

ENGINEERS AUSTRALIA

ACCREDITATION BOARD

ACCREDITATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

EDUCATION PROGRAMS AT THE LEVEL OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEER

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Title Engineers Australia Policy on Accreditation of Programs Offered by Australian Universities at Offshore Locations



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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. OFFSHORE PROGRAMS - INTRODUCTION.....	3
3. OFFSHORE PROGRAMS – ACCREDITATION POLICY	3
4. TWINNING PROGRAMS - INTRODUCTION	4
5. TWINNING PROGRAMS – ACCREDITATION POLICY	5
6. OVERALL PRINCIPLES	5

1. INTRODUCTION

The following policy on Accreditation of Programs Offered by Australian Universities at Offshore Locations or through Twinning Arrangements with Offshore Institutions was approved by the Accreditation Board on 11 December 2000. Minor revisions were approved by the Board on 18 March 2003.

2. OFFSHORE PROGRAMS - INTRODUCTION

2.1 Australian universities are now offering engineering degree programs that are taught wholly or partly at offshore locations. They include the following arrangements:

2.2 The Australian university operates a wholly-owned campus in another country ("the host country") and teaches the entire degree program there. This is referred to as an offshore program.

2.3 In some cases, Australian staff are seconded to the offshore campus, or travel to the offshore campus for limited periods to teach. For the latter arrangement, the program may be structured in modular form. Australian staff operating in this way are usually assisted by locally-recruited staff. In other cases, teaching is conducted entirely by local staff; there may be an Australian program leader or campus head.

2.4 The offshore campus may be a partnership between an Australian and a local university or other provider. The degree may be awarded jointly by the two institutions, or by the Australian university alone.

2.5 In most known cases, the degree is awarded by the Australian university alone. It may be differentiated in some way from the corresponding degree (if any) awarded at the home (Australian) campus. More often, the degree is specifically marketed as being indistinguishable from the home-campus offering, and the graduate testamur carries no indication of where the studies leading to the degree were undertaken.

2.6 In some cases a specific feature of the program may be to promote student mobility between locations and encourage students to complete a program across two or more locations.

3. OFFSHORE PROGRAMS – ACCREDITATION POLICY

3.1 Engineers Australia's *Manual for the Accreditation of Professional Engineering Programs* (1999) requires (at Sections 1.5, 7.4, 7.10 and elsewhere) that the accreditation criteria must be met for all modes and pathways by which a program can be completed. This is specifically intended to include offshore arrangements.

3.2 It is a requirement, therefore, that documentation submitted for accreditation of a program should include information about all major locations at which the program is offered, to the same depth and level of detail. Similarly, it is expected that the accreditation panel will visit all such locations and will interview staff and students at each.

3.3 **Where the offshore program is separately identified from the home program**, it will normally be treated as a separate accreditation exercise and **each program will be evaluated for accreditation in its own right**. The offshore program must be identified in some way that is evident from the testamur held by graduates; for example the award title may be different, or the delivery location must be shown.

3.4 **Where graduates of the offshore and the home programs hold identical testamurs, and the two are represented by the university as one program offered in multiple locations**, then Engineers Australia will evaluate and **accredit the program as a single entity**. The accreditation criteria must be met at all locations or combinations of locations through which the program can be completed. **The program cannot be accredited at any location unless it is accredited at all locations: by the university's own statement, there is no distinction.**

3.5 In either instance, Engineers Australia will receive documentation from the university and will arrange an accreditation visit to the offshore location under the normal procedures outlined in the *Manual*. It is particularly important that the documentation be received well ahead of the proposed visit, so that any apparent difficulties can be identified in advance and the visit rescheduled if necessary.

3.6 The university concerned will be expected to reimburse Engineers Australia for all costs associated with an offshore accreditation visit. This *may* include a charge for the time of panel members, which at present is not normally charged within Australia.

3.7 Engineers Australia wishes to undertake offshore accreditation activities only where these are acceptable to relevant authorities in the host country. On receipt of a request from an Australian university for offshore accreditation, Engineers Australia will wish to negotiate with the host-country authorities and will not wish to undertake a visit until those authorities have expressed their concurrence with the arrangements. Wherever possible, Engineers Australia's preference will be to conduct visits jointly with host-country authorities. The university will be kept fully informed of such negotiations and involved to the maximum extent appropriate.

4. TWINNING PROGRAMS - INTRODUCTION

4.1 Twinning refers to formal arrangements with other providers - in this context, overseas institutions - whereby students undertake the initial stage/s of a program at the other institution and then transfer to an Australian university, with predetermined credit, to complete the program and qualify for the award.

4.2 Individual students can of course be admitted to a degree program with credit for studies completed elsewhere. Twinning refers to a formally-agreed arrangement with another provider which envisages significant cohorts of students and specifies credit, usually for an integral number of years of a program.

4.3 A twinning arrangement may involve recognition by the Australian university that the first (say) two years of an overseas institution's curriculum is equivalent to its own, or that a sub-degree qualification completed elsewhere will attract a defined level of credit and recognised entry point to the Australian program. Alternatively, it may involve the overseas institution specifically teaching the first (say) two years of the Australian university's curriculum, with or without some assistance from Australian staff.

4.4 Early twinning programs commonly involved a first year of study overseas, giving entry to a degree program in Australia at second-year level (known as a 1+3 program). Building on market experience, 2+2 programs have been progressively introduced and there are now examples of 3+1 programs. A final step, not yet in evidence, might be “4+0” in which an Australian university would franchise its entire program to an offshore provider and continue to award the Australian degree.

5. TWINNING PROGRAMS – ACCREDITATION POLICY

5.1 Where no more than two years of the program are completed overseas, substantial reliance is placed on the Australian-based third and fourth years as sufficient tests of the quality of the initial part of the program. Accreditation policy should still require the Australian university to explain what mechanisms it uses to assure quality in the overseas component.

5.2 Where the first three years are completed overseas and only the final year is taken in Australia, the approach to accreditation will depend on whether the overseas program follows identically the Australian curriculum, or whether it is an overseas-owned curriculum recognised as equivalent.

5.3 If the Australian university can certify that the third year of the overseas program follows essentially the Australian curriculum, if there are substantial formal examinations which are set and marked in common between the Australian and overseas programs, if other forms of assessment can be shown to be essentially identical, and if all these aspects are part of the formal twinning agreement, then it will normally not be necessary for Engineers Australia to visit the overseas establishment. It would be desirable to interview a sample of students on arrival in Australia.

5.4 In all other cases, Engineers Australia will require documentation through the Australian university and will conduct a visit to the overseas establishment, on a full-cost-recovery basis. As in the case of wholly-offshore programs, Engineers Australia will wish to liaise with the local authorities.

6. OVERALL PRINCIPLES

6.1 In all instances, the onus is on the university awarding the degree to demonstrate that the accreditation criteria are met.

6.2 As with evaluations conducted within Australia, Engineers Australia reserves the right to investigate in depth how stated outcomes are actually achieved in practice.

6.3 In arranging any visit to an offshore campus or institution, Engineers Australia will consult with the accreditation authorities in the country concerned and will endeavour to secure their agreement and/or participation in the process (refer 3.7 and 5.4).