

CRITERIA

AND

PROCEDURES

FOR ACCREDITATION

(NOVEMBER 2023 REVISION)

E|C|T|E

European
Council for
Theological
Education

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INTRODUCTION

This document contains the *Criteria and Procedures* for ECTE Accreditation, providing the basic procedures that are used by ECTE. This November 2023 edition of *Criteria and Procedures* includes a number of organisational and operational changes that were introduced in 2021, such as the creation of an Accreditation Commission,¹ the introduction of the role of Accreditation Director, a revision of the functions of the ECTE Board and of some site visitation procedures. It also includes innovations introduced in 2022, such as the establishment of an integrated review procedure, consideration of institutional status and the use of the revised ECTE Certification Framework and concept accreditation for new programmes. A final set of changes were approved during the March 2023 General Assembly, most notably the disconnection of membership from accreditation services entailing the possibility of accreditation to all providers within the Christian faith tradition.

The following procedures will be developed in this document.

Membership procedures. Institutions apply for membership. This procedure normally requires a few months to complete.

Accreditation procedures. Institutions entering the accreditation process for the first time undergo procedures that ensure that necessary institutional and programme standards are in place to support the delivery of tertiary theological educational programme and to guarantee the quality of the programme(s) that the institution is delivering. Both institutional and programme accreditation are included in this initial procedure. An orientation phase that assesses the readiness of the institution an initial review is normally part of this procedure.

Institutions apply for accreditation, produce a self-evaluation report (SER) and receive a site visit, after which a review report is produced as the basis of the Accreditation Commission decision. Compliance to the *Standards and Guidelines* for ECTE accreditation is the main focus of ECTE accreditation. This normally requires about one year to complete.

Maintaining accreditation procedures. This consists in annual reporting procedures and in a cyclical review every 5 years.

Other procedures. These include the possibility for separate Institutional and Programme accreditation procedures, procedures to recognise prior institutional accreditation and procedures for the accreditation of micro-credential providers.

We offer this update as a tool in helping our stakeholders in their continued quest to be learning institutions and thus become, remain and improve their fitness for purpose.

Dr Steffen Schulte, Chairperson
Dr Marvin Oxenham, General Secretary
Carmen Crouse, Accreditation Director
Dr Graham Cheesman, Review Secretary

¹ <http://ecte.eu/introducing/organisation/accreditation-commission/>

1. MEMBERSHIP PROCEDURES

Regular membership in the ECTE is independent from ECTE accreditation procedures, but it often represents a first step for institutions.² It is reserved to institutions that identify with an evangelical faith tradition and grants full voting rights in the ECTE General assembly. This procedure normally requires a few months to complete.

Regular Membership in the ECTE network is available to all institutions of evangelical theological education operating formally at post-secondary level. Associate Membership is also available.³

1.1 – Membership criteria

The criteria for regular Membership in the ECTE are:

1. The applicant is an institution of theological education operating formally at higher education level.
2. The applicant is in good standing in its relevant evangelical community;
3. The applicant adheres to the ECTE Core Values;⁴
4. The applicant agrees to pay regular ECTE membership fees.⁵

The applicant delivers theological education within the Christian faith tradition, and thus:

- Identifies itself as a provider of theological education focused on Christian theology or of religious studies that include the Christian religion.
- Generally understands the foundations of Christian doctrine as expressed in the main articles of the classical confessions of the Christian faith, such as the Apostles' Creed.
- Normally serves one or more recognised, reputable and well-established evangelical constituencies.
- Is favourable to be associated with Christian institutions representing other traditions and theological convictions, and other institutions are likewise favourable with the association.
- Is respectable within its societal context and is not associated with disreputable organisations.
- Considers the Christian Scriptures (Old and New Testament) as a primary source for theology.
- Reflects core Christian values in its operations and programmes

² Institutions can apply for accreditation without being ECTE members. Likewise, institutions can be members of the ECTE network without proceeding with accreditation procedures. See *Introducing the ECTE* www.ecte.eu/about/

³ Associate Membership grants voice, but no right of application or vote in the ECTE General Assembly. It is available to non-formal, non-tertiary providers of theological education, to theological institutions that do not identify themselves within the 'evangelical' tradition and to individuals and organizations (such as an association of theological institutions, a theological association, a church, a denomination or a mission) that have vested interest in theological education. The same procedures apply as for Regular Membership.

⁴ See *Criteria and Procedures for ECTE Membership* www.ecte.eu/network/membership/ and *Introducing the ECTE*, Section 1.5

⁵ See <http://ecte.eu/about/fees>

1.2 – Membership procedures

The following steps lead to achieving regular Membership in the ECTE:

1. Submission of an ECTE *Membership Application* form⁶ to the ECTE General Secretary together with the required supporting documentation;
2. The ECTE Board (meeting twice a year in spring and autumn) deliberates on applications;
3. The ECTE General Secretary notifies the applicant either of membership approval or of further steps that need to be taken;
4. The ECTE Treasurer invoices the yearly membership fees (per calendar year).
5. Member institutions may include the statement ‘Member of the European Council for Theological Education (ECTE)’ or equivalent expression in their publications and use the ECTE logo. Care must be taken by the institution to make it clear that their membership in the ECTE does not equate accreditation of their institution or of their programmes.

All documents and forms are to be sent digitally, in English⁷, by email to the ECTE addresses that are provided. Official communication from the ECTE will also occur by email and in the English language. It is the responsibility of the institution to inform the ECTE of the primary contact persons with email addresses.

1.3 – Cessation of membership

DISCONTINUATION

Members can discontinue their membership in the ECTE at any time by writing to the General Secretary (office@ecte.eu). Membership discontinuation will be acknowledged and verbalised by the ECTE Board. Membership fees will be paid until the end of the calendar year in which membership is discontinued.

SUSPENSION OR REVOKING MEMBERSHIP

The ECTE reserves the right to suspend or revoke membership in accordance to the criteria and procedures outlined the ECTE’s Statutes.

