



Federal Recognition Process for Accrediting Agencies – At a Glance

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) relies on recognized accrediting agencies and State approval agencies to oversee higher education quality. Only institutions and programs accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or State approval agency can provide students with access to federal student aid, including Federal Pell Grants and student loans. ¹

More information on accreditation in the United States can be found here:

https://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation_pg2.html#U.S.

RECOGNITION APPLICATIONS

- Each accrediting agency must be reviewed at least every five years.
- The National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), which advises the Secretary on recognition, currently meets twice per year to review accrediting agencies.

AGENCIES SUBMIT APPLICATIONS FOR INITIAL and RENEWAL OF RECOGNITION

- The entire recognition process takes two years to complete.
- Accrediting agencies seeking initial recognition or renewal of recognition must submit an application demonstrating compliance with the Secretary's Criteria for Recognition (Criteria) which can be found here: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-602?toc=1>.

THE DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCES NACIQI MEETINGS and INVITES COMMENTS

- Approximately one-year before a NACIQI meeting, the Department publishes a Federal Register notice announcing agencies currently under review for recognition by Department staff and inviting written comments on the agencies' compliance with the Criteria which are incorporated into Department review.
- 30 days prior to the NACIQI meeting, the Department publishes a second Federal Register soliciting oral comments for the NACIQI meeting.
- A few days prior to the beginning of the meeting the Department publishes the agenda for the meeting on the NACIQI website which can be found here: <https://sites.ed.gov/naciqi/>
- Both Department staff and NACIQI make separate recommendations about the recognition of agencies.

¹ Recognized State approval agencies accredit programs and institutions for vocational education and nurse education. The recognition process for these agencies follows the approval process described in this document except these agencies are reviewed at least every four years. The criteria that applies to State approval agencies for vocation education can be found here: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-603>. The criteria that applies State approval agencies for nursing education can be found here: https://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation_pg9.html#CriteriaforNurseEducation

THE DEPARTMENT REVIEWS APPLICATIONS and DEVELOPS DRAFT STAFF REPORTS

- For each accreditor, Department staff review the accreditor's application, public comments, and incorporate additional information gained from a file review, agency meetings and reviews, and any other information requested.
- Department staff assess the accreditor's compliance and produce a preliminary report.
- Accreditors have 180 days to respond to the draft report and may share additional documentation to demonstrate compliance.

THE DEPARTMENT SENDS FINAL STAFF REPORTS WITH STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS TO NACIQI and AGENCIES

- Department staff must provide a final staff analysis back to the accrediting agency and NACIQI 30 days prior to the date of the NACIQI meeting.
- Final staff reports are made available to the public here: <https://surveys.ope.ed.gov/erecognition/#/public-documents> and the full analysis can be found here: <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accred-agencies.html>.

NACIQI HOLDS MEEETING & MAKES ITS OWN RECOMMENDATION

- The Department, accreditors, and members of the public provide input to NACIQI.
- NACIQI makes independent recommendations for each accreditor up for review.

THE SENIOR DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL (SDO) MAKES RECOGNITION DECISION

- Both Department staff and NACIQI make recommendations to the SDO.
- The SDO must make a recognition decision within 90 days of the completion of the NACIQI meeting.

AGENCIES MAY APPEAL THE SDO DECISION TO THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

- Agencies may submit a notice of appeal within 10 business days of the SDO decision and have 30 days to submit their appeal.
- There is no time limit for the Secretary of Education (Secretary) or designee to make a decision on appeal.

AGENCIES MAY CONTEST IN FEDERAL COURTS

- Agencies may contest the Secretary's decision in the Federal courts.