

On the way to PEO's **BIG AUDACIOUS FUTURE**



By Michael Mastromatteo

PEO's big audacious goal, envisioned future and strategic intents of 2009 were fashioned to be the regulator's next-generation strategic plan, extending the progress of its 2001 and 2005 plans to a 25-year horizon. Together, they comprise a framework of touchstones to focus ongoing improvement, rather than a roadmap to a final destination. Two years along, it's time to take stock.

In May 2009, PEO council gathered for its annual workshop, this time to develop an updated strategic plan built on the plans of 2001 and 2005. Council's resulting "big audacious goal"—for PEO to be "the global leader in professional self-regulation that responsibly improves the quality of life for all"—represents the regulator's envisioned future some 25 years hence. At the workshop, councillors also developed vivid descriptions of what the future would look like if PEO achieved its goal and six strategic intents to help get there.

Should PEO achieve its vision, council said, engineering would be the highest publicly trusted profession, and professional engineers would be sought after worldwide for their valued expertise. Licence holders would be regarded as "exemplary practitioners" for their integrity, competence, ingenuity and cost effectiveness, and recognized by virtue of their superior education as accountable for protecting the public interest by preventing failure and accidents in all fields of engineering practice.

Council's envisioned future would also see PEO regarded as the model for self-regulation and the leader in standards and public policy development, promoting inclusiveness and diversity to drive innovation. Because the profession would reflect the diversity of society, licence holders would be proud to belong to PEO and to be P.Engs, while students would consider engineering a rewarding career and be excited about obtaining their licences. Consequently, a larger proportion of engineering students would become engineering interns and complete a seamless transition to their P.Eng.

Council saw governments having total confidence and trust in PEO's ability to administer the *Professional Engineers Act*, and the public being more aware of the relevance of engineering licences.

To move toward its described future, council determined PEO would have to make progress in six areas: self-regulation—public trust; PEO's global influence; diversity/inclusion—a profession that reflects society; education/professional development/competence; highest standards of practice; and ethics and professional responsibility.

As then President Catherine Karakatsanis, P.Eng., FEC, said following council's formal approval of the workshop output in September 2009: "PEO has stood out as a self-regulatory body and has earned recognition from government, whose ongoing support for our profession has been tremendous. In order to build on this success, I believe we need to address issues of relevance and value in a long-range strategic plan."

Karakatsanis also said it was important to work together to define the measuring sticks needed to plot the organization's progress.

"The plan will serve as a guide and will help focus council over the long term," she said. "Continuity is essential through a succession of new presidents and new members of council in order to advance significant and worthwhile policy direction and initiatives."

MEASURING PROGRESS

So how far has PEO come in the two years since council developed and unveiled its vision?

Towards PEO's envisioned future as the world leader in engineering self-regulation, global standards work, and public policy development, PEO has made great strides thanks to the growth of the Ontario Centre for Engineering and Public Policy (OCEPP), which several legislators have lauded as a key development in linking the engineering profession with sound, technically informed public policy.

Now part of PEO's tribunals and regulatory affairs division, OCEPP actively reaches out to members of the engineering profession, the academic community, policy-makers, opinion leaders and others interested in advancing the public interest. Its sponsored lectures, panel discussions, technical seminars and other events foster greater awareness and discussion of technological problems and how engineering expertise can be applied to public policy to solve them. OCEPP's recent third annual Public Policy Conference included expert panels on infrastructure in a deficit-cutting world, policy challenges of the *Green Energy Act*, and improving health-care delivery and patient safety.

As for promoting and implementing inclusiveness as a key driver of innovation and an Ontario engineering profession that reflects the diversity of society, implementation of the recent change to the *Professional Engineers Act* to eliminate the requirement to be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident to obtain licensure will be a boon to international engineering graduates, who can arrive in Ontario well on their way to becoming licensed or even fully licensed, so they may more easily integrate into the economy.

