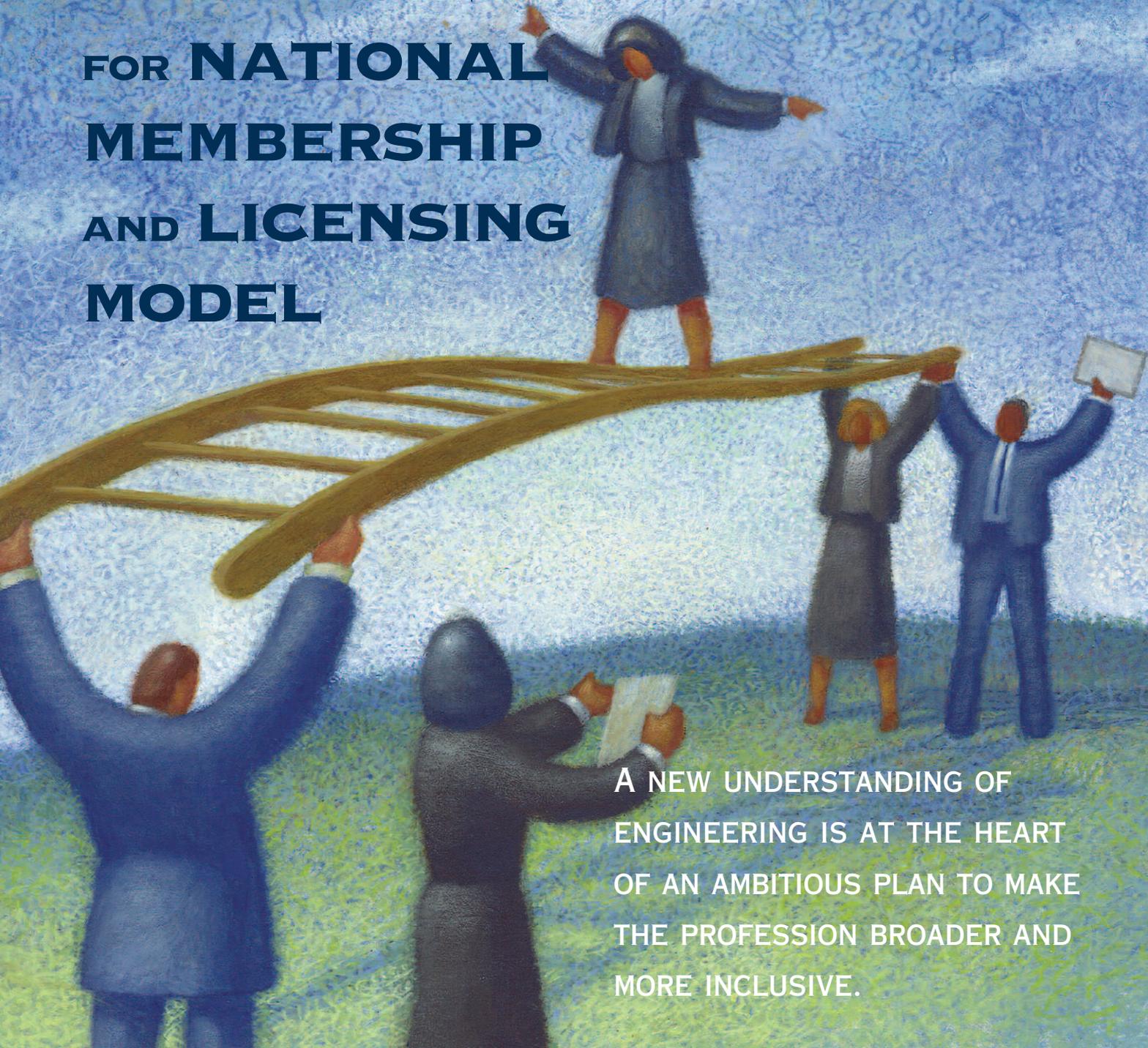


SUPPORT BUILDING FOR NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP AND LICENSING MODEL



A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF
ENGINEERING IS AT THE HEART
OF AN AMBITIOUS PLAN TO MAKE
THE PROFESSION BROADER AND
MORE INCLUSIVE.

By Michael Mastromatteo

PEO is spearheading development of a national licensing model that it hopes will bring new meaning and relevance to the generic engineering licence.

Elements of what is now the National Framework for Membership and Licensure were first approved by PEO council in 2007. The framework into which they've been woven has since won the support of other engineering regulators across Canada.