Institutions or organizations which are two years or more behind with their payments of fees will receive a formal notice, after which their membership will be suspended. If, after being suspended for two years, institutions/organisations have still not settled their arrear payments, their membership will be revoked, and they will need to apply again after settling their arrears. Members which have a strong case for reduction of fees due to unusual financial constraints should appeal to the Board for this with supporting documentation and these will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Appeals may be made following the policy laid out in the ECTE website.⁸

⁶ Download at <http://ecte.eu/ga/forms/membership-application-2/>

⁷ Translation provisions can be discussed for institutions whose main language of delivery is not English.

⁸ <http://ecte.eu/ga/appeals/>

1.4 – Summary of membership procedures

PROCESS SEQUENCE

Procedure	What	Who
Membership	Inquiry about membership and/or accreditation	Applicant contacts General Secretary
	↓ Applicant sends Membership Application	Applicant to General Secretary
	↓ Board deliberates on Membership	ECTE Board
	↓ Applicant is informed of outcome	General Secretary to Applicant Treasurer invoices Applicant annually
	↓ Applicant pays membership fees	
	↓	

FORMS AND GUIDELINES

- *Membership Application* form (form used by the institution for membership application);⁹
- *Introducing the ECTE* (document describing membership rights and advantages, statutes and bylaws, ECTE core values);¹⁰

⁹ Download at <http://ecte.eu/qa/forms/membership-application-2/>

¹⁰ See <http://ecte.eu/about>

2 – ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES

Accreditation is the main procedure in the ECTE accreditation process. Accreditation normally approximately one year to complete.

Institutions may submit multiple programmes for accreditation and more than one programme may be considered in a review event. Each programme, however, will be assessed individually.

2.1 - Accreditation criteria

To successfully obtain ECTE accreditation, an institution of higher education must satisfy the following criteria:

1. The applicant delivers theological education within the Christian faith tradition, and thus:
 - Identifies itself as a provider of theological education focused on Christian theology or of religious studies that include the Christian religion.
 - Generally understands the foundations of Christian doctrine as expressed in the main articles of the classical confessions of the Christian faith, such as the Apostles' Creed.
 - Normally serves one or more recognised, reputable and well-established Christian constituencies. University departments may be excluded from this criterion.
 - Is favourable to be associated with Christian institutions representing other traditions and theological convictions, and other institutions are likewise favourable with the association.
 - Is respectable within its societal context and is not associated with disreputable organisations.
 - Considers the Christian Scriptures (Old and New Testament) as a primary source for theology.
 - Reflects core Christian values in its operations and programmes.
2. The applicant meets the institutional and programme standards A1-A6 and B1-B5 as laid out in the *Standards and Guidelines* for ECTE accreditation.¹¹ This is demonstrated through a self-evaluation report and corroborated by an on-site visit.
3. As necessary, additional criteria may apply as outlined in the ECTE Supplemental Guidelines series (e.g. the *Guidelines for Distance and Online Education* for programmes using distance or online delivery).
4. The applicant pays the relevant fees (visitation fees, then per academic year: institutional fees, per programme fees, per student fees).¹²

2.2 - Accreditation procedures

Institutions interested in ECTE accreditation are encouraged to write to the General Secretary or to the Accreditation Director. In the case of institutions that are new to the accreditation process, the ECTE offers a mandatory Orientation Phase. If the case of institutions that already have third-party quality assurance

¹¹ Standards A7 and B6 do not need to be considered as Accreditation criteria as both institutional and programme standards and the full ESG 1 are covered in standards A1-A6 and B1-B5.

¹² See www.ecte.eu/about/fees

arrangements in place, these should be specified in the initial application, so the Accreditation Director can evaluate the conditions to employ ECTE's modified procedures for dual, joint or transferred accreditation.

Here are the procedures for achieving ECTE accreditation.¹³

1. **Initial application.** The institution fills out the *Accreditation Application* form¹⁴. This application includes a timeline for the submission of the *Self-Evaluation Report* (SER) and suggested dates for a site visit. If more than one programme is being submitted, this must be specified.
2. **Authorisation.** The Accreditation Director (AD) either:
 - a. approves the start of the Orientation Phase¹⁵ to assess the readiness of the institution with its programmes for an initial review and provides the name and contact information of the staff person providing guidance to the institution.¹⁶
 - b. approves the application, authorises the site visit and provides the name and contact information for the Review Secretary
 - c. provides alternative instructions (should the application be insufficient or unsuitable as a *bona fide* case for accreditation).

In case of approval, the AD instructs the institution to proceed with the production of a *Self-Evaluation Report* (SER) authorises the Review Secretary to begin assembling a Visitation Evaluation Team (VET) and arrange a date for the site visit.

3. **SER.** The institution produces a *Self-Evaluation Report* (SER)¹⁷ with hyperlinks to supporting documentation and sends it to the Review Secretary and to the Accreditation Director at least two months before the site visit. This is a major quality assurance exercise whereby the institution evaluates its operations in light of the *Standards and Guidelines* for ECTE Accreditation.¹⁸ It is important that the institution understands this as an opportunity for a thorough reflection that will often indicate need for change, innovation, revision and improvement of its institutional quality. The result of this exercise, which normally takes several months and involves all the stakeholders of the institution, is a substantial document that responds to each of the standards and relative guidelines in detail along with written evidence of compliance. In the case of multiple programmes, it must be clear how each programme responds to the required standards.

As necessary, institutions also respond to additional guidelines from ECTE Supplemental Guidelines series. This will be communicated by the Accreditation Director.

