

OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE BACHELOR OF ENGINEERING DEGREE

Purpose: To inform participants in the September/October consultation of the on-going work plan to align the Bachelor of Engineering (BE) degree with the changes in the Washington Accord graduate profile.

At the international meeting for the Washington Accord (WA) in June 2009, the signatories¹ agreed on the immediate implementation of the changes to the international graduate profile for the four-year BE degree. Subsequently, consultation occurred with universities and industry during September/October about the new graduate profile and the implications for the current BE degree in New Zealand. The outcomes were that the majority of industry either required further information on the need for the proposed changes or were satisfied that the current BE degree which complies with the old WA graduate profile, produced graduates to meet their needs.

After considering the feedback, the National Engineering Education Plan (NEEP) Project Consortium agreed that continued adherence to the WA exemplar standard is vital in order to maintain international benchmarking and protect the competitiveness of New Zealand engineering. However, there is a need to clarify the extent of the gap, if any, between the graduate profile of the current BE degree programmes and the new WA graduate profile. It was agreed that the 'gap analysis' work is best performed by IPENZ in parallel to its accreditation programme. Once the extent of any gap is defined, it was agreed that a single national approach to establishing any necessary change in programme length is required.

Since referral to IPENZ, discussions have occurred at the IPENZ Standards and Accreditation Board and with the New Zealand Council of Engineering Deans (NZCED) and the proposed approach has been agreed. As the universities go through accreditation over the next 2-3 years, the four-year BEs will be assessed against the new graduate profile as well as the IPENZ accreditation criteria and the shortfall in terms of graduate outcome identified. The NZCED can then discuss with IPENZ what programme change from the present four-year programme is required. At that point discussions with industry and with the Tertiary Education Commission can occur to decide any change.

This process may be accelerated if one or more of the following occurs:

- the international observers sent to New Zealand by the Washington Accord to monitor our accreditation report to the Accord that the IPENZ standard is no longer substantially equivalent to the new WA exemplar, requiring a more rapid response, or
- Australia decides to change from a four-year programme, in which case New Zealand should change at the same time and in the same way, or
- there is a strategic move by Government to invest in higher level engineering skills as part of transition to an innovation-led economy.

In summary, it is business as usual for the tertiary providers until there is a definitive outcome from the assessment of the current four-year BEs against the new graduate profile exemplar of the WA.

¹. The other signatories to the Washington Accord are Australia, Canada, Chinese-Taipei, Hong Kong-China, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, United Kingdom and USA