

Agency for Public Health Education Accreditation

**PROGRAMME****ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES**

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# Introduction

The following programme accreditation refers to first and second cycle (Bachelor and Master) programmes which focus on public health. The titles of such awards varies widely in the European region and throughout the globe.

The Agency for Public Health Education Accreditation (APHEA) is an independent body established as an *international non-profit association (INPA)* under Belgian law, with the purpose of accrediting Public Health Institutions and Programmes. APHEA is an autonomous organisation which establishes its own accreditation policies and procedures explained in this document. The founding members of APHEA are: the Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER), the European Public Health Association (EUPHA), the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), EuroHealthNet, and the European Health Management Association (EHMA).

This document explains the procedures of the accreditation process for programmes and provides an outline of APHEA’s organisational structure. Procedures and criteria used to assess programmes will be regularly reviewed.

# APHEA Organisational Structure

## The APHEA General Assembly and Board of Directors

The APHEA General Assembly and the APHEA Board of Directors are the two governing bodies of the agency. The General Assembly is composed of representatives from all organisations which are part of the APHEA consortium.

The General Assembly is responsible for the following:

* Approving the annual budget
* Approving new members to APHEA
* Appointing members of the Board of Directors
* Approving changes to accreditation procedures and accreditation criteria
* Nominating individuals for the reviewers’ pool

The Board of Directors is appointed by and accountable to the General Assembly and is led by the President of the Board.

The Board of Directors is responsible for the following:

* Strategic management of APHEA
* Appointing the Chair of the Board of Accreditation
* Making recommendations to the Chair of the Board of Accreditation regarding appointments of members to the Board of Accreditation
* Making an annual budget proposal
* Making decisions regarding accreditation of individual programmes based on recommendation formulated by Board of Accreditation
* Proposing changes to accreditation procedures and accreditation criteria
* Constituting an Appeals Committee if necessary
* Representing the agency to the public

## The APHEA Board of Accreditation

The APHEA Board of Accreditation is led by the Chair, who is officially appointed by the Board of Directors and represents APHEA independently from all its member organisations.

The Board of Accreditation, composed of members appointed by the Chair of the Board based on recommendations from the Board of Directors and keeping in mind gender parity, is responsible for the following:

* Approving appointments of individuals for reviewers’ pool
* Assigning site review teams in collaboration with the Secretariat
* Reviewing reports (self-evaluation, site visit, etc.) and formulating a recommendation to the Board of Directors regarding accreditation of the programme based on which Board of Directors will make a final decision
* Proposing changes to accreditation procedures and accreditation criteria

## Appeals Committee

The Appeals Committee is an ad hoc committee instituted by the Board of Directors as necessary for the purpose of considering appeals against accreditation decisions. This committee will consist of three members, none of whom served on the Review Team or are currently on the Boards of Directors or Accreditation.

The Appeals Committee will:

* Assess the evidence presented by the Board of Accreditation and by the appellant programme in order to make a recommendation to the Board of Directors on whether the appellant’s case is reasonable and on whether the original accreditation decision should stand or be amended.

## Secretariat

The Director of the APHEA Secretariat, appointed by the Board of Directors, will be in charge of day-to-day management of the organisation.

Responsibilities include the following:

* Developing all documents and materials pertinent to the accreditation process
* Corresponding with institutions to set a timetable for the process
* Assigning site review teams in collaboration with the Board of Accreditation
* Preparing materials for the site review team in cooperation with the institution
* Assisting the site review team in producing final site visit report
* Conducting ongoing training for site reviewers
* Acting as the secretariat for both Boards, proposing a budget and keeping accounts
* Maintaining the website

An outline of the organisational structure of APHEA is illustrated below.



# Overview of Accreditation Process

The following list provides an overview of major steps in the accreditation process. The subsequent sections explain each part in more detail.

