

Final Report

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE
November 18, 2016

Executive Summary

The Practice Evaluation and Knowledge (PEAK) program is being proposed by PEO's Continuing Professional Competence Program Task Force as a foundation for "a comprehensive program of continuing professional development and quality assurance" as Council directed in its March 2014 decision to create the Continuing Professional Development, Competence and Quality Assurance Task Force.

The methodology employed by this program is different from those of the mandatory continuing professional development programs implemented by other professional regulatory bodies. First, the proposed program is designed to provide the association with an accurate and up-to-date profile of its licence holders to help ensure it has sufficient information to effectively carry out its role as the regulator of the profession.

The program will also provide a personalized recommendation to each practitioner suggesting the commitment they should make in order to maintain a level of knowledge and skill commensurate with the individual's need to maintain expected standards of professionalism. And, by asking each licence holder to reflect on the quality assurance practices currently implemented in his or her workplace, the association will encourage licence holders to consider how these can be improved.

This unique program consists of three elements that are required to be completed annually by each licence holder:

1. An online Practice Evaluation Questionnaire or Non-Practising Status Declaration;
2. A continuing knowledge report (for practising licence holders only); and
3. An online ethics module.

The PEAK program was developed following in-depth research by two PEO task forces and significant consultation with licence holders, including two focus groups, seven town hall meetings held across the province from September to November 2015. Council has been regularly updated on the work of both Task Forces as work proceeded. The beta test site, which allows users to test and comment on the program, has been available to Council members since September 15, and will continue to be available to all PEO licence holders until the full system goes live on March 31, 2017.

Introduction

In November 2015, the Continuing Professional Development, Competence and Quality Assurance Task Force (CPDCQA TF) presented to PEO Council a report describing a novel approach for implementing a continuing professional development (CPD) requirement for PEO licence holders. The core feature of this approach is a procedure for determining the CPD requirements for individual licence holders based on a number of factors that may or may not be present in their practice environment and which may contribute to the risk to the public. The program allows licence holders to make independent choices regarding how they will mitigate this risk through either continuing professional development or the implementation of various best practice measures.

After review of the report, Council created the Continuing Professional Competence Program Implementation Task Force ((CP)² TF) and approved the Terms of Reference (ToR) for this task force on February 5, 2016. Subsequently, eight PEO volunteers, including five councillors, were selected as task force members. Annette Bergeron was installed as chair. During the period from February 29, 2016 to November 15, 2016, (CP)² TF held 10 meetings.

As stated in the Terms of Reference, the purpose of the (CP)² TF is “to establish criteria and details for elements needed to operationalize the program proposed by the Continuing Professional Development, Competency, and Quality Assurance Task Force.” That task force had developed the framework for a program that:

- i) recognizes that there are both practising and non-practising licence holders
- ii) focuses on the legitimate needs of a regulatory body to collect information while avoiding the creation of a bureaucratic hurdle for licence holders as all information gathering will be conveniently handled on-line through the existing PEO member portal
- iii) ensures continuing knowledge requirements will be based on the risk that the work of an individual licence holder presents to the public and the profession
- iv) encourages licence holders to adopt best practices within the work environment
- v) improves on, but is compatible with, programs implemented by associations in other provinces

This report explains the work undertaken by the (CP)² TF to develop the specifications needed to implement the proposed program and its on-line reporting system. This includes defining the implementation stages and setting a project schedule. This work has been completed on schedule and is described in the following sections.

Background

The Continuing Professional Development, Competency, and Quality Assurance Task Force decided that adopting a risk-based approach to CPD was the best way to address the diversity of practice among licence holders. That is, instead of having identical CPD requirements for all members, the requirements would be correlated to the amount of risk to the public the practitioner’s work entails. Consequently, the program proposed by that task force centred on a questionnaire for the purpose of ascertaining the risk associated with their practice and whether sufficient risk mitigation measures were employed.

The current task force has retained the core elements of the original proposal but has modified them slightly to deal with concerns expressed by PEO licence holders and other stakeholders. First, concerns about the practitioner's risk to the public have been de-emphasized and the focus placed instead on an inquiry about implementation of known best practices in the workplace. The (CP)² TF also recognized that, as collection of data regarding licence holders and their practice is fundamentally necessary for PEO to properly carry out its regulatory role, this aspect of the program should be seen as a core component. For this reason, completion of the questionnaire will be compulsory for all practising licence holders.

