

# ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES



Australian Institute  
of Landscape Architects <sup>®</sup>

The AILA National Council reserves the right to vary its decisions on all policies and procedures based on a case by case assessment of situations that may develop, including circumstances not covered by published guidelines and policy documents.

All queries on National Policy and Procedures should be directed to the AILA's Executive Director.

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## 1 Overview of Accreditation

Professional Accreditation is the process of review designed to evaluate a program in the light of its educational objectives and the minimum standards and core competencies as defined in AILA's University Education Policy and the Accreditation Standards.

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) oversees professional accreditation of landscape architecture education programs in Australia.

The purpose of professional accreditation is to serve the needs of four key stakeholders:

- The community which is entitled to have confidence in the employment of landscape architects who have adequate knowledge of the theory and practice of landscape architecture;
- The students and graduates who are entitled to assurance that the program has been independently reviewed and found to meet professional higher education standards and competencies;
- The tertiary institution for which the process provides a consultative peer review and stimulus to continually improve their educational programs to meet emerging and future needs;
- The profession which is entitled to have confidence in the level of general and technical knowledge of graduates seeking to engage in the profession of landscape architecture.

AILA Accreditation is achieved when the AILA National Council concludes, after review of performance indicators or any other evidence as required that these objectives have been and/or are likely to be substantially met.

## 2 AILA Accreditation Structures

### 2.1 *National Council and the Chief Executive Officer*

The AILA National Council has ultimate responsibility for overseeing the Education and Accreditation Policy implementation. To achieve this the Council may establish committees to oversee specific tasks but at all times final decisions are referred back to the National Council, at times via the National Council Executive.

The AILA Chief Executive Officer, on behalf of the AILA National Council, oversees and manages the AILA National Education and Accreditation processes and all panels and committees put in place to implement the Policy and carry out the Accreditation Procedures.

The Chief Executive Officer's ex officio role on the Panel involves a range of duties including at times being a spokesperson, managing the processes, chairing meetings and representing the AILA National Council. In future years - as resources allow – this role may be allocated to another paid staff member.

AILA's Accreditation processes rely heavily on the volunteer time of the members to serve on panels and committees as well as the commitment from the program staff to fulfil the requirements.

### 2.2 *The National Accreditation Panel*

At least once in the cycle of each 4 year accreditation period, A National Accreditation Panel, being a sub committee of National Council, visits each program.

This Panel is to comprise at least three Senior Registered Landscape Architects and the Chief Executive Officer of AILA (ex officio/Panel Chair).

Before each visit, the National Accreditation Panel members review previous Program Annual Reports, the Advisory Committee reports, and other sources of information to assess actions and issues.

The National Accreditation Panel will request clarification and/or further evidence in order to determine the degree to which the program is meeting its educational objectives, the AILA University Education Policy and the Accreditation Standards.

The process normally takes place over two days and includes:

- a formal review of a representative range of student work (student work will typically comprise samples of work over each of the years of the program and across subjects to demonstrate assessment procedures and benchmark standards for the full range of achievement levels (i.e. fail through pass and credit to distinction grades);
- an inspection of facilities and resources;
- interviews with staff and students;
- a meeting with the Dean of the School and the Vice-Chancellor, to report on the current accreditation and to provide a national context for the program.

After the visit, the Panel consults with the local AILA State Accreditation Advisory Panel prior to submitting a report to the National Council. The report to Council includes information and recommendations in regard to the on-going accreditation status of the program.

This report also informs national policy directions and becomes the basis for consultations between the local AILA Local Accreditation Advisory Panel and the Program for the next four years.

The Panel's report is compiled using an agreed template in order to achieve national consistency of information.

The National Council may initiate other visits as required.

### *2.3 The Local Accreditation Advisory Panel*

Each programme has regular contact with a local Accreditation Advisory Panel which is established by the Chief Executive Officer in consultation with the local program(s) and the local State Executive.

The Accreditation Advisory Panel is a sub committee of National Council and is appointed by National Council – a process overseen by the AILA Chief Executive Officer who provides the direct liaison link between the National Council and each local Accreditation Advisory Panel.

The Accreditation Advisory Panel establishes direct links to the AILA State Group Executive and is expected to report on a regular basis through their Chair to the local State Executive as well as annually to the National Council via the Chief Executive Officer.

