



EPC Bulletin | December 2020 | Twitter [@EngProfCouncil](https://twitter.com/EngProfCouncil)

As we approach the end of a calendar year like no other, we would like to say a huge thank you to all our members for your support in informing, guiding and engaging with our work on behalf of engineering HE academics throughout 2020.

We ended this year's events series – online – with our Recruitment & Admissions Forum, which visited entry requirements, international students, student numbers and fair access in the company of esteemed experts from DataHE, Engineering UK, HEPI, StudyPortals, TASO, U-Multirank, UCAS, UKCISA and other key players.

We look forward to 'emerging stronger' in 2021; Sir Michael Barber, Chair of the Office for Students, launches our 2021 webinar series as we ask how we can use the experience of trying to deliver high-quality engineering degree programmes to strengthen our teaching in future. More details below.

EPC news

EPC RECRUITMENT & ADMISSIONS FORUM 2020

With interventions on admissions from UniversitiesUK, UCAS and the Government in the days before our first webinar, our debate on **entry qualifications** could not have been timelier. We followed up by debunking the myths around whether **international students** still want to come to the UK to study engineering amid the triple-whammy of Covid, Brexit and visa rule changes. Our **student numbers** session offered a first glimpse at the health of engineering enrolments this autumn with the launch of EPC's engineering enrolments survey result and looked forward to 2021 recruitment and admissions. And finally, with conflicting imperatives at play in the sector, our closing session discussed **fair access** in engineering HE.

If you missed any of the sessions or you'd like to watch again, you can find recordings of all of the webinars on the [EPC website](#).

EPC ENGINEERING ENROLMENTS SURVEY

More importantly than ever this year, the EPC engineering enrolment survey gives you some clarity around the state of engineering HE enrolments. The survey gives us an early annual temperature check of the health of HE undergraduate and postgraduate engineering enrolments long before any official data does so.

Sector pressures undoubtedly impacted the 2021 survey. Given the unprecedented competing deadlines and priorities this year, the EPC scaled back our research to focus on the changes experienced in new enrolments in engineering this autumn, while our members reported timing issues, complexities and structural changes resulting from Covid-19, and sensitivity and caution around engineering departments' positions.

With over a third of responses recording new undergraduate enrolments at more than 10% higher than last year, and even more among home enrolments (which typically represent approximately three-quarters of the undergraduate population), we can be relatively assured that 2020 was a healthy year for home undergraduate engineering enrolments. What's more, our survey also highlighted relative stability in the international undergraduate numbers this year, despite earlier fears in the sector of the impact of Covid-19 on global travel.

However, we found less stability at postgraduate level: over half of postgraduate engineering disciplines reported an overall decline in non-EU enrolments of more than 10%, and around 40% of postgraduate engineering disciplines surveyed experienced a drop in EU enrolments. These differences are important as approximately 2 in every 3 engineering postgraduates are international, suggesting the overseas engineering market may have shrunk this year in this context.

For analysis at institution type, regional and discipline level, and for a brief insight into changes in deferral and attrition behaviours, please see the blog on the [EPC website](#).

EXPERIENCE ENHANCED: The Department for Education gets involved

You will recall that our 2018 degree apprenticeship project report, [Experience enhanced: improving engineering degree apprenticeships](#) addressed the issues that concerned the academic community about degree apprenticeships and provided a platform for action. We are pleased to report that, as well as our success in facilitating joined-up working between IfATE and the PEIs, we have recently been able to secure the long awaited DfE engagement we have been working towards. Members of the EPC executive team and EEES committee recently met with DfE officials to re-present our recommendations and establish an open channel of communication going forwards. This is an important step in this space, particularly with the political impetus on technical education and apprenticeships' role in improving social mobility.

EPC ONLINE: project update

We are pleased to report that our invitation to tender to develop our new online services to support the Engineering Academics Network and other strands of the EPC strategic plan resulted in a host of bids currently under review by the Steering Group.

The result of the project – the biggest single investment the EPC has ever made – will be an all-new online presence and a complete overhaul in the way that we communicate with members. This is more than just a new website. It will allow you to explore our huge archive of resources, reports and data analysis in a way that is timely and tailored to your interests. You'll be able to interact with other members, sharing opinions, ideas and best practice. And the EPC will be able to communicate with you about what you need to know, when you need to know it. (One aim is that these bulletins will become much shorter and more relevant to your individual interests.)

