

# The value of the P.Eng. licence



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**A**s noted in my last column in the May/June issue, a licence is “an exclusive right to practise a profession.” Not all engineers get such a right with their licence from PEO. Professional engineers can be grouped into four areas based on whether they are practising engineering (in its broader context), and whether they have an exclusive right to practise in their field.

belong to PEO, even though they do not need a licence to do their jobs. I believe this need could be better met by creating a new membership category that confers a right to title only, without conferring a licence (right to practise). Such members would retain all of the voting privileges of membership. However, since they would not be licensed, they would not be permitted to take professional responsibility for engineering work—which shouldn't be an issue, since they're not practising engineering anyway!

D. These individuals are of most concern, because the P.Eng. licence does not confer an exclusive right to practise in their fields. These include the high-tech and other non-traditional fields in which professional engineering work is not well-defined, like computer and software engineering, communications,

so. Several organizations already exist to license or certify professionals who work closely with engineers.

Alternatively, PEO can open its doors to practitioners in non-traditional and emerging engineering fields, and continue on our path to grow as an open and inclusive profession. And we can do the right thing by society and the public interest—by issuing proper, full licences that have real meaning, by defining scopes of practice and by conferring an exclusive right to practise in every field of engineering.

## Discipline specific practice issues

To better regulate the profession, PEO also needs to stay abreast of the problems members are dealing with in professional practice. For example, the differences in the work that chemical, software and civil engineers do, and the practice issues these three groups face, are dramatic. Chemical engineers may find that their area of practice overlaps with that of applied chemists. Licenced software engineers should perhaps be tasked through demand-side legislation to deal with issues like credit card fraud and Internet security, in order that the public interest is served and protected. Civil engineers may be concerned with quality-based selection versus price-based selection.

Such practice issues will only surface if PEO reaches down to the practice level of each discipline. To do this, we need to involve practising engineers in addressing discipline specific issues.

## List servers

To get this kind of input, PEO is in the process of setting up list servers for specific disciplines or practice sectors. These will provide a new venue for members to exchange views on practice issues in their fields. A list server defines an exclusive group of people who have joined it. List members communicate by exchanging standard Web email. As important issues are exposed through virtual discussions, they can be brought to Council's attention, so that PEO can respond more effectively and more quickly.

PEO will soon introduce this new tool on its website. I look forward to seeing online discussions get underway in the near future. ♦

The four categories of licensure

	Have exclusive right to practise (PEO members/licensees)	Do not have exclusive right to practise (mix of PEO members and non-members)
Practising engineering	A	D
Not practising engineering	B	C

The categories in the table are defined as follows:

- A. These engineers are in the most desired state, since they have well-defined scopes of practice. This is the territory of traditional disciplines, such as structural engineering and the design of water treatment systems, high-pressure vessels and high-power systems.
- B. These are licensed PEO members in traditional disciplines, such as civil or structural engineering, who are no longer practising engineering because they have either retired or moved into non-engineering fields.
- C. These engineers have either changed their occupations or retired. They were originally in a discipline that does not have a well-defined right to practise—say computers/software. Nevertheless, members of both B and C wish to

some chemical and mechanical work, bioengineering, etc. Since there has not been PEO enforcement over these areas of practice, or demand-side legislation that defines who are qualified practitioners, the market is wide open even to those who do not have the proper skills.

It's essential that justification for licensing be based solely on the public interest. The self-interest of our members/licensees is not a justification. PEO must be seen to be licensing qualified practitioners for the greater common good, rather than to protect turf. This is the critical point that must be clearly understood, since it underlies the essence of proper licensure for all disciplines.

We do have a choice. We can be closed and exclusive. But society will always respond to protect itself from potential harm. It's my position that if PEO does not respond to this deep-seated need, other organizations will be created to do