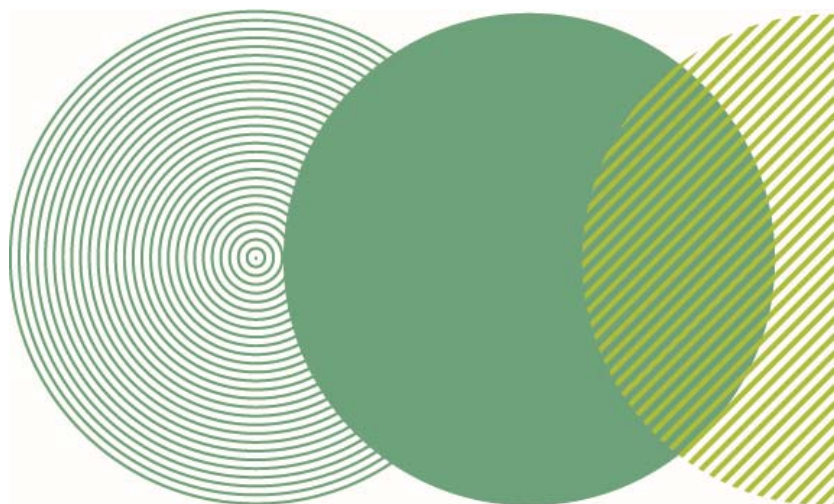




# School Improvement through the Accreditation Process

BASED ON THE 8<sup>TH</sup> EDITION OF THE GUIDE TO SCHOOL EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION

Explaining CIS Evaluation and Accreditation



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## *Introduction*

The Accreditation Process has long been recognised in international school circles as a highly effective means of initiating and maintaining school improvement while adhering to publicly stated Standards. The information contained in this Explanatory Paper is intended to clarify the Accreditation Process, its declared purpose, its procedures, its costs - in terms of time, effort and money - and the benefits it offers to a school. For a more detailed explanation of all matters relating to Accreditation please see the official CIS Main Guide to School Evaluation and Accreditation (Version 8.2).

### *A. Accrediting agency / agencies*

The Council of International Schools (CIS) is a membership organisation serving approximately 665 international schools around the world. It has been accrediting member schools since 1970. The CIS Accreditation Process is highly regarded in many parts of the world.

On request from schools, CIS collaborates with other entities such as USA- based Accrediting Agencies and the International Baccalaureate Organisation. In such cases, the school produces one Self-Study Report and hosts one joint Team Visit. The Chair and Co-Chair(s) representing the various entities convey the recommendations of the Visiting Team to their respective organisations. Each entity makes its own decision with regard to the school's status. The school is accredited/approved separately by each agency.

### *B. The purpose of the accreditation programme*

The main purpose of the CIS programme for School Evaluation and Accreditation is to support international and internationally-minded schools in their pursuit of educational excellence by providing a system for periodic self-examination combined with external appraisal. The award of Accreditation also assures both a school's own constituency and the community at large that the institution so recognised has achieved high standards of professional performance with a continuing commitment to their maintenance and to institutional improvement. The process has a strong focus on student learning and student well-being as shown by the ['Concept Diagram'](#)

Congruency between the school's own Guiding Statements and school practice as well as the promotion of internationalism/inter-culturalism are other strong areas of focus in the process.

### *C. Criteria for evaluation*

Each school is evaluated against two basic sets of 'benchmarks', these being:

- a) The School's own 'Guiding Statements', that is to say its declared Philosophy, Mission, Vision and Educational Objectives. Each school is required to have clear statements of this kind, and the institution is evaluated in terms of how well it meets its own stated purposes. (Congruency between what is said and what is done.)
- b) The CIS Standards for Accreditation. Each school is required to align with a set of CIS Standards in each area of its operation. These Standards, now in their 8th Edition (Version

8.2), have been developed and refined by CIS professional staff and by educational 'peers'. These Standards can be obtained from CIS on request. The school should consider its operations carefully in the light of the CIS Standards and their corresponding Indicators before deciding to apply for entry into the Accreditation Process. It should be noted that the Standards and Indicators are designed to ensure that a school is offering a broad general education of a high quality before being awarded accreditation. However, they do not pre-suppose any specific model of excellence nor do they seek to impose the methods of one school upon another. The important principle behind the process is that a school will be evaluated in terms of its own Guiding Statements.

#### *D. An outline of the accreditation process*

The initial criteria for participation in the process are:

- The school must have been in operation for at least two full academic years.
- The school must be a Member of CIS.

Once a school applies for participation in accreditation, the process involves five basic steps, as set out below:

##### 1. THE PRELIMINARY VISIT FOR FIRST TIME ACCREDITATION, OR THE PREPARATORY VISIT FOR RE-ACCREDITATION

A Preliminary Visit is made by one or two CIS representatives, and usually lasts for three to four days. At least one of these representatives will be a CIS Regional Accreditation Officer. The Visit includes a workshop to prepare the school for future steps. The purpose of the visit is both to ascertain the school's readiness to undertake the self-study and to clarify the Accreditation Process. The Visitor(s) will discuss the Standards for Accreditation under Sections A-G with the Head of School and other key teaching and support staff. Presentations to explain the Accreditation Process will be made to all staff as well as to representatives of the Governing Body, the Parent Body and the Students.

