



MEASURING PROFESSIONALISM

Professionalism can be a subjective notion, which is why the Chief Justice of Ontario's Advisory Committee on Professionalism several years ago struck a working group to define the concept, with particular reference to the legal profession. A key impetus for the activity was a concern that the profession was sacrificing a sense of professionalism to the dictates of the bottom line.

The outcome of its work, *Elements of Professionalism*, is a paper that sets out 10 characteristics or "building blocks" the committee has endorsed as a measure of honourable, forthright practice-or professionalism. These elements are: scholarship, integrity, honour, leadership, independence, pride, spirit and enthusiasm, civility and collegiality, service to the public good, and balanced commercialism.

The Law Society of Upper Canada, the regulating body for the province's lawyers, is represented on the Advisory Committee on Professionalism, and has used the *Elements of Professionalism* to heighten awareness of professionalism throughout the legal community. The paper has also, at least in part, inspired development of a mandatory module on professionalism in the Bar Admission Course, and production of practice management guidelines to support lawyers.

Is *Elements of Professionalism* the final authority on this complex subject? Undoubtedly not. But it does present an opportunity to measure various professions against a new professionalism yardstick. Toward that end, *Engineering Dimensions* explored the professions of engineering, law, medicine, nursing, chartered accounting, architecture and teaching in Ontario using criteria derived from the conceptual elements of professionalism. The results of our research are presented below. We invite readers to continue the discussion.

BY MICHAEL MASTRONATTO

SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC GOOD Does the profession have whistleblowing procedure to bring attention to misconduct?	PEO's Definition of Professional Misconduct states that failure to report a situation that an engineer believes may endanger the safety or welfare of the public would constitute professional misconduct on the part of the engineer. A guideline, <i>The Professional Engineer's Duty to Report</i> , is available, outlining a process for reporting.
	The Rules of Professional Conduct, with which all lawyers in Ontario must comply, include a duty to report lawyer misconduct, the details of which are explained in Rule 6.01(3) and commentary.
	The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) has mandatory reporting requirements regarding sexual abuse. Under the Health Professions Procedural Code of the <i>Regulated Health Professions Act</i> (RHPA), a physician shall file a report if he or she has reasonable grounds, obtained in the course of practising the profession, to believe that another member of the same or a different health profession has sexually abused a patient (no requirement to file a report if physician does not know the name of the professional who would be subject of the report). In addition, an employer who terminates, revokes, suspends or imposes restrictions on the privileges of a member, must report to the registrar within 30 days of the action. The College has also lobbied government for legislation requiring physicians to report colleagues who may be incapacitated due to illness, drug or alcohol abuse or incompetence. It also has an ethical expectation that individual physicians take action if the public is at risk.
	Any member of the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) or member of the public can make a complaint through the Complaints process. Under the standards of practice set out in Regulation 27 under the <i>Architects Act</i> , every member of the association must bring to the attention of the registrar any act or omission by another member that may constitute professional misconduct or incompetence. Failure to do so may be considered to be professional misconduct.
	Yes, by law, educators must report all incidents of suspected sexual misconduct. The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) issued an advisory on professional misconduct, related to sexual abuse and sexual misconduct to all of its members, advising them of their responsibilities as professionals.
	Chartered accountants have a rule of professional conduct that requires any CA or CA firm to report to the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario (ICAO) any information concerning an apparent breach of the rules of professional conduct, or any information raising doubt as to the competence, regulation or integrity of another CA, a CA student or a CA firm. Some exemptions are applicable, such as when the disclosure would result in a breach of a statutory duty not to disclose, the loss of solicitor-client privilege or the matter is trivial.