The membership of the panel should reflect a diverse range of practice and interests. It should consist of at least three local registered members with no current formal employment commitment to the program and not be recent graduates of the program.

The majority of the committee should preferably have graduated from other programs or, if from the program in question, should have at least five years practice since graduation.

The AILA will not appoint any person to these roles against the reasonable objections of the program in question. Ideally at least one member should be involved in a larger practice, another in a public sector department and collectively they should have experience of graduates from a number of programs. The panel should have a gender mix.

Consistency and continuity of accreditation evaluations is to be ensured by a progressive turnover / replacement of panellists and that, at any time, at least one, and preferably two, of the members appointed has served on the previously appointed panel.

Service on the Panel by any individual member is ideally limited to six years.

**Avoiding Potential Conflicts:** Any potential conflicts are to be avoided by not having members of the Accreditation Advisory Panel involved in any substantial commitment between themselves and the program. If any doubts are identified, the matter should be first referred to the Chief Executive Officer, who in turn may seek guidance from the National Council Executive. For example - The occasional volunteer sessional role with the program may not be a conflict, whereas a formal paid on-going lecturing/contract role would most likely be a potential conflict of interest. Any member of staff or student would most likely not be appropriate for membership of the Accreditation Advisory Panel.

The local Accreditation Advisory Panel meets at least twice annually with the program to discuss a range of matters including the operation of the program, to update information, and to address any points previously identified in accreditation reports.

Key tasks include:

- Establish regular contact with the program to promote a supportive relationship and maximise familiarity with its operation.
- Elect a Chair.
- Formally meet with the program at least twice a year to discuss issues and to view student work;
- Review a representative range of student work, view facilities, verify resources and have discussions with staff as deemed necessary. A representative range of student work will typically comprise samples of work over each of the years of the program and across subjects to demonstrate assessment procedures and benchmark standards for the full range of achievement levels (i.e. fail through pass and credit to distinction grades). This range of work should be made available to the panel by having the student projects and reports laid out on tables for the panel to access – possibly after the work had been assessed and reviewed by staff.
- Review student exhibitions.
- Other options could be to view classes, assessment reviews and tutorials.
- Complete the Accreditation Advisory Panel's annual report in the format as supplied by the Chief Executive Officer.

#### 2.4 *Links to the University's Program Advisory Committees/Boards*

Each program is encouraged by the AILA to establish their own program advisory committees. The terms of reference for these in-house committees are established by the University.

However the AILA looks to the University to ensure that these committees have roles and responsibilities that clearly delineate their functions from that of AILA's Accreditation Advisory Panels.

AILA members appointed to the University's advisory panel should avoid situation whereby they may be asked to offer advice or opinions that could be in conflict with the current Education Policy and Procedures. Advice on accreditation issues needs to be sourced directly from the AILA and is not a function of the University's own advisory committees.

Any member of the AILA local Accreditation Advisory Panel should not sit on the University's program advisory committee/board.

Membership of these committees is established by the University. The AILA encourages the university to work with the local AILA Executive to have an appropriate AILA membership included and through that representation establish a link to the local AILA Executive.

The typical terms of reference would be along the lines of:

- Advise the faculty/program on directions in Landscape Architecture.
- Advise on the current employment situations within the profession.
- Discuss academic and practice issues, including course structure and content and the quality of the program.
- Discuss and provide guidance on new program initiatives and new directions being proposed by the program.
- Provide guidance on student work experience and mentoring.
- Provide guidance on marketing of the program.
- Advise on liaison with the profession and community.

#### 2.5 *Other AILA Representation (Faculty Boards etc)*

The AILA recommends that program heads/university school/faculties consult with the local AILA State President about any other landscape architect representational appointments within the University, for example, the appointment of a local Registered Landscape Architect to a Faculty Board.

The AILA prefers that such appointments are linked back to the AILA State Executive. The preference is for members who have a range of expertise and experiences, which are perceived not to be linked to the program historically and who are able to commit to remaining in touch with the local AILA Executive.

### 3.0 Annual Review

Each year the local Accreditation Advisory Panel and the program head each submit an independent report to the National Council, via the Chief Executive Officer.

