Received 26 April 2025
Revised 6 July 2025
12 July 2025
Accepted 14 July 2025

Stakeholder engagement in accreditation and quality assurance via the program advisory board: contributions and benefits

Katherine Julie Attree
Department of Indigenous Leadership and Engagement, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, Australia

Abstract

Purpose – Accreditation bodies often require higher education institutions to establish program advisory boards (PAB) to integrate industry insights into the curriculum, as a mechanism to improve graduate employability. This research aims to investigate how stakeholders engaged in these advisory boards contribute to the institution and assist in the quality assurance and accreditation process.

Design/methodology/approach – Qualitative interviews with 31 members of business PABs across three Australian universities were analysed using a constructivist grounded theory approach. Data were supplemented by a desk audit of Australian universities policies and practices in relation to advisory boards enabling.

Findings – Advisory boards are a valuable source of information to institutions, providing expert insight into industry trends and requisite graduate skills and capabilities. Furthermore, external stakeholders provide a rich account of their contributions, viewing their "real world" insights as critical to bridging the gap between academic theory and workplace realities, significantly contributing to institutional accreditation and quality assurance processes. Internal stakeholders affirm this perspective.

Research limitations/implications – The findings are specific to the Australian context and may have limited generalisability.

Practical implications – Advisory boards help institutions meet quality assurance compliance requirements from governments, international and professional accrediting bodies.

Originality/value – This study fills a gap in qualitative research on external stakeholders in PABs, offering comprehensive insights into their contributions to accreditation and quality improvement within the Australian higher education context.

Keywords Quality improvement, Stakeholders, Benefits, Quality assessment, Business schools, Accreditation

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

As predominantly public institutions, universities are expected to contribute to public value by graduating employable professionals who enhance national productivity (Hogan, 2021). However, globally, these institutions face criticism for producing graduates who are not job-ready and lack essential professional skills such as teamwork, analytical reasoning, complex problem-solving and

Quality Assurance in Education
Vol. 34 No. 1, 2026
pp. 70-85
Emerald Publishing Limited
0968-4883
DOI 10.1108/QAE-04-2025-0112

change management adaptability (Andrus and Martin, 2001; Jackson, 2010). Graduates are increasingly expected to lead multidisciplinary, globally dispersed project teams (Ahmad Kamal, and Che Ibrahim, 2025) and foster ethical, responsible and sustainable managerial responses to societal challenges, and climate concerns (Alajoutsijärvi *et al.*, 2015; Hogan *et al.*, 2021).

Stakeholder engagement (i.e. of industry, alumni, students and academics) in the review of university curriculum design, development and delivery is mandated by government accreditation authorities as part of their quality and assurance mechanisms. It is also strongly recommended by international accrediting bodies such as AACSB International and often required by discipline-based professional accreditation bodies to bridge the theory/practice gap and align educational offerings with current and future industry needs (Attree and Neher, 2023). One common method recommended for institutions to engage with stakeholders, seek advice, feedback and input into the currency and relevance of their programs, and improve the employability of their graduates, is the program advisory board (PAB), also known as a program advisory committee or course advisory committee (Attree and Bamforth, 2024).

Analysis of the literature on advisory boards reveals that a high proportion of papers focus on the US context. Furthermore, the majority use descriptive case studies or survey approaches to benchmark operational and logistical aspects, identify the common activities and focus of these boards and put forward best practice guidelines for their establishment and administration (Attree and Bamforth, 2024). While accreditation is noted as a significant driver for the establishment of these structures and a common meeting agenda item (Ellingson *et al.*, 2010) the predominant viewpoint in the extant research is the internal stakeholder perspective i.e. chairs, heads of departments and senior university leaders. Few studies examine the viewpoint of the external stakeholder or adopt qualitative approaches.

This research addresses these gaps and makes following contributions. Firstly, it responds to the paucity of prior qualitative studies on PABs, particularly those investigating the perspectives of external stakeholders. Secondly, by using qualitative interviews to explore the views of a broad range of stakeholders, this research provides a more comprehensive understanding of stakeholder engagement in university PABs and their contribution to quality assurance and accreditation processes. In addition, it offers new insights into the benefits stakeholders derive from engagement, revealing reciprocity and mutuality is evident in the process. Importantly, this study explores these dynamics within an antipodean context, thereby broadening the geographical scope of existing research.

This paper continues with a discussion of the literature on advisory boards and quality assurance in higher education. Next, the methodology used for data collection and analysis is presented, followed by discussion of the findings and implications. The paper ends by noting the limitations and further research directions

Literature review

Accreditation is a key quality assurance practice in higher education (Kumar *et al.*, 2024). There are three types of accreditations impacting higher education institutions. The first, *institutional accreditation* is mostly undertaken by national or regional governments, government bodies or agencies, and generally provides the institution with a "licence to operate" (Harvey, 2004, p. 208). The second, *professional accreditation* is usually granted at the program level by a professional body, and signals that the institution is producing graduates with the knowledge, skills and capabilities to practice competently within their discipline (Attree *et al.*, 2025; Nguyen *et al.*, 2021). Globally, for business schools, a third type of accreditation i.e. *international accreditation*, is offered by agencies such as AACSB International [1], the Association of MBAs (AMBA) and EFMD Global [2]. These international accreditations are increasingly viewed as signals of quality, prestige and

rigorous academic standards in a globally competitive education market (Attree *et al.*, 2025; Kundu and Majumdar, 2020; MacKenzie *et al.*, 2019).

All three types of accreditation systems emphasise the importance of stakeholder engagement to the quality assurance process. For example, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2015) govern institutional accreditation in Europe and outline the expectation that European institutions should involve external stakeholders in the design, review and continuous improvement of programs and program learning outcomes. Similarly Australian universities are governed by the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF, 2021) which, although not specifically referencing stakeholders, necessitates institutions to "take account of emerging developments in the field" when monitoring, reviewing and improving accredited courses (Australian Government, 2021, HESF, Section 5.3.2). In India, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) requires institutions to seek student, alumni, employer and other stakeholder input as part of its criteria for evaluation (Stella, 2002) and actively engages in its own stakeholder input (Prakash *et al.*, 2023). Stakeholders are also integral to accreditation processes in South African and Tanzanian institutions (Mtitu, 2025).