When the school concerned is seeking re-accreditation a similar visit is conducted, with the main differences being that the school remains in accredited status throughout and the visit is entitled the Preparatory Visit in order to highlight this distinction.

##### 2. THE SELF-STUDY

The self-study is the most important part of the whole evaluation and accreditation process, both in the commitment of time and effort involved and in the value to be derived. It normally takes between one and two years to complete. The self-study begins with a specially designed Opinion Survey which involves all the key constituents of the school community. The school then reviews its Guiding Statements and submits each area of its operations to a searching evaluation following the instructions laid out in the CIS Main Guide to School Evaluation and Accreditation 8th Edition (Version 8.2).

The self-study is divided into the following parts:

- Part One
- Part Two:
  - a. School Guiding Statements
  - b. Teaching & Learning

- c. Governance & Leadership
- d. Faculty & Support Staff
- e. Access to Teaching & Learning
- f. School Culture & Partnerships for Learning
- g. Operational Systems
- Part Three

For each Section A to G listed above, the school assembles and analyses data, rates its current practice in the light of its own Guiding Statements and the Standards for Accreditation, and writes its findings - including plans for improvement - following the template instructions laid out in a specially designed Reporting Booklet.

The self-study requires a considerable time commitment from all members of the school staff as well as from a number of parents, governing body members and students. It is CIS's intention that the self-study should present an honest, broad-based view of the school, and that it should not represent the views of any minority group. It is also the intention that the self-study process should stimulate action to address any areas needing improvement. In this way, the school will be a better institution at the end of the self-study process than it was at the beginning.

### 3. THE TEAM VISIT

Following its completion, the school's Self-Study Report is sent to CIS and to members of the future Visiting Team. This Team, made up of suitably qualified and trained administrators and teachers drawn from other schools, visits the host school a few weeks later.

The primary function of the Team is to assist the school by providing an objective assessment of the conclusions of the self-study. The Team visits the school for a week to see it in action. Team members visit classrooms and talk to students, parents, staff and members of the Governing Body. The Team examines all aspects of the school in the light of the Self-Study Report, the school's own Guiding Statements, and the CIS Standards for Accreditation. As in the self-study process, there is a strong focus on student learning and well-being during this Team Visit. Congruence between the school's Guiding Statements and its practices as well as the Standards and Indicators on internationalism and inter-culturalism also receive close attention.

It should also be noted that during the course of the Team Visit no assessment will be made of individual staff performance nor will critical reference be made to any staff member in the ensuing report. The Team reviews the quality of educational programme on offer, not the qualities of individual teachers.

The Team writes a detailed Visiting Team Report which addresses all content of the Self-Study Report. The Team offers its Significant Commendations, Significant Recommendations and Additional Advice as well as rating the school against the Standards. However, the Visiting Team Report does not contain the Team's overall recommendation with regard to the school's status in the accreditation process - that is made directly to the CIS Board itself.

### 4. DECISION ON ACCREDITATION

The CIS Accreditation Service and its Advisors carefully review the Visiting Team Report, and they consider the Team's overall recommendation with respect to the school's status. A recommendation is sent to the CIS Board of Trustees which will take a decision within one of the following four categories:

- a) Award Accreditation or Re-Accreditation.
- b) Award Accreditation or Re-Accreditation with specific qualifications.

[In cases where the school generally aligns with the Standards, but the Board feels that certain recommendations must be met immediately or within a given period of time. A Special Report and/or Visit by one or two CIS representatives may be a follow-up requirement under such circumstances.]

- c) Postpone Accreditation or Re-Accreditation for some specified reason(s).

[In cases when the school may align with a good number of Standards but falls seriously short in certain specific areas which the Board feels could be satisfactorily addressed within a specified time. A Special Report and Visit will be arranged as a follow-up under these circumstances.]

- d) Not award Accreditation or Re-Accreditation.

[In cases when the school aligns poorly with a substantial number of Standards, and has shortcomings of a relatively serious nature which it appears to be unwilling or incapable of rectifying.]

## 5. SUBSEQUENT PROCEDURES

Follow the Award of Accreditation, the drive for school improvement using the accreditation 'vehicle' should be an on-going process. It will be punctuated by a number of procedures, including:

- a) The First Report on Progress & Planning, submitted by the school (usually approximately two years after the Team Visit) in response to all the Significant Recommendations contained in the Visiting Team Report.
- b) The Five Year Report on Progress & Planning, submitted by the school, giving details of progress relative to all the Visiting Team's Significant Recommendations, explaining changes which have occurred in the school during the intervening period, and showing intended future actions. At this stage the school will receive a two or three-day Five Year Visit from one or two CIS representatives who will submit a Report to CIS and the school.
- c) A Preparatory Visit, eight and a half years after the Team Visit, to initiate the next cycle aimed at Re-Accreditation.

