

Welcome – Penny Taylor

Chair, Professional Review Committee (PRC)



*Our Chair considering
"discuss cases" at PRC*

The last PRC newsletter was sent out using a different mailing system and I'm pleased to say that it seems to be a big improvement on the earlier one, as only one person has contacted me saying they didn't get the September Newsletter. Some success there!

It's great to get more contributions to the Newsletter from a wider range of people in the membership applications processing community – some willing volunteers and a few having their arms slightly twisted. Thank you all. To anyone out there who has anything they would like to add, please let Matthew Waterhouse know.

The November PRC has, for some years now, been preceded by the legendary 'catch-up day'. This year, some of us were able to get back together to do catch-up day and PRC in hybrid form – some in-person attendance at HQ and some people online. Thanks to all who participated and those who took lists right up to the last moment.

The sheer number of applications that get processed in the last quarter of the year, to meet the Engineering Council deadline early in December, meant that we had 24 individual cases to discuss at PRC. This is much higher than we would normally have, but still each application gets the same level of discussion and scrutiny. Steve Corner did a great job of chairing our first hybrid PRC meeting.

Things we learned from this "first of a kind" provided several lessons for future hybrid meetings:

1. No discussions on the side and noise in the room to be kept to a minimum. The microphone was particularly sensitive to paper rustling, which drowned out what was being said for those online.
2. Phones and other electronic equipment need to be switched off or on silent. It's very distracting for those in the room and again make following what's going on almost impossible for those online.
3. We had three of us managing the meeting – Steve on camera, chairing proceedings; Kevin on his computer pulling up documents and sharing his screen where necessary and me, monitoring the chat and watching for 'hands up' from the remote participants.

If anyone has anything to add, please let me know.

Now that UK-SPEC 4 is almost implemented, I have asked the 'Task Force' that worked on it to stay together and take on a new challenge. As yet Terms of Reference have not been finalised, but what I want them to look at is the whole piece about how we attract PRI interviewers, and then how we train, monitor, assess and feedback to them. The processes we operate currently have evolved over the last decade and now is the time for things to become more systematic and documented. I have already heard from a number of PRI interviewers that they welcome feedback and would appreciate a more structured 'review' of each interview session.

During the catch-up day, we were able to log-on to a webinar 'Securing the Future of Birdcage Walk as our Headquarters'. If you have not already attended one of these, I would encourage all members to watch the recording which is available on the IMechE Web site and engage with the discussions. It is important that as many members as possible make their views known.

We also had a Teams call from our new CEO Alice Bunn and got to see her home office – complete with dog. She was very appreciative of all the work we do on processing membership applications and sent her thanks to each and everyone involved, as I do.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Kind regards

Penny

Editor's Comment

Hi and here is Newsletter 4.



This newsletter reports from 4 observers of the PRC process – it is proving to be an invaluable method to allow many IMechE volunteers to see how the PRC works. Judging by the words so far written, these observers have both enjoyed the event and learnt much about how robust the IMechE membership application process is.

With so much else to tell in this letter, there is no room for more of the history of membership.

Matthew Waterhouse – VC, Communications

UK SPEC 4 Working Group — the progress so far.



Well, the Working Group has virtually completed its initial task of reviewing all the PRC documentation, in relation to the introduction of UK SPEC 4.

Note that I used the word 'virtually'. By this I mean that, whilst the task of transitioning to Spec 4 is now complete, up and running and on-line, a couple of loose ends still remain.

When we began this Working Group, the task was deemed a simple one. However, as you may appreciate, it soon became apparent that UK-SPEC4 was bigger than first thought. We quickly realised that it meant a changes to all the IMechE Application Forms, Guidance Notes, Training Guides, the list was endless. Therefore, we set about identifying all the documentation that is the PRC's responsibility.

Once this task had been completed, we had a better understanding of how big the job was to become.

Consequently, we have re-written the Application Forms and Guidance Notes for all the categories of Membership and Registration. The Workshop Guides and Assessor Training packs, put together by Henry Fullerton and Mick Davis, have also been upgraded and look really good. An excellent job, Well done!

Over the last twelve months, it has become obvious to us, as a Working Group, that much more could be done and I understand that it is the PRC Chair's intension to look at ways in which the Working Group can progress some of these further ideas.

I'm confident that by the type of co-operation, determination and commitment shown by the whole team we can continue to build and maintain the IMechE as a world class Institution.