While not a direct requirement, advisory bodies are viewed favourably by AACSB International and EFMD Global (Andrus and Martin, 2001; Ellingson *et al.*, 2010; Kilcrease, 2011). AACSB International requires input from stakeholders who employ the institution's graduates when developing the school's mission and stipulates that the school must also have adequate processes for adjusting the curriculum in response to stakeholder input (Baker *et al.*, 2007; Norman and Bagranoff, 2019).

Professional accreditation bodies tend to be more specific in relation to their requirements for stakeholder engagement. For instance, the American Institute of Certified Public Accounting requires accredited higher education institutions to maintain advisory boards (Norman and Bagranoff, 2019). Advisory boards are also requirement for engineering program accreditation by ABET[3] in the US (Coe, 2008; Genheimer, 2007; Schuyler *et al.*, 2001) and are strongly encouraged in disciplines such as social work (Dietz *et al.*, 2002) and construction management (Emmer and Ghanem, 2013).

In Australia, the two main accounting professional bodies CPA Australia and Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand (CAANZ) require institutions seeking accreditation to provide details of employer representation on PABs. The Australian Human Resource Institute (AHRI) requires accredited higher education institutions to maintain advisory boards and provides guidelines regarding the expected background and experience of members. Likewise, Engineers Australia stipulates requirements for accredited institutions to establish and maintain formal advisory bodies consisting of industry professionals, recent graduates, alumni and leading employers with the purpose of "defining, updating and evaluating educational outcomes for each program" (Engineers Australia, 2019, p. 30). The use of PABs is also supported by Computing and IT accreditation bodies in the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand (Taylor and Calitz, 2020).

Turning to the literature on advisory boards, studies suggest these structures facilitate knowledge transfers between industry and academia (Attree and Bamforth, 2024; El Refae *et al.*, 2016; Xu *et al.*, 2023). Members help bring awareness of new technologies and career paths, identify important workplace skills, suggest changes to the curriculum, and thereby enhance the likelihood of institutions producing work ready graduates (De Los Santos *et al.*, 2011; Ellingson *et al.*, 2010). Numerous scholars emphasise the benefits of PABs in incorporating the latest industry trends, innovations and technology developments into the curriculum (Calitz *et al.*, 2019; Dietz *et al.*, 2002; Genheimer, 2007; Lawrence *et al.*, 2018; Shalamova *et al.*, 2021). These boards also provide insights into both current and long-term

market needs for skills and capabilities (Ellingson *et al.*, 2010; Hinton and Williams van Rooij, 2021; Query, 2018), particularly in sectors where rapid change occurs (Söderlund *et al.*, 2017). Further, industry members assist to bridge the gap between academics and practitioners, making the connection between academic theory and on the job reality more explicit (Emmer and Ghanem, 2013).

Aligned to this focus on graduate capability, accreditation requirements are frequently cited as a driver for the establishment of these boards and a common agenda item at meetings. For example, in their survey of US accounting schools, Ellingson *et al.* (2010) found that over 75% of boards established by business schools discussed accreditation with their members. Assistance with ABET accreditation is noted as a significant function of engineering advisory boards in studies conducted by Calitz *et al.* (2019) and Taylor and Calitz (2020) and was strongly correlated to the perceived effectiveness of the board by members in survey research by Genheimer (2007). Advisory boards were also helpful in the accreditation of programs in other fields such as nutrition and dietetics, social work and sports management (Dietz *et al.*, 2002; Lawrence *et al.*, 2018; Taylor *et al.*, 2010).

Input into the curriculum is viewed as a major function of advisory boards (Mandviwalla *et al.*, 2015; Söderlund *et al.*, 2017), helping to ensure that it is current, comprehensive and aligned to employment market or community needs (De Los Santos *et al.*, 2011; Norman and Bagranoff, 2019; Taylor *et al.*, 2010). Types of input include updating or strengthening existing programs, advice on program content changes and improvements and recommendations for new topics, subjects, majors or even whole program areas (Baker *et al.*, 2007; Calitz *et al.*, 2019; Hinton and Williams van Rooij, 2021). Industry members can also assist institutions with new terminology to ensure subject and program names contemporary and aligned with common industry terminology and can provide case-based examples of concepts in practice (Reinstein *et al.*, 2019).

In summary, the literature suggests that PABs are an important stakeholder engagement tool for universities to utilise to meet institutional, international and professional accreditation requirements aligned to graduate outcomes. However, as noted in the introduction, most studies on quality assurance, stakeholder engagement and advisory boards in higher education have been conducted from the institutional perspective. Therefore, a significant gap in exists in exploring the perspective of external advisory board members as to how they can assist in the accreditation and quality assurance process, contribute to the institution, and ultimately impact the curriculum and graduate outcomes. This study addresses this gap.

Method

This study is part of a broader investigation into stakeholder engagement in PABs, examining stakeholders' perceptions, motivations, benefits, contributions, participation and engagement from their own perspectives. Specifically, this paper focuses on stakeholder contributions aligned to the research question:

RQ1. What does stakeholder engagement in program advisory bodies look like and how do stakeholders contribute, collaborate, and create value?

Following university ethics committee approval, data were collected using semi-structured interviews with 31 current or former members of four different advisory boards in varying business disciplines at three Australian universities. Qualitative research methods are valuable for in-depth explorations of human experiences, behaviours and perceptions (Myers, 2019). Given the identified gap in the literature regarding the perspectives and

experiences of external stakeholders in advisory boards, qualitative research represented an appropriate approach to explore the topic in more depth.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their open-ended nature, allowing deeper exploration of issues and flexibility to follow new lines of inquiry (Charmaz, 2014). Questions were designed to elicit members' perceptions and experiences. Examples include: "What knowledge, skills and expertise do you bring to the board?", "What contributions have you made?", and "What benefits do you gain from being a member of the board?" Discussion covered aspects including professional and personal knowledge, skills and expertise and input into professional accreditation and curriculum change.