1. If a programme has not previously undergone accreditation by APHEA, an application must first be submitted indicating that the programme fulfils the Curriculum Validation.
2. The school is notified by APHEA Secretariat as to whether or not it has passed the Curriculum Validation phase.
3. If so, the programme begins to conduct an analytical self-evaluation. Completion of this phase takes time, usually 4-6 months but may be extended if necessary.
4. The APHEA Secretariat, in correspondence with the school, sets a deadline for the submission of the final self-evaluation Report and tentatively schedules the site visit.
5. The school submits the self-evaluation Report to the APHEA Secretariat.
6. APHEA Secretariat notifies the school regarding the composition of the review team and inquires about conflicts of interest.
7. APHEA Secretariat sends each review team member the self-evaluation Report of the applicant programme and background materials in preparation for the site visit.
8. The school develops a tentative site visit agenda and consults with APHEA Secretariat a month prior to the site visit.
9. The review team conducts visit and determines the validity of the self-evaluation Report. The chair of the review team reports major findings to the school officials during the final briefing session.
10. APHEA Secretariat along with the chair of the review team prepares the first draft of the site visit report and distributes to team members for completion/ amendments.
11. Final draft of report is submitted to the school and the director of programme is invited to prepare a written response in 14 days addressing any inaccuracies and factual omissions in the report.
12. Corrections from the school, if any, are discussed with the chair of the review team, and incorporated into the final version of the report when appropriate before it is forwarded to the Board of Accreditation.
13. The Board of Accreditation reviews the report at its next meeting and formulates a recommendation regarding accreditation of the programme.
14. The Board of Accreditation forwards this recommendation to the Board of Directors who will make a final decision.
15. APHEA Secretariat notifies the director and officials of the school of decision.
16. APHEA Secretariat invites the director of the programme to evaluate the process.
17. If a programme is accredited, the final decision is posted on the APHEA website along with the executive summary of the final report. The institution may post the final report in its entirety on its website if it chooses to do so along with the APHEA logo.
18. If a programme is currently accredited, approximately two years before the six year accreditation term expires, APHEA Secretariat notifies the school that the programme will require a further review to re-affirm the accreditation status.

An outline of the main phases, their approximate duration are presented in the following table:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Stages** | **Content** | **Average duration** |
| Curriculum Validation | Curriculum Validation of programme. Denotes eligibility of programme to proceed to accreditation | 2-3 months |
| Self-evaluationExternal Review | Self evaluation against the set of agreed upon quality standards resulting in a self- evaluation reportExternal review by a team of 3 peer reviewers including a 2 day site visit and resulting in an external review report | 4-6 months2-4 month |
| Accreditation | Accreditation decision | 1-3 months |

# Initiating the Review Process: Curriculum Validation

## New Applicants

An institution which wishes to have its Public Health programme accredited must successfully undertake a Curriculum Validation to proceed to accreditation. Programmes organised by more than one institution of higher education are eligible to seek accreditation as a single entity. The programme will be evaluated against the same set of criteria as programmes organised by a single institution.

APHEA will consider programmes outside of the European region; however due to the variable nature of public health education around the world and APHEA’s capacity, these programmes will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The application must be accompanied by:

1. A statement indicating that the institution understands all required components of the accreditation process, including the self-evaluation procedure, conduct of an on-site visit and payment of all fees.

2. A statement signed by the head of the institution in which the programme is located inviting APHEA to initiate the accreditation process. The request should be co-signed by the director of the programme. In the event that the programme is administered by more than one institution, a signature must be obtained from the director of each respective body.

If the applicant programme is eligible, the institution will be notified shortly thereafter and the Secretariat along with the institution will create a procedural schedule for the rest of the process along with a fee schedule.

Candidacy status by no means guarantees eventual accreditation.

The candidate may withdraw from the accreditation process at any point prior to the final decision.

## Re-Accreditation

Accreditation is granted for six years. When accreditation status is conferred, the Board of Directors designates a specific date through which that status is valid. Approximately two years prior to the expiration of the accreditation period, APHEA staff notify the school of the upcoming review and advise that the programme begin a self-evaluation process anew. In the event a programme does not wish to maintain its accreditation status, it should advise APHEA in writing and no further review procedures will be scheduled.

In such an event institutions / programmes will be entitled to use the past tense when referring to accreditation after the expiration date of the current accreditation. They will not be granted the permission to use the previous accreditation status for present student cohorts if they have not graduated at the date that the accreditation has expired. All references to APHEA accreditation should be made in the past tense.

Institutions / programmes wishing to maintain their accreditation status beyond the previous accreditation cycle are required to follow the standard procedural framework by undertaking the relevant Curriculum Validations and self-evaluation documentation, site visit and decision. Initial documents can be resubmitted highlighting substantive changes made since the previous round of accreditation. The objective of the re-accreditation cycle is to encourage improvement and institutions / programmes are requested to explicitly address the recommendations for quality improvement resulting from the first accreditation cycle under the relevant criteria.

If an accredited institution / programme completes the procedural requirements, and is deemed successful before the end of their accreditation cycle, the previous accreditation status is maintained and automatically continues into the next cycle of 6 years.