Upcoming events

EPC ONLINE EVENT: EMERGING STRONGER: Lasting Impact from Crisis Innovation, Wednesday 27th January 2021, 14:30-17:00

What have we learned about learning under lockdown? How can we use the experience of trying to deliver high-quality engineering degree programmes to strengthen our teaching in future?

Featuring a keynote by **Sir Michael Barber, Chair of the Office for Students**, this live webcast will explore the findings published by the EPC in August 2020 entitled [*Emerging Stronger: Lasting Impact from Crisis Innovation*](#), edited by Prof Bev Gibbs and Dr Gary C Wood. We will explore assessment; collaboration and professional skills; remote laboratory work and practical skill development; employability; and student partnership in learning design.

We are especially delighted that Sir Michael has agreed to join us to present a keynote. He will be stepping down shortly from his role as Chair of the English HE regulator, the Office for Students, and will be delivering a review of digital learning to the Government. The lessons of *Emerging Stronger* have already been fed into his research and this will be an exclusive opportunity to hear his insights before they are published more widely.

This webcast will be useful for all academics and teachers in engineering higher education and related disciplines at all levels from early careers staff to those with managerial or strategic responsibilities at faculty level. It will also interest employers, students, professional bodies and anyone with an interest in enhancing the learning experiences of tomorrow's engineers.

This event will be free to members and [registration](#) is essential so that we can send you joining instructions.

EPC ONLINE EVENT: TRUSTED RESEARCH, Friday 5th February 2021, 14:00

Last month we brought you news of the development of [Trusted Research](#) to support academics to manage the risks to international research collaboration. We have also hosted a guest blog on the [EPC website](#).

We can now confirm that we will also be hosting a webcast on 5th February, introduced by **David Sweeney, Executive Chair of UKRI**, to raise awareness of the risks to research collaborations which may occur when working with organisations or research partners with links to nations whose democratic and ethical values are different from our own. We hope this will help our members get the most out of international collaboration whilst protecting intellectual property, sensitive research and personal information. Booking opens in January.

EPC CONGRESS 2021: UWE, 7th to 9th June 2021

Planning for Congress 2021, which will take place at UWE from 7th to 9th June 2021, has already begun. This is likely to be a hybrid event, providing a much-missed opportunity to meet and network with colleagues face-to-face and also online broadcast of some sessions. Please save the date.

In the news

ADMISSIONS REFORM: discussed by members

It seems that everyone has waded into the Post Qualification Admissions (PQA) debate this autumn, with proposals outlined by UCAS and UUK, and consultations promised by Gavin Williamson and the Office for Students. In addition to PQA, the cacophony of proposals for debate in the recruitment and admissions arena include restricting the use of unconditional offers, promoting consistency in contextual admissions, and developing a code of practice with consequences for a breach. You can hear more about how this effects engineering by watching the [EPC Recruitment and Admissions Forum Series webcast: Entry requirements, where now?](#)

QUALITY AND VALUE: the debate continues

Speaking of consequences, the OfS proposals on quality and standards have been in the news under the guise of rooting out 'low quality' degrees. The OfS is consulting (see below) on what it calls "tougher minimum standards" with the threat of fines and even deregistration for HEIs that don't meet them. These powers, it is proposed, will be exercised not merely at an institutional level, but at a subject level too, which, in effect, might allow OfS to exert direct or indirect pressure on an HEI into closing a department whose metrics looked like underperformance.

- [Summary: The OfS's proposals in a nutshell](#)
- [Are the proposals good for the sector? A personal blog by the EPC Chief Executive](#)

HE SPENDING: latest policies

Universities didn't really feature in the Chancellor's one-year Spending Review in November, but there has been a lot of talk lately about the unexpected "health" of HE finances drawing on an OfS report (although the financial fitness is not evenly spread). Research benefits from an overall £740m uplift in the BEIS research and development budget.

In Covid news, the UK government has provided further details of a loans and grants to cover "up to 80 per cent of a university's income losses from international students for the academic year 2020–21, up to the value of non-publicly funded research activity in that university" – despite the fact that the bottom doesn't appear to have fallen out of the international market this year after all.

Brexit-wise, funding for a UK-wide domestic alternative to Erasmus+ programme in the event of no deal has been announced.

