Engineering Professors Council
Minutes of the meeting of the
Education, Employability and Skills Committee (EES)
held on 3rd February 2025 via Zoom

Present via Zoom
Johnny Rich (JR), Faith Nightingale (FN), Clive Neal-Sturgess (CNS), Georgina Harris (GH), Andrew Spowage (AS), Kay Bond (KB), Alan Brown (AB), John Mitchell (JM), Mike Sutcliffe (MS) and Matteo di Benedetti (MB)

With
Stella Fowler (SF) and Rhian Todd (RT)

Apologies
Sravanthi Sashikumar (SS), Rink Desai (RD), Bev Gibbs (BG) and Abel Nyamapfene (AN)

		Action ref
1.	***Apologies for absence***	
	Noted as above.	
2.	***Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd October 2024***	
	The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed. Previous minutes to have draft watermark and highlighting removed and loaded to website as confirmed minutes. **Action: RT**	***2502-01***
3.	***Matters arising not on the agenda***	
	JR welcomed new members to the committee. All committee members introduced themselves.	
4.	***Toolkits Update***	
	JR told the new committee members the background of toolkits. He said in recent years EPC have produced the Crucible Project, which became the Enterprise Collaboration toolkit on relationships between industry and academia, the Ethics toolkit and the Sustainability toolkit. The EPC have recently started work on the complex systems toolkit which is being funded by Quanser but we hope to attract other funding from other sources as well, and we're in discussion with mathworks. This will be a 4 year project and will result in a toolkit to support the teaching and understanding of complex systems in engineering. The first	

	phase which was to scope the project, come up with a budget and an oversight group who will be meeting at the end of this month for the first time. JR said also in the pipeline are plans for a safety toolkit, hopefully funded by the Lloyds Register Foundation. JR said the EPC hope to compile another toolkit on EDI but as it is such a wide area that the approach adopted is to work on various projects that will all join together to create an EDI toolkit. SF has been working on the Neurodiversity Project, which will result in toolkit type content. JR said there is the EDAP (Engineering Deaf Awareness Project) being run by various volunteers from a number of different universities to embed awareness of hearing impaired students. A number of tools will be going online shortly. JR said we also joined a bid led by Wrexham University for funding to produce an EDI toolkit. Part of the bid was that the EPC would promote and host the outputs of it. JR said that will result in lots of toolkit content but it will not be labelled as an EDI toolkit until a more comprehensive offer is available. JR said we will come back to the committee with regular updates, and if committee members have any thoughts, or want to volunteer to be involved in any of the projects, then get in touch. AS said there is a lot of resources on the committee who could lend value.

JR asked the committee if we should register domains to do with our toolkits? For example the engineering ethics toolkit on the EPC website is less discoverable for anyone typing in engineering ethics than if the if you own the domain engineeringethics.com. JR said given that part of what we're trying to achieve is visibility for these. JR asked if we should register any domains? If so, now? If so, which? And if so, what do we do with them once we've registered them?
GH said the domain title itself, whilst helpful, is only half the job. The other half is making sure that it gets picked up by the search engines so that people can find it so. GH suggested buying a domain then linking it to a Google site and link it back out of a Google site. Alternatively, buy a site through the Google. GH suggested investigating doing it that way. GH said we could explore having some form of redirect from a Google site because that will pull the information right to the top of the search engine.

AS suggested setting up one domain for all of the toolkits and keeping all of the content where it is but having that as a as a front page. The front screen should have links to the toolkits and then all the search engine optimization would be on that page.

JR thanked the committee for their suggestions and said that Wendy may contact GH or AS for a better understanding of what we need to do internally to register a single domain or and set up a Google site. **Action: WA** | *2502-02* |
| 5. | ***Neurodiversity Project*** | |
| | SF said since the last meeting work has begun on the neuro inclusion maturity framework which is co-created in an open community. It has been agreed to use a Delphi model which requires an expert panel who review the work. It takes the form of iterative approval until there is an outcome that everybody is happy with. SF said a host of engineering academics, central services experts and students have been appointed to the Delphi panel but the student side of the panel is the weakest. All baseline requirements in terms of diversity on the panel have been met but there is an opportunity to improve the student side of things by having students from a wider range of institution types. SF said she is keeping the call open to invite students into the panel and added the link in the chat. SF asked committee members to forward the link to any interested student.

