



Adventist  
Accrediting  
Association

# ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK

**A Manual  
for Team  
Chairs**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Philosophy and Purposes of Seventh-day Adventist Accreditation	3
Types of Accreditation Visits	4
The Regular Accreditation Visit	4
Interim Visit	4
Administrative Review Visit	5
Focused Visit	5
Accreditation Materials	5
Chairing a Regular Accreditation Visit	6
Prior to the Visit	6
The Visit	8
After the Visit	12
Chairing an Administrative Review or Interim Visit	13
Chairing a Focused Visit	14
Appendix A1-4: Sample Letters	15
Appendix B: Sample Regular Accreditation Visit Schedule	19
Appendix C: Outline of Accreditation Report	20
Appendix D: Writing Commendations and Recommendations	22
Appendix E: Final Accreditation Recommendation	25
Appendix F: Required Documentation for Regular Accreditation Visits	28
Appendix G1-2: AAA Visit Timelines	30

## **PHILOSOPHY AND PURPOSES OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST ACCREDITATION**

The Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (AAA) is the recognized accrediting body commissioned by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to carry out the accrediting process. Accreditation is principally concerned with the improvement of quality in Adventist educational institutions around the world and with assuring the church organization, its members, and other entities that Adventist secondary schools, colleges, and universities meet established standards or criteria.

The task of accreditation is based on the philosophy that each educational institution operated in the name of the Seventh-day Adventist Church assumes the double responsibility of fulfilling the expectations of its constituency and of supporting the Church's mission.

The Adventist Accrediting Association holds to the principle that denominational accreditation is not dependent upon regional, state, or national recognition requirements. International experience, however, has shown that many of the academic, professional, and ethical standards established by the Adventist Accrediting Association coincide with those required by other professional and governmental accrediting bodies.

The Adventist Accrediting Association supports the right of each institution to pursue its educational mission under the guidance of a governing board elected by its constituency; the right of the faculty to teach, carry out, and publish research; and the right of students to learn and to develop their God-given talents. However, the exercise of these rights must not interfere with the institution's obligation to provide quality education within the context of the beliefs, mission, educational philosophy, and practices of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Each institution is required to carry on the process of self-evaluation on an ongoing basis. Periodically the evaluative process will culminate in a *Self-Study* document and an institutional visit by an evaluation team appointed by the Adventist Accrediting Association. The successful fulfillment of the requirements results in initial accreditation or the reaffirmation of denominational accreditation.

## TYPES OF ACCREDITATION VISITS

### **The Regular Accreditation Visit**

A regular accreditation visit will normally take place at least every five years. At the time of each visit, the visiting team will usually recommend to the AAA a term for continued accreditation between one and five years. The action taken by the AAA in response to this recommendation will determine the time of the next visit. Teams can also recommend interim visits, interim reports, or annual reports in their accreditation reports.

Most institutions are accredited under the terms of Form A (see information on accreditation documents below). This process combines strong focus on both issues of institutional quality in general as well as the specific mission focus expected of Seventh-day Adventist institutions. The recommendation on accreditation will be determined by the team-members based on the *Self-Study* prepared by the institution and interviews/observations made throughout the visit.

Where institutions undergo rigorous and external accreditation by regional or government accreditation agencies in their countries and have a track record of managing a quality and mission-focused institution, Form B may be used as the basis of accreditation by the AAA (see information on accreditation documents below). This seeks to complement existing accreditation processes by focusing on issues more specifically related to the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education and the mission and focus of the institution. In the case of institutions using Form B that have a regional/government accreditation term which exceeds five years, an initial term of accreditation of five years may be given. This will be followed by an administrative review visit. This may result in an extension of the accreditation term to equal that of the regional/government accreditation term. A regular accreditation visit will then only take place at the end of the extended term (see also “Administrative Review Visit” below).

### **Interim Visit**

An interim visit takes place between regular accreditation visits and will be concerned with specific items identified as areas of concern at the time of a regular accreditation visit. These will have been recorded in the form of major recommendations in the last AAA report. Also, it is expected that 50% or more of other recommendations will be fulfilled or that significant progress toward fulfillment has been made by that time. An interim team will normally be no more than four in number.

At an interim visit, the team will evaluate institutional progress on the major and other recommendations identified by the AAA and their report will act as a supplement to the major report written at the time of the last regular accreditation visit, unless the Interim Visit Report incorporates any outstanding recommendations and therefore states that it

“will serve as the only set of recommendations on which the institution will report at the time of the next regular visit”.

## **Administrative Review Visit**

An Administrative Review Visit will only take place at institutions that (a) have been authorized by the AAA to be accredited under the terms of Form B and (b) have received an accreditation term from a regional or government accreditation body that exceeds the usual maximum term of five years awarded by the AAA. In this case the team will usually not exceed three members. This group can decide to recommend an extension of the AAA accreditation term to that given by the region/government (with the next regular AAA visit taking place within one year of the external accreditation visit). They can also recommend that the extension not be granted. In this case a regular AAA visit would take place approximately one year from the date of the Administrative Review Visit. For an institution to receive an extension the following will be expected:

1. Ongoing accreditation from the region/government and evidence that external expectations continue to be met.
2. Major and other recommendations from the last AAA visit have been met or are in the process of being met.
3. Institutional developments since the last regular visit and plans for future development indicate a mission-focused college/university.

## **Focused Visit**

A focused visit takes place by the request of an institution, or its board, or by action of the AAA. Such a visit normally focuses on particular areas of concern regarding the institution’s mission or operating stability. The terms of reference for such a visit and reporting procedures will be identified before the visit takes place.

## **ACCREDITATION MATERIALS**

In support of the accreditation process, the AAA produces an *Accreditation Handbook*. The handbook has four parts and each one can be used as a separate document.

**Part I** is concerned with the accreditation philosophy of the AAA, its purposes, and the types of accreditation available through the AAA. This section is useful to all involved in an accreditation visit as it provides the context for the accreditation visit, explains what should be the focus of the visiting team, and defines the expectations of the Adventist Accrediting Association.

**Part II** focuses on the accreditation visit in all its forms and on the roles and responsibilities of all involved in a visit. It also provides a timeline and outline of the final report for a regular accreditation visit. This is a basic manual for both an institution facing accreditation and the members of a visiting team.

