

# Research Series

**Professional Associations and**  
**Registration Bodies: Implications**  
**for Universities and Students in**  
**Queensland**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background

In 1995, prior to the release of the HEC report, concern was expressed to TEPA regarding the requirements imposed on universities by professional associations and registration bodies. The central issue at the time was that in order to fulfil curriculum guidelines established by professional associations and registration bodies, universities may set course prerequisites which would not otherwise be necessary. In turn, to meet the subject prerequisites for entry to some university courses, students were forced as early as Year 10 to choose a narrow combination of subjects for Years 11 and 12. This practice potentially limits the options for an alternative career or further study.

Peak professional associations influence curriculum content and course structure through the development of accreditation procedures and guidelines. Governments recognise the part these organisations have to play through the registration of some professional fields, in particular the health-related professions, and in the inclusion of representatives of peak professional associations on the Boards of registration bodies.

Interaction between these groups is therefore a practical necessity, however it also bears substantial potential for conflict between the autonomy of the university and the interests of professional bodies.

As one of the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority's (TEPA) objectives is to monitor tertiary entrance policies, issues and procedures, part of its responsibility is to keep under review practices which may impact on Queensland secondary students and undergraduate studies. In the climate outline above, the TEPA Strategic Plan for the 1996—1998 triennium stipulated that the Research Team would identify the implications of the requirements and practices of professional associations and registration bodies on tertiary institutions and their programs; and prepare a report and recommendations for the Authority regarding the implications for the tertiary sector *vis-à-vis* subject choices etc (TEPA Strategic Plan 1996—1998).

Three main areas for investigation were established:

1. Whether and to what extent professional associations and registration bodies have a role in the accreditation of university courses.
2. Whether and to what extent professional associations and registration bodies influence subject prerequisites for entry to university courses.
3. Whether graduates are eligible, without undertaking further study, for membership of a relevant professional association; and/or registration to practise in the profession for which they have studied.

## **Findings**

Professional associations and registration bodies perform three main functions:

- Registration of individuals to practise within a particular profession;
- Accreditation of professional education courses;
- Promotion of a particular profession.

Professional associations and registration bodies have different roles in these functions, due to the nature of the organisations.

### **Accreditation functions of registration bodies**

Registration bodies have a legislated responsibility for the accreditation of university and TAFE courses. This responsibility is exercised at the discretion of the registration body, with the result that practices differed across registration bodies. Six registration bodies involved in the research accepted the recommendations of independent accreditation committees, while the remaining four had an active accreditation process within the organisation.

Accreditation functions of registration bodies fell into four broad categories:

1. Where the accreditation function is conducted by national committees representing the registration bodies themselves.
2. Where federal legislation has established national councils.
3. Registration bodies choose to accept the findings of accreditation processes conducted by peak professional associations.
4. Where registration bodies have an active accreditation process

It should be noted that peak professional associations usually have a representative on the Registration Board, as prescribed in the relevant legislation.

### **Professional associations and registration**

Interpretation of 'accreditation' varied between individual professional associations. In addition to the incomplete nature of much of the information supplied as part of the research, these differences in interpretation made it impossible in some cases to determine whether the accreditation role claimed by some organisations involved any review of university courses at all.

Most often 'accreditation' referred to a formal external review process involving assessment of the quality of courses or schools, and associated resources. Peak professional bodies were most likely to refer to accreditation in this sense.

Some professional associations have an accreditation process only insofar as it defines acceptability of graduates for membership of the association. Where this is the case it is likely that the professional associations have little influence over the structure of university courses.

Only four professional associations supplied detailed information regarding accreditation processes and guidelines provided to universities. For this reason it was possible neither to make a comparison between professional fields regarding the level of influence of professional associations over the course content and structure of university degrees, nor to draw any conclusions about these issues in general based on the information provided.

### **Prerequisites for tertiary study**

The examination of course prerequisites by field did not show a marked relationship between subject prerequisites for specific courses and areas where professional associations or registration bodies were active. However, it was apparent that in only a very small number of courses were prerequisites so prescriptive that students are forced to choose a specific range of subjects.

### **Impact on graduates**

It is likely that students' employment prospects influence the decisions made regarding university courses. For this reason, graduate eligibility for membership of professional associations and/or registration to practise in the profession for which they have studied, without undertaking further study, was investigated as part of the research.

Registration bodies commonly require graduates to complete a period of practical experience or supervised practice prior to full registration. During a prescribed period, graduates are most often employed within the profession. Others may undertake relevant employment to obtain certain competencies. In some circumstances this employment may be outside the field in which the graduate will eventually seek registration.