SF told the committee that the neuro inclusion community will be meeting on the 28th of March in Hereford, and all committee members are invited.

SF said a webinar took place on neuro inclusive assessment in January and there are plans for an in-person workshop. | |

6.	OfS Strategy Consultation	
	SF said we did respond to any an OfS strategy consultation a few years ago and were quite critical. SF said since then, quite a lot has changed with the OfS, not least, that they were subject to an external review which was pretty scathing. Sf said this strategy consultation is much more workable for the sector and hones in on what they consider to be a really successful risk register approach. There are some tried and tested things including references to the Tef. SF said she has, with the help of colleagues on the committee and other colleagues, drafted some points that she thinks are the key points that need to go in the response to the consultation. SF said the top three are probably financial sustainability, staffing and workload and qualities and standards. SF invited feedback and input from the Committee on those points, plus any others that may be missing. GH said following their conversation a lot of what was discussed has been articulated well in the paper so thank you. SF suggested going through the points one by one. JR said he thinks the most useful thing to do as the EPC is provide feedback on the impact of regulation, how this affects engineering education? How does it affect us and our members?

SF started with financial sustainability. The key points in financial sustainability are a call on the regulator to get involved, to protect strategically important subjects, including engineering and to play a role. SF said engineering is an expensive course to deliver so if you start making cuts, you very quickly start to affect the quality. SF asked the committee how they feel about the call on the regulator to actually show an interest in subject importance?

GH said she has not seen an example in engineering yet. GH told the committee that Cardiff University announced last week that they are withdrawing from nursing as it is too expensive to deliver. If we are going to be expected to deal with our financial situation as a business these sort of business decisions are going to be taken that are not in the interest of the nation. The regulator in this case is META not OfS. GH said it may be worth mentioning as it is a good example of what to expect to see if universities start withdrawing from expensive subjects.

MS said he thinks there is a deeper problem with nursing due to the removal of bursaries which is in the same space of the discussion about not appropriately funding the subject area that then leads to a significant drop in applications. MS said he thinks what is helpful to focus on is making it more output focused. MS said the key thing is giving students the skills that they need and quality education and that is facilitated by funding and staffing. MS said in the first paragraph laptops are mentioned but the more general issue is about specialist facilities and infrastructure. MS agreed with GH comment in the chat that industry ready graduates are needed with experience of practical work. SF agreed that adequate resourcing is the key point. MS said the 1.7k for engineering per student per year is not sufficient and it is up to us to make that point clearly. SF said data ranges from 11k to 20k per student for engineering courses. MS suggested including some numbers in the response.

SF asked the committee to move on to the staffing part. SF said the point is the logistical delivery of engineering programmes without the requisite staff is a real threat. SF said we may want to say more about fragmentation of provider types in HE and FE. Sf asked for feedback. GH said she thinks more could be said here but thinks it should stay short and punchy. SF said she could add something to say, if you want further evidence in any of the areas to contact us. CNS said SF could make the point that in excess of 80% of fixed costs are associated with staffing (CNS said this information can be found in HESA table 12 – Analysis of staff costs 2016-2024). JR said the most important theme we need to come back to is that OfS needs to have a discipline level focus and institutions needs to be encouraged to have a breadth of discipline.

SF asked the committee to move on to quality and standards. SF said you can't | |

have a high-quality course if you are making cuts. SF said in this section in our last response, we did talk about an Ofsted model being more suitable as it is a self-improving system, with emphasis on development and next steps, rather than something punitive and that self-regulation is something we feel strongly about. JR said something that might be missing from the response is in terms of some guiding principles of strategy. JR said the importance of the relationship between diversity of provision and innovation, and using metrics and other approaches that support diversity rather than undermine it because, historically, OfS's approach has undermined diversity and undermined any risk taking in terms of provision autonomy and the need for institutions to operate independently of each other. JR said OfS is going to need to take a role in collaboration but who is going to monitor that collaboration to make sure that it isn't anti-competitive.