And finally:- **Volunteering.**

When I first volunteered to assist in this project, little did I realise what I would receive from it. The camaraderie amongst the team members has been tremendous and they have been a real tonic and pleasure to work with. Being part of this Working Group, looking at UK-SPEC4, I have learnt a great deal about the way our Institution is run which has helped me understand the responsibilities we ALL carry as individuals.

So if you do get the opportunity to volunteer I can wholeheartedly recommend it.

Don't be shy! Do it! Volunteer!

Graham Ballinger – PRC Member.

Baroness Platt of Writtle Award



The Baroness Platt of Writtle Award is a UK national award to recognise the most outstanding individual registered as an Incorporated Engineer (IEng) each year. The prestigious award is named after Baroness Platt of Writtle CBE FREng in recognition of her work in support of the engineering profession in general and Incorporated Engineers in particular.

The Award is Presented by the Engineers Trust the Charitable Trust Fund of the Worshipful Company of Engineers. This prestigious, annual award, recognises the achievements of a newly registered Incorporated Engineer (IEng).

Professional Engineering Institutions licensed by the Engineering Council are invited to nominate up to five, exceptional, successful IEng applicants who gained registration in the year.

In recent years the IMechE has been well represented and has won in:

2020 with Claire Herbison IEng MIMechE

2019 with Tim Ward IEng MIMechE

2017 with Sam Williams IEng MIMechE

Volunteers are needed to review applicants for 2022. The task involves assessing candidates nominated for the award through their PRI and then ranking these, so that the top 5 can be asked to complete a nomination form. If you would like to be part of the team that nominates these IMechE applicants please contact:

Siân Davies – Vice Chair IEng.

Diversity and Inclusivity (D&I)



An IMechE volunteer recently volunteered, after a UK-SPEC4 training day, to assist the PRI community with some starter questions on the topic of D&I. D&I is newly included in UK-SPEC4 and is included in the UK-SPEC4 training roll out. But as some further help here are some suggestions:

- What does Diversity, Equality and Inclusion mean to you and are they important?
 - In your opinion, what is the most challenging aspect of working in a diverse environment?
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- What is your approach to understanding the perspectives of colleagues from different backgrounds?
 - How would you handle a situation where a colleague was being either culturally insensitive, sexist, racist or homophobic?
 - How would you advocate for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion with colleagues who don't understand it's importance?
 - Can you give me an example when you advocated for Diversity and Inclusion in your workplace?
 - How would you deal with a Bullying, Harassment or Discrimination (BHD) complaint?
 - What have you done to further your knowledge and understanding about Diversity and Inclusion?
 - Can you recall a time when a person's cultural background affected your approach to a work situation? How did you deal with this? If no, how would you deal with this?
 - How have you demonstrated an active commitment to D&I in your most recent role?
 - Have you ever attended any formal Diversity and Inclusion training?

Hopefully these will help shape some questions.

Towny

Warrant Officer Class One, Paul Townsend, IEng MIMechE GCGI CMgr MCMI

Industrial Advisor appointment sub-group



At the September PRC meeting, Penny Taylor put forward a proposal to set up a sub-group of about 5 members to streamline the approval and appointment of Industrial Advisors. The sub-group will be formed and headed by Michael Hepworth and will be called the Industrial Advisor Appointment Group. It will have delegated authority from the PRC to go through applications and will replace the current system in which applications were sent to all PRC members.

It is intended that the sub-group will mainly comprise members of the PRC Panel to give them an opportunity to become more involved in wider PRC activities. Membership of the sub-group will not be restricted by an individual's grade of membership.

A report looking at issues including current availability, Terms of Reference, succession planning and job specification for the role of Industrial Advisor is being prepared. There are currently 160 registered Industrial Advisors, many of long standing.

PRC panel members who wish to join the sub-group are invited to contact Michael Hepworth (PRC member) or Kathryn Devine at IMechE

Some comments on observing a PRC meeting (24th November 2021)



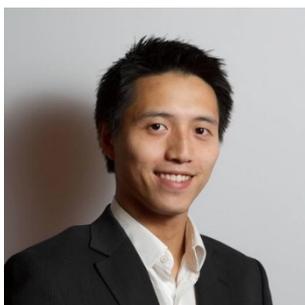
I was grateful for the opportunity to observe the PRC and see the depth and breadth of its activities. From discussing the new Spec 4 transition through to a detailed discussion on a candidate. As an IF it has given me a better understanding of the next stage of the application process and improve the guidance that I can give to PRI panel members. It looked to me from the day that a hybrid PRC meeting can be made to work and I would thus urge all new IFs to be

given the opportunity to observe virtually a PRC meeting at the earliest opportunity.