4. **Visitation arrangements.** As the institution prepares the SER, the Review Secretary (RS) begins to collect availability for a Visitation Evaluation Team (VET) including a potential VET Leader. The RS submits the potential VET-Members and Leader to the Accreditation Commission for approval and asks the institution to sign off on the team and agree on the date for the visit. Perceived conflict of interest situations by the institution relating to any team member must be addressed at this point. Detailed arrangements of the site visit are coordinated between the institution and the VET Leader.¹⁹ These arrangements include accommodation needs, provision for arrival and for local travel, a schedule to be followed during the visit, a list of individuals to be interviewed and of

¹³ Special provisions are made for schools with other accreditation, see *Guidelines for Dual and Joint Accreditation* www.ecte.eu/qa/guidelines

¹⁴ This is an online form that is automatically sent to the General Secretary and to the Accreditation Director <http://ecte.eu/qa/forms/accreditation-application/>

¹⁵ See Appendix A

¹⁶ This process can be adjusted or waived for institutions with third party quality assurance in place.

¹⁷ An SER template is available the *Guidelines for Producing a SER* <http://ecte.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Guidelines-for-Producing-Self-evaluation-Reports.pdf>

¹⁸ If the institution delivers programmes by distance or online education, the additional *Guidelines for Distance and Online Education* must also be considered in the SER.

¹⁹ See also *Guidelines for Site Visits* www.ecte.eu/guidelines

materials to be examined and/or translated into English, and similar details. These details are normally finalised a month before the site visit.

Institutions engaging in accreditation procedures to nominate an Internal Review and Accreditation Coordinator who will be the main interface with the ECTE throughout the process.

5. **Documentation.** The SER is to be submitted at least two months prior to the site visit. Once the SER is received, the RS provides the VET panel with copies of the SER to be evaluated on-site in light of the *Standards and Guidelines* for ECTE Accreditation and gives access to the historical archive of the institution. In preparation for the visit, each member of the VET panel carefully examines the documentation that is provided.

All documents and forms are to be sent digitally, in English,²⁰ by email to the ECTE addresses that are provided.²¹ Official communication from the ECTE will also occur by email and in the English language. It is the responsibility of the institution to inform the ECTE of the main contact persons including their contact information for the accreditation process.

6. **Visitation.** The accreditation visit takes place, which might include multiple programmes. This is normally a physical visit, but online or blended visits are also a possibility. For more details on ECTE site visits, consult *Guidelines for Site Visits and VETs*.²²
7. **Review Report.** The production of a *Review Report* resulting from the site visit is a fundamental component of the quality assurance process. If more than one programme is being considered in the review, they will be treated distinctly. The main person responsible for collating the final *Review Report* is the Review Secretary (RS). After the accreditation visit, the VET panel and the RS produce a *Review Report*²³ that is signed off by the institution for factual accuracy and submitted to the Accreditation Commission for deliberation and decision-making. Following the AC decision, the report is published on the ECTE website by the General Secretary.

For more details on the content and procedures relative to Review Reports, consult *Guidelines for Site Visits and VETs*.²⁴

8. **Visitation fees.** After the approval and publication of the Review Report, the institution is invoiced by ECTE for visitation fees (visitation fees plus travel expenses).²⁵ The institution covers accommodation expenses during the visit directly. No direct financial transactions will occur between institutions and the VET panel members.
9. **Decision-making process.** The Accreditation Commission considers the *Review Report* and any other supporting documents it deems necessary (e.g. the SER) and makes a final decision concerning accreditation. Distinct decisions will be made concerning Institutional accreditation and Programme accreditation of each programme being submitted. Through a vote by simple majority, the Accreditation Commission will either:
 - a. Grant accreditation, meaning full compliance to all standards.
 - b. Grant either/or institutional and programme accreditation (for all programmes) with recommendations, meaning substantial compliance to one or more standards. *Recommendations* indicate areas of further improvement and development and progression must be reported in the APRs.
 - c. Confirms requirements based on the VET suggestions, meaning non-compliance to one or more institutional standards. This holds up re-accreditation until the requirements are

²⁰ Translation provisions can be discussed for institutions whose main language of delivery is not English.

²¹ See www.ecte.eu/contact/

²² See <http://ecte.eu/guidelines-for-site-visits/>

²³ Download at www.ecte.eu/qa/forms/

²⁴ See <http://ecte.eu/guidelines-for-site-visits/>

²⁵ See <http://ecte.eu/guidelines-for-site-visits/>

judged to be fulfilled within the set timeframe by the AC. Since programme accreditation depends on institutional accreditation, no programme will be granted accreditation until institutional standards are met. During this phase, the institution will be listed on the ECTE directory as 'Under Review'.

- d. Grant institutional accreditation but sets forth requirements for one or more programmes, meaning non-compliance to one or more programme-related standards. Programmes that are subject to requirements will not be granted accreditation until the requirements are met. During this phase, the programmes subject to requirements will be listed on the ECTE directory as 'Under Review'.
- e. Does not grant institutional or programme accreditation and provides further instructions to the institution should a re-submission be needed. During this phase, the institution and programme/s will be listed on the ECTE directory as 'Under Review'. Since it is possible to submit more than one programme for review, each programme will receive a distinct decision which may be different from the others. In other words, each programme will be self-standing in terms of the outcome of the review.
- f. Not grant accreditation and provide further instructions to the institution if it wishes to re-apply

Concerning institutional or programme requirements, a due date is specified in the minutes of the Accreditation Commission and in the follow-up correspondence from the AD. Pending the meeting of the requirements, the institution may undergo a period of probation during which accreditation is provisionally maintained. The ECTE directory will show "under review" during this phase. Failure to implement requirements will result in the loss of accreditation.

In all cases, the decisions of the ECTE Accreditation Commission will be communicated and explained to the institution in writing by the Accreditation Director.

10. Publication

In line with best practice in quality assurance, the accreditation decision, together with the integral *Review Report*, will be published on the ECTE website (appeals and their outcomes will also be published should they arise).²⁶ Institutions have the right to appeal the decision of the ECTE Accreditation Commission.²⁷ The accredited institution and programmes will be listed in the ECTE Accreditation Directory.²⁸

Once accreditation is granted, institutions include the claim "ECTE Accreditation" on their website and publications, making sure they use the formulation provided in *Guidelines for Institutional Status and Qualification Nomenclature*²⁹. It is important that this publicity distinguishes Institutional accreditation and accreditation of each programme, ensuring that *only* programmes that have been individually accredited by the ECTE are labelled as such. If an accredited institution offers programmes that are not accredited by the ECTE, they should clearly be marked as: 'not accredited by the ECTE' in publicity materials.

