



**Y.Bhg. Datuk Engr. Professor Dr Ow Chee Sheng**  
*2005/2006 President*  
*The Institution of Engineers, Malaysia*

## IEM Presidential Address 2006

**IEM AND ITS MEGA ISSUES****Y. BHG. DATUK ENGR. PROFESSOR DR OW CHEE SHENG***B.E. Hons. (Cantebury), D.I.C., Ph.D (London), F.I.E.M., P.ENG.*

22 April 2006

**BACKGROUND**

It was exactly one year ago that I addressed honourable members at the AGM on a topic entitled 'Meeting Realistic Challenges and Maintaining Benchmarks'. In this subsequent address, I would like to revisit some of the more important issues identified and to review the various initiatives taken by the IEM Council in addressing some of those issues.

**INITIATIVES TAKEN BY IEM COUNCIL**

Since 1995, the IEM Council, recognising the challenges ahead, embarked on the preparation of an IEM Strategic Plan to formulate strategies to proactively move IEM to the fore-front to be the PREMIER professional organisation pivotal to Malaysia achieving Vision 2020. In October 2004 the IEM council held a brainstorming session focusing on four major areas which faced IEM then. The objectives of the brainstorming were to address the IEM's value to the general membership, IEM's leadership in meeting current competition, IEM's nimbleness and responsiveness to current issues and IEM's view on volunteerism, education, marketing and certification. The topics discussed included:

- Future Role of IEM as a membership driven society
- Empowerment and Delegation
- Council Effectiveness and Governance
- Products and Services to meet Membership/Society needs

On the future role of IEM as a membership-driven society, the questions addressed included how IEM fared in the past, its present performance and how it should fare in the near future. What must IEM do to ensure membership loyalty and hence its relevance. Is IEM comfortable in its present form permitting it to evolve and adapt to present day and future challenges.

To make the body more nimble and responsive to current issues, a certain degree of empowerment and delegation is needed. However, with such empowerment, there must also be in place a reliability centre scheme so as to ensure that such delegation of council's authority does not lead to lengthy litigious issues.

The Council should also address the issue of Council effectiveness and governance by the Council. Is Council and its Executive Committee into too much micromanaging whilst missing the mega issues facing IEM? Is IEM council aware of the onset of threats to IEM? Is there life after Presidency for our past president? Are we providing the right kind of products and services for the members so as to retain membership loyalty and to attract new members? Some of the more successful societies of the west do face the question of ageing membership and the loyalty of its current crop of members.

Volunteerism is very much alive amongst our membership both new and old. We need to address the role of our past presidents more effectively and to orientate new volunteers so that they know when and how to steer clear from issues of conflict of interest. Arising from the brainstorming, an action plan has been drawn out. I would now like to shed some light on how far we have gone with the action plan.

**MEGA ISSUES**

Numerous issues were addressed in the action plan. Amongst these perhaps there are 3 mega issues which I feel the institution should address albeit in the short or longer term. Every non-profit society faces external and internal threats. For IEM in particular, the internal threat sometimes overwhelms the external threat via differing views amongst Council and Executive Committee members with secretariat staff caught in the middle. Hence one mega issue which needed to be addressed would be to sell the idea to members that key positions within the IEM structure should seek the person instead of the present method

of the candidate seeking the post for whatever reasons. Some tools are in place for the membership to identify future leaders and yet at the same time train the younger members to become future leaders as well. We have a constitution which is sufficiently flexible for this to be implemented. As an immediate step, I have welcomed members to sit in on Excomm meetings to be introduced and to follow the proceedings.

IEM has with the BEM been conducting an annual examination for the working technical sub-professionals to acquire the basic qualifications for becoming a professional engineer. In this respect, the Engineering Council of UK (EC) examinations for which we adopted as a ready benchmark have served its useful purpose. It would be wise for IEM to develop its own local benchmark with the assistance of local Institution of High Learning of acceptable standards. This is a mega issue for Council to address in the longer term.

On the professional interview for corporate membership of the institution, there is a need to define the benchmark which corporate members needed to meet and not left it to be benchmarked against the experiences of the professional interviewer so appointed. A change in mindset is needed here. In this age of IT and computer power, can our practices of yesteryear stand up to the challenges of the present? The question of revisiting the professional qualifications benchmark is a third major issue to be resolved by this Council in the near future.

