

Criteria 6: Linkages with Professional Institutions / Learned Bodies

This chapter contains:

- Overview
- The purpose and benefits of external linkages
- Other Aspects: Professional Titles and CSR
- Evidence Required for Accreditation
- [Adding Value: The range of Good Practices](#)

Overview

Leading organisations' enthusiasm for linking with Professional Institutions (such as Engineers Ireland) serves a number of purposes. Firstly, it enhances the firm's professional status and establishes its credibility with client bodies, staff, prospective employees and other firms.

Secondly, it enables organisations to collaborate with their relevant Professional Institution(s) in developing career structures and training plans for staff. Engineers Ireland's CPD ACCREDITED EMPLOYER scheme is an example of the benefits of such collaborations. Accreditation with Engineers Ireland serves to demonstrate a company's commitment to the development of its people.

Thirdly, memberships of Professional bodies enable staff to meet and "network" with other like-minded professionals. This enables them to share their ideas, learn from others and stimulates deeper interest in career progression and continuing professional development (CPD).

While small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can enjoy a number of behavioural advantages over their larger counterparts (e.g. rapid response to external threats and opportunities; efficient internal communications; interactive management style), they can also suffer from a number of mainly material disadvantages (e.g. difficulties in market start-up abroad; problems in funding longer-term R&D).

One area in which SMEs can suffer a marked disadvantage is that of establishing the appropriate network of learning contacts with external sources, particularly to garner scientific and technological expertise and advice (Rothwell & Dodgson 1991).

Therefore improving in this area of CPD practice can certainly give an SME a crucial cutting-edge.

While some of the same issues can apply to larger firms (>100 engineering professionals), this scale of enterprise tends to enter into different kinds of linkages, e.g. with universities, research institutes, standard-setting bodies, regulatory agencies, government agencies, trade associations.

In some regards, large companies, universities and specialist research firms (such as new biotechnology firms) are endowed with complementary assets to generate, develop and commercialise new products together. Thus, there are wide ranging opportunities.

The range and scope of linkages an organisation can establish can have a marked impact on its ability to acquire and augment technical skills and market-place know-how. Professional Institutions, Specialist suppliers, training institutions, technology transfer agencies, key customers, business associations and specialist web forums all offer the opportunity to tap into the latest technological advances.

Connections with “non-engineering” bodies can help to give engineering and technical staff another perspective of the business world. Just as importantly, it introduces staff members to the benefits of working with people in other walks of life. In formal CPD terms, associations and linkages should facilitate learning and moving up the value chain, ultimately adding to the business bottom line.

PURPOSE OF LINKAGES with Professional Institutions/Learned Bodies

- Ensure organisation is outward looking. Avoid “negative lock-in”.
- Ensure organisation is keeping abreast with information on emerging technologies and best in industry practices. In order to do this it is important to ensure that you have coverage of all relevant research institutes, industry groups, user groups, on-line forums, Chambers of Commerce etc.
- To allow innovative collaborations
 - Structured approach to building a strong cohort of staff with a registered Professional Title i.e. Chartered Engineer.

EVIDENCE FOR ACCREDITATION

6.1 Engineering professionals are active members of relevant professional bodies

- Attend relevant lectures, seminars, site visits etc
- Take part in committees and taskforces
- Write papers and deliver presentations

HOW CAN YOU DO THIS IN PRACTICE?

- Organisations can state their commitment to support subscription fees for membership of relevant Professional Bodies in their company CPD policy
- An organisation's CPD committee should ensure all engineering staff know that CPD credits can be acquired through active involvement on committees and taskforces in their Professional Body. Up to 3 days CPD per annum can be achieved via this means.
- Decide which Professional bodies are key. Appoint "points-people" to forge and sustain links and report back on new practices, innovations etc
- Reward staff who play an active part in their Professional body and in doing so raise the profile of your company overall

6.2 Professional titles are achieved through these learned institutions

- Experienced staff mentor their junior counterparts in the process of achieving a Professional title
- Senior staff are expected to have attained a Professional Title

HOW CAN YOU DO THIS IN PRACTICE?

- Many leading organisations ensure the attainment of Professional Titles through their Performance Management & Development system and their Mentoring practice.
- The core competences needed to obtain a Professional Title (such as Chartered Engineer) signify rounded development and broad experience. Leading organisations reward and promote those who obtain Professional titles.
- Link Professional Titles to progression on defined Career Ladders

6.3 Linkages with Third Level Institutions

- Provide guest lecturers
- Participate at Career Fairs hosted by Third Level Institutions
- Take on summer students for placements
- Sponsor relevant research projects

HOW CAN YOU DO THIS IN PRACTICE?

- Guest lecturing, on a topic of particular specialism, offers your staff a rare opportunity to hone their knowledge and their presentation skills. Students can often offer insightful questions and well-positioned comments. The stronger the linkages between industry and academia, the more likely it is that graduates will be informed and educated to the required standard. By getting in touch with the School of Engineering in your local Third Level Institution today, you can put steps in place to get more involved.
- Career Fairs and so-called ‘Milk Rounds’ to Third level institutions offer a chance for you to attract the potential top candidates. Think about what differentiates your organisation as an employer. Although pay and conditions are important to graduates, the other top consideration for graduates is whether they will be joining a try learning organisation. Be sure to highlight to them the CPD opportunities you offer.
- Most Third level institutions run summer placements and, increasingly, term-time placements or full secondments. Such placements offer a superb opportunity for your organisation to give students real and meaningful engineering opportunities. Many placements student return to the same employer when they graduate. Sponsoring a research project means a strategic business aim of the organisation’s can be met.

GOOD PRACTICES

Standard Good Practices

Active participation with relevant, learned bodies

Staff encouraged to obtain Professional Titles e.g. Chartered Engineer

Organisations link with Third-Level institutions

Advanced Good Practices

Attainment of designated Professional Titles linked to senior roles

To avoid 'negative lock-in' a clear outward-facing policy supports Membership of relevant bodies and participation on taskforces, special committees etc

Engineering professionals are actively encouraged to have their work published in professional journals; deliver papers at learned-body lectures/seminars

Collaboration with Universities in R&D projects and innovations

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects to encourage a deeper

THREE THOUGHTS

- Rather like a gym membership, you get from Membership of a Professional Body what you put into it. Consider how you staff could contribute, and thus gain from, the activities of your Professional Body. Get active!
- Founded in 1835, Engineers Ireland has a library with proceedings and papers covering the years since, right up to today. Our library is free to use and is open to all.
- Increasingly industry and academia are influencing each other: through research from Third Level institutions aiding employers and through leading employers providing input into course curricula. Have you made the link?