

IChemE's position on the status of engineers

The Institution of Chemical Engineers (IChemE) is a registered charity in England, Wales and Scotland. We are licenced to award Chartered Engineer (CEng), Incorporated Engineer (IEng) and Engineering Technician (EngTech) titles by the Engineering Council.

The Engineering Council is the regulatory body for engineering profession in the UK. It sets and maintains internationally recognised standards of professional competence and commitment as set out in the [UK Standard for Professional Engineering Competence](#) (UK-SPEC).

The status of engineers has always been a controversial topic. In 2011, the Board of the Engineering Council established a working group to consider issues relating to the status and title of engineers. The resulting policy position statement was agreed in March 2012. IChemE's stance is fully aligned with that of the Engineering Council. The reasoning is explained below.

The word 'engineer' and professional titles

The use of the word 'engineer' in the English language has evolved over many centuries. Hence anyone in the UK may describe themselves as an engineer. Seeking to regulate or legislate on the use of a now common term is recognised by the Engineering Council as totally impractical. However, the professional titles such as Chartered Engineer may only be used by those who have been granted these titles via licenced Professional Engineering Institutions (PEIs), including IChemE.

Chartered Engineer status is a sign of the professional competence of the holder and their commitment to professional ethics and practice. The title is only awarded to those who can demonstrate, through a process of peer assessment, that they meet the required standards.

The Engineering Council, working in partnership with IChemE and other PEIs, keeps these standards under constant review to ensure that they remain valid and are clearly defined. Taken together, these features of the regulatory system provide assurance, serve to protect the public and give confidence to society. It is upon such recognition that the status of professional engineers and technicians must rest.

The professional titles are fully protected under law by means of the Engineering Council's Royal Charter and Bye-laws; further legislation is thus unnecessary. To protect these titles, action can be taken through the courts against their unauthorised use.

Through the [European Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications 2005](#), they are also recognised throughout the European Union. More generally, as a benchmark standard, the titles have a world-wide currency.

Why is there no restriction on who can call themselves an engineer in the UK?

The words 'engineer' and 'engineering' have been in common use for centuries. Neither is legally defined and in everyday language the term 'engineer' is very often taken to mean anyone who is in some way associated with engineering, including the design, manufacture, maintenance or operation of a technical product or system.

Successive examinations of the subject by the profession and by the UK Parliament have concluded that any attempt to restrict use of the term would have little prospect of success. Indeed, such an approach might be seen as simply meddling with language usage and could thus have a negative effect and alienate people for no good purpose. However, the specific titles that denote professional engineering competence are quite different; these are protected by law and their use is restricted.

IChemE therefore concentrates on promoting awareness and understanding of its professional titles, which demonstrate the professional standing of their holders and which are protected by law.

Don't other professions in the UK manage to protect their titles?

In most cases, it is a very specific title that is protected, rather than a generic one. For example, anyone may call themselves an accountant or a surveyor, but only those who are entitled to do so may describe themselves as Chartered Accountants or Chartered Surveyors. Similarly, there is no restriction on the use of the word lawyer, but the professional status of Solicitor, Barrister and Advocate are protected.

One obvious example of restrictions on the use of titles is found in the medical and healthcare professions. Those employed in this field are dealing directly with the care and welfare of individuals and as a result these professions are also regulated by government in several ways. These restrictions therefore are essentially for public protection, rather than to promote the status of the professions concerned.

Even where legislation is in place, such as the restrictions on the use of the title 'Architect' established in the first half of the 20th Century, these are limited in scope and are essentially to regulate architectural practices. There is no restriction on the use by individuals of terms such as architectural designer, and anyone may offer architectural services.

Isn't use of the term engineer restricted in other countries?

Although it is commonly assumed that the term is more regulated in mainland Europe, there is in fact a range of practice across different countries and [surveys](#) suggest that the UK approach is in the middle of the spectrum.

In English-speaking countries, the same difficulties arise as in the UK. Even where there is legislation to protect title (e.g. Alberta in Canada and Queensland in Australia), this is usually not all-embracing and is not always supported by the courts.

Shouldn't IChemE protect the status of its members?

We do, through the award and protection of our professional titles. These titles are protected by law (stemming from the Engineering Council's Royal Charter and Bye-laws) and unauthorised use of them is pursued through the courts. IChemE and the Engineering Council are vigilant in this matter. It is incumbent upon individual registrants to bring all suspected cases of misuse to the attention of IChemE.

What status do titles such as Chartered Engineer have in Europe?

The EU Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications (2005/36) provides for the Engineering Council's professional titles to be recognised at the same level as their equivalents in other European countries. This is to ensure mobility of professionals within the European Union. Through its contacts with UK government, and with the European Commission, and its membership of FEANI, the Engineering Council actively promotes the implementation of the Directive and monitors its effects.

The UK's referendum decision to leave the European Union in 2016 has cast some uncertainty on future developments in the professional recognition and mobility of chemical engineers. IChemE is monitoring

developments in conjunction with the other leading engineering institutions and will advocate to safeguard the public interest in relation to the chemical engineering profession where appropriate.

Shouldn't there be some restriction on who can practise chemical engineering?

In common with the other engineering disciplines, chemical engineering is continually evolving and by its nature embraces innovation. IChemE has always recognised and encouraged this approach. Efforts to restrict its practice would go against this ethos and risk stifling innovation and therefore may be viewed as anti-competitive and unjustified.

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