



Institutional Membership Application Guidelines

For Online Education Providers

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Applicable to: All private online education providers seeking Associate Membership in IAPUC, and Associate Members seeking reclassification to Full Membership

Preamble

The International Association of Private Universities and Colleges (IAPUC) is a global, nonprofit membership organization registered in the State of Colorado, United States of America (Nonprofit Registration No. 20251179157). IAPUC is dedicated to advancing quality in private higher education through the establishment and promotion of the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) accreditation system.

This document provides comprehensive guidance for private online education providers seeking to apply for institutional membership in IAPUC. It sets forth the eligibility requirements, application procedures, required documentation, evaluation criteria, and fee obligations applicable to institutions applying for Associate Membership or seeking reclassification from Associate Member to Full Member. The guidelines herein are designed to ensure a transparent, rigorous, and fair admission process that recognizes the distinctive operational models, technological infrastructure, and pedagogical approaches of online education within the broader landscape of private higher education.

These guidelines are consistent with the IAPUC Constitution, the IAPUC Membership Eligibility and Admission Standards, the IAPUC Strategic Development Plan (2026–2031), and the IQA Supplementary Standards for Distance and Blended Learning Quality Assurance. All institutions are encouraged to review these foundational documents before commencing their application.

Chapter 1: General Provisions

Article 1: Purpose and Scope

1.1 These Guidelines serve to:

- (a) Provide a clear and detailed roadmap for private online education providers applying for institutional membership in IAPUC;
- (b) Define the documentary requirements, evaluation criteria, and procedural steps for membership applications;
- (c) Recognize the distinctive characteristics of online education—including its reliance on digital platforms, asynchronous and synchronous delivery models, geographically dispersed learners, and technology-mediated assessment—within the IAPUC membership framework;
- (d) Ensure that all applicants are assessed consistently and fairly against the established standards;
- (e) Facilitate the efficient processing of applications by the IAPUC Secretariat and the Membership Credentials Committee.

1.2 These Guidelines apply to all private online education providers that:

- (a) Are seeking Associate Membership for the first time;
- (b) Are Associate Members seeking reclassification to Full Membership after obtaining degree-awarding authority;
- (c) Are existing members seeking to renew or update their membership credentials.

Article 2: Interpretation

2.1 In these Guidelines, terms defined in the IAPUC Membership Eligibility and Admission Standards shall have the same meaning.

2.2 The term "online education provider" refers to private institutions that deliver educational programmes primarily through digital platforms and the internet, where instruction and interaction between faculty and learners occur predominantly in a virtual environment. These institutions may offer non-degree certificates, diplomas, professional development programmes, and, where legally authorized, academic degrees. Their core operational model relies on a learning management system, digital content delivery, and technology-enabled student support services.

2.3 The term "applicant" refers to the online education provider applying for membership or reclassification.

Chapter 2: Membership Categories for Online Education Providers

Article 3: Available Categories

Online education providers may apply for the following categories of institutional membership, depending on their degree-awarding authority:

Category	Code	Description	Eligibility
Associate Member	ASM	Institutions without degree- awarding authority, including online training providers, e- learning platforms, virtual schools, and other entities delivering educational services primarily online	Open to all qualifying online education providers
Full Member	FM	Legally established private universities and colleges with degree- awarding authority, including those that deliver their programmes primarily or entirely online	Open to online education providers that have obtained degree- awarding authority

Article 4: Progression Pathway

The typical progression pathway for an online education provider is as follows:

Application for Associate Membership → Review and admission as Associate Member.

Participation in IAPUC activities → Access to professional networks, training, publications, and knowledge resources.

Reclassification to Full Member → If the institution subsequently obtains degree- awarding authority, it may apply for reclassification.

Application for IQA accreditation → After becoming a Full Member, the institution may apply for accreditation if it meets all eligibility criteria. The IQA review will include assessment against the IQA Supplementary Standards for Distance and Blended Learning Quality Assurance.

It is important to note that Associate Members are not eligible to apply for IQA accreditation. Only Full Members with valid degree- awarding authority may enter

the accreditation process. Associate Members that are committed to eventually pursuing accreditation are encouraged to use their membership period to strengthen their internal quality assurance systems, enhance their technological infrastructure, and align their practices with the IQA supplementary standards for distance learning in preparation for the accreditation process.

Chapter 3: Eligibility Requirements for Associate Membership

Article 5: Mandatory Eligibility Criteria

An applicant for Associate Membership must satisfy all of the following conditions:

5.1 Legal Status and Authorization

The institution must:

- (a) Be a legally registered and operating private online education provider;
- (b) Hold valid operating permission, registration, or license from the competent authority in its country of domicile, or, where no specific online education regulatory framework exists, provide evidence of legal establishment as a business or educational entity;
- (c) Provide a copy of its registration certificate, operating license, or equivalent authorization document, duly certified or notarized as required.