The first stage of data collection involved interviews with 23 advisory board members at a single institution. Under a constructivist approach, data is generated or co-constructed through participant-researcher interaction (Charmaz, 2014). Following interviews, participants were invited to review the transcripts, correct any responses and provide additional input if desired. Next transcripts were imported into NVivo for analysis and coding. Grounded theory techniques, including iterative analysis, constant comparison, memoing and diagramming (Charmaz, 2014), were used to allow concepts and categories to emerge inductively from the data, and to capture any potential biases and subjectivities in the research process.

The second stage of data collection involved theoretical sampling i.e. purposefully selecting additional interviewees and structuring interview questions to fill gaps and test theory development. In accordance with the constructivist co-creation approach, emerging diagrams, figures, categories and concepts were shared with participants and feedback was invited. This method enhances the researcher's understanding of conceptual categories, allowing them to confirm, clarify, refine or expand these categories and densify their properties and dimensions (Charmaz, 2014). This stage involved interviews with eight advisory board members at two additional Australian universities. By the end of this second stage of interviews, it became evident that although there were some minor contextual differences in board operations and membership, no new codes or categories had emerged. Theoretical saturation was therefore deemed to have been reached.

Participants, who provided their own pseudonyms (see Table 1 below), were all working full time in industry and were all therefore deemed to be industry experts. This includes students who had between four (Maree) and 30 years' industry experience (Elizabeth). Also included in the 31 participants were six internal academic staff. Their responses provided an important counterpoint to the perspectives of the external board members. The gender distribution across all 31 participants was 18 female (58%) and 13 male (42%). Participants ages ranged from mid-20s (Maree) through to mid-60s (John) with most being either at mid or senior career levels. Career levels are indicated by (E) early, (M) mid and (S) senior, in Table 1.

Findings from the interviews (see next section) were supplemented by a desk audit of the 41 public and private universities in Australia universities for information on policies and practices in relation to advisory boards.

Findings

The desk audit revealed that at least 35 Australian institutions (78%) referenced program advisory structures in program accreditation policy, other policy documents or showed evidence of these bodies on their public-facing websites. At least half recommended (or had in existence) an advisory board for each program or a group of programs in a similar discipline. Analysis of the stated purpose or terms of reference from these documents includes: to advise on changing workplace trends, provide information on graduate skill

Table 1. Research participants

Institution	Industry representatives (non-alumni)	Industry representatives (alumni)	Industry representatives (current students)	Internal academic staff	External academic
University A: MBA/ Master of Business Advisory Board	Emma (M) Delilah (S)	Nikita (M) Joseph (M) Grace (S) James (M)	Nil	Roger (M) Dahra (S)	John (S)
University A: Human Resource Management (HRM) Advisory Board	MTW (S) Donna (S) George (S) Richard (S)	Soraya (S) Magpie (S) Jo (S) Jim (E)	Elizabeth (S) Maree (E)	Talloola (M) Sunni (M) Minnie (E) Nikki (S)	
University B: Business Advisory Board	Fanny (S)	Lance (S) Abe (E) Tom (M)	Dora (E) Kaja (M)	n/a	n/a
University C: Business Advisory Board		KC (S) Adeline (M)		n/a	n/a

Source(s): Author's own work

requirements, maintain links with industry, government and the community and meet legislative requirements for quality assurance as outlined in the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021. This suggests that institutional accreditation is a key driver for the establishment of advisory boards in Australian institutions.

As of 2025, 24 Australian business schools (59%) had achieved AACSB accreditation for their domestic campuses and two for their international campuses (AACSB International, 2025). All institutions were accredited by the two main accounting bodies and at least 18 institutions had achieved AHRI accreditation for their human resource management programs [Australian Human Resource Institute (AHRI), 2025]. As outlined in the literature review, international and professional body accreditations act as drivers for the establishment and maintenance of advisory boards.

Contributions

Expertise, skills, capabilities, actions and inputs provided by stakeholders to the PABs were classified as contributions and coded accordingly. During the interviews. participants were asked what skills, knowledge and experience they brought to the board and what specific advice or contributions they recalled making. Participants described their contributions in terms of the breadth of their experience across multiple sectors (Lance, Kaja, Elizabeth) or the depth of their experience in a particular industry (KC, Adeline, Tom, Abe). For example, Elizabeth described her contributions as follows:

> In terms of my industry experience and what that brings. […] my own background being across a range of HR functions, organisation types, role size, role focus, and sector experience, I think, gives a breadth. Which is quite useful for evaluating this perspective or direction that the committee's discussing and how's that likely to go down with the real world. (Elizabeth)

They also identified their particular discipline/specialist expertise such as strategy (George), industrial relations (Joseph, Talloola), change management (Grace, Donna), banking (James), economics (Tom and Abe), marketing and product management (Emma), project

management (Elizabeth), talent acquisition (Jo) and learning and development (MTW). They emphasised their current knowledge of workplace trends, industry changes, macro factors, regulations and standards, and their knowledge of practice as significant contributions. For example, Grace described her contributions in terms of her people focused approach, her change management and development expertise, her experience working in government and her knowledge of that sectors changing workplace needs:

> I am a people focused person, and you know the change management aspects. Always thinking, I suppose – what's the impact on people for whatever we're talking about […]. So, I bring that lens of the personal impacts of things, or the staffing impacts of a change. Also, the government perspective – working in state government for a long time I'm able to share the government's general direction around what it wants of its workforce […] the change in how government defines the skills that it wants in its workforce, what learning and development looks like for government. (Grace)