PEAK Program Elements

Practice Evaluation Questionnaire

For those who are practising, the initial part of the reporting process will require completion of a **Practice Evaluation**. This form requires licence holders to respond to 23 questions concerning the individual licence holder and the policies and procedures for quality management employed in his or her workplace. Completion of this form will generate the individual voluntary continuing knowledge targets. The (CP)² TF adopted an approach that will encourage many practitioners to adopt best practices such as quality assurance programs or peer reviews since in this plan continuing knowledge activity requirements for a practitioner would be reduced by the actions already taken by the practitioner or firm. This approach will facilitate PEO's goal of maintaining high standards of professionalism in the provision of engineering services.

Non-practising licence holders will simply be asked to make a declaration that they are not practising professional engineering in any capacity. They will be given no voluntary CPD targets, though they will be required to take the same ethics and professional practice refresher course as practising licence holders.

Recent experience has demonstrated that the current collection of member provided data, such as employer and email address, is significantly flawed and incomplete. Also, PEO has not sought information, such as the percentage of the membership that do not practice, that is routinely needed by Council and committees for their decision making. In order to rectify these problems and to obtain data needed for policy development purposes, all licence holders will be required to annually update their profiles with current personal information. Data obtained through the questionnaire will provide PEO with an accurate and up-to-date picture of the activities and practices of its licence holders that will enable the Association to more effectively carry out its role as the regulator of the profession.

Knowledge Declaration

Upon completion of the questionnaire, licence holders will be provided with a recommendation for the voluntary number of hours of professional development activity they should undertake annually to maintain a level of knowledge and skill commensurate with safeguarding the public interest in their particular situation.

At this time, as continuing professional development is **not** mandatory, there will be no obligation for PEO licence holders to actually complete the suggested CPD targets. However, the system will allow for

members to voluntarily report any qualifying CPD activities. This information will be publicly available in the directory of practitioners.

The PEAK program takes a unique approach to recommending the time that licence holders should commit to continuing knowledge activities; an approach not used by any other engineering regulator in the country. The program adopts a risk-based approach that addresses the diversity of practice among licence holders. That is, instead of having identical requirements for all members, the recommended requirements correlate to the amount of risk to the public the practitioner's work entails. It is not a one size fits all solution. Based on the outcome of the Practice Evaluation Questionnaire, licence holders would be provided a recommended number of voluntary hours of continuing knowledge to complete prior to the next licence renewal date.

A truly unique aspect of the program is that it allows professional engineers the opportunity to design their knowledge plan to align with their area of practice and the available professional development opportunities along with increased quality assurance through best practices. Under this self-directed initiative, each licence holder will:

- complete the Practice Evaluation Questionnaire to determine the recommended number of voluntary hours for annual continuing knowledge;
- determine his or her own opportunities, based on his or her own practice;
- pursue opportunities that are most relevant to his or her practice; and
- report what they have done to PEO.

Acceptable continuing knowledge activities fall into three broad categories: formal education, informal education and contribution to knowledge. Formal education refers to any structured classroom-based learning provided by persons with expert knowledge of the subject matter. This includes college or university courses in technical subjects; courses for industrial sector certifications; training courses provided by manufacturers or suppliers; and similar activities. Courses must be completed in order to count towards the annual continuing knowledge requirement. Teaching or instructing such courses also counts.

Informal education refers to learning activities that take place outside the classroom. This includes self-study through reading of technical journals, books or manuals. It also includes attendance at conference technical sessions or trade-shows; or at standalone workshops or seminars. Structured discussions with peers such as mentoring sessions or study groups are also acceptable as long as the subject of the discussions is technical in nature.

Contributions to knowledge includes any activity that disseminates knowledge to other licence holders or establishes best practices for the profession. This includes the preparation and publication of papers on topics of interest to the engineering community; preparation and publication of articles in technical or trade journals or magazines; participation on committees developing codes and standards; participation on expert advisory panels; preparing and/or delivering a seminar or presentation to an audience of professional engineers, technologists, or related professions.

Licence holders who are *not practising* professional engineering will have no continuing knowledge requirement under the PEAK program beyond the online ethics refresher module.

Licence holders will be encouraged to report any continuing knowledge activities they have completed during the year.

Ethics Module

When this program is implemented, practising and non-practising licence holders will be asked to complete an online professional ethics refresher prior to date of their licence renewal. The Task Force has decided that this course is needed in order to ensure that all licence holders, including those who are not practising, are aware of their ethical obligations and how they must govern themselves in compliance with the *Professional Engineers Act* and its regulations. It is important for all licence holders to complete this no-cost module. Licence holders declaring non-practice status must understand what activities are foreclosed to them when they decide to adopt retired or other non-practising categories.