**Part III** provides information for Form A institutions on writing the *Self-Study* and identifies the criterion that describe an institution of excellence in this category. It also provides suggestions of issues team members may explore in considering the Form A *Self-Study*. All involved in a Form A institution visit should be thoroughly acquainted with this section of the *Accreditation Handbook*.

**Part IV** provides the same information as Part III but for an institution being accredited under Form B. All involved in a Form B institution visit should be thoroughly acquainted with this section.

## **CHAIRING A REGULAR ACCREDITATION VISIT**

Accreditation visits run under the terms of Form A normally will be chaired by the General Conference liaison for the division in which the institution is situated. The education director of that division will be the secretary. Accreditation visits run under the terms of Form B will be chaired by the General Conference liaison for the division or an administrator from a peer Adventist institution with a similar education system. In cases where the chair is from a peer Adventist institution, representatives from the education departments of the General Conference and division will facilitate the accreditation visit and the GC liaison will serve as secretary for the team.

### **Prior to the Visit**

Prior to a regular accreditation visit, the team chair will have the following responsibilities:

#### **Agreeing on the date of the visit**

This discussion normally will be initiated by the GC education liaison to the division in which the institution to be accredited is situated.

#### **Approving the team members**

This discussion will again be initiated by the education representative in the division but the chair's input will be invaluable. The following should be considered:

1. Choosing a representative group of individuals who will provide a breadth of experience.
2. Mixing the team to include individuals experienced in accreditation with less experienced individuals.
3. Matching team members with the perceived needs of the institution.

The president of the institution should also be consulted on the appropriateness of team membership.

### **Maintaining regular contact prior to the visit with both the institution and the team members**

Once the team members have been selected, the chair will be the primary point of contact for the professional side of the visit. (The division education representative will serve as the primary contact for practical arrangements—e.g. travel arrangements, accommodation, team room requirements, etc.) The chair's contact should include, but not be limited to:

1. Sending a letter to all team members welcoming them as members and giving them the following key information: time of first and last meeting of the visit (so travel plans can be made); the names of the other team members; what they should do in preparation for the visit; who to contact regarding practical arrangements for the trip, and when and what communication to expect in the future. The following attachments should go with the letter: *AAA Accreditation Handbook* and a copy of the most recent full AAA report of that institution along with any interim/annual reports submitted by the institution since that time. (The chair may also request that the General Conference Department of Education send out the reports. However, the chair should tell all team members what to expect and from whom.) This letter should be sent a minimum of three months prior to the visit. Appendix A-1 provides an outline of a letter that could be sent to team-members.
2. Sending a letter to the institutional president, and a copy (or individual letter) to the institutional board chair formally confirming the dates and starting/ending times of the visit, the team members, and identifying what future communication needs to take place with the institution. The chair may ask the president to identify who he/she wishes to be the primary contact at the college/university. The president should also be reminded of the *Self-Study* expectations and that team members should receive the *Self-Study* and other key documents one month in advance of the full visit. If the visit is to an institution using Form B, the institution also needs to be reminded that all materials relating to their regional/government accreditation should also be made available to the team. If this is too bulky to send to members, it should be available on arrival. This letter should be sent a minimum of three months ahead of the visit. Appendix A-2 provides an outline of a letter that could be sent to the president and board chair.
3. Discussing with team members their specific interests. If the roles of the members are clear, it can be an advantage if they are told prior to the visit of their particular responsibilities. If the roles are not so clear, this discussion may not happen until the team meets for the first time.

4. Agreeing to a tentative schedule with the institution and team members. Although there needs to be room for flexibility in the schedule, the institution is helped if they can know in advance the key individuals the team will want to meet and approximately when. (Please see **Planning the Schedule** below for suggestions on developing the schedule.) In order to set up the schedule, the chair may wish to invite team members to identify groups/individuals they want to meet. The chair should also confer with the institution on blocks of time that would be convenient for meeting particular groups. The discussion on schedule may not be completed until after team members have received the *Self-Study* from the institution as this may identify for them areas they wish to pursue.
5. Sending out final information (formally or informally) about two weeks prior to the visit. This will include the schedule and team responsibilities to date and identify the place of the first meeting. Appendix A-3 provides an outline of a letter that could be sent at this time.

## **The Visit**

During the visit the chair has the following major responsibilities:

### **Setting a positive environment for the visit**

An Adventist Accreditation Association accreditation is a peer evaluation. The team consists of professional peer evaluators whose goals are to assist the institution by evaluating its effectiveness in (a) reaching its stated goals and (b) meeting the ideals of the standard identified by the AAA.

“Critical friend” may be a useful term. The accreditation team should not take a confrontational attitude to the visit but it should be willing to provide constructive criticism. The institution should not be able to conclude that accreditation is merely a formality. Thus, the team should be willing to make difficult recommendations if they are appropriate. However, the visit should take place in an environment of genuine concern for the institution and its particular challenges. Its successes and strengths should be celebrated.

### **Orientating the team members**

Some team members will have had prior experience in accreditation; some may not. Most will not have experienced the style of the present chair and the first hour the chair spends with the team will be vital to the direction of the visit. During the orientation, the chair could:

1. Discuss key sections of the AAA Accreditation Handbook with the team, particularly those relating to their professional responsibilities as team members and how to write commendations and recommendations. It is particularly



important that team members understand the importance of confirming their judgments before writing them into the report.

2. Discuss with the team the difference between minor items and concerns that should become recommendations in the report. Less experienced members in particular may want to include every issue they identify as a possible recommendation. That is not helpful to the institution. Under the guidance of the chair, the team may wish to agree to the approximate number of recommendations and commendations they wish to include in the final report. Focus should be on the key areas that will assist the institution to move forward as a quality Seventh-day Adventist institution.
3. Organize the team. This may have happened prior to the visit, but if not, this is the time to arrange who will be responsible for what part of the report. Team members should be encouraged to check their conclusions with at least one other team member before writing them as recommendations. If possible, two individuals should team together for preparing key areas of the report.
4. Remind the members that this is a team effort. It is important that by the time the visit concludes all members of the team are willing to support the conclusions of the group. Items that are not supported by the group should not be included in the final report.
5. Remind the members of the importance of listening and not allowing their own preconceptions to unduly influence their conclusions. Although there are some core expectations of all accredited Seventh-day Adventist institutions, the institution should be evaluated according to its own *Self-Study* and its individual mission.
6. Make clear the ethical responsibilities of the team members. In particular, it is unethical to recruit faculty or students while being a member of an accreditation team.
7. Consider how the report will be written. Normally the GC or division representative will serve as committee secretary. Decisions will also have to be made on how team members write and pass on their recommendations to the secretary.
8. Agree with the team on the schedule for the visit.