## Payment of Fees and Expenses

The fee schedule is available on the APHEA website. Accredited programmes must pay all annual fees on time as requested. Failure to pay required fees by the defined deadlines will

* delay an initial accreditation decision (for applicants) or
* result in removal from APHEA’s list of accredited programmes as well as the use of the APHEA logo by the programme and host institution.

## Timetable for Review

Site visit dates are determined by APHEA staff in consultation with the school after the Curriculum Validation phase has been passed. Dates will be established for submission of the self-evaluation report as well as for the site visit. The review process for first-time accreditation can take up to 10 months from the date of the application’s acceptance to the date of the Board’s official decision. The re-accreditation process takes the same amount of time.

# Self Evaluation Phase

## Process

The self-evaluation phase is the main component of the accreditation process. Applicants are expected to address all accreditation criteria and provide detailed quantitative and qualitative documentation of compliance with the criteria. All data provided for each established criteria should be as recent as possible and a maximum of one year old. The requirements for the self- study are the same for first-time and reaccreditation reviews.

An institution has great flexibility in carrying out its self-evaluation. However, involvement of all constituent groups is essential (administrators, faculty, students, alumni, advisory groups, community constituents, i.e. staff members from organisations/institutions which collaborate with the institution in education, research, and service, and other stakeholders). The institution may choose any method it wishes to conduct the self-evaluation. In the case of programmes managed by multiple institutions, constituents from each institution must be involved in the process of putting together the self-evaluation.

## Self-Evaluation Report

The process should result in a report of quantitative and qualitative information describing and analysing the features of the programme, addressing all accreditation criteria (refer to the self-evaluation handbook) and including a description of the programme’s strengths and weaknesses. For each criterion, the report must include elements of description, analysis, and evaluation, always evidence based. Each criterion should be addressed in terms of supporting evidence indicating performance, and an analytical assessment leading to a conclusion as to whether or not the programme meets that particular standard. The evaluation should culminate in an insightful analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, as well as challenges and limitations, and present a plan specifying measures which will be taken to correct deficiencies. Data templates are provided to facilitate the presentation of material.

The document should be limited to 35 pages not including the appendices. This report forms the basis for the external evaluation. Since the review team is international and APHEA is a European agency, the report must be written in English. It should be sent to the APHEA Secretariat 8 weeks prior to the scheduled site visit. APHEA staff is authorised to cancel a site visit if the document is not received in time.

Copies of the final report with all appendices in pdf and Word version and electronic links/hardcopies of the programme bulletin or catalogue should be forwarded to the APHEA secretariat. A copy will be forwarded to all members of the review team, and one copy will be kept for office records. One hard copy should be bound and presented to the secretariat during the site-visit so that it can be kept for official records.

*Report format should be of 1.5 line space, body text of Calibri or Arial font size 11, margins 2.54cm. Applicants are advised to follow the criteria and use as a template to ensure compatibility between documents .*

# External Review Phase

## Site Visit

The on-site visit[[1]](#footnote-1) is a crucial part of the accreditation process. The purpose of this visit is to:

* Assess the validity of the self-evaluation report with a thorough peer review process
* Provide on-site consultation with expert peers
* Ensure that the programme under review complies with the criteria for accreditation

## Scheduling the Site Visit

Site visits normally take two days plus the evening preceding the visit. On occasion, the visit may be lengthened or shortened if there is agreement that this is needed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the programme. The institution will be asked for comments on any potential conflict of interest concerning selected review team members. The school is asked to prepare a schedule for the site visit using the proposed template below as a framework. The schedule should be prepared as soon as the APHEA Secretariat confirms that the review is to proceed, following review of preliminary documents. The review team chair must also approve the schedule. The school should send this schedule to the APHEA site visit coordinator a month prior to the visit. The agenda should be flexible enough to allow for adjustments which may be requested by the review team prior to and during the course of the site visit. During the visit, the team will need to meet with a broad representation of school constituents, including programme administrators, faculty, students, programme alumni, community representatives, and other stakeholders. The site visit will commence with an entrance conference with the director of the programme/head of school who will provide an overview of the programme and end with an exit conference during which the review team will present a summary of their conclusions. Site visits will be conducted in English.

