The Psychological Society of Ireland

Process for Accreditation of Undergraduate and Conversion Courses in Psychology

The Psychological Society of Ireland
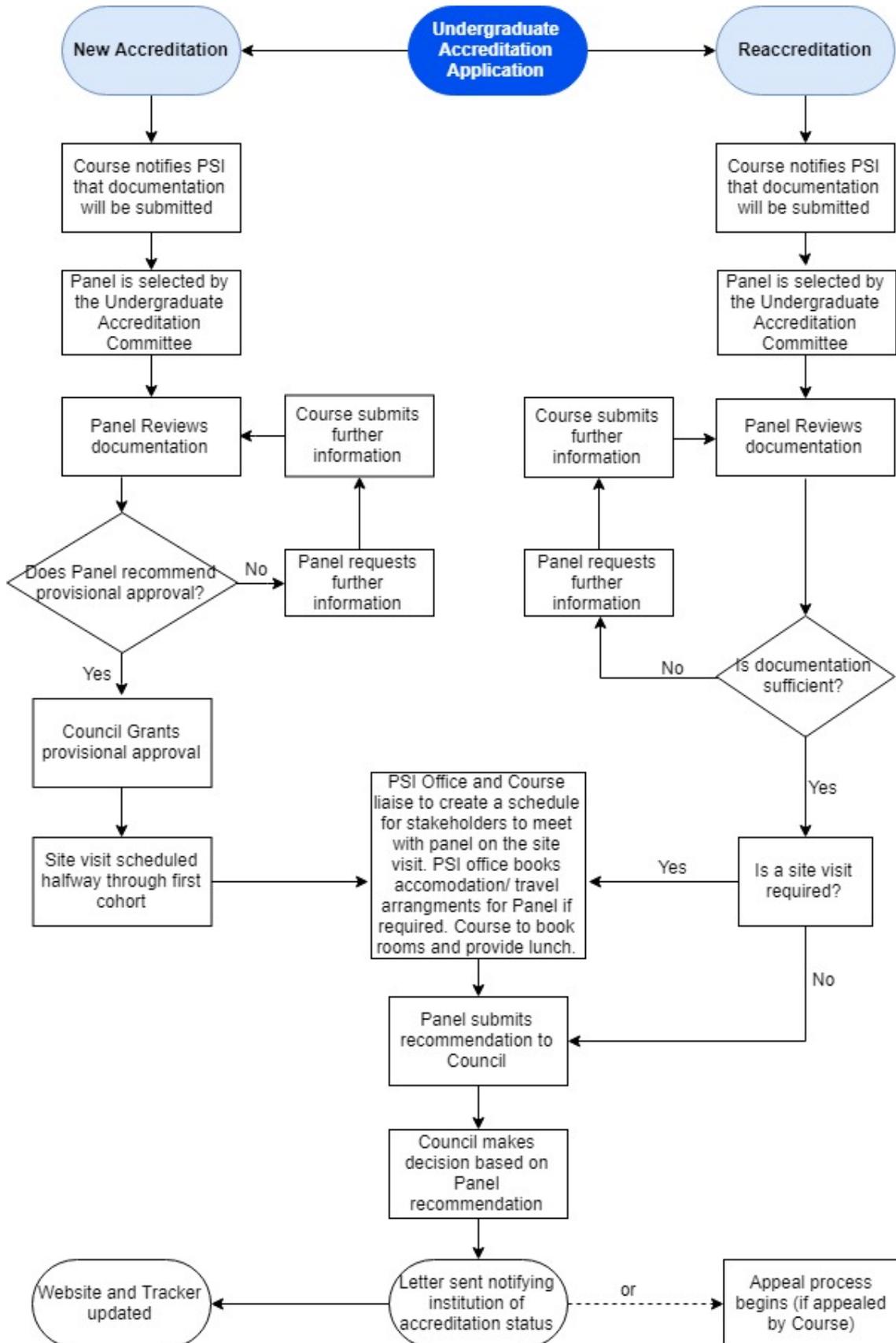
Cumann Síceolaithe Éireann

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Foreword

Accreditation relies on Partnership, encompassing collaborative working between the Society and education providers. The Society undertakes to engage in all activities and reviews in the spirit of partnership and co-operative enquiry, and Providers shall engage in a similarly open, co-operative and collaborative fashion.