A key objective of the new membership and licensing model is creation of a national vision for the engineering profession, which it is hoped will be adopted by all provincial/territorial regulators by June 2009.

The model envisions a more inclusive engineering profession through the use of new classes of licence and membership. It also seeks to increase and maintain contact between engineering graduates and the engineering regulator in each province or territory.

It's intended the national membership and licensing model will also lead to increased public understanding of the distinction between engineering graduates and licensed professional engineers. Recent studies have indicated that while the profession is generally well respected in the wider public, many have a dim understanding of engineering work and tend to confuse those wearing an iron ring with licensed professional practitioners.

In addition to clearing up these perception problems, the model is intended to facilitate the licensing of a greater number of recent engineering graduates, while enhancing contacts between regulators and all other stakeholders in the wider engineering community.

Following up on their initial discussion of the issue, PEO council in September 2008 organized a plenary session to better understand the national framework proposal and seek consensus on what it should achieve. Council members supported the view that a national model should better protect and serve the public interest, provide registration practices that are transparent, objective, impartial and fair, and enhance members' interests by showing the added value gained via an engineering licence.

Council then directed PEO CEO/Registrar Kim Allen, P.Eng., to continue developing a national licensing model and to engage council in the development, using its knowledge-based approach.

BROAD SUPPORT

Since PEO council's endorsement in principle, development of a national framework has also been supported by other provincial/territorial engineering regulators across Canada. In October 2008, Engineers Canada and the provincial engineering association presidents agreed on a set of principles to guide the creation of a national vision for the profession.

The idea of a "national" model is central to its appeal. In addition to overcoming inconsistency in the regulatory practices across the country, a truly national framework for membership and licensure would facilitate increased mobility and credential recognition for engineers throughout Canada.

SENSE OF UNITY

"The thinking here is that the engineering 'profession' is much broader than the sum of all its licence holders," Allen told *Engineering Dimensions* February 11. "The national membership and licensing model is an effort not only to take a fresh look at licensing, but also to bring a sense of unity to the entire profession."

Allen outlined a number of clear advantages of the new model. First, it will bring harmonization to the regulatory practices of engineering regulators across the country.

Not only will this enable full mobility of engineers in each jurisdiction, but it will also overcome difficulties in enforcing engineering practice standards nationwide.

Other key benefits include expansion of the profession's ability to deal with labour market development, and an effort to register, by means of different classes of licence, all those involved in engineering work.

Allen has been active with the Engineers Canada-sponsored National

Framework for Membership and Licensure

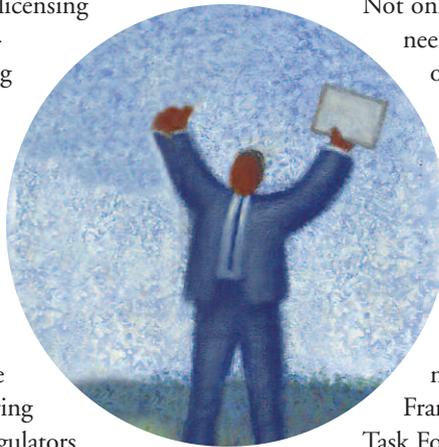
Task Force that has been extolling the virtues of the new model to stakeholder groups across the country.

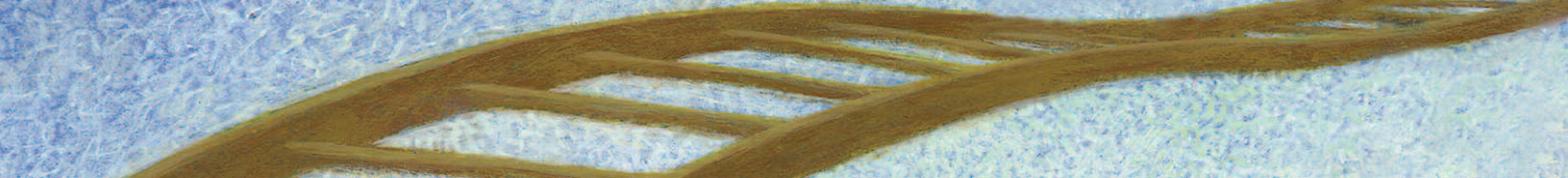
He recently presented to the Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Newfoundland and Labrador, and has met with government officials and other players with an interest in engineering regulation.

