



**PHEE**

A forum for Academic Leaders in  
Electronic Engineering and Allied Technologies

**A Discussion Paper on the Future of PHEE**  
*June 2008*

1. PHEE has existed in some form or other for more than 25 years. The present PHEE Committee believes that PHEE has consistently provided a useful service to the academic community, and that service is still clearly valuable.
2. The value of PHEE to the academic community it seeks to serve has been demonstrated by the success of its Annual Conferences and the previously held Course Leaders' Conferences. Some disappointment has been expressed at recent levels of support but the fact is that the Annual Conference is successful and continues to attract a significant fraction of the PHEE constituency. Whatever changes may now be felt necessary in future strategy, it is clear that **everything possible should be done to preserve the Annual Conference as a permanent feature, held at Savoy Place with the helpful support and hospitality of the IET.**
3. The original PHEE was of course "Polytechnic Heads of Electrical Engineering", a disciplinary sectoral group of CEP (Committee for Engineering in Polytechnics). The truth is that PHEE and similar groups in other discipline areas were actually responsible for the creation of CEP to provide a united voice in representing the interests of Polytechnic Engineering Departments. The current "Engineering Professors' Council" (EPC) was formed in 1993 by the merger of CEP with the earlier "Engineering Professors' Conference" and there was considerable discussion at the time as to whether discipline specific sectoral groups were still needed. In the event, it was decided that they should continue in operation and PHEE became "Professors and Heads of Electrical Engineering". Most, if not all, of the sectoral groups were viable, at least in the short term and comparatively speaking, PHEE remains reasonably fit and well to this day.
4. There is concern within PHEE, that the name discourages the participation of some academic leaders. PHEE is actively trying to change the impression that it functions solely for the benefit of those who are professors and heads of department. Like many organisations, it is proposed that the letters P H E E cease to stand for "Professors and Heads of Electrical Engineering" and that PHEE as a brand becomes "An Organisation for Academic Leaders in Electrical Engineering and Allied Technologies"
5. Although the value of discipline specific sectoral groups under the aegis of EPC was agreed in 1993, it needs to be questioned whether this is still true, given the changing practice of Engineering, the growth of inter-disciplinary activity and the mergers of University Engineering Departments and of Professional Engineering Institutions.
6. The way in which the funding councils divide up the sector for funding purposes, the Research Assessment Exercise and the like, suggests that those who operate in the discipline will continue to have much in common, will wish to network and share their ideas and problems. This means that there will continue to be a function for sectoral groups, even if not the same ones as at present.

7. The situation has changed so markedly since 1993 that EPC could be regarded as short-sighted if it did not now consider some re-alignment of its Sectoral Groups. PHEE could now well provide a vital service by suggesting exactly that to the EPC Committee, since the necessary debate must at least begin at that level. Who knows what significant re-alignment plans might come out of such a debate?
8. There are strong arguments for considering a grouping that mirrors many of the recent organisational changes in universities and which establishes a viable representative academic body closely allied to the interests and aspirations of the IET. Although PHEE could easily become PHET, “Professors and Heads of Engineering and Technology” – a title indicating an intended association with IET - it would be unwise to make such a leap without the active support of others in the EPC community. The important point, however, is that the necessary debate should be initiated at EPC Committee level as a matter of urgency.
9. Whatever title was adopted for any new group, it would be desirable not to advertise any conference of that group simply as a conference of that group. To maximise its appeal, any conference should be marketed at least as an Engineering Education Conference, and especially, if possible, with a relevant theme. The group name should only appear in the small print as the conference sponsor/organiser.
10. **PHEE has evolved well and has a proud record; it or its successor can, and should, have a successful future.**