### **Agreeing on the schedule**

No two schedules for an AAA visit will look exactly the same. Some key principles, however, are:

1. Provide the team with significant team time. This should include time for team orientation, times each day for personal visits and writing, times when all team members need to be present so that the development of the report can be discussed (particularly later in the visit), and adequate time for the whole team to agree and edit the full report before the exit interview is given. Ideally a close to final report should be ready when the exit interview is given. This can only happen if the team has time together. Ideally team members should be asked to conclude planned interviews 24 hours before the visit ends.
2. Set a meeting with administration at the beginning of the visit. The chair may wish to invite the president along with other members of the administrative team to present a report to the team as the first item on the agenda after team orientation. This can assist the team in getting a quick grasp of the direction of the institution, the visions of the administration, and their challenges.
3. Set group interviews as early in the schedule as possible. This will normally include students, faculty, academic administrators, spiritual/student life leaders, and available members of the Board of Trustees. These are the meetings that will usually need to be set up well in advance of the visit.
4. Ensure that some time is set aside for group worship/prayer. If the college/university has worship in the morning, the team should try and join the corporate worship. If this does not happen, it is good for the team to spend a few minutes each morning in group prayer/worship. This will help set the tone and direction of the visit.
5. Give time for the report to be written. While the team has a secretary to input/prepare the report, there will be a need to coordinate with him/her the deadlines for submitting recommendations and commendations. These are best submitted throughout the visit so that the report can be ready for the exit interview.
6. Give time for the team to decide thoughtfully on the final recommendation. It is easy to run out of time toward the end of the visit. It is important that sufficient time is taken to decide on major recommendations and to decide the recommended accreditation term.

Appendix B offers a sample schedule.

### **Ensuring the completion of the draft report (on-site)**

Some of the key principles have already been identified, but in general the following should be remembered.

1. The final report should follow the pattern of all AAA reports. The *Guidelines for Evaluation Visits* both provides an outline for a report and gives a summary

document on how to write commendations and recommendations. These are copied for convenience in Appendix C and D. The team will also have a copy of the last AAA report for the institution being visited and the new report should follow the same pattern. However, a team may decide to make some minor variations and these are welcomed. For example, while not the usual pattern, in some instances a paragraph explaining the context of a key recommendation is appropriate.

2. An important section of the report is the one identifying major recommendations and commendations. These should be selected by the team toward the end of the visit and should be those items that most impact the whole institution and, in the case of recommendations, are most essential to the institution's continuing quality and Christian/Seventh-day Adventist ethos. This section helps the institution identify where they should place their major and immediate focus.
3. Ensure that comments are not duplicated. Since team members may be submitting individual items without consultation with the whole group, it is possible that some items will be duplicated in the report. Eliminating duplication will be one of the responsibilities of the team in its final meetings.
4. Ensure that the report has balance. All institutions have strengths and it is important these are recognized. Commendations are rarely over-stated. However, it is also important to ensure that recommendations are widely distributed and that while they may focus on particular areas where needs are clear, lack of balance should not be the result of over-preoccupation by the team in one area.
5. Ensure that the team is completely in support of the final accreditation recommendation. The choices for final recommendations are identified in Part II of the *Accreditation Handbook* and are copied in Appendix E for convenience. The team should vote this action. It is also important that all members sign on the signature page in the report to show their agreement to both the major accreditation recommendation and the report that will follow it. Three original signature pages should be completed and the GC representative on the committee should remind you of that necessity. He/she will take those pages to add to the final filed reports (one for the institution and two for the GC Department of Education).

### **Serving as the chief link between the team and the local administration**

While the division and GC representatives may take responsibility by the chair's request for some of the on-site arrangements, once the team is on the campus of the institution, the chair will serve as the formal representative of the team. This will mean:

1. Ensuring that the team members have all the material they need to function adequately. The institution should have provided a wide range of material for the team in their work room. The team will need to time to look at this and ask

through the chair for any information that is not present or for additional material. See Appendix F for a list of the material that should be provided.

2. Chairing group meetings with institutional administration, faculty, staff, students, board, etc. If the chair will not be present for one of those meetings, he/she should identify who will lead out in that discussion.
3. Keeping the administration informed on how the visit is going. It is often advisable for the team chair to meet with the chief administrator prior to the exit interview to inform him/her of the directions in which the team is moving. This will give the administration time to correct any misunderstandings and/or to be prepared for the more public statements that will be made at the exit interview.
4. Chairing the exit interview, keeping the following in mind:
  - Institutions vary in whom they want to be present at the exit interview and this often reflects culture. The primary report is always to the institutional president. In addition, the board chair should always be invited. Others are invited by the institutional administration and can vary widely from only the key administrative personnel to all administration, board, faculty, staff and students. Let the decision on who is invited be that of the president, although openness is the preference of the AAA.
  - Reports can also be given in different ways. On some occasions a verbal summary is given; other times just the major recommendations and commendations are read; on other occasions the full report is given. The chair should decide which approach to take based on the nature of the report, its length, and the ability of those who will hear the report to understand the language, etc.
  - It is usual to provide the president and chair of the board with a text of what is read. These should be collected again afterwards, in case there is need for further corrections to be made.
  - At the time of the exit report, clarifications should be permitted. The administration must be given opportunity to correct factual errors for an agreed length of time after the report is given.
  - The Chair of the visiting committee will not announce the confidential recommendation that will be made to the AAA Board pertaining to the accreditation term.