11. **Follow-up** is envisioned at various levels, depending on the outcomes of the accreditation decision (see 9 above).

- a. When accreditation is granted, the institution follows up with an Annual Progress Report to which the Accreditation Director responds after deliberation with the Accreditation Commission as needed.

²⁶ See www.ecte.eu/qa/reports/

²⁷ See <http://ecte.eu/qa/appeals/>

²⁸ See <http://ecte.eu/accreditationdirectory/>

²⁹ See www.ecte.eu/qa/guidelines/

- b. When accreditation is granted with recommendations, the institution reports on progress in its Annual Progress Report which are noted and monitored by the Accreditation Director and successive review visits. Progress relating to recommendations receive special attention in the 5-year-reaccreditation process.
 - c. When accreditation is subject to requirements, the institution responds in direct correspondence with the Accreditation Director providing evidence as the requirements are met. During this correspondence, the Accreditation Director can provide further clarification on the requirements. Documentation related to the fulfilment of requirements are submitted to the Accreditation Commission. Once the Accreditation Commission deems requirements to be met, the Accreditation Director will confirm this in writing to the institution and grant institutional accreditation (the tag 'Under Review' will be removed from the website directory). The five-year period until re-accreditation starts with the date of the first AC deliberation relating to this review.
 - d. When accreditation is not granted, the Accreditation Director will contact the institution to provide further guidance should a new application be sought.
12. **Feedback.** At the end of each site visit, the Accreditation Director will ask the hosting institution and all members of the VET panel to fill out a *Visitation Feedback* form where all parties will be asked to evaluate the different aspects of the site visit.³⁰

As part of the ECTE's quality assurance processes³¹ the feedback data will be used in two ways.

 1. Following each site visit, the Accreditation Director will provide a summary of the *Visitation Feedback* to the VET panel, recommending good practices, highlighting areas of improvement and addressing areas of concern.
 2. The Accreditation Director will thank the hosting institution for the feedback by email and reassure that any issues of concern that have been raised will be brought to the respective decision-making body for action and response.
 3. The Accreditation Director will consider all *Visitation Feedback* forms annually and develop action plans in conjunction with the Review Secretary and the General Secretary for the professional development of ECTE peer experts. Specific replies will also be provided to institutions raising specific concerns.
13. **Annual reporting and annual fees.** Accredited institutions report at the end of every academic year on areas of institutional and programme quality through an *Annual Progress Report (APR)*, see more below. The APR also includes reports on student numbers upon which accredited institutions will be invoiced per academic year for their accreditation fees.³² Institutions who have not paid their fees and have not responded to requests for payment will also be listed as "under review" in the ECTE website directory.

³⁰ The *Visitation Feedback* form has a set of common questions as well as distinct questions for the institution and for the VET panel.
<http://ecte.eu/ga/forms/visitation-feedback/>

³¹ This responds in particular to ESG 2.4 related to the assessment and development of peer experts.

³² See <http://ecte.eu/guidelines-for-site-visits/>

2.3 – Summary of accreditation procedures

PROCESS SEQUENCE

Procedure	What	Who
Accreditation	↓ Institution submits online Accreditation Application	Institution to AD
	↓ AD approves application, production of SER and site visit	AD to Institution, RS and GS
	↓ Institution produces SER and sends it to RS and AD	Institution to RS, GS and AD
	↓ VET panel assembled, site visit date arranged, and VET Leader nominated and confirmed	RS, AD, AC, Institution and VET
	↓ Accreditation Visit	VET Leader coordinates; RS, VET performs; Institution hosts and pays visitation fees upon receipt of invoice
	↓ Institution is invoiced for and pays site visit fees	Treasurer invoices, institution pays
	↓ Production of Review Report	RS and VET; Institution signs off
	↓ Accreditation Commission deliberates on Accreditation	Accreditation Commission
	↓ Institution is informed of outcome	AD to Institution
	↓ Follow up on any requirements	Institution, AD and AC
		Treasurer invoices, Institution pays
		↓ Institution pays annual accreditation fees
	↓ Publication	ECTE publishes in the Review Directory, Institution publishes on its website. DEQAR entry for institution is initiated

FORMS³³

- *Accreditation Application*
- *Self Evaluation Report (SER) - a template*
- *Review Report*

GUIDELINES

- *Standards and Guidelines for ECTE Accreditation*³⁴
- *Guidelines for Producing a SER*³⁵
- *Guidelines for Site Visits*³⁶
- *Fee schedule*³⁷
- *Guidelines for Dual and Joint Accreditation*³⁸
- *Guidelines for Distance and Online Education*³⁹

³³ All the forms below can be downloaded at <http://ecte.eu/forms>

³⁴ See <http://ecte.eu/qa/standards/>

³⁵ See www.ecte.eu/qa/guidelines/

³⁶ See www.ecte.eu/qa/guidelines/

³⁷ See www.ecte.eu/about/fees

³⁸ See www.ecte.eu/qa/guidelines/

³⁹ See www.ecte.eu/qa/guidelines/

- *Guidelines for Concept Accreditation*⁴⁰
- *Guidelines for Institutional Status and Qualification Nomenclature*⁴¹

⁴⁰ See www.ecte.eu/qa/guidelines/

⁴¹ See www.ecte.eu/qa/guidelines/

3 – MAINTAINING ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES

All accredited ECTE institutions and programmes must undergo cyclical external quality assurance, both at the institutional and programme level. To maintain accreditation, institutions must a) submit Annual Progress Reports (APRs) and b) undergo a full accreditation review every 5 years.