The following is a sample agenda for a site visit[[2]](#footnote-2),[[3]](#footnote-3):

# Indicative Site Visit Agenda

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Day 0. Arrival date:**  | **Location** |
|  | Arrival of review team in country |  |
|  | Preparatory meeting review team (behind closed doors)  | Hotel |

| **Day 1.**  |
| --- |
| **Time** | **Agenda** | **Location** | **Programme Participants** | **Criteria** |
| 09:00 – 09:30 | Arrival of review team on site and welcome by school. Explanation of materials on display and practical arrangements during the site -visit. |  |  | N/A |
| 09:30 – 10:45**Session 1** | Meeting with programme repre-sentatives, board, programme management and author(s) of the Self-Evaluation Report: overview of programme under review, highlighting any special features/ peculiarities of programme; unclear issues as perceived by review team to be put forth. |  |  | 1 & 2 |
| 10:45-11:00 | SESSION DEBRIEF - review team |
| 11:00-12:00**Session 2** | Non-specified session for continuation of previous sessions or additional requirements based on SED review. |  |  | various |
| 12:00 -12:15 | SESSION DEBRIEF - review team |
| 12:15- 13:15 **Session 3** | Meeting with students (includes student members of advisory bodies at school). Ensure mix of 1st and 2nd year. |  |  | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7 |
| 13:15-13:30 | SESSION DEBRIEF - review team |
| 13:30 – 14:30**Session 4** | Lunch – Light buffet meeting with Alumni. |  |  | 2, 3, 4 & 7 |
| 14:30 - 14:45 | SESSION DEBRIEF - review team |
| 14:45 - 15:45**Session 5** | Tour of school premises and facilities, preferably guided by students (lecture halls, tutorial rooms, computer facilities, library etc.). |  |  | 6 |
| 15:45-16:00 | SESSION DEBRIEF - review team |
| 16:00 - 17:00**Session 6** | Meeting with representatives from labour market/stakeholders outside programme. |  |  | 2, 3 & 7 |
| 17.00 - 17.30 | DAILY DEBRIEFING - review team  |
| 17.30 | Team return to hotel. |  | N/A |  |

|  |
| --- |
| Evening event if planned |

| **Day 2.**  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Time** | **Agenda** | **Location** | **Programme Participants** | **Criteria** |
| 09:00 – 10:00 | Review of materials |  |  |  |
| 10:00 – 11:30**Session 7** | Meeting with core staff members (includes members of advisory bodies at school) |  |  | 2, 3, 5 & 7 |
| 11:30-11:45 | SESSION DEBRIEF - review team |
| 11:45 - 12:45**Session 8** | Review of teaching |  |  | 3, 5 & 6 |
| 12:45 - 13:45 | Light lunch / Internal team consultation hour. |  |  |  |
| 13:45 – 15:00**Session 9** | Meeting with other representatives of the school.1: Representative of admissions board2: Career advisor/ student advisor3: Head of educational support office |  |  | 4 & 6 |
| 15:00 - 15:15 | SESSION DEBRIEF - review team |
| 15:15 – 16.00**Session 10** | Meeting with other representatives of the school.1. Welfare & Accommodation representatives
2. International office
3. Human Resources
 |  |  |  |
| 16:00 - 16:15 | SESSION DEBRIEF - review team |
| 16:15 – 17.00**Session 11** | Meeting with other representatives of the school.7: Representative of examiners’ board8: Quality management committee |  |  | 3 & 7 |
| 17:00 -17.30 | DAILY DEBRIEFING |
| 17:30 | Return to hotel |

| **Day 3.**  |
| --- |
| **Time** | **Agenda** | **Location** | **Programme Participants** |
| 09:00 – 12:00 | Review team meeting behind closed doors  |  |  |
| 12:00 - 13:00 | (if required) Concluding meeting with school representatives, board, programme management. |  |  |
| 13:00 – 14:30 | Oral presentation on first impression by chair and team. |  |  |
| 14:30 onwards | Site visitors leave |  |  |

## The Review Team

The site visitors are assigned by the APHEA Secretariat in collaboration with the Board of Accreditation. Site visitors are a select group of individuals who share the following characteristics:

* Competence by virtue of experience
* Sensitivity to the unique features of the programme
* Impartiality without any known conflict of interest

The review team will consist of 3 reviewers, including the review team chair, in addition to an agency representative. The review team will be responsible for conducting the external in-country evaluation of the applicant programme and based upon the self-evaluation report provided by the applicant, following the accreditation criteria set out by APHEA. The review team will produce a report following the site visit indicating if and to what degree the programme meets APHEA criteria, based on which the Board of Accreditation will formulate a recommendation regarding accreditation of the programme to be forwarded to the Board of Directors. The main roles and composition of the review team are described below.

