



Guidance for visitors: Conducting an accreditation



Education and Culture

Leonardo da Vinci

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INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of this guidance is to assist the members of ACOVENE visitation panels in the preparation for, conduct, reporting and follow-up of accreditation site visits.
2. The accreditation process involves the consideration of a written self-assessment submission and the evaluation by the visitation team of physical evidence that demonstrate the ACOVENE accreditation criteria can be met by the applicant school.
3. Where a school cannot demonstrate immediate compliance with the ACOVENE accreditation standards, the visitation panel will set recommendations that will need to be addressed before accreditation can be agreed. A visitation panel must subsequently follow up recommendations and ensure that schools have produced, and are implementing, suitable action plans.
4. This document sets out the role and responsibilities of a visitation panel and will assist you to prepare for an accreditation visit and help you to evaluate the information a school should provide in their application self-assessment report (SAR)

Good preparation will help your visitation panel to focus during the site visit and to produce an accurate evaluation of the facilities, resources and curriculum of the applicant institution.

THE VISITATION PANEL

5. An ACOVENE visitation panel comprises four individuals:
 - The Chairman, who will be appointed by, or be a member of, the ACOVENE Board. The Chairman is responsible for liaising with the applicant school, leading and directing the visitation panel and for the production of the site visit report. The Chairman is also responsible for following up compliance by the applicant school with any recommendations that the panel decide must be addressed before accreditation can be recommended to the ACOVENE Board.
 - A second ACOVENE panel member. This will be either a member of the ACOVENE Board or a person appointed by ACOVENE who has expertise in accreditation and quality assurance processes.
 - A veterinary nurse from the applicant school's own country, normally appointed by the relevant national representative organisation.and
 - A veterinary surgeon from the applicant school's own country, normally appointed by the relevant national representative organisation.

The role of the national panel members will include acting as translators wherever necessary during the conduct of the site visit as the ACOVENE members may not be fluent in the language of the applicant school's country. It is therefore important that the national members are both proficient in English.

6. Panel members should have no actual or potential conflicts of interest in the visitation i.e. they must not have recently been employed by the applicant school or be employed by a commercial competitor organisation, or have any other issues with the applicant school that might prejudice their evaluation. Visitation panel members must declare

potential conflicts of interest to ACOVENE immediately such a situation becomes apparent.

7. The Chairman of your visitation panel will contact you at least two months prior to the visitation in order to establish communications and discuss the planned visit with you.

PREPARATORY WORK

8. It is important that all members of visitation panels respond promptly to communications from ACOVENE or the visitation panel chairman and are willing to prepare thoroughly for a visitation. You should be prepared to spend the equivalent of at least one working day in preparatory work. It is not adequate to read documents whilst travelling to the visitation, or to expect to do this during the site visit. A lack of preparation is likely to compromise the visitation and lead to an inadequate evaluation of the applicant school.
9. Once an application and self-assessment report (SAR) is received from an applicant school, ACOVENE will send a copy of this to the visitation panel members along with these guidance notes and a copy of the visitation report form. The application will be provided electronically and it is a matter for panel members whether they print off hard copies of the documentation or elect to review this in electronic format. It may be most helpful to print key documents, such as the SAR form itself, and to review appendices in electronic format.
10. The Chairman will contact all members of the visitation panel once the applicant school's SAR is available. S/he may ask individual panel members to concentrate on the review of certain Standards or may prefer that all panel members review information relating to all the Standards. In either case, the Chairman must ensure that the visitation panel as a whole reviews the applicant's compliance with all the Standards. The Chairman will ask the panel to provide comments on their review prior to the accreditation visit. These comments will:
 - Enable ACOVENE to request further information/clarification from a school prior to the visitation if necessary
 - Assist the Chairman to set the visitation agenda
11. As a panel member, you must review the SAR alongside the ACOVENE standards that are set out in the APP. When commenting on the SAR itself or the appendices of additional information, you should make notes and ensure that these are carefully referenced to the document and page in question and to the ACOVENE Standards. You will need to refer to your notes during the visitation and in discussion with the Chairman and so it is important to be able to find information easily.
12. When you have reviewed the SAR documentation, you should contact the Chairman by email or telephone to discuss your findings and any major concerns that have arisen. This discussion should take place at least three weeks prior to the visitation date. If you would like further information to be provided by the school prior to the visitation, or would like specific documents or other evidence to be provided for you during the visitation itself, please bring this to the attention of the Chairman.
13. Prior to the visitation, please ensure that you read and thoroughly familiarise yourself with the APP document. It is especially important that you appreciate the Standards and what is required to meet them, the accreditation categories that can be applied and the implications of the visitation panel making recommendations to a school.

