



## **Standards for Professional Accreditation Processes**

**June 2008**

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## **AGREED STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION PROCESSES**

### **Rationale for agreed cross-profession standards for accreditation processes**

1. To provide an agreed standard against which professional accreditation authorities can assess their own behaviour and performance, and thereby to improve quality.
2. To provide greater transparency in professional accreditation practices.
3. To demonstrate to stakeholders the standards which professional accreditation bodies set for their own practice.
4. To promote greater uniformity and consistency in accreditation practices between professional accreditation bodies, to the benefit of institutions which undergo accreditation by a range of professional bodies.
5. To extend the opportunities for sharing accreditation databases and resources between accreditation bodies and thereby to reduce costs.

In adopting these standards, it is acknowledged:

- that each accreditation agency has evolved in response to the overriding purpose of the accreditation process and the professional context, including the settings/environment in which the profession is practiced, the public interests protected by setting standards for education of practitioners; and the specific knowledge, skills and professional attitudes required for practice in the profession;
- that there are a diversity of approaches to, and purposes for, external quality evaluation, but that these approaches can be underpinned by some common agreed principles.

These standards are adapted from the following sources:

- AS/ISO International standards for quality assurance: ISO 17011 on conformity assessment, and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education Guidelines of Good practice <http://www.inqahe.org>
- International standards and benchmarking processes relevant to specific professions, for example World Federation for Medical Education/World Health Organisation Guidelines for Accreditation (<http://www.wfme.org>).
- The collective experience of the professional accreditation agencies.

## **GOOD PRACTICE IN ACCREDITATION OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION**

### **Aims of the accreditation process**

The accreditation agency defines the purpose and scope of the accreditation process. The link between accreditation of programs and registration of the graduates of accredited programs is stated.

In addition to quality assurance, the stated aim of the accreditation process includes continuous improvement of the quality of professional education and training to respond to evolving community need and professional practice.

### **The accreditation standards**

The accreditation agency has defined accreditation standards or criteria, set in advance of the assessment of courses. The standards are used to assess whether or not the institution seeking accreditation has met the defined requirements for accreditation.

The accreditation agency supports its standards or criteria with research and an evidence base.

Standards are reviewed regularly. The accreditation agency indicates the opportunities available to stakeholder bodies to contribute to the development of the standards. The accreditation agency makes its standards public.

### **Responsible body**

The accreditation agency provides information about its role and functions. This describes:

- the accrediting agency and its mission
- the legal and registration framework in which the accreditation system operates
- the power of the accrediting body to undertake its assessing and accrediting roles
- the governance structure for the accreditation agency; terms of reference and membership requirements, including the requirement for the profession to be represented on the accrediting body, and for membership by other specified stakeholder groups
- the bodies (expert teams/review committees/site survey teams) which assess programs acting with the accreditation agency's policies and procedures
- the agency's communication processes and mechanisms for stakeholder and community communication with the accreditation agency.

## **Business practices of the accreditation agency**

The accreditation agency has a code of conduct, linked to national and/or international codes of conduct for accreditation bodies in its profession or in the professions in general.

The accreditation agency describes the independence of its quality assessment. An accreditation agency is independent to the extent that it has autonomous responsibility for its operations and that the judgments made in its reports are not influenced by third parties.

The agency describes policies that apply to the conduct of business, including:

- confidentiality regarding documentation and proceedings
- management of conflicts of interest
- document control and records management
- continuous review processes and internal auditing
- resources available, including staff training and development
- collaboration with other accreditation agencies locally and internationally and with other bodies in the profession
- funding the accreditation system including infrastructure costs and the costs of assessments of individual programs and institutions.

## **Accreditation cycle**

### ***For established programs/institutions***

The accreditation agency has a cyclical accreditation process, providing for regular re-assessment of accredited/approved institutions in order to verify that they continue to comply with the approved standards.

The accreditation agency's policies describe the accreditation cycle, including the duration of full accreditation, and factors that may impact on the timing of assessments.

### ***For new programs or institutions***

The accreditation agency has a process for assessing proposed new programs in the discipline. The process entails:

- an assessment of capacity
- initial accreditation or approval to proceed before students commence in the program.

The accreditation agency's policies describe the accreditation cycle for new programs, including requirements for monitoring during the implementation phase and the way in which the period of accreditation is determined.

### ***For major changes to established programs***

The accreditation agency describes the procedures for institutions to report on plans for change to their accredited program. It defines the major changes which would affect the accreditation status of an already accredited program.

The accreditation agency has a process for assessing institutions' plans to make major changes to established and accredited programs. The process entails initial accreditation of the program before students commence in the changed program.

The accreditation agency's policies describe the accreditation cycle for programs which are undergoing major change, including requirements for monitoring during the implementation phase and way in which the period of accreditation is determined. The policies also specify requirements for assessment and monitoring of the 'teach out' of the old program.