3.1 – Annual reporting (APR)

Accredited institutions report every year on areas of institutional and programme quality through an *Annual Progress Report (APR)*. If an institution has more than one programme accredited with the ECTE, the APR should provide a distinct response for each programme.

Here are the procedural steps for maintaining accreditation through the submission of a yearly report called the *Annual Progress Report (APR)*:

1. Institutions submit an *Annual Progress Report (APR)*⁴² via the online form of the Accreditation Director, which is copied to the ECTE Treasurer for invoicing purposes.⁴³ APRs are submitted every year before the end of June relative to the previous academic year (e.g. the APR for the academic year 2021-22 are submitted before the end of June 2022).
2. The Accreditation Director confirms the receipt of the APRs, considers the reports and sends response to the institution as needed.
3. To maintain or renew accreditation, institutions need to be in line with their fees. Institutions which are two years or more behind with their payments of fees after reminders have been issued by the Treasurer will receive a formal notice from the General Secretary. If, six months following the formal notice, schools have still not settled their fees, their membership and accreditation will be suspended and the ECTE directory updated to reflect this (i.e. suspended as of month/year).⁴⁴ If, after being suspended for two years, institutions have still not settled their arrear payments, their membership and accreditation will be revoked, and they will need to apply again. It should be noted that being revoked involves loss of membership and both institutional and programme accreditation. When an institution is revoked, the name of the institution will be removed from the directories on the ECTE website.

In addition to the required APR, any significant institutional changes are to be discussed with the ECTE within one month of implementation or decision and major programme reforms are to be discussed with the Accreditation Director and approved by the Accreditation Commission before implementation. Whenever an institution adds a new specialization/concentration or a new delivery method to an existing accredited programme, that institution must also inform the Accreditation Director before implementation can begin.

Similarly, whenever a new programme is developed, the institution should notify the Accreditation Director, indicate its plans for programme accreditation and specify in its publications whether the

⁴² Download at www.ecte.eu/ga/forms/

⁴³ See www.ecte.eu/contact/

⁴⁴ See www.ecte.eu/about/fees. Schools which have a strong case for reduction of fees due to un-usual financial constraints should appeal to Board for this with supporting documentation and these will be considered on a case by case basis.

programme is accredited by the ECTE or not. For new programmes the *Guidelines for Concept Accreditation* should be consulted.

All documents and forms are to be sent digitally, in English,⁴⁵ by email to the ECTE addresses that are provided.⁴⁶ Official communication from the ECTE will also occur by email. It is the responsibility of the institution to inform the ECTE of the main contact persons, including their email addresses that will be used in the accreditation process.

PROCESS SEQUENCE

Phase	What	Who
4a. Yearly maintenance of accreditation	↓ Institution sends in Annual Progress Report (APR) before the end of June	Institution to AD
	↓ AD reviews APR	Accreditation Director
	↓ AD responds to institutions	AD to Institution
		Treasurer invoices Institution annually
	↓ Institution pays fees	

FORMS

- *Annual Progress Report (APR)*⁴⁷

GUIDELINES

- *Standards and Guidelines for ECTE Accreditation*⁴⁸
- *Fee schedule*⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Translation provisions can be discussed for institutions whose main language of delivery is not English.

⁴⁶ See www.ecte.eu/contact/

⁴⁷ All the forms below can be downloaded at <http://ecte.eu/forms>

⁴⁸ See <http://ecte.eu/ga/standards/>

⁴⁹ See www.ecte.eu/about/fees

3.2 – Cyclical review

ECTE accredited institutions and programmes undergo a cyclical review every 5 years on areas of institutional and programme quality through a *Cyclical Self Evaluation Report (C-SER)*. If an institution has more than one programme accredited with the ECTE, the C-SER will require a distinct section for each programme.

Here are the procedural steps for maintaining accreditation through the cyclical accreditation review.

1. **Application.** Six to twelve months before the conclusion of the 5-year cycle, an initial contact is made between the institution and the Accreditation Director to initiate the cyclical review. The institution fills out the online *Cyclical Review Request* that is forwarded to the Accreditation Director.⁵⁰ This request includes a timeline for the submission of the *Cyclical Self-Evaluation Report (C-SER)* and the three suggested dates for a site visit.
2. **Authorisation.** The Accreditation Director (AD) either a) approves the request and authorises the site visit or b) provides alternative instructions. In case of approval, the Accreditation Director instructs the institution to proceed with the production of a *Cyclical Self-Evaluation Report (C-SER)*, authorises the Review Secretary to begin assembling a Visitation Evaluation Team (VET) and arrange a date for the site visit.

No visits will be authorized for institutions which are behind with their payments of fees, thus risking the loss of their accreditation.

3. **C-SER.** The institution produces a *Cyclical Self Evaluation Report (C-SER)*,⁵¹ covering both institutional and programme standards A1-A6 and B1-B5 outlined in the *Standards and Guidelines*⁵², and sends it to the Review Secretary, the General Secretary and to the Accreditation Director at least two months before the site visit with hyperlinks to all supporting documentation.⁵³ This is a major quality assurance exercise whereby the institution evaluates its operations in light of the ECTE standards with the focus on part A and B of the *Standards and Guidelines* for ECTE Accreditation.⁵⁴ It is important that the institution understands this as an opportunity for honest and thorough reflection that will often indicate the need for change, innovation, revision and improvement of its institutional quality. The result of this exercise, which normally takes several months and involves all the stakeholders of the institution, is a substantial document that responds to each of the institutional and programme standards in detail and outlines a response to the programme standards along with written evidence of compliance. In the case of multiple programmes, it must be clear how each programme responds to the required standards.

As necessary, institutions also respond to additional guidelines from ECTE Supplemental Guidelines series. This will be communicated by the Accreditation Director.

A C-SER must normally be submitted no later than two months prior to the site visit. In extenuating circumstances some flexibility will be allowed concerning the 5-year deadline, which may mean extending the cycle of an institutional or programme accreditation by no more than one or two years. In any case, the completed review cycle of either institutional or programme accreditation will not exceed 8 years.