**THE ACTION PLAN**

An action plan was drawn up arising from the Council Brainstorming. This plan was finalised bearing in mind the eleven-point summary in the dialogue with Hon. Deputy Minister of Works, Y.B.Dato' Ir. Md Zin Bin Mohamed (M.I.E.M.) who addressed IEM Council at the brainstorming session. Some of these included;

- Hon. Prime Minister's new benchmark for the country to become a centre of excellence, glory and distinction;
- in principle, the government empowers professionals to certify competency (e.g. CFO issue);
- professional institutions need to pull up their socks to meet the competition abroad;
- cannot depend on domestic business alone. Window of opportunity is in globalisation and liberalisation, AFTA, ASEM;
- service and manufacturing sector to balance construction sector;
- to have engineers with broadband views and yet do not compromise professional standards;
- the formation of a Malaysian Academy of Engineering if needed.

I shall not highlight in detail the action plan here except to focus on the major areas which we are currently addressing. On the future role of IEM, the workshop identified that as a member-driven society we need to promote the image of engineers and to enhance fellowship amongst its members. It also aims to provide advice to the government on national policies and enhance business networking amongst its members thereby anchoring itself as the leading engineering institution in the country and in the region. The other efforts are towards revamping and expanding the IEM Training Centre and establishing IEM as a brand. On responsiveness to current issues, the timeline is shortened to less than 2 days with the establishment to position statement committees to research on the learned society's stand on various recurring issues which all of you are well aware of.

On empowerment and delegation by council to various committees and the secretariat, the workshop focused on removing ambiguities amongst them. It was further identified that a closer follow-up is to be made on those delegated to represent the institution



on external bodies and to equip them with sufficient knowledge of the issues so as to be able to project the correct views of the Institution.

It has always been felt that the IEM Council is too large to be effective and to execute proper governance. This also leads to a lack of time allocated for members of the Councils participation in the debate. There is also the emergence of newer societies which can compete with IEM and hence there is a dire need for IEM Council to be sufficiently nimble in addressing these new competitions.

On products and services to meet membership needs, we are clear on the following issues namely that we need to make more use of ICT for communications with our members via our existing website; to expand our existing list of specialist to include a list of distinguished lecturers; to benchmark quality CPD and PDP programmes; to jointly prepare guidelines with other stakeholders on the certification of training providers and a whole lot of other wish list. The crux of the problem here is we are not short of ideas only short of volunteers to champion each of them.

## STATUS OF THE ACTION PLAN IEM Membership and core business

Efforts towards branding of IEM as the society which represents all engineers in this country has been actively pursued throughout the year by our Graduate and Students Section visiting schools, commercial organisations and also by IEM branches throughout.

To increase participation of members, the IEM's Constitution and Bylaws had been amended to provide an avenue for students undertaking engineering degrees to be eligible for student membership of the Institution. Formerly only those undertaking engineering degree programmes recognised by the Institution are eligible for student membership. By allowing all engineering students to join the Institution as student members, IEM will be able to guide those who are not undertaking recognised degree programmes in the right path towards achieving Graduate Engineer status en-route to professional status.

Another effort by the Institution in the last session was to introduce a title for IEM members especially Graduate Members and I am pleased to announce that the introduction of the title "Engr." to all IEM Corporate and Graduate Members had been approved by the ROS on February 2006. In the meantime, IEM's representatives to committees in local authorities and agencies have regularly been reporting to IEM on action items arising from those meetings that were relevant to IEM. Nevertheless, continual monitoring to ensure that IEM representatives submit their feedback to IEM needed to be carried out by the relevant Standing Committee.

## Empowerment, Delegation and Volunteerism

An Orientation was carried out with new Council members on IEM's Quality Management System especially with respect to existing guidelines, procedures and the scope of their responsibilities and authorities empowered to each standing committee. Council members were briefed on the role played by the various Committees and their respective scope. As per the requirement laid down by Council, all Council Members are required to serve in two Standing Committees and therefore their understanding of the role they play and their responsibility was very important. A master-list of volunteers was introduced to be used for performance surveillance and reporting at Excomm or relevant Standing Committee.