5.2 Physical and Legal Address

The institution must:

- (a) Provide a verifiable physical address that serves as its legal registered office or principal place of business. This address is required for legal identity verification, regulatory compliance, formal communication, and accountability purposes, and does not imply that the institution must operate a traditional campus;
- (b) Ensure that the address provided is capable of receiving official correspondence and legal notices. A P.O. Box alone is generally not sufficient; if a virtual office or co- working space is used, additional documentation confirming its status as the registered legal address and its capacity to reliably receive official correspondence must be provided.

5.3 Operational History

The institution must:

- (a) Have been in operation for at least two full academic or training cycles;
- (b) Have produced at least one cohort of learners who have completed programmes

and received certificates, diplomas, or other recognized credentials;

(c) Provide evidence of learner completion and satisfaction data, including completion rates and, where available, learner feedback or employer recognition.

5.4 Institutional Governance

The institution must:

(a) Have a clearly defined governance structure with documented roles, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms;

(b) Demonstrate the existence of a governing body, an academic or curriculum committee, and a management team, all of which may operate virtually but must have clear terms of reference and documented decision-making procedures;

(c) Provide evidence of institutional autonomy in decision-making concerning curriculum, assessment, and staffing.

5.5 Technological Infrastructure

The institution must:

(a) Operate a secure, reliable learning management system (LMS) or equivalent digital platform that supports content delivery, learner interaction, assessment, and progress tracking;

(b) Demonstrate that its platform meets basic technical requirements, including system availability, data encryption, user access controls, and regular security assessments;

(c) Provide evidence of a privacy policy and data protection measures that govern the collection, storage, and use of learner personal data, consistent with applicable data protection laws and the principles set out in the IAPUC Digital Security and Privacy Regulations;

(d) Ensure that the platform is accessible to learners with disabilities, in accordance with relevant accessibility standards.

5.6 Educational Programmes and Quality Assurance

The institution must:

(a) Offer clearly defined educational programmes with stated learning outcomes, published syllabi, and transparent completion requirements;

(b) Have a documented quality assurance system that addresses curriculum design, course development, instructional delivery, learner assessment, and periodic programme review;

(c) Demonstrate that its programmes are designed for the online environment, with evidence of active instructional design rather than the mere uploading of face-to-face materials.

5.7 Faculty and Instructional Staff

The institution must:

- (a) Employ a sufficient number of qualified instructors to support its programmes, with documented policies for instructor recruitment, evaluation, and professional development;
- (b) Ensure that instructors possess relevant subject- matter expertise and, where appropriate, industry experience, as well as demonstrated competence in online teaching and facilitation;
- (c) Provide instructors with training and ongoing support in online pedagogy, digital tools, and learner engagement strategies.

5.8 Learner Support Services

The institution must:

- (a) Provide accessible learner support services appropriate to the online environment, including technical helpdesk support, academic advising, and access to digital library or learning resources;
- (b) Have documented procedures for responding to learner complaints, appeals, and requests for accommodation;
- (c) Demonstrate mechanisms for monitoring learner engagement and identifying learners at risk of disengagement or non- completion.

5.9 Assessment Integrity and Learner Identity Verification

The institution must:

- (a) Have documented policies and procedures to ensure the integrity of online assessments and the verification of learner identity at key points in the learning journey;
- (b) Where online proctoring or automated proctoring tools are used, ensure that learners are fully informed of the methods, data collected, and their rights, and that such tools have been subject to ethical review;
- (c) Ensure that decisions with significant academic consequences are not based solely on automated tools without human review.

5.10 Financial Sustainability

The institution must:

- (a) Demonstrate financial viability and sustainability through audited financial statements, independently verified financial reports, or equivalent documentation;
- (b) Have documented financial management policies and procedures;
- (c) Not be subject to bankruptcy proceedings, financial restructuring, or similar

insolvency processes.

5.11 Ethical Standards and Good Standing

The institution must:

- (a) Not have been subject to major regulatory sanctions, license revocation, or public censure for misconduct, enrollment fraud, financial impropriety, data breaches affecting learner privacy, or other serious violations within the preceding three years;
- (b) Have documented policies on academic integrity, ethical conduct, data protection, and non-discrimination;
- (c) Provide a signed declaration of good standing by its chief executive officer or equivalent.

5.12 Alignment with IAPUC Mission and Values

The institution must:

- (a) Demonstrate genuine alignment with the mission and core values of IAPUC, as set forth in the IAPUC Constitution and the IAPUC- IQA Founding Philosophy and Authoritative Statement;
- (b) Provide a written statement explaining how its institutional mission and strategic priorities align with IAPUC's commitment to quality, continuous improvement, and social responsibility;
- (c) Commit to active participation in IAPUC activities and to contributing to the development of the Association and its membership.