## **After the Visit**

After the conclusion of a regular AAA accreditation visit the chair will have the following responsibilities:

### **Ensuring the final report is completed and distributed**

Ideally by the end of the visit the report will be in close to its final form. The institution should be given a few days to identify any factual concerns in the report. The team members should also be offered the opportunity to note any final corrections. All these recommendations should be sent to the chair who will send them on with his/her approval to the secretary. The chair will have authority to decide on final edits.

Once the final document is completed, the chair should send it to the division education director and the Executive Secretary of the AAA and will agree with them about the process of sending it to the institutional president/chair of board. Normally either the chair will forward it or this will be done by the AAA by the chair's request. The report should be with the institution and the AAA a maximum of two months after the visit is concluded but ideally at an earlier time.

The letter sent with the report to the institution should also identify when the report will be discussed by the AAA Board. The institution should be reminded, however, that until that time, the report can be used as a working document and should be shared with the institutional board at the first possible opportunity. The AAA retains the right to make changes to the recommendations made at the time of discussion by the AAA Board.

A sample final letter to the institutional president and board chair when the final document is sent to them can be found in Appendix A-4.

### **Thanking those that made the visit work well**

The chair should also be the person to send notes of thanks to members of the team and key individuals at the institution for their support of the accreditation process. This is optional but advised.

**Please note that Appendix G-1 provides a summary timeline, identifying responsibilities throughout the AAA process for regular accreditations.**

## **CHAIRING AN ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR INTERIM VISIT**

Normally an administrative review visit is chaired by a peer administrator and an interim visit by the GC liaison for the division in which the institution is situated. In either case the following will be the normal pattern:

### **Division Director of Education**

The division director of education will be the primary person responsible for setting the dates of the visit, ensuring that practical arrangements are in place, inviting team-members to take part in the visit, and coordinating initial contact between team members.

## **General Conference Liaison**

The General Conference liaison will be the primary person responsible for facilitating selection of team-members, communicating with the institution on expectations and scheduling, and facilitating discussion with the team-members on the accreditation process.

## **Team Chair (Peer Administrator or GC Liaison)**

The chair will be the primary person for facilitating the visit on site and ensuring completion and communication of the final report. The team however will be small and it is most likely that the team members will be General Conference and division education personnel and individuals who have been on earlier visits. Therefore the team orientation will not need to be in the same depth as for a regular accreditation visit. The schedule will also have been approved in advance.

The chair will therefore focus on the following elements of the chair's responsibilities identified under regular accreditation visits:

1. Setting a positive environment for the visit
2. Ensuring the completion of the draft report (on-site)
3. Serving as the chief link between the team and local administration
4. Ensuring that the final report is completed and distributed (after the visit)

While the schedule will have been largely agreed to before the visit, the team chair will also need to manage the schedule on-site and facilitate any changes/additions to the agreed program.

Part II of the *Accreditation Handbook* will provide more material on the nature and operation of administrative review and interim visits. A recommended timeline which identifies key responsibilities for administrative review and interim visits is found in Appendix G-2 of this document.

## **CHAIRING A FOCUSED VISIT**

The general principles of how accreditations should be conducted as identified in this document will apply to focused visits as with all other AAA visits. However, the specific responsibilities of a focused visit cannot be identified until such a visit has been requested or the AAA has taken an action to ask for such a visit. At that time, the chair and all other team members will be informed in writing of the terms of reference of the visit and the particular responsibilities of all members.

## Appendix A-1

### Sample Initial Letter to Team

Dear

**Re: Regular Accreditation Visit to (name of institution), (dates)**

On behalf of the Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA), thank you for your willingness to be a member of the accreditation team that will visit \_\_\_\_\_ for a regular accreditation visit. This is an important assignment and I am privileged to be chairing a team of individuals who have shown themselves to be both outstanding professionals and strongly committed to the mission of Seventh-day Adventist education.

The full team is confirmed as the following:

(list team members, their positions, and specific areas of expertise)

Attached to this letter are some key documents. The *Accreditation Handbook* is produced by the AAA and will orientate you both to the process of accreditation and the role of our accreditation team. Please be thoroughly acquainted with this document before the commencement of our visit. You will also find attached the AAA report from the last regular accreditation visit to \_\_\_\_\_, as well as \_\_\_\_\_ (if other interim reports, etc. are available, identify these at this point.) These documents will give you some initial orientation to \_\_\_\_\_. Prior to our arrival on campus you will also receive directly from \_\_\_\_\_ an institutional *Self-Study* and (list other documents you have asked the institution to provide for the team). These should reach you approximately one month before the visit is due to take place.

As you prepare for this visit please plan on being on site from (time of first meeting) to (time of last meeting). As your travel plans become clear, please let (division education director or other, as agreed) know of your arrival time (at the airport/on campus, etc.) He/she will also provide information about your accommodation and other practical arrangements regarding your stay. His/her contact information is: \_\_\_\_\_

Over the next few weeks, I will be working with the administration of \_\_\_\_\_ to set up a schedule for our visit. Please let me know of any specific requests you have so these can be fitted into that schedule. I will be back in contact with you with details of this schedule and of our first meeting about two weeks prior to our trip. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact me at \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you again for being part of this team.

Yours sincerely,

Cc: GC liaison (if not the chair), division education director, institutional president

## Appendix A-2

### Sample Initial Letter to President (copy Board chair)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

#### Re: Regular Accreditation Visit to (name of institution), (date)

As you will know, I have been appointed by the Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA) as the chair of the team that will be on your campus from (dates) for a regular accreditation visit. I very much look forward to the visit and understanding more of the particular successes and challenges of your institution as you seek to provide quality Seventh-day Adventist education to your students.

The full team has been approved as follows:

(list team members, their positions, and specific areas of expertise)

The team visit will last from (time on first day) to (time on second day). Before our visit, we will need to communicate further on the schedule for the visit and the practical arrangements. I will be the contact point for the schedule. The (division education director/other) will be the chief contact point for the practical arrangements. Would you please let us know who you would like us to communicate with on your campus as we work on these details. Please make contact by \_\_\_\_\_.

