

CTI International Workshop, 13th February 2012

ROLE AND IMPACT OF QUALITY LABELS IN ENGINEERING EDUCATION

– THE EXAMPLE OF THE EUR-ACE LABEL

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Comments of Denis McGrath, Chair of ENAEE Promotion Committee

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ENAEE authorises European accreditation agencies to award the EUR-ACE label to accredited engineering programmes.

1. The nature of the engineering profession is such that it operates on a global basis. For this reason alone international recognition of engineering education degree programmes is valuable in enabling engineers to work in many different countries. There are a number of international recognition agreements already in place, the most well-known being the Washington Accord. This agreement requires the signatories to accept the accreditation decisions of all signatories in the same way as their own. This means that, for example, an engineering degree programme accredited by Engineers Canada is given the same status in Japan as engineering degree programmes which are accredited by the Japanese Accreditation Board for Engineering Education (JABEE). ENAEE was established, through the EUR-ACE labelling system, to provide a similar agreement in the European Higher Education Area as well as establishing a framework and standards for engineering education programmes. There is on-going dialogue between ENAEE and the International Engineering Alliance (IEA), encompassing the Washington Accord.
2. Industrial employers require a wide range of skills and knowledge in the engineers they employ. These include so-called soft or transferrable skills such as communication skills, ethical reasoning, teamwork etc. While most engineering graduates have scientific and technical skills at a good level, they often lack a satisfactory level of soft skills. The accreditation criteria which accreditation agencies authorised to award the EUR-ACE label must apply include excellent coverage of these skills. It is essential that accreditation agencies should require universities to ensure that graduates of accredited programmes which are to be awarded the EUR-ACE label are able to demonstrate these skills. Also perhaps ENAEE should include an evaluation of teaching performance in its criteria?
3. Industry and other stakeholders can be assured that engineering degree programmes which have been awarded the EUR-ACE label are of high quality with all the benefits accruing to such quality assured programmes. Such programmes are also more attractive to school-leavers thereby making a career in engineering more desirable than other careers.
4. The EU financially supported the establishment of ENAEE and the EUR-ACE label. While the EU favours the establishment of quality labels such as EUR-ACE, no financial support is now provided by the EU to ENAEE. ENAEE must survive on membership and labelling fees.

5. The EUR-ACE label is now widely seen as the sign of a high quality engineering programme at first or second cycle levels. CTI accredits programmes in many countries outside France. Experience to date is that engineering programmes at second cycle level accredited by CTI in Africa and China which are also awarded the EUR-ACE label are highly valued in these countries as these degrees are compliant with a high European standard. Furthermore, engineering students wishing to transfer to engineering degree programmes in other European countries can be encouraged to choose those engineering degree programmes which have been accredited and awarded the EUR-ACE label.

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