

T4: Accreditation Q&A

1. What is accreditation?

For our purposes, accreditation provides an independent and external mark of quality, that can be used by an education provider to demonstrate that they are a genuine provider of education and, subject to some additional checks, can be accepted onto the Sponsor Register to bring international students into the UK under the new Points Based System. In order to be acceptable, the accreditation will need to cover such areas as teaching practices, legal and financial requirements, progress monitoring of students and any other specific criteria For these purposes, **accreditation will need to go beyond any approval to deliver a particular course(s) and will involve a full institutional inspection.**

2. What constitutes appropriate accreditation for the UK Border Agency's purposes?

UK Border Agency staff are not education professionals and so have worked with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in order to establish the criteria which accreditation bodies will need to meet in order to be approved bodies for the UK Border Agency's purposes.

The criteria cover the following key areas:

<u>1. The organisation</u>
The accreditation body must demonstrate that –
1.1 it possesses sufficient resources to meet any legal challenge regarding its accreditation decisions;
1.2 There are appropriate arrangements, and sufficient capacity and capability to respond to requests for accreditation, and to manage an ongoing four-year cycle of inspection
1.3 it will share information with the UK Border Agency to ensure that institutions are bona fide providers of education. Procedures are in place to inform the UK Border Agency promptly when an institution's accreditation is removed and to take prompt action to check institutions when UK Border Agency staff report concerns

<u>2. The inspectors</u>
The accreditation body must ensure that its inspectors:
2.1 have appropriate qualifications and relevant skills needed to apply the inspection framework;
2.2 know and understand the relevant regulatory requirements of the UK Border Agency;
2.3 have appropriate knowledge and understanding of the type of institution being inspected;
2.4 are well-matched to the particular needs of the institution;
2.5 work to a Code of Conduct consistent with that used by Ofsted, and
2.6 are well-trained and kept up to date
<u>3. Objectivity</u>
The Accreditation body must ensure that
3.1 its inspectors are not connected with the institutions that they inspect;
3.2 the organisation has no interest which might hinder the impartiality of the inspection
3.3 its inspectors make consistent and objective judgements in relation to the regulations
<u>4. The inspection framework</u>
The accreditation body must ensure that:
4.1 its inspection framework is rigorous and accurately determines whether or not a provider should be approved
<u>5. Inspection management</u>
The accreditation body must ensure that:
5.1 its inspections are effectively planned, staffed and organised;
5.2 its management information systems (MIS) are adequate to enable it to meet the UK Border Agency's regulatory requirements;
5.3 it maintains appropriate support systems for inspection; and
5.4 it has appropriate contingency arrangements in place
<u>6. Quality assurance</u>
The accreditation body must:
6.1 monitor the quality of its inspections;
6.2 provide support and guidance for inspectors;
6.3 assure the quality of its reports; and

6.4 hold and maintain records available for scrutiny by Ofsted and UK Border Agency.

7. Handling complaints

The accreditation body must ensure that:

7.1 any complaints against it are dealt with promptly and fairly.

3. What is the process for becoming an approved accreditation body?

Any other bodies wishing to be considered for approval by the UK Border Agency should contact the Temporary Migration Team in the UK Border Agency for further details. Essentially, the process involves the submission of written evidence as well as an inspection observed by Ofsted. UK Border Agency will also not approve an accreditation body where either its Directors or its inspectors or any other person who is involved in approving education providers has been convicted of an immigration offence. Approved organisations will need to agree to some ongoing monitoring by UK Border Agency and Ofsted. (eg. this monitoring may include ad-hoc visits by Ofsted inspectors to accredited institutions) and to participate in a Standards and Consistency Committee involving Ofsted and UK Border Agency and the other approved accreditation bodies.

4. What does accreditation mean for education providers wishing to bring in international students under the Points Based System?

Publicly funded institutions are already required to submit themselves to the system of public inspections conducted by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the former Adult Learning Inspectorate and their devolved equivalents and in the higher education sector, to institutional audits/reviews by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). These activities already provide appropriate assurance that a publicly funded institution is a genuine provider of education and so such institutions will NOT be required to undergo any additional accreditation before they make an application to join the PBS Sponsor Register. In addition, such providers can also be reassured that neither the inspections or audits they undergo, nor the frequency with which they take place will change.

Independent schools must, by law, already be registered with the DfES following a successful inspection by either the Independent Schools Inspectorate or Ofsted and so these institutions will also not require any additional accreditation.

A limited concession to the accreditation requirement has also been agreed for very low risk **overseas HEIs** offering only part of their programmes in the UK. (For further details - see below).

In the **private education sector**, many private providers already voluntarily submit themselves to accreditation by one of the UK Border Agency-approved accreditation bodies. These institutions will not be required to undergo any additional checks and they will be able to make an application to join the Sponsor Register provided their accreditation is valid at the time of their application and continues to be renewed. A small number of private higher education providers are also subject to audit/review by the QAA and they too will be eligible to apply to join the Sponsor Register provided they are in good standing with QAA at the time of their application and remain in good standing.

The accreditation requirement will therefore only create an additional qualifying step for those institutions currently operating outside the system of public inspections and QAA audits/reviews outlined above and who are not currently accredited by one of the UK Border Agency-approved accreditation bodies or subject to QAA audits/reviews.

(For a more detailed breakdown of the different types of institutions and detail on who will require accreditation see below).

