

Introducing: A New British Master of Engineering Degree

Submitted by Peter Hodson

In the United Kingdom, the engineering profession, the government and universities went through a period of considerable debate and critical self-examination in the early 1980s about the appropriate type and nature of post-secondary education which should be required of a Chartered Engineer.

The outcome of this was an agreement to permit some of the best students to follow a course of four year's duration (rather than the normal three year's duration for a Bachelors degree) which would give them a qualification which had the title of "Master", even though this qualification had the status of a first, or undergraduate, degree.

At the University of Birmingham, the Bachelor of Engineering and Master of Engineering Degrees are taught in common during their first two years, and students are admitted to this single, combined program of study. At the end of the second year of study, the examination results are used to determine which students should be permitted to proceed on the four-year program and which should be required to proceed on the three-year program. Students selected as qualified to proceed on the four-year program may choose to proceed on the BEng instead.

A fundamental qualification for being permitted to proceed on the MEng is performance at first-class or upper second-class level in the examinations at the end of the second year.

There is, therefore, at entry, a single standard of entrance requirements for the two programs. Currently approximately 11 percent of the second year pro-

ceed on an MEng program; it is the intention of the Birmingham faculty that this should increase to approximately 20 percent, but it will take some time for a general realization of the advantages of these degrees to result in improved recruitment.

A complication is the existence of a degree of Master of Engineering and Management. This is a four-year program with a separate entry from the other programs in the same department (Mechanical Engineering). Students with significantly higher A-level point scores at entry may be admitted to this program. Students failing to perform at a first or upper second class level during their first and second years are required to transfer out of this program into the Single Honors program (BEng/MEng) in Mechanical Engineering.

The postgraduate Masters degrees in the faculty of engineering have the titles of MSc(Eng) for the one-year taught Masters program and MPhil(Eng) for the one- to two-year research program below the PhD.

Birmingham's position on the BEng/MEng degrees is the model recommended by the engineering profession and is the one adopted, or being adopted, in most other UK universities. However, there are still significant variations between different universities, particularly in nomenclature.

There is no longer a BSc degree in engineering at Birmingham; it has, effectively, been renamed the Bachelor of Engineering. Most universities have made a similar change; some are calling the new degree a BSc(Eng). The content of the

third and fourth years of the MEng program typically consists of all of the material given in the third year of the Bachelors program, plus a substantial, industrially-linked project and additional specialist material at a higher level. □

(Peter Hodson is Senior Assistant Registrar at the University of Birmingham in England. Birmingham was founded in 1900 and has about 7,500 undergraduate students, 2,000 postgraduate students, and faculty, research, technical and administrative staffs of about 3,000 persons. It is located only two miles from the center of Birmingham, a city known as the "powerhouse" of England's Industrial Revolution, which boasts more miles of canal than Venice).