

SUMMARY OF ONLINE DISCUSSION SESSIONS

We held online discussion sessions for members on 28 May, 2 June and 8 June 2021 about the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's (MBIE) proposals for occupational regulation of engineers.

At each session, we gave an overview of our position on MBIE's proposal and the key issues as we see them. We also answered questions raised by members during the sessions. This document summarises the common themes and issues raised across all three sessions.

REGISTRATION

There was considerable discussion as to who should be registered. Throughout MBIE's consultation we have heard support for relatively low-threshold and all-inclusive registration, ensuring all practicing engineers can be held to account under the same scheme. We have also heard that allied professions – such as engineering technologists, engineering technicians, and engineering geologists – should be registered as well, although these registers should be specific to their profession. There was widespread support that an obligation of being a registered practicing engineer include adhering to a Code of Ethical Conduct and Continued Professional Development.

Members raised several questions and concerns about how registration would work in practice, including:

- there would be no meaningful indication of competence if registration occurs upon graduation
- the need for pathways for practicing engineers who have equivalent experience or have done their training overseas but whose credentials are not recognised under the Washington or Sydney Accords, and noting that New Zealand relies heavily on engineers trained overseas to meet its skill shortages
- whether all engineers – including experienced engineers (eg supervisors, managers, academics) – would need to be registered
- whether the proposal would apply to engineers who are already covered by a different regulatory regime (eg aviation engineers)
- cost of registration and whether this is a one-off or annual fee
- whether the proposal is proportionate to the perceived risks

- how membership with Engineering New Zealand as the professional body could be impacted by this proposal
- whether ‘engineer’ or other terms should be a protected title.

POLL RESULTS

During each session we asked attendees to answer the question, ‘At what level do you think engineers should be required to be registered?’. Nearly half of respondents (48.5%) favoured the ‘current chartership level’ and almost another one-third (32.7%) favoured ‘after graduation, a few years’ experience and completing a professional course’.

	28 May	2 June	8 June	Total	
After graduation	3	1	8	12	5.8%
After graduation and completing a professional course	6	13	8	27	13.0%
After graduation, a few years’ experience and completing a professional course	39	21	8	68	32.7%
At the current chartership level (after 4-6 years’ experience and a demonstrated ability to undertake complex engineering work)	59	9	33	101	48.5%

These results appear to conflict with the support we’ve heard for widespread registration. We will comment on this later in this summary.

LICENSING

During the sessions we discussed MBIE’s proposals for licensing and our understanding of how this might play out if the proposals come into effect.

Members raised the following concerns and questions about licensing:

- costs associated with obtaining and renewing a license (most likely annual renewals)
- whether some engineers would require more than one license
- whether CPEng remains relevant with new licensing classes
- whether current chartered professional engineers would be grandfathered into the new system as licensed engineers.

SYSTEM

Participants observed that occupational regulation cannot prevent all engineering failures. System-wide action is also needed, including better mechanisms for peer review and quality assurance. However, our

understanding is that there is a general consensus among members for a regulatory system that covers all engineers and that can provide consumers with confidence. We have heard a strong desire from members that a comprehensive register and licensing framework for engineers should also remove the need for building consenting authorities to maintain their own registers (as they currently do).

Members raised the following questions and concerns about the proposed system changes:

- potential impact on engineers already covered by a different regulatory regime (eg electrical or aviation engineers)
- whether international equivalents could be appropriated or replicated for New Zealand
- the potential conflict of interest in Engineering New Zealand acting as both regulator and professional body (MBIE propose this conflict will be managed by separate governance arrangements)
- whether CPEng should remain as an additional tier in a new system with a low threshold for registration and a higher, competency-based threshold for licensing
- whether there should be training and professional development requirements for registration and for licensing.

Members also raised concerns about the cost of registration and licencing, the resourcing needed to administer a ‘scaled up’ regulatory system, and potential implications for engineers’ insurance. ACE New Zealand is working with its members to better understand the compliance costs and business implications associated with the proposal. Questions about the timeline for implementation were also raised: MBIE has suggested that any change would take about five or six years to come into effect.

OUR COMMENTS

Over 400 people attended the online discussion sessions to share their thoughts about MBIE’s proposals and our draft response to MBIE. We are grateful to all who participated. We acknowledge a lot of detail surrounding the proposal is yet to be determined and this will happen in later stages of development – this consultation primarily concerns the high-level framework for the proposed new system.

We have observed there is widespread support for licensing in high-risk areas that includes a competency assessment – and that the competency threshold for some high-risk areas may be higher than it is currently.

There appears to be a discrepancy between the widespread support we are hearing for low-threshold registration and the reported poll results. We think this indicates engineers want a regulatory system that is proportionate to the risk of work being done, and that there is a need for a competency-based “quality mark” even in areas that are not high-risk to life or personal safety.

Since MBIE sees registration being a mark of professionalism and not of competence, one solution could be that the regulator can create license classes not only for “high-risk” categories, but wherever there is a need to give the public and relevant authorities assurance that engineers are competent in their nominated discipline and can be held to account.

NEXT STEPS

We are now finalising our submission to MBIE. Through the consultation process to date, we have heard from members, technical groups, and others about our draft response. We have analysed this feedback and will use it to inform a detailed response to MBIE about our preferred option for an effective and efficient regulatory system.

MBIE's consultation closes on **Friday 25 June**. We will share our final submission after this date.

SUBMIT TO MBIE

In the meantime, we encourage you to make a submission to MBIE, either by using our [email template](#) or [submitting to them directly](#).