To expedite the processing of non-corporate applications, Council empowered the Excomm to approve applications for admissions and/or transfers to Student and Graduate Members rather than wait for the quarterly Council meetings. This will expedite the approval processing and applicants would be able to enjoy the benefits of being a member of the Institution earlier.

Council will continue to look into continual improvement to ensure provision of speedy and efficient services to members.

## IEM's Responsiveness to Current Issues

Many Position Statement Committees consisting of volunteers from within and without IEM were set up, each dealing with specific issue which affected the profession or public and for which the learned society's stand is sought by others. Some of the position statements which were put forth in the institutions webpage together with the background paper provided invaluable information to those who wished to argue their case.

In addition, IEM has endeavoured in the past one year or so to respond to the press on current issues related to engineering within 1 day and had during the last session been receiving very good coverage and reception from the press and media.

## Product And Services To Meet Membership / Society Needs

IEM had embarked on a project to localise the IEM/BEM Graduate Examinations in early 2005. New examination structure, guidelines and syllabus on the IEM/BEM Graduate Examination had been drafted with the assistance of members who are from local Institutions of Higher Learning to benchmark the acceptable standards of basic qualifications to become a professional engineer. The new examination structure, guidelines and syllabus would be presented for discussion with BEM being a partner in the examination upon approval from Council.

As a Standards Writing Organisation, IEM is also looking into the setting up of Standards Writing Committees to assist in developing new standards related to engineering. IEM plans to work with SIRIM and the Department of Standards in this area. Currently IEM had completed drafting the Concrete Code of Practice, which will be submitted to the relevant authorities. In keeping with this objective, IEM requires more volunteers from the general membership for the good of the nation in general and the profession in particular.

Members may get an insight into the host of Position Papers already prepared and those that are in progress through the IEM website. The IEM website will also serve to ensure that updated guidelines, standards and relevant documents are disseminated to members and the public.

On the issue of the CPD - a requirement imposed by the BEM so as to be in line with international practices, IEM had endeavoured and succeeded in obtaining certification from BEM for all activities organised by the Institution to be allocated with CPD hours, a pursuit to provide opportunities for IEM members to accumulate the necessary CPD hours to satisfy BEM's requirement. Steps are still being undertaken to iron out initial teething problems in providing these services to the members.

From the above I can safely conclude that we have achieved more than one third of what we set out to do at the beginning of this session.

## Regional Initiatives

At the FEISEAP General Assembly organised by Institution of Engineers Indonesia last year, the need for a FEISEAP Benchmark for accreditation of engineering education was identified and it is hoped that this shall eventually address the education background requirement of engineers among the FEISEAP member countries. In conjunction with this meeting, a Tripartite meeting between PII, IES and IEM was held and IEM also signed a Resolution to Address the Issue of Cross Border Airborne Pollution and Haze Problem with PII (Persatuan Insinyur Indonesia) and IES (The Institution of Engineers, Singapore). The main objective of the resolution was to look for a short-term, mid-term and long-term solution for the Haze issue in this part of the world.

During last year's CAFEO23 held in Vientiane, LAO PDR, a Vientiane Resolution was signed amongst all the ten AFEO member institutions calling upon "The ASEAN Heads of States and the ASEAN Economic Ministers in their endeavour to realising the formation of AEC, should mobilise ASEAN stakeholders involved in engineering, integrated engineering and construction sectors, dealing with S.E.T. issues, in the promotion, development, implementation and the eventual operation and maintenance of ASEAN flag-ship projects such as those of SKRL, ASEAN Power Grid, ASEAN Gas pipeline, etc. This will then be the primary motivation of the ASEAN Member-countries in assisting ASEAN Engineers, the stakeholders of the said projects, in attaining the goal of "Enhancing ASEAN Co-operation in Engineering for Poverty Allevation and Sustainable Development" - the very theme of CAFEO 23". This Resolution is a follow-up to the previous Yangon Declaration signed amongst the same body of representatives at CAFEO 22 in Myanmar two years ago.

## CLOSURE

As we are also hosting the ASEAN Federation of Engineering Organisations meeting end of the year in conjunction with CAFEO 24, we do have our hands full and I can see that IEM shall have to lead the body for another year. I thank you for the opportunity to address you and to serve the Institution. ■