Membership of professional associations is available to initial graduates, but not usually with full member status until further study or experience has been completed. It should be noted however, that membership of professional associations is not usually compulsory in order to work within a profession, although it may be necessary for professional advancement.

In one or two areas (notably Psychology and Accounting) graduates are required to undertake what would be regarded as substantial postgraduate study and or work experience. It appears that in no case does it prevent employment.

### **Recommendations**

1. TEPA provide advice to the universities which participate in QTAC Ltd that it is still extremely difficult to obtain clear and accurate information regarding minimum qualification levels required for practice and/or membership of professional associations in some fields. This advice should include a recommendation to the universities that they examine the quality of information which is currently available to students in their own university

2. Further research in this area would require TEPA to invest considerable time and capital and is unlikely to yield more conclusive results in the near future. Unless universities and professional bodies substantially improve the transparency of their processes in this area, TEPA should only maintain a watching brief in relation to professional bodies.
3. Ongoing review and maintenance of the database of information regarding professional associations and registration bodies would be time consuming and costly, and is likely to be of little benefit. The existing database should be kept on file at the TEPA offices.

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# 1: INTRODUCTION

## The nature of professionalism

The attributes required before an occupation can be accorded professional status have been debated for much of this century (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1964; Etzioni, 1969; Goode, 1969). In the past, the professional fields included primarily "those of ancient lineage which by common consent are called the professions, with law and medicine among the foremost" (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, p.3). Even in their 1933 study, when Carr-Saunders and Wilson categorised the professional fields, traditional boundaries between the professions and other occupations were becoming less distinct. They noted: "...other vocations, which though more recently and less firmly established, are usually granted professional rank (for example, architecture, engineering and accountancy)" (ibid). As the current emphasis on further study and qualifications for the workforce increases, it is likely that this trend will continue, and new occupations will emerge which will be classified as professions.

The Australian Council of Professions defines a profession as:

"..a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards and uphold themselves to, and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to exercise this knowledge and these skills in the interest of others". (Australian Council of Professions, AGM, 1997)

It follows that professional associations are those organisations formed to represent practitioners of a particular profession. Professional associations may be established for a variety of reasons. Prominent among them are the advancement of knowledge in the field, the advancement of the profession itself, promotion of professionalism among practitioners, and the protection of consumers (i.e. self-regulation). Professional bodies may set standards of academic qualification for graduates and guidelines for the acceptability of tertiary courses, may require continuing professional development and adherence to a code of ethics, and will usually have procedures for disciplining members who do not maintain established professional standards.

## Registration bodies

Registration bodies are created as an administrative measure through legislative provision of individual State governments. The intention of governments in forming registration bodies is, in all cases, to protect the consumer from loss or exploitation caused by the actions of unscrupulous practitioners or individuals falsely claiming to be practitioners in a particular field.

All registration bodies are required to keep a register of all persons entitled to practise the relevant profession within that state. (Recent agreements between states provide mutual recognition for practitioners within any given field throughout Australia and, in some cases, in New Zealand as well). The register is available for public scrutiny, and is published at prescribed intervals. Registration bodies have power under their enabling legislation to discipline practitioners, including the ability to cancel registration. In addition, registering bodies have the power under legislation to determine the appropriate level of qualifications for practice.

## **Professional associations, registering bodies and the tertiary sector**

Universities are autonomous institutions, however they are accountable to the public for successful outcomes from their courses. In the increasingly competitive tertiary sector, they are also concerned with attracting students and with the quality of those students. Registration bodies and many professional associations are concerned with ensuring high standards in their field, and this can depend on appropriate education and training. Good professional education is expected by the public; in particular, students expect to receive an education which will fit them for professional practice in their chosen field.

Universities recognise that graduates will in many cases seek registration or membership of professional associations in a particular field. In addition, it can only be considered beneficial to a profession or field of study when all those involved work together for the benefit of knowledge and practice. This theory underpins the desire of professional associations to exert some influence over curriculum content and course structure through the development of accreditation procedures and guidelines. Government recognition of the role these organisations play through the registration of some professional fields, in particular the health-related professions, and in the inclusion of representatives of peak professional associations on the Boards of registration bodies.

Interaction between these groups is therefore a practical necessity. However it also bears substantial potential for conflict between the autonomy of the university and the interests of professional bodies.