AS said also on quality is the transnational element. AS said the OfS is planning to look at transnational education as well and bring that under their umbrella. AS said having worked in 3 different countries in transnational education, there are differences between the way the UK sees things and the way other countries sees things. They will be regulating T and E operations which are already regulated by people like the Engineering Council and also the local equivalent of OfS which could cause significant problems. AS said the way it works in Malaysia is there is a body similar to OfS called the Malaysian Quality Agency that delegate all of this to the Engineering Council. SF said should we say that OfS should be delegating powers where they exist? GH said yes, we should be clear that the value of our programmes is that they are professionally regulated. SF said that is a good point the fact that they are distracting from the value of the programmes rather than adding to it and that professional accreditation is a value where as OfS's interference is not. SF asked the committee to move on to the point about franchising in section 4 of the paper. SF said we had a discussion around the use of the term engineering in higher education to get high needs funding and some people felt that it was being abused at the moment. SF asked the committee for their views. MS said it's not making it clear that it's the accredited degree programs that are the key here. The binary distinction between accredited and non-accredited did not come through. MS suggested dropping the foundation year and just mentioning the higher cost. MS said he thinks we need a bit more punch in terms of the need for accredited degrees and that they do cost more. GH said she thinks the point we are trying to make is that on the whole in the UK we have providers who are trying to do the right thing but the OfS have opened the gates to alternative providers whose focus is more on the financials for the programmes that the outcomes for students. SF said to confirm, we should say that they should leave accredited courses alone. MS said in other works, there is a quality assurance process in place for accredited programmes but no equivalent for non accredited programmes. JR said he thinks the broad point is that OfS should be mindful that there are other regulators and quality checks in the system and where possible they should not duplicate them. GH said it is not a requirement to be accredited but to be able to access the higher cost of delivery funding it, she thinks it should be. JR said he doesn't think it needs to be so black or white as there may be unintended consequences for example barriers to entry. JR suggested making it OfS's problem and suggesting they might look at the relationship between accreditation and higher course costs.

SF referenced point 5 on HTQs and degree apprenticeships and asked for the committee to comment. JR said there is a point here about LLE in that the strategy doesn't address how they plan to regulate LLE courses operating within new funding via LLE so they should be looking towards that. This then links to the section on measures because most of the measures available at present are inappropriate for any LLE outcomes. SF said she will be more explicit in that section about the need for more careful consideration on that and then labour the point about the cross regulation. GH said the other thing to point out is that there are several different funding models in Wales for example which is already complicated.

	Sf said the next section in the paper is labelled student and employer expectations and asked the committee if that is the correct label. SF said the point here is around the idea of using governance to manage expectations. SF mentioned measures and that value added is really important, more so than the measures they are saying. JR said value added and benchmarked – he thinks the two are related but not the same. JR said as far as possible the OfS should have regard to the unintended consequences of any proxy measures it uses. SF asked if she should reaffirm the ground previously covered about the lack of inclusivity of the existing measures. JR agreed. SF said the bulk of the response will go into the comments on the proposed strategy but there are very specific omments around unintended cnsequen ces and around areas of the proposal that we think need more information to be able to comment on. SF said this leads to questions about whether or not we have an opinion as to whether a move to 5 years from 3 years is appropriate and on I statements. JR thanked SF for her hard work. SF said she will draft a response and circulate it to committee members for comment. JR suggested using a shared document so changes can be added. **Action: SF**	*2502-03*
7.	*Horizon scanning and scope of work*	
	JR said SF along with UCL will be updating the State of Engineering work that was done for RAEng. JR updated the committee on upcoming EPC events. FN shared details in the chat about EuroMAT 2025 as she is part of the organising committee. FN asked committee members to share with their networks. JR suggested LC add event details to the latest news section of EPC Online and also add it as an external event listing. **Action: LC**	*2502-04*
7.	*Any other business*	
	None.	
8.	*Date of next meeting*	
	20th May 2025.	

Action log

Reference	Agreed Action	By
2502-01	Previous minutes to have highlighting and draft watermark removed and loaded to website as confirmed minutes.	**RT**
2502-02	JR and WA to discuss committee's suggestions for toolkit domains.	**JR/WA**
2502-03	SF to draft a response and circulate to the committee for comment as a shared document.	**SF**
2502-04	LC to add details of EuroMAT 2025 to the latest news section of EPC Online and also as an external event.	**LC**