## Training for Site Visitors

APHEA will periodically hold training sessions for site visitors. The objective of this is to make sure that site visitors are fully knowledgeable about accreditation policies, procedures and criteria, and are clear about their roles. Materials are developed for training purposes as needed.

## Main Roles of the Review Team Chair

The main roles of the review team chair are as follows:

* To serve as the official voice of the team during the site visit.
* To set the agenda for the site visit along with the Secretariat and the school.
* To review training documentation and participate in the briefing sessions provided by APHEA.
* To review the self-evaluation report produced by the applicant programme prior to the site visit.
* To coordinate efforts of and lead members of the review team during the site visit of the applicant programme in order to verify the contents of the self-evaluation report.
* To lead the production of a quality site visit report (written in English) assessing whether the programme complies with the accreditation criteria based on which the Board of Accreditation will formulate its recommendation to the Board of Directors. The entire review team must be in agreement regarding the content of this report, written according to established guidelines. The report must be submitted in a timely manner.

## Main Roles of the Review Team

The main roles of the review team are:

* To review the self-evaluation report produced by the applicant programme prior to the site visit.
* To review training documentation and participate in the briefing sessions provided by APHEA.
* To carry out an external evaluation by visiting the applicant programme in order to verify and clarify the contents of the self-evaluation report.
* To contribute to the writing of a review report based on a criterion-by-criterion assessment of the applicant programme.
* To assume all duties as assigned by the review team chair.
* The review team may not accept any kind of gifts from those at the school being visited.

## Site Visit Report

The report of the review team serves as the primary source of information used by the Board of Accreditation in making its recommendation to the Board of Directors regarding a programme’s status.

The following notation is used in the report for each sub-criterion assessed:

* The sub-criterion is met: The programme demonstrates satisfactory compliance with this requirement or exceeds the expectations embodied in the criterion. Sub-criterion could be met with commentary, meaning that the minimum requirements within a certain sub- criterion are met, but some aspects of performance could be strengthened.
* The sub-criterion is partially met: The review team has identified a concern or multiple concerns regarding a programme’s compliance with a sub-criterion. Improvement is necessary before the sub-criterion can be considered met.
* The sub-criterion is not met: The review team has identified major concerns regarding a programme’s minimal compliance with a given sub-criterion. Substantial improvement is required.

The report includes the presentation of the review team and the method used during the site visit (including the visit agenda) in addition to an assessment of compliance, sub-criterion by sub-criterion. Factual material and observations are presented to support statements concerning strengths and weaknesses. Conclusions and specific recommendations for improvement will also be presented. The report should include concrete recommendations for quality enhancement. The report should also indicate any special features of the programme under evaluation.

The review team chair will collect required material from all reviewers before the end of the visit. This material will then serve as the basis for the first draft of the team’s report. The draft will be reviewed by all review team members, who will be asked to respond by a specified date. The team’s revisions will be incorporated into a second draft which, once approved by the entire team, will be sent to the director of the programme by the Secretariat within 60 days of the completion of the site visit. The institution has 14 days to provide a written response to the report, including any factual corrections to the review team’s findings. The final site visit report, prepared by the review team chair with the assistance of the Secretariat, will be revised in light of the school’s response. It will be forwarded, along with the school’s response to the Board of Accreditation at least 14 days prior to the meeting at which the Board of Accreditation will devise a recommendation. The Board of Accreditation reserves the right to modify the report based on its final discussions. The Board of Accreditation will forward its recommendation to the Board of Directors which will render a final decision regarding the accreditation of the programme. The final decision is conveyed to the school in a letter from the President of the Board of Directors along with the final site visit report no later than 60 days following the meeting at which the final decision was made.

## Contents of On-Site Resource File

The on-site resource file should generally include any materials referenced in the self-evaluation which are not included in the appendices along with any other information the school deems necessary in order to provide evidence of the programme’s compliance with the accreditation criteria.

The review team should have access to the following documents (see handbook):

1. Programme pamphlets and catalogues/publicity material
2. Policy plan regarding research in the programme or similar document(s)
3. Course schedules from past 3 years (if different from Curriculum Validation)
4. Quality assurance policy documents or similar document(s)
5. Results/analysis/documented outcomes of any recent evaluations
6. Six representative sample of integrating experiences (i.e. theses, dissertations etc.) as highlighted in sub-criterion 3.6.
7. Faculty CVs
8. Representative selection of sample examinations/assessments (presentations, portfolio assessments, work placements) with corresponding assessment criteria and requirements (answer models)
9. The most recent External Examiner comments if available
10. Records of written student complaints and grievances, if any, for the past three years
11. Alumni survey results if available

On line access is required for all site review members. Lap tops should also be available.