Participants articulated the particular niche they occupied on the board e.g. "the small business perspective" (Magpie), "the global perspective" (Jo), "the government perspective" (Grace), "the aged care perspective" (Nikita), the "not-for-profit perspective" (MTW), and the "consulting lens" (Delilah). Some also mentioned their personal experiences or perspectives as being advantageous such as the "working parent" perspective (Grace), the "Aboriginal Australian" perspective (Jim), the "student" perspective (Dora, Kaja, Elizabeth, Maree) including their dual lens as both a student and a working professional. Kaja detailed how he drew on his industry experience in small business to provide insights and feedback on the accounting curriculum e.g.:

> There wasn't much preparation for […] small business. I knew what GST was and how to deal with that. But I'd never seen a BAS [4] statement. I had never seen a tax form. We learn all about taxation law and the overarching law. But the practicalities of filling out a tax form just wasn't there. And if I had gone into a large public company, and either did auditing or prepared their books and financial statements, I'd be fine. But in a small business environment, I've been on a huge learning curve. and I don't think they prepared me well enough for that. (Kaja)

Members identified personal skills or attributes they contributed, such as "an analytical mind" (Soraya), "interpersonal skills" (Talloola, Jim, Richard), the "return on investment/ commercial perspective" (Jo), "the human lens" (Grace), "de Bono's hats" (Nikita) or the "personal networks" that they brought to the board (Donna). MTW talked about her willingness to do the work of the board and to "acquit those tasks diligently, thoroughly and […] in a timely manner and contribute some analysis and synthesis that benefits the outcome".

A few were members of professional bodies and drew on their professional body knowledge, connections, and experience when providing input into curriculum and accreditation processes. This input ranged from new trends and developments in industry, emerging skill requirements (Richard, Tom, Soraya, James, KC), to providing suggestions for how students, universities and professional societies can leverage their connections more effectively (Abe, Tom).

Figure 1 below illustrates the rich and diverse nature of stakeholder contributions, which were meticulously coded through an iterative and inductive process. This extensive inductive coding, combined with abduction and thorough analysis, was consistent with the grounded theory methodology underpinning this study.

The body of work associated with accreditation submissions was noted by participants as significant with MTW describing it as "the most labour-intensive thing we had to do". Examples of specific curriculum advice provided as part of accreditation or quality assurance processes included recommendation for "training on managing mental health issues in the

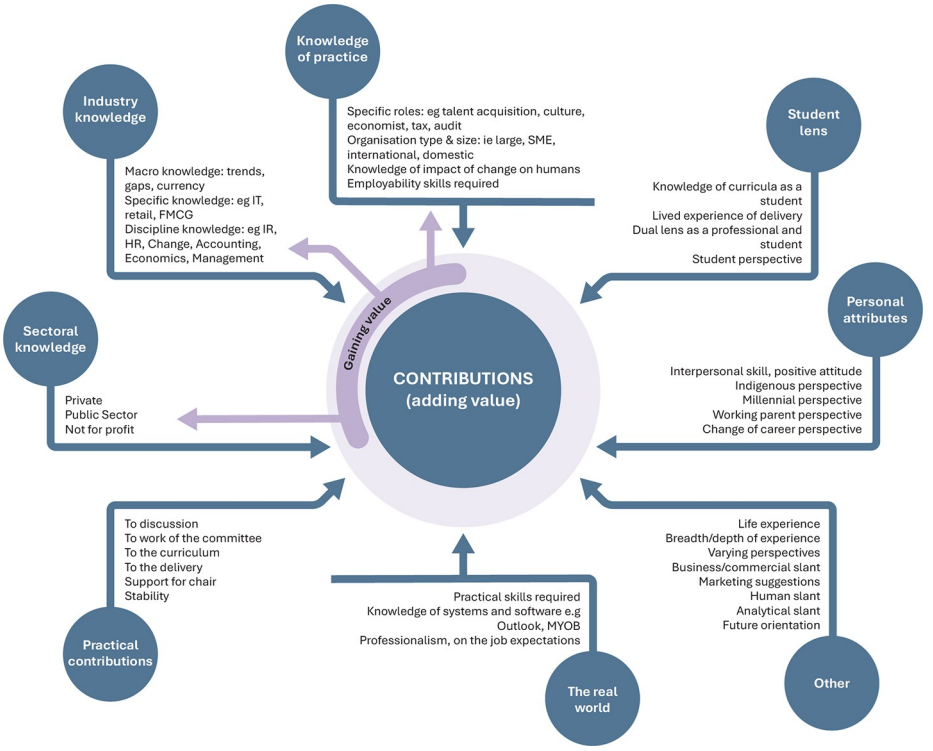

Figure 1. Stakeholder contributions to PABs
Source: Authors' own work

workplace" for HR students (Magpie), advice around financial body accreditation and the demand for graduates with data analytics skills (James), new trends in economic skill requirements (Tom) and the need for greater governance and risk management skills for MBA graduates (Nikita).

Participants also described their contributions as coming from the "real world" (Soraya, Joseph). For example, George described the value of his "input into things like accreditation and the industrial relations framework "was on conveying how "the world has moved on in the industry […], and proactive leadership models are becoming more important". Fanny stressed the need for assessments to be more authentically aligned with workplace practicalities. Internal academic staff viewed the insights from industry into curriculum generally, and accreditation process specifically, as exceptionally valuable (Sunni, Roger, Minnie). Similar to external members they perceived the input as providing insight into what is "actually happening" (Sunni) in the "trenches of the real world" (Dahla). Being part of the committee enabled them to keep in touch with changes in the work environment. For example, Sunni noted how he had been out of industry for six years and being on the committee allowed him to keep up to date with "the rise of flexible working arrangements and hybrid offices" and if a new concept such as automation arose, "it would be a learning point to make a note and then go away and do some research on what automation means to HR" and then feed that into the curriculum.

