

Engineers to have a say on the profession's regulatory frameworks

The Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) has embarked on a countrywide roadshow to discuss revisions to its governing instruments with stakeholders in the profession.

The three frameworks the council is looking to revise are: recognition of voluntary associations (VAs), the continuing professional development (CPD) policy and its commitment and undertaking guidelines for establishing accords with employer body.



Sipho Madonsela

Regulatory framework cannot be stagnant

The current consultation process resulted from feedback from the previous roadshow, as well as independent requests from government (through the CBE) and from the VAs, to publically discuss the compilation of the revision of these documents. To make the process more efficient, ECSA has therefore drafted one revision, which it has made available for comment.

ECSCA chief executive officer, Sipho Madonsela, stresses the need for the revision of these frameworks is to align the measure of responsibility of all involved engineering practitioners with the accountability that is required of every professional engineer, and which all engineers understand.

“Our regulatory framework cannot be seen to be stagnant, especially when the needs of our stakeholders are changing at a dynamic pace. This is why we have chosen to take such a bold step in response to the needs of the profession – in order to strike a balance between ECSA’s role as the custodian and regulator of the profession, and the engineering profession at large.”

Three output arms

He highlights that ECSA’s broader mandate is carried out by three output arms. Firstly, an administratively – which is the day-to-day operation of council through policy standards and procedures development; registration, accreditation and quality assurance; professional conduct management through the legal support team; and through the CPD programme.

Secondly, ECSA functions through the voluntary support of engineering professionals who sit on different ECSA committees.

And thirdly, through the VAs, which are delegated functions by the ECSA council comprising 50 individuals appointed by government.

Accountability

“Where inefficiencies had been detected in the administrative output arm of which I am CEO, staff found to be working beneath ECSA’s standards have been disciplined, with some losing their jobs,” Madonsela says.

He explains that the council has taken accountability for the service it offers to our constituents, being the engineering professionals. It should therefore stand to reason that any inefficiencies in the operation of the ECSA committees and VAs should also be approached in a similar manner, to ensure that standardised operations are maintained across all three output arms.

“I cannot stress enough, the need for the introduction of accountability that matches responsibility. In the past, ECSA has absorbed all accountability for the regulation of the profession, even where VAs and committees were seen to be clearly functioning under the standards that they would expect ECSA to uphold.

“We must match the responsibility of the administrative, committees and VA operation outputs, with appropriate accountability,” he added. “It would be unfair that some parties go undisciplined, even when there is evidence of inefficiencies across all arms,” he adds.

Two mandates

Madonsela explains that ECSA as a regulatory body has a hard and a soft mandate. The former would be the legislative operations of ECSA, which are outlined in The Engineering Profession Act No 46 of 2000 (EPA), while the latter concerns corporate governance responsibilities such as a clear transformation agenda in the profession; the aligning of ECSA’s mandate with government’s vision. “Our revision of the frameworks is also influenced by this soft mandate.”

There is the need to demystify the perception that ECSA is the “gate-keeper” of the profession, and the level of transparency that ECSA is expected to uphold should also be required of the voluntary associations (VAs) and there needs to be collaboration and clear service level agreements as this affects the primary constituents of both ECSA and the VAs.

The consultative process will visit all nine provinces in South Africa, with three sessions scheduled for Gauteng, which has the largest concentration of engineers and VAs in the country. The [schedule](#) runs from 4 July, and be concluded in Johannesburg on 19 August 2016.

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