COVID-19: Professional Review Interviews

The Engineering Council has been taking soundings from a number of Heads of Membership regarding maintaining their schedule of professional review interviews during the period of social-distancing. Indications are that many PEIs already use remote interviewing (up to 100% for some) and decision-making, and are able to extend the use of this. The overarching feedback we have received is that there is no requirement for the relaxation of the professional review regulations and that there is sufficient flexibility to provide the "same standard, different delivery"

PEI's also have the option to set out their own special Covid-19 variation for authorisation by RSC if there are circumstances specific to their discipline that they feel could provide sufficient assurance to justify a specific and time-limited variation to their procedures. RSC would need to review any such proposals but would seek to do so as expediently as possible. Please contact Katy Turff kturff@engc.org.uk if you would like to discuss this approach.

The Registration Code of Practice allows the use of remote interviewing without limitation. The Professional Review Guidance Note was updated in 2017 and, by kind permission of BCS, includes an example of a guidance note to reviewers on remote interview etiquette and how to use their preferred system. This can be found on the Partner Portal under the Guidance tab.

Feedback also indicates that the wide variety of online tools available should offer something that meets the technical, bandwidth and financial needs of most PEIs, candidates and reviewers. Some of these are included with standard business and personal software, and others are available with smartphones. Methods PEIs report having used successfully include:

- Standalone Skype or Polycom (can be heavy on data, and not necessarily always of high quality).
- Skype for Business (generally found to be reliable, good quality and accessible whether people have Skype for Business or not)
- Apple FaceTime (needs all to have iOS, and a broadband internet connection,
- WhatsApp (works on smartphones and tablets, has a conference facility and also works on 3G and 4G – numbers on the call may be restricted to 4 including the person hosting)
- Microsoft Teams
- Google hangouts
- Huddle/GoToMeeting

Many of these allow for audio and video recording. Those with established remote interview practices will most likely already make provision for recording some or all remote interviews for internal QA purposes, and take account of this in their data privacy/GDPR protocols for candidates, reviewers, committees and internal QA teams. If you are new to remote interviewing, these are things that will need to be considered. Recording at least a sample of interviews would also be helpful for Licensing purposes.

The Engineering Council would welcome any hints and tips, troubleshooting suggestions, examples of recording and GDPR protocols etc, that you have and would be willing to share with other PEIs. Please send any suggestions to Katy Turff kturff@engc.org.uk cc Charles McArthur cmcarthur@engc.org.uk and we'll put them onto the Partner Portal under the COVID-19 tab.

A further consideration is that reviewers may not be trained in conducting remote interviews and may not be confident with the technology. This may mean a limited pool of reviewers is best placed to conduct remote interviews, at least in the short term. Use of a small pool may lead to those reviewers working in more-or-less fixed pairings. Whilst this is not ideal it is acceptable under the regulations. Please also remember that it is acceptable to share trained reviewers with other PEIs.

Please let Katy Turff kturff@engc.org.uk cc Charles McArthur cmcarthur@engc.org.uk know if you have online reviewer training that you would be prepared to make available to other PEIs, or if you would be interested in some form of collaborative online training. This may take a little time to organise and offers of sharing from those who have experience, training products and platforms that could be made available to others would be welcome.

Katy Turff
Head of Professional Standards

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