You will have already received the *AAA Accreditation Handbook* which identifies the materials that will need to be sent to the team members. As requested in that *Handbook*, the *Self-Study* should reach all team members at least one month before our visit. The following should also be sent at the same time: the latest institutional *Bulletin* and a copy of the institutional master plan/strategic plan. A copy of your last audited statement should also be sent to me. During the visit the documents relating to your last regional/government accreditation will also be considered by the visiting team. These may be sent ahead of the visit or provided on site if they are too bulky to be sent in advance. Any of the documents requested from you may be sent to team members by e-mail attachment or in hard copy.

I look forward to working with you over the next few months as we prepare for this regular accreditation visit. I will be the major point of contact for all questions relating to the professional side of the visit. Please do feel free to contact me at any time with any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,

Cc: GC liaison (if not chair), division education director, board chair



## Appendix A-3

### Sample Second Letter

(Sent to all team members and institutional president/key institutional contacts)

Dear Colleagues

**Re: Regular Accreditation Visit to (name of institution), (date)**

We will be meeting at \_\_\_\_\_ in only two weeks from now. Thank you all for your co-operation in the planning stages of this visit.

The tentative schedule for the visit is now in place and this is attached. Inevitably changes will be made as the visit proceeds but this will provide the framework of the visit. Please note that the first meeting will be at (time) in (place). For team-members unacquainted with the campus, this room can be found (give directions, etc.).

(Add other details specifically relevant to this visit. You may want to work with the individuals dealing with practical arrangements and summarize them all in this letter, so team members have all the information they need in one place.

I look forward to seeing you on \_\_\_\_\_. Safe traveling!

Yours sincerely,

Cc: GC liaison (if not chair); division education director; board chair

## **Appendix A-4**

### **Sample Final Letter to Institution**

Dear (President)

I am pleased to enclose the final copy of the AAA regular accreditation report from our recent visit to your campus. Thank you again for your hospitality and cooperation with us during this visit. I hope that the report will assist (institution name) positively as you work with your team to discuss and implement the recommendations we have made. I hope it will also encourage your academic community, for we identify in the report many significant strengths of your institution.

This report has now been sent to the Executive Secretary of the AAA, who will consider the accreditation recommendation made by our team at the next AAA Board. This meets (give date). After that meeting, the Executive Secretary will contact you and give you the action taken by the Board. In the meantime, the attached completed report should be considered a working document by you and your team and may be used as the basis for future planning. It should also be shared with the Board of Trustees at its next full meeting.

Thank you again for your positive involvement in the accreditation process.

Yours sincerely,

Cc: GC liaison, division education director, board chair

## Appendix B

### Sample Regular Accreditation Visit Schedule

The table that follows is a sample only. It is most important in identifying the key groups that should be met during an accreditation visit, and identifying the balance needed between interviews and team work. Chairs should feel free to adjust this as necessary to fit the individual situation in each institution. Where such arrangements are possible, group interview meetings over meals may help the schedule work better.

	<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Day 2</b>	<b>Day 3</b>
8:00am	Orientation	Team time	Team time
9:00	Team time with documents	Personal interview time (team members to set up interviews) Personal work in team room	First draft reading
10:00	Meeting with president (and other admin) Campus orientation		Essential follow-up meetings
11:00			Chair meets president—discusses document direction Personal work in team room. Final recommendations and commendations written
12.00pm	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1:00	Personal interview time (team members to set up interviews) Personal work in team room	Meetings with Academic Committee and spiritual leaders (team splits)	Team review document Agree major recommendations and commendations and term of accreditation
2:00		Meeting with department chairs, deans of schools, etc. and student life leaders (team splits)	Final corrections to document Team signs off on report
3:00	Team time	Personal interview time (team members to set up interviews) Personal work in team room	Exit report with president, board chair if available and others as invited
4:00	Meeting with selected students (including student leaders)		
5:00	Meeting with faculty (or selection of faculty)	Team meeting	Final team meeting if needed
6:00	Dinner	Dinner meeting with available members of the Board of Trustees	Dinner and close
7:00++	Personal time—work on report or free time	Meeting with local alumni and/or free time	

## **Appendix C**

### **Outline of the Accreditation Report**

#### **Introduction**

A short summary of the report including the name of the institution visited, the dates of the visit, the members and affiliation of the visiting committee, the text of the final accreditation recommendation, and the signature page.

#### **Background to Institution and Visit**

This section will usually include:

1. A brief historical and geographical background to the institution.
2. Institutional profile:
  - a. A listing of degree programs
  - b. Enrollment statistics and trends
  - c. Faculty statistics
  - d. A listing of other institutional and/or program accreditations
  - e. A listing of institutional administrators at the time of the visit
3. Circumstances of the visit including a listing of documents examined
4. Summary recommendation fulfillment.
5. Major commendations and recommendations.
6. Analysis of institutional fulfillment of the Criteria for Review (CFR)
7. Appreciation
8. Final recommendation

In the case of interim or administrative review visits, the report will serve as a supplement to the regular (full) accreditation report unless the Interim Visit Report incorporates all outstanding recommendations and therefore states that it “will serve as the only set of recommendations on which the institution will report at the time of the next regular visit.”

#### **Major Recommendations and Commendations**

Major recommendations and commendations will be selected from the full list of recommendations and commendations identified by the team. They will be those that have the most whole institutional significance, and, in the case of recommendations, hold the greatest threat to the stability and/or Adventist ethos of the institution. These will be asterisked where they are found throughout the report and then repeated as a group towards the front of the report.

The number of total major recommendations should not exceed **ten**.

### **Responses to the Recommendations from the Last Accreditation and/or Interim Report**

The team will review each recommendation made by the last full evaluation committee, those made by any interim visit (if any), the institutional response, and evidences of their fulfillment. They will assess the reasons recommendations have not been implemented, or fully implemented.

The report will include a comment on the team's conclusions, usually written in the form of commendations and/or recommendations.

### **Responses to the *Self-Study***

1. The team will review the documentation provided in response to the *Self-Study* documentation and the degree to which these responses, supplemented by interviews, observation, and other institutional documentation, provide evidence of a quality, Seventh-day Adventist institution. (See Parts III and IV of the *Accreditation Handbook* for some of the issues the team may wish to pursue in considering the *Self-Study*.)
2. Team members will consider areas of excellence and the areas where documentation or information is lacking or where interviews and observation suggest a need for improvement. Commendations and recommendations should be written accordingly (see Appendix D for suggestions on writing these).
3. Each criterion will be responded to separately. It is recommended that the team focus on major issues and that the number of recommendations remain at a realistic level for institutional action.