If institutions have these documents online they are encouraged to attached the specific web-links within the Self-Evaluation Report so that the site visit team has more time to digest before their arrival.

## Use of Third-Party Evaluations

The results of self-evaluations or external evaluations not carried out as part of the APHEA accreditation process can be taken into account provided they were carried out no more than 3 years prior and are compatible with the methods and standards of APHEA.

# Final Decision

## Presentation of Site Visit Report to Board of Accreditation and Possible Decisions

The final site visit report is presented at a meeting of the Board of Accreditation which is responsible for formulating a recommendation as to the accreditation of the programme based on which the Board of Directors will make a final decision. Any Board members who have a conflict of interest in relation to the institution must abstain from the recommendation-making process. In addition to the site visit report, the Board will consider the self-evaluation document, the school’s response, if any, to the site visit report, and any other material available. The recommendation as to the accreditation of the programme will be forwarded to the Board of Directors which will be responsible for making the final decision as to whether or not the programme will be accredited (including term of accreditation and interim requirements, if any) and whether or not to adopt the review team’s report, with or without amendment, as the official report to be sent to the institution. Any members of the Board of Directors who have a conflict of interest in relation to the institution must abstain from the recommendation-making process. A copy of the official site visit report will be sent to the director of the institution, notifying him/her of the final decision within 30 days of the decision.

The decision can be as follows:

* Accreditation – A programme demonstrates minimum compliance with all applicable accreditation criteria. The accredited status is valid for 6 years. In specific cases, there may be requirements for follow-up measures such as interim reports etc. When a programme is accredited, the results and report executive are published on the APHEA website.
* Denial of accreditation – A programme does not meet the criteria for accreditation. The applicant may reapply after a period of 2 years.
* Provisional/conditional accreditation – This could either be granted when an already- accredited programme fails to continue to achieve its stated mission and objectives, or fails to meet the requirements for its reaccreditation review or interim report requirements or to a programme undergoing the process for the first time which presents shortcomings that could potentially be rectified within a reasonable period of time. This status is conferred for a specific length of time not to exceed 2 years. If the programme comes into compliance with the accreditation criteria within the allotted time frame, the term of accreditation will be extended up to the remainder of the 6 years. If the programme does not come into compliance within the given time period, the Board will deny accreditation. If accreditation is denied, the institution can reapply after 2 years. See Annex A.
* Extension of term – The Board may decide to extend accreditation for a programme which is provisionally accredited based on the results of an interim report indicating that the programme has made significant progress toward compliance of accreditation criteria.
* Revocation of accreditation – A programme does not meet the criteria for continued accreditation (based on institution’s report of any substantial changes to APHEA) or refuses to have the programme re-evaluated at the appropriate time.
* Deferral – The Board may require further information in order to be able to make the appropriate decision on accreditation. A specific time limit will be defined and the programme will maintain applicant status in the interim period.

## Term of Accreditation

Programmes seeking initial accreditation are eligible for a maximum term of 6 years. After initial accreditation, programmes are subject to review every 6 years. Some follow-up actions may be required such as interim reports, a special visit by APHEA staff, etc.

An institution may request to postpone its regularly scheduled site visit but only for extraordinary reasons. Such a request must be made 8 months prior to the expiration of the accreditation term. The Board may then decide to extend the current accreditation term by a specific period of time.

If a programme is accredited, the final decision is posted on the APHEA website along with the executive summary of the final report. The institution may post the final report in its entirety on its website if it chooses to do so along with the APHEA logo.

## Interim Reports

In some cases, an institution may be requested to submit an interim report to document steps taken to rectify specific areas of noncompliance found at the time the accreditation decision was made. This will be used to assess whether a programme has come into compliance with a given or multiple sub-criteria which were not met or partially met at the time of the site visit. A programme will be given a defined amount of time not to exceed 2 years to come into compliance with an accreditation standard within which it showed deficiency during the initial site visit. This period may be extended for good cause. In determining whether good cause exists, some of the factors to be assessed are a programme’s progress toward achieving full compliance, the complexity of the required changes, financial and logistical considerations, and any other circumstances which might affect the time needed for the programme to come into compliance. The Board of Accreditation will decide whether or not to accept the interim report in its initial state. The programme’s accreditation (or provisional accreditation) status will either be revoked should the programme fail to come into compliance within the time allotted or an extension of term may be granted upon the discretion of the Board. Other types of follow up may be required depending on the situation including a visit by APHEA staff or a review team.

