I
n 2003, the Structural Engineering Certification Board (SECB) was established with a simple mission with three straightforward goals: Promote structural engineering licensure (SE) in all jurisdictions; determine the unique and additional qualities (beyond a professional engineering license) necessary to practice structural engineering; and provide the engineering profession, the public, and other stakeholders with a way to identify engineers with these unique and additional qualifications. Originally formed through a group of past presidents of the National Council of Structural Engineers Associations (NCSEA) as an interim step towards SE licensure, SECB eventually became a financially stable organization with certificate holders in all 50 states and a roster of more than 1,200 certified structural engineers. While states would not initially recognize this new SECB certification, the vision was to create momentum within the structural engineering community for higher credentialling that would serve as a model or bridge for SE licensure adoption in more states.

Now, almost 20 years later, the time has come for the profession to reaffirm its focus on our end goal of nationwide SE licensure. Starting a new chapter is always challenging, as it begins by ending one. But the first chapter, SECB’s work, has helped us figure out where we want to go—and now is the time to go there. In September of 2021, the SECB governing board, in conjunction with the governing boards of NCSEA, the Structural Engineering Institute (SEI), the Coalition of American Structural Engineers (CASE), and the Structural Engineering Licensure Coalition (SELC) agreed that the need for the interim step no longer exists and that it is now time for our profession to focus solely on a direct path toward SE licensing. SECB will therefore be closing its doors effective March 31, 2022, coinciding with the expiration of all current dues. Although its progress has been slower than desired, SECB has had some success in reaching its goals. Its initial efforts—starting with its very creation—brought the SE licensure into broader awareness within the profession. Position papers, webinars, and articles brought the issue into focus and spurred a lively debate. Increased inclusion of the thoughts and opinions of practicing structural engineers allowed SECB to define the benefits of an SE designation better and refine its certification criteria.

Significantly, SECB was instrumental in establishing the national SE exam. After first considering a suggested minimum curriculum for structural engineering degrees, the board decided instead to specify any accredited engineering degree in conjunction with passing a 16-hour structural engineering exam, to be taken by candidates after passing their fundamentals of engineering (FE) and principles and practice (PE) exams. This accommodated the variety of widely available degree programs and, not coincidentally, those represented by engineers already practicing.

But at the time, only the state engineering boards in California, Washington, and Illinois offered a 16-hour structural engineering exam, which made the testing requirement problematic. Creating a new exam was beyond the resources of SECB—not to mention its desired timeframe—so the board looked to other organizations for assistance. The UK-based Institution of Structural Engineers, whose membership exams are rigorous and demanding, was consulted with the idea of authorizing SECB to administer the IStructE exams.