Unlike the Professional Practice examination, the ethics module will not be just a test of knowledge of the code of ethics and the professional misconduct provisions in O. Reg. 941. Instead, it will present scenarios and elicit participant's response to the scenarios. Each question will allow multiple attempts with teachable moments. That is, instead of focusing on true or false answers, responses to the questions will provide information and suggestions for the participant to consider. A final quiz will reinforce the learning acquired. The ethics module will take approximately one hour, with a 15 minute quiz. The module will make use of available an on-line multimedia learning tool, ScholarLab, which is already used by PEO.

Gamification

In order to encourage licence holders to complete each of the three levels of the program, their completion status will be indicated in the on-line directory. The items to be reported are: completions of the Practice Evaluation Questionnaire or Non-Practising Declaration; completion of the voluntary Knowledge Declaration; and completion of the Ethics Module. The directory will not indicate whether the licence holder has completed the recommended hours of continuing knowledge activities.

Authority

The *Professional Engineers Act* provides PEO with the authority to create regulations dealing only with the provision of continuing education for members. However, because of its arrangement with OSPE, PEO cannot provide continuing education programs. Also, PEO will need to be granted the power to create regulations to make continuing education a mandatory requirement for maintaining licences and the authority to create regulations dealing with enforcement of the mandatory requirements.

Council has already approved "the policy intent to amend the *Professional Engineers Act* to provide the authority for mandating Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements for all licence holders, limited licence holders, and temporary licence holders." The request to change the *Act* to accomplish this end has been made to the Ministry of the Attorney General. PEO is awaiting confirmation from the Minister that the changes will be made.

PEO has the authority to collect information that will further its public interest regulatory mandate. However, it may be prudent for PEO to consider amendments to the *Professional Engineers Act* and

regulations to ensure the smooth operation of the program. The above noted request should be able to address this issue.

Implementation Strategy

Should Council approve the proposal, implementation of the program is recommended to begin March 31, 2017. The rollout will be preceded by an enhanced communication program that will explain the importance of the two core elements of the program: the practice evaluation questionnaire and the knowledge declaration (continuing knowledge activity reporting). The communications program will include e-blasts, messages to chapters, as well as content in *Engineering Dimensions*, on the PEO website, and on social media. This content will include articles, commentary, guidelines and other written material as well as video commentary from parties both from within PEO and from external organizations such as providers of professional liability insurance.

The rollout will be promoted at PEO's annual general meeting with staff presence at the event to demonstrate the program for AGM attendees. Communications will continue after the rollout with different emphasis. For instance, members who renew their applications without completing the PEAK questionnaire or non-practising declaration will be notified by mail of the requirement to do so.

Referendum

The Terms of Reference for (CP)² TF directed it to prepare a referendum question. The Task Force has decided that Council should postpone a referendum because the program recommended here does not include mandatory continuing professional development. At this time, licence holders will only be required to complete the Practice Evaluation Questionnaire and the Ethics Module. The program will only highly recommend that licence holders complete the recommended continuing knowledge activities.

The Task Force is recommending that Council postpone the referendum until the program has been used by licence holders for at least one year.

Timeline – Implementation of CPD Program Elements

Program Element	Start Date
Beta Practice Evaluation Questionnaire available to all licence holders for review and comment	October 2016
PEO website updated with information on proposed PEAK program	October 2016
E-blast inviting licence holders to review and comment on beta Practice Evaluation Questionnaire	October 2016
Posts on PEO social media accounts promoting opportunity for licence holders to comment on beta Practice Evaluation Questionnaire	October 2016
Update in <i>Engineering Dimensions</i> promoting opportunity for licence holders to comment on beta Practice Evaluation Questionnaire and encouraging licence holders to ensure their online profile is accurate	Nov/Dec issue (published Nov.2)
Final Report to Council (approval of future implementation actions)	November 2016
PEO website updated to reflect Council's approval of the program	November 2016
Posts on PEO social media accounts informing of Council's decision and availability of information on PEO website	November 2016, ongoing
Update in <i>Engineering Dimensions</i> notifying of Council's decision and details of program implementation	Jan/Feb issue (published Jan.18)
Video testimonials posted on website; members notified via e-blast and social media posts	February 2017
Create guideline on program for licence holders	February 2017
Create fact sheet on program for licence holders	February 2017
CPD-themed issue of <i>Engineering Dimensions</i> , includes two feature articles on the topic	Mar/Apr issue (published Mar.16)
Modifications to portal and questionnaire based on member feedback	March 2017
Ethics module complete	March 2017
Reporting module complete	March 2017
Official launch of program to licence holders at PEO AGM	March 31, 2017
News release to announce official launch of program	March 31, 2017
Report to Council – first year results	June 2018