However, questions of autonomy are involved for universities. In some cases concern has been raised with respect to academic rigour and independence, as well as concern that market forces are driving changes to course content to the detriment of the broader education of students. It has been argued that in order to appease professional and registration bodies and attract students, it was necessary for universities to sacrifice their autonomy.

## Background

In the period leading up to the development of the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority (TEPA) Strategic Plan 1996—1998, higher education institutions had expressed concerns at a national level about institutional autonomy in relation to professional associations and registration bodies (Higher Education Council, 1996). There had been ongoing discussion in the education and general communities regarding the appropriate content, structure and length of undergraduate degree courses (Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1990; Anderson, 1990; Rosenman, 1996). In 1990, the Higher Education Council (HEC) expressed concern regarding the influence of professional associations and registration bodies over university degree courses:

Academics have often yielded to the demands from professional bodies about course structures and their discipline content, motivated by a justifiable concern that their students would be disadvantaged relative to others if the graduates were not recognised by the relevant bodies. ...The Council is wary, however, of the seeming proliferation of professional bodies which have been able to take it upon themselves to accredit courses and, in a few cases, to threaten institutions that their graduates will not be registered to practise the profession (NBEET 1990, p. 33-34).

In 1996, the HEC published *Professional Education and Credentialism*, a report commissioned in 1995 by the then Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training. The investigation carried out by the HEC involved two research projects, submissions from professional bodies and universities, questionnaires and a consultation process. The scope of the resulting report was broader than that of the current study, incorporating an examination of funding arrangements in professional education.

The Council found that relationships between the universities and professional bodies are extremely complex and vary significantly between professional fields. In addition, it was concluded that:

- Professional associations and registration bodies are heavily involved in university course approvals and review, however they did not find evidence of unreasonable demands which might impact on institutional autonomy.
- The academic quality of professional education courses is primarily secured by the internal quality assurance processes of the universities, and not by the accreditation processes used in the various professions.

In 1995, prior to the release of the HEC report, concern was expressed to TEPA regarding the requirements imposed on universities by professional associations and registration bodies. The issues raised centred around the possibility that the requirements for accreditation of university courses by professional associations and registration bodies had the potential to have a significant backwash effect on Queensland secondary students. The main

issue at the time was that, in order to fulfil curriculum guidelines established by professional associations and registration bodies, universities may set course prerequisites which would not otherwise be imposed. In turn, to meet the subject prerequisites for entry to some university courses, students were forced as early as Year 10 to choose a narrow combination of subjects for Years 11 and 12. This practice may potentially limit the options for the pursuit of an alternative career or further study should students miss out on a place in the course of their choice, or change their minds before finishing their senior studies.

In this climate, the TEPA Strategic Plan for the 1996—1998 triennium stipulated that the Research Team would identify the implications of the requirements and practices of professional associations and registration bodies on tertiary institutions and their programs; and prepare a report and recommendations for the Authority regarding the implications for the tertiary sector *vis-à-vis* subject choices, etc. (TEPA Strategic Plan 1996—1998).

### **Role of the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority (TEPA)**

The Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority (TEPA) is a Queensland statutory authority which oversees the transition of students from Year 12 to tertiary education. TEPA has specific legislated responsibilities, including a responsibility to confer and collaborate with universities, school systems, schools, the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (BSSSS), the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd (QTAC), Education Queensland (EQ), the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (BTR) and the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations (DETIR) (TAFE Qld) (*Education (Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority) Act 1990*). This is achieved in various ways, including research and consultation with these groups, informal interactions with relevant groups, and through TEPA's Advisory Council and the Authority itself, both of which are representative of all stakeholders.

#### **Aims of the study**

It was agreed that research should be undertaken into the practices and requirements of professional associations and registration bodies within Queensland, with particular reference to the impact of these on Queensland secondary students.

The aims of the study were twofold:

1. Identify and map the requirements and practices of professional associations and registration bodies with respect to university course requirements and university graduates.
2. Identify the implications of these requirements with respect to senior school students in Queensland.

## 2: THE STUDY

### Identification of relevant organisations

The TEPA Strategic Plan (1996—1998) refers to the “requirements and practices of professional associations and registration bodies”. In determining the limits of the study which was to be undertaken, it was necessary to select an appropriate definition for each of these terms and identify those suitable for inclusion in the study. In the case of registration bodies, this was a simple matter; however the definition of a professional association proved more difficult due to the number and range of organisations which may call themselves “professional associations”. Many are very small, with little or no influence; others have aims and functions which are outside the parameters described by academics such as Carr-Saunders & Wilson (1964). As TEPA is concerned with issues which affect the transition of all students from Year 12 to tertiary study rather than strictly defining the attributes required by a professional association, a broad view of the term was adopted for the purposes of the investigation.

