



NCEES

Understanding the Mutual Recognition Agreement

Between NCEES and the U.K. Engineering Council

Executive Summary

In response to increasing interest from government bodies, employers, and professional associations, there has been a concerted effort to explore the feasibility of mutual recognition of professional qualifications between the United Kingdom and the United States. This intention was articulated by the U.K. Prime Minister's opening remarks in the Atlantic Declaration at the White House on June 8, 2023: *"An agreement to work towards mutual recognition of more professional qualifications in areas like engineering..."*

Beginning in June 2023, the National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying (NCEES) began working with the Engineering Council (EngC) to develop a mutual recognition agreement (MRA) to facilitate this objective. EngC, established by Royal Charter, governs the engineering profession in the United Kingdom, setting and upholding internationally recognized standards of professional competence and dedication for the public benefit.

The core objective of this agreement is to optimize mobility for Chartered Engineers (CEngs) in the United Kingdom and Professional Engineers (P.E.s) in the United States. By simplifying administrative procedures, eliminating redundant assessments, and seeking cost-efficient approaches, the aim is to facilitate seamless movement for professionals between our jurisdictions. Such an agreement is beneficial to safeguarding the public health, safety, and welfare for both nations by having individuals licensed in the proper jurisdictions. This mutual recognition also fosters increased opportunities for individuals and businesses, promoting trade, knowledge exchange, and collaboration while addressing skills shortages in critical sectors.

The MRA builds on the foundation laid by both organizations as founding members of the International Engineering Alliance (IEA) and the International Professional Engineers Agreement (IPEA). The IPEA has an agreed-upon set of professional competencies that individuals must meet to be on a member country's section of the International Professional Engineers Register. The means for assessing the competencies may vary from country to country, but in the end, all individuals on a register possess the established professional competencies. For example, the United States uses the Principles and Practice of Engineering (PE) exam to assess, while the United Kingdom uses a structured process involving experience reviews and an oral examination.

In summary, P.E.s on the NCEES international register will qualify for licensure as a CEng in the United Kingdom. CEngs on the EngC international register will qualify for licensure as a P.E. in a U.S. jurisdiction that participates in the MRA. Someone on the U.K. register is substantially equivalent to someone on the U.S. register and vice versa. This reciprocal recognition streamlines the licensure process, bypassing redundant traditional requirements on both sides, though local jurisdictional or discipline-specific criteria may still apply.

Given the decentralized nature of engineering licensure in the United States, each NCEES engineering member board must independently decide on participation in the MRA. NCEES stands ready to assist with information and guidance, facilitating any necessary legislative or regulatory adjustments. Moreover, British Consulates are available to provide support to interested boards throughout the process. Like the old saying "if there is a will, there is a way," if a member board has the will, we can show the way.

Timeline of the MRA

April 2023

- CEO David Cox attends formal signing of an MRA between the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) and the United Kingdom at the invitation of the British Embassy. He is informed by the British Ambassador to the United States that the U.K. Prime Minister will be discussing the desire for a similar agreement with engineers in June during his visit to the United States.
- CEO Cox informs the NCEES board of directors (BOD) and is directed to proceed with preliminary discussions.

June 2023

- The U.K. Prime Minister makes remarks in the Atlantic Declaration at the White House, expressing his desire for an engineering agreement.
- CEO Cox begins initial conversations with EngC in Taiwan at an IEA meeting. An initial framework for an MRA is developed.

August 2023

- NCEES BOD is updated on June work.
- British Consulate representatives address the Council and the Member Board Administrator Forum at the NCEES annual meeting in Boston.

October 2023

- Initial draft is completed and presented to boards of directors for NCEES and EngC. The boards provide feedback.

November 2023

- Second draft is completed and distributed to NCEES BOD, and feedback is received.

December 2023

- Third draft is completed and distributed to NCEES BOD in preparation for London visit.

February 2024

- The British invite a delegation of 11 member boards to London to discuss the draft MRA, meet with government officials, review the U.K. processes with EngC, etc., and provide feedback.
- Final draft is completed and approved by NCEES BOD.

March 28, 2024

- Final draft is approved by EngC BOD.