The Annual Accreditation Advisory Panel report should indicate the Panel's views of substantial compliance with the requirements of the Education Policy and Standards by addressing its relevant performance indicators as well as issues identified by the National Accreditation Panel.

The Accreditation Advisory Panel's report is initiated by the Chief Executive Officer, who will supply a form to be completed which will contain notes from the previous reports highlighting issues that need to be addressed and/or discussed. The completed reports from Accreditation Advisory Panel are to be returned completed annually directly to the Chief Executive Officer.

The Annual Program Report (Head of program) should provide information on the program using the supplied template. The program should include an indication of future directions and any planned changes to the vision, objectives or content of the program. The program report is submitted to the AILA National Council via the Chief Executive Officer by the head of Programme annually by the end of November in each year.

The AILA may distribute collated information based on the program reports to the program leaders of all other accredited programs.

The annual process is:

- The AILA Accreditation Advisory Panel meets with the Program staff throughout the year to develop an understanding of the operation of the programme, view student work, and review any information relating to previously raised issues;
- The Accreditation Advisory Panel makes arrangements with the Head of Program for any reasonable access including to meet with students and staff as required;
- The Accreditation Advisory Panel submits to the National Council an annual checklist report and includes in the document any issues being raised and actions being recommended. The report is submitted electronically directly to the AILA Chief Executive Officer by the end of November each year;
- Early in the year, the Chief Executive Officer uses the information from the previous year to produce an overall report on the programs. This is submitted to the National Council for ratification and for any actions recommended;
- Any recommendations made will be considered by the National Council and the program advised in writing of the adoption or otherwise thereof. Otherwise, all programs will receive a letter (by email) from the Chief Executive Officer acknowledging the completion of the annual process.

Failure by an accredited program to comply with these annual requirements may result in reduction to conditional accreditation and, if not addressed within a further six months from the date of such notices, in withdrawal of accreditation.

## **4.0 Accreditation**

### **4.1 Full Accreditation**

Following the National Accreditation Panel visit and receipt of recommendations, the National Council will determine the on-going accreditation status of the program for the next four years.

The Head of Programme will be informed of the determination via the Chief Executive Officer.

Accreditation will last for 4 years until the next review by the National Accreditation Panel unless the annual review identifies extraordinary changes to the programme which would entail a review of this status.

The prerogative remains with the local Accreditation Advisory Panel and/or the local AILA Executive to raise serious issues or concerns directly with the National Council via the Chief Executive Officer at any time.

Following the notification of such issues the process would be:

- The Chief Executive Officer would clarify the matters raised;
- The Chief Executive Officer would then notify the National Council Executive of the matters raised;
- The National Executive would appoint a sub committee and the Chief Executive Officer to seek more information and make recommendations on any further actions;
- If required, the National Council may initiate a National Accreditation Panel visit to seek solutions and/or to make a recommendation on the on-going accreditation of the program in question.

### **4.2 On Notice**

AILA may issue an 'On Notice' to a program due to extraordinary circumstances such as non-compliance with agreed procedures or on-going evidence that indicates that policy objectives are not being met.

In such cases, National Council will establish the circumstances for the removal of the 'On Notice'. Failure to comply with stated conditions may lead to withdrawal of professional accreditation of the program.

### **4.3 APPEALS**

An education provider may appeal the adverse outcome of an accreditation review that results in refusal or withdrawal of accreditation or the imposition of conditions.

An appeal must be in writing stating fully the grounds on which the appeal is made and signed by the divisional head (Dean or Head of School) in the institution.

Lodgement of an appeal should be made to the Chief Executive Officer within four working weeks of formal notification of Council's resolution on the Program Accreditation Panel's report and recommendations.

On receipt of an appeal National Council will appoint an Appeals Panel. The Panel will elect its Chair and the Chief Executive Officer will act as Secretary to the Appeals Panel and coordinate its deliberations. The hearing of an appeal will take place at a time and place designated by the Panel Chair within 45 days of the receipt of the documented appeal.

The hearing may be conducted via telephone conference or video link subject to agreement by all parties. The Chair will preside at the hearing and rule on procedural matters. The Appeals Panel may either affirm the Program Accreditation Panel's decision or recommend that it reconsider that decision, giving reasons in either case. All decisions must be assented to by a majority of the Panel members.