This Process Guidelines Document outlines the steps to be undertaken by any higher education institution wishing to apply for accreditation or reaccreditation of an undergraduate programme/course. This Document does not address the specific programme/course requirements. These requirements are detailed in the 'Guidelines on the accreditation of undergraduate and conversion programmes that give a first qualification in psychology' document. This document was approved by the PSI Council on 26 April 2019. It will be reviewed in 2022, or earlier if required.

Process Flow

The Psychological Society of Ireland
Cumann Síceolaithe Éireann

Undergraduate Accreditation Application

New Accreditation ← Undergraduate Accreditation Application → **Reaccreditation**

New Accreditation (left branch)

Course notifies PSI that documentation will be submitted
↓
Panel is selected by the Undergraduate Accreditation Committee
↓
Panel Reviews documentation ← Course submits further information
↓
Does Panel recommend provisional approval? — No → Panel requests further information
↓ Yes
Council Grants provisional approval
↓
Site visit scheduled halfway through first cohort →

Reaccreditation (right branch)

Course notifies PSI that documentation will be submitted
↓
Panel is selected by the Undergraduate Accreditation Committee
↓
Course submits further information → Panel Reviews documentation
↓
Panel requests further information ← No — Is documentation sufficient?
↓ Yes
Is a site visit required?

Yes → PSI Office and Course liaise to create a schedule for stakeholders to meet with panel on the site visit. PSI office books accomodation/ travel arrangments for Panel if required. Course to book rooms and provide lunch.

No →

PSI Office and Course liaise to create a schedule for stakeholders to meet with panel on the site visit. PSI office books accomodation/ travel arrangments for Panel if required. Course to book rooms and provide lunch.
↓
Panel submits recommendation to Council
↓
Council makes decision based on Panel recommendation
↓
Letter sent notifying institution of accreditation status

Website and Tracker updated ← Letter sent notifying institution of accreditation status — or --→ Appeal process begins (if appealed by Course)

1. Introduction

The Society invites institutions of higher education who are providing or seek to provide undergraduate and/or conversion programmes of education in psychology to submit their programme(s) for accreditation by the Society. Through its accreditation procedures, the Society wishes to support courses in a period of self-study and peer review, thus enabling them to maintain the highest standards of education leading to a first qualification in psychology. Accreditation procedures consist of examining documentation associated with the programme and an on-site visit to meet with appropriate teaching staff, students, supervisors and other stakeholder partners as appropriate.

The words course and programme can be used interchangeably to refer to undergraduate and conversion programmes that give a first qualifications in psychology throughout this document.

This document outlines:
New Accreditation Process
Reaccreditation Process

2. New Accreditation Process

2.1. Initial Application

The Course Team should notify PSI in writing that they will be submitting an application for a new course. The initial submission should be made before the first cohort of students begins the course. Once the notification has been received, PSI will send an invoice for the Accreditation Application fee to the Course Director. Full payment of the accreditation fee is due upon submission of documentation.

2.1.1. Panel Selection

An accreditation panel will be selected from the membership of the Undergraduate Accreditation Committee. The accreditation panel should have three members, a panel Chair and two reviewers.

2.1.2. Chair of Panel

The Chair of the panel should normally be someone who will be familiar with current accreditation guidelines, relevant processes and protocols within PSI, and HEA processes. It is desirable, but not essential, that the Chair of the accreditation panel will have been a member of a previous PSI accreditation panel. The Chair will be appointed by the panel members. The duties of the Chair of the accreditation panel will be to:
- Chair meetings of the panel;
- Facilitate all communication between the panel and the Course Team during the accreditation process;
- Act as a communication link between the panel and relevant PSI structures;
- Act as a communication channel between the panel members;
- Set and maintain the timeline for the completion of the task;
- Ensure that all accreditation and provisional approval practice is carried out in a fair, transparent and consistent manner.

