

# Joining Forces to Reduce Accreditation Fatigue

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Schools can be overwhelmed by the work required to earn accreditation from multiple agencies. Joint accreditation visits could be the solution.

- When accrediting bodies have similar requirements and protocols, they can collaborate on joint visits that save schools time and effort.
- AACSB already organizes joint visits with authorities that accredit business schools in the Netherlands and healthcare management programs elsewhere.
- AACSB works closely with the other accrediting body, the peer review team, and the school to ensure a manageable and fruitful joint visit for all involved.



An accreditation coordinator at a business school recently remarked that she was exhausted from managing all the accreditations she was charged with handling. It seemed to her that she was always planning for another visit, whether it was from AACSB or an international, national, or sectoral accreditor. She noted that accrediting bodies often were interested in the same information. They just requested it for different time periods, sliced and diced it for different reporting structures, and required schools to use distinct terminologies.

She was experiencing what some refer to as accreditation fatigue. When AACSB formed the Business Accreditation Task Force (BATF) in 2018 to reimagine the accreditation standards, one of its goals was to find ways to address this problem.

The task force soon identified one potential solution: joint visits. If accreditors work together, schools can share the same information with multiple agencies in one visit. In countries where such an opportunity exists, this model reduces effort and cost for institutions seeking multiple accreditations.

## Models of Collaboration

Interest in joint visits has been growing as schools begin exploring how they can achieve national accreditation by leveraging the work they already do to earn or maintain AACSB accreditation. Several models of cooperation already exist:

**The recognition of AACSB accreditation as a substitute for national accreditation.** This is the case for both the [Agence pour l'Evaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur](#) (AEQES), which is responsible for assessing the quality of higher education in francophone Belgium, and for the [Higher Education Quality Council](#) (HEQC) in Türkiye.

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**The use of AACSB reports or accreditation status to prove quality.** AACSB accreditation status is considered evidence of “excellence or exceptional achievements” by the [International Centre of Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality Education](#) (THE-ICE). This is a global accreditation agency for institutions offering programs in tourism, hospitality, events, and the culinary arts. Similar arrangements also exist in the United Arab Emirates with the [Commission for Academic Accreditation](#).

**The coordination of accreditation visits from AACSB and other accrediting bodies.** We have organized joint visits with two authorities that have overlapping interests with business accreditation: the [Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders](#) (NVAO), which is in charge of quality assurance reviews for Dutch and Flemish universities; and the [Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education](#) (CAHME).

## How Joint Visits Work

In practice, joint visits require a great deal of planning and coordination. First, AACSB and the partner agency carry out a comparative analysis of the two organizations’ standards and procedures. In the cases of NVAO and CAHME, this mapping work revealed a clear overlap in the quality requirements. Next, the organizations discuss how to set up combined visits that will guarantee the integrity of both accreditation frameworks, which is crucial to achieving productive joint visits.

The agreement between AACSB and NVAO was collaboratively developed by the two organizations, with input from Dutch business schools, and applies to all Dutch institutions on a voluntary basis. The agreement defines the conditions for the joint visits, such as duration of visits, number and expertise of team members, and team approval processes and reporting requirements. Compared to a typical visit, joint visits may be longer and consist of more team members due to the increased scope of the joint accreditation. One of the team members must be a student, as required by the European standards and guidelines for quality Assurance in the [European Higher Education Area](#) (ESG), which is the basis for the Dutch qualification framework.

The agreement between AACSB and CAHME is similar. Joint visits are conducted on a voluntary basis and require site visits from both accreditors.



Even when organizations combine their visits, different reports are required because the scope of accreditation can vary between accrediting bodies.

Even when organizations combine their visits, the school and the team both provide separate reports. This is in large part because the scope of accreditation can vary between accrediting bodies. For instance, NVAO accredits at both the institutional and program level, which makes the reporting process lengthier. CAHME is a programmatic accreditor that accredits Master's in Health Administration (MHA) programs, MBA programs in Healthcare Administration, and other degrees in healthcare management. Only the programs housed in the business school opt for a joint AACSB/CAHME visit.

## Evidence of Success

AACSB and NVAO signed their cooperative agreement in 2015. Shortly afterward, the Dutch Minister of Education mentioned it in a parliamentary paper as an example of positive development in the quality assurance area.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Han van Dissel, then dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Amsterdam, the first school to benefit from the agreement. Van Dissel, a past board member of AACSB, said, "This marks the successful completion of the first part of a new combined way of review."

Since then, all Dutch AACSB-accredited institutions have used the option of the joint visit. Three used it for the second time in spring 2022, which indicates how successful the initiative has been. In addition, after seeing how the collaboration worked for NVAO Netherlands, NVAO Flanders entered its own agreement with AACSB in 2020.

While the AACSB/CAHME agreement was formally signed in 2021, discussions between the two organizations date back to a first pilot conducted in 2012. Four schools have participated in joint site visits with AACSB and CAHME, and university leaders reported high levels of satisfaction with the approach. Several more joint visits are scheduled. We



also are working on applying joint site visits to programs outside of North America as CAHME extends its global reach.

## Challenges Remain

While more countries are showing an interest in developing collaborative accreditation agreements with AACSB, these combined visits bring added complexity. Even if the “spirit” of quality reviews is similar between collaborating organizations, some procedures and standards always will be different and need to be accommodated.

As an example, schools can use Continuous Improvement Review reports from AACSB to show how their programs align with CAHME criteria. Only criteria specific to healthcare management are examined by CAHME site visitors. For those criteria that are shared by both organizations, CAHME defers to the AACSB site visitor findings. This keeps the duration of the visit to a normal length and avoids double reporting.

## Virtual meetings with all panel members prior to the visit ensure that everyone is familiar with both accreditation frameworks.

To ensure the efficiency of joint visits and to facilitate the work of peer review teams, AACSB works closely with the team, the school, and the accreditation body before each combined visit and informs panel members well in advance of the specific joint requirements. AACSB also regularly reviews the terms of the joint visits and makes changes when necessary.

For instance, after completing the first AACSB/NVAO visits, we adjusted the protocols. Now we require a virtual meeting with all panel members prior to the AACSB/NVAO visit to ensure that everyone is familiar with both accreditation frameworks and to build the team spirit that is essential for a fruitful visit. Because AACSB volunteers are understandably more knowledgeable about AACSB standards, we also decided to add an expert in the local higher education system to guide the panel on how the institution is performing to NVAO criteria. Such changes ensure a high-quality review for both organizations and eliminate an excessive level of responsibility falling on AACSB volunteers.



## The Future of Joint Visits

While joint visits are more complex for the team to run, volunteers generally have had very positive reactions. Moreover, the collaborative approach allows team members from AACSB to compare our processes to those of other nations and see the advantages of other protocols. For instance, many team members involved in AACSB/NVAO visits have reported on the added value of having a student on the panel.

Team members from outside the U.S. also have asked whether AACSB could create similar cooperative arrangements with national authorities in their own countries. School leaders who want to suggest accrediting agencies that might be candidates for joint visits should reach out to Stephanie Bryant at [stephanie.bryant@aacsb.edu](mailto:stephanie.bryant@aacsb.edu) to discuss the feasibility of such a collaboration. These combined visits help school officials avoid accreditation fatigue—and ensure that business schools achieve the highest standards of education.