Accreditation of new UK programmes: A guide to our application process

January 2019
Contact us

If you have any questions about Accreditation through Partnership, or the process that applies to you please feel free to contact the Partnership and Accreditation Team:

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Introduction

The British Psychological Society (‘the Society’) is the learned and professional body, incorporated by Royal Charter, for psychology in the United Kingdom. The key objective of the Society is ‘to promote the advancement and diffusion of the knowledge of psychology pure and applied and especially to promote the efficiency and usefulness of members by setting up a high standard of professional education and knowledge’. The purpose of the Society’s accreditation process is to further that objective.

What is accreditation?
Accreditation through Partnership is the process by which the Society works with education providers to ensure quality standards in education and training are met by all programmes on an ongoing basis. Our approach to accreditation is based on partnership rather than policing, and we emphasise working collaboratively with programme providers through open, constructive dialogue that allows for exploration, development and quality enhancement.

Benefits of accreditation
Delivering a programme that meets the standards required for accreditation is a significant commitment, and there are many reasons why Society accreditation is worth your investment of time and money:

- It is a highly regarded marker of quality that prospective students and employers understand and value.
- It enhances the marketability of your programmes in a competitive market place.
- It gives your graduates a route to Society membership, an integral part of students’ development as psychologists, or as part of the wider psychological workforce.
- It is a high quality benchmarking process aimed at getting the best out of programmes.
- It provides an opportunity for you and your students to influence the society and its support for education providers and students and its policies for the future.
- Together we have a powerful voice in raising the profile of psychology and psychological practice in the UK and internationally.

Our standards
In 2017, the Society’s Partnership and Accreditation Committee (PAC) and its constituent Education and Training Committees reviewed the overarching programme standards, with the aim of providing greater clarity and more effective signposting to other relevant guidance in a way that is helpful to programmes when they articulate their work.

Our standards are intended to be interpreted and applied flexibly, in a way that enables programmes to develop distinctive identities that make the most of particular strengths shared by their staff team, or those that are reflected in the strategic priorities of their department or university. During partnership visits, the questions that visiting teams will ask will be designed specifically to give education providers every opportunity to confirm their achievement of the standards.
Our standards are organised around eight overarching standards, as follows:

1. Programme design

2. Programme content

3. Working ethically & legally

4. Selection & admissions

5. Student / trainee development & professional membership

6. Academic leadership & programme delivery

7. Discipline-specific resources

8. Quality management & governance

The standards have been derived following extensive consultation between the Society and education providers, and must be achieved by all accredited programmes. Each overarching standard is followed by a rationale for its inclusion, together with guidance and signposting of other relevant resources. All handbooks can be downloaded from www.bps.org.uk/accreditationdownloads.
The application process: An overview
The application process: An overview

Our processes typically allow a decision on accreditation to be made before the programme is up and running. Dependent on the timing of your application, and whether your submission and the evidence you provide enables our reviewers to confirm that our standards have been adequately met, this means that you will be able to advertise the programme as accredited when you are recruiting students.

The Partnership and Accreditation team, and the reviewers we work with, manage a large number of accreditation reviews and visits over the course of the year, and the period between March and June is typically our busiest. We are able to accept applications for accreditation for new programmes at any time, but we would encourage providers to apply as early in the academic year as possible. Whilst we are unable to specify how long it will take to reach a decision regarding the accreditation of your new programme, we aim to give initial feedback on your application within three months of receipt, and to have agreed an initial outcome no later than six months following receipt.

