design, their input into teaching and mentoring, their views on the programme graduates (whom some may have employed).

Day 2

Discussion with the Head of Department and senior staff

This is an important meeting and is likely to include staff not present at the introductory meeting yesterday. You should:

- introduce EAB and the visiting team
- set the scene, explaining ethos and mechanics of the visit, and establish a constructive atmosphere
- explain that a panel member will lead on an issue, with contributions from others.

Private panel meetings

The discussion should focus on:

- evidence that the learning outcomes are being achieved

- areas where it does not appear that the learning outcomes are being achieved
- issues of major concern that would necessitate '*required action*' before accreditation can be recommended
- *recommendations* for improved practice
- examples of good practice, i.e. practice that is *more than the required* practice
- examples of good practice that could be replicated by others

Private discipline-specific panel meetings

You should remind the discipline-specific panels that they must appoint a rapporteur to capture their discussion points to report back to this panel and also to their own PEI.

During this time, you will be able to begin to outline the visit report with the EAB Secretary, though this will be completed later, after the final panel discussions.

EAB has agreed that the recommendations from each participating PEI should be recorded in the draft visit report. Therefore you should ensure that this is done before the end of the visit. If a PEI is unable to make a recommendation at the end of the visit, you should encourage the institution representatives to give an indication of their likely recommendation, and confirm with that PEI's representative(s) that their recommendation will be sent to the EAB Secretariat within two weeks.

Some PEIs may have institution-specific information that they wish to include in the report. If so, EAB members and institution chairs have agreed that an annex should be provided by the PEI to the EAB Secretary and that this annex should form part of the report. You should confirm with the relevant PEI that the annex will be sent to the EAB Secretary within two weeks of the visit. Failure to do so will lead to slippage in the agreed timescales in the visit concordat.

Final debriefing session with the EAB panel and staff

You should:

- thank the University for inviting the EAB
- make any appropriate compliments about organisation
- explain that final decisions on accreditation rest with individual institution committees, that tend to meet three or four times a year
- explain that feedback from this panel normally gives an indication of possible accreditation decisions that will be made by the individual PEIs' committees
- mention areas where standards are being met, examples of good practice and areas of non-conformity or concern that are likely to be included in the visit report
- remind them of the reporting timescales
- remind the University of the importance of producing action plans with sufficient and relevant detail, and within the time-scale specified.