2.2. Application Documentation

The documentation submitted must follow the PSI guidelines for the Programme being accredited. The documentation must signpost clearly where the Programme meets the PSI

criteria. If the panel is not satisfied with the quality and clarity of documentation it can be returned for revision and resubmission. The process will not continue unless the Panel is satisfied with the submitted documentation.

The 'Guidelines on the accreditation of undergraduate and conversion programmes that give a first qualification in psychology' document details the areas for consideration and each area must be completed.

The documentation submitted must be paginated and thoroughly proofread before submission. It should be submitted in electronic format.

Typically, documentation will contain the following:
- Programme design details
- A document detailing learning outcomes and teaching and learning/assessment strategy;
- Module descriptors;
- Programme Handbook(s);
- Booklists;
- Assessment Material;
- Brief information on subsidiary subjects;
- Staffing and resourcing, including CV's of key academic personnel
- Physical and online learning facilities
- Quality Assurance processes
- Any other relevant information

Advertising your programme: We recommend you make contact with us as soon as you have made the decision to move forward with an application. Once you have submitted your application for accreditation, you may advertise your programme as *application for accreditation submitted to The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI)*. You should bear in mind any deadlines relevant to your processes for receiving applications and selecting students on to your new programme when deciding when to submit your application for accreditation. Again, please note that it is your responsibility to ensure that all applicants are able to make decisions on the basis of accurate information regarding the programme's accreditation status. If you are still developing your new programme and have yet to make a formal application for accreditation, you should not refer to Society accreditation being sought in any of your advertising and promotional materials.

2.3. Document Review
The assigned Accreditation Panel will review the submitted documentation. The Panel will request further information from the Course Team if it has any queries on the submission. If the Panel agrees that the initial application meets PSI criteria, the Panel will recommend that the PSI Council grant provisional approval.

PSI Council will review the accreditation Panel's recommendation and will, if satisfied, grant provisional approval of the course.

2.4. Site Visit
Once provisional approval has been granted, a site visit will be scheduled, normally during the programme's first year of operation.

The Accreditation Panel will meet the following groups as appropriate, depending on the nature of the course:
- Course Team;
- Head of Department (or equivalent);
- Representatives of the University management;
- Students from the course;
- Representatives from the support team;
- Any other identified stakeholder groups.

The PSI Learning and Development Coordinator will book accommodation and travel arrangements for the panel as required. The Course Team will provide meeting rooms and organise refreshments for the Panel.

The Accreditation Panel will meet to discuss the course and the documentation received prior to the on-site visit. The on-site visit lasts for one day and begins with a private panel meeting which is followed by a meeting with the Course Team and then with other stakeholder groups throughout the day.

Prior to the on-site visit, all courses will be asked to contact stakeholders and inform them as part of the accreditation process that the accreditation Panel is interested in their views of the course.

The PSI Learning Coordinator should be included in all communication between the Course Team and the Accreditation Panel. There should be no communication between the Course and the PSI President or a Council member, as this could interfere with any potential appeal or constitute a conflict of interest.

2.5. Final Report

2.5.1. Review of Visit

The Panel will review all documentation and information gathered at site-visit meetings and draft its report using the template in Appendix 2. The Introduction and Methodology sections of the Draft Accreditation report will then be sent to the Course Team for factual Checking.

