Comments by ECSA on Recognition of Professional Bodies and Registration of Professional Designations

SAQA Public Meeting of Professional Bodies
21 April 2010
Overview

- Objective: to make input into SAQA criteria and policies for:
  - Recognition of professional bodies and
  - Registration of professional designations
  with focus on statutory professions

- Where do statutory professions fit in the landscape?

- A perspective on ECSA as a statutory body

- Input on policy and criteria for recognition of statutory professional bodies

- Issues relating to registration of professional designations

- Inputs on registration of professional designations
The Landscape: Where do the Professions Fit?

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<th>NQF Levels</th>
<th>(Statutory) Professions</th>
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ECSA Perspective

– ECSA is established by Engineering Profession Act

– Professional categories of registration are defined in the Act, each carrying a designation (Section 18)
  • Professional Engineer
  • Professional Engineering Technologist
  • Professional Engineering Technician
  • Professional Certificated Engineer

– Section 19: Council must register an applicant if it is satisfied that the applicant has demonstrated competence as measured against standards determined by the council for the category
Professional Development Model

- Professional Registration
- Candidate Registration
- Graduation

Accredited Programme

- Training And Experience
- Meet Standard For Professional Competency
- Meet Standard for Engineering Education
- Observe Code of Conduct and Maintain CPD

ECSA has ensured coherence, integration, international recognition and realistic progression for this model and variants.
Why Regulate Engineering Practice?

Engineering:

- Serves the needs of people, economic development and the provision of services to society by typically
  - exploiting natural resources,
  - harnessing, converting and using energy,
  - countering forces of nature,
  - making and using harmful substances,
  - using machines, controlling complex processes,
  - …
- And is accompanied by risks to health, safety, environment, sustainability, …

- Engineering work must therefore be carried out:
  - competently and
  - accountably
Nature of Professional Regulation

- Engineering Profession Act is based on the principle:
  - Regulation relies on the expertise of the profession.
  - Independent public representation ensures a clear focus on the public interest

- Decision making on education, competence, disciplinary matters is based on peer judgement because it:
  - can only be expressed in broad baseline standards
  - can not be reduced to tick-box rules
  - needs fundamental, specialist and contextual knowledge, coupled with experience
  - may use incomplete or unexpected forms of information
  - may require expert elicitation of information
Competency Standard: Pr Eng

General Requirement: Demonstrate:
• integrated performance of outcomes at specified level
• within complex engineering activities,
• according to applicable context guidelines

Level: Complex engineering activities
• Scope: systems or complex subsystems
• Context: complex, varying, unpredictable, multidisciplinary
• Resources diverse and significant: people, money, equipment, materials, technologies
• Interactions: wide-ranging or conflicting technical, engineering or other issues
• Constraints: time, finance, infrastructure, resources, facilities, standards & codes, applicable laws
• Risks: significant in a range of contexts

Group A: Engineering Problem Solving
1:-Define, investigate and analyse complex engineering problems
2:-Design or develop solutions to complex engineering problems
Level: Complex engineering problem definition

Group B: Managing Engineering Activities
4:-Manage part or all of one or more complex engineering activities

Group C: Impacts of Engineering Activity
5:-Recognise and address the reasonably foreseeable social, cultural and environmental effects of complex engineering activities

Group D: Judgement, ethics, responsibility
7:-Conduct engineering activities ethically
8:-Exercise sound judgement in the course of complex engineering activities

Group E: CPD
11:-Undertake professional development activities sufficient to maintain and extend competence
Input: Policy for recognising professional bodies

Statutory bodies:
- Their existence, governance, responsibility and functions are entrenched in their own Acts
- Enjoy autonomy to operate within their Acts
- Apply the peer-review principle to decision making
- Can not surrender control to any other body
- Do not need permission from SAQA to exist or operate
- Have diverse missions, functions, modus operandi

This suggests an ultra light touch approach for recognising statutory bodies: Little option but to recognise statutory bodies “because they are there”
**Issues: Registering Professional Designations**

SAQA Presentation: “Professional designations … will now have to meet national policy and criteria”

- Tread carefully:
  - What is this national policy and criteria?
  - Acts of professional councils reflect national policy!
  - What are the objectives of registration on the NQF?
  - Is there a SAQA approval step for competency standards?
  - Are formats, language, etc to be standardised?
  - Will it be a one-size-fits-all model?
  - Will there be SAQA-enforced revision cycles?

- Will registration of professional designations add value?

- Will registration be burdensome in time, energy and cost?
Input: Registering Professional Designations

– Do not replicate the SAQA qualification registration process and format

– Restrict information to actual requirements that applicant for registration must fulfill, e.g. competency standards, ....

– Keep competency standard to essentials: for example:
  • Concise purpose
  • Outcomes in format suited to professional context
  • Clear, contextualised level indication
  • Any contextual knowledge (content) requirement
  • But not: rationale, credits, learning assumed to be in place, assessment criteria, registration of assessors, moderation, etc

– Let the profession set the renewal cycle
Database Issues

– Engineering Professions Act requires ECSA to maintain a register of persons registered in various categories

– The ECSA database copes with de-registration, re-registration, multiple registrations, death, and answers public queries

– Requirement in s30 of NQF Act for profession to maintain a database (of what?) for the purpose of the NQF Act looks like unnecessary duplication ….

– Requirement to forward data to NLRD: extension to professional designations – how to deal with de-registrations?

– ECSA Register must remain the definitive database
Recommendations

– Registration of statutory professional bodies will have to be done on face value

– Registration of professional designations should essentially be a publication function

– The peer-judgement decision-making system in the professions must not be compromised

– A plea: let us not end up with a burdensome system that adds no value!