14. Once the Chairman has received comments from the panel members s/he will finalise the visitation agenda and communicate this to the applicant school and the visitation panel.

ACCOMMODATION AND ADMINISTRATION ARRANGEMENTS

15. The applicant school will provide the Chairman with details of local hotel accommodation and travel directions, including airport and railway station information and the availability of taxis for airport/station transfer. The visitation panel should expect to stay overnight during the two-day visit or, if national panel members, be available in the evening if necessary.
16. During the visitation, the applicant school will provide a “base” room for the Panel. This should have facilities to use laptop computers and will have space to accommodate prepared files of key information you may need to examine. Ideally the room will be lockable so that confidential information you may be working on can be secured when the room is left from time to time.
17. The school is asked to provide access to tea and coffee during the day and ensure that you can obtain a light lunch. Schools are not required to provide lavish catering and, indeed, the Chairman of the visitation panel should diplomatically discourage overly elaborate hospitality.

CONFIDENTIALITY

18. In order for the ACOVENE accreditation system to be effective, participant schools must have confidence in the integrity of the Board and members of visitation panels. The Panel will have access to both written information and oral information disclosed by staff and students during the course of the visitation. You must treat all such information sensitively and regard everything disclosed as confidential or commercially sensitive unless it is information that is clearly public (such as annual reports or prospectuses).

THE VISITATION AGENDA

19. The visitation agenda will be set in advance between the Chairman and the applicant school. The following outline indicates the general nature of a visitation agenda and the activities the Panel can expect to engage in:

20. Day One 10am	Arrive and meet with Director and senior course tutor. Agenda confirmed	Comments Opportunity to meet senior staff, reiterate the purpose of the visitation and confirm the agenda events and timings.
10.30	Presentation by course team	Enables the course team to explain the programme and present the philosophy of course, the school facilities, the value of its graduates etc.
11am	Private meeting of visitation team. Initial audit of documentation	The Chairman will discuss the detailed visitation agenda and agree tasks for each panel member*

		<p>Whilst much information will be contained in the SAR, Panel will need to verify this information, and sometimes seek additional information, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Examining course and meeting files and policy documents ▫ Seeing physical facilities and resources ▫ Interviewing staff ▫ Interviewing students <p>*it may be convenient to team the two national members with ACOVENE members rather than all four panel members working independently</p>
Lunch		
1pm	Site tour	<p>The Panel may wish to split into two teams in order to visit site resources.</p> <p>Check that the physical resources described in the SAR are present; there is no need to check every piece of equipment in detail. Concentrate on checking major items and randomly auditing other items from the list.</p> <p>Check the library shelves and note the number, age and condition of books against the information in the SAR. Note how well-used the library appears to be.</p>
3pm	Private meeting of panel, preparation for meetings with course team, students and school director.	<p>Panel note findings so far and use this information to set the agenda and focus for meetings with staff, students and the school director.</p> <p>Further time to cross-check SAR information with on-site records.</p>
Evening		<p>The Chairman may wish to spend some time with the Panel reflecting on the day and preparing for the following day. It is suggested that no more</p>