⁵⁰ This is an online form that is automatically sent to the General Secretary and to the QAC. See www.ecte.eu/qa/forms/

⁵¹ A C-SER template is available in section 3 of the *Guidelines for Producing a SER* www.ecte.eu/guidelines

⁵² Note that standards A7 and B6 do not need to be considered as Cyclical Review criteria as both institutional and programme standards and the full ESG 1 are covered in standards A1-A6 and B1-B5.

⁵³ See *Guidelines for Producing a SER* www.ecte.eu/guidelines.

⁵⁴ If the institution delivers programmes by distance or online education, Part A of the additional *Guidelines for Distance and Online Education* must also be considered.

- 4. Visitation arrangements.** As the institution prepares the C-SER, the Review Secretary (RS) begins to collect availability for a Visitation Evaluation Team (VET), including a potential VET Leader. The RS submits the potential VET-Members and Leader to the Accreditation Commission for approval. The RS asks the institution to sign off on the team and date for the visit. Potentially perceived conflict-of-interest by the school relating to any one nominated team-member must be addressed at this stage by the school to the RS. Detailed arrangements of the site visit are coordinated between the institution and the VET Leader.⁵⁵ These arrangements include accommodation needs, provision for arrival and for local travel, a schedule to be followed during the visit, a list of individuals to be interviewed and of materials to be examined and/or to be translated, and similar details. These details are normally finalised a month before the site visit.

Institutions nominate an internal review and accreditation coordinator who will be the main interface with the ECTE throughout the process.

- 5. Documentation.** The C-SER is to be submitted at least two months prior to the site visit. Once the C-SER is submitted, the Review Secretary (RS) provides the VET panel with copies of the C-SER to be evaluated on site in light of the *Standards and Guidelines* for ECTE Accreditation (Parts A and B) and gives access to the historical archive of the institution that includes the *Institutional* and *Programme Review Reports* from the previous visits. The RS also instructs VETs concerning recommendations from the previous accreditation and APRs that should be followed through on (these documents must normally be made available to the VET panel at least two months before the site visit). In preparation for the visit, each member of the VET panel carefully examines the documentation that is provided.

All documents and forms are to be sent digitally, in English,⁵⁶ by email to the ECTE addresses that are provided.⁵⁷ Official communication from the ECTE will also occur by email and in the English language. It is the responsibility of the institution to inform the ECTE of the main contact persons including their email addresses for the accreditation process.

- 6. Visitation.** The cyclical accreditation visit takes place. This is normally a physical visit, but online or blended visits are also a possibility. For more details on ECTE site visits, consult *Guidelines for Site Visits and VETs*.⁵⁸
- 7. Review Report.** The production of a *Cyclical Review Report* resulting from the cyclical review site visit is a fundamental component of the quality assurance process. If more than one programme is being considered in the review, they will be treated distinctly. The main person responsible for collating the final *Cyclical Review Report* is the Review Secretary (RS). After the cyclical accreditation visit, the VET panel and the RS produce a *Cyclical Review Report*⁵⁹ that is signed off by the institution for factual accuracy and submitted to the Accreditation Commission. The report is published on the ECTE website by the General Secretary.

For more details on the content and procedures relative to Review Reports, consult *Guidelines for Site Visits and VETs*.⁶⁰

- 8. Visitation fees. Visitation fees.** After the approval and publication of the Review Report, the institution is invoiced by ECTE for visitation fees⁶¹ (visitation fee plus travel expenses). The institution covers accommodation expenses during the visit directly.

⁵⁵ See also *Guidelines for Site Visits* www.ecte.eu/guidelines

⁵⁶ Translation provisions can be discussed for institutions whose main language of delivery is not English.

⁵⁷ See www.ecte.eu/contact/

⁵⁸ See <http://ecte.eu/guidelines-for-site-visits/>

⁵⁹ Download at www.ecte.eu/qa/forms/

⁶⁰ See <http://ecte.eu/guidelines-for-site-visits/>

⁶¹ See <http://ecte.eu/guidelines-for-site-visits/>

9. **Decision-making process.** The Accreditation Commission considers the *Cyclical Review Report* and any other supporting documents it deems necessary (e.g. the C-SER) and makes a final decision concerning the renewal of institutional accreditation and of each programme submitted for review. Through a vote by simple majority, the Accreditation Commission either:
- Renews both institutional and programme accreditation (for each programme), meaning full compliance to all standards;
 - Renews either/or institutional and programme accreditation (for all programmes) with recommendations, meaning substantial compliance to one or more standards. *Recommendations* indicate areas of further improvement and development, and progression must be reported in the APRs.
 - Confirms requirements relating to institutional standards, meaning non-compliance to one or more standards. Institutions subject to requirements will not be granted accreditation until the requirements are met. Since programme accreditation depends on institutional accreditation, no programme will be granted accreditation until institutional standards are met. During this phase, the institution and its programmes will be listed on the ECTE directory as 'Under Review'.
 - Renews institutional accreditation but sets forth requirements for one or more programmes, meaning non-compliance to one or more programme standards. Programmes that are subject to requirements will not be granted accreditation until the requirements are met. During this phase, the programmes subject to requirements will be listed on the ECTE directory as 'Under Review'.
 - Does not grant institutional or programme accreditation confirmation and provide further instructions to the institution should a re-submission be needed. During this phase, the institution and programme will be listed on the ECTE directory as 'Under Review'.

In all cases, the decisions of the ECTE Accreditation Commission will be communicated and explained in writing by the AC Director to the institution.

Institutions have the right to appeal the decision of the ECTE Accreditation Commission (appeals and their outcomes will also be published should they arise).⁶²

Concerning institutional or programme requirements, a due date is specified in the AC decision included in the follow-up correspondence with the AD. Pending the meeting of the requirements, the institution may undergo a period of probation during which accreditation is provisionally maintained. Prolonged failure to implement requirements (normally, no more than 2 years) will result in the withdrawal of accreditation.