Additionally, at council's February 19, 2011 meeting, it approved an equity and diversity policy and guidelines, having an overall objective of ensuring "PEO's environment is one in which all stakeholders are treated equitably and where members of diverse groups are recognized, welcomed and valued." The policy should "assist PEO in striving to create a culture of

shared values and behaviours consistent with its mission and core values.” This culture is expected to be characterized by:

- PEO’s respect for diversity being taken into account in practices and policies relating to governance, volunteer service and employment;
- open, responsive and meaningful communication;
- collaboration and partnership with the community on equity and diversity issues; and
- equity and diversity in PEO operations, as measured through research, monitoring of training and development, cultural interpretation and community partnerships.

Admittedly, measuring PEO’s success toward some aspects of its envisioned future isn’t easy, in particular its goals that existing members be proud to belong to the regulator and hold dear their P.Eng. licence, students regard engineering as an exciting and rewarding career, and more engineering graduates register as interns as part of a seamless transition to their becoming licensed as professional engineers.

However, council has taken steps to make progress here, as well. At its June 2010 workshop, for example, council brainstormed ideas for increasing the numbers of engineering graduates who become licensed, resulting in a plan to raise awareness of the value of licensure among international engineering graduates, engineering students, employers of engineers and unlicensed graduates. This plan was presented to council in September 2010, and implementation has begun. Results will be evaluated after three to five years.

In addition, at its April 8, 2011 meeting, council approved expanding its province-wide mentoring program for engi-

neering interns from the current five chapters to 16. Council approved the mentorship pilot in November 2009, with the first phase roll-out in June 2010. More than 200 mentor/mentee pairs were matched in the program’s first phase. In the same motion that expanded the mentoring program pilot, council also directed that a subcommittee of the Experience Requirements Committee advise on the role of collaborators and mentors in assisting licence applicants achieve the licensing requirement for 12 months of Canadian experience.

To support these initiatives, PEO also reorganized staff resources to create an outreach unit to engage students, engineering interns and chapter volunteers. The outreach unit includes staff responsible for the engineering intern, student membership, Engineer-in-Residence and Government Liaison programs, the PEO Education Committee, and the PEO chapter system.

To add value, the recent act changes also included creation of a protected EIT title for engineering interns.

In fact, the 66 changes to the act passed as part of the government’s *Open for Business Act, 2010* are both a means for PEO to begin to implement its long-term vision and an indication that aspects of the vision are being achieved.

In promoting such changes as an updated definition of the practice of professional engineering and the elimination of the exception to the requirement to be licensed to do professional engineering in relation to production machinery in your employer’s facility (the “industrial exception”), the Ministry of the Attorney General has indicated its confidence in PEO’s ability to administer its act in the public interest.

Achieving the new definition of professional engineering was essential for harmonizing licence and registration requirements across Canada. PEO is leading this effort to create a national framework where all Canadian jurisdictions have the same requirements for licensure to best serve the public interest. Such a framework will add value to their licence for Ontario P.Engs, because it will facilitate their licensure across Canada, increasing their mobility. The new definition also explicitly recognizes for the first time the role of professional engineering in protecting the environment and the public’s financial interests, and makes the managing of professional engineering the practice of professional engineering.

RAISING AWARENESS

As for making the public more aware of the value and relevance of an engineering licence, implementation of the elimination of the industrial exception is requiring PEO to reach out to and work with industry like never before.

The final report of a recently struck task force to review PEO’s complaints and discipline processes is also likely to elevate the public’s appreciation of the value of an engineering licence. This task force presented its interim report to council in April, and was directed to write terms of reference for a suc-



cessor review to examine “the fundamentals of complaints and discipline in contemporary society.” This task force is expected to consult widely both within and outside the profession.

Once completed, the renovation of PEO’s new headquarters at 40 Sheppard Avenue West in Toronto is also likely to raise the Ontario profession’s profile. In its renovations, PEO is seizing on opportunities to introduce environmentally conscious initiatives that will lead to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification, to transform the 22-year-old building into an innovative showplace for the Ontario engineering profession.