MRA

The draft MRA is attached as Appendix A. The following are highlights:

- P.E.s on the NCEES international register will qualify for licensure in the United Kingdom as a CEng. CEng.s on the EngC international register will qualify for licensure as a P.E. in a U.S. jurisdiction that participates in the MRA. Someone on the U.K. register is substantially equivalent to someone on the U.S. register and vice versa.
- An applicant qualifying under the MRA will not have to meet overarching traditional requirements, such as a CEng being required to take the Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) and PE exams, or a P.E. undergoing the stringent experience review/mapping to competencies and the oral exam. However, applicants still may need to meet local jurisdictional or discipline-specific requirements.
- The parties will cooperate with each other regarding disciplinary and enforcement issues related to individuals licensed or applying under the MRA.
- The MRA does not preclude the need to conform to applicable immigration and visa requirements.
- The parties will provide an annual report to each other on the applicants who have applied under the terms of the MRA.
- The parties will review and update the MRA at least every five years based on their experiences.

IEA/IPEA Basics

EngC and NCEES both became founding members of the [IEA](#) and the IPEA in 1997. Participation by NCEES was approved by the Council prior to that signing. The IEA has engineering-related accords and agreements. The accords cover education, and the agreements deal with licensure. In the United States, ABET is the member of accords, and NCEES is the member of agreements. In many countries, including the United Kingdom, one entity covers both.

The IEA is a global organization comprised of members from 41 jurisdictions within 29 countries, across seven international agreements. These international agreements govern the recognition of engineering educational qualifications and professional competence. Through the educational accords and competence agreements, members of the IEA establish internationally bench-marked standards for engineering education and expected competence for engineering practice.

A professionally competent person has the attributes necessary to perform the activities within the profession to the standards expected in independent employment or practice. The professional competence profile records the elements of competence necessary for performance that the professional is expected to be able to demonstrate at the stage of attaining licensure. Professional competence can be described using an agreed-upon set of attributes.

Each member maintains an international register of individuals who meet these agreed-upon professional competencies and other requirements of the IPEA, including a minimum of seven years of experience, proof of continuing education, and no disciplinary actions. Each member is audited every six years to ensure compliance with the agreement.

To be placed on the NCEES international register, an individual must have an NCEES Record and be a Model Law Engineer, which requires an engineering degree from a program accredited by the Engineering Accreditation Commission of ABET (EAC/ABET), passage of the FE and PE exams, at least four years of experience, and no disciplinary actions. That individual then goes through further evaluation to ensure seven years of experience and a record of continuing education. The only exception is that those without an EAC/ABET-accredited engineering degree can still be on the international register if they have a degree from a Washington Accord program. Our PE exam is the assessment tool used to determine that an individual has met the agreed-upon competencies. NCEES has mapped each PE exam specification and related materials against the IPEA competencies to make sure there are no gaps.

EngC also has a detailed process for placing a CEng on their register. Again, those individuals must have at least seven years of experience, proof of continuing education, and no disciplinary actions. The educational requirement is basically our equivalent of an engineering master's degree. They assess meeting of the competencies through evaluating everyone's experience record to map actual work to each of the competencies and then conducting an oral exam (like a thesis defense). During that interview, the applicant orally connects different parts of the experience record to each competency. On average, an applicant obtains approximately 10 years of experience to meet all the competencies.

Individuals on both registers have been assessed and determined to possess the competencies required under the IPEA. Therefore, individuals on both registers are determined to be substantially equivalent, and the processes in making that determination are substantially equivalent and are subject to audit under the IPEA terms. Both NCEES and EngC are just completing their six-year audit and have received preliminary notice of passage.

Next Steps

NCEES and EngC still must work out logistics, such as U.K. applicants obtaining an NCEES Record so that we can transmit all their information to any member board to which they apply, and the equivalent for U.S. applicants going to the United Kingdom. We will also need to establish fees that we both intend to be reasonable and approximately the same in the United States and United Kingdom. Any individual state or jurisdictional fees will still apply, as with any candidate.

Since engineering licensure decisions are made at the state level in the United States, each individual NCEES engineering member board must decide whether to participate in the MRA. NCEES encourages member boards to participate and can assist with additional information and help in the determination of any law or rules changes that may be necessary. Many boards have flexible language that would allow them to participate without any changes. If you have the will, NCEES and the British Consulates will assist in helping you with the way.

We are planning a ceremonial signing for interested member boards at the British Consulate in Chicago during the NCEES annual meeting in August. All a member board needs to do to take part is express an interest in pursuing participation in the MRA. It is not required that the member board be ready to participate at that time. Some boards may need law or rule changes and other meetings and process changes that will take time to complete. There is no time requirement imposed on member boards' participation.

Appendices

- A. Mutual Recognition Agreement
- B. IEA Graduate Attributes and Professional Competencies
- C. Delegation of U.S. Engineering State Board Members
- D. EngC Introduction
- E. U.K. Standard for Professional Engineering Competence and Commitment
- F. EngC Disciplinary Procedure Guidance