		than an hour is spent in this way; visitations are tiring and the Panel will need time "out". Be cautious about accepting evening hospitality from the school for similar reasons.
Day two		
9am	Meeting with course team	Opportunity to explore in detail the programme design, teaching and learning, assessment its quality assurance, student support.
Coffee break		
11am	Meeting with students	The Panel should meet representatives from all cohorts or meet with whole student groups as appropriate. Ideally you should meet at least three students from each cohort. Ask about the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, teaching methods, frequency of tutorials, whether or not they use the library and/or IT facilities. Explore the teaching and support gained on clinical placements. Ask about the availability of employment for graduates and where they hope to work.
12pm	Meeting with school director and senior staff	Explore resource issues, market for the programme, staffing, plans for the future.
Lunch		
2pm	Private meeting of Panel	Consideration of visitation findings, deciding on accreditation, framing recommendations and general feedback to school.
3.30	Feedback to school director	Summarise findings of visitation and recommendations regarding accreditation to be made to ACOVENE Concentrate on issues especially influenced by the school's senior management, such as the provision of

		adequate staff and resources.
4pm	Feedback to course team	Summarise findings of visitation and recommendations regarding accreditation to be made to ACOVENE Concentrate on issues especially influenced by the course team, such as the curriculum design, support of students, assessment, management of clinical placement

PROVIDING FEEDBACK

21. Before providing feedback to the school, the Panel must decide whether or not they will recommend accreditation to ACOVENE and, if accreditation is to be recommended, whether this will be conditional on the school meeting any critical or major recommendations. Please refer to the APP and ensure that you understand the categories of recommendation and when these should be made.
22. When setting recommendations, the Chairman must make it clear which ACOVENE standard has not been fully addressed and the category of the recommendation. The visitation report form reminds on this point. Sometimes a recommendation will apply to more than one Standard, in which case all deficient standards should be listed in the margin of the report form against the recommendation.
23. When writing a recommendation, keep it short and ideally to one sentence. Do not try to tell the school how to address a deficiency against the standards; that is for them to do (see below). If you find you are making more than six critical and/or major recommendations you should consider very carefully whether or not you can recommend accreditation to ACOVENE on this occasion. A large number of such recommendations indicates a significantly deficient programme and further development may be needed overall in order to bring it up to standard.

REPORTING AND MONITORING PROGRESS

24. A feedback summary (the back page of the visitation report) should be left with the school director at the conclusion of the visitation. He/she should agree a date by which ACOVENE will receive a response to any recommendations and should sign the summary. The chairman should keep a copy of the summary sheet for ACOVENE records.
25. The summary sheet ensures that the applicant school has a written record of feedback and is aware of the key issues arising from the visitation. The school will also be in a position to commence work on an action plan to address any recommendations. The summary sheet also ensures that the Chairman has a record of the key issues and is able to refer to this when writing the full visitation report.
26. The Chairman must write up the visitation report and provide this to the ACOVENE office within two weeks of the visitation date. He/she should circulate the draft report to other panel members for comment before submitting it.

27. Where recommendations are set, a response from the school will be required that demonstrates how and when these recommendations will be addressed. The response must include an action plan showing the following for each recommendation:
 - The actions to be taken by the school to address the recommendation
 - Who will be responsible for the action
 - The evidence to be provided to ACOVENE that the recommendation has been addressed
 - The date by which evidence of completion will be provided
28. The school and the Chairman will agree the date for response, which should generally be within two months of the visitation and, in the case of April visitations, by the end of May 2007 in time for the June ACOVENE meeting at which accreditations will be discussed. Remember that the response is simply a document demonstrating how recommendations will be addressed and how progress can be monitored (an action plan) and not the full resolution of all recommendations. It is very important that the Chairman ensures that this is understood by the applicant school.
29. It is very important that schools and visitation panels appreciate that ACOVENE must be able to see that recommendations have been met. Evidence of progress is therefore a crucial element of any action plan. Evidence might be, for example, a revised curriculum document, receipts for purchased books or equipment, photographs of upgraded facilities. It is not enough for a school to provide a statement of completion with no other evidence.
30. Schools must provide a realistic date for resolution of all critical and major recommendations with their action plans and this date must be acceptable to ACOVENE.
31. ACOVENE will, with the assistance of the visitation Chairman, monitor the progress of schools with their action plans and will follow up recommendations which appear not to have been addressed. Progress will be reported to the Board.