INTEGRITY Is there both a licensing and a member interest body?	Licensing and regulation—PEO; advocacy/member services—OSPE.
	The Law Society of Upper Canada is the licensing/regulatory body for lawyers in Ontario. The Ontario Bar Association is an advocacy association.
	The CPSO licenses/regulates. The Ontario Medical Association (OMA) is the member-interest body. Specialists are certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. While the CPSO deals with matters of enforcement, discipline, complaints and professional misconduct, the OMA looks after members' political, economic and "image" interests.
	There is one body. The OAA is a professional organization of members that regulates, supports, represents and promotes the practice of architecture in the interest of all Ontarians. The OAA mission builds on the statutory mandate of the Association, which is set out in s.2 of the <i>Architects Act</i> , and includes four main elements: regulate, serve and support, advocate, communicate and promote.
	OCT is the sole licensing and regulatory body, but teachers' unions advocate for wages and working conditions.
	ICAO is the governing body of 31,000 CAs and 3500 CA students. It works with other provincial institutes of CAs and the Canadian Institute of CAs—ICAO serves as primary voice of the accounting profession in Ontario. The Institute protects the public interest through the CA profession's high standards of qualification and the enforcement of its rules of professional conduct. The Public Accountants Council is the licensing body for accountants wishing to be licensed to do public accounting (i.e. sign audited financial statements). Thirty-three per cent of CAs are licensed by the PAC.

INDEPENDENCE Is the profession entirely self-regulating?	Yes, self-regulation under the <i>Professional Engineers Act</i> .
	Yes, the profession is self-regulated, with the Law Society as the governing body. As of December 2003, the Society had more than 34,000 members, of which 18,908 were engaged in the private practice of law.
	CPSO uses the term "self-regulated" to refer to independence of the profession to govern itself. A large portion of the profession is self-regulated; however, there is consideration of development of health-care teams that work together and are paid using a formula other than the current fee-for-service model.
	The OAA is a self-regulating, self-governing organization established under the <i>Architects Act</i> , which is a statute of the government of Ontario. The Association's primary role is to regulate the profession and serve and protect the public interest through the administration of the act, and through the leadership of the profession in Ontario.
	Yes, the teaching profession is self-regulated. The OCT has 190,000 members. Of these, 140,000 are directly employed in Ontario's publicly funded schools and institutions. Another 50,000 work in private or independent schools, educational agencies or as educational consultants.
	Celebrating its 125th anniversary in 2004, the Institute governs the chartered accounting profession in Ontario through powers delegated by the Ontario government via the <i>Chartered Accountants Act</i> . The recently passed <i>Public Accounting Act, 2004</i> (Bill 94) established the Public Accountants Council (PAC) as the body responsible for overseeing those practitioners (CAs, Certified Management Accountants and Certified General Accountants) engaged in <i>public</i> accounting (i.e. sign audited financial statements). About 33 per cent of CAs are licensed by the PAC.

More the purview of the Consulting Engineers of Ontario. Nonetheless, PEO has information and guidelines on fee setting, and quality-based selection (QBS) issues. The Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE), the advocacy association, touches on issues of balanced commercialism through its position on QBS. OSPE advocates the adoption of QBS by all levels of government and other procurers of engineering services. QBS is a general competitive procurement process that includes public announcement of projects, full and open competition, and careful review of firms' capabilities, experience, technical skills and personnel. Once a firm is selected, a detailed scope and description of services are agreed upon. Only then is an appropriate fee negotiated, taking full account of the client's desired emphasis on factors such as environmental impact, cost, schedules and social implications.

Regulating lawyers' fees is not within the mandate of the Law Society. The Ontario Bar Association (OBA) advocates on behalf of more than 15,000 lawyers, judges and law students in Ontario. With respect to commercial issues, the OBA says lawyers charge a range of fees that vary according to experience, expertise and other factors. Some lawyers charge a flat fee for specific tasks. Every situation is different and legal work varies in complexity. It may not be possible for a lawyer to set an exact fee for the work that lies ahead. Lawyers are also business people and set their fees to be affordable. Clients who have few resources and are facing an urgent legal issue may be eligible for legal aid.