After a call to members that yielded close to 400 suggestions for how to identify the building in a way that will reflect an organization that’s professional, relevant, creative, inclusive, build on PEO’s existing branding, distinguish the building, be memorable and broad enough to include the wildest long-term vision for the engineering regulator, five alternatives are being developed for testing with members and the public. A decision is expected in June to enable the PEO identification to be in place in early 2012.

In the area of increasing PEO’s global influence and recognition, in April 2010, then President Karakatsanis and CEO/Registrar Kim Allen, P.Eng., FEC, signed a council-approved agreement with Engineers Without Borders (EWB) that outlines principles of mutual support between EWB and PEO. In support of the agreement, PEO participated in January 2011 in EWB’s 10th annual national conference. PEO believes the agreement emphasizes the important and relevant role professional engineers can play in the areas of both technical design and social policy. For its part, EWB has committed to ensuring its staff, chapter presidents and Africa-based volunteers are connected with regulators as student members, engineering interns or licence holders, and to actively promoting licensure to its full membership base.

PROACTIVE REGULATION

To demonstrate the “audacity” of its goals, however, PEO must be proactive in certain areas.

In particular, PEO’s strategic intentions have things to say about professional development of practitioners. While progress in this area has been slow, PEO is committed to integrating professional development awareness with the maintenance of one’s engineering licence. The policy that council has approved, but that has yet to be implemented, is that all licence holders will have to declare annually that they maintain competence in the performance of any professional engineering services they undertake.

As well, the regulator’s vision calls for PEO to give some heed to the development of appropriate practice standards to prevent failure and accidents in all fields of engineering practice. Toward this end, at its April 2011 meeting, council approved for publication practice guidelines for professional engineers:

- providing services for demolition of buildings and other structures;
- using software tools; and
- writing engineering evaluation reports for drinking water systems.

Council also approved a practice standard for writing engineering evaluation reports on drinking water systems, which will become part of Regulation 260/08.

It was also anticipated from the time council first discussed a new vision to guide PEO’s long-term direction, that it would involve some changes to PEO’s governance structure. “It is anticipated that a change would result in several meaningful advantages that would improve council’s performance,” then President Karakatsanis said.

Among the anticipated changes was a call for the PEO president (and vice president) to be selected from among elected members of council, rather than directly by members during annual elections.

The change was considered, in part, to ensure the PEO president enjoys the full confidence of council, that future presidents take office with a clear, supportable mandate, and that greater continuity from one administration to the next is achieved.

As well, the governance structure changes were seen to enhance the public interest role of the president’s office through participation of the lieutenant-governor appointees (LGAs) in the selection of the president. LGAs are the public’s representatives on PEO council.

Lastly, achieving PEO’s long-term vision will require that PEO increase awareness among practising engineers and the public that PEO members uphold professional responsibility and ethics to the highest standards. The work of the Complaints and Discipline Process Task Force and its successor task force should go a long way toward this intention, which also informs much of the messaging in PEO announcements and advertisements.

TOUCHSTONE FOR DECISION MAKING

In many ways, PEO’s big audacious goal or vision is an attempt to realize an ideal state for the engineering regulator. As Karakatsanis has noted, while such an ideal state might not even be fully achievable, it provides a good dose of inspiration and positive ideology to strive for, “a ‘big picture’ plan as a touchstone against which ideas can be tested and decisions can be made.”

And now, almost two years later, the vision is still front and centre, as then President Diane Freeman, P.Eng., FEC, explained at the March 2011 town hall meetings, which were dominated by discussion of the governance changes.

Yet even as the governance changes have become the most controversial aspect of the regulator’s continuing evolution, the proposal has engaged members in a lively debate on how PEO can best fulfill its regulatory mandate now, and 20 or 25 years down the road. Surely not a bad thing for an organization—and a profession—looking toward the future. Σ