

ENGINEERS AUSTRALIA

ACCREDITATION BOARD

ACCREDITATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

EDUCATION PROGRAMS AT THE LEVEL OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEER

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2	Associate Director, Accreditation. Professor Alan Bradley	Chair of the Accreditation Board. Professor Robin King	30/8/08

Table of Contents

1. EVALUATING ALTERNATIVE IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAYS	3
2. OFFSHORE, REMOTE CAMPUS AND DISTANCE BASED IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAYS	3
3. ARTICULATION ON THE BASIS OF ADVANCED STANDING.	5
4. REFERENCES.....	5

1. EVALUATING ALTERNATIVE IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAYS

The demands for a more flexible approach to program structural design and delivery are widespread. Engineers Australia encourages innovative approaches to program design leading to flexible options for the benefit of students and the provision of new engineering education products.

Flexible delivery options will commonly be manifested as alternative implementation pathways within a common program definition. In this case each pathway will normally be designed to deliver the same educational outcomes and neither the title of the program nor that of the associated award would normally be differentiated on the basis of the particular implementation pathway followed.

For a program to maintain ongoing accreditation, all implementation pathways must be individually evaluated and each pathway must meet the accreditation criteria concurrently. The accreditation processes for the alternative pathways are thus coupled.

Alternative implementation pathways may be considered for accreditation simultaneously and within a common review cycle. This could occur for example in the consideration of a home campus program with alternative pathways providing optional major and minor study sequences, elective academic units, an optional cooperative mode, project/thesis options, workplace learning options, study abroad, external or other flexible study options or designated articulation routes.

On the other hand the accreditation of alternative implementation pathways may be staggered in time. This could be the case for example where a particular program has one implementation pathway at the home campus and an alternative pathway offered through a regional Australian campus or an offshore operation. Confirming full accreditation of one implementation pathway would re-affirm ongoing full accreditation of other implementations (up to the end of each individual accreditation cycle).

An educational provider can always choose to have alternative offerings evaluated for accreditation as separately defined programs. This most certainly will be the case where a particular award is available by two or more different program routes, involving substantially different curricula, staff, or facilities, and potentially different educational outcome targets. In these cases it would be expected that the title of the award would be clearly differentiated on the basis of the respective program of study followed. The accreditation processes for the two programs of study would not be coupled.

Where the Board has reason to believe that different routes to an award differ substantially in their compliance with the criteria for accreditation, it may decide to evaluate them as separate programs. This would normally be a matter for consultation with the educational institution and would require clear differentiation of titles for the resulting programs and associated degrees.

2. OFFSHORE, REMOTE CAMPUS AND DISTANCE BASED IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAYS

In the specific case of developing an offshore, regional campus or distance based offering of a program already established in a home campus setting, an educational institution would need to firmly decide between the following approaches.

- a) Undifferentiated case: - Each offering is manifested as an alternative implementation pathway within a single program definition, and with a unified set of targeted educational outcomes. The accreditation criteria must be satisfied simultaneously for both implementations of the program through separate evaluation processes. A unified program title and award title would normally apply for all implementations of the program.
- b) Differentiated case: - The offshore, regional campus or distance offering is identified as a separate program with unique educational outcomes perhaps leading to a similar award as the home campus program. Each program would be independently accredited in its own right and in this case program titles and award titles would be expected to distinguish separate program implementations on the home and offshore or regional campuses.

Under normal circumstances, separate accreditation visits and unsynchronised accreditation review cycles would apply for offshore, regional campus and home campus offerings. Where the separate offerings are alternative implementations of the same program as in a) above, then confirming full accreditation on one campus reaffirms ongoing full accreditation at other campuses (up to the end of the individual accreditation cycle in each case).

The Washington Accord in its Rules and Procedures now recognises accreditation of programs that are offered in differentiated or undifferentiated form by a provider, headquartered in the jurisdiction of a signatory, but delivered at a location outside of the national or territorial boundaries of that signatory. In the case of an Australian engineering school implementing an undifferentiated program at a location within the jurisdiction of another signatory to the Accord, accreditation of the offshore offering would be initiated by Engineers Australia, but undertaken collaboratively with the signatory associated with the country of delivery. In this case the offshore program implementation must satisfy the accreditation criteria of both signatories.

Distance based implementation pathways would normally be evaluated as part of a general review of home campus programs for any particular educational institution.

Further detail on the accreditation of offshore program implementations is provided in the Engineers Australia *Policy on Accreditation of programs offered by Australian Universities at Offshore Locations or through Twinning Arrangements with Offshore Institutions* (Reference 1). Further detail on the accreditation of distance based programs is provided in the Engineers Australia Interim policy on Accreditation of Programs Offered in Distance Mode (Reference 2).

Details on procedures for start up and for seeking provisional accreditation status for offshore program offerings are provided in Reference 3.

3. ARTICULATION ON THE BASIS OF ADVANCED STANDING.

Where articulation and/or admission rules allow explicit credit for prior learning to be granted for up to a maximum of the first two academic years of a full time professional engineering program, it is the responsibility of the engineering program provider to maintain policies and practices for the formal evaluation of such prior learning on a case by case basis. Under such circumstances, articulation routes will not be evaluated as separate implementation pathways. The policies and practices established by the engineering education provider for assessing prior learning will however be considered within the overall accreditation process.

In cases where specific advance standing agreements allow transfer from other educational institutions or learning circumstances into a professional engineering program, and in particular where potential academic credit exceeds the equivalent of two full time study years, then the defined prior learning sequence will be considered as an alternative implementation pathway within the engineering program definition. Under these circumstances the full details of this implementation pathway will be subject to evaluation by the Accreditation Board in accordance with the accreditation criteria defined in Reference 4.

A number of Australian universities have negotiated feeder or twinning programs with offshore institutions. Again, where the final two or more years of the program must be completed at the Australian campus, the feeder arrangement is considered to be part of the home program. Where less than two years are taken at the home campus, Engineers Australia expects to identify and accredit the feeder route as an alternative implementation pathway within the definition of the host program. In this latter case a visit to the offshore feeder institution is likely to be necessary.

4. REFERENCES

- 1 P03 Engineers Australia Policy on the Accreditation of Programs Offered by Australian Universities at Offshore Locations.
- 2 P04 Engineers Australia Policy on the Accreditation of Programs Offered in Distance Mode.
- 3 G04 Introducing New Programs and Program Amendments
- 4 S02 Accreditation Criteria Summary.