The CPSO provides guidance to the profession on issues such as block fees. There is also legislation that defines and prohibits conflicts of interest. The CPSO does not represent members' interests regarding earnings/fees. This is solely the responsibility of the OMA, which negotiates fees on their behalf with government.

Limitations Act is cited as an example where the OAA worked closely in a leadership role with other associations to help the provincial government achieve an appropriate balance between the rights of the public and consumers, and the interests of those who provide services to them.

The teaching profession is not a fee-for-service industry. Most certified teachers are in the direct employment of publicly funded institutions. There are several teacher federations and associations that advocate for teachers, as individuals, regarding wages and working conditions.

The general principles that uphold the professional obligations of the chartered accountant include: the sustaining of professional competence; the duty to avoid conflicts in respect of a client's affairs; and, the development of a practice upon a reputation for professional excellence.

The College is not involved in determining or negotiating nurses' wages (this is left to the unions). The College's role is to register members of the profession, set standards of practice and address complaints or reports of inadequate care provision or behaviours relevant to the individual's suitability to practise nursing.

BALANCED COMMERCIALISM
How does profession balance members' commercial interests with public service?

Voluntary mentorship/internship [Engineer Internship Training (EIT) program], liaison with senior-year engineering students, *MENTOR* publication, Student Membership Program, chapter licence certificate presentation ceremonies.

The Mentoring Program at the Law Society comprises three initiatives. Volunteer members of the legal profession are matched with people interested in becoming lawyers, practising lawyers in need of advice, or students at law seeking assistance and advice with their career.

Undergraduate—medical students, Formal—postgraduate training systems (residency/fellowship), Informal—shadowing.

The Intern Architect Program is a national program that helps ensure that future Canadian architects are best prepared for architectural practice. The OAA administers the program for over 1200 Ontario intern architects and student associates. The program features mentors, employers, the *Canadian Experience Record Book*, a broad range of experience categories and employment situations, and a periodic review of experience by the OAA. An Intern Architect is a person of good character who has paid the prescribed fee, has graduated with a professional degree/diploma in architecture from a post-secondary institution or has successfully completed the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) syllabus and has been granted certification of his/her academic qualifications by the Canadian Architectural Certification Board (CACB).

The OCT conducted original research among teaching professionals last year and presented a policy paper to the Minister of Education calling for the creation of a mandatory program of teacher induction in all Ontario schools. Educators want this, but because of funding cuts, only about 20 per cent of the province's boards of education now provide any kind of formal mentoring program.

There are over 600 offices in Ontario that are designated to train CA students. Many of the larger firms recruit students directly from university campuses across the province. A number of local and regional offices also hire students, however, they will likely have a smaller presence on campus. The Institute provides a listing of all offices designated to train students.

Within the College's standards, civility and collegiality are an expectation. Students come to the College for their practicum, but there is no formal mentorship or internship program.

CIVILITY AND COLLEGIALLY
Are there mentorship and internship programs?

Engineering Week, Engineer-in-Residence (EIR) program, support of engineering student associations, active involvement with mentoring programs, presentations to newcomer community groups, appropriate sponsorship, targeted advertising.

The Law Society engages in many public outreach activities, including public and community events, and public educational activities. Examples include: Pride Week, Black History Month, South Asian Heritage Month, and Law Week.

The CPSO often speaks to medical professionals and the public about issues of interest and relevance to each group. The CPSO will also be undertaking a public education campaign designed primarily to help the public understand the College's role as a regulator. In addition, the Federation of Health Regulatory Colleges, of which all health colleges are members, has embarked on a three-year public education initiative to improve the public's knowledge and understanding of the role of health colleges and our public protection mandate.

The OAA has an Outreach program that includes events, *Perspectives* quarterly journal, the OAA website, exhibitions and resources. Architecture Week is an annual event hosted by the OAA. The event is designed to raise awareness of the profession across the province. During Architecture Week, the 14 regional societies of the OAA plan and undertake a number of events in communities across Ontario. Architecture Week 2004 takes place from September 29th to October 5th.

