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| ***MANAGEMENT  OF PROFESSIONAL, STATUTORY AND REGULATORY BODY RELATIONSHIPS*** | |
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| **1** | **Introduction** |
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|  | The University has a long tradition of offering vocational, professionally accredited courses and such courses are increasingly popular with applicants because of the direct link to employment.  As a consequence recruitment is strong and it is usually possible to fill available places with well-qualified and highly motivated students.  This trend will be further strengthened by the introduction of bursaries for a number of health-related courses.  It is clearly in the University’s interests to maintain and, where possible, further develop this suite of courses and critical to on-going success in this area is the accreditation of courses by relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs).  The University has links with a wide range of PSRBs and the manner in which these bodies undertake accreditation activities varies between subjects.  This paper sets out some key strategies for successful development and maintenance of PSRB relations and is based on the University’s experience of such engagements over a number of years. |
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| **2** | **General Strategies for Success** |
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|  | The approach taken in developing a relationship with a PSRB needs to be tailored to ensure that the University and students on relevant courses gain the maximum advantage from any recognition or accreditation opportunities.  *General*   * Most PSRBs publish detailed guidance notes and subject staff must ensure that they are completely familiar with PSRB requirements for accreditation, in particular in relation to curriculum and resources. * Subjects should undertake a critical, detailed and realistic assessment of the extent to which they meet PSRB requirements and should identify any shortcomings to School, Faculty or University management at an early stage so that appropriate decisions can be made and remedial action agreed. * Where possible joint validation / revalidation / accreditation arrangements should be developed.  In general where such arrangements exist PSRBs do not conduct separate additional visits and the overall accreditation process is more efficient.  Subjects may find it helpful to review current arrangements in consultation with the Academic Office to see if there is scope for development in this area. * Where joint validation arrangements cannot be developed and separate accreditation visits are necessary the Quality Management and Audit Unit will provide central support and guidance if Faculties consider this would be helpful.  In particular the Unit can assist with visit scheduling, agendas for meetings, review of pre-visit documentation and identification of areas where additional information may be required.  It is anticipated that administrative/clerical support would also be available from the associated Faculty. * If a joint validation agreement cannot be developed other ways of developing a close relationship with the PSRB should be considered.  Wherever possible the University should seek to be represented on such bodies since this allows for a useful input to discussions of PSRB policies and procedures.  Staff elected to PSRBs should remember they are there in the first instance to represent the views of the Higher Education sector, including the University.  In general it is most helpful to be a member of the Education (Sub-) Committee of the PSRB as this allows for the subject to be kept up to date on the arrangements for accreditation and any changes to PSRB requirements. * Recent experience has shown that some external bodies are much less flexible than others in terms of the judgements that they can make at the end of a visit.  Some PSRBs will not accredit a new course until a complete cohort has passed through the course.  Such constraints on judgements must be recognised by the University at an early stage and particular care must be taken in the wording of information provided to applicants to ensure that the University is not suggesting that full accreditation has been achieved when this is not the case. * Visits by, or other contacts with, PSRBs should never be used to complain about the University or as a means of exerting pressure for additional resources.  This is both discourteous to visitors and undermining of the University’s and the subject’s standing.  The University has a resource planning process which is the appropriate mechanism to follow if more resources are required. * In general all correspondence with PSRBs should be signed by the Dean or Associate Dean of Faculty.   ***Accreditation without Visit***  Some professional bodies offer forms of accreditation or recognition which do not involve a visit from the organisation, but which are based on the submission of specified documentation.  For example accountancy courses can secure exemptions from professional examinations for their students without a visit but on production of curricular and assessment information.  In such cases maintenance of relations with the professional bodies can be achieved through familiarity with published requirements and active engagement with local and national branches of the organisation.  *Accreditation Visits*   * Where a PSRB visit to accredit/reaccredit a University programme is planned, the PVC (Teaching and Learning) should be informed.  The visit agenda should be provided along with any guidance notes issued by the PSRB.  The agenda should include a meeting with the relevant PVC(s), who may wish to review any evidence to be provided in advance of the visit.  It is important that PSRBs are aware that the University takes an active interest and is supportive of its accredited provision and the involvement of senior management in the process is an effective way to signal this.   There are a number of key elements in achieving a successful visit.  Success in this context means that the objective(s) set by the University for the visit have been achieved.   * Establish lead in time for the visit that will be sufficient for satisfactory preparations to be completed. It is key to identify a core group of staff who will take preparations forward, to involve them and provide them with all background documentation from the outset.  A corporate approach to the preparations is usually most effective. This may mean the involvement of staff with relevant experience who are not directly associated with the programme in question. A formal means of informing the core group of the outcomes from preparatory meetings should be established. * Define the required outcome – usually quite easy to do – accreditation or reaccredidation without a long list of conditions and for the longest possible period, identify any aspects of current provision which would put that outcome at risk and put in place appropriate risk management strategies. * In some cases a visit by a PSRB may provide a useful opportunity to discuss recent or planned policy shifts by the visiting body and this should not be neglected.  Where changes to validation or revalidation arrangements or other quality processes are to be discussed staff from the Academic Office and the Quality Management and Audit Unit should be involved. * Advance documentation sent to the PSRB should meet the requirements of the body for that documentation (these are usually set out quite clearly in guidance notes) and should be presented to a high standard with appropriate use of the University’s corporate image. * A visit programme should be developed and if necessary agreed with the visiting body in advance. * All staff to be involved in the visit should receive adequate briefing and should be quite clear about their role. * Any resources/locations to be visited should be checked in advance to ensure that equipment is working, health and safety considerations are being observed and technical or other staff are on hand to answer questions. * If visitors are going to an off-campus location they should be escorted by a member of University staff who should effect the necessary introductions.  Staff at the location being visited should be fully briefed in advance. * If documentary evidence is required during the visit this should be carefully selected to ensure that it is relevant and addressed the necessary areas identified in PSRB guidelines, checked thoroughly in advance and well presented in a manner which ensures it is accessible to the visiting group.  Visiting teams have limited time at their disposal and will appreciate clearly indexed papers. * The Quality Management and Audit Unit will be happy to assist with visit preparation and it would be helpful if details of forthcoming visits could be provided at an early stage.   ***Visit Follow-up***   * Any follow-up evidence or comments requested should be provided within the timescale set and should be checked against previous submissions to ensure consistency in the information provided. * The PSRB report should be sent to the PVC (Teaching and Learning) with a response/action plan which has been approved by the relevant Faculty Committee.  The Teaching and Learning Committee will receive reports and Faculty responses/ action plans for consideration. * Faculties should ensure that action on issues raised in PSRB reports is monitored and reported through appropriate Faculty committee structures and a record of such action should be included in Annual Subject monitoring reports. |