Regarding the hybrid meeting format, I thought it worked well, but I believe it is necessary to give virtual attendees improved situational awareness of what is going on through the whole meeting. For example, every agenda item is talked to through a share screen presentation, it is made clearer who is talking, and the camera and microphones are improved. None are "showstoppers", just ways of enhancing a very welcome initiative. Thank you for the opportunity to observe.

Andrew Fawkes FIMechE – IMechE Interview Facilitator

Comments on observing a PRC meeting (September 2021 too late for last Newsletter) - A Big Black Hole?



I have been a PRI panellist for 5 or so years and I believe I speak for many others in saying that what actually happens behind the scenes at IMechE membership applications can be a total mystery. It is as if the IMechE and PRC are a big, faceless entity which you know exists but cannot interact with. Even after writing up the interview recommendation sheets, it gets collected by the Interview Facilitators and it feels like I am dumping the paperwork into a big black hole, never to be seen again.

So, it was through an interview refresher course during the summer that the trainer mentioned that any Professional Review Chair/Co-panellist is permitted to send in a request to observe the PRC at a meeting. Literally 2 minutes later I had finished typing my email request and sent it in. My spot was confirmed for the next meeting – September 2021.

During the round of introductions all Observers, representing multiple areas of IMechE (business development staff, membership applications staff, and myself representing PRI volunteers) introduced ourselves and expressed what we hoped to gain from listening in on the 3 or so hours of the PRC meeting.

I was most fascinated by the PRC-wide discussion that took place on two cases up for discussion through a combination of PRIs, IF, Professional Review Panel not in full agreement, and having to read in between the lines of the PRI recommendation sheet documentation. The PRC discussed whether the processes have been followed, and to also decide how to weight the opinions of all those who have reviewed the documentation. This is perhaps the single most worthwhile part of the whole day (from a PRI Chair perspective, and also as a mentor for several graduates who hope to seek Membership one day) as it helped me identify where potential areas of concern may be and will certainly help towards improving the quality of feedback on the recommendation sheets.

It was also enlightening to hear the viewpoints of Kevin Murphy and Karen Bayless who were representing IMechE staff rather than the PRC, as they were able to provide input to the PRC on logistical issues. E.g. whether to continue arranging face to face interviews now that most candidates actually seem to prefer remote interviews, and other seemingly trivial tasks like arranging half-day interviews actually doubles the amount of work on IMechE staff. From an outside perspective it does show potential areas of bottlenecks in any procedures, but it also gives insights as to why applications can sometimes take a while between stages.

Observers were given the opportunity at the end to put our views forward. As someone who also interviews for another Institution, it was a great way for me to compare and contrast between them. And similarly one of the items for discussion was the seeming lack of recognition from Interviewers that several candidates can have a non-mechanical engineering degree yet become worthy of Membership of the IMechE (including myself, my MEng degree being in civil engineering and early career being based around structural engineering). I fervently urge readers of this newsletter to remind themselves of the IMechE's [Definition of Mechanical Engineering](#) because the areas can be much broader than you think.

Volunteering for more

During the meeting, it was mentioned that for the purposes of bringing in 'new blood' and also due to shortage of volunteers, there was a call out for anyone wanting to join Professional Review Committee, Panel, Arbitration etc. As someone who tries to bring diversity to most dealings, I feel that my age (amongst first to be a "digital native", which influences how early careers will have evolved) and my multicultural background would be of benefit. I have wholeheartedly put myself forward for selection and fingers crossed it will work out.

Tim Lai – EUR ING CEng MIMechE

Some more comments on observing a PRC meeting (September 2021 meeting, too late for the last newsletter)

Thank you so much for the opportunity to attend the PRC meeting.

The first thing learnt was the extent of the PRC's role, the committee has a lot more responsibility than I first imagined. More than reviewing/approving decisions from the PRI process, I can see how the due diligence, demonstrated by the committee, is essential in safeguarding the Institution and its registration activities.

I found the discussion around the 5-year vs 10-year guidelines very interesting. I believe that the application guidelines we use states 5-years, but I am sure that I have read, or at least been told on good authority that 10-years can be considered in some cases.

The discussion around the interview assessor's role being to assess competence rather than experience, although quite obvious, helps to clarify why the 5/10-year rule is in place.

The discussion from the result of our last licencing audit by the UK Engineering Council in regard to the 2nd interview, the reasons why this might be invoked, how it should be conducted and PRC role within this was also very useful.

