

Professional registration for technical staff working in data centres

Context

The UK data centre sector has undergone rapid growth and data centres are now widely recognised as the core infrastructure underpinning our digital economy. The industry has grown so fast that many of the processes and procedures around staff recruitment, retention and career progression taken for granted in more established industries have not yet had time to develop. As a result many data centre managers are now looking for nationally recognised frameworks and benchmarks to ensure they have the right skills and competencies in place to guarantee optimal performance of the data centres they operate.

It is equally important that existing skills and competencies held by individuals working in data centres are adequately recognised, and that technical staff within the sector are able to access routes to formal qualifications and other forms of career progression. techUK and the IET have completed a joint project to make the process of applying for professional qualifications (CEng, IEng, EngTech and ICTTech) less intimidating, without reducing rigour or compromising standards.

Previously the strong focus on postgraduate HE qualifications discouraged individuals who had developed their expertise within industry, working at the forefront of technology development and building their knowledge in a practical rather than an academic environment. The objective of this project is to provide a supported route to professional qualification for these people. Professional qualifications differ from, but complement, certifications provided by training providers such as CNET. techUK chose to work with the IET because it is the only organisation licensed by the Engineering Council to assess all four professional qualifications relevant to data centres.

What we did

The first task was a three way mapping exercise to align the Engineering Council's UK SPEC (Standards for Professional Engineering Competence) framework with both the SFIA (Skills Framework for the Information Age) and the job descriptions/tasks of those working in data centres. This allowed the IET to develop a competence model specific to data centres. The purpose of the exercise was to allow those working in the data centre sector to identify how the responsibilities, competencies and roles that they were familiar with mapped onto formal skills frameworks and professional standards. This way, individuals and their managers could use their job descriptions to identify the level of professional qualification that would be most appropriate for them before starting the Professional Registration process.

A successful pilot phase validated the mapping exercise, demonstrated that there was appetite in the sector for professional registration and that technical staff working in data centres were "registerable". A second pilot followed to build a bespoke registration system for data centre operators. This second pilot has now been completed and the registration process is open for business, with around 100 individuals currently in the pipeline.

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Professional Qualifications: Why bother?

HR professionals

Improved status as an employer: With an acute shortage of technical skills in the marketplace, data centre operators need to work harder and harder to attract and retain their technical staff. One way to do this is to support employees in their education and training through a structured process of continuing professional development. Companies providing this kind of support are naturally more attractive as employers for ambitious candidates who wish to develop their capabilities. Offering a route through which these skills can be formally recognised demonstrates that technical staff will be appropriately valued and rewarded.

Improved customer confidence: Employing professionally registered staff helps to increase customer confidence: customers with mission-critical data will want to be sure that those managing the supporting infrastructure are appropriately qualified. Operators with a high percentage of professionally registered technical staff are therefore in a better position to win contracts.

A more structured recruitment process: At the same time, making use of an established framework of roles and responsibilities for the data centre industry helps operators to ensure that the process of selecting and recruiting new staff is better defined. In turn this increases the likelihood of successful outcomes.

Technical staff working in data centres

Evidence of commitment to professional standards: Professional registration is an important milestone for any engineer or technician and demonstrates a genuine commitment to professional standards.

Improved career prospects and employability: Professional registration demonstrates a commitment to developing and maintaining competence to peers and employees and a commitment to enhancing knowledge and skills to keep up with technological developments.

Evidence of expertise: Registration establishes that individuals have dedicated significant time over a number of years and have acquired a proven level of knowledge, understanding and competence.

Higher earning potential: The Engineering Council's [2013 survey of professionally registered engineers and technicians](#) revealed that holders of EngTech, IEng, CEng or ICTTech enjoyed pay increases above the national average throughout the recession and that these individuals are likely to benefit from higher earnings for their entire working lives.

International recognition: Professional registration is internationally recognised. According to the Engineering Council's website "The [UK Standard for Professional Engineering Competence \(UK-SPEC\)](#), and [ICTTech, The Standard](#), against which individuals are assessed for EngTech, ICTTech, IEng or CEng registration, is well respected across the world. The Engineering Council also works with many international engineering organisations to promote recognition of the standard and titles overseas. This helps to facilitate the international mobility of professionally registered engineers and technicians."

In addition to the benefits above, the Engineering Council lists other advantages including enhanced status leading to higher self-esteem, greater influence within own organisation and industry and recognition as a counter-signatory.