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CC: Professor Ian Walden, Head of CCLS.

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## **QMUL RESPONSE TO IPREG CONSULTATION PAPER ON ACCREDITATION WITHDRAWAL**

CCLS welcomes clarification of IPReg's accreditation procedures. We agree that carefully designed accreditation withdrawal arrangements, with clear and transparent procedures focused on the provider's competence in terms of facilitating teaching and learning outcomes as specified in the IPReg Accreditation Handbook, are integral to a robust accreditation system.

### **Question 1: What are your views on the circumstances in which accreditation would be withdrawn?**

- We support clarification by IPReg of the circumstances in which serious and sustained failure to achieve teaching and learning outcomes, as set out in the IPReg Accreditation Handbook, would justify withdrawal of accreditation. Matters falling outside the provider's role of achieving teaching and learning outcomes should not constitute grounds for the accreditation to be withdrawn. An example of the latter might be student complaints unrelated to teaching and learning outcomes.

### **Question 2: Do you have any comments on the proposed procedure?**

- **Concerns triggering withdrawal procedures:** We are of the opinion that the circumstances triggering the initiation of any such procedure must be specified in clear terms and relate directly to serious and sustained failure to achieve teaching and learning outcomes as specified in the IPReg Accreditation Handbook. In that regard, a clarification as to what amounts to "significant concerns" pursuant paragraph 2.3 of the

annex and a clarification of how these are distinguished from the mere “concerns” referred to in the previous paragraph, and indeed unsubstantiated concerns or vexatious complaints, would seem appropriate in order to protect the integrity of the process and safeguard the legitimate interests of all parties.

- **Making a case against a programme:** We are of the opinion that there should be a formal and structured procedure for collecting and verifying evidence pertaining to facts which may cast doubt on the accreditation of a given programme.

Evidence from student feedback requires a mechanism for collecting verifiable feedback that is independent and easily accessible to the students. In assessing whether the feedback raises serious concerns, providers should be able to participate in the process of assessing the plausibility of any complaint and to submit their observations on specific issues raised.

Of course, the procedure of collecting and verifying relevant evidence should ensure the effective pseudonymity of the students involved and be fully compliant with data protection legislation. We are of the opinion that these measures would promote the transparency of the procedure.

- **Submissions to IPReg Board and IPreg Education Group:** We are of the opinion that an opportunity to submit observations to the Decision Board prior to the discussion of a case to remove accreditation is both sensible and fair. Providers should be given adequate notice to review all allegations and prepare their response as well as an opportunity to support their views by way of an oral argument in front of the Decision Board. In our view, such notice should not be shorter than one calendar month because, in addition to the programme team, several other parts of the provider’s organisation will likely need to be involved in producing a response.
- **Clarity as to how a decision to remove accreditation is reached:** Despite the further explanations provided in paragraphs 3.1 and 3.3. of the annex, paragraph 12 of the IPReg consultation paper does not clarify the way a final decision to remove accreditation is reached. Although the final decision is defined as one jointly reached by the IPReg Board and the IPReg Education Board in paragraph 3.1 of the Annex, it is referred to as a decision of the IPReg Board in paragraph 3.3. We would welcome more information about the exact role of the IPReg Education Board and its involvement in the decision-making process. It is unclear, for instance, whether the IPReg Board would act in reliance of findings and recommendations submitted by the IPReg Education Board with regard to some issues. In any event, the specific majority rule adopted for such procedure needs to be clarified in advance.

Furthermore, we are of the opinion that a decision to withdraw accreditation should be justified by a statement setting out the exact reasons it is based upon to enable an appropriate review and/or appeal.

- **Review/appeal of the decision to remove accreditation:** It is unclear whether the grounds for the review mentioned in paragraph 14 of the IPReg consultation paper are confined to a “case different and additional” to that already made in the context described by paragraph 3.1 of the annex as suggested in paragraph 3.8 of the annex. This is because paragraph 3.8 makes reference to an appeal thereby allowing, at least seemingly, providers to challenge any aspect of the Decision Board’s decision.

In our view, providers should be able to appeal any decision to withdraw accreditation. Furthermore, any review of such a decision in light of a different and additional case should also be subject to an appeal, as it constitutes a new decision.

- As regards the potential review/appeal mechanisms, procedural fairness mandates that the reassessment of a decision to withdraw accreditation should not be carried out by those who have been involved in the original decision. In view of that, the review and/or appeal procedure described in paragraph 14 of the consultation paper and paragraph 3.8 of the annex seems problematic since it provides for the assessment to be carried out by the IPReg Chair and the IPReg Executive team.

Apart from that, it remains unclear whether the views of the IPReg Executive team would generally tend to determine the outcome of the assessment or whether the IPReg Executive team will simply play a supporting/counselling role assisting the Chair in taking a decision.

In our view, none of the panel members involved in the original decision to remove accreditation should take part in the review/appeal proceedings against that decision.

- **Publication of decisions:** Contrary to what is provided for in paragraph 3.3 of the annex, we are of the opinion that any form of publicity prior to the decision to withdraw accreditation becoming final has the potential to inflict irreparable reputational harm to providers.

**Question 3: Is five working days an appropriate timeframe for an attorney qualification provider to put together a (different) case for consideration on appeal?**

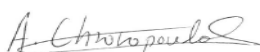
- We are of the opinion that five working days is not sufficient time especially if providers are expected to put together a different case for consideration at the review stage. The same should apply to appeals allowing providers to challenge withdrawal decisions on the grounds of any potential error in assessment.

The preparation of such a response is a very demanding task requiring the collaboration of a group comprised of both academics and administrative staff. Preparing a response might prove even more difficult if the necessary work needs to be done in periods of the academic year that are particularly hectic because, for instance, academics have to mark exam papers or dissertations.

Hence, we are of the opinion that providers should be allowed the time of one calendar month to respond to a well-reasoned withdrawal decision at the very minimum.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit our views on the IPReg consultation paper for withdrawing accreditation of a qualification pathway and remain at your disposal for any further questions you may have.

Sincerely yours,



Apostolos Chronopoulos