



GESUITI EDUCAZIONE
fondazione delle scuole ignaziane

PROTOCOL FOR ACCREDITATION AS COMPANION SCHOOLS IN EUM PROVINCE

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1. INTRODUCTION

In July 2020, the Society of Jesus published the document “Jesuit & Companion Schools: Companions in Mission,” which arose from the need to provide an overview of the distinctive criteria and validation processes related to collaboration among schools that are part of the Global Network of Jesuit Schools in various capacities.

The motivation behind this document lies in the desire to recognize the great variety of educational institutions operating within the Global Network of Jesuit Schools and the ways in which they work together in “collaboration in mission.”

A fundamental element is the distinction between proper works and companion schools. The mission of a proper work—whether administered by a Jesuit or by another entity that shares this commitment—“shall ultimately be subject to the authority of the Superior General of the Society through the various levels of authority.” The same concept is also expressed in the IAF, which specifies that an institution is a “proprietary” one when “it derives its Jesuit identity from the Society itself and is therefore governed according to the Society’s common law [...] it receives support from the Society itself to promote its identity and mission through various means” (IAF, 121).

A companion school, on the other hand, is an Ignatian work that, however, “does not necessarily depend on the Society of Jesus, even though it may be affiliated with it through networks or other structures.”

In summary, therefore, the main difference between Jesuit schools and companion schools lies in whether or not they can be considered works of the Society.

Partner schools and the Society of Jesus may decide to establish a relationship and collaborate, through the participation of partner schools in provincial or congregational networks, or in the Global Network of Jesuit Schools. A “Memorandum of Understanding” (MoU) is often used, in which mutual responsibilities and expectations are outlined.

The process therefore requires the expression of a willingness to collaborate through a formal request.

This document includes a section that identifies the fundamental requirements defining a Jesuit school, by referring to the ten global identifiers outlined in the document “Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition in the 21st Century.” Every school that aspires to be considered part of the Jesuit network must put these identifiers into practice and periodically evaluate their implementation, as they form the basis for establishing any associative relationship with the Society’s network of schools. A tradition of belonging to the Society is in no way sufficient to make an educational institution a Jesuit school; rather, what is required is a constant commitment to being a “living tradition” of education, as conceived at all levels, through a process of ongoing discernment and in accordance with the authorities of the Society.

2. PURPOSE OF THE PROTOCOL

This protocol aims to address the needs outlined in the Society’s document by establishing a procedure that defines the criteria and procedures for an educational institution within the EUM Province to qualify as a partner school.

The Province’s network of schools currently consists of six institutions directly operated by the Society of Jesus and one “former directly operated” institution recognized as a Companion School, the S. Ignazio in

Messina, managed by a social cooperative and housed in a building for which the Society holds a surface right on land owned by the local diocese. This school was granted “Companion School” status based on the application of the previous revision of this Protocol.

The application of the Society’s universal document to our Province must also be understood with regard to our own institutions—defined as Jesuit schools—precisely because the spirit of the document emphasizes the need for all schools to follow a path guided by the identifying principles contained in the document “Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition in the 21st Century.” To this end, it is helpful to recall the tradition and current relevance of the process of accompaniment visits, a practice that is part of our Province’s history and was formalized in 2020 by the FGE with the publication of the latest version of the “Program and Protocol for Accompaniment Visits in the EUM Jesuit Education Network.”

The process described in this program draws on the established practice of visits, updating the criteria and standards in light of the Society’s most recent documents on education. This tool has served as an effective foundation for drafting the present protocol for the accreditation of companion schools.

The Fè y Alegria Italia network deserves separate consideration, as its unique nature and the specific characteristics of its schools in Italy make it more complex to evaluate. Furthermore, the current status of the three schools in Genoa, Milan, and Rome does not, at this time, allow for an objective and systematic assessment of their proven adherence to the principles of the Society’s pedagogy and its requirements, as updated in the most recent published documents.

3. UPDATE TO THE PROTOCOL

Three years after its initial implementation, the protocol has made it possible to verify the effectiveness of the process in practice and to identify certain aspects that require greater operational precision. The current text has been revised to incorporate the lessons learned from the three-year experience, with the aim of making the accreditation process more precise and better suited to the actual needs identified in the management of evaluation processes.

4. THE ACCREDITATION APPLICATION

To initiate the process, the interested school must submit a formal application for accreditation.

The application must include the following documentation:

- ✓ a letter of motivation regarding the request for accreditation and participation in the Jesuit Education Foundation;
- ✓ a commitment to adhere to the network’s vision;
- ✓ staffing plan with details on the applicable collective bargaining agreement and teachers’ qualifications;
- ✓ the organization’s bylaws and organizational chart illustrating the functioning of the governing bodies;
- ✓ the most recent approved financial statements;
- ✓ land registry extract and floor plan of the property, along with contracts governing its use if the property is not owned by the school;
- ✓ policy for the protection of vulnerable individuals;

- ✓ privacy policy;
- ✓ recognition as a state-recognized school (for Italian schools);
- ✓ three-year educational plan – PTOF (for Italian schools);
- ✓ self-assessment report – RAV (for Italian schools).