2.5.2. Potential outcomes of an accreditation application

The following recommendation options are available to an accreditation panel:
  i. Full accreditation awarded to cover five cohorts of students.
        or
  ii. While full accreditation is the default position, provisional accreditation can be awarded if specific conditions for receiving accreditation can be met within a set timeframe.
      In this case, the Panel will take into account
      - all accreditation criteria and the extent to which they have been met and their impact on the overall quality of the course
      - the developmental stage of the course
      - resources available to the course vs. resources needed by the course
      - the time frame necessary to meet accreditation criteria
          or

iii.   Ongoing accreditation is not granted, and the withdrawal of accreditation process will need to be initiated. Where accreditation is withdrawn, the provider will need to make a new accreditation submission.

The Panel will provide a written account of their decision-making process to include a rationale for their recommendation to the Council for ratification.

2.5.3. How long is a course accredited for?
The Society has adopted a policy of accrediting a course to cover a defined number of cohorts of students. In practice, this means that if a course is awarded full accreditation all cohorts on the course within a particular period of time would graduate from an accredited course. The following wording is used:

"This accreditation covers five student cohorts commencing with those entering at start of academic session _____"

For example: *"This accreditation covers five student cohorts commencing with those entering at start of the academic session 2019/2020"*

This accreditation period would span the years

1. 2019/2020
2. 2020/2021
3. 2021/2022
4. 2022/2023
5. 2023/2024

If reaccreditation is then sought, an application should be made to PSI early in the 2023/2024 academic year to ensure completion of the process before the entry of the next cohort i.e. 2024/2025.

Backdating accreditation: Accreditation is awarded to specific student cohorts and applies from the academic year during which they commence the programme in question. Applications for accreditation of new programmes are generally made before the programme starts running. However, if you have developed an existing programme to meet our accreditation standards, and you would like us to backdate accreditation to cover current cohorts, you will need to clearly state the intake year from which accreditation is sought, and most importantly provide evidence that our requirements were fulfilled at the point at which those students commenced their studies. If, following consideration of your application, we find that we need to ask you to change particular aspects of your provision, we may not be able to backdate accreditation.

We expect you to maintain regular communication with us regarding changes to your provision, and any changes that materially affect the way in which your Accredited Programmes meet the relevant accreditation requirements.

2.6. Council Ratification
PSI Council will review the Accreditation Report and consider the recommendation from the Panel. If Council agrees with the report, it will ratify the report and award accreditation for the course. Accreditation can be awarded up to a maximum of five cohorts based on the Accreditation Panel recommendation.

Once Accreditation has been granted, a letter outlining the Council's decision will be sent to the Course Team along with a full copy of the Final Accreditation Report.

2.7. Appeals Process: Outlined Below

1. Accreditation decisions may be appealed by the Institution. The appeal must be lodged in writing to the Chief Executive Officer within three weeks of receipt of the Council decision. **There is an administrative fee of €750 per course for an appeal.** If an appeal is upheld in full, the fee for an appeal will be refunded.

2. An appeal panel will be established with the following membership:

   - Chair of the original Panel;
   - 2 new panel members

3. The appeal panel will review the appeal and present their recommendation to Council for ratification. The Council decision will be final and will be communicated to the Institution.

4. Canvassing or any form of deviation outside this protocol will disqualify the institution as the fairness and transparency of this process must be maintained. Any form of appeal in advance of due process will be ruled out of order.

   The Chief Executive Officer has oversight of the integrity of this process.

2.8. Feedback on the Process

Any complaints separate from an appeal following an accreditation can be emailed in confidence to the PSI President at president@psychologicalsociety.ie.

2.9. How much does an accreditation application cost?

The current accreditation application fee for undergraduate and conversion programmes that give a first qualifications in psychology is €1750 per course. The accreditation fee includes PSI administration costs, and travel and accommodation expenses for panel members.

3. Reaccreditation

3.1. Reaccreditation Application

A Course Team notifies PSI in writing when it will submit its application for reaccreditation. The application for reaccreditation should be submitted at least 9 months prior to the expiration of the current accreditation period. Once the notification has been received, PSI will send an invoice for the Accreditation Application fee to the Course Director. This is due prior to the Panel visit.

