

improved consistency to motive power post-secondary training. It was an idea that industry equally supported.

In the late 1990s, CARS hired Bruce Keele, a retired dean of transportation from the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology-Kelsey Campus, to develop these standards. Keele did a great deal of work to review curriculum and educational programs across the country and to find the best standards.

He brought these new standards back to the board and they made suggestions and further developed them. CNAB's first program was accredited on July 30, 1998 at Kelsey. Today, there are 26 post-secondary programs which are accredited by the CNAB.

The CNAB accreditation process involves four steps, and depending on the quality of the program at the beginning of the review, can take between a few days to over a year before accreditation is granted. The process enables post-secondary institutions to submit their motive power programs to an independent, industry driven auditing process.

The first step is to submit a request for accreditation; the second step is to complete the program self-evaluation, followed by the site audit activities, with the last step being the CNAB final evaluation. All of the accreditation preparatory information is available on the CARS website so institutions can prepare before the process starts.

Murray Russell works with the accreditation board of volunteers from

industry, retail and education to accredit motive power repair and service post-secondary programs such as automotive, diesel or auto body/paint/collision and damage repairs.

Russell says accreditation is completely voluntary and he travels to colleges to inform them of the benefits to having an accredited program. He says some of the challenges of accrediting programs are comfortable administrators and administrative staff who are overworked and view this as one more thing that is extra work for them. Regardless, he thinks it is very important that programs in the automotive industry continue to be accredited.

"Because the complexities of automobiles have raced ahead of trainers, the level of education required has also grown," said Russell. "Not only do programs need to be strengthened but we need to continually challenge ourselves as an industry to raise the bar for training and accreditation." Russell retired from General Motors in 2004 as National Commercial Service Manager.

"Education is the power of our country," says Russell. "It is up to us as an industry to ensure students get exposed to the best programs available – with consistency– across the country."

CARS is Canada's leader in human resource development and training for the automotive repair and service industry. It is funded by the Government of Canada's Sector Council Program.



AAAC

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Leading the way

The Washington Accord, signed in 1989, has pioneered the way for licensing engineers around the world. It has proven that countries can work together toward one common goal and serves as a positive paradigm for other members of the AAAC.

Deborah Wolfe, P.Eng., Director of Education, Outreach and Research at Engineers Canada, has spent much time and effort developing the Accord into an agreement that countries all over the world are interested in joining.

In her opinion, accreditation and a common understanding of what defines it, ensures all students in the engineering profession are given the same quality of learning no matter what school they attend.

The Washington Accord was inspired by a cross-border agreement formed in 1980 between Canada and the United States. ABET, the engineering, technology

and computing accreditation body in the U.S. and Engineers Canada have worked for many years to ensure the education of students who study at an accredited university program are mutually recognized.

Accredited engineering programs are certified by their respective professional associations as having fulfilled pre-determined standards, which are set by the governing bodies of each country.

"In my view, accreditation is a mechanism to simplify the entire engineering licensing process in the country," Wolfe said, adding that accreditation instills a view that graduates of the programs are well-educated and well-prepared to get their license and become professional engineers.

Ten years ago when she started working on the Accord, Wolfe's objectives were not only to continue working towards the mobility of graduates but also to help

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“One of our goals is to help other countries implement an accreditation system or to develop an existing accreditation system. An accreditation system lays the foundation for an improved quality of engineers through improved educational quality and, therefore, an improved standard of living for the country,” Wolfe said.

Since the inception of the Washington Accord, two other accords have followed; the Sydney Accord and the Dublin Accord.

The Sydney Accord, signed in 2001, provides joint recognition of academic programs accredited at the engineering technologist’s level in signatory countries, while the Dublin Accord, signed in 2002, does the same at the engineering technician’s level. Both operate similarly to the Washington Accord.

Wolfe cautions professionals in other fields interested in creating similar accords to do their research.

“Understand the benefits but also the costs, both monetary and travel,” Wolfe has said. “You can’t just join an organization and forget about it, you have to maintain it...with the money and time costs measured against [the importance of] graduate mobility.”

There are some challenges to membership, including the cost and human resources, evaluating new applicants, mentoring provisional applicants and managing changing standards.

Wolfe also advises professionals creating similar accords to structure everything from the beginning rather than developing policies and procedures only as needed.

“Of course, one can’t predict every policy that will be needed, but we have faced some issues for which we didn’t have a policy and therefore risked unfair or inconsistent treatment of members and applicants.”

Having the Accord means accreditation systems meet an internationally recognized standard. Therefore graduate qualifications from

The six founding members of the Washington Accord were Canada, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. Hong Kong, South Africa, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan (Chinese Taipei) and South Korea later followed. Malaysia, Russia, India, Germany and Sri Lanka currently have provisional status.

“The process to become a full member is long because we want to make sure that every country is given the opportunity to meet the criteria,” Wolfe said. “We’re hoping that this is going to lead them to have a substantially equivalent accreditation system.”

For example, Canada has been working with Costa Rica since the 1990s to develop its accreditation system. For countries to be considered for the Washington Accord, they must have accreditation criteria that have the potential to meet the Accord’s standards; as well, the country must first be nominated by two of the current signatories.

“You have to be confident in their ability to meet the criteria in the future, and that’s not an easy decision,” Wolfe said.

Canada, represented in the Washington Accord by Engineers Canada, has been an active player through the evolution of the Accord. Engineers Canada is the national association of the 12 provincial and territorial associations and orders that regulate engineering in Canada.

“I wouldn’t want to say that [Canada] is the model, rather, we learn from each other,” Wolfe explained.

Although the Washington Accord was originally signed nearly two decades ago, signatories continuously monitor and exchange information on criteria, procedures, manuals and publications. Each member plays an equal part in the development of the Accord, something other AAAC members should take note of when considering following in their footsteps.

At annual meetings, signatories discuss their individual processes and once all of the ideas are

Signatories base their policies on what points they can all agree on and continue working on the ones they cannot agree on. In addition, Washington Accord members have set up working groups responsible for dealing with issues that have come forward and for keeping up-to-date with changes in the world.

One working group, commissioned in 2003, is responsible for researching the possibility of accrediting distance delivery education and programs offered across national boundaries.

Accord members realized distance education was an issue when two universities in Australia opened branches in other countries; something that had not been done before. Issues arose such as exam security and the assurance of the quality of education received. Since then, much work has been completed on researching and developing policies and procedures for the Australian university branch locations. Policies have since been approved on programs offered across national boundaries; however, a final decision has not yet been made on distance education.

“We are not convinced that a 100 per cent distance education program is feasible but we do see that it can be an add-on, a flexible component,” Wolfe said, since the working group is still in talks and has the intention to come back at the June 2009 meeting with a recommended policy on the issue.

The working group recently completed a survey of other signatories, asking them about distance education components in their programs, and will use the findings to mold their proposed policy.

The Washington Accord is an innovative step for the future of engineers. It may also set a precedent for other professions.

“It’s been an honour to be involved in an organization that brings together such a diverse group of people who all have the same mandate and goals,” Wolfe said. “It’s been wonderful to have a network of people all over the world.”