*Queensland Tertiary Courses (QTC) 1999* (QTAC, 1998) is a comprehensive publication issued free of charge to all Year 12 students. QTAC administers all applications for undergraduate places in Queensland universities. As a result, the book is used as a reference by all students seeking a university place in Queensland and was therefore chosen as the main resource for the compilation of a list of professional associations and registration bodies relevant to universities and intending university students in Queensland.

It was therefore decided to include all organisations listed in *Queensland Tertiary Courses 1999 (QTC 1999)*. *Queensland Tertiary Courses* is published annually by QTAC on behalf of all Queensland universities, TAFE, and a small number of interstate universities and colleges. It lists each of the courses available by institution and major area of study. A brief description of each course is included, along with the professional associations and registration bodies which graduates are eligible to join.

Information concerning professional associations and registration bodies, including contact details, was also obtained from, and cross-referenced with, the *Directory of Australian Associations*, enabling the compilation of the most accurate and up-to-date list of professional associations and registration bodies possible.

### Contacting professional associations and registration bodies

The first stage of the study involved obtaining data outlining the requirements and practices of professional associations and registration bodies with respect to universities and graduates, and compiling it in a database to allow the comprehensive mapping required.

Professional associations and registration bodies cited by universities in the *QTC 1999* handbook were contacted by mail and asked to provide information regarding the academic and/or other requirements for membership of the association and the level of involvement in accreditation and/or development of university courses. Other information requested included the aims or mission of the association and whether the association prescribed adherence to a code of ethics.

A very large proportion of organisations did not respond to the two requests for information. Despite extensive efforts to obtain contact details for professional associations and registration bodies, it was discovered that a number of these addresses and telephone numbers were either outdated or incorrect. Where a non-responding organisation was known to have an Internet site or where one could be located through a search of the Internet, the site was accessed and the relevant information was obtained in this manner. This method was also used in the case of organisations which did not provide all the information requested.

## Sample

There are a total of 22 registration bodies in Queensland and a further two Commonwealth registration bodies are cited in *QTC 1999*. Data was obtained concerning 23 registration bodies and 79 professional associations (152 professional associations were asked to supply information); however, in many cases professional associations and registration bodies did not provide all of the information requested. Where it was not possible to obtain sufficient information, the professional association or registration body was excluded from the study. The information collected was used to compile a database of professional associations and registration bodies with respect to the membership and professional requirements of university graduates and the accreditation guidelines for universities.

In addition, Faculty and Department heads within all Queensland universities were contacted to confirm the information received from professional bodies and contained in *QTC 1999*. A total of 272 university staff were contacted, but only 19 (7%) responses were received.

## Procedure

In order to determine whether the influence or requirements of professional associations and registration bodies has any significant impact on university courses or on secondary students' choices with respect to Senior subjects and potential career choices, three main areas of focus for analysis of the information were established:

1. Whether, and to what extent, professional associations and registration bodies have a role in the accreditation of university courses.
2. Whether, and to what extent, professional associations and registration bodies influence subject prerequisites for entry to university courses.

3. Whether graduates are eligible, without undertaking further study, for membership of a relevant professional association; and/or registration to practise in the profession for which they have studied.

Each professional and registration organisation was classified according to the Academic Organisational Unit (AOU) Groups used by DEETYA in compiling the *Selected Higher Education Statistics* prior to analysis. (see Appendix 1). These categories are roughly equivalent to those used by QTAC in grouping courses in *QTC 1999*.

A database of university course prerequisites was also compiled using the *QTC 1999* guide, as it is reasonable to infer that this is where the intervention of professional bodies is most likely to influence students in their choices (i.e. in imposing a narrow subject selection during Senior studies in order to meet eligibility requirements for a specific course). Prerequisites for tertiary courses were also analysed by DEETYA AOU classifications.

A final inference was made on the basis of information included in *QTC 1999* for the purpose of analysing the information provided by professional associations and registration bodies. A very high proportion of course descriptions supplied in *QTC 1999* also include lists of professional associations and registration bodies which students would be eligible to join on completion of that course. Given that tertiary-bound students do use *QTC 1999* to inform their decisions regarding selection of tertiary courses, it is reasonable to assume that universities include this information to make a course more attractive to students. On this basis, the information in the database was analysed according to specific qualifications required to determine whether, and at what level, graduates in a particular field were eligible for membership and/or registration without the need to undertake further study.