There is a Ministry-set Education Week in Ontario that occurs every May. In addition, the College participates in career fairs and university information fairs across the province. OTC publishes newspaper ads to acknowledge World Teachers Day in October. College also routinely receives delegations from, and makes presentations to, educational organizations, community groups and agencies.

The Ontario CA Challenge is a competition designed for high school students considering a career in accounting. It will provide high school Associate Students with a tremendous opportunity to compete provincially with others who share their interest in the accounting profession.

The Institute sponsors several carefully selected community and charitable groups, and is involved in selected economic development initiatives. These sponsorships, and related programs, reflect the CA profession's commitment to diversity and the development of Ontario's youth.

College produces *Here for You* publication (up to 500,000 circulation), which is distributed to hospitals, community care centres and long-term care facilities, and fact sheets that explain the role of the College. CNO is also producing a video that will be used for nursing student/public educational purposes. National Nursing Week takes place each May.

PRIDE
What does profession do to reach out to the public and community?

SPiRiT AND ENTHUSIASM
How does the profession honour achievement?

Ontario Professional Engineers Awards, Order of Honour service awards, chapter awards programs.

Every year, the Law Society honours the outstanding achievements of lawyers. Each year, the Society awards its top honour, the Law Society Medal, to selected lawyers who have made a significant contribution to the profession. The Law Society also awards the Lincoln Alexander award and honorary degrees of Doctor of Laws (LLD).

CPSO formally honours physician excellence and those who come closest to meeting society's vision of an "ideal physician" with a Council award, which is awarded episodically for outstanding achievements. CPSO also recognizes physicians with letters of commendation from the registrar for matters that are brought to its attention by patients and colleagues. There are also many awards from almost every association, college or society in the medical community.

The OAA's Annual Awards Programs includes juried awards for architectural excellence, ideas & presentations, business, allied arts, 25-year awards and the Order of da Vinci. The Honors & Awards Task Group organizes the awards and the awards presentation, the Celebration of Excellence. This public awards ceremony and dinner is held in May as part of the OAA Annual conference. The OAA also has honorary membership, recognition for members of long standing, a volunteer recognition program and a scholarship program.

The Prime Minister recognizes outstanding teachers through an annual awards program. The Premier of Ontario has just announced a similar program for this province. Federations have a series of awards to recognize professional achievement. The OTC established a foundation last year to provide financial awards to promote excellence in teaching. The OCT profiles the professionalism and teaching approaches of outstanding teachers in its quarterly publication, *Professionally Speaking*.

The ICAO Award of Outstanding Merit is the highest honour that the Institute can bestow upon its members. It recognizes conspicuous and sustained service to, or on behalf of, the CA profession, including service to the community.
An entirely new award, the ICAO Distinguished Service Award, was created to honour an individual—not necessarily a chartered accountant—who has provided outstanding service to, or on behalf of, the CA profession. Every three years, new Fellows of the Chartered Accountants of Ontario are elected. Fellowship is the highest designation the Institute confers, recognizing outstanding career achievement. Fellows comprise about 3 per cent of the Institute's membership.

The CNO does not have an awards program, but it does feature outstanding nurses in its quarterly publication. The professional associations have recognition programs for members.

HONOUR
How is discipline handled?

Investigating complaints is the duty of the Regulatory Compliance department of PEO. The department also oversees matters of enforcement, discipline and appeals. In 2003, the Regulatory Compliance department received 67 preliminary complaints, 28 of which were reviewed by the Complaints Committee as formal complaints. The Discipline Committee held 15 hearings in 2003. Matters referred for a discipline hearing can involve professional misconduct, incompetent practice, or both.

The majority of complaints the Law Society deals with involve the service a lawyer has provided. The Society solves most of these by working with the complainant and the lawyer. Only a small number of complaints can't be solved this way, and result in further action. These cases are sent to the investigations department for further review. Once the investigation is completed, the matter is either referred to a Proceedings Authorization Committee, which decides whether it should be heard by a discipline tribunal, or is closed.

