

Determining Pathway Eligibility

For Peer Reviewers

Introduction

Peer reviewers consider an institution's eligibility to choose its Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation as part of a Standard or Open Pathway Year 10 comprehensive evaluation. An institution's eligibility to choose its pathway is based on set rules and a peer review team's judgment of:

1. The institution's condition at the time of the comprehensive evaluation.
2. The institution's past relationship with HLC.

Institutions are eligible to choose their pathway if they (1) demonstrate the capacity for quality assurance and improvement and (2) meet expectations of membership as outlined in HLC's policies. If the peer review team determines that an institution is not eligible to choose, it must recommend the institution should be limited to the Standard Pathway. An HLC decision-making body will consider the peer review team's pathway recommendation when it takes action on the comprehensive evaluation.

Recommendation Options

Peer review teams have two options to consider when recommending pathway eligibility:

1. Recommend an institution for the Standard Pathway based on specific conditions or on the team's judgment.
2. Recommend an institution is eligible to choose either the Standard or Open Pathway.

Recommending an Institution for the Standard Pathway

Based on Specific Conditions

The team should recommend an institution for the Standard Pathway if it meets one or more of the following conditions at the time of determination:

- It has been accredited for fewer than 10 years.
- It is in the process of a Change of Control, Structure or Organization or it has undergone a Change of Control, Structure or Organization within the last two years.
- It is on Notice or related action with HLC or has been under HLC sanction or related action within the last five years.
- It has pending recommendations for a focused visit or extensive monitoring, or it has a history of extensive HLC monitoring, including accreditation cycles shortened to seven or fewer years, multiple monitoring reports, and multiple focused visits extending across more than one accrediting cycle.

Based on the Team's Judgment

If the specific conditions do not apply and the team is recommending any interim reports, the team should weigh the following considerations, along with the institution's history and the number and magnitude of improvement expectations, when making a recommendation for pathway eligibility:

- Has the institution been undergoing dynamic change (e.g., significant changes in enrollment or student body, opening or closing of multiple locations or campuses) or requiring frequent substantive change approvals since the last comprehensive evaluation?

- Has the institution indicated significant change at the time of the review or in the years immediately following reaffirmation?
- Has the institution raised significant HLC concerns about circumstances or developments at the institution (e.g., ongoing leadership turnover, extensive review by a governmental agency, patterns identified in financial or non-financial indicators)?
- For institutions currently on the Open Pathway: Did the institution fail to make a serious effort to conduct its Quality Initiative?

If circumstances suggest to the peer review team that the institution should focus its improvement efforts on the Criteria for Accreditation, the Standard Pathway should be recommended.

Recommending an Institution is Eligible to Choose Its Pathway

If the team does not recommend the institution for the Standard Pathway, the team should recommend that the institution is eligible to choose its pathway.

Decision-Making Process

The team will indicate its recommendation in the Assurance System along with a brief rationale to be stated in the conclusion of the team report. The team's recommendation will be forwarded to an HLC decision-making body with the other findings from the comprehensive evaluation. Institutions have an opportunity to respond to recommendations. The decision-making body will make the final pathway determination for each institution.