The following process applies to all new programmes, with the exception of:

(i) established providers of undergraduate programmes, for whom a ‘fast track’ process is available, and

(ii) new Doctoral programmes, who may choose to arrange for their accreditation visit to take place alongside a Health and Care Professions Council approval visit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Initial decision</th>
<th>Visit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Submit self-evaluation questionnaire and supporting evidence</td>
<td>Initial decision communicated normally within 3 months.</td>
<td>Consideration of accreditation of ≤3 additional cohorts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission reviewed by 2 reviewers with support from your PAcT Officer.</td>
<td>One of three possible outcomes: proceed to visit, further clarification required, or not accredited.</td>
<td>One of two possible outcomes: accreditation granted (subject to conditions) or accreditation withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established UG providers can submit fast-track application (no visit required).</td>
<td>Accreditation will not be granted until all areas of clarification have been resolved</td>
<td></td>
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The application process in detail
The application process in detail

The process for considering new programmes for accreditation is as follows:

1. **Submit your application**
   You will need to complete the relevant self-evaluation questionnaire, and compile the required supporting evidence.

   Guidance on preparing your submission is provided elsewhere in this document.

   Providers of new Doctoral programmes will need to propose a date for an onsite partnership visit and co-ordinate arrangements with the HCPC, normally **at least six months prior to the planned start date** for the first trainee cohort. Guidance on planning and preparing for a visit can be found in our *Preparing for a partnership visit* handbook. For such programmes, accreditation for all cohorts will be considered at the visit, unless you explicitly tell us that you wish to seek a decision from the Society via the process outlined below.

   Your submission will be evaluated independently by two reviewers, who will be supported by your nominated contact from the Partnership and Accreditation Team. Reviewers report back individually and their decision is collated by your nominated contact. We aim to give initial feedback on your application within three months of receipt.

   We outline later in this document the factors you should consider before submitting your application.

2. **Receive your initial decision**
   We will confirm the initial outcome of your application in writing. The outcome will be one of the following:

   a. **Your programme meets the accreditation standards**, accreditation can be granted for the first cohort, and an accreditation visit may go ahead the following academic year.

      - Accreditation will be granted in accordance with the Society’s terms and conditions: 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.

      - Your programme will be added to the Society’s searchable online database of accredited programmes.

      - We will invite you to propose a date for an onsite visit, normally during the programme’s first year of operation, ideally during semester 1. Providers may make a case to defer their visit to semester 2 of the programme’s first year of operation, although approval of such a request will be at the discretion of the reviewers and the Partnership and Accreditation Officer.

      - For established providers of undergraduate programmes who are adding to their existing portfolio of accredited provision, visits will be undertaken in line with the existing schedule of reviews that is in place.

   b. **You need to provide further information or clarification** before accreditation can be granted.
● We will give you feedback regarding any specific action that may need to be taken and which of the Society’s accreditation standard(s) such action relates to.

● The first submission of additional information will be dealt with in the usual way: It will be sent to the two reviewers for their consideration and we will advise whether outcome a, b, or c has been reached. If additional request(s) for further information need to be made, we will give you both a date by which to submit the additional information, and a date on which you may be invited to discuss your submission with the reviewers via teleconference/Skype. Following the discussion, we will confirm whether outcome a or outcome c has been reached.

● Accreditation will not be confirmed until all areas for clarification have been resolved.

c. Your programme does not meet the accreditation standards and a new application will need to be submitted at a later date.

● The earliest a provider may make a new application is six weeks following confirmation of this outcome being issued.

3. Prepare for a visit

The purpose of the partnership visit will be to confirm accreditation for up to a maximum of three further student cohorts. Guidance on planning and preparing for a visit can be found in our Preparing for a partnership visit handbook.

The visit should be undertaken during the programme’s first year of operation, ideally during semester 1. Priority will be given to visits to new programmes as part of the visit planning process. Providers may make a case to defer their visit to semester 2 of the programme’s first year of operation, although approval of such a request will be at the discretion of the reviewers and the Partnership and Accreditation Officer. If the provider is not able to go ahead with the visit during the first year of operation, ongoing accreditation will not be confirmed, and the programme application process will need to be recommenced from scratch.

There will be two possible outcomes from the visit:

a. Ongoing accreditation may be granted for up to the next three cohorts, subject to any conditions that may apply.

b. Ongoing accreditation may not be granted, and the withdrawal of accreditation process will need to be initiated.