## 3: FINDINGS

### Accreditation of university courses

Determining the role of professional associations and registration bodies in accreditation of university courses proved extremely problematic, largely due to difficulties encountered in obtaining information, in particular from registration bodies. The request for information pertaining to accreditation of university courses frequently received no response. Some professional associations and registration bodies were unwilling to discuss the role the organisation played in accreditation (beyond a yes/no response), or to provide written information (e.g., guidelines published for universities). In some instances the person responding to the inquiry did not know whether the organisation had an accreditation role; in others the information received conflicted with written information provided and/or previous verbal responses.

These difficulties were further compounded by the fact that interpretations of ‘accreditation’ varied between individual professional associations and registration bodies. In addition to the incomplete nature of much of the information supplied, these differences in interpretation made it impossible in some cases to determine whether the accreditation role claimed by some organisations involved any review of university courses at all.

### **Defining ‘accreditation’**

Two main usages of the term were encountered during the conduct of the study. The interpretation of the term ‘accreditation’ varied between professional associations and registration bodies. Most often ‘accreditation’ referred to a formal external review process involving assessment of the quality of courses or schools, and associated resources. Peak professional bodies were most likely to refer to accreditation in this sense, and responses from universities distinguished the two uses of the term.

Several professional bodies accredit graduates or degrees from the [Science Faculty] and have an input into the design of programs. There are other professional bodies to which graduates may apply for accreditation, but that have no direct input to the degree program. Care must be taken in the distinction between accreditation of degrees and accreditation of individual graduates.

Some professional associations have an accreditation process only insofar as it defines acceptability of graduates for membership of the association. For example, the Australian Mathematical Society explains its process of accreditation as “Accreditation, which allows the member the use of the postnominals GAustMS, or FAustMS, is a way of the Society recognising a members qualifications and experience”. Processes of accreditation of this kind appear likely to have little influence over the structure of university courses.

For the purposes of this report, ‘accreditation’ will be taken to refer to the formal external review process outlined above.

### **Accreditation: Professional associations and registration bodies**

Professional associations and registration bodies perform three main functions:

- registration of individuals to practise within a particular profession;
- accreditation of professional education courses; and
- promotion of a particular profession.

Professional associations and registration bodies have different roles in these functions, due to the nature of these organisations.

## Registration bodies

Information was collected from a total of 21 Queensland and two federal registration bodies, and much of this information was derived solely from the legislation pertaining to the individual Boards, due to the difficulty of obtaining information from the registration bodies themselves.

Registration bodies are legally responsible for the registration and regulation of professionals in certain fields. Registration of professionals varies from state to state. For example, Queensland and South Australia are the only two states in Australia which require teachers to be registered. Registration bodies also have a legislated responsibility for the accreditation of university and TAFE courses. Each of the enabling Acts governing the various registration bodies in Queensland provides for this function by prescribing qualifications for registration. In a few cases, for example the *Dental Act 1971*, the legislation stipulates specific degrees or courses which are acceptable for registration purposes. However, the Acts most frequently refer to qualifications which are 'recognised' by the Board, establishing an implicit role in accreditation for registration bodies.

This responsibility is exercised at the discretion of the registration body, with the result that it is exercised differently by individual registration bodies. Ten registration bodies provided information regarding accreditation of tertiary courses. Where this information was made available, six registration bodies accepted the recommendations of independent accreditation committees, while the remaining four had an active accreditation process within the organisation.

In some circumstances where a registration body accepts the findings of an independent accreditation committee, the accreditation function is conducted by national committees representing the registration bodies themselves. Where this is the case, the committee has usually been formed to facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications between state Registration Boards, as required by federal legislation (*Mutual Recognition Act 1992*). The committee accredits courses nationally, and each Registration Board accepts the committee's findings. This legislation applies to all registration bodies, including those from which no response was received.

In the cases of the Dental Board of Queensland and the Medical Board of Queensland, federal legislation has established national councils (the Australian Dental Council and the Australian Medical Council) with specific responsibility for accrediting all relevant degree courses, removing this responsibility from state registration bodies.

Registration bodies may also choose to accept the findings of accreditation processes conducted by professional associations. The Psychologists' Registration Board, for example, accepts the accreditation decisions made by the Australian Psychological Society.

Only four of the registration bodies which supplied accreditation information conduct an active accreditation process, one of which was a federal body.

