

# WASHINGTON ACCORD

## GRANTING PROVISIONAL ADMISSION AND SIGNATORY STATUS

(based on draft discussion document *Development Pathways for Provisional Admission* presented to the June 2003 Meeting of Signatories in Rotorua, New Zealand and revised and renamed at the June 2004 Workshop in London)

The Washington Accord, signed in 1989, is an international agreement among bodies responsible for accrediting engineering degree programs. It recognizes the substantial equivalency of programs accredited by those bodies and recommends that graduates of programs accredited by any of the signatory bodies be recognized by the other bodies as having met the academic requirements for entry to the practice of engineering.

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This paper suggests that a more structured process is needed to assist new countries wishing to become signatories to the Accord, incorporating developmental support where this may be necessary. The paper proposes such a process, and suggests some additional flexibility in the timing of admission decisions.
- 1.2 This revised discussion paper has been prepared for consideration and reconsideration at the Workshop, and incorporates suggestions from the 2003 Meeting of Signatories and the 2004 Workshop. The objective now is to seek further comment and to prepare the document for approval by signatories. The paper should be read in conjunction with the CCPE paper “Application for Provisional Status in the Washington Accord” adopted in 2001, hereafter referred to as the “Guidelines for Admission”.

### 2. Definition of Terms

#### 2.1 Provisional Signatory status

A Provisional Signatory will have demonstrated that the accreditation system for which it has responsibility appears to be conceptually similar to those of other signatories of the Accord. By conferring Provisional status, the signatories have indicated that they consider that the provisional signatory has the potential capability to reach Full Signatory status. Award of Provisional status in no way implies any guarantee of the granting of Full Signatory status. Equivalence of the engineering education programs concerned shall normally become effective from the date on which the new signatory was admitted to Full Signatory status.

#### 2.2 The Committee

The Chair and Secretary of the Accord acting as a managing committee to steer the processes of application from a country wishing to become a signatory to the Accord.

#### 2.3 Mentor

Signatories assigned by the Committee to act on behalf of the Accord and work with an applicant country through a program of visits and advice in order to assist the applicant

country with its progress to Provisional Signatory status and/or to Full Signatory status subsequently. A Mentor can act as a Nominator but not as a Reviewer.

Details of the mentoring process are available in the document *Guidelines for Mentors*.

## **2.4 Nominator**

A signatory with detailed knowledge of an applicant country's accreditation system and reports its appraisal to the signatories as part of the admission process of the applicant as a Provisional Signatory.

## **2.5 Reviewer**

A signatory appointed by the committee that visits and reports to the signatories, as part of the process of transition to full signatory status, on the substantial equivalency of a Provisional Signatory program outcomes to Washington Accord members program outcomes

## **3. Introduction**

- 3.1 Increasing numbers of countries are showing interest in joining the Washington Accord. Some may have well-developed accreditation systems that already align closely with those of existing signatories. Others will have systems that are at an early stage of development, or are radically different in character. In these latter cases, it may take considerable time and developmental effort to achieve equivalence, in nature and standard, sufficient for admission to signatory status.
- 3.2 The Accord is at a crossroads in its approach to admitting new members. On the one hand, it must uphold the standards it represents, which form the incentive for others to join. On the other hand, it must not behave like an exclusive club. Gaining admission must not be so difficult that applicant countries become discouraged and turn away.
- 3.3 The Accord does not claim to be superior to other systems. It is simply a voluntary agreement of equivalence among similar systems, using tried and tested approaches to accreditation and mutual verification, and sharing a common view of evolutionary directions. The signatories welcome to membership other countries that wish to adopt similar approaches and share the existing experience.
- 3.4 For countries wishing to join the Accord, there should be a helpful and constructive procedure to help them achieve Full Signatory status, extending over several years if necessary. The existing process has served well during the Accord's formative years. It now needs to be further developed and documented so that the expectations on all parties are clear.

## **4. The present process**

- 4.1 Under the present process for new applications, the applicant country has to find two existing signatories to act as nominators or supporters. It is not clear whether the nominators are acting on behalf of the applicant or of the Accord. Nor is it clear whether the nominators are certifying that the new country's accreditation system and program outcomes are substantially equivalent to those represented by the Accord. There is a need for these responsibilities to be better defined.
- 4.2 At present, all admission decisions are taken at general meetings of the signatories. If an applicant country is judged not to be ready in all respects for admission, it must wait

another two years: it is probably not practicable to hold meetings any more frequently. This places considerable pressure on the decision-making process and on the applicant country. It would be helpful if a way could be found to relieve this pressure while still maintaining the integrity of the process.

- 4.3 The following sections suggest a more structured process for admission, incorporating developmental assistance where needed. They are intended to be suitable for inclusion in expanded *Guidelines for Admission*, if so decided.