## Notice of Substantive Change

Accreditation is awarded based on the assumption that the programme will continue to comply with the accreditation criteria in their entirety over the entire term of accreditation. If and when an accredited programme plans to make substantive changes, it must notify APHEA, fully describing the change in writing. A substantive change includes but is not limited to: a major change in the mission of the programme; change of programme format (e.g., face to face to distance, etc.); major change in the length of the programme; major organisational changes; major revision of curriculum; any other change which may affect meeting the accreditation criteria. Along with the cover letter, any supporting documents that will allow APHEA to determine whether the change will impact compliance with the accreditation criteria must also be submitted.

If other changes occur including but not limited to adverse actions by other accrediting bodies, or loss of legal authority to operate, the school is obligated to inform APHEA. This will generally be for information purposes, but APHEA may, at its discretion, request additional information or initiate a partial or complete review prior to the end of a given term of accreditation.

# Appeals, Complaints and Third Party Comments

## Appeals

Should the Board of Directors decide to deny or revoke accreditation, APHEA will notify the director of the programme explaining the reasons for the decision taken and provide information about the right to appeal.

Appeals must be notified in writing by the appellant institution no later than 30 days following the point at which the appellant institution was notified of the initial accreditation decision by the Board of Directors by filing a notice of appeal in writing and requesting an appeal hearing. If no notice of appeal is filed within this time period, the Board’s decision becomes final.

The full written appeal statement, explaining the reasons for appeal and providing supporting evidence, must be received by the Board of Directors no later than 90 days following the date that the school was notified of the initial accreditation decision. The Appeals Committee (constituted by the Board of Directors) will make a judgement on the appeal within 90 days of the committee’s receipt of all required materials from the appellant organisation. The Appeals Committee will pass its decision to the Board of Directors which will be responsible for communicating this decision to the school within 60 days of the Committee’s review. The school may request to see the record considered by the Committee in reaching its final decision. The school may terminate the appeal in writing at any time up until the moment the Appeals Committee renders the decision.

Grounds for appeal are:

* The decision of the Board of Directors was arbitrary or not supported by substantial evidence presented in the material on which the Board based the decision
* Failure to follow due process in making the final decision

The school will have the opportunity to be represented before the Appeals Committee. The decision of the Appeals Committee is based on conditions as they existed at the time of the initial decision. The Committee either affirms, amends, or reverses the decision being appealed. If the Committee affirms the decision, the decision becomes final. If the Committee amends or reverses the decision, it must provide a detailed explanation for its rationale. The length of the accreditation term must be defined at this point along with any conditions imposed as part of the decision.

Appeals Committees shall be comprised of two members and a chair, none of whom served on the review team for that programme, is currently on the Board of Accreditation or Board of Directors, was in any way involved in the action which led to the appeal, or has a conflict of interest as determined under APHEA’s conflict of interest policy. The chair shall have a casting vote where required. The chair shall be drawn from a body of experienced public health professionals and will receive advice on the due process to be expected of the Committee. The other committee members will also be experienced public health professionals in good standing who will be prepared to receive advice on the due appeal process.

The Appeals Committee will be supported by a member of the APHEA staff who will play no part in the decision of the Committee, but who may advise on due process. The school will be notified of the composition of the Appeals Committee to ascertain that it has no objections to the selection of any of the members based on conflict of interest.

The fee for conducting an appeal can be found either on the APHEA website or by contacting the secretariat. The fees are payable at the time a school or programme files its notice of appeal. This fee covers all administrative expenses incurred.

## Complaints

APHEA will only receive complaints which, if substantiated, would indicate partial or substantial noncompliance with one or more of the accreditation standards. A complaint must specify which accreditation standard the given programme is violating, as well the outcome sought and must include any documentation to support the complaint. A complainant must present documentation indicating that all appropriate administrative processes within the institution itself have been exhausted prior to filing this complaint. Even though a complaint may not lead to formal action, APHEA will maintain a record of formal complaints filed for 3 years.