### **Expression of appreciation to the institution visited**

#### **Accreditation Recommendation**

The final accreditation recommendation to the Adventist Accrediting Association will be drafted by the evaluation committee toward the end of the visit on the basis of the observations made and taking into consideration the options available (these options are identified in this document and will be discussed with the team by the chair). The committee will arrive at its final recommendation by either majority vote or consensus agreement.

## Appendix D

### Writing Commendations and Recommendations

The majority of the institutional report will consist of commendations and recommendations. All team members will be involved in writing these in their areas of expertise and in approving those written by others. While all commendations should be for tasks performed in an above-average or superior manner, some of these commendations and recommendations will be identified by the team as **major**.

In drafting commendations and recommendations, members of the evaluation committee should keep the following items in mind:

1. Statements must be based on either the *Self-Study* document, personal observation, or an interview with a board member, administrator, faculty, staff, or students, only after the team member has carefully cross-checked and verified each observation or statement.
2. Commendations or recommendations should be addressed to a specific group, department or unit in the institution—never to individuals by name.
3. Commendations should be given only for achievements or tasks performed in an above-average or superior manner and not for the normal fulfillment of a duty.
4. Recommendations should be concise and specific, with measurable ingredients (how will an observer know if a specific recommendation has been fulfilled?), and should not preempt the governance role of the institutional board or the administrative authority of the administrators.
5. Recommendations should focus on major issues and should be limited to a number reasonable for the institution to manage in the period before the next full evaluation visit.
6. In order to assist the secretary in drafting the report, each commendation or recommendation should be keyed to the appropriate criterion number and to the page number of any document referred to. They should also include the name of the committee member submitting the item.

Sample commendations and recommendations follow, with an explanation of how these can be used as a pattern for team members.

#### Commendations

Samples:

The visiting committee (or team) commends:

1. The administration for their high level of positive communication with the local church community (*Self-Study*, p. 32; interviews).
2. The administration, faculty, staff and students for their active involvement in the development of a spiritual master-plan that is already making an appreciable difference to the spiritual programming and ethos of the campus (*Self-Study*, pp. 17, 47; institutional strategic plan; interviews; student survey).

Notes:

1. Writers should say who the commendation is for—i.e. in the first commendation, the administration and in the second, administration, faculty, and staff. Individual names should not be given—only titles, or groups of individuals.
2. Commendations should state clearly what is being commended with as much preciseness as possible. This can include not only **what** is being done but also the **effect**—e.g. in the second sample commendation, the commendation is for “the active development of a spiritual master-plan” but the next part of the sentence helps explain why that is so important “that is already making an appreciable difference to the spiritual programming and ethos of the campus.”
3. A writer should give the source(s) of information that led to the conclusion. Where there are specific references to documents and page number that can be given, pages should be identified. If information comes from an interview, the name(s) of the individuals should not be identified.

## Recommendations

Samples:

The visiting committee (or team) recommends:

1. That the administration urgently reconsider their plans to build a new classroom block until the debt on the library construction has been fully paid (interviews; audited financial statement, 2002-03; *Self-Study*, p. 35).
2. That the Academic Committee continue its plans to develop a process for more structured evaluation of courses and teaching that will involve feedback from students as well as peers and administration (interviews, *Self-Study*, p. 63).

Notes:

1. Writers should identify clearly who the recommendation is to—e.g. in the above examples, to the administration and the Academic Committee. The recommendations can be to an individual (mentioned only by title, e.g. President), a committee, or a group of individuals.
2. If a recommendation is already in the plans of an institution, this should be credited in what is written—e.g. “That the Academic Committee **continue its plans . . .**”
3. All recommendations should be do-able and measurable. The institution needs to

- be able to report completion of the recommendation and the next accrediting team needs to confirm that it has been met.
4. The sources of recommendations should be referenced in as much detail as possible—e.g. audited financial statement, 2002-03.
  5. As team members they should consider which of the recommendations they will want to suggest as **major** ones to their colleagues. In the samples given above, the first would be considered a major recommendation since it impacts the financial stability of the institution. **In general, major recommendations will be those that significantly impact the college/university and are most essential to its continuous quality and to the embodiment of the Seventh-day Adventist ethos.**

## Suggestions and Other Comments

While the majority of the accreditation report will be written in the form of commendations and recommendations, there are occasions where the team may decide to add additional commentary or suggestions. This will normally be for one of the two following reasons:

- a. The team face a particularly complex or sensitive situation and consider that the context of a recommendation needs to be carefully explained. This is best done as a preamble to a section of the report or directly prior to a key recommendation.
- b. The team consider that there is an important statement to make to institution that will be best expressed as a “suggestion” rather than a recommendation or commendation. A suggestion should be given at the end of the commendations and recommendations under the relevant criterion, and may best be introduced by following the same pattern, i.e. The visiting team suggests:

The chair of the committee will guide the team in the appropriateness of adding extra sections to the report.



## Appendix E

### Final Accreditation Recommendation

The accreditation recommendation is the overall recommendation on whether an institution should be reaccredited and, if so, for what term and with what conditions, if any.

In considering the accreditation recommendation (to be reached by a majority vote), the visiting committee will have at its disposal the following options:

1. *A five-year institutional accreditation with no interim revisit.* This is for an institution that has fulfilled or satisfactorily addressed all the previous recommendations, submits an acceptable *Self-Study* in advance of the visit, shows adequate strength in each major area identified in the *Self-Study*, and anticipates no major changes that will impact its mission, Seventh-day Adventist focus, or the financial and administrative stability of the institution. The recommendation may include the request for written reports on specific items at established times.
2. *A five-year term of institutional accreditation with a report and administrative review visit at the end of that period by a team appointed by the AAA and the possibility of extension of the term to that of the regional or government term of accreditation/recognition.* Additional interim reports may be requested. **This term is only available for institutions accredited under the terms of Form B.** It is for an institution that has a strong track record of success in external accreditations, has fulfilled or satisfactorily addressed all previous AAA recommendations, submits an acceptable *Self-Study* in advance of the visit, shows adequate strength in each major area of its operation, and anticipates no major changes that will impact its mission, Seventh-day Adventist focus, or the financial and administrative stability of the institution.