Collaborative activities identified during the coding process included actions where the institution and PAB members worked together to achieve common goals. In addition to providing input into the curriculum, members drew on their professional body memberships and connections to benefit the institution. For example, as a professional employed in the secondary education sector Adeline engaged both the university and industry representatives in career information activities for school students. Abe recalled facilitating discussions between the institution and the professional society to collaborate on measures to increase the number of young women studying economics, while Tom used his connections to identify keynote speakers from industry for university conferences. KC, Abe, Tom and Joseph were all strong advocates of greater connection and collaboration between the university and the professional bodies and worked actively to facilitate this.

Members viewed the use of advisory boards by the university as "good practice", explaining how involvement in the board made them appreciate "what goes behind the scenes to actually develop a program […] change the content […] and align it with what is needed in the industry" (Tom). Similarly, Soraya described the involvement in the AHRI accreditation submission as "a good experience to see what sits behind all that, the rigour and the depth".

Benefits

Members noted that by contributing to the advisory board, they also derived significant benefits and these helped sustain their engagement. For coding purposes benefits were advantages and positive outcomes stakeholders reported that they gained from participating in PABs. These included knowledge gains, exposure to new perspectives, networking opportunities, reputational and credibility aspects, and personal satisfaction.

The most oft cited gain was knowledge transfer. Members like Jo found liaising with industry leaders "inspiring and valuable for understanding trends and approaches in different organisations". Delilah, Soraya and Elizabeth appreciated how discussions triggered new thoughts and ideas to take back into their workplace. Joseph highlighted the benefits of "learning about the university sector", particularly the governance processes, for his own training venture. Magpie believed that participation in the board had broadened his "knowledge of HR" explaining how the board gave him exposure beyond his own sector of small business and enabled him to "encounter the experiences of other people in multinationals and corporates". Grace described the board as having "broadened my knowledge of the private sector and what happens outside of government". George mentioned "learning how people from non-profits or an educational setting or from other services, what they expect, how they handle issues" as beneficial. This reciprocal exchange was expressed by Dora as follows: "I'm bringing a different perspective; I'm gaining different perspectives as well". This opportunity to gain knowledge simultaneously whilst contributing is illustrated in Figure 1 above by the purple lines and arrows.

Several members highlighted the professional reputation and credibility benefits of participating in the board. Jo perceived significant professional advantages, noting that being a board member gave her "gravitas" and "acceptance as a professional at that level within your industry sector". MTW echoed this sentiment, stating that "being on a curriculum board for a university" in her profession enhanced her credibility. Magpie, who ran his own HR consultancy, likewise found that board participation added an "element of credibility, authority" useful for client engagement. Similarly, George, who transitioned from a senior corporate role to consultancy, valued the "reputational elements" of being part of an advisory group. Many members acknowledged the career advantage of listing their board participation on resumes or LinkedIn profiles.

As a professional body member, KC felt that being a board member helped her understand the mechanics of the degree development and delivery process and that this "helps me inform my industry on how we can go about better working with the universities". Abe similarly mentioned understanding "a bit more about the challenges affecting universities and the way they operate" helped him in his role in the professional societies to identify opportunities to work together.

A notable intrinsic benefit for participants was the feeling of achievement and satisfaction members derived from being able to contribute and improve outcomes. For example, Emma was motivated to "contribute to society" and the "betterment of employment outcomes for future students" by "contributing to the future of the program." For Richard, "the possibility to in a small way influence the future learning of students coming to a profession that I love dearly" was an important motivator. Similar sentiments were expressed by George. Participants expressed a strong desire to impact and influence by utilising their industry expertise and were keen to see their input fed through into curriculum changes and operational changes.

Key benefits members derived from participating in advisory boards are depicted in Figure 2 below.

Discussion

Accreditation has been noted in the literature as a key driver for the establishment of advisory boards (Baker *et al*., 2007; Coe, 2008; Norman and Bagranoff, 2019). The desktop

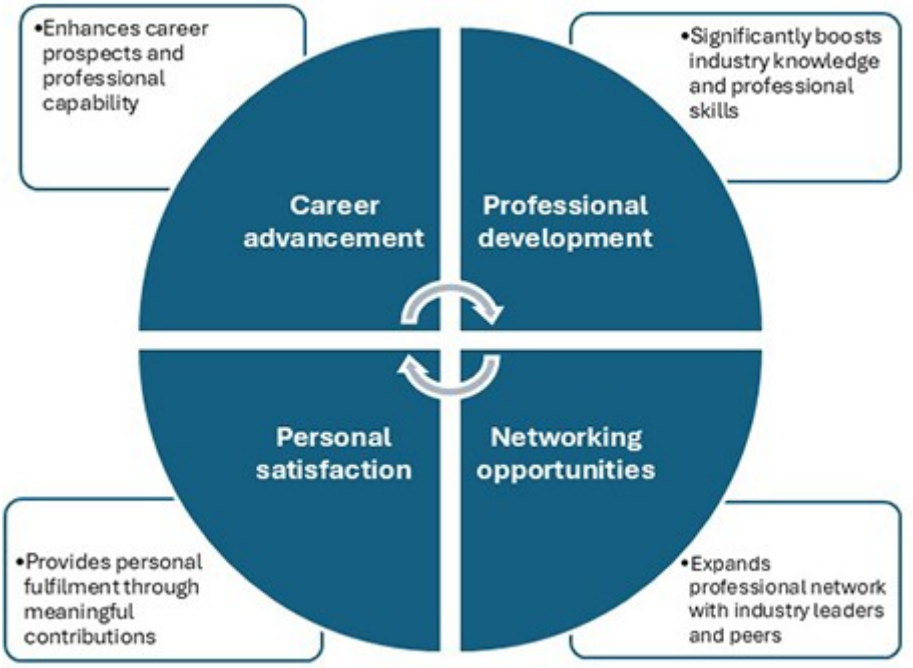

Figure 2. Benefits of PAB membership for stakeholders
Source: Authors' own work

research conducted as part of this study into Australian university policies reveals a strong alignment between institutional accreditation requirements and the existence of PABs within Australian higher education institutions. University policy stipulations requiring establishment of separate boards for each program or discipline group indicates that Australian universities recognise the importance of specific discipline expertise in aligning educational programs with industry and professional bodies' requirements. Stakeholder engagement is critical to this process.

