



# DETERMINING PATHWAY ELIGIBILITY

## For Peer Reviewers

### INTRODUCTION

An institution's eligibility to choose a Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation 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 prior to Reaffirmation of Accreditation.
2. The institution's past relationship with HLC.

Institutions demonstrating the capacity for quality assurance and improvement while also meeting expectations of membership as outlined in HLC's policies are deemed eligible to select their own pathway. 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. The Institutional Actions Council will consider the peer review team's pathway recommendation when it makes the decision to reaffirm an institution's accreditation.

When the pathways model of accreditation was first developed, several factors were identified and used by HLC staff to determine how each institution would transition into pathways. Peer review teams trained to make such recommendations will use the same factors when considering an institution's eligibility to choose the Standard or Open Pathway.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Peer review teams have three options to consider when recommending pathway eligibility. Peer review teams can:

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

#### **RECOMMEND 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 under HLC sanction or related action or has been under HLC sanction or related action within the last five years.
- It has pending recommendations for a focused visit or extensive other 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.

## **RECOMMEND AN INSTITUTION FOR THE STANDARD PATHWAY BASED ON JUDGMENT.**

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

- Has the institution been undergoing dynamic or disruptive change (e.g., significant changes in enrollment or student body, opening or closing of multiple locations or campuses) 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, reports required due to flagged financial or non-financial indicators)?
- For institutions currently on the Open Pathway: Did the institution fail to make a genuine effort of its Open Pathway Quality Initiative?
- For institutions currently on the AQIP Pathway: Has the institution failed on multiple occasions to follow required AQIP processes (e.g., missed deadlines for filing Action Project Updates, failure to post an Action Project charter within the expected timeframe following a Strategy Forum, requested delays in filing documentation, including the Systems Portfolio; and/or inadequate preparation for peer review visits)?

- For institutions currently on the AQIP Pathway: Has the institution established a pattern where it fails to meet AQIP Continuous Quality Improvement expectations (e.g., lack of demonstrable improvement between the filing of two or more Systems Portfolios; lack of demonstrable improvement in addressing strategic issues noted in prior Systems Appraisals; lack of transparency in institutional matters; changes in the institution's decision-making processes that limit broad input and discussion about important institutional issues; lengthy vacancies in critical institutional positions; and/or inconsistent commitment to continuous quality improvement)?

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.

## **RECOMMEND AN INSTITUTION IS ELIGIBLE TO CHOOSE STANDARD OR OPEN PATHWAY.**

If the team determines that the institution does not meet the conditions for the Standard Pathway identified by the specific conditions or its judgment and is not recommending monitoring on any of the Criteria for Accreditation, the team should determine 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 peer review team's recommendation will be forwarded to the Institutional Actions Council with the other findings from the comprehensive evaluation. Institutions have an opportunity to respond to recommendations. The Institutional Actions Council will make the final pathway determination for each institution.