



GESUITI EDUCAZIONE

fondazione delle scuole ignaziane

PROTOCOL FOR ACCREDITATION AS A COMPANION
SCHOOL IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN (EUM)
PROVINCE

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1. INTRODUCTION

In July 2020, the Society of Jesus published a document entitled "Jesuit & Companion Schools. Companions in Mission", which aim is to provide a general framework of the distinctive criteria and validation processes related to collaboration between schools belonging in diverse forms to the Global Jesuit Network of Schools.

The motivation behind this document is rooted in the desire to recognize the wide variety of educational institutions operating within the Global Jesuit Network of Schools and the ways in which they work together in a common "collaboration in mission".

A fundamental element is the distinction between works of the Society and companion schools. The mission of a work of the Society, whether administered by a Jesuit or by another entity sharing the same commitment, "will be ultimately accountable to the General of the Society through the appropriate levels of authority." The same concept is reinforced in the IAB (Ignatian Association of Principals), where it is specified that works are considered proper when "they belong to the Society, since it is their owner and proprietor and normally also the owner of the material means applied to them" (IAB, 110).

A companion school, on the other hand, is an Ignatian work that, however, "does not necessarily depend upon the Society of Jesus, although it may be affiliated with it in partnership through networks and 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.

Companion schools and the Society of Jesus may decide to enter into a relationship and collaborate at different levels through the participation of companion schools in provincial or conference networks, or in the Global Network of Jesuit Schools. They do this usually through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a similar agreement in which their mutual responsibilities and expectations are stated.

The process thus requires an expression of willingness to collaborate, through a formal request.

The document includes a section that identifies the fundamental requirements that define a Jesuit school by referring to the ten global identifiers explained in the document "A Living Tradition in the 21st Century". Any school aspiring to be considered part of the Jesuit network should put these identifiers into practice and periodically evaluate their implementation, as they serve as the basis for establishing any associative relationship with the network of schools affiliated with the Society. A tradition of belonging to the Society is never sufficient on its own to qualify an educational institution as a Jesuit school. What is required is a constant commitment to the "living tradition" of education, as it is discerned at all levels, in accordance with the appropriate authorities of the Society.

2. PURPOSE OF THE PROTOCOL

This protocol aims to address the needs outlined in the Society's document by defining a procedure that establishes the criteria and methods for an educational institution within the Euro-Mediterranean (EUM) Province to qualify as a companion school.

The network of schools in the Province is composed of six Jesuit-owned works of the Society institutions and two former works of the Society now managed by independent third party Social Cooperatives. The Pontano School in Naples and the S. Ignatius School in Messina, although previously Jesuit schools and still located in properties owned by the Province, do not currently hold the specific qualification of "Companion Schools". In their Strategic Plan for the coming years, both schools have expressed their desire to undergo a process that regularizes their position within the global network of Jesuit schools as "Companion Schools." The Provincial, in his mandate letter to the Board of Directors of the FGE (Fondazione Gesuiti Educazione or Jesuit Education Foundation) on 7 December 2021, has effectively initiated the process for these two schools, as requested by the Society's charter.

The application of the Society's universal charter within our Province should also be understood in relation to works of the Society, defined as Jesuit schools, precisely because the spirit of the document emphasizes the need for the journey all schools embark upon, following the indicators outlined in the Living Tradition. In this regard, it is useful to recall the tradition and relevance of the process of accompanying 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 Accompanying Visits in the Jesuit Education Network of the EUM".

The process described in this program refers to the well-established practice of visits, updating criteria and reference standards in light of the Society's most recent documents on education. This tool has provided an effective basis for the drafting of this protocol for the accreditation of Companion Schools.

Separate consideration is given to the Fè y Alegria Italy network, whose unique nature and the specificity of its schools in Italy contribute to the complexity of its evaluation. Moreover, the current identity of the three schools in Genoa, Milan, and Rome does not currently include an objective and systematic assessment of their proven adherence to the principles of the Society's pedagogical methods and its requirements as contained in the most recently published documents.

3. REQUEST FOR ACCREDITATION

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

The application must include the following documentation:

- ✓ letter of motivation regarding the accreditation request;
- ✓ a commitment to adhere to the network's vision;
- ✓ confirmation of being a private school;
- ✓ three-year plan of educational offerings (or PTOF);
- ✓ self-assessment report (or RAV);
- ✓ staffing plan specifying the collective labor agreement applied and teachers' qualifications;
- ✓ organization's statute and organizational chart illustrating the functioning of the collegial bodies;
- ✓ latest approved financial statement;
- ✓ land registry certification and floor plan of the building, as well as contracts regarding its use if not owned.