Chapter 4: Reclassification from Associate Member to Full Member

Article 6: Conditions for Reclassification

6.1 An Associate Member that subsequently obtains degree-awarding authority from the competent education authority in its country of domicile may apply for reclassification to Full Member.

6.2 The institution must satisfy all eligibility criteria for Full Membership as set forth in the IAPUC Membership Eligibility and Admission Standards and the IAPUC Institutional Membership Application Guidelines for Universities and Colleges.

6.3 The institution must submit:

- (a) A formal application for reclassification;
- (b) Certified evidence of its newly acquired degree-awarding authority;
- (c) Updated documentation addressing all Full Member eligibility criteria.

6.4 If an Associate Member has commenced preparatory work toward accreditation before reclassification, such preparatory work may be recognized after reclassification—meaning the institution does not need to repeat preparatory steps already taken—but the formal accreditation application may only be submitted after Full Member status takes effect.

Chapter 5: Application Procedures

Article 7: Pre- Application Consultation

7.1 Before submitting a formal application, prospective applicants are encouraged to:

- (a) Review the IAPUC Constitution, the IAPUC Membership Eligibility and Admission Standards, these Guidelines, and the IQA Supplementary Standards for Distance and Blended Learning Quality Assurance;
- (b) Contact the IAPUC Secretariat to discuss any questions regarding eligibility or the application process;
- (c) Attend an IAPUC information session or webinar for prospective members, if available.

7.2 Pre- application consultation is optional but recommended to ensure that the applicant understands the requirements and can prepare a complete application.

Article 8: Submission of Application

8.1 The applicant must submit a completed Institutional Membership Application Form, together with all required supporting documentation, to the IAPUC Membership Credentials Committee through the IAPUC Secretariat.

8.2 Applications may be submitted electronically via the IAPUC online portal or by email to the designated address, or in hard copy to the IAPUC Secretariat address. Electronic submission is preferred.

8.3 The application must be signed by the chief executive officer (Director, President, or equivalent) of the applicant institution, or by a duly authorized representative with documented delegation of authority.

Article 9: Required Documentation

9.1 The applicant must submit the following documents as part of its application package:

A. Institutional Profile and Legal Documents

- (a) Completed Institutional Membership Application Form;
- (b) Certified copy of the institution's registration certificate, operating license, or equivalent authorization document;

- (c) Documentation verifying the institution's physical registered address and its legal validity;
- (d) Institutional brochure, prospectus, or equivalent summary document describing the institution's history, mission, governance, and programmes.

B. Governance and Management Documents

- (a) Organizational chart showing governance and management structures;
- (b) Composition and terms of reference of the governing body;
- (c) Curriculum vitae or biographical profiles of the chief executive officer and senior management.

C. Programme and Quality Assurance Documents

- (a) List of all programmes currently offered, with descriptions, learning outcomes, duration, and credentials awarded;
- (b) Description of the institution's quality assurance system, including curriculum design, course development, programme review, and learner assessment processes;
- (c) Evidence of active instructional design for the online environment.

D. Technology and Data Protection Documents

- (a) Description of the learning management system and key technology platforms used, including security features;
- (b) Privacy policy and data protection procedures;
- (c) Summary of platform accessibility features;
- (d) Results of any recent security assessments or penetration tests, if available.

E. Faculty and Instructional Staff Documents

- (a) Summary of instructor profile, including qualifications, online teaching experience, and employment status;
- (b) Instructor recruitment, evaluation, professional development, and online teaching support policies.

F. Learner Support and Assessment Integrity Documents

- (a) Description of learner support services, including technical support, academic advising, and digital resource access;
- (b) Policies and procedures for assessment integrity and learner identity verification;
- (c) Learner complaint and appeal procedures.

G. Learner Data

- (a) Current learner enrollment by programme;
- (b) Completion rates for the most recent two training cycles;
- (c) Learner satisfaction or feedback data, if available.

H. Financial Documents

- (a) Audited financial statements for the most recent fiscal year, or equivalent independently verified financial reports;
- (b) Summary of financial policies and procedures.

I. Ethical and Compliance Documents

- (a) Code of conduct or ethical standards policy;
- (b) Non- discrimination and equal opportunity policy;
- (c) Signed declaration of good standing.

J. Alignment Statement

- (a) Statement of alignment with IAPUC mission and values.

9.2 All documents not originally in English must be accompanied by a certified English translation.

9.3 The applicant may be requested to provide additional information or clarification during the review process. In particular, IAPUC may request a demonstration of the institution's learning platform to verify the technological infrastructure and learner experience.

