

Academic Services

QME Process Sheet (QPS41)

Outline of PSRBs and types of engagement

WHAT ARE PROFESSIONAL, STATUTORY AND REGULATORY BODIES?

PSRB is an umbrella term for a very diverse group of bodies, including a large number of professional bodies, regulators and those with statutory authority over a profession or group of professionals. PSRBs engage with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and other providers of higher education at regulatory, representative and promotional levels. Some bodies have a prescribed statutory or regulatory responsibility to accredit higher educational programmes and determine standards.

Professional bodies interact with HEIs in a number of ways, from low-level involvement such as offering student membership to a very high level of involvement if the body is a statutory regulator with a responsibility to participate in setting standards and participating in quality assurance. There are a wide cross-section of PSRBs providing membership services, holding registers of professionals, licensing accreditation, and undertaking accreditation, validation, and recognition of programmes of study. UWE engages PSRBs at all these levels.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AND REGULATORY BODIES

Certain professionals are governed by both a professional and a regulatory body. The distinction is important to understand in order to ascertain the appropriate tone of communication with them. The HEBRG¹ makes the following distinction:

A general distinction may be drawn between professional bodies and regulatory bodies, although there may be some overlap between the two. **Professional bodies** often act in the interest of an individual profession to promote and support professionals by being a membership organisation. They are usually independent of government and control entry to a specific profession, ensuring that members meet the body's standards. A professional body may provide services to members without regulating them, such as providing continuing professional development (CPD), ensuring that courses broadly cover a core curriculum rather than formally accrediting courses and/or holding lists of providers. Many professional bodies are involved in professional certification and sometimes membership is synonymous with certification.

A regulatory body acts in the public interest, regulating professional activity or individual professionals. Many statutory bodies or regulators have powers mandated by Parliament and protect the public interest by guaranteeing that the professional title is a sufficient measure of technical and ethical competence, agreeing minimum standards, and often minimum requirements for CPD, and holding a single register of practitioners who meet standards of training and practice. Membership may be mandatory, for example, if there is a licence to practise requirement. Their authority

¹ Higher Education Better Regulation Group - Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies: an exploration of their engagement with higher education
http://www.hebetterregulation.ac.uk/OurWork/Documents/HEBRG_PSRB%20report_FINAL.pdf

might restrict the use of protected titles to registrants and individuals may be removed from the register if fitness to practice is found to be impaired. Many regulatory bodies develop and promote a core curriculum for the profession and accredit courses as a means of regulating qualifications and training.

For professions regulated by statute, only graduates of accredited courses are able to practise. Regulatory bodies act on public complaints and publish records of disciplinary procedures. Some regulatory bodies only regulate a title. For example, by statute, individuals using the title of Architect must be registered with the Architects Registration Board (ARB), but the ARB does not regulate the activity of designing and erecting a building.

TYPES OF INTERACTIONS WITH PSRBs IN HIGHER EDUCATION

PSRBs refer to their engagement with HEIs via a number of different terms. Essentially however, the main roles of PSRBs are the monitoring and review of academic provision through accreditation, the approval or recognition of courses. There are many types of accreditation by PSRBs across the HE sector, and accreditation processes vary widely. Accreditation may be essential, a legal requirement, or it may be considered beneficial in improving a student's employability. Accreditation may allow graduates to practise as a professional in their field, grant exemption from all or part of professional exams, or provide entry to membership of a professional association or learned society. However, accreditation or recognition does not always provide professional status, membership or exemption. The accreditation process may involve a series of formal, on-site visits to an institution or department, or it may operate more informally, by self-evaluation, submission of documentation, correspondence, or a combination of the above. Internal monitoring and review events may be combined with PSRB accreditation events in order to streamline internal processes for HEIs and reduce the burden on staff. Further information on the relationship between PSRBs and HEIs can be found via the [Higher Education Better Regulation Group](#).

A brief description² of the various relationships a programme and an HEI can have is given below. It is important to note however different PSRBs can mean different things with regards to the terms below. It is always important to check the PSRBs guidance documentation to ascertain what level of involvement and engagement is required.

- **Accreditation**

The term 'professional accreditation' covers all the means by which PSRBs officially approve, monitor and review relevant programmes of study. In some areas this may involve a series of regular formal visits to the department concerned whilst in other areas the interactions may be less regular, more informal or largely conducted through correspondence.

- **Exemption**

The term 'exemption' describes the process by which the PSRB reaches a judgement that successful completion of a programme of study enables exemption from that PSRB's requirements.

- **Recognition**

The term 'recognition' describes the process by which the PSRB reaches a judgement that a programme of study achieves the professional body's aims.

² Used with permission from Manchester Metropolitan University
http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/psrb_icp.pdf

- **Prescription**
The term 'prescription' describes the process by which the PSRB agrees that a particular qualification or award of the university meets the criteria of an award, or set of awards, that allow the holder to be registered as a practitioner subject to and protected by Statutory Regulation.
- **Validation**
The term 'validation' describes the process by which the PSRB reaches a judgement on the suitability of a programme of study to be recognised or continue to be recognised as meeting the necessary academic and professional standards for the award of a degree.
- **Licence to Practise**
The term 'licence to practise' describes the process by which authority is conferred by a PSRB to carry out professional work in the sphere regulated by that PSRB.

It should be noted (as discussed by the Higher Education Better Regulation Group) – “several institutions use the term ‘accreditation’ to represent a wide range of activities that are not limited to formal accreditation visits or events. Generally, *accreditation* may be used as an umbrella term to signify any of the following: qualified status, endorsement, exam exemption, (formal) accreditation, provision of curricular material, details of membership eligibility and other partnership activities between HEIs and PSRBs. They are rarely used solely for the purpose of registering the details of accreditation in the strictest sense”.

This guidance will use the term “accreditation” to be an umbrella term for all the above for ease of use but it is important when liaising with a PSRB to use the appropriate term for that PSRB.

THE BENEFITS OF PSRB ENGAGEMENT

The importance of enhancing student’s employability via maximising professional body accreditation has been identified as one of the key themes via VCEG’s Planning process (*VC report to Academic Board April 2011*, Academic Board Paper AB11-04-02). The Higher Education Better Regulation Group³ discusses the benefit of PSRB engagement for universities and students:

For students, PSRBs provide access to professions through membership; industry contacts; links to employers and access to both initial and continuing professional development (CPD). Completion of accredited or recognised programmes may provide a fast-track route to qualified or chartered status or to a professional title.

For Universities, PSRBs provide vital external points of reference and help to support their graduate employability aims and maintain or strengthen their reputation. Acting in the public interest, PSRBs licence providers, assure statutory standards and regulate entry to professions. PSRBs may set standards nationally or internationally, promoting consistency of standards and codes of practice and conduct.

³ Higher Education Better Regulation Group – Plain English Statement on PSRBs - <http://www.hebetterregulation.ac.uk/OurWork/Documents/Plain%20English%20statement%20on%20PSRBs.pdf>