EXAMS IN 2021: devolved differences

Pushing on with (delayed) exams next summer in England, Ofqual is seeking views on support materials and advance information in 2021 GCSE, AS and A level exams. Northern Ireland is expected to follow suit with a reduced number of exam papers required for each A level (one week later than usual). Scotland has followed Wales in cancelling examinations for 2021. Highers and Advanced Highers exams will be replaced by teacher assessment.

ENGINEERING COUNCIL: Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes

As you know, [AHEP4](#) will be introduced at the start of the 2023 academic year, following its current transition period in which engineering departments can request accreditation against the old or new learning outcomes.

A summary of key changes to the document; a comparison of the learning outcomes in this fourth edition to the previous edition of AHEP; 'Mapping Learning Outcomes AHEP4 against AHEP3'; and a table of 'Defining characteristics and learning outcomes', which sets out the characteristics that

define accredited programmes and the generic learning outcomes are available at:
<https://www.engc.org.uk/ahep4th>.

In addition, [Approval and Accreditation of Qualifications and Apprenticeships](#) (AAQA) is the new Engineering Council Standard against which apprenticeships (including Degree Apprenticeships and Graduate Apprenticeships) and non-degree qualifications can be recognised. AAQA supports the formal recognition of competence, as well as knowledge and understanding, developed through non-degree qualifications and apprenticeships. For higher level programmes this refers to the same defining characteristics and generic learning outcomes as degree accreditation.

A guest blog with more information is available on the [EPC website](#).

Consultations

OFFICE FOR STUDENTS: consultation on HE quality and standards

The Office for Students has just launched a consultation on one of the most important changes to its practice since its inception. We've summarised the key takeaways on the [EPC website](#) and [the OfS's own documents can be found here](#).

The EPC will be responding to this consultation on behalf of members and we have already invited member views through a survey.

We have also published [a personal perspective on the proposals by the EPC Chief Executive](#).

APPG ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN STEM: new inquiry on Equity in the STEM workforce

Individuals and organisations are now invited to submit evidence to the APPG's new inquiry on Equity in the STEM workforce, launched on 10 November 2020. The APPG has published a [data analysis brief](#) on the diversity and representation in the STEM workforce as it stood in 2019. It found that 65% of the STEM workforce are white men, and only 27% are women. Workers of Indian ethnicity are statistically over-represented in STEM, whereas people of other ethnic minorities tend to be under-represented in STEM.

The inquiry will examine how the Government and organisations employing STEM workers are helping to create a diverse and inclusive environment and be used to develop actionable solutions to increasing equity in STEM.

As the APPG is keen to hear about the experiences of individual STEM workers from junior employees to those in leadership positions, the EPC will not be making a response on behalf of the sector, but would encourage our members to provide evidence on the six key questions on representation in the STEM workforce

Full details can be found in the [Call for Evidence](#). The deadline is Friday 29th January 2021.

Opportunities

EPC COMMITTEES: vacancies

The work of the Engineering Professors' Council is delivered via its Committees and working groups. They each meet 2 or 3 times per year on a perpetual calendar to set out a programme of activities, including a draft dissemination programme and to steer and receive updates on the activities of their working groups and/or smaller task groups. In addition, they provide reports to the EPC Executive Board on matters that have arisen in the policy arena and an update on progress with the agreed pro-active programme of activity.

VICE CHAIR: Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer Committee

The EPC Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer Committee has a vacancy for a Vice Chair, following early appointment of the previous Vice Chair to Chair of the Committee. If you would like to discuss the work of the Committee, join the Committee, or nominate yourself, please contact [Andy Alderson](#) in the first instance.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND VICE CHAIR: Recruitment and Admissions Committee

The EPC Recruitment and Admissions committee has vacancies for Committee members and it is looking to appoint a new Vice Chair in keeping with our regular succession planning strategy. If you would like to discuss the work of the Committee, join the Committee, or nominate yourself, please contact the [EPC Executive](#) in the first instance.

TEACHING OF ETHICS SURVEY

The Royal Academy of Engineering and the Engineering Council are looking at how and when ethics is taught in UK HEIs at undergraduate level in engineering courses. If you are involved in undergraduate engineering teaching, please do take a couple of minutes to [complete their survey](#) to help them to understand how ethics is currently taught and to shape future resources to support the teaching of ethics.

Please also feel free to forward the survey to others in your institution involved in undergraduate engineering teaching, in different engineering sub-disciplines. The deadline is Friday 15 January 2021.



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