10. **Publication.** In line with best practice in quality assurance, the accreditation decision, together with the integral *Review Report*, will be published on the ECTE website (appeals and their outcomes will also be published should they arise).⁶³ Institutions have the right to appeal the decision of the ECTE Accreditation Commission.⁶⁴ The accredited institution and programmes will be listed in the ECTE Review Directory and on the DEQAR.⁶⁵

Once accreditation is renewed, institutions include the claim "ECTE Accreditation" on their website and publications, making sure they use the formulation provided in *Guidelines for Institutional Status and Qualification Nomenclature*⁶⁶. It is important that this publicity distinguishes Institutional accreditation and Programme accreditation of each programme, ensuring that *only* programmes that have been individually accredited by the ECTE are labelled as such. If an accredited institution

⁶² See <http://ecte.eu/qa/appeals/>

⁶³ See www.ecte.eu/qa/reports/

⁶⁴ See <http://ecte.eu/qa/appeals/>

⁶⁵ See <http://ecte.eu/accreditationdirectory/>

⁶⁶ See www.ecte.eu/qa/guidelines/

offers programmes that are not accredited by the ECTE, they should clearly be marked as: 'not accredited by the ECTE' in publicity materials.

11. **Follow-up** is envisioned at various levels, depending on the outcomes of the accreditation decision (see 9 above).

- a. When renewal of institutional and programme cyclical accreditation is granted, the institution follows up with an Annual Progress Report to which the Accreditation Director responds.
- b. When renewal of institutional and programme cyclical accreditation is granted with recommendations, the institution reports on progress in its Annual Progress Report which are which are tracked by the Accreditation Director and monitored in successive review visits.
- c. When renewal of institutional and programme cyclical accreditation is subject to requirements (related either to institutional standards or programme standards relative to specific programmes), the institution submits additional representation to the Accreditation Director providing information and documentation on how it addressed the requirement(s). During this correspondence, the Accreditation Director can provide further clarification on the requirements. Once the Accreditation Commission concludes that requirements have been met, the Accreditation Director will confirm this in writing to the institution and thus confirm institutional and programme accreditation.
- d. When renewal of institutional and programme cyclical accreditation is not granted, the AC Director will contact the institution to provide further guidance should a new application be sought.

12. **Feedback.** At the end of each site visit, the Accreditation Director will ask the hosting institution and all members of the VET panel to fill out a *Visitation Feedback* form where both parties will be asked to evaluate the different aspects of the site visit.⁶⁷

As part of the ECTE's quality assurance processes⁶⁸ the feedback data will be used in two ways.

4. Following each site visit, the Accreditation Director will provide a summary of the *Visitation Feedback* to the VET panel, recommending good practices, highlighting areas of improvement and addressing areas of concern.
5. The Accreditation Director will thank the hosting institution for the feedback by email and reassure that any issues of concern that have been raised will be brought to the Accreditation Commission for action and response.
6. The Accreditation Director will consider all *Visitation Feedback* forms annually and develop action plans in conjunction with the Review Secretary and the General Secretary for the skill development of ECTE peer experts. Specific replies will also be provided to institutions raising specific concerns.

13. **Annual reporting and annual fees.** Accredited institutions report every year on areas of institutional and programme quality through an *Annual Progress Report (APR)*. The APR includes reports on student numbers upon which accredited institutions will be invoiced every year for their accreditation fees.⁶⁹ Institutions who have not paid their fees and have not responded to reminders for payment will also be listed as "under review" in the ECTE website directory.

⁶⁷ The *Visitation Feedback* form has as set of common questions as well as distinct questions for the institution and for the VET panel.
<http://ecte.eu/ga/forms/visitation-feedback/>

⁶⁸ This responds in particular to ESG 2.4 related to the assessment and development of peer experts.

⁶⁹ See <http://ecte.eu/guidelines-for-site-visits/>

PROCESS SEQUENCE

Procedure	What	Who
Cyclical 5 year maintenance of accreditation	↓ Institution and AD make initial contact with an institution in order to initiate the Cyclical Review	Institution, AD
	↓ Institution sends in Cyclical Review request	Institution via online form to AC
	↓ AD approves request, production of SER and site visit	AD to Institution, RS and GS
	↓ Institution produces Cyclical SER and sends it to RS, GS and AD	Institution to RS, GS and AD
	↓ VET panel assembled, site visit date arranged, and VET Leader nominated and confirmed	RS, AC, Institution and VET
	↓ Cyclical Accreditation Visit	VET Leader coordinates; RS, VET performs; Institution hosts and pays visitation fees upon receipt of invoice
	↓ Production of Cyclical Review Report	RS and VET; Institution signs off
	↓ Accreditation Commission deliberates on renewal of Accreditation	Accreditation Commission
	↓ Institution is informed of outcome by Accreditation Director	AD to Institution
	↓ Follow up on any requirements	Institution and AD
		Treasurer invoices Institution annually
	↓ Institution pays Programme accreditation fees	

FORMS⁷⁰

- *Cyclical Self-Evaluation Report (C-SER)* – a template
- *Cyclical Review Report*

GUIDELINES

- *Standards and Guidelines for ECTE Accreditation – Part A and B and Appendix A: ECTE Certification Framework*⁷¹
- *Guidelines for Producing a SER*⁷²
- *Guidelines for Site Visits*⁷³
- *Fee schedule*⁷⁴
- *Guidelines for Distance and Online Education*⁷⁵

⁷⁰ All the forms below can be downloaded at <http://ecte.eu/forms>

⁷¹ See <http://ecte.eu/qa/standards/>

⁷² See www.ecte.eu/qa/guidelines/

⁷³ See www.ecte.eu/qa/guidelines/

⁷⁴ See www.ecte.eu/about/fees

⁷⁵ See www.ecte.eu/qa/guidelines/

4 – OTHER ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES

This section explains the procedures for institutional accreditation, programme accreditation and recognition of prior institutional accreditation

4.1 – Institutional Accreditation

There may be cases where institutions only wish to pursue ECTE institutional accreditation. In these cases, the following criteria and procedures apply:

4.1.1 - INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

The same criteria apply as 2.1 above with the exception of §3 for which the applicant must only meet the institutional standards as laid out in the *Standards and Guidelines* for ECTE Accreditation, Part A to include Standard A.7 to cover the full scope of ESG 1.