## *E. The benefits of the accreditation process*

- *The Award of Accreditation itself:* A school's own claims to excellence, however well justified, will always be open to question in the absence of an objective verification of quality. Accredited status can be very reassuring to parents and is an indication to the school community - and to other individuals and establishments such as universities - that the school offers an education of quality.
- *The opportunity for self-assessment:* To some extent this is already a feature of many schools, but not at the level to which self-evaluation is taken during the self-study process when the school is working to clear guidelines and demanding deadlines. Schools receiving Accreditation tend to agree that introspection and the actions for improvement which that generates are the most valuable aspects of the entire process.
- *The opportunity for improved intra-school contact and understanding:* In some schools it is quite possible for staff members to go from year to year feeling that colleagues in other areas are vague acquaintances at best, and that the concerns of other sections are of little

interest to them. It is the common experience of schools undergoing evaluation that the Accreditation process overcomes this feeling and becomes a unifying force in a school.

- *The opportunity to receive a detailed, objective evaluation conducted by fellow professionals:* These peers have been trained in the evaluation process, and are familiar with the nature and concerns of international and internationally-minded schools.
- *A plan for the future:* the Preliminary/Preparatory Visitors' Report, the Self-Study Report, the Visiting Team Report, the Reports at Two & Five Years, and the Five Year Visitors' Report serve as working material for the school as it maps out its direction for the years ahead. The recommendations contained in these reports serve as excellent bases for the construction of School Plans - indeed, school planning and the improvement work to obtain and maintain accreditation should be fully integrated.
- *Closer links with CIS and with other international schools:* These are created by contacts with in-coming Visitors and by the school's own staff serving on teams visiting other schools (which is itself excellent professional development for those individuals).
- *Confirmation of the school's needs:* It may be that Board members, teaching and support staff, administration, students or parents have felt the existence of certain needs for some time. Accreditation reports, including the Visiting Team Report, will serve to guide staff, board and administration in establishing priorities.

#### F. *A typical time-line for accreditation*

Normally, a Preliminary/Preparatory Visit is followed by a Team Visit at minimum one year later (rare) and at maximum two years later, with the intervening period being occupied by Self-Study. In most cases, the Self-Study period lasts about one-and-a-half years.

A typical timeline is shown below:

A typical timeline – shown here for a Northern Hemisphere school <i>Patterns starting at other times of the year are also available</i>	
Feb / Mar 2010	Preliminary Visit, leading to award of Candidate Status for Accreditation
April - June 2010	Appointment of Self-Study Steering Committee. Part One work including Opinion Survey. Review of Guiding Statements by Committee A.
September 2010	Appointment of other Self-Study Committees. Commence main Self-Study
June 2011	First Draft of Self-Study Report completed
Sept 2011	Self-Study Report updated and distributed
Oct / Nov 2011	Team Visit
Dec 2011 / Jan 2012	Decision regarding Accreditation
Oct / Nov 2013	Submission of First Report on Progress & Planning

Oct 2016	Submission of Five Year Report
Nov 2016	Five Year Visit
Feb / Mar 2020	Preparatory Visit leading to Candidature Status for Re-Accreditation
Between Prep. Visit and Team Visit	Self-Study period
Oct / Nov 2021	Team Visit
Dec 2021 / Jan 2022	Decision regarding Re-Accreditation
On-going	Cycles continue

### *G. 'Accrediting the accreditors'*

The CIS Accreditation Service is a member in good standing of the Commission on Accreditation (CoA) which operates under the auspices of the National Association of Independent Schools NAIS. The members of this Commission are agencies based in the USA or Canada, plus CIS itself. CIS voluntarily submits to an 'accrediting the accreditors' scheme which involves each CoA member agency undergoing a process similar to that used in accrediting schools. This means that each agency is subjected to an evaluation cycle involving self-study against published Standards, review by a Visiting Team made up of personnel from peer agencies, and the submission of regular reports on how recommendations have been addressed.

### *H. Financial costs*

CIS has established a schedule of fees which schools will be charged at various stages of the programme. From the start of the semester in which candidature for accreditation is granted, an annual fee is levied on all schools in the programme (see separate Scale of Fees document). There are also fees for the various visits involved in the cycle.

Additionally, the school is also expected to pay the expenses directly incurred in travel and accommodation related to any Visits. However, the school does not pay a fee to Visitors or members of the Visiting Team.



### *Contact information*

Please note that a useful document entitled 'The School Improvement Continuum' can be obtained from the address below. This document shows CIS expectations of schools at various stages of the process into membership and eventually accredited status. All enquires and requests for further information about any aspect of the programme should be addressed to:

**The Director of Accreditation Services**

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2316 XC LEIDEN

The Netherlands

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E-mail: [accreditation@cois.org](mailto:accreditation@cois.org)