## 5. Assessing Equivalence

- 5.1 Assessing equivalence of outcomes is a complex matter. The experience of the existing signatories is that an assessment based on documentation is only a first step – necessary but not sufficient. Confidence in outcomes can only be achieved through a substantial program of visits and in-depth interaction.
- 5.2 In particular, it is difficult to define on paper the standard to which graduates must be able to exercise the required attributes. The same words can embrace a wide range of standards. Documentation can describe criteria and procedures; but standards can only be reliably judged by experienced people through live interaction.
- 5.3 The expected characteristics of an accreditation system and criteria for accreditation, including the attributes expected of engineering graduates, are set out in the present *Guidelines for Admission*. If an applicant country's system appears on paper to be substantially equivalent to those of the Washington Accord, tests of the system in operation might then be:
- a) Does the operating documentation focus attention on the fundamental criteria for accreditation – in particular, the required graduate attributes – in a way that is clearly evident to the educational institution concerned? Do the criteria translate into procedures that evaluate in depth the outcomes of each program and how they are assured?
  - b) Are accreditation visits conducted according to the documentation, and are the people involved clear about the key features of the criteria and procedures? Are the procedures capable of addressing unusual circumstances in a perceptive way, and is this illustrated in practice? Is there evidence that the criteria and procedures are applied consistently across a diversity of institutions and programs?
  - c) Do the visit reports provide sufficient detail for the Accreditation Board (or equivalent) to make informed decisions whether or not to accredit particular programs, or to impose conditions? Are recommendations and decisions made in accordance with the criteria? Does the Board demonstrate a capacity to make difficult decisions in a way likely to be beneficial to the engineering profession in the longer term?
  - d) Is the outcome standard, as evaluated by existing signatories during live observation and interaction, consistent with that represented by the Washington Accord?
- 5.4 These questions might be seen as a reflection, at system level, of the criteria for accrediting educational programs themselves. They are questions that every signatory faces constantly within its own system.

- 5.5 Substantial equivalence of characteristics, criteria and outcome standard, as set out in the Guidelines and above, are hereafter referred to as “the Requirements” for admission to membership of the Accord.
- 5.6 Applicant countries should understand that the procedures for achieving membership are lengthy not because the signatories are critical of new countries, but because the issues are difficult and comparisons are complex. Building confidence takes time. Even the periodic review of an existing signatory takes eighteen months or more.

## **6. Admission procedure**

- 6.1 The Chair and the Secretariat of the Accord act as a managing committee (hereafter “the Committee”) for new admissions.
- 6.2 A country wishing to become a signatory should first contact the Secretariat.
- 6.3 The Secretariat will provide the *Agreement, The Rules and Procedures* as well as *The Guidelines for Admission* (augmented as may be decided at this meeting) and will invite the applicant country to provide preliminary documentation on its accreditation system. The applicant country will be informed that a mentoring service is available should they want to make use of it. Details of the mentoring process are available in the document *Guidelines for Mentors*.
- 6.4 If the documentation does not appear to meet the Requirements in principle, the Committee will advise the applicant country that its system differs from the Requirements in certain fundamental respects (to be indicated) and ask whether the country wishes undertake major development work and pursue its application further when it believes the issues identified have been addressed and the Requirements met.
- 6.5 If the documentation appears to the Committee to meet the Requirements in principle and if it is the wish of the applicant country, the Committee may assign a team of two or three Signatories to act as Mentors to assist the applicant country in progressing to provisional membership. Selection of mentors should recognise any existing relationships with the applicant country and should include (if possible) one signatory familiar with the applicant system, and at least one signatory not familiar with it.
- 6.6 The responsibilities of the mentors are detailed in *Guidelines for Mentoring*. The mentors are appointed by the accord to advise the applicant country in the interest of both parties.
- 6.7 When the applicant country chooses to proceed with its Provisional member application, having worked or not with mentors, it will request two of the existing signatories to act as Nominators. When the Nominators believe the applicant country’s accreditation system meets the Requirements, they should recommend to the Signatories that the country be admitted to Provisional membership of the Accord. A detailed statement describing the basis on which the sponsor is able to attest that the applicant system meets the Requirements must support such a recommendation.
- 6.8 Again, if it is the wish of the applicant country, the Committee may assign a team of two or three Signatories to act as Mentors to assist the applicant country in the transition to Full Signatory status.

- 6.9 At the request of the Provisional Member, the Committee will assign three signatories as Reviewers to examine and report on the applicant system and recommend to the Signatories, when they are satisfied that the Requirements for full Signatory status are met. During the period of Provisional status, it shall be open to all Signatories to visit the applicant.
- 6.10 Transition from Provisional to Full Signatory status requires that, as well as meeting the Requirements as defined above, the accreditation system shall be well established (at least one program having gone through a full accreditation cycle) and a substantial proportion of engineering programs offered in the country shall have been evaluated under the system as described. The recommending signatories must have observed visits to a representative cross-section of institutions, and must have observed a range of accreditation decisions.

## **7. Authority for decisions**

- 7.1 A decision to admit as Provisional Signatory shall require the affirmative vote of two-thirds of existing signatories, and a decision to admit to full Signatory status shall require the unanimous vote of existing signatories. Such votes shall normally be taken at general meetings of signatories.
- 7.2 In circumstances where an applicant country is judged to be close to meeting the Requirements for admission to Provisional status, and there are good prospects that the Requirements will be met in the near future, a general meeting of signatories may empower the Committee to admit the country to Provisional status on receipt of one or more further reports confirming that the Nominators believe the Requirements have then been met.
- 7.3 In circumstances where a Provisional member is judged to be close to meeting all requirements for transition to full Signatory status, and there are good prospects that these will be met in the near future, a general meeting of signatories may empower the Committee by unanimous vote to admit the country to full Signatory status on receipt of one or more further reports confirming that all designated reviewers and signatories believe the requirements have then been met. Prior to admitting a country to full Signatory status on this basis, the Committee shall circulate to all signatories and ensure that there is no objection to admission.
- 7.4 At least one general meeting of signatories must occur between the admission of a country to Provisional status, and its transition to full Signatory status.

## **8. Costs of providing assistance**

In principle, an applicant country is expected to meet the costs incurred by existing signatories in acting as Mentors, Nominators and Reviewers.