In the accreditation application, the team—appointed by the Foundation and composed of experts in the areas under review—assesses whether the minimum eligibility requirements are met, including the completeness of the documentation and, in particular, actual compliance with certain parameters required by the country of origin. By way of example and without limitation, the following are the requirements set by the Italian government for obtaining parity status:

- an educational plan in harmony with the principles of the Constitution;
- a curriculum plan compliant with current regulations and provisions;
- proof of ownership of the school and public disclosure of financial statements;
- availability of facilities, furnishings, and teaching equipment appropriate for the type of school and compliant with current regulations;
- establishment and operation of collegial bodies;
- application of current regulations regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- teaching staff holding valid teaching credentials;
- individual employment contracts for administrative and teaching staff that comply with national collective bargaining agreements for the sector.

If the verification of requirements is successful, the accreditation process is declared open and will be conducted as described in the following paragraph.

5. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Once the accreditation process has been declared open, the next step is for the school to prepare and submit to the Foundation the self-assessment documentation covering the areas of educational proposal, organization, leadership and management, and apostolic financial management.

Attached (Appendix 1) is a framework containing, for each of these three areas, certain standards to which reference must be made and the corresponding indicators that allow for verification of whether the standard has been met. There is also a column for self-assessment containing questions to stimulate reflection, a column for assigning a self-assessment score for each indicator, and finally a column listing the scores obtained from the subsequent audit visit.

The standards consist of values and characteristics required of schools seeking accreditation as companion schools and draw upon various foundational texts of the Society's educational apostolate, such as the

Guidelines issued by the Foundation in 2017—and subsequent updates—and “Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition in the 21st Century.” Each standard is broken down into several indicators, to which the school is asked to assign a self-assessment score from 1 to 5 according to the evaluation grid provided in the appendix (Appendix 2).

The self-assessment documentation must be submitted to the Foundation within three months of the date of notification that the accreditation process has begun. After reviewing the submitted dossier, the team proceeds to organize the first audit visit to the school, visiting the institution in person, if possible, within two months of receiving the self-assessment documentation.

The purpose of the visit is to gain firsthand knowledge of the school and to verify the self-assessment conducted by the school itself, which involves assigning scores to each indicator to confirm or adjust the scores the school had previously assigned.

Within two months of the visit, the Foundation prepares a final evaluation report containing the fully completed accreditation evaluation form and a brief summary of the process’s outcome. To receive a favorable evaluation at this stage, each indicator must achieve a score of at least 4.

If this condition is not met, the school must implement corrective actions to achieve this result. Ideally within three months of receiving the final evaluation document from the Jesuit Education Foundation, the school must notify the Foundation that the corrective actions have been implemented. Within two months of receiving this notification, the team will conduct a second audit visit and update its evaluation document.

Once all required standards have been met, the team will send—ideally within one month of the last visit—the final proposal for the school’s accreditation to the Foundation’s Board of Directors, which will forward the request to the Provincial, providing all the necessary information—as clear, complete, and objective as possible—for the final evaluation. The Provincial will decide and notify both the Board and the Institute of the acceptance or rejection of the application.

It is advisable that, during the final approval phase, the Provincial consult with the Bishop of the local diocese where the school seeking accreditation is located, seeking the Bishop’s opinion through a letter of introduction from the Institute, if deemed appropriate in the specific case.

The Institute that has obtained accreditation will submit to the Foundation its application to join the Network, accepting all its conditions.

The Provincial will inform the Father General of his decision and of the process followed to reach it, through a letter addressed to the Secretary for Secondary and Pre-secondary Education of the Society of Jesus. He will also attach to the letter the Regulations for Participation in the Foundation, on the understanding that the Companion school’s acceptance of the Regulations is equivalent to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding required by the document “Jesuit & Companion Schools: Companions in Mission.”

6. FINAL EVALUATION: OUTCOME AND RENEWAL

The final evaluation regarding accreditation is issued by the Provincial following the process as implemented and described in the previous paragraph.

Approval of the accreditation application remains, of course, the prerogative of the Province, which has the ultimate authority to determine the outcome of the evaluation regarding the admission of a new companion school into the global network of Jesuit schools.

Approval of the application for accreditation as a partner school is valid for 4 years. At the end of this period, the Foundation must conduct a renewal evaluation, examining any changes that have occurred in the school's situation in the broadest sense, and requesting the submission of all updated initial documentation, including the evaluation form for accreditation.

After analyzing the documentation and conducting a dedicated audit visit, the team submits a final evaluation report to the Foundation's Board of Directors to present the renewal request. Similarly, the Provincial may proceed with the renewal, if warranted.

It should be noted that, in any case, significant changes that have occurred during the four-year period—such as changes in ownership structure, changes in the ownership or use of the property, recognition of parity, changes to the collective bargaining agreement applicable to employees, amendments to the bylaws, etc.—must be promptly reported to the Foundation, which will assess their potential impact on the maintenance of accreditation.

The granting of temporary accreditation, to be renewed periodically, allows for ongoing verification of the requirements necessary to qualify as a partner school, thereby protecting the Company from any risks associated with insufficient oversight of institutions seeking to become partners.

Sources

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