The "discuss case" decision outcomes were super useful. I have come across some cases where the interview report/feedback to PRC has been generic and not very useful. While this can be, quite often, down to an applicant's performance on the day if the assessor struggles to draw information out, it is very reassuring to see the process that PRC undertakes when the decisions might be borderline or discrepancies have been identified.

I found my attendance was very useful and helped me gain a better understanding of the process which will help me be more effective in my own role. I really enjoyed the meeting. After 4½ years with the IMechE there is always more to learn and every day is a school day.

Craig Davies – IMechE Business Development Executive - Southern

Even more PRC feedback (November 2021 meeting)



I enjoy being involved with IMechE mentoring, helping developing engineers and more recently acting as chartership interview co-chair. I feel it is so important to "give back", both to my Institution and to developing engineers, given that I did not get so much from the Institution or from my own mentors when I was a developing engineer.

I had often heard about the IMechE Professional Review Committee (PRC), but never really knew much about it. I imagined it to be a committee of experienced, learned IMechE representatives who scrutinised the interview paperwork produced by the interview panel and gave their rubber-stamp to the process.

So, I thought it would be worth observing a PRC meeting, thinking it would help me to become a more effective chairperson if I was able to listen to the discussions first-hand about some of the more contentious decisions as to whether to elect a candidate to chartership, defer, grant a second interview, or reject.

It was a combined in-person/virtual hybrid meeting, with around 15 people in the room and maybe another 10 dialled in – observers like myself, IMechE administration personnel, organisers, and other PRC members.

After introductions, etc., there was some discussion around UK-SPEC 4, which is currently being implemented.

Then there was some debate around how the interview panel can be supported after completion of training, to ensure standards are met and maintained. It may be obvious, but it is so important that the interview panel follows their training at each and every interview, to ensure a consistent, fair and credible process. There was some discussion about how the Institution can best ensure that all interviews are standardised when compared with interviews elsewhere. It is clear that the IMechE invests a lot of time and effort in ensuring that all interviews are conducted in as consistent a manner as possible and that the same high standards are upheld at all times.

I then learned how the PRC actually works when it comes to the actual business of chartership decisions. Professional Review Interview (PRI) recommendations are reviewed by PRC members, in conjunction with the written application. Often, this review will be straightforward, with the PRI and PRC personnel in agreement. However, where there is

contention, then the case is discussed in the quarterly PRC meeting. Bearing in mind that the PRC meeting will not have access to any interview transcript, this highlights the importance of thorough, concise, clear explanatory notes from the interview panel. For cases up for debate, all the documentation is considered and discussed by the PRC meeting, and a decision reached by consensus. It seemed a fair and credible process.

I saw around 10 cases discussed in the PRC meeting. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that the IMechE is consistent in its standards. These meetings are vitally important in ensuring the Institution's integrity is upheld, and all meeting attendees/volunteers undoubtedly are vital in this process.

The IMechE were very happy to facilitate my attendance at the meeting, and I found it very interesting. It will certainly have helped my interview skills, in particular to keep in mind the need to carry out interviews and write up notes with the PRC in mind, and to think about "what do the PRC need to see in the interview notes, to help them to support the interview decision?" I would certainly encourage anyone involved in mentoring or interviewing to attend and observe a PRC meeting.

John Lenehan, 24th November 2021

Yet more thoughts on the PRC meeting (November 2021 meeting)



I am a PRC panel member. I really enjoyed my two days attending Catch Up and being an observer at the PRC meeting the following day. I joined the Institution as a Student Member shortly after starting an apprenticeship in design and manufacturing with a small aviation company and I am now retired.

At Catch Up, I was assigned lists with my assigned pair. This was the first real opportunity for me to start to get to know them.

Arriving in good time for the PRC meeting, there were formal introductions before the meeting started work on the outstanding decisions. I had already studied the discuss cases, which ranged from decisions by inexperienced interviewers to downright fraud. It was impressive to witness the discussion and the care that was taken before a decision was made.

Many PRC members present, and many of those remotely on Teams, who had an opinion, were listened to before a decision was made. I was pleased to see how the different membership categories of CEng, IEng and EngTech were considered as being separate rather than hierarchical achievements.

It would be helpful to new attendees if photographs of PRC members were published on a single sheet and updated for those of us that work remotely. It could also include members of staff with whom we often communicate.

I believe candidates should receive more support and advice from their proposers, and also from those Interview Facilitators who often just copy and paste the same statements.

Thank you, PRC for a very enjoyable and worthwhile experience. I look forward to my next lot of batches, particularly now that we have met in person.

Peter Astley, CEng, MSc, FIMechE, FACostE

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