ENGINEERS AUSTRALIA

ACCREDITATION BOARD

ACCREDITATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

FOR

ENGINEERING EDUCATION PROGRAMS

(CURRICULUM BASED)

IN THE OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY OF ENGINEERING ASSOCIATE

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Title   Engineers Australia Policy on Accreditation of Programs Offered in Distance Mode

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ACCREDITATION **POLICY**
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1. Introduction:

Engineers Australia recognises that educational and learning techniques are continually changing and advancing. Accordingly Engineers Australia wishes to encourage and promote new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, limited only by the requirement that the knowledge and attributes appropriate for entry to professional engineering practice can reliably be shown to have been attained by all graduates of the program. Engineers Australia reserves the right to investigate in depth how stated outcomes are actually achieved in practice.

Accordingly, Engineers Australia does not wish to be unduly prescriptive about particular criteria that might apply to distance learning, or any other mode of flexible delivery. The preferred approach is to examine any program on its merits and in light of the criteria common to all programs. However, when approaching any variety of programs in which it does not have an existing body of experience, Engineers Australia will attempt to seek out and be guided by current and emerging best practice.

A policy on distance based delivery has been determined by the Accreditation Board, originally intended for programs that may be considered for accreditation as an appropriate base level education in the Professional Engineer category. The following policy statements and guidelines interpret this policy for distance based delivery of curriculum based Engineering Associate programs.

2. POLICY STATEMENTS

(a) Engineers Australia will evaluate, for accreditation, programs leading to the Engineering Associate qualification which are conducted partly or principally in distance mode.

(b) The accreditation criteria and process are those set out in the Accreditation Management System in particular, document G05EA_Curr Alternative Implementation Pathways deals with offshore, remote campus and distance based delivery, in which the process specifically requires that the criteria be met and the evaluation be conducted for all modes and pathways by which the program can be completed.

(c) Engineers Australia will expect to modify these guidelines from time to time and to that end encourages input from all interested stakeholders.

3.   GUIDELINES:

Engineers Australia has developed the following guidelines as a basis for the evaluation of programs delivered in distance learning mode. These guidelines will be progressively reviewed with the development of learning technologies and as further convergence occurs between traditional on-campus and external delivery approaches. The guidelines are not prescriptive, but where they are not followed, the evaluating panel will wish to be convinced that any alternative approach is equally effective.

1.   A distance learning mode offering should be built on an existing engineering education program, concurrently offered in traditional mode to on-campus learner cohorts, so that teaching staff members are kept constantly face-to-face with how learners actually learn. Even for experienced staff it is difficult to operate solely in distance mode. Distance delivery should therefore be one of a number of possible implementation pathways for a particular program. Accreditation of the program must take account of all possible implementation pathways.

2.   Electronic and face-to-face opportunities must be provided for on-campus and distance mode learners to interact, particularly to ensure that group and team based learning experiences are equitable for both on-campus and distance mode cohorts. It is desirable that on-campus learners make some use of materials developed for distance learning.

3.   The learning and assessment design, learning activities, learning resources and assessment measures for a distance mode implementation of a program must be purpose built to support the external learner in a comprehensive and independent manner. Therefore a distance education program should be designed explicitly for external learners, not just adapted from on-campus materials.

4.   Distance mode learning must be underpinned by a sound delivery platform using electronic and print-based resources that satisfy defined standards of quality, consistency, effectiveness of learning support and performance monitoring, ensuring vocational outcomes equivalent to those of on-campus learners. When developing or enhancing learning materials, teaching staff should have access to instructional design, multi-media and editorial consultants.

5.   There must be in place an overarching quality system that fully embraces the distance mode and engages the external learner as a key stakeholder within the learning system. Appropriate mechanisms should be in place to ensure timely and adequate feedback on matters such as assessment and queries within this quality system.

6.   The teaching staff team must be committed, equipped and adequately resourced to support implementation of the distance based learning mode. A distance education program cannot be built on the work of a minority of dedicated staff, however innovative or passionate. Everyone involved must be a committed contributor.

7.   Teaching policies and regulations should be framed so that they recognise and support the teaching and administrative requirements of a distance education program, such as learner enrolment, and program delivery, learning and assessment methodologies.

8.   There must be equitable access to learner services, teaching and administrative support for distance and on-campus learners alike such as library, counselling and learning skills.

9.   Distance mode learners must be required to participate in residential on-campus learning activities equivalent to a minimum duration of one full teaching week for every semester of effective full time study. In this way the school can observe and thereby ensure that graduates have attained the specified attributes and capabilities. Residential schools enhance learner-staff and learner-learner interactions as well as enriching the learning experiences of both learners and staff. Also, although most or all practical experience may have been gained off-campus, it is important that staff be convinced of learners' practical capabilities at first hand.

10. Provision must be made for laboratory and practical learning, project work and exposure to professional engineering practice that is demonstrably equivalent to those experiences delivered to the on-campus learner cohort.

11. There must be specific and adequate mechanisms for tracking the development of personal and professional skills in the distance learning mode to ensure the satisfactory attainment of the generic attributes in graduates.

12. The bandwidth, performance and accessibility of electronic communication systems must be adequate to ensure the quality and effectiveness of learning support and performance monitoring, equivalent to that experienced by on-campus learners.