

Position Statement

Rationale for the “Canadian Experience” Requirement for Licensure

Summary

As the regulatory body for a self-regulated profession, PEO regulates the practice of professional engineering by establishing and maintaining standards of qualification and standards of practice to protect the public interest. These standards of qualification and the processes used to confirm them apply to all applicants for licensing. Integral to the process is validation of an applicant’s ability to practise professional engineering in Canada by a person licensed as a professional engineer in Canada.

Discussion

Under the authority of the *Professional Engineers Act*, PEO exists to serve and protect the public interest by regulating the practice of professional engineering in Ontario.

Requiring individuals to be licensed to perform certain acts or types of work is necessary because permitting unqualified people with no professional accountability to do them would endanger the public. Licensure is at the core of the Canadian philosophy of proactively preventing public harm by limiting professional practice to only those who have demonstrated the necessary knowledge, practical skills and professional integrity. It is based on the premise that it is better to prevent incompetent and/or unethical practitioners from ever practising without supervision, than to redress the harm after it has occurred. PEO’s most important mechanism for protecting the public from unsafe or unscrupulous engineering work is licensure.

Through its licensing processes, PEO must ensure that every applicant for a licence is qualified, and will engage in the practice of professional engineering with competence and integrity.

Supervised Canadian experience fundamental to public protection

The requirement for supervised Canadian experience is fundamental to the Canadian system of protection of the public through licensure. It is not simply a matter of ensuring the applicant has knowledge of local climate, culture, codes and standards, but, more importantly, a matter of verifying the applicant’s practice skills and suitability for unsupervised practice.

PEO and its counterparts across Canada rely on the Canadian experience requirement to confirm applicants for licensing possess the necessary practice skills and competencies to practise independently in Canada. Such confirmation is provided through the reports of professional engineers who have supervised the work of an applicant and are in a position to advise if the applicant has demonstrated the required skills and associated professional attributes. Those who have already been licensed know the skills and attributes expected of a professional engineer practising in Canada and are obliged through PEO’s Code of Ethics to evaluate and report on them honestly.

Engineering practised, regulated differently in different countries

Canadian standards of practice and expectations of professionals are different from those in many other countries. To discharge its obligation to protect the public, PEO must assess and validate applicants' competencies and professional attributes on the job in Canada. To do this, PEO relies on documentation that includes a reference from someone licensed to practise engineering in Canada, who can confirm that an applicant has demonstrated appropriate professional engineering practice skills and attributes related to suitability to practise.

It is important to recognize that in many countries the practice of engineering is not regulated and, in some countries, there is no engineering profession at all. And even in established jurisdictions, like those in the European Union, admission to engineering occupations is based solely on academic credentials, with employers perhaps providing some apprenticeship or internship.

Engineering takes place in the context of local business cultures and regulatory environments. Public safety considerations, for example, differ amongst various countries. Many considerations that are the norm in Canada are not considered part of the engineering scope in some countries. In assessing an applicant's experience, it is therefore important to observe how the applicant understands and deals with such considerations in the Canadian context.

An engineer's scope of responsibility also differs amongst various countries. What may be considered the responsibility of an engineer in one country may be deemed the responsibility of a technician in another. It is important for an engineer practising in Canada to have had experience in the Canadian engineering environment, with its specific codes and standards, documentation levels, seasonal differences, safety standards, scope of responsibility and communication requirements, and to have worked in areas they have not been previously exposed to. An engineer who does not know his or her scope of responsibility and does not have experience in it could endanger public safety.

Professional attributes also assessed through supervised Canadian experience

Equally important in assessing an applicant's experience for licensing is the assessment of the applicant's professional attributes. These are also confirmed through the requirement for supervised Canadian experience. An applicant's ability to communicate effectively in English on the job in Canada, for example, is validated through having a Canadian licence holder act as a referee for licensing purposes. It is critical to protection of the public that someone familiar with the expectations of a licensed professional engineer in Canada attest to an applicant's ability to understand and be understood, and readiness to practise competently and responsibly on his or her own.

The requirement for at least 12 months of practical experience under the supervision of a licensed professional engineer provides PEO an opportunity to evaluate both an applicant's practice skills and the suitability for professional practice in Canada. Because engineering is practised and regulated differently in different countries and the professional expectations of practitioners also differ, references from people who are not licensed to practise the profession in Canada may be of limited value to PEO in assessing an applicant's suitability for unsupervised practice in Canada. Because public welfare is at stake, an applicant's experience practising engineering in a Canadian context must be validated by at least one person who is familiar with such practice and who, through licensing, is accountable to PEO for that validation.