Where accreditation is withdrawn, the provider will need to make a new programme application. The earliest a provider may make a new application is six weeks following confirmation of this outcome being issued.
Factors to consider before applying for accreditation
Factors to consider before applying for accreditation

The timing of your application for accreditation
The length of time it will take us to process your application is dependent on a number of factors. We recommend you make contact with us as soon as you have made the decision to move forward with an application, and you should make clear in your application any deadlines associated with your advertising, recruitment and selection processes. However, please note that, in accordance with our terms and conditions of accreditation, 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.

The Partnership and Accreditation team, and the reviewers we work with, manage a large number of accreditation reviews and visits over the course of the year, and the period between March and June is typically our busiest. We are able to accept applications for accreditation for new programmes at any time, but we would strongly recommend that you submit your application as early in the academic year as possible.

Validation of your new programme
Developing a new programme involves trying to meet both internal and external requirements, and our experience is that it is often more straightforward to deal with one process at a time. But which should come first – validation or accreditation? The Society does not have a view on the order in which these two processes should be approached. However, some factors you may wish to consider to help you decide which approach suits your needs best are outlined below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validation first, accreditation later</th>
<th>Accreditation first, validation later</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close internal scrutiny of your programme in advance of submitting for accreditation will mean you will be in a good position to identify:</td>
<td>An in principle decision to accredit will have been reached ahead of validation, potentially reducing the amount of internal scrutiny that is required. You will need to let us know:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Areas for development;</td>
<td>• The timescale within which your validation process is likely to be complete, including the date of your validation event;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Key strengths;</td>
<td>• Confirmation of the outcome of your validation event, including any changes made to the programme as a result of the validation process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Specific challenges that may benefit from more detailed consideration by our reviewers.</td>
<td>A complete and current set of documentary evidence will be in place, and you can submit this with your application for accreditation.</td>
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Combining your application for accreditation with other processes
One of the aims of the partnership model of accreditation is to reduce demands placed upon education providers by placing greater reliance on other quality management processes in which they are involved. In particular, education providers often ask us whether there is scope to combine the accreditation process with university validation. Once your new programme is accredited, we are happy to consider combining the accreditation process
with internal revalidation or periodic review if you think that offers a more efficient way of undertaking the task. However, most providers have a much more positive experience of the accreditation process if their initial application for accreditation is undertaken as a standalone process.

The only exception to this relates to new Doctoral programmes. These require approval by the Health and Care Professions Council, and will therefore require an HCPC approval visit; the Society has extensive experience of successfully combining accreditation with HCPC approval and we will be happy to talk to you about that further. You can also find more information in our Preparing for a partnership visit handbook.

**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 standards 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.

Where accreditation is backdated, you will need to pay an accreditation subscription at the current rate for each cohort for which accreditation is confirmed. For more information on the cost of accreditation, see [www.bps.org.uk/accreditationdownloads](http://www.bps.org.uk/accreditationdownloads).

**Application fee**

We do not charge an application fee to existing providers submitting new programmes to us for accreditation. However, new providers – by which we mean departments (or equivalent academic units) that do not currently offer any Society-accredited programmes – will be liable for an application fee at the point at which their submission is made. Details of our current application fee can be found at [www.bps.org.uk/accreditationdownloads](http://www.bps.org.uk/accreditationdownloads). We will invoice you once we receive your application, and will only be able to confirm the outcome of your application once your fee has been paid.

**Advertising your new 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 British Psychological Society*. 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, in accordance with our terms and conditions of accreditation, 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.
Where your provision has been successfully accredited by the Society, you are encouraged to use our logos in your advertising and promotional materials. Copies of our logos, and some specific guidance on their usage, can be requested by emailing pact@bps.org.uk.
Guidance on preparing your application
Guidance on preparing your application

Accreditation through Partnership relies upon existing documentation and education providers’ own internal monitoring processes as the key sources of evidence that we would expect to demonstrate achievement of our standards. Our self-evaluation questionnaires (available to download from www.bps.org.uk/accreditationdownloads) signpost the relevant sources of evidence. Please feel free to provide us with different evidence sources if our suggestion does not meet your needs, but where this is the case we would appreciate a brief rationale so that we can understand why you have selected the evidence source in question.

