



Reaction to MCAST's response to ASIIN's recommendations: MCAST Pre-Warrant Qualification Course

04th November 2020

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Background

The Evaluation Report of the Pre-Warrant Qualifications Course¹, as prepared and revised by the ASIIN Consult, was sent to the Chamber of Engineers (CoE) by the Engineering Profession Board (EPB) on 17th September 2020.

The CoE later received MCAST's proposal of a restructured PWQC, with the premise that the course structure as proposed is addressing the expert panel's recommendations specified in the above mentioned report. MCAST's response was received on the 21st October 2020. The CoE clarifies that no documentation was received from MCAST in the interim of the review process and therefore had no visibility of any restructuring following the first PWQC material reviewed in the April 2020 online audit.

As a major stakeholder of the engineering profession in Malta, the CoE continues to provide its feedback to this review process while safeguarding its autonomous role. The CoE is hereunder presenting its views on MCAST's proposal covered by the letter of MCAST Principal/CEO of 14th October 2020.

Reaction and Recommendations

The CoE positively observes that the newly proposed PWQC study-units are now aligned with fundamental and theoretical engineering subjects and therefore strives to bridge any gaps in the lacking fundamentals for both the electrical and mechanical streams. Furthermore MCAST presents course material which per the documentation presented advocates an appropriate level. As regards the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), the CoE welcomes the commitment to have this confined to learning in formal academic or postgraduate CPD settings.

On the other hand, the CoE notes the below pending requirements, which in its view are needed to ensure a fair and rewarding PWQC to potential students and the engineering profession in its entirety.

1. The proposed PWQC's allocated timeframe is not congruent to what is expected from a 30ECTS course. This is because the proposal is for full-time working students to undertake 30 ECTS which are compressed in 6-7 months time i.e. "part-time" student availability to cover for lectures, coursework, contact hours, project work, personal reading and study time. Hence a 12-month minimum timeframe is being recommended as a more realistic course duration.
2. In relation to 1. above, executing the engineering project module in parallel to taught study units decreases the value of the course. The engineering project module should as far as possible be carried out after extracting knowledge from the taught study units as to have ample opportunity to apply previous learning. Hence a 12-month minimum timeframe is being recommended to support better distribution of student workload with fixed months allocated for the project module.

¹ Reference is made to the revision of 12-SEP-2020 of the *Evaluation Report of the Pre-Warrant Qualifications Course*.



Note: MCAST have not committed any arrangements of time and resources allotted at the workplace as required by ASIIN to justify the 6-7months timeframe. Therefore, 12 months is proposed as a reasonable minimum.

3. From a course workload standpoint, 30ECTS are not commensurate with 6-7months. 30ECTS typically constitute a full academic semester on full time basis. Furthermore a typical 12- month research Masters degree is constituted of 90ECTS on full time basis. Hence, 45ECTS would make more sense for a “part-time course” across the proposed minimum PWQC timeframe of 12 months.
4. In relation to 3. above, the CoE re-iterates its proposal to have 20ECTS allocated to the Engineering Project. 25ECTS of study units and 20ECTS of engineering project would constitute the 45ECTS deemed appropriate for a 12-month part-time course. The CoE gives high value to the engineering project as a unique opportunity to showcase engineering knowledge in practice and retains its position of allotting further weight to this project module which is so critical for a complete engineering education.
5. MCAST are proposing that, for the examiner’s board, the institution would propose 3 warranted engineers from which the EPB would select 1. This goes against the overarching principle the CoE agreed to that all courses should have independent and external examination board members. In full respect to the review processes, the CoE recommends that the choice of nominees remains the prerogative of the EPB as the national regulator of the profession e.g. the EPB recommends 3 warrant holders trusted with the task and MCAST may choose the one needed. In addition the CoE recommends that such board members should hold the right academic qualifications at PhD level to have the right competence and experience in such a critical quality control process.
6. MCAST are also being recommended to include an external examiner from an external reputable academic institution in the examination review process of the PWQC.

Conclusion

The CoE remains committed to ensure a solution is found and ultimately reached as the organisation appreciates this is a pending item in high anticipation of resolve. However, the CoE also appreciates that the eligibility of the warrant should remain subject to the law and the regulator and therefore the solution should only reflect the high standards of the profession and free from any considerations or forms of pressure.

The covering letter by the MCAST Principal/CEO is explicitly stating, that the recommendations set forward by ASIIN in their revised evaluation report, are to be considered as closed. The CoE is of the understanding that ASIIN needs to review the documentation and deliverables presented by MCAST and it should be ASIIN that determines whether MCAST’s responses meet the requirements up to the required satisfaction.

Therefore, the CoE does not consider the PWQC as case closed at this stage, but based on ASIIN’s closing statement, there needs to be a mutual understanding between stakeholders involved prior to the course starting date. This approach is foreseen to be more beneficial to the engineering profession.