Article 10: Application Fee

10.1 An application fee of USD 1,500 is payable upon submission of the application for Associate Membership.

10.2 The application fee is non- refundable, except where the application process cannot be completed due to reasons attributable to IAPUC.

10.3 Payment instructions are provided with the application form.

Chapter 6: Review and Decision Process

Article 11: Initial Screening

11.1 Upon receipt of the application, the IAPUC Secretariat conducts an initial screening to verify that:

- (a) The application form is complete and signed;
- (b) All required documents have been submitted;
- (c) The applicant appears to meet the basic eligibility criteria.

11.2 If the application is incomplete, the Secretariat shall notify the applicant within 15 working days and specify the missing information or documents. The applicant shall have 30 days to supplement the application.

Article 12: Membership Credentials Committee Review

12.1 Complete applications are forwarded to the Membership Credentials Committee for substantive review.

12.2 The Committee reviews the application against the eligibility criteria set forth in Chapter 3 of these Guidelines.

12.3 The Committee may:

- (a) Request additional information or documentation from the applicant;
- (b) Conduct a virtual interview with the applicant's leadership and, where appropriate, a demonstration of the learning platform, if deemed necessary;
- (c) Consult external experts or references, with the applicant's consent.

12.4 The Committee shall complete its review within 45 days of receipt of a complete application. This period may be extended if additional information is requested.

Article 13: Decision

13.1 The Membership Credentials Committee makes a recommendation to the IAPUC Board of Directors, which makes the final decision on membership applications.

13.2 The possible decisions are:

- (a) Approved: The applicant is granted Associate Membership;
- (b) Deferred: The application requires further information or clarification before a decision can be made;
- (c) Denied: The applicant does not meet the eligibility criteria.

13.3 The applicant shall be notified in writing of the decision. If the application is denied, reasons shall be provided.

13.4 An applicant whose application is denied may reapply after 12 months, addressing the reasons for denial in its new application.

Article 14: Admission and Membership Activation

14.1 Upon approval, the applicant must pay the first- year membership dues within 30 days.

14.2 Membership takes effect upon confirmation of payment. IAPUC issues an Associate Member certificate.

14.3 The institution's name and profile are added to the IAPUC online member directory.

Chapter 7: Post- Admission Obligations

Article 15: Maintenance of Membership

15.1 Associate Members must:

- (a) Pay annual membership dues by the due date;
- (b) Submit annual updates on institutional information as required by IAPUC;
- (c) Comply with the IAPUC Constitution and all applicable regulations;
- (d) Notify IAPUC of any material changes that may affect eligibility, including significant changes to the technology platform, data protection policies, or regulatory status.

Article 16: Obligations Regarding Accreditation

16.1 Associate Members must not, in any external communication or promotional material, imply or lead the public to believe that they hold IQA accreditation.

16.2 If an Associate Member subsequently obtains degree-awarding authority, it must notify IAPUC and may apply for reclassification to Full Member.

Article 17: Participation in IAPUC Activities

Associate Members are encouraged to:

- (a) Attend IAPUC conferences, workshops, and training events, which may be offered virtually to accommodate the needs of online providers;
- (b) Participate in professional networks and forums, including those focused on digital learning and educational technology;
- (c) Contribute to the development of good practice resources and case studies on online and distance education quality assurance;
- (d) Engage with the IAPUC membership community to share experiences and learn from peer institutions.

Chapter 8: Supplementary Provisions

Article 18: Confidentiality

All information and documents submitted by the applicant shall be treated as confidential and used solely for the purpose of evaluating the membership application, in accordance with the IAPUC Privacy Policy.

Article 19: Relationship with Other IAPUC Documents

These Guidelines operate in conjunction with:

The IAPUC Constitution;

The IAPUC Membership Eligibility and Admission Standards;

The IAPUC Institutional Membership Application Guidelines for Universities and Colleges;

The IAPUC Institutional Membership Application Guidelines for Tertiary Vocational Institutions;

The IQA Supplementary Standards for Distance and Blended Learning Quality Assurance;

The IAPUC Digital Security and Privacy Regulations.

Article 20: Interpretation and Amendment

20.1 These Guidelines are interpreted by the IAPUC Board of Directors.

20.2 IAPUC reserves the right to amend these Guidelines. Amendments take effect upon approval by the Board of Directors and apply to applications submitted after the effective date.

Article 21: Effective Date

These Guidelines take effect upon approval by the IAPUC Board of Directors.

Approval

Role	Name / Title	Date
Prepared by	IAPUC Membership Standards Working Group	May 2026
Reviewed by	IAPUC Board of Directors	Pending
Approved by	IAPUC Board of Directors	Pending

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