In response to an identified gap in the literature, this qualitative study examined how stakeholders themselves, particularly external stakeholders, perceive the contributions they make to higher education as members of PABs. The findings show that stakeholders provide rich and detailed accounts of their significant contributions and perceive themselves as offering industry knowledge, sectoral knowledge, knowledge of practice, personal skills, attributes and perspectives. They perceive their contributions as being of significant value to the institutions.

Consistent with findings from literature surveying internal stakeholders (Calitz *et al.*, 2019; El Refae *et al.*, 2016; Lawrence *et al.*, 2018; Norman and Bagranoff, 2019), external stakeholders in this study perceived themselves as sharing valuable insights into contemporary industry trends, innovations, technological developments and requisite graduate skills, which were fed into curriculum review as part of quality assurance and accreditation processes. This substantiates arguments that advisory boards are essential for ensuring that curricula are current, comprehensive and aligned with employment market or community needs (Kilcrease, 2011; Mandviwalla *et al.*, 2015; Söderlund *et al.*, 2017). It also supports findings in survey-based studies that advisory boards provide input into curriculum planning, review and development and into other quality assurance and accreditation processes (Baker *et al.*, 2007; Ellingson *et al.*, 2010; Xu *et al.*, 2023).

Participants described their "real world" industry expertise as crucial for bridging the gap between academic theory and on the job reality, confirming arguments in the literature that advisory board members help make this connection more explicit (Emmer and Ghanem, 2013). Internal academic members similarly viewed these "real world" contributions as valuable, allowing them to keep up to date with industry developments and feed this information into the curriculum.

Members articulated the specific and unique expertise they brought to the board, including insights into emerging trends and requisite graduate skill requirements. This discipline-specific input is especially relevant to institutions in meeting their professional accreditation requirements, while advice on broader industry trends and the future of work align with institutional and international accreditation bodies' emphasis on relevance and quality. Members viewed their engagement in the PABs as evidence of good practice in the sector, enhancing their perception of institutional quality assurance processes. This aligns with findings by Fagrell *et al.* (2020) that external stakeholders perceive institutional quality as connected to workplace needs and graduate employability.

In addition to understanding the role they played in the professional accreditation process; members expressed a strong commitment to their profession and sought ways to connect institutions more closely with the professional bodies for mutual benefit. This suggests significant advantages exist for universities to recruit professional body members onto their PABs and in exploring opportunities for effective collaboration. Previous studies have noted that greater connection and collaboration between professional bodies and universities would be beneficial for all parties, including students (Attree *et al.*, 2025; O'Connell *et al.*, 2015).

The study also found that reciprocity occurs in the process of stakeholder engagement in PABs, with members deriving significant benefits from participation. Figure 1 highlighted that members gain knowledge and insights while contributing their expertise. Figure 2 noted additional benefits, such as networking, professional development, enhanced reputation, credibility and satisfaction that are derived from engagement in the board. Together these benefits help contribute to the long-term engagement and effectiveness of advisory board members in supporting accreditation and quality assurance.

Conclusion, limitations and further research

In conclusion, this paper offers novel insights into the significant contributions of PAB members to accreditation and quality assurance processes within higher education institutions. The research addresses a gap in the existing literature, which has predominantly adopted an institutional viewpoint and quantitative methodologies, by using a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of both external and internal members of PABs across three Australian universities.

The findings underscore that PABs serve as a valuable conduit for bringing "real world" industry expertise into the academic setting, providing crucial input on current and future trends, requisite graduate skills and capabilities. Stakeholders articulated their substantial contributions, which were also acknowledged by internal academic staff. This engagement benefits institutions in meeting accreditation requirements and also individual advisory board members who derive personal and professional benefits from their participation.

Although this study provides new insights into the contributions made by PAB members to the process of quality assurance and accreditation of higher education institutions, it has certain limitations. Firstly, as with all qualitative research, the analysis and interpretation of the interview data, involve a degree of researcher subjectivity. While grounded theory methods were used to mitigate bias, the emergent categories and themes are ultimately shaped by the researchers' understanding of the data.

While 31 interviews were conducted across three Australian universities, this sample size, inherent to qualitative research, might not capture the full spectrum of experiences and perspectives across all types of higher education institutions and PABs even within Australia. The focus on business disciplines might limit the applicability of findings to other fields such as engineering, healthcare or the arts. In addition, the unique context of this study, conducted in Australia, may restrict its relevance to other locations.

Given the paucity of empirical research examining stakeholder engagement in discipline-based PABs, there are numerous avenues for future research. This study is one of the few to examine PABs outside of the US, and as far as can be ascertained, the only study of its kind evaluating this topic in the Australian context. Opportunity exists to undertake similar research in various locations globally.

In addition to the scarcity of empirical studies, there is a notable lack of research exploring stakeholder engagement in PABs from the stakeholders' own perspectives. Further, stakeholders' perceptions, contributions, and benefits may also differ depending on their roles, and this is a potential area for further examination. This gap presents a valuable opportunity for further investigation focusing on distinct categories of members (i.e. alumni, students, industry, internal academics). For instance, no studies could be found evaluating the perspective of students, and only two studies, Kilcrease (2011), Sena *et al.* (2010), have assessed the perspectives of internal academic staff towards PABs. Both authors used survey data, indicating an opportunity to explore these stakeholder perspectives through various methodologies in greater depth. While this current study includes the perspectives of internal academic staff and students, future research focused solely on discrete groups would be beneficial.

Although this paper highlights the contributions to and benefits of PABs from the perception of the stakeholder members, it does not address implications for practice or potential challenges or risks. Future research could explore and report on these areas – particularly from the external stakeholder perspective.

Finally, it is acknowledged that advisory boards are not the only mechanisms for stakeholder input into programs of study and therefore research reporting on other methods would be valuable.

Notes

[1.] AACSB International was formerly known as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. This organisation now refers to itself as AACSB International.

