



Terms of Reference

Continuing Professional Development, Competency, and Quality Assurance Task Force March 21 2014

OBJECTIVES

The Continuing Professional Development, Competency, and Quality Assurance Task Force is directed by PEO Council to prepare a plan for a comprehensive program of continuing professional development and quality assurance with a strong focus on competency. Council is implementing this policy in recognition of the fact that PEO should be proactive in regulating the profession. A proactive stance focuses on preventing faulty engineering practice rather than relying on a system for punishing licence holders for practice failures that could possibly have caused harm.

Continuing Professional Development is believed to provide net benefits to PEO and its stakeholders that include:

- alignment with practices utilized by other professional organizations
- increased credibility of PEO as a regulator through use of CPD to ensure the current skills and knowledge of professional engineering practitioners are consistent with the state of art in their discipline
- increased competence of individual licence holders
- improvement in professional engineering practice resulting in improvement in the safeguarding of life, health, property, economic interests, the public welfare or the environment, or the managing of any such act

However, such potential net benefits need to be quantified with respect to any specific implementation of CPD. The task force is to review the continuing professional development programs of other professional bodies in the Province of Ontario and engineering licensing organizations in other jurisdictions and identify criteria for success present in these programs. Success is to be understood as including but not limited to the following:

- a) universal or near universal compliance
- b) verifiability of compliance
- c) actual increase in skills and knowledge of practicing licence holders
- d) ability to demonstrate the benefits of the program to licence holders and the public

The plan will describe, in detail, the elements of a continuing professional development program that can be successful given the diversity of situations in which PEO members are engaged. The plan will also describe the quality assurance program that complements the continuing professional development program.

BACKGROUND

During the past 25 years PEO Council has formed at least three task forces and committees to investigate the need for and the ways of implementing competency assurance or continuing professional development. Council has also conducted two membership surveys that found strong support for the implementation of a continuing competency program, created but did not implement the Professional Excellence Program and passed motions directing the Registrar to develop a system of mandatory self-declaration of competence maintenance. At this time, PEO is the only engineering regulator in Canada that has no form of either mandatory or voluntary continuing professional development.

Professional associations have developed many differing forms of continuing professional development. Activities accepted as meeting the requirements of these programs include reading professional publications, publishing articles, attending conferences or seminars, self-study, watching webinars, or attaining certifications. However, for the most part, compliance is a matter of trust. Most associations rely on self declaration by the members of their continuing

competency activities. Others require evidence, in the form of Continuing Education Credits (CEU) certificates, of attendance at professional training sessions.

However, there can be weaknesses in compulsory CPD programs that need to be considered. A webinar can be streaming on a computer without the attention of the professional. Conferences or seminars that provide CEUs recognize that many people sign up but do not attend or attend for only the portion of the day when they can obtain the certificate. The effectiveness of a CPD program depends on meaningful participation by the members; that is, their willingness to engage in activities that will reinforce their qualifying skills and knowledge, introduce state of the art concepts, and ensure they conduct themselves professionally. But that participation must also be verifiable and shown to produce the anticipated maintenance or improvement in skills and knowledge.

Effectiveness can only be determined by a quality assurance program that works in conjunction with the continuing professional development program. A QA program can employ numerous different assessment methods. One association requires members to undergo an oral exam annually. Associations could track complaints, law suits or charges against members and determine whether those actions related to incompetence or poor professional practice. Practice reviews or audits could be used. Another option would be the requirement for members to submit with their annual licence renewal a report on their professional development activities and how it relates to their engineering practice. A random number of CPD reports could be selected for review each year. For any reviews that raised concerns the reporting licence holder could be questioned. A QA program could involve periodic surveying of stakeholders such as clients, employers or government to ascertain their perception of the quality of services provided by members. The Task Force is asked to examine various QA options and propose a program that will provide assurance to PEO licence holders and the public that the CPD is effective and a reasonable burden on the licence holders and their employers.

MANDATE (Specific Tasks)

This task force, with the assistance of staff and external resources (if needed), is expected to provide to Council a plan for a continuing professional development program that can be successfully implemented and is consistent with the aims of the Association.

Subtasks that the subcommittee should consider as crucial to this process are:

- a) determine the public interest oriented goal or goals for the proposed CPD program (e.g. maintaining practitioner competence, maintaining public trust in the profession, enhancing Canada's economic competitiveness by ensuring practitioners are conversant with the state of the art in their disciplines, providing value to clients and employers, etc.);
- b) conduct a cost-benefits analysis and determine the net cost and net benefits to each stakeholder group: PEO members, public, clients, employers, etc.
- c) compare each of the various options for a CPD program on the basis of criteria including but not limited to:
 - accessibility of CPD opportunities to all licence holders
 - applicability to all areas of engineering practice
 - requirements for non-practicing licence holders
 - affordability
 - reportability of CPD activities
 - verifiability of reported CPD activities
- d) determine the form of CPD most capable of achieving the identified goal or goals;
- e) obtain, using any necessary resources or techniques, evidence needed to justify both goal or goals and form of the proposed CPD program to licence holders and other stakeholders so as to mitigate opposition to the implementation of a CPD program;
- f) consider how a competency assurance program can be used in conjunction with a continuing professional development program both to assess the program's effectiveness and to provide information on how the CPD program can be improved;

- g) conduct consultations of licence holders and other stakeholders;
- h) identify PEO operational changes needed to implement the programs;
- i) provide estimate of annual cost of the programs to PEO and to licence holders;
- j) identify any regulation amendments needed to allow implementation of the programs; and
- k) recommend whether PEO should implement a similar program for ensuring quality of Certificate of Authorization holding firms and, if such a program is implemented, criteria for how to conduct this program.

MEMBERSHIP

Since a continuing professional development program would need to consider the differing professional demands on licence holders The initial composition of the Task Force should be comprised of 7 – 10 members with at least one member from each of the following, with the option to consider councilors who may act in one or more of the categories below:

- a licence holder employed by a consulting practice
- a licence holder employed in an engineering department providing in-house engineering services
- a retired licence holder
- a non-practicing employed licence holder
- a licence holder employed by a government
- a licence holder employed as a professor in a college or university
- a licence holder employed by a manufacturing company
- a sole practitioner
- a councilor
- a member of the Executive Committee to assume the role of Chair

Once appointed, the members remain in office until they either resign or the Task Force is stood down.

During the course of the project each member should consult with colleagues in order to refine his or her views so that they may be considered representative of similarly situated licence holders.

CHAIR

In addition to the duties of a task force Chair, the Chair of this TF will be responsible for written updates to Council on a regular basis.

BUDGET

It is anticipated that for the first part of the project the Task Force will require funds for meeting and regular volunteer costs associated with travel, accommodation and meal expenses. The 2014 expenses are estimated to be \$20,000 and should be provided from Council discretionary project funds. Since the Task Force will make use of extensive consultation with PEO licence holders and stakeholders such as employers and clients and may need to retain services of external resources such as experts in creating and assessing continuing professional development programs the task force request additional funds in 2015. These additional funds may amount to \$80,000.

DELIVERABLES

The Task Force will present a report describing the recommended CPD program to Council no later than December 2015. The report should include a gap analysis for any proposed programs compared to any of the existing professional development programs from the sister organizations across the country.

Meeting Schedule: At discretion of the Task Force members
 Completion Date: December 2015