You should consider the self-evaluation questionnaire as a framework for orientating our team of reviewers to the programme(s) you are putting forward for accreditation. In due course, it will also act as a framework for preparing your staff team for the partnership visit. For new programmes, it is particularly important that we are able to consider quite a detailed critical self-review, reflecting on how you feel your programme meets our standards, as well as detailed mapping of the content of the programme against our standards in order to reach an initial accreditation decision with confidence.

We are keen to reduce and remove repetition across our documentation wherever possible. You may find that the information you provide in relation to one part of the self-evaluation questionnaire is also relevant to other aspects of our standards. Where this is the case, we would ask that you cross-reference as appropriate (e.g. ‘see our response to question X’) rather than repeat the same information in different places in the questionnaire.

Preparing your submission

A clear and easy to navigate evidence submission is a really important part of the Accreditation through Partnership process – it allows our visiting team to readily identify the evidence for your programme’s achievement of our standards, and, in the event that they feel that further information is required before a decision can be made, it will enable them to easily identify the additional information sources that are required, and to explain why the information that you have provided does not meet their needs.

You should provide your submission in the following way:

1. A main folder should be created using your University and programme names e.g. University of xxx MSc xxx;
2. A sub-folder must be created for each of the Programme Standards i.e. Programme Standard 1, 2 and so forth. Each of these folders will sit in your main folder (above);
3. The SEQ must be submitted as a Word Document and should be contained within its own folder named SEQ, which will sit in the main folder;
4. Label each piece of supporting evidence (document) sequentially in relation to its folder i.e. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 2.1, 2.2, 2.3;
5. Please use generic terms for each document within the folder i.e. Staff Student Liaison Committee Minutes; and
6. Include a proposed timetable within the SEQ folder. Our standard timetables can be found on our website using the download link below. Our timetables provide a guide for education providers planning for a partnership visit, therefore we are keen for you to propose a timetable that best meets your needs.
Additional guidance for Doctoral programmes

New Doctoral programmes will normally need to undergo an onsite visit in order to gain Society accreditation alongside HCPC approval for their new provision. You will need to complete two mapping documents for the HCPC – one to demonstrate how your programme meets the Standards of Proficiency (which correspond broadly to our required competencies), and one to demonstrate fulfilment of the Standards of Education and Training (we reflect links to HCPC SETs within our own standards). However, you will also need to complete our self-evaluation questionnaire, signposting the evidence for your achievement of the Society’s standards accordingly. We ask that, for such visits, you provide a complete copy of the information you submit to the HCPC as part of your electronic submission to us.
Additional information
Additional information

Appealing against an accreditation decision
Should you wish to appeal against a decision in relation to accreditation of a programme, details of the Society’s appeals process can be found on our website at www.bps.org.uk/accreditationdownloads. Appeals must be submitted in writing within two calendar months of the date of the letter informing you of the decision against which you wish to appeal.

Please note that a fee of £500 will be charged for the assessment of appeals against a decision of the Society’s accreditation process. In the event that the appeal is upheld the Society will refund this fee.

Feedback
Accreditation through Partnership has been developed over a number of years and continues to be refined on the basis of your feedback. Whenever we provide you with an approved visit report or paper-based review outcome, we will ask you to provide us with feedback. If you want to comment on any aspect of accreditation through partnership, or make a suggestion as to ways in which we might improve the services and products we offer to you, please feel free to get in touch with the Partnership and Accreditation Team at pact@bps.org.uk.

Terms and conditions of accreditation
Information on the terms and conditions of accreditation, including the fees that we charge for accreditation, can be found on our website at www.bps.org.uk/accreditationdownloads. New providers will be required to pay an application fee before an accreditation decision can be made.
accreditation through partnership