

Accreditation tools used by members of the Health Professions Accreditation Collaborative Forum, December 2020

What is accreditation?

Accreditation is a process for quality assurance and quality improvement of education programs. Accreditation authorities assess and monitor programs and the program's provider against accreditation standards to determine if those standards are met. Accreditation is also the status granted to programs that meet the standards.

Accreditation has elements of quality assurance assessment and quality improvement review, respecting the expertise of both the provider and the assessors.

Purpose of accreditation under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme

The *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009* (the National Law) covers the accreditation of programs of study in 16 regulated health professions in Australia under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme. The objectives and guiding principles of the National Scheme as set out in the National Law are broad and extend from matters specific to education and training to workforce innovation, flexibility and sustainability, public safety and access to services.

The accreditation authorities operating under the National Law facilitate high quality education and training of health practitioners by assessing whether an education program graduates practitioners with the knowledge, skills and professional attributes to practise in the profession.

Accreditation good practice

The Health Professions Accreditation Collaborative Forum (the Forum) is a coalition of 15 accreditation entities responsible for accreditation of programs of study for the regulated health professions in Australia. Forum members commit to good practice in accreditation, and have developed a statement of high level accreditation principles that all members of the Forum aspire to achieve. [Forum Accreditation High Level Principles October 2018.pdf](#)

As the basis of their accreditation processes and decision-making frameworks, Forum members aspire to a right touch approach based on a proper evaluation of risk, which is proportionate, and outcome focused.

Members of the Forum are committed to high quality accreditation processes that are effective and add value to the work of education providers and programs.



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Accreditation tools

Accreditation authorities use a mix of accreditation tools to assess programs of study and their providers. The tools and processes together aim to ensure that the Accreditation Authority has an objective and comprehensive understanding of the performance of a program and its provider against the accreditation standards.

Tools include:

- Provider-generated analysis of its performance against the standards. This might include self-assessment reports, accreditation submissions addressing the standards, and data collections. Accreditation authorities publish templates and guides to ensure that these submissions provide the appropriate foundational information for the accreditation assessment.
- Reports, data and findings of other accreditation, review and regulatory bodies. Accreditation authorities aim to streamline reporting by using the findings and outcomes of others or by sharing information through memoranda of understanding, such as MOUs with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency or Australian Skills Quality Authority.
- Accreditation authority-generated analysis of the program and the provider. Accreditation authorities track programs against the standards over time and use this tracking to inform risk assessments.
- Structured consultations with program stakeholders, which may be about the program as a whole or about specific standards. Consultations may be in the form of stakeholder surveys, structured submissions, consultation meetings, or focus groups. These consultations support the accreditation authority to understand important perspectives on the program, and to triangulate the provider's information.
- In-depth assessment by an expert team or panel. The team may use a number of techniques including document analysis of the reports and submissions provided (see above), site visits, meetings, observation of teaching and/or assessment, surveys, and desk top audits. Appointment of expert panels or teams allows the accreditation authority to assess a program in depth and to bring specific expertise to the assessment.



Site visits are a key accreditation technique, allowing for extended dialogue and interaction. The purpose of the site visit will depend on the circumstances and the nature of the program and the provider. Accreditation authorities use site visits to:

- understand the provider's institutional culture and the context in which the program is delivered and their influence on the program
- allow the external accreditors to verify information provided in accreditation documents such as accreditation and self-assessment submissions or stakeholder submissions and triangulate information across different groups
- allow for detailed and timely discussions between accreditors and key contributors and local stakeholders of the program including staff and students
- assess program resources and facilities
- allow the provider to share additional information with the accreditors, particularly contextual information that further demonstrates how the accreditation standards are met
- enrich the accreditation authority's comprehensive report on the assessment of the program and the provider and its accreditation decision making.

Depending on the accreditation authority and the nature and context of the programs being accredited, the site visit may also be used to:

- facilitate collegial interactions and peer review
- gain insights concerning the program and provider that is best obtained by direct observation, such as observation of teaching or assessment, or review of detailed material that needs to be kept confidential such as samples of student reports or assessment forms
- consider specific issues such as complaints or concerns that a program may not be meeting standards.

As technology improves, accreditation authorities are increasingly mixing face to face site visits with online discussions. In making a decision about the use of site visits, the accreditation authority will consider how best they can develop an objective and comprehensive assessment of the program and the provider against the standards.



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During the COVID-19 pandemic, many accreditation authorities have adapted to travel and physical distancing restrictions by enhancing the use of virtual site visits.

The Forum member accreditation authorities consider the following factors in deciding what elements of a site visit should be face to face or virtual:

- risk assessment of program and provider
- new program or material changes to program
- knowledge of the provider including the senior staff and the organisational culture
- capacity to include representative samples of all stakeholder groups in relevant discussions and to keep discussions confidential where necessary
- cost and logistics
- provider's use of video and teleconference
- value of the site visit to the provider.

The Members of the Forum are sharing their experiences of the strengths and challenges of virtual site visits to further improve accreditation practices and will refine this statement as that experience is evaluated.

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