Discipline cases are usually heard by a panel of three benchers (members of the Law Society's governing body), including one person who is not a lawyer. If the panel decides the lawyer should be disciplined, possible penalties range from a formal warning to loss of licence to practise. In addition, conditions or restrictions can be placed on the lawyer's practice.

The Discipline Committee hears matters of professional misconduct (sexual abuse, fraud) and incompetence (public at risk).

Two screening committees (executive, complaints) make referrals to this committee. Each panel of the Discipline Committee includes three members of the profession (at least one of whom must be a member of Council) and two public members of Council.

If the Discipline Committee finds the physician has committed an act of professional misconduct or is incompetent, there are a number of penalties which it can impose. The doctor may be reprimanded, fined, have his or her certificate of registration suspended or revoked, or the committee may impose specified terms, conditions or limitations on the physician's certificate. The doctor has the right to appeal any conviction or penalty to the courts.

Investigation of complaints against architects is a statutory requirement under the *Architects Act*. The complaints process is part of the consumer protection component of the OAA Professional Excellence Program. A member of the public, or of the Association, can file a complaint regarding the professional conduct or actions of any member of the Association or a holder of a Certificate of Practice or Temporary Licence.

The Complaints Committee, comprising 10 architects and at least one lay member, considers and investigates all formal written complaints. They may dismiss a complaint, refer a complaint to the Discipline Committee for further action, or take other appropriate action.

The Discipline Committee hears allegations of professional misconduct against an architect licensed by the Association, holder of a Certificate of Practice, or a holder of a Temporary Licence. Referral can be made from the Complaints Committee or Council.

The Ontario College of Teachers' Professional Misconduct Regulation describes a range of behaviours, including incompetence, that constitutes misconduct. School boards are required by law to provide Teacher Performance Appraisals on a regular basis for all their teaching staff. The school board must report to the College if it dismisses a teacher for failing to earn a satisfactory appraisal. That report becomes a complaint of incompetence and is referred to the Discipline Committee for a hearing. Whatever the nature of the complaint, it is referred to a disciplinary hearing. A three-person panel of the Discipline Committee holds the hearing and makes a finding on the allegations. The hearing is public and the panel's decision is posted on the public register and published in the College's quarterly magazine.

When the Professional Conduct Committee lays charges of professional misconduct, a formal hearing is held in front of the Discipline Committee. The Discipline Committee's members are appointed by the Council and consist of Institute members and public representatives. Hearings are conducted in accordance with the provisions of the *Statutory Powers Procedure Act* and the bylaws of the Institute and are open to the public unless an application is granted that they be held in camera.

A member found guilty of professional misconduct can be subject to a wide range of penalties, including reprimand, monetary fine, charged costs of the hearing, suspension from the Institute (and the profession).

While the College promotes the public's right to quality nursing care and privacy, incidents can occur when standards of practice are not met. When this happens, the College protects the public by investigating complaints about the practice of its members. Discipline hearings (similar to procedures in a court of law) are held when warranted. Based on evidence collected, the College's Discipline Committee decides whether to dismiss allegations or pursue a charge that the member committed acts of professional misconduct or is incompetent. If the member is found guilty, the committee orders an appropriate penalty, the most severe being revocation of their Certificate of Registration.

PEO makes government submissions, and is involved with the Ministry of the Attorney General with respect to the PEA, and with various ministries with respect to pending legislation impacting on the practice of professional engineering.

OSPE, the advocacy organization, advances the interests of the province's 65,000+ professional engineers by advocating with governments, offering member services, and providing opportunities for professional development. In 2004, OSPE issued media releases and position statements on such issues as Brownfields legislation, electricity sector restructuring and building code reform.