In the application for accreditation, the evaluation team assesses whether the minimum eligibility requirements are met, which include the comprehensiveness of the documentation and the effective compliance with certain parameters as required by the State for obtaining parity, such as:

- educational program in line with the principles of the Constitution;
- educational planning in accordance with current regulations and provisions;
- proof of management and public disclosure of financial statements;
- availability of premises, furniture, and educational equipment appropriate for the type of school and in accordance with current norms;
- establishment and functionality of collegial bodies;
- compliance with current regulations regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities or disadvantaged conditions;
- teaching staff holding the required qualifications;
- individual employment contracts for managerial and teaching staff that comply with national collective labor agreements for the area. In the event that the verification of the minimum requirements is successful, the accreditation process is declared open. This process, described in the next section, may or may not lead to the granting of accreditation to the school concerned.

In the case of accreditation being approved, the school should submit its application for participation in the Network to the Foundation, to officially become part of the Jesuit educational institutions of the EUM Province.

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The accreditation process begins with the submission of an application by the interested school. If the evaluation team verifies the presence of the necessary minimum requirements, the process is declared open.

As mentioned in the previous section, the minimum requirements consist of the completeness of the required documents and compliance with the stated parameters required for obtaining parity.

The next phase involves the preparation by the school of self-assessment documentation that should be submitted to the Foundation, focusing on areas related to its educational proposals, its organization, leadership and governance, and its apostolic financial management.

The attached document (Annex 1) provides an outline for each of these three areas, including standards to be referenced and indicators to assess whether or not these standards are being met. In addition, there is a column for self-assessment including questions to stimulate reflection, a column for assigning a self-assessment score for each indicator, and finally a column in which the scores obtained from the ensuing inspection visit are given.

The standards consist of values and characteristics necessary for schools seeking accreditation as Companion Schools and refer to various foundational texts such as the Guidelines issued by the Foundation in 2017 (and subsequent updates) and the Living Tradition. The achievement of each standard is assessed through the measurement of several indicators, for which the school is asked to assign a self-assessment score between 1 and 5 according to the evaluation grid provided in Annex 2.

The self-assessment documentation must be submitted to the Foundation within a maximum of three months. After reviewing the dossier, the evaluation team will subsequently organize the first inspection visit of the school, visiting the Institute in person within the following two months.

The purpose of the visit is to acquire first-hand knowledge of the school and it aims to verify the self-assessment carried out by the institution itself, providing for assignment of scores for each indicator, which will confirm or modify those that the school had previously assigned.

Within one month, the Foundation will prepare a final evaluation document containing the fully completed accreditation assessment and a brief summary of the outcome of the process. To obtain a positive rating at this stage of the proceeding, it is necessary for each indicator to attain a minimum score of 4 out of 5.

If this condition is not met, the school must implement corrective actions in order to achieve the desired result. In this case, a second inspection visit to the school by the evaluation team will be required, to be carried out within two months of the preparation of the assessment document.

The team will then update its evaluation document and, if the minimum score goal has been achieved, it will present the final proposal for the school's accreditation to the Foundation's Board of Directors within one month of the last visit.

At this point, the Province officially accepts the accreditation request submitted by the Foundation's Board of Directors. Approval is expected to be confirmed within three months. In this way, the entire process, from the submission of the application to its final acceptance, takes approximately twelve months (see the schematic representation in Annex 3).

In the final stage of approval, it is useful to foresee that the Father Provincial liaises with the Bishop of the local diocese where the school applying for accreditation is located, obtaining his opinion through a letter of presentation introducing the Institute.

5. FINAL EVALUATION: OUTCOME AND RENEWAL

The final evaluation for accreditation is issued by the Province following the process as implemented and described in the previous section.

Acceptance of the application remains a prerogative of the Province, which has the ultimate authority to determine the outcome of the evaluation for the inclusion of a new Companion School within the network of Jesuit colleges.

The preparatory work, consisting of data collection, self-assessment by the school and verification by the Foundation, as well as the preparation of the final evaluation document, aims to provide the Province with elements that are as clear, complete, and objective as they can be, in order that the most appropriate decision can be taken.

Following the positive outcome of the final evaluation carried out by the Province, the Companion School will submit its application to the Foundation to join the network as a new member. Acceptance of the Foundation's regulations is in effect equivalent, for our Province, to signing a Memorandum of Understanding, as cited in the document on Companion Schools issued by the Society.

The acceptance of accreditation as a Companion School is valid for a duration of 4 years. At the end of this time, the Foundation must proceed with a renewal of the evaluation by examining any changes that have occurred in the school's situation in the broadest sense. This process requires the submission of all updated documentation, including the initial framework assessment for accreditation.

After analysing the documentation and conducting a further inspection visit, the evaluation team will present a final evaluation document to the Board of Directors to submit the renewal request. Accordingly, the Province will proceed with the issuance of the renewal, if appropriate.

It is important to note that any significant changes that occur during the four-year period should be reported to the Foundation, which will be able to assess their possible impact on maintaining accreditation. Examples of such changes include variations in the ownership structure, modification of property ownership or use, recognition of parity, changes in the collective bargaining agreement for employees, statutory amendments, etc.

The granting of temporary accreditation, to be renewed periodically, allows for ongoing verification of the required criteria for defining a Companion School, ensuring that the Society avoids any risks associated with the low supervision of institutions intending to pose as collaborators in its mission.

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