At the time of the administrative review visit the team will expect to find that the institution has: (a) met the major recommendations of the previous visiting committee, (b) made significant progress toward meeting all other AAA recommendations, and (c) satisfactory progressed in addressing the relevant issues raised by the regional accrediting or governmental review process. Only if these criteria are met, may the visiting committee recommend and the AAA grant an extension of the accreditation term that will match the term granted by the regional or governmental agency. If these requirements have not been met, the visiting committee shall recommend and the AAA may grant a one-year extension of accreditation to the institution to allow it to prepare a *Self-Study* and to be ready for a full accreditation visit at the end of the one-year extension.

3. *A five-year institutional accreditation with an interim visit.* This is for an institution that has satisfactorily fulfilled or addressed the previous recommendations, submits an acceptable *Self-Study* in advance of the visit, shows

weaknesses in a few areas, and/or is experiencing or will experience in the near future important changes in its administration, status, programs, or size that could impact the institutional mission and/or Seventh-day Adventist identity. These specific issues will be identified in major recommendations. At the time of the interim visit, the team will expect that the institution has fulfilled or made substantial progress in fulfilling all of the major recommendations. The approximate time for the interim visit will be identified in the accreditation recommendation.

4. *Three or four year institutional accreditation. Interim reports or visits may be included.* This is for an institution that has not fulfilled several previous recommendations, has not prepared an acceptable *Self-Study*, shows weaknesses in several areas of its operation or leadership, and/or is experiencing or will experience significant changes in its leadership and/or programs that could impact on the institutional mission and Seventh-day Adventist identity. Only on rare occasions, where external situations result in institutional instability beyond the control of the institution, may a team give only a one or two year term of regular accreditation.
5. *Deferral.* Deferral is not a final decision. It is interlocutory in nature and designed to provide time for the institution to correct certain deficiencies. This action allows the Board to indicate to an institution the need for additional information or progress in one or more specified areas before a decision can be made. Deferrals are granted for a maximum period of one year.
6. *Probationary status with a specific time limit of two years or less.* This is for an institution where the accreditation visit is unsatisfactory or the pre-work by the institution is unacceptable. Several of the following will be evidenced:
  - The institution has not submitted an acceptable *Self-Study*
  - The institution has not submitted a *Self-Study* on time
  - The institution has not made significant progress in responding to the recommendations of the previous evaluation visit
  - The institution shows substantial weaknesses in major areas of its operation or leadership
  - The institution is not representative of Seventh-day Adventist educational philosophy, policy and/or practice
  - The institution willfully disregards IBE/AAA guidelines and/or actionsThese weaknesses need to be carefully documented with specific conditions, expected evidence of their fulfillment, and a time frame for the removal of the probationary status. In situations where one particular department/school shows significant weaknesses, the visiting team may recommend a focused visit to the institution within a two-year period to review that program. If the college or university has not resolved the identified problems by that time, then the whole college/university may be placed on probation.

7. *Issue an Order to Show Cause.* An Order to Show Cause is a decision by the AAA Board to suspend or terminate the accreditation of the institution within a maximum period of one year from the date of the Order unless the institution can show cause why such action should not be taken. Such an Order may be issued when an institution is found to be in substantial noncompliance with one or more Standards or Criteria for Review or has not been found to have made sufficient progress to come into compliance with the Standards. An Order to Show Cause may also be issued as a summary sanction for unethical institutional behavior or constant disregard of IBE/AAA guidelines and/or actions. In response to the Order, the institution has the burden of proving why its candidacy or accreditation should not be suspended or terminated. The institution must demonstrate that it has responded satisfactorily to Board concerns, has come into compliance with all Standards, and will likely be able to sustain compliance. The candidacy or accredited status of the institution continues during the Show Cause period, but during this period, any new site or degree program initiated by the institution is regarded as a substantive change and requires prior approval. In addition, the institution may be subject to special scrutiny by the AAA Board which may include special conditions and the requirement to submit prescribed reports or receive special visits by representatives of the AAA. The Order to Show Cause is sent to the chief executive officer and the chair of the governing board.
8. *Suspension of accreditation.* This is for an institution that either refuses to fulfill the recommendations of previous evaluation visits, does not welcome an AAA visit, and/or openly deviates from the philosophy and objectives of Seventh-day Adventist education. These will need to be carefully documented with specific conditions that will allow the institution to regain regular status with the Adventist Accrediting Association.

### **Accreditation Recommendation for an Institution Facing Initial Accreditation**

An institution facing its first accreditation after being awarded candidacy status can be given any of the accreditation terms identified in 1, 3-5 above, although its *Self-Study* will respond to recommendations made at the time candidacy was given rather than to recommendations of any previous AAA visit.

If the visiting accreditation team considers that an institution in candidacy status does not reach the required standard for accreditation, it may recommend that the institution be dropped from candidacy and that no accreditation is awarded, or it may extend candidacy for a maximum of another two years. If an extended term of candidacy is awarded, the institution will need to have met both the initial recommendations from the teams recommending candidacy and any additional recommendations/conditions made at the time of the first AAA visit before the end of the extension period. An extension to candidacy can only be given once.

