



The U.S. Department of Education (ED) relies on **accrediting agencies** (accreditors) to oversee higher education quality. Only institutions and programs accredited by a federally recognized accreditor can provide students with access to federal student aid, including Pell Grants and student loans. Periodically, a subset of the more than **60 federally recognized** accreditors come up for review by ED and the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (**NACIQI**).

Here is a snapshot of how the **accreditor recognition process** works.

**Accreditor  
Federal Recognition  
Process**

**ED REQUESTS FEDERAL RECOGNITION APPLICATIONS**

- Each accreditor must be reviewed at least every five years once recognized
- NACIQI currently meets twice per year to review agencies and advise ED

**ACCREDITORS SUBMIT APPLICATIONS**

- Accreditors must demonstrate compliance with the Secretary of Education’s Criteria for Recognition Learn more about the criteria [here](#)

**ED ANNOUNCES NACIQI MEETING & INVITES COMMENT**

- NACIQI meetings and a notice inviting public comment are announced several months before the meeting Federal
- Register notices are available [here](#)

**ED REVIEWS APPLICATIONS & DEVELOPS DRAFT STAFF REPORTS**

- For each accreditor, ED staff review the accreditor’s application, public comments, and other info ED staff assess the accreditor’s compliance and produce a preliminary (draft) report

**ED SENDS DRAFT STAFF REPORTS TO ACCREDITORS FOR RESPONSE**

- Accreditors have 30 days to respond to the draft report
- Accreditors may share additional documentation to demonstrate compliance

**ED SENDS FINAL STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS TO NACIQI, ACCREDITORS & PUBLIC**

- ED reviews accreditors’ responses and compiles final reports and recommendations Final staff reports for current and past meetings are [here](#)

**7  
DAYS**  
before NACIQI  
meeting

**NACIQI HOLDS MEETING & MAKES ITS OWN RECOMMENDATION**

- ED, accreditors, and public commenters provide input to NACIQI members NACIQI makes separate recommendations for each accreditor up for review

**ED SENIOR OFFICIAL MAKES RECOGNITION DECISION**

- Both staff and NACIQI recommendations, as well as NACIQI proceedings, are considered Senior official’s decision comes within 90 days of the meeting

**90  
DAYS**  
after NACIQI  
meeting

**ACCREDITOR MAY APPEAL DECISION TO SECRETARY OF EDUCATION**

- Accreditors have until 10 days after decision to give notice of appeal, and 30 days to file appeal
- Secretary has no deadline by which to decide the appeal

**10 & 30  
DAYS**  
after  
decision