The Society frequently communicates with the public through media releases, community notices and via the Society website. The Society also works with the government on issues of importance to the public and the profession. Current issues include the regulation of legal services, contingency fees and "pro bono" legal services.

The CPSO has made a number of submissions over the past year, as one of its strategic goals is to advocate for quality health care. The CPSO has made the following submissions: Submission to SARS Commission; Submission re: Privacy of *Personal Information Act*; Submission on Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act; Submission on Review of Ontario's Medical Audit System. General (including government Discussion Paper: *Tackling the Doctor Shortage*.)

The Ontario Medical Association (OMA) represents the political, clinical and economic interests of its 24,000 members. The OMA has been responsible for producing many reports, discussion papers and guidelines addressing clinical and healthcare issues, as well as direct communications to the members, such as newsletters and journals. Today, the *Ontario Medical Review (OMR)* is regarded as a leading source of vital professional, economic, legislative and policy information affecting the medical profession in Ontario. To date, the OMA has issued 20 media releases in 2004.

The OAA has formalized an ongoing liaison with the provincial government and a long list of associations in the design/development/construction sector. The OAA has made a number of submissions to the government over the past year, including: submissions regarding Bill 124, Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal's *Building a Better Tomorrow*, the Kyoto Protocol.

The OCT has made submissions to the government in the past year on new teacher induction (mentoring), the qualifying test, acceptable post-secondary degrees, and in response to the cancellation of the Professional Learning Program. College expects to send position papers to the province in the next few months on college governance, men in teaching. College also issues media releases related to policy decisions or original research (six in 2003).

ICAO conducts a highly active government relations program with the provincial government, advising it on the recently passed *Public Accounting Act, 2004*. Future activity will focus on the detailed wording and critical implementation aspects of the act. The Institute has also written and forwarded to both levels of government submissions on a wide range of policy and legal issues related to the accounting profession.

Several submissions to government and to media are made through the College each year, and the College has a collaborative relationship with the provincial government to provide input on relevant matters. Four formal news releases issued as of July 2004.

The Ontario Nurses Association (ONA), the trade union representing the province's 49,000 registered nurses and allied health professionals, also performs a leadership role. The ONA is forging ties with the health ministry in renewing the province's healthcare system. From September 2003 to June of this year, the ONA has issued 20 media releases on healthcare issues.

LEADERSHIP
Does the profession speak out on public issues?

Graduation from a recognized university engineering program or equivalent education, four years of acceptable and documented practical experience, writing and passing the Professional Practice Examination, earns a P.Eng. licence.

To practise law in Ontario, one must be a member in good standing of the Law Society, and have completed the Bar Admission Course after graduating from an approved Canadian law school. There are special requirements for exceptions, for example foreign-trained lawyers.

The requirements for an independent practice certificate are:

Education: A medical degree from an accredited Canadian or U.S. medical school, or from an acceptable medical school listed in the *World Dictionary of Medical Schools*.

Screening Exam: Parts 1 and 2 of the Medical Council of Canada qualifying examination.

Certification: by examination by either the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPC) or the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC).

Training: one year of postgraduate training or active medical practice, or completion of a free clinical clerkship at an accredited Canadian medical school.

To be licensed as an architect, an individual must meet education, experience and examination requirements:

- graduation from an accredited university architecture program or completion of the RAIC syllabus, and certification from the CACB;
- completion of a minimum 5600 hours of experience under a licensed architect, 940 hours of which must be in Ontario, within three years of application for licence;
- completion of the OAA Admission Course; and
- pass the Architect Registration Examination (nine divisions.)

Only individuals licensed by the OAA may legally use the title "architect." All architects offering architectural services to the public must have a Certificate of Practice and professional liability insurance through Pro-Indemnity Insurance Company.

Requirements are an undergraduate degree and a one-year bachelor of education degree (or equivalent) from a recognized faculty of education. There is also a mandatory entry-to-practise test called the Ontario Teaching Qualifying Test that people must pass before they can be certified to teach in Ontario's publicly funded school systems. Registration with the OCT is your licence to teach in a publicly funded school in Ontario.