5. Why are you insisting that unaccredited private institutions are accredited before they can be T4 Sponsors?

There have been problems in the past with completely fictitious, bogus colleges offering places to “students” purely to facilitate their entry to the UK and abuse the student route. The introduction of the Register of Education Providers (REP) has been very successful in combating such bogus colleges. However, the paper-based application process for the REP and lack of any quality assurance check means that the REP has been less successful in getting rid of the low-quality providers who may care more about student fees than in the quality of education they provide and may be operating largely to provide courses to those wishing to enter or remain in the UK as students whilst working illegally. The accreditation requirement for the Sponsor Register will provide an additional independent check that should prevent such providers getting on the new register.

6. What are the benefits of accreditation?

To our immigration control:

Accreditation will:

- support sponsorship under the Points Based System, as entry clearance officers will be able to trust the decisions of individual institutions when issuing certificates of sponsorship to potential students.
- reduce the need for intelligence-led investigations of suspect institutions: enabling UK Border Agency compliance resources to be

better targeted in a proactive manner on higher risk employers and institutions.

- free UK Border Agency resources to work with educational institutions to reduce the frequency with which they may be misled by bogus students using them as a means to enter the UK, and ensure sponsors' activities are supporting the integrity of the new system.

To UK education providers:

Accreditation will:

- enable Entry Clearance Officers in our posts overseas and immigration staff in the UK to place more trust in the educational judgements of the institutions that are offering places to international students.
- help tackle the less reputable colleges that disrupt the otherwise excellent reputation of UK education and as a result should help attract more international students to UK.
- also provide international students with greater assurance about the quality of education they will receive in the UK.

7. Who are the UK Border Agency - approved accreditation bodies?

- **Accreditation UK** – which offers an accreditation service for English language centres; <http://www.britishcouncil.org/accreditation.htm>
- **ABLS Accreditation** - which offers an accreditation service for English language centres; <http://www.ablsaccreditation.co.uk/>
- **BAC** – the British Accreditation Council – which offers a more general accreditation service to cover a wide range of different educational establishments; <http://www.the-bac.org/>
- **ASIC** – the Accreditation Service for International Colleges - which also offers a general accreditation service to cover a wide range of different educational establishments. <http://www.asic.org.uk/>

8. What will accreditation cost?

For the institutions that require accreditation, the costs of accreditation will be set by the accreditation bodies. It is expected it will cost an average of £4,000 for 4 years (this may be slightly higher or lower depending on the accreditation body chosen and the size of the institution to be inspected).

9. If my institution needs accreditation, how often will we need to renew it?

Every 4 years.

The following provides a more detailed breakdown of the different types of educational institutions for them to check whether they need to obtain any accreditation before they can make an application to register as a Tier 4 Sponsor on the PBS Sponsor Register:

Higher Education Sector:

- **A publicly funded HEI (higher education institution)** – an audit by QAA will be sufficient.
- **A private HEI with UK recognised degree-awarding powers** - an audit by QAA and in good standing with QAA will be sufficient.
- **A private HE college working in association with an HE institution with degree awarding powers** – valid accreditation with one of the UK Border Agency- approved accreditation bodies will be needed.
- **An overseas HEI solely offering short-term study abroad programmes in their own premises in the UK to students who are enrolled in their home country and who come to the UK for one or two semesters before returning home to complete their degree courses** – such providers can benefit from a concession where they will qualify to apply for registration on the Sponsor Register if they can show:
 - they hold overseas accreditation from a nationally recognised accreditor;
 - they only teach part of their HE programmes in the UK;
 - they have full legal control of the premises they use; and if
 - the UK Border Agency is able to confirm that their programmes are UK degree level equivalents.
- **Overseas HEIs delivering entire degree programmes in the UK, with full-time students enrolled solely in the UK** - valid accreditation with one of the UK Border Agency- approved accreditation bodies will be needed.

Further Education Sector

- **A publicly funded FE College inspected by Ofsted or its devolved equivalents**– no additional accreditation required – proof of an Ofsted inspection needed
- **A private FE College** - valid accreditation with one of the UK Border Agency- approved accreditation bodies will be needed.
- **A private college in receipt of public funding and inspected by Ofsted or its devolved equivalents***- – no additional accreditation required – proof of an Ofsted inspection needed.

* where a college loses its public funding because the programme it is delivering comes to an end, then accreditation by one of the UK Border Agency- approved accreditation bodies will be needed for it to continue on the Sponsor Register.

English Language Sector

- **A private English Language School** - valid accreditation with one of the Ofsted approved accreditation bodies needed.
- **A private English language School working in a publicly funded HEI** – where such a college also recruits its own students direct rather than just providing courses to registered University students then the school will need valid accreditation with one of the UK Border Agency- approved accreditation bodies.

Schools

- **A state school providing education for those up to the age of 18** - Schools in the state sector may not recruit fee-paying international students so will not need to register on the new Sponsor Register.
- **An independent fee-paying school for children up to 18 years old** - an inspection by the Independent Schools Inspectorate or Ofsted will be sufficient.

A specialist college

For example: riding schools, bible colleges, computer colleges, accountancy training specialists etc

- **A private specialist college**- valid accreditation with one of the UK Border Agency- approved accreditation bodies needed.
- **A specialist college in receipt of public funding and inspected by Ofsted or its devolved equivalents** *- – no additional accreditation required – proof of an Ofsted inspection needed.

* where such a college loses its public funding because the programme it is delivering comes to an end, then accreditation by one of the UK Border Agency-approved accreditation bodies will be needed for it to continue on the Sponsor Register.