If the Appeals Panel affirms the recommendations of the Accreditation Panel there is no further remedy available and the decision is final.

If the appeal is upheld it will make recommendations to the National Council for further action.

#### 4.4 *New Programmes Accreditation Procedure*

Where a new program is being planned, or a substantial restructure of an existing program or programs is to be undertaken, the School needs to formally apply for AILA accreditation. In relation to new programs, accreditation will be granted subject to the evidence available before the program is implemented.

The AILA requires programs/schools to give ample notice of the implementation of a new program or a substantial restructure of an existing program in order that the local advisory committee will have satisfactory time to advise on and respond to the new program content or the restructured program. The AILA takes no responsibility if this development process cannot be completed in time for the program's introduction if information is not supplied and responded to in a timely manner that allows for the volunteer nature of the local advisory committee.

The School should supply the Chief Executive Officer with documentation clearly demonstrating the responses to the objectives and standards as set out in the Education Policy and Standards. This is to be done in an accessible matrix form, so that the assessment can be carried out easily. A similar matrix is to be presented for dual or double degrees, demonstrating how all students will satisfy the criteria under AILA's Education Policy

Upon receipt of complete information, the Chief Executive Officer will arrange for an assessment of the proposed program. This may involve a paid outside assessor and/or a sub-committee of National Council. Once the assessment report has been received by the Chief Executive Officer, other advice may be sought from the National Accreditation Panel and then recommendations will be made to the National Council on the granting of the AILA Accreditation.

Key Submission Stages:

- 1 Notify the Chief Executive Officer of the intention to alter the program or to introduce a new program – supply proposed timelines;
- 2 Contact the AILA State Group Executive and/or through the local Programme Advisory Committee to establish a period of consultation on the proposed changes or new program;
- 3 Submit the final document to the National Council, via the Chief Executive Officer.

While the program is still being considered for AILA Accreditation, the School is advised not to make any statements to students or potential students about the likelihood of the success of the application for AILA Accreditation, such as that the "AILA Professional Accreditation is pending".

By agreeing to accept the AILA's professional accreditation for the new program, the program/school would be agreeing to the necessary performance reviews, such as annual reporting, required over the period of the accreditation period that allows the AILA to validate the accreditation given in advance.

#### 4.5 *Variations*

The AILA National Council reserves the right to vary its decisions on the accreditation of particular programs based on a case by case assessment of situations that may develop, in particular where such circumstances are not covered by these guidelines and policy documents.

#### 4.6 *Conflict of interest*

The AILA's processes rely heavily on the volunteer time of the members to serve on panels and committees as well as the commitment from the program staff to fulfil the requirements.

Any potential conflicts are to be avoided by members of the committee being selected from those with no formal substantial commitment between themselves and the program. If any doubts are identified, the matter should be first referred to the Chief Executive Officer, who in turn may seek guidance from the National Council. For instance, the occasional volunteer role with the program may not be a conflict; however a formal paid on-going tutoring role would most likely be a potential conflict of interest. Any member of staff or student would most likely not be appropriate for membership of the program's advisory committee. The aim is to have a mix of registered members, mixed expertise and preferably from a range of university programs.

#### 4.7 *Accreditation Fees*

##### *Annual*

Starting with the financial year 2010 - 2011, the AILA invoices all programs on an annual basis for conducting the National Accreditation Visits and other associated procedures.

The AILA Annual Accreditation Fee is to be: \$1,100 (incl GST)

which over a four year period is: \$4,400 (incl GST)

This annual charge has been calculated to recover costs, namely travel, accommodation, meals, cab charges and consumables incurred by the National Panel members for all National Accreditation Visits and associated processes over the four year accreditation cycle.

The fee will be reviewed annually in line with annual budgets.

##### *Review or Revision*

Where a program makes major changes to its program that are not requested by the AILA and requests a preliminary or new assessment, the University will pay the total costs associated with the assessment and any special visits. This fee will have to be negotiated on a case by case basis.

##### *New*

When a program submits for a new program, the University will pay the total costs associated with the assessment and any special visits.

Unless otherwise stated – the submission fee for new programs is \$1,500 for each new program.

