

Questions and answers related to Engineering Council ‘Compensation and Condonement Policy’

Q: What is compensation and condonement?

A: When a student completes a component of their degree (usually termed a ‘module’ in the UK system) there is typically a pass mark that indicates the student has met, at the lowest threshold level, the learning outcomes for that component. If a student misses the pass mark, there is commonly a mechanism within the Higher Education Institution (HEI) that still allows them to progress to the next year of study or to receive their degree. Usually there is a limit placed on what the student can or cannot fail, both in terms of the lowest mark and the amount of modular credit that can be failed. This process is variously termed ‘compensation’ or ‘condonement’ within the HEI, but the definitions used are inconsistent. The levels of compensation and condonement permitted by the HEIs’ general regulations also vary.

The Engineering Council defines compensation as: “The practice of allowing marginal failure (ie not more than ten percentage points below the nominal pass mark) of one or more modules, often on the basis of good overall academic performance.”

The Engineering Council defines condonement as: “The practice of allowing students to fail one or more module(s) with a fail mark of more than ten percentage points below the nominal pass mark, yet still qualify for the award of the degree.”

The Engineering Council allows a certain amount of marginally failed modules to be compensated if the marks achieved are less than 10 percentage points below the normal pass thresholds, however it does not allow condonement.

Q: Why is the Engineering Council concerned about compensation and condonement?

A: Professional Engineering Institutions (PEIs) are licensed by the Engineering Council

to accredit degrees against the Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes (AHEP) Standard. Accreditation panels are tasked with ensuring engineering degree programmes they recommend for accreditation meet the AHEP learning outcomes. Meeting those outcomes is evidenced during an accreditation visit by the HEI providing assessment samples, which demonstrate that students are being assessed at and the minimum threshold levels. Where students have failed modules, panels cannot be sure that the learning outcomes delivered at the modular level have been fully met.

Q: Why allow students to progress or graduate if they have not passed all their modules?

A: Since the AHEP outcomes are usually delivered more broadly across the programme, there is a likelihood that a marginal failure of a small number of course elements means that the student will still meet the AHEP learning outcomes. However, this point is debatable and some other UK regulatory and professional bodies take a different view and insist on all individual course components being passed. Internationally, within engineering, the practice of allowing even marginal failure of course elements is uncommon.

Q: What has changed regarding the Engineering Council's position on compensation/condonement?

A: Previous guidance notes provided to PEIs by the Engineering Council were translated into policy in 2018, for implementation for student intakes from 2022; the existing limits on compensation and condonement were confirmed at that time. A subsequent review completed in 2021 concluded that there was no evidence to warrant a change in the Policy, but resulted in slight rephrasing of the reference to credit and enhancement of the Guidance Note.

Q: What triggered the change from guidance to policy?

A: The previous guidance was not specific enough or applied consistently enough to ensure common standards were being applied to all accreditation visits, leading to inconsistent accreditation outcomes between PEIs. There was also a need to ensure that degrees met international standards where, as stated earlier, the practice of compensation and condonement is atypical. A review conducted by the Engineering Council indicated that the guidance needed to be strengthened to Policy to ensure that graduates more closely adhered to international standards.

Q: How has this policy been communicated previously?

A: Since the announcement in 2018, a guidance note was published in 2019. Departments delivering accredited programmes have also been written to individually by the accrediting PEIs, advising them of the policy. It has also been considered at

accreditation visits since the policy was announced. PEIs agreed to put in place requirements for HEIs to comply with the new policy by the implementation date in 2022, if the HEI were found to be noncompliant during an accreditation visit. The policy is also referred to in AHEP fourth edition, which has been shared widely.

Q: What is changing in 2022 for students registering for their first year of a degree programme?

A: All students following an accredited engineering degree programme will need to meet a common standard for compensation/condonement.

Q: Will this mean that more students fail their degree programme?

A: It is hoped that HEIs will put in place measures to ensure that this does not happen. This may mean changes to assessments that more rigorously test students' abilities at the threshold level, as well as at the higher grades. Where students cannot meet the progression or degree requirements for their accredited programme of study, yet meet the standards of the HEI's general regulations, an award with a different title can still be made. The Engineering Council policy does not stipulate the number of attempts that the student can make at their assessments, so there is flexibility in the way that HEIs manage the process of ensuring that students can demonstrate a pass mark at the threshold level.

Q: Will this impact on HEI workload and increase administration?

A: **In the short term this is likely to involve changes in practices for some examination boards and may result in some HEI policy changes. Since this is a firm policy which is being applied consistently across all engineering degrees, in the longer term it will lead to more consistency of practice across a HEI.**

Q: What rules apply to students who enrolled on a programme prior to autumn 2022 that was not subject to the policy for their intake but due to a delay in their studies will graduate with a cohort for whom the policy applies?

The Engineering Council anticipates that HEIs would follow their usual procedures and practices for treating enrolled students who have delayed study (for example, repeating a year), regardless of the reasons for the delay. This means that (for example) a first-year student beginning in September 2021 who retakes an entire year of study and joins the next cohort starting in September 2022 as a resitting student would be permitted to follow the pre-2022 Engineering Council policy with regards to compensation and condonement, but only if the HEI policy allows it by default. This is to ensure that the Engineering Council policy does not come into conflict with the contract between the HEI and the student.

For the sake of clarity, The Engineering Council does not expect HEIs to apply the 2022 policy to students joining before September 2022, unless it is the standard practice to implement changes to the programme specification/regulations (or similar) retrospectively.