CA must: complete a university degree (which has either been included or augmented by university credit courses in areas such as financial, and cost and management accounting); complete CA professional education program; complete a 30-month training period with an Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario (ICAO)-designated CA office, and pass the CA profession's national uniform evaluation (UFE).

CNO recently enhanced educational requirements for RNs in Ontario. As of Jan. 1, 2005, new applicants to the College must have a baccalaureate in nursing to register as an RN. It's expected that RPN applicants will require a diploma in nursing from a community college. Only those with a valid Certificate of Registration from the CNO can practise as a nurse in Ontario and use the titles, "nurse," "registered nurse" or "registered practical nurse."

SCHOLARSHIP
What education and training is necessary to enter the profession?

ENGINEERING

LAW

MEDICINE

ARCHITECTURE

TEACHING

CHARTERED
ACCOUNTING

NURSING

Failing grade for P.Engs on professionalism?

Chartered Accountants
Professional Engineers
GRADE: A
GRADE: F

REPORT CARDS



Although engineering is winning praise among the major regulators for its efforts to promote greater access by internationally trained candidates, at least one observer believes engineering is falling short of other disciplines in some aspects of professionalism.

Enhancing the engineering profession was the focus of a provocative presentation made last fall at the General Assembly of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE). Conducted by Toronto-based public policy consultant Erin O'Connor, the presentation's main theme was that while engineers strive for the same level of respect and recognition as doctors, lawyers and other highly esteemed professionals, the engineering community, particularly in Ontario, lacks some of the essential ingredients that are widely accepted as the hallmarks of professionalism.

Much of the data in the presentation was culled from a 1999 Internet-based survey of the regulated professions. A highlight of the survey was that 50 per cent of regulated professions have a continuing competence program and encourage members to pursue ongoing development beyond licensing.

"To me, engineers are falling behind other professions," O'Connor told OSPE members. "This is a profession rightly demanding to be recognized as a profession, yet it is not on a par with other professions in terms of the highest standards being required and being policed."

To support her observation, O'Connor outlined a "characteristics of professions" chart listing seven essential qualities: a code of ethics, minimum academic standards, minimum professional experience, practice standards, practice inspections, continuing educational requirements, and a specialist designation.

She then compared engineers to medical doctors, chartered accountants, lawyers, teachers, architects, pharmacists, and nurses, to see how each profession reflects these seven qualities of professionalism.

Doctors and chartered accountants scored a perfect seven out of seven on the professionalism scorecard, while engineers finished last with a score of three out of seven. According to

O'Connor, the engineering profession loses marks for failing to require practice standards, practice inspections, continuing education for members, and a specialist designation.

Much of O'Connor's presentation hinted at a simmering debate in the engineering profession centred on continuing professional development and on what some see as a shortcoming in the "generic" P.Eng. licence. Some practitioners have suggested that engineers should be required to update their credentials with ongoing courses, while others argue that there is sufficient incentive for P.Engs to maintain competency on their own, without the need of compulsory programs.

O'Connor however, suggested that governments, policy-makers and even the general public have increasingly come to associate professionalism with ongoing demonstrations of competence and specialization.

"There will be increasing regulation of anything affecting the public with strict accountability measures," O'Connor told OSPE members. "Continuing competency will need to be demonstrated—they won't simply take a professional's word that they are up to date."

O'Connor suggested that the pressure on regulated professions to demonstrate proof of ongoing competence and development may have caught up with engineers. "You see this in the Ontario Building Code exam under Bill 124. The BRRAG requirements for the building code came in—a P.Eng. is not good enough—and proficiency in the building code must be demonstrated through an exam."

Although O'Connor didn't provide definitive answers, she said engineers should be prepared to discuss the ongoing competency issue before expecting policymakers—and the public—to hold the profession in higher regard.

BY MICHAEL MASTROMATTEO