It is important to note that, even where a registration body is actively engaged in accrediting courses, the relevant peak professional associations usually have a representative on the Registration Board. The presence of such a representative on the Board is provided for in the enabling legislation which governs the constitution of the Board. Sixteen of the 23 registration bodies examined in the study included at least one Board member representative of a professional association.

## **University relationships with registration bodies**

The limited number of responses received from universities renders it impossible to generalise about relationships between universities and registration bodies. Responses took a number of forms, ranging from simple lists of professional associations and registration bodies with which the Faculty has contact, to detailed information on the nature of the Faculty's involvement with professional associations and registration bodies. However, it is interesting to note that of the 62 references made by university staff to professional associations and registration bodies, only 11 of these were to registration bodies.

## **Professional associations and registration**

A very small number of professional associations have legislated responsibility for registering practitioners and regulating the profession in a similar manner to that provided by registration bodies, such as the Institute of Engineers Australia (IEAust). However, most professional associations do not have formal responsibility for regulation of a profession in the way that registration bodies do, although there are many influential bodies which, in practice, have a regulatory role.

A number of less apparently influential associations claim to register practitioners, and certainly keep a register of members, but have no formal registering authority and most discipline members who fall short of ethical or professional standards by excluding them from membership, in the same way that registration bodies will revoke registration.

As explained earlier, the interpretation of 'accreditation' varies between individual professional associations. However, the aim of professional associations in assuming an accreditation role, of any nature, is invariably similar to that expressed in the following extract from the Australian Psychological Society's *Accreditation Guidelines*.

[T]here needs to be some external moderation of undergraduate courses so that high standards are achieved and maintained. ... students who complete postgraduate applied programs are being trained for working with the public. The public must be assured that the training is adequate and that the psychologist whom they consult has received a proper education and sufficient supervised practice to be competent. ... In order to ensure a competent profession as well as competent academics and researchers, the Society has concerned itself with the

setting and monitoring of standards for such university courses and programs in collaboration with universities and Registration Boards.

While 50 professional associations provided information on accreditation, 23 of these provided insufficient detail regarding their role in accreditation for the purpose of analysis. A further nine provided only a list of accredited courses, without providing information regarding the accreditation process itself. It was not possible to make any judgement regarding the level of involvement in, or the nature of, accreditation of university courses with respect to these professional associations.

Two of the remaining 18 organisations, (the Australian Institute of Management and the Australian Natural Therapists Association) do not claim a role in formally accrediting tertiary courses. Of the 16 professional associations which claimed to accredit university courses, only four supplied detailed information regarding the accreditation process and the guidelines provided to universities. For this reason it is possible to make neither a comparison between professional fields regarding the level of influence of professional associations over the course content and structure of university degrees, nor to draw any conclusions about these issues in general.

### **University relationships with professional associations and registration bodies**

Again, the low level of response from universities means it is not possible to do more than make general observations regarding those university faculties which did supply some form of response. Fifteen of the 19 responses provided lists of courses offered within the faculty and the professional associations which accredit them. Only four provided any further detail and none of these provided a significant detail regarding the level of influence of professional associations or registration bodies in course content or structure. Given the small number of responses it was not considered worthwhile to request further information. Perhaps the most pertinent comment made by a university staff member was that “All courses have to some degree industry and professional input so that students can successfully meet the needs of the workplace on completion of their studies”.

### **Prerequisites for tertiary study**

There are certain considerations which universities must take into account when designing courses. In the current economic and political climate, universities are increasingly accountable to all stakeholders for the outcomes of their courses, and competition between universities is gaining momentum (Meek and Wood, 1998). Students are increasingly discerning with respect to the perceived quality of tertiary courses and have high expectations regarding the outcomes of their investment in university-level study. It is significant, for example, that the popular *Good Universities Guide* (Ashenden and Milligan, 1998) awarded its Australian 1998 University of the Year to the University of Queensland for “Outstanding Outcomes for Graduates”.

It was considered that the best means of discovering whether students' options were affected by the requirements of professional bodies would be to examine those subjects required at senior secondary level by universities as prerequisites to enrolment in specific courses according to AOU group categories. This data was then compared to information on accreditation processes.

The results of the first level of analysis are as follows:

- Of the 705 courses listed in *QTC 1999*, 394 (56%) specify English as a prerequisite to enrolment.
- When additional prerequisites are required, Mathematics is the most common prerequisite (179: 25%), followed by Science subjects (94: 13%).
- The field most likely to have prerequisites was Engineering Processing, with 93 per cent (71 of the 76 courses) specifying required senior subjects.
- Of the 94 Science courses 63 (67%) had required subjects and nearly a third (30 courses) had three or more prerequisites.
- None of the 84 courses within the fields of Humanities and Social Studies set any prerequisite other than English.