3.1.1. Panel Selection

An accreditation panel will be selected from the membership of the Undergraduate Accreditation Committee. The accreditation panel should have three members, a panel Chair and two reviewers.

3.1.2. Chair of Panel

The Chair of the panel should normally be someone who will be familiar with current accreditation guidelines, relevant processes and protocols within PSI, and HEA processes. It is desirable, but not essential, that the Chair of the accreditation panel will have been a member of a previous PSI accreditation panel. The Chair will be appointed by the panel members. The duties of the Chair of the accreditation panel will be to:

- Chair meetings of the panel;
- Ensure the administrative tasks for the panel are carried out;
- Facilitate all communication between the panel and the Course Team during the accreditation process;
- Act as a communication link between the panel and relevant PSI structures;
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- Set and maintain the timeline for the completion of the task;
- Ensure that all accreditation and provisional approval practice is carried out in a fair, transparent and consistent manner.

3.2. Application Documentation

The documentation submitted must follow the PSI guidelines for the Programme being accredited. The documentation must signpost clearly where the Programme meets the PSI criteria. If the panel is not satisfied with the quality and clarity of documentation it can be returned for revision and resubmission. The process will not continue unless the Panel is satisfied with the submitted documentation.

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- Module descriptors;
- Programme Handbook(s);

- Booklists;
- Assessment Material;
- Brief information on subsidiary subjects;
- Staffing and resourcing, including CV's of new academic personnel since the last accreditation.
- Physical and online learning facilities
- Quality Assurance processes
- Any other relevant information

3.3. Document Review

The assigned Accreditation Panel will review the submitted documentation. The Panel will request further information from the Course Team if it has any queries on the submission. If the Panel agrees that the initial application meets PSI criteria, the Panel will recommend that the PSI Council grant provisional approval.

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Once provisional approval has been granted, a site visit will be scheduled, normally during the programme's first year of operation.

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7. 2020/2021
8. 2021/2022
9. 2022/2023
10. 2023/2024

If further reaccreditation is then sought, an application should be made to PSI early in the 2023/2024 academic year to ensure completion of the process before the entry of the next cohort i.e. 2024/2025.

We expect you to maintain regular communication with us regarding changes to your provision, and any changes that materially affect the way in which your Accredited Programmes meet the relevant accreditation requirements.

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4. Withdrawal of Accreditation

There are three circumstances under which the process for withdrawing Accreditation may be initiated by the Society: First, when we have undertaken a site visit and granted ongoing Accreditation subject to the fulfilment of certain conditions, and in our opinion you have not provided a satisfactory response to our concerns within any designated timescale; second, when

we believe that there is clear evidence that our standards either are not being met or cannot be met; and third, when you fail to respond to requests for information, including for the purposes of an Accreditation review, visit, or other scheduled return or information request as notified by us. If in our reasonable opinion you do not provide us with appropriate information to be able to judge whether your Programme or other provision meets our standards, we will advise that Accreditation for future Cohorts will be withdrawn unless the information we have requested is forthcoming within our stipulated timeframe, and such evidence, in our opinion, provides sufficient to show that standards can be met.

Where one of these three scenarios occurs, Accreditation will be formally withdrawn from future Cohorts with immediate effect. Where Accreditation is withdrawn, any reference to your provision being accredited must be removed from programme information, marketing materials, websites and/or social media, and our decision communicated to all applicants to whom an offer has been made, as well as those who have accepted offers on the Programme. If you wish to seek reinstatement of Accreditation for your Programme(s) at a future date, you will need to submit a full application for Accreditation. The earliest you may submit your application is 3 months following the date on which we notified you of our decision to withdraw Accreditation.

Any decision to withdraw Accreditation will not materially affect those Cohorts who have already enrolled on the Programme concerned. However, at any stage of the withdrawal of Accreditation process, the Society may stipulate additional actions that you need to take to ensure that current/continuing Learners have an appropriate experience and exit the Programme having achieved the relevant academic and/or practice requirements at an appropriate level.