4.1.1 - INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES

The same procedures apply as 2.2 above with the following exceptions:

§1 - The institution submits the *Institutional Accreditation Application* form⁷⁶.

§3 - The institution produces an *Institutional Self Evaluation Report (I-SER)*⁷⁷

§7 - An *Institutional Review Report* is produced following the site visit.

§9 - A decision is made only concerning Institutional accreditation

§10 - Institutions only publish results of ECTE institutional accreditation, ensuring that it is clear that its programmes are not accredited by the ECTE.

§13 – Annual reports concerning institutional standards and institutions pay annual institutional fees

4.2 – Programme Accreditation

There are cases where institutions that already have institutional accreditation only wish to pursue ECTE programme accreditation. This may be the case, for example, if an institution already accredited with the ECTE that is adding one or more new programmes or if an institution that has prior institutional accreditation (see 4.3 below) and wishes only to obtain ECTE accreditation for one or more programmes. In these cases, the following criteria and procedures apply:

⁷⁶ <http://ecte.eu/qa/forms/institutional-accreditation-application/>

⁷⁷ An I-SER template is available the *Guidelines for Producing a SER* <http://ecte.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Guidelines-for-Producing-Self-evaluation-Reports.pdf>

4.2.1 - PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

The same criteria apply as 2.1 above with the exception of §3 for which the applicant must only meet the programme standards as laid out in the *Standards and Guidelines* for ECTE Accreditation, Part B to include the full scope of ESG 1.

4.2.2 - PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES

The same procedures apply as 2.2 above with the following exceptions:

§1 - The institution submits the *Programme Accreditation Application* form.⁷⁸

§3 - The institution produces a *Programme Self Evaluation Report* (P-SER)⁷⁹ that includes each programme being submitted for accreditation.

§7 - A *Programme Review Report* is produced following the site visit.

§9 - A decision is made only concerning programme accreditation.

§10 - Institutions only publish results of ECTE programme accreditation for each accredited programme, specifying whether it is also accredited institutionally by the ECTE or not.

§13 – Annual reporting and fees should reflect programme standards (and institutional fees if the institution also has ECTE Institutional accreditation).

4.3 – Recognition of prior institutional accreditation

Institutional review for accreditation can be waived where it has already been granted by another recognised quality assurance agency.

In this case, the following special procedures apply:

1. The institution submits the *Institutional Accreditation Application* which goes to the Accreditation Commission.⁸⁰ In the application, the institution checks 'Requesting Recognition of Prior Institutional Accreditation'.
2. In the application, the institution provides information and documentation relative to their institutional accreditation by a recognised quality assurance agency.
3. The Accreditation Commission (AC) either a) approves the application and grants institutional accreditation or b) requests further documentation and evidence. Should documentation or evidence be deemed inadequate, the AC can reject the application to recognise prior institutional accreditation and instruct the institution to follow the regular procedures outlined above.

If an institution is granted the recognition of prior institutional accreditation, it can proceed immediately to programme accreditation procedures.

4.4 – Micro-credential Provider (MCP) accreditation

⁷⁸ <http://ecte.eu/qa/forms/programme-accreditation-application/>

⁷⁹ An I-SER template is available the *Guidelines for Producing a SER* <http://ecte.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Guidelines-for-Producing-Self-evaluation-Reports.pdf>

⁸⁰ This is an online form that is automatically sent to the General Secretary and to the QAC. See www.ecte.eu/qa/forms/

The ECTE accredits providers offering micro-credentials. This accreditation is distinct from ECTE institutional and programme accreditation and follows separate procedures and has different standards.

Criteria, procedures and standards for micro-credential provider (MCP) accreditation can be found in the *Guidelines for Micro-credential Providers*.⁸¹ The ECTE website features a micro-credential provider area where further information is available, together with application forms and a link to the MCP Directory.⁸²

⁸¹ <https://ecte.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Guidelines-for-Micro-credential-Providers.pdf>

⁸² <https://ecte.eu/qa/mcp/>

APPENDIX A – ORIENTATION PHASE

Following an application for accreditation, ECTE provides orientation and guidance regarding policies and process and an initial assessment of readiness for a review in an Orientation Phase. This should not be interpreted as a consultancy service concerning compliance to any of the standards under review. This phase can be waived by the Accreditation Director if the institution has prior experience with external quality assurance.

This appendix outlines the orientation phase procedure.

1. Following the Accreditation Application, the institution receives notification from the Accreditation Director about the orientation phase with name and contact information of the staff person dedicated to this institution.
2. The institution identifies an Internal Review Coordinator (IRC).
3. The IRC takes the ECTE “Preparing for Accreditation” course. This is a 10-hour online course hosted on the ICETE Academy that introduces the accreditation process and engages the institution in a preliminary draft SER. Tutoring will be provided in this course by ECTE staff.
4. Once the course has been completed, an orientation site visit by the staff person is arranged to further assess the readiness for the accreditation process.
5. The staff person will produce a summary report and evaluation of readiness, on the basis of which the Accreditation Director will either
 - a) authorize the production and submission of a full SER with hyperlinked supporting documentation and proceed with the procedures indicated in Part 2 of this document,
 - b) provide further indications on how to adequately prepare for the accreditation process

Institutions that undergo the orientation phase, will also benefit from a pre-submission check of their SER by ECTE Staff to ensure complete and adequate coverage of the Standards and Guidelines.

An orientation fee of will be invoiced after the site visit by the staff person.⁸³ The institution will also cover travel costs and room & board for the orientation visit.

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⁸³ See <http://ecte.eu/about/fees>