[2.] EFMD Global was formerly known as the European Foundation for Management Development. Similar to AACSB, this organisation now refers to itself by the acronym. EFMD Quality Improvement System (or EQUIS) is the accreditation awarded by EFMD Global to accredited institutions.

[3.] ABET formerly known as the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology is now referred to by its acronym only.

[4.] A Business Activity Statement (BAS) must be submitted by registered businesses to the Australian Taxation Office at regular intervals.

References

AACSB International (2025), "AACSB-Accredited universities and business schools", available at: www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/accredited-schools (accessed 4 June 2025).

Ahmad Kamal, N. and Che Ibrahim, C.K.I. (2025), "Quality assurance in civil engineering education: insights into program educational objectives (PEOs) in Malaysia", *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 33 No. 3, pp. 479-499, doi: 10.1108/QAE-10-2024-0205.

Alajoutsijärvi, K., Juusola, K. and Siltaoja, M. (2015), "The legitimacy paradox of business schools: losing by gaining?", *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 277-291, doi: 10.5465/amle.2013.0106.

Andrus, D.M. and Martin, D. (2001), "The development and management of a department of marketing advisory council", *Journal of Marketing Education*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 216-227, doi: 10.1177/0273475301233007.

Attree, K. and Bamforth, J. (2024), "Adding value: engaging stakeholders in higher education via the course advisory committee", *37th ANZAM Conference: Celebrating management research, its impact and future*, *Wollongong, Australia*, pp. 465-479.

Attree, K. and Neher, A. (2023), "Does it matter? External stakeholder perceptions towards business program accreditation", *In 36th ANZAM Conference: Changing management values and practices for a sustainable future*, *Wellington, New Zealand*, pp. 126-135.

Attree, K., Neher, A. and Xie, G. (2025), "Are accreditation signals being recognised? Business professionals' awareness and views on accredited university business programmes", *Studies in Higher Education*, pp. 1-22, doi: 10.1080/03075079.2025.2456571.

Australian Government (2021), "Higher education standards framework (threshold standards) 2021", available at: www.legislation.gov.au/F2021L00488/latest/text (accessed 10 April 2025).

Australian Human Resource Institute (AHRI) (2025), "AHRI accredited courses", available at: www.ahri.com.au/certification-and-training/course-accreditation/ahri-accredited-courses (accessed 25 April 2025).

Baker, C.R., Karcher, J. and Tyson, T. (2007), "Accounting advisory boards: a survey of current and best practices", in Schwartz, B.N. and Catanach, A.H. Jr (Eds), *Advances in Accounting Education Teaching and Curriculum Innovations*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Leeds, pp. 77-92, doi: 10.1016/S1085-4622(07)08005-4.

Calitz, A.P., Taylor, E. and Cullen, M. (2019), "Guidelines for IT industry advisory boards at higher education institutions in Southern Africa", in Tait, B., Kroeze, J. and Gruner, S. (Eds), *48th Annual Conference of the Southern African Computer Lectures' Association (SACLA), Northern Drakensberg, South Africa*.

Charmaz, K. (2014), *Constructing Grounded Theory*, Sage, London.

Coe, J.J. (2008), "Engineering advisory boards: passive or proactive?", *Journal of Professional Issues in Engineering Education and Practice*, Vol. 134 No. 1, pp. 7-10, doi: 10.1061/(ASCE)1052-3928(2008)134:1(7).

De Los Santos, E., Dominguez, D.G. and LaFrance, K. (2011), "Innovation in competency-based program development: leveraging the advisory board faculty alliance", *Administrative Issues Journal*, Vol. 1 No. 1, available at: https://dc.swosu.edu/aij/vol1/iss1/7/

Dietz, T.J., Moore, L.S. and Jenkins, D. (2002), "Using professional advisory committees to achieve excellence in social work education", *Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 49-61, doi: 10.18084/1084-7219.7.2.49.

El Refae, G.A., Askari, M.Y. and Alnaji, L. (2016), "Does the industry advisory board enhance education quality?", *International Journal of Economics and Business Research*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 32-43, doi: 10.1504/ijebr.2016.078800.

Ellingson, D.A., Elbert, D.J. and Moser, S. (2010), "Advisory councils for business colleges: composition and utilization", *American Journal of Business Education (AJBE)*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 1-8, available at: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=J1060330

Emmer, M.J. and Ghanem, A.A. (2013), "Influence of industry advisory boards on construction management programs' curriculum and content", *Proceedings of 49th ASC Annual International Conference, San Luis Obispo, CA.*

Engineers Australia (2019), "Accreditation management system: accreditation criteria user guide – higher education, version 2.0", available at: www.engineersaustralia.org.au/sites/default/files/2019-09/AMS-MAN-10_Accreditation_Criteria_User_Guide-Higher_Education_v2.0.pdf (accessed 5 April 2025).

Fagrell, P., Fahlgren, A. and Gunnarsson, S. (2020), "Curriculum development and quality work in higher education in Sweden: the external stakeholder perspective", *Journal of Praxis in Higher Education*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 28-45, doi: 10.47989/kpdc62.

Genheimer, S.R. (2007), "The effectiveness of industry advisory boards in engineering education", Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Oklahoma.

Harvey, L. (2004), "The power of accreditation: views of academics", *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 207-223, doi: 10.1080/1360080042000218267.

Hinton, R. and Williams van Rooij, S. (2021), "CxO advisory councils: new approaches in executive education", *Journal of Education for Business*, Vol. 96 No. 5, pp. 284-290, doi: 10.1080/08832323.2020.1812491.

Hogan, O., Kortt, M.A. and Charles, M.B. (2021), "Mission impossible? Are Australian business schools creating public value?", *International Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 44 No. 4, pp. 280-289, doi: 10.1080/01900692.2020.1715425.

Hogan, O.T. (2021), "The future of Australian business schools: theory, evidence and policy", Doctoral Thesis, Southern Cross University, Gold Coast.

