



ASAC operating principles

Under the terms of the Agreement made between the Partners in the Accreditation UK scheme (the British Council and English UK), accreditation under the scheme marque is conferred or withdrawn by the Executive Board of the scheme.

The Executive Board has delegated certain powers to the Accreditation Scheme Advisory Committee (ASAC), and has set out the following operating principles for the ASAC which encompass its delegated powers.

By the Agreement, the Executive Board retains the power to revise or revoke the Operating Principles if it believes that such action would be in the best interests of the scheme.

The powers of the ASAC

1. Delegated power from the Executive Board

ASAC has delegated power from the Executive Board under the Scheme Agreement to do the following, where the conditions set out in the Accreditation Handbook, Section 2.4 are met:

- Accredit a new applicant
- Withhold accreditation from a new applicant
- Offer partial re-inspection to a new applicant from whom accreditation has been withheld
- Continue the accreditation of an accredited provider
- Place the accreditation of an accredited provider under review
- Withdraw accreditation from an accredited provider.

Where ASAC proposes to withdraw accreditation from an accredited provider, this power shall be exercised by negative resolution, viz the joint Chairs of the Executive Board shall be notified of the proposal, and if neither of them requests a review of the decision within 48 hours, the ASAC proposal shall be implemented and the provider shall be notified of the decision forthwith. ASAC shall report to the Board in due course with a summary of reasons for the decision.

2. Referring cases to the Executive Board

ASAC shall refer to the Executive Board (EB) the report or documentation and its views on any cases not clearly provided for in the Accreditation Handbook, including those where irregular or exceptional circumstances make it likely that the recommendation may present a legal or reputation risk to the Scheme. The EB's role is a) to review the case in relation to the general principles of the Accreditation UK scheme and b) to direct the Unit on the action to be taken.

The basis for reaching decisions

3. Moderation

As a moderating body, ASAC provides a check on the reliability of individual reports and the consistency of report recommendations across the range of providers inspected.

4. Instances where the inspectors' final recommendation is not accepted

When clarification or further information is needed, reports are returned to the inspectors and decisions are reached through Chair's action where appropriate or at the following ASAC meeting.

Although the vast majority of inspectors' recommendations are accepted, ASAC may not accept the inspectors' recommendation if this recommendation is not consistent with the content of the report (for example, where the report states that the section standard has been met despite the seriousness and number of individual criteria which are not met within the section).

The rationale for the ASAC decision is fully minuted. The ASAC considers the inspection report and takes a view on whether the inspectors have interpreted the Handbook correctly.

5. Postponement of inspections

Postponement of an inspection may be allowed only in exceptional circumstances (for example, a move to new premises, a merger, a change in senior management or unavoidable absence of key staff due to some overriding reason such as jury service). The case for allowing a postponement is stronger if the provider making the request is, to the knowledge of the committee, operating to the standards of the Scheme and provision for students remains unaffected. The committee exercises its professional judgement in arriving at a decision.

Postponement of a spot check may be allowed if the provider making the request is in the process of resolving particular technical problems, such as moving to improved premises, that had been the cause for recommending a spot check in the first instance.

A limited time period for the postponement is agreed.

The reason for the decision is fully minuted.

6. Under review

The ASAC, in order to provide opportunities for continued membership of the Scheme where appropriate, may use the status of 'under review' positively. The committee will use its judgement in recommending that accreditation be placed under review, rather than being withdrawn, even if one or, very exceptionally, two of the section standards are not met. This option is exercised only where the reasons for failing to meet the section standard are technical rather than structural and can be remedied within the specified time period. Under review will not normally be recommended if the provider has been under review in the previous inspection cycle.

7. Major changes in a provider's provision leading to an inspection

If the ASAC is notified by the provider of the change (Handbook, Section 3.2 *Between inspections*), an inspection is not requested if a planned inspection is due within the following 12-month period, unless there are serious concerns.

If the ASAC is not notified of the change directly by the provider and learns of the change from another source, an immediate inspection is normally requested.

8. Inspection of new applicants

Where the inspection of a provider seeking accreditation is inconclusive in that ASAC receives insufficient evidence to reach a decision, the ASAC may withhold the report and recommendation and offer the provider a supplementary inspection (at the provider's expense) to seek additional information. The provider will be informed of the area(s) of concern so that it has the opportunity to offer more evidence of quality provision before the supplementary inspection takes place. A final recommendation will be made by the ASAC on receipt of the original report and an account of the supplementary inspection.

The conduct of the committee

9. Quorum

ASAC members are expected to attend all committee meetings throughout the year. If absence is unavoidable the committee member must give apologies in advance of the meeting so that the Accreditation Unit can ensure that the meeting will be quorate. Members who do not attend meetings may be asked to stand down.

The ASAC has a quorum of five voting members, including the Chair. Should a meeting not meet the quorum, it may deal with routine business, but any recommendation to accredit a new provider or to place a provider's accreditation under review or withdraw/withhold accreditation will require the consent of the Executive Board, or of both its Joint Chairs if there is no scheduled meeting within two weeks.

10. Confidentiality

All committee papers and all discussion are confidential to the meeting. Content may be discussed only with the Executive Board and the Unit.

11. Expertise rather than representation

Committee members are selected by the Board for their personal expertise in key areas of UK ELT provision rather than as representatives of particular interests.

12. Declaring an interest

Committee members are required to declare an interest in any organisation under consideration. An interest may be personal connection, previous employment or consultancy. The member is expected to withdraw for the duration of the discussion. The significance of the interest declared is at the discretion of the Chair.

13. Consensus and observer status

Decisions are reached in practice by consensus and observers are encouraged to participate in discussion. Should the need for a vote arise, observers are not allowed to vote.

Written operating principles concerning decisions made and conduct at committee meetings will continue to be developed in other areas as they arise.

Mike Welch, British Council
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