### **Review committees / assessment teams**

The accreditation agency describes the role and responsibilities of its assessment teams, the qualifications required, and the way in which the team composition is determined. It has policies on the selection, appointment, training, and performance review of team members. Its policies provide for the use of competent and knowledgeable individuals, who are qualified by experience and training, to assess professional education and training programs. The members of the review or assessment team should include a majority with a background in education or practice in the relevant profession and other skills appropriate to the specific assessment.

The accreditation agency's policies provide for the institution being assessed to be informed about the proposed members of the assessment team and to have the opportunity to draw attention to potential conflicts of interest. The agency's policies describe how it manages conflict of interest in the survey team and confidentiality.

### **Key components of the accreditation process**

The accreditation agency's policies describe the key components of the process, and list the forms to be completed or documentation to be provided. They also describe essential pre- or co-requisites (e.g. other necessary accreditation).

The process of accreditation must include the following stages:

- Self-assessment by the institution seeking accreditation. The self-assessment is an important planning instrument to enable the institution to identify strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement. The self-assessment should provide the basis for the institution to develop its accreditation submission.
- An external assessment, by a team appointed by the accreditation agency, and based on the accreditation submission, team visits and meetings, and if necessary the collection of stakeholder feedback.
- A final report by the team after the external assessment, containing recommendations regarding the decision on accreditation.
- The decision on accreditation.
- Ongoing monitoring and reporting by accredited institutions to the accreditation agency.

### **Team visits and meetings**

The accreditation agency's policies describe in detail the role of site visits and/or meetings with the institution; how this program is negotiated and conducted, and the duration and scope; and the respective responsibilities of the accreditation agency and the host institution for

organising and informing participants about the interactions between the team and institutional representatives.

The agency describes how the team will gather information during the interactions between the team and institutional representatives. This should include a variety of methods such as collection of documents and statistics (e.g. study guide, reading lists and statistical material on pass/failure at exams); individual interviews (with dean, department heads, etc.); group interviews (at meetings with the committee or group responsible for the self-evaluation, curriculum committee, students, etc.); and/or direct observation (at visits to facilities, departments and classrooms).

The accreditation agency describes the feedback provided to the institution during and at the end of these interactions.

### **Feedback to the institution and review of reports**

The accreditation agency's policies describe the nature of reports provided to the institution (e.g. draft written or preliminary verbal, final written etc), opportunities for review and comment, timeframes for comment.

The policies should include provision for the institution being assessed to correct errors of fact in a draft report.

### **The accreditation decision**

The agency's policies describe the range of accreditation options available.

Decisions on accreditation must be based on the assessment against the accreditation criteria or standards. Accreditation must be valid for a fixed period of time. Categories of accreditation decisions:

- 1 Full accreditation for the maximum period is conferred if all criteria or standards are fulfilled.
- 2 Conditional or limited accreditation, the seriousness of the problem is to be reflected in the specification of conditions:
  - accreditation may be conferred for the entire period stated but with conditions, and specific actions to be reported; OR
  - accreditation is granted for a shorter period of time, in cases where some criteria or standards are only partly fulfilled or more criteria or standards are not fulfilled, and a specific review process must be followed.
- 3 Denial or withdrawal of accreditation in the event that the quality of the program cannot be remedied within an appropriate period. Concerns about quality would be signified by failure to meet criteria or standards. Whether the agency provides remediation and assistance in these circumstances should be clear.

### **The final report**

The final report addresses the accreditation standards. The report describes the program/institution's performance against the standards or criteria and gives a brief account of the evidence supporting the assessment. The report includes recommendations to the accreditation agency regarding the decision on accreditation.

The accreditation agency provides the report to the registration agencies as well as to the institution. It has a public policy on the release of accreditation reports to other bodies and individuals.

The agency maintains a public list of the accredited programs/institutions.

### **Process for ongoing monitoring of accredited institutions and programs**

The accreditation cycle provides for the monitoring of accredited institutions to ensure the agency is appraised of developments in the accredited programs, and to verify their continued compliance with the standards.

The accreditation agency's policies describe the cycle for accredited institutions to report; the nature of the reports, and how periodic reports are considered. Any special procedures for notifying potential or actual changes to the training program should be described.

The agency has developed procedures to be followed in the event of unsatisfactory progress by an accredited institution. These specify whether the agency provides remediation and assistance in these circumstances.

### **Appeals process**

The agency describes the principles, rules and grounds for appeals against accreditation decisions as well as the cost of such appeals processes.

### **Evaluation and feedback**

The accrediting agency has processes to review the accreditation standards and process.

The agency should describe its process for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of its performance, and the performance of its teams.

### **Complaints**

The accreditation agency has a process for dealing with complaints.

The accreditation agency has a process to consider complaints it receives about accredited programs. The policy should specify the range of complaints that the agency is able to consider. These should relate to the agency's accreditation standards. The policy should also specify the processes for assessing and responding to complaints, the circumstances in which the accredited institution is asked to respond to a complaint, and whether confidential complaints can be made.

The agency's procedures need to ensure the timely, fair, and equitable handling of all complaints related to the standards and procedures for accreditation/approval.