## Appendix F

### Required Documentation for Regular Accreditation Visits

The following documents and materials must be available to members of the accreditation committee in a room designated for their work on campus at the time of their arrival on campus:

- The *Board Handbook* or *Manual*
- The latest edition of the college or university *Bulletin*
- The *Faculty/Staff Handbook*, including job descriptions for administrators, faculty, and staff
- The *Student Handbook*
- Minutes of the Board and the Administrative Committee for the last three years
- All audited annual financial statements since the last regular accreditation visit (three years in the case of Form B institutions)
- The current institutional budget
- A year-to-date financial operating statement
- Report of the Financial Oversight Committees (Audit and Compensation Review).
- Annual report of the treasurer/chief financial officer that is provided to the board. This report must include the financial statement, all schedules—including loans receivable or loans guaranteed or cosigned for subsidiary organizations, assets pledged as collateral, and any off-balance-sheet obligations of the organization concerned.
- A copy of the class schedule and the academic calendar
- Campus map
- Institutional master plan(s), including spiritual master plan(s) if not integrated in a detailed manner into the full master plan
- Documents on affiliations and extensions
- Course syllabi, organized by schools and departments, with information on how the integration of faith and learning takes place in classes
- Listing of church affiliation of each administrator, faculty, staff member by department
- Church affiliation percentages for student body for both traditional and non-traditional students
- Institutional publications such as sample articles, news releases, and PR materials used with the university/college constituency
- List of faculty research/publication. The team should also be given access to faculty files/portfolios
- Administrative/faculty/staff pay scales as related to the approved denominational scales or approved by Board action
- A list of recommendations for endorsement of relevant faculty teaching in the seminary/department of religion, and a copy of any alternative International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) process approved for

the institution

- Most recent AAA accreditation *Self-Study* and visiting committee report and any interim/annual reports completed since that visit
- Copies of any national/regional accreditation/validation material (annual reports, self-studies, government accreditation/validation notifications, any correspondence changing accreditation/validation status, etc.)

**Appendix G-1  
AAA Visit Timelines  
Regular Accreditation  
Recommended Responsibility Summary**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Date for Completion</b>
Institutional head, vice president for academic administration, and board chair to be advised on visit in next calendar year and sent AAA Accreditation Handbook	AAA Executive Secretary	By April of previous calendar year
Division chair of BMTE and institutional head to be reminded of IBMTE guidelines	AAA Executive Secretary	By April of previous calendar year
Institutional <i>Self-Study</i> started	As designated by institutional president	When documentation received
Specific dates of visit to be agreed	Division director in consultation with GC liaison, and institutional president	June of previous calendar year
Chair to be appointed (where applicable)	GC liaison, division director with institutional president	By beginning of June of previous calendar year
Information on chair responsibilities sent to chair (where applicable)	GC liaison	June of previous calendar year
Team to be agreed	Division director in consultation with GC liaison and chair, with input from institutional president	Summer of previous year
Letter to be sent to team members re process of visit. A copy of the last AAA report and the AAA Accreditation Handbook to be included	Chair of team or designee	Three months before AAA visit
Letter to be sent to institutional president and board chair re process of visit	Chair of team or designee	Three months before AAA visit
<i>Self-Study</i> to be completed	As designated by institutional president	Six weeks before AAA visit
<i>Self-Study</i> and other required documentation sent to all team members	Institutional president or designee	To be received at least one month before AAA visit

Outline schedule of visit to be agreed. This to include meetings with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• available board members</li> <li>• administration</li> <li>• faculty</li> <li>• representative group of students</li> </ul> and time for exit report	Chair/secretary with institutional president. Consultation with other team members	One month prior to the visit
Institution to be informed of travel arrangements of team members	Division director or as agreed	At least two weeks prior to arrival of team members
Accommodation of team members	Institutional president or designee with division director	Team members to be informed of arrangements at least two weeks prior to the visit
Arrangements for visit on site. The following need to be provided: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a work room for the team</li> <li>• documents as identified in the handbook for accreditation, p.5</li> <li>• a computer and printer in the work room</li> <li>• arrangements for meals/refreshments</li> </ul>	Institutional president	Prior to arrival of the team
Draft report	Chair of team	By time of exit report
Final draft report complete, after having input from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all team members</li> <li>• institutional president and board chair on issues of accuracy</li> </ul>	Chair of team	Two months after completion of visit
Final report sent to AAA Executive Secretary and division education director	Chair of team	Two months after completion of visit
Final report to institution (president and board chair), including note identifying time report will go the AAA Board	Chair of team/AAA executive secretary	Two months after completion of visit
Institutional board informed of report findings	Institutional president, board chair	After receipt of visiting team report
Institution informed of decision of AAA Board	AAA Executive Secretary	After action by AAA Board

**Appendix G-2**  
**AAA Visit Timelines**  
**Interim Visit or Administrative Review Visit**  
**Recommended Responsibility Summary**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Date for Completion</b>
Institutional head, vice president for academic administration, and board chair to be advised of visit in next calendar year and sent Accreditation Handbook	AAA Executive Secretary	By April of previous calendar year
Team recommended	GC liaison and division education director with input from institutional president	By June of previous calendar year
Dates for visit to be agreed	Division education director, in consultation with institutional president and other team members	September of previous calendar year
Letter to be sent to team members re process of visit, along with last full AAA report and the AAA <i>Accreditation Handbook</i>	GC liaison or designee	At least three months prior to the visit
Letters to be sent to institutional president and board chair confirming dates of visit and specific needs/plans	GC liaison or designee	At least three months prior to the visit
Institutional report to be sent to all team members	Institutional president or designee	At least one month before the visit
Outline schedule of visit to be agreed.	Team chair/secretary with institutional president after consultation with other team members	One month before the visit
Institution to be informed of travel arrangements of team members	Division education director or as agreed	One month prior to visit
Accommodation of team members	Institutional president or designee with division director	Team members to be informed of arrangements at least two weeks prior to the visit
Arrangements for visit on site.	Institutional president	Prior to arrival of the team



This should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a work room, with computer and printer</li> <li>• arrangements for meals/refreshments</li> </ul>		
Draft report	Chair of team	By time of exit report
Final report complete	Chair of team	One month after completion of visit
Final report sent to AAA Executive Secretary	Chair of team	One month after completion of visit
Final report to institution, including note identifying time report will go to the AAA Board	Chair of team/AAA Executive Secretary	One month after completion of the visit
Institutional board informed of report findings	Institutional president, board chair	After receipt of visiting team report
Institution informed of decision of AAA Board	AAA Executive Secretary	After action of AAA Board

Adventist Accrediting Association  
12501 Old Columbia Pike  
Silver Spring, MD 20904  
Tel: 301-680-5066  
Fax: 301-622-9627  
Web: [adventistaccreditingassociation.org](http://adventistaccreditingassociation.org)