If the complaint clearly identifies the standard being violated and documents efforts to pursue administrative processes at the institution itself, the following steps will be taken by APHEA:

1. The Secretariat will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 30 days and decide upon subsequent actions to be taken based on whether the complaint represents potential noncompliance with accreditation standards.
2. Copies of all material received related to the complaint will be sent to the institution within 30 days of the receipt of the complaint, along with a request for verification that administrative measures within the institution have been exhausted.
3. If the institution confirms that the complainant has exhausted administrative measures within the institution, then the institution will be asked to prepare a written response addressing the complaint within 30 days of receiving the materials.
4. The Board of Accreditation will meet by teleconference within 30 days of receiving the institution’s response in order to review all materials related to the complaint and will determine whether there is sufficient evidence to believe the programme is in violation of APHEA’s accreditation criteria.
5. If the Board of Accreditation determines that the complaint lacks sufficient evidence in order for the investigation to go forward, the complainant and the institution will be notified in writing within 30 days of the decision.
6. If the Board of Accreditation decides that the complaint is valid, a three member investigative committee will be appointed. The process will begin within 30 days of the establishment of the committee. Both the complainant and a representative of the institution will be offered an opportunity to appear before the committee.
7. The Board of Accreditation will be the one to make a recommendation to the Board of Directors after considering the assessment submitted by the investigative committee. The Board of Directors will render the final decision. The final outcome could be no change in accreditation status whatsoever, continuing the accreditation status of the programme but with an earlier review, placing a programme on probation, or revoking the accreditation status of a programme.
8. The institution will be advised of the Board’s decision within 30 days.

The school has the right to appeal the decision of the Board. The appeals procedures previously described will apply.

Complaints related to the agency itself and its policies, procedures, or practices can be forwarded directly to the Secretariat, who will attempt to resolve the matter in a timely manner. If the staff is not able to resolve the issue, the complaint will be referred to the Board of Directors and/or Accreditation and/or General Assembly.

## Third-Party Comments

Third-party comments about programmes undergoing accreditation can be submitted in writing to the Secretariat. Comments will not be considered if they are submitted anonymously.

# Evaluation of the Review Process

The effectiveness of the review process is constantly reviewed by the agency Secretariat and Boards based upon input from site visitors as well as the director of the institution (programme) being evaluated. After completion of an on-site evaluation, each member of the review team completes a questionnaire evaluating the review process. Review team members, excluding the chair, are asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the chair.

At the completion of the entire review process and after the institution has been notified of the final decision, the director of the programme is asked to evaluate the entire review process. Results of these assessments are analysed and used in revision of standards, procedures, criteria, etc. and in the appointment of future site review teams.

# References

The following references were used to create this document:

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* Handbook of Policies and Operating Procedures. Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME). June 2010.
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* Conference for Academic Accreditation in Switzerland: Accreditation Guidelines. Berne. June 2007.

# ANNEX A: Procedures for Institutions and Programmes seeking provisional accreditation re-assessment

Article 1. If not already successfully completed, the applicant is required to undertake Curriculum Validation(s).

Article 2. Following a successful Curriculum Validation the programme / school is required to write a report on how it has addressed all 'not met' & 'partially met' issues identified in the original site visit report. The applicant will need to produce any relevant documentation such as their strategic plans or decisions officially made. These will need to be produced in English. The report should include annexes also written in English. (*Report maximum length to be 10 pages with format of 1.5 line space, body text of Calibri or Arial font size 11, margins 2.54cm*).

Article 3. Upon successful completion of the report, referenced in article 2, an internal telephone conference will be convened with the original review team,\* one Board of Accreditation member and one rapporteur. Further clarification following this stage may be sought from the applicant. (\**APHEA reserve the right to alter the team construct*)

Article 4. Once article 3 is complete, a short report will be produced, reviewed and authorised by the review team. This report will then be presented to the APHEA Board of Accreditation.

Article 5. The APHEA Board of Accreditation produce a recommendation to the Board of Directors.

Article 6. The APHEA Board of Directors make a decision based upon a dichotomous yes/no decision. A "Yes" decision will confer an accreditation award totalling 6 years which will consider the amount of provisional accreditation years as spent. A "No" decision will signify the end of the accreditation process. The applicant will be eligible to apply for a new accreditation within a period of not less than 24 calendar months. The applicant will be required to cease any contemporary reference to the accreditation award in their publicity material.

1. A school may submit multiple programmes for accreditation (each one counting as a separate accreditation), but APHEA is able to assess no more than two programmes during any given site visit. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The final agenda must list participants for each session including their titles and (educational) roles. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The room set aside for the site visit needs to be spacious enough to comfortably accommodate the team of 4 -5 review team members in addition to the interviewees. Any on-site materials should be displayed on the tables in a clear fashion. Room should have capacity for laptop plug in and internet connection. Readable name cards should be prepared for all interviewees and review team members. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)