CLOSING THE BACK DOORS

PEO President David Adams, P.Eng., says the national membership and licensing framework encompasses two of the objectives outlined in the plan he presented to council when assuming the presidency last May. Adams says the development of the national framework, and the removal of major exceptions to licensure of engineers, such as the industrial exception, would "close the back doors" to the practice of professional engineering.

Other benefits Adams sees in the proposal have to do with improving standards of practice in the profession. "This broad need to register all with a science or engineering education, who practise or are seeking to practise engineering, is a necessary and important adjunct to protecting the public by enabling enforcement of standards of performance through our regulatory tribunals," he says.





“A national licensing framework will also provide barrier-free mobility for engineers when adopted by all provincial and territorial regulatory bodies. National harmonization is a much sought-after commodity today, a first step to regulated US and global participation in engineering work, with consistent licensing standards and requirements.”

The president is taking the national framework on the road throughout March, to present the concept and seek input at a series of town hall meetings throughout Ontario.

Chantal Guay, P.Eng., CEO of Engineers Canada, says the new model is a hot topic at the national level. “The framework for licensure is an interesting concept, and certainly grabbed the attention of our board members, and of our constituent members’ senior staff and presidents,” Guay says. “We look forward to reviewing the results of the task force’s work this coming June.”

DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

A key driver in the development of the national framework concept was PEO’s interest in governing or offering membership to all those with an engineering education or who work in engineering. In addition to actively practising professional engineers, this would include engineering school graduates, provisional and limited licence holders, internationally educated applicants, and those who are retired from or not practising engineering.

Allen says an additional benefit to the national framework proposal is its more effective enforcement of the *Professional Engineers Act*, since it includes the establishment of a statutory tribunal for enforcement matters, eliminating the need for civil courts to deal with enforcement problems. Enforcement tribunals would operate under the authority of the engineering regulators, with their decisions able to be appealed to provincial court.

Allen also suggests the new model is a recognition that the patterns of employment have changed markedly since the last major revision to the act in 1984. He says evidence from recent labour market and licence-uptake studies indicates that engineering regulators seem to have lessening influence over all those involved—even peripherally—in engineering work. He says it appears that licence holders make up only about one-third of those working in engineering, and less than 50 per cent of Canadian engineering graduates today apply for the P.Eng. Census data also show that approximately 30 per cent of people classified as working in “engineering occupations” are not even university engineering graduates.

As Allen explains in a paper co-authored with Donald Wallace, PhD, director, Ontario Centre for Engineering and Public Policy (see insert, *The Journal of Policy Engagement*), engineering regulation has become “a patchwork” of licensing practices from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. As federal and provincial governments promote the breakdown of trade and

mobility barriers, this lack of consistency among engineering regulation becomes even more acute.

NO EXCEPTIONS

The Allen-Wallace paper also makes the case that all engineering-related activities should be subject to regulation, and that licensing exceptions for supervisors of engineering teams should not be tolerated.

Related to the national framework’s stepped-up regulatory oversight is a more uniform approach to the profession’s commitment to ensuring the competence and accountability of its practitioners.

“All those working in engineering, and not just licence holders, should ultimately be registered with the profession,” Allen says. “As well, engineering graduates can and should be urged to register with the profession, even if they do not require the P.Eng. licence for their employment.”

In presentations to other stakeholders on the proposed membership and licensing framework, Allen makes the point that today’s regulatory organizations don’t seem to have a place for all those involved in the engineering profession. By concentrating excessively on licence holders, associations could be losing out on their ability to effectively govern the wider profession.

MORE BENEFITS

The national framework for membership and licensure is seen to benefit all stakeholders in the engineering community, including the public, federal and provincial governments, employers and practitioners. Licensed members, for example, would enjoy increased professional recognition, enhanced employability and mobility, expanding networking and affinity opportunities, and more incentive to participate in governing their profession.

Internationally educated engineering graduates would likewise enjoy speedier integration into the local workforce, increased support from the provincial regulator and earlier access to membership benefits.

Engineering students would also have a greater incentive to become involved with engineering associations through their earlier involvement and increased exposure to the benefits of registration. This would, in part, fulfill a long-standing objective of PEO and other regulators to provide a more seamless transition from student to graduate to intern, and finally to licensed member of the profession.

Allen, Adams and other key proponents of the national framework say it affords an entirely new understanding of what membership in the profession entails.

“It’s time to reframe engineering as a welcoming, engaging and inclusive profession,” Allen says, “especially as we make clear the difference between registering with the profession and being licensed to practise engineering.” Σ