While it was not possible to compare this information with data relating to the accreditation processes, the analysis of course prerequisites by field did not show a marked relationship between subject prerequisites for specific courses and areas where professional associations or registration bodies are active. Fields which have the highest numbers of prerequisites are generally those which require prior knowledge of Maths and Science subjects at a secondary level for success in the course. (One or two of these will waive the prerequisites if an OP above a certain level is achieved by students wishing to enrol.) Students who wish to undertake courses in these areas are in some cases required to take three or more prerequisite subjects at secondary level; in a few cases students need four or five subjects as course prerequisites, although it should be stressed that such requirements are in the minority.

No university staff raised the subject of prerequisites in their responses. On the basis of the information available, there is no apparent link between tertiary course prerequisites and the requirements of professional associations and registration bodies.

## Impact on graduates

The length of time taken to complete a particular course, and the associated financial burden, is a consideration for many students making decisions about tertiary study (Marginson, 1998; Edwards, 1998). It was therefore decided to investigate whether graduates are eligible, without undertaking further study, for membership of the courses cited in *QTC 1999*, and/or registration to practise in the profession for which they have studied.

Membership of most professional associations is available to students in their area of study. With the exception of only a few professional associations, this is at the level of Student Member. (Nomenclature varies between

professional associations. The equivalent, for example, may be Associate Member.) Initial graduates are also eligible to apply for membership, but not usually with full Member status until further study or experience has been completed, as required by the particular body. It should be noted, however, that membership of professional associations is not usually compulsory in order to work within a profession, although it may be necessary for professional advancement.

In one or two areas (notably Psychology and Accounting) graduates are required to undertake what would be regarded as substantial postgraduate study and/or work experience. In no case does it prevent employment.

It is common for registration bodies to require graduates to complete a period of practical experience or supervised practice known as Provisional Registration prior to becoming fully registered. During the prescribed period of Provisional Registration, graduates are most often employed within the profession. Others may undertake relevant employment to obtain certain competencies. In some circumstances this employment may be outside the field in which the graduate will eventually seek registration.

In addition, while anecdotal evidence suggests that some courses are occasionally called into question by professional associations and registration bodies, eligibility for registration and membership of professional bodies is not based on the graduate having attended a 'prestigious' university (e.g. League of Eight universities). This matter appears to be decided on a course-by-course basis, with the result that students are not advantaged or disadvantaged in this respect by attending particular universities.

## 4: DISCUSSION

It was not possible to compile the comprehensive database and report desired during the conduct of this investigation, due to the difficulties encountered in contacting organisations and in obtaining information from them, as outlined previously. However, much valuable information has been collected and a number of insights have been gained.

All bodies responsible for registering professions within Queensland are required to fulfil some form of accreditation function under state or federal legislation. Professional associations also participate in the accreditation of courses to varying degrees. Peak professional associations, in particular, appear to exert some influence over university degree courses, but it is not possible to make any definitive conclusions about the extent of this influence based on the information available.

While university academics may continue to have concerns about the intrusion of professional associations and registration bodies requirements into course structure and content, the limited number of responses from universities, and the fact that no university raised this as an issue in its correspondence, suggest that it has at least come to be accepted that professional associations do have a role to play in the design or accreditation of tertiary courses.

The fact that no link could be established between subject prerequisites and the requirements of professional associations and registration bodies suggests that, while students may be required to make narrow subject choices, this does not appear to be the direct result of intervention by professional associations and registration bodies. Again, it is not possible to formulate a definitive conclusion on this matter.

While graduate eligibility requirements are often quite specific, and in some cases prescriptive, in no instance investigated were these requirements found to prevent graduates obtaining employment. Neither were they dependent on attendance at 'prestigious' universities. Some equity issues may be involved in requirements to undertake further study, in particular with the direct or indirect imposition of further financial liability. This consideration is particularly relevant in light of the recent changes to HECS funding for postgraduate study, but was beyond the scope of this study.

