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A report was submitted to Council in March dealing with the licensing of engineering technologists by PEO. The full report is available to all members through the PEO website.

The work of the task group consisted of a reappraisal of the present regulations pertaining to the issuance of limited licences to practice professional engineering and comparing them with the regulations of other jurisdictions.

The matter addressed is by no means new and, in the body of the report, a historical overview of the discussions and events over the last 50 years is set out. The issue initially revolved around the recognition of those individuals who were members of the engineering team but whose qualifications did not meet the requirement of this association for licensing as professional engineers, in the main due to their level of academic training.

Subsequently, with the formation of the Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technicians and Technologists (OACETT), that organization has championed the role of technologists and has aggressively pursued recognition of certain of its members as full-fledged professionals able to take legal responsibility for their work and with OACETT itself becoming a licensing body setting defined scopes of practice.

Before any consideration is given to the issuance of a limited licence, PEO first requires a certain minimum academic level. Provided this is achieved, an applicant's experience is reviewed by

Setting professional standards

the Experience Requirements Committee (ERC).

The understood but often unstated point is that our education does not stop upon graduation from university or college. Learning continues in the workplace. In the case of an applicant for a limited licence, it is the task of the ERC to assess whether that workplace learning has led to a level of competence equal to that which we would require of a professional engineer working in the same field. The reasoning is that in settling into one area of practice, we all rely on a narrower body of knowledge than that covered in the wide array of subjects taught at school, but equally that we, through our work experience, acquire a deeper background or develop knowledge not taught in school. This applies to bright young technologists just as it does to bright young engineers.

These considerations formed the background to the deliberations of the task group which, as is appropriate, looked at the present provisions entirely from a regulatory viewpoint, as they would best serve the public interest.

The task group concluded that no other similar jurisdiction at present had regulations that were more progressive or markedly different from Ontario's; that OACETT could provide a worthwhile initial screening service of its members; that it was appropriate to give a special title to OACETT members who satisfied PEO's requirements for the issuance of a limited licence; and that such licence holders would be held to exactly the same professional standards as licensed professional engineers in their field.

There were other recommendations. Two of these in particular may well lead to a great deal of controversy. One is the idea that if a holder of a limited licence is as competent as a professional engineer in a given field, then limited licence holder should be able to be listed on a

Certificate of Authorization as a person responsible for that particular area of practice. The other, following the same logic, suggests that the limited licence should also, perhaps, be provided with a particular class of membership. Council has not yet deliberated on these matters and there are those who regard these provisions as being an ill-advised short cut to obtaining a professional qualification. However, the task group did not arrive at its conclusions lightly.

In examining the recommendations, the point that is not immediately obvious, and one that is of fundamental and far-reaching importance, is the understanding that a holder of a limited licence must be able to perform at the same level as a professional engineer in the same field. Therefore, in order to properly assess the qualifications of an applicant for a limited licence in a particular discipline, we obviously have to be clear on the knowledge and abilities we require of a professional engineer in that same field and, by extension, to insist on a mandatory core body of knowledge for each field.

While PEO staff is able to satisfy itself as to the acceptability of an applicant for licensure largely through assessing experience portfolios and the comments of referees, referees do not assess a candidate's abilities and qualifications against any specific criteria.

There is no doubt that our admissions staff, working closely with members of the ERC, could arrive at suitable standards to apply, since this would, in most cases, involve the formalization of the work being done at present. However, PEO is an umbrella organization for a wide range of disciplines and activities. We should accordingly endeavour to involve industry, technical societies and other professional groups in addition to our own volunteers in setting standards, certainly for each main discipline. ❖