Jackson, D. (2010), "An international profile of industry-relevant competencies and skill gaps in modern graduates", *International Journal of Management Education*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 29-58.

Kilcrease, K.M. (2011), "Faculty perceptions of business advisory boards: the challenge for effective communication", *Journal of Education for Business*, Vol. 86 No. 2, pp. 78-83, doi: 10.1080/08832323.2010.480989.

Kumar, A., Paliwal, J., Singh, M., *et al*. (2024), "Focused literature review on accreditation and quality assurance: insights and future research agenda", *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 33 No. 3, doi: 10.1108/QAE-08-2024-0170.

Kundu, G.K. and Majumdar, J.P. (2020), "The learning and teaching area of AACSB standards: a process model framework", *Business Process Management Journal*, Vol. 26 No. 6, pp. 1379-1399, doi: 10.1108/BPMJ-11-2017-0295.

Lawrence, H.J., Strode, J., Baker, R.E., *et al*. (2018), "Sport management program advisory boards: the advantages of outside assistance", *Journal of Contemporary Athletics*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 253-270.

MacKenzie, W.I., Jr Scherer, R.F., Wilkinson, T.J., *et al*. (2019), "A systematic review of AACSB international accreditation quality and value research", *Journal of Economic and Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 1-15, doi: 10.1108/JEAS-10-2018-0123.

Mandviwalla, M., Fadem, B., Goul, M., *et al*. (2015), "Achieving academic-industry collaboration with departmental advisory boards", *MIS Quarterly Executive*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 17-37, available at: https://aisel.aisnet.org/misqe/vol14/iss1/4

Mtitu, E.A. (2025), "Exploring factors for the introduction and implementation of quality assurance systems in selected higher education institutions in tanzania", *Cogent Education*, Vol. 12 No. 1, p. 2455767, doi: 10.1080/2331186X.2025.2455767.

Myers, M.D. (2019), *Qualitative Research in Business and Management*, Sage, London.

Nguyen, C.H., Marshall, S.J. and Evers, C.W. (2021), "Higher education quality assurance and accreditation implementation in several countries across the world and lessons learned for Vietnam", *Vietnam Journal of Education*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 11-17, doi: 10.52296/vje.2021.27.

Norman, C.S. and Bagranoff, N.A. (2019), "Accounting advisory councils: engagement between practice and academe", in Calderon, T.G. (Ed.), *Advances in Accounting Education: teaching and Curriculum Innovations*, Emerald Publishing, pp. 133-151, doi: 10.1108/S1085-462220190000023010.

O'Connell, B., Carnegie, G.D., Carter, A.J., *et al*. (2015), *Shaping the Future of Accounting in Business Education in Australia*, CPA Australia, Melbourne.

Prakash, P., Gornale, S.S., ShyamaSundar, M., *et al*. (2023), "The role of the national assessment and accreditation council in ensuring quality education in the Indian education system: an analysis of its accreditation standards and grading practices", *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies*, Vol. 4 No. 6, pp. 1-18, doi: 10.37745/bjmas.2022.0341.

Query, J.T. (2018), "Actuarial science advisory boards: a survey of current and best practices", *Journal of Education for Business*, Vol. 93 No. 8, pp. 403-411, doi: 10.1080/08832323.2018.1496896.

Reinstein, A., Churyk, N.T., Taylor, E.Z., *et al*. (2019), "Using accounting department advisory councils and higher quality continuing education requirements to improve the accounting profession's ethical reasoning skills", *Advances in Accounting Education: teaching and Curriculum Innovations*, Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 177-193.

Sena, M.P., Sena, J.A. and Crable, E.A. (2010), "Faculty perceptions on the goals and achievements of information systems executive advisory boards", *Information Systems Education Journal*, Vol. 8 No. 41, available at: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=J1146851

Shalamova, N.N., LaPointe, A.K., Nero, R.R., *et al*. (2021), "Shaping UX academia-industry alignment: a strategic partnership through an industrial advisory board", *Extended Abstracts of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, Virtual Conference*.

Söderlund, L., Spartz, J. and Weber, R. (2017), "Taken under advisement: perspectives on advisory boards from across technical communication", *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, Vol. 60 No. 1, pp. 76-96, available at: https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/7828113

Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area (ESG) (2015), available at: www.enqa.eu/esg-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-in-the-european-higher-education-area/ (accessed 12 April 2025).

Stella, A. (2002), "External quality assurance in indian higher education: case study of the national assessment and accreditation council (NAAC)", New Trends in Higher Education, International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO, Paris, available at: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=D479839

Taylor, E. and Calitz, A.P. (2020), "The use of industry advisory boards at higher education institutions in Southern Africa", in Tait, B., Kroeze, J. and Gruner, S. (Eds), *ICT Education: SACLA 2019, Communications in Computer and Information Science*, Cham, South Africa, pp. 244-259.

Taylor, E., Marino, D., Rasor-Greenhalgh, S., *et al*. (2010), "Navigating practice and academic change in collaborative partnership with a community advisory board", *Journal of Allied Health*, Vol. 39 No. 3, pp. 105E-1110.

Xu, H., Waldrup, B.E. and Michenzi, A. (2023), "Assessing the effectiveness of advisory boards in accounting programs", *Journal of Accounting Education*, Vol. 63, p. 100847, doi: 10.1016/j.jaccedu.2023.100847.

About the author

Katherine Julie Attree is a Senior Lecturer, Business Academic and Curriculum Specialist. Kath's research is centred on the higher education policy and practice including institutional accreditation, quality assurance, scholarship of teaching and learning, graduate outcomes and student success. Kath has peer reviewed articles for the *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, the *Student Success Journal and for the Advancing Scholarship and Research in Higher Education* (ASRHE) *Journal*. In recognition of her expertise and leadership in teaching and supporting learning in higher education, Kath was awarded a Senior Fellowship (SFHEA) with the UK based Advance Higher Education (Advance HE) professional body in 2022. Katherine Julie Attree can be contacted at: katherine.attree@uts.edu.au