## 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

After an extensive investigation of the issues surrounding the involvement of professional associations and registration bodies in tertiary education and the possible implications of these for Queensland secondary students, the following recommendations are appropriate:

1. TEPA provide advice to the universities which participate in QTAC Ltd that it is still extremely difficult to obtain clear and accurate information regarding minimum qualification levels required for practice and/or membership of professional associations in some fields. This advice should include a recommendation to the universities that they examine the quality of information which is currently available to students in each university.
2. Further research in this area would require TEPA to invest considerable time and capital and is unlikely to yield more conclusive results in the near future. Unless universities and professional bodies substantially improve the transparency of their processes in this area, TEPA should only maintain a watching brief in relation to professional bodies.
3. Ongoing review and maintenance of the database of information regarding professional associations and registration bodies would be time consuming and costly, and is likely to be of little benefit. The existing database should be kept on file at the Office of TEPA.

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# Appendix 1. Classification of academic organisational unit groups

The Academic Organisational Unit Group classification provides a means of grouping Academic Organisational Units which have a likeness in terms of the subject matter of units of study for which they have responsibility. The classification has a two-tiered structure:

**Major AOU Groups:** There are 11 major AOU group categories, each of which has a 2-digit numeric code.

**Minor AOU Groups:** Within each major AOU group there are a number of minor AOU groups. The number varies from major group to major group. Minor AOU groups have a four digit numeric code, the first two digits of which comprise the code for the major AOU group within which the minor AOU group is located.

<b>01</b>	<b>HUMANITIES</b>	05.03	Computer Science
01.00	Humanities — General	05.99	Other Mathematics, Computing
01.01	English		
01.02	History		
01.03	Philosophy		
01.04	Ethnic/Area Studies	<b>06</b>	<b>VISUAL/PERFORMING ARTS</b>
01.05	Languages other than English	06.00	Visual/Performing Arts — General
01.06	Communication Studies	06.01	Art
01.07	Religious Studies	06.02	Graphic Arts/Fashion Design
01.08	Other Humanities	06.03	Craft, Ornaments
		06.04	Performing Arts
		06.05	Music
		06.99	Other Visual/Performing Arts
<b>02</b>	<b>SOCIAL STUDIES</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>ENGINEERING, PROCESSING</b>
02.00	Social Studies — General	07.00	Engineering, Processing — General
02.01	Behavioural Sciences	07.01	Chemical
02.02	Geography	07.02	Civil, Structural
02.03	Library/Archival Studies	07.03	Electrical, Electronic, Computer, Communications
02.04	Welfare, Counselling	07.04	Mechanical, Automotive, Aeronautical
02.05	Sport, Recreation	07.05	Mining
02.06	Political Science, Government	07.06	Industrial, Processing
02.07	Sociology	07.89	General Engineering
02.99	Other Social Sciences	07.99	Other Engineering, Processing
<b>03</b>	<b>EDUCATION</b>	<b>08</b>	<b>HEALTH SCIENCES</b>
03.00	Education — General	08.00	Health Sciences — General
03.01	Education Studies	08.01	Medical Technology
03.02	Education Practice	08.02	Therapies, Therapeutic Technology
<b>04</b>	<b>SCIENCES</b>	08.03	Nursing
04.00	Sciences — General	08.04	Nutrition and Dietetics
04.01	Biological Sciences	08.05	Environmental Health
04.02	Earth Science	08.06	Medicine, Medical Science
04.03	Physical/Materials Sciences	08.07	Dentistry, Dental Services
04.04	Pharmacology	08.08	Optometry, Optical Services
04.05	Chemical Sciences	08.09	Community/Family/Personal Health Care
04.99	Other Sciences	08.99	Other Health Services
<b>05</b>	<b>MATHEMATICS, COMPUTING</b>		
05.00	Mathematics, Computing — General		
05.01	Mathematics, Statistics		
05.02	Computer-based Information Systems		

09	ADMINISTRATION BUSINESS, ECONOMICS, LAW	10	BUILT ENVIRONMENT
09.00	Administration, Business, Economics, Law — General	10.00	Built Environment — General
09.01	Economics	10.01	Architecture
09.02	Accounting	10.02	Environment/Product Design
09.03	Commerce, Sales, Services	10.03	Building, Construction
09.04	Management, Administration	10.04	Surveying
09.05	Secretarial Studies	10.00	Other Built Environment
09.06	Law, Justice, Legal Studies	<b>11</b>	<b>AGRICULTURE, RENEWABLE RESOURCES</b>
09.99	Other Administration, Business, Economics, Law	11.00	Agriculture, Renewable Resources — General
		11.01	Agriculture
		11.02	Animal Husbandry
		11.03	Forestry, Parks, Wildlife
		11.04	Veterinary Science
		11.99	Other Agriculture, Renewable Resources

(Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, *Selected Higher Education Statistics 1996*)