Please check first on the level of fee to be applied, especially if an undergraduate and master program are being submitted together as a different fee will apply.

Unless there are other exceptional circumstances, there should be no further charges for the Accreditation Processes – but unforeseen cases will be assessed on a case by case basis in consultation with the program(s) concerned.

## **ATTACHMENT: The National Accreditation Panel Visit Procedures**

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### *Key Elements of the National Accreditation Visit*

- An introductory discussion with the Head of School, Head of Program and senior colleagues;
- Inspection of student work; both by open exhibition and guided with the focus on each year;
- Inspection of the school/program facilities;
- Inspection of the school/program facilities while in use;
- Discussion with the staff responsible for specific areas of study; where applicable this should include sessional staff;
- Discussion with the teaching staff as a group;
- Discussion with students and recent graduates;
- Discussions with the local Accreditation Advisory Panel members;
- The option (as requested by the Panel) of discussions with other local members/employers;
- A meeting with the Head of the School and Vice Chancellor;

### *Facilities during the visit*

The national panel requires the use of a lockable meeting room for the duration of the visit.

### *Exhibition of Student Work*

The Panel requires easy and unlimited access over the two days to an exhibition of student work completed during the previous 12 months.

The exhibition is to include:

- Work from all years arranged to demonstrate development by the students over the period of the program;
- Assignment and program guides handed to students;
- Work from all core parts of the program;
- Written and drawn examples of student work;
- Examples of all aspects of the program – including where possible, electives;
- Examples of portfolios that achieved a range of results – such as the highest, average and lowest pass grades.

### *Meeting with Students*

The panel requires at least one meeting with students with no staff present. This group should be as representative as possible of the different years, including if possible recently graduated students and international students and any other representation to allow the panel to obtain a comprehensive overview. The students are to be briefed in advance by the program staff as to the role of the Accreditation Panel's work and the AILA Accreditation processes.

Australian Institute of Landscape Architects  
The Accreditation Procedures

*Suggested Two Day Timetable*

(Details to be discussed and to be confirmed for each visit)

Prior to the visit the National Panel may meet via telephone to assess available documentation and to identify any key issues to be addressed. The Panel may choose to meet with local individuals (members) or the local AILA Group Executive or Education Committee at any stage of the two-day visit.

The Panel will meet the evening before the visit to confirm details.

The program is requested to make the appropriate appointments and arrangements in line with the following template – variations to be discussed - and confirm a final version with the Chief Executive Officer at least two weeks in advance of the visit.

Day One

9.00 am	Panel convenes in allocated meeting room. Members of the local AILA Accreditation Advisory Panel are to be asked to join this meeting to discuss previous reports. (arranged by the AILA Chief Executive Officer)
10.00 am	Panel meets with Head of School and senior members of staff. Panel Chair provides overview and raises any issues identified. Head of School/Program provides overview and comment on /clarify any outstanding points.
11.00 am	Initial viewing of student work/exhibition.
12.00 pm	Meeting with teaching staff (including sessional staff where possible).
1.00 pm	Lunch – Panel meets over Lunch in private session. (Lunch provided by University)
2.00 pm	Meeting with Students.
3.00 pm	View student work with staff to discuss year by year progress.
4.30 pm	Panel meets in private to discuss progress.

Day Two

9.00 am	Discussion with Head of School and Vice Chancellor.
10.00 am	Panel observes program in normal session.
10.30 am	Inspection of school/program facilities.
11.30 am	Follow up meetings as requested with either groups of students and/or staff or individuals as required.
Lunch	(Lunch provided by University) Meeting with the local Accreditation Advisory Panel (arranged by the AILA Chief Executive Officer) Private session to draft notes for the report.
2.00 pm	De-briefing with Head of School and senior staff. The panel may reserve the right to comment on the final outcome as the Panel needs to make recommendation first to the National Council – and may also be seeking further evidence on particular criteria.

The subsequent draft report will be confirmed with the local AILA Accreditation Advisory Panel, with National Council and then be sent to the Head of School concerned.

The School will have a month to respond to any issues raised.

Once the report is confirmed by the National Council, the report will be adopted as the basis for future discussions and consultations between the program staff and the local Accreditation Advisory Panel.