



# **GUIDELINES**

Programme Approval for  
Providers of Post-secondary /  
Tertiary Education and Training

# Table of Contents

	<b>Page</b>
Preface	2
Guidelines for Programme Approval	3
What is Programme Approval?	3
Programme Approval Period	3
Who conducts programme approval?	3
Is programme approval the same as programme accreditation?	4
Benefits of Programme Approval	
Criteria for Programme Approval	5
Programme Approval Process	7
What is the process for programme approval?	7
Process for sub-baccalaureate degrees and related qualifications approval	7
Post Approval Process	9
Changes to Programmes Approved by the Council	9
Who evaluates the programme?	11
Are all post-secondary/tertiary programmes eligible for approval by the BAC?	11
How can a provider apply for programme approval?	11
What are the fees for programme approval?	11
Short Course Approval	12
When are fees payable?	12
Programme Review	13
Programme Review Period	13
Programme Review Model	13
Programme Review Fees	14
When are fees payable?	14
Maintenance	15
What is involved in the maintenance process?	15
What are the benefits of maintenance?	16
Annual Maintenance Fees	16
When are fees payable?	16
Programme Approval Process Flow Chart	17

# **Preface**

This document has been prepared by the Barbados Accreditation Council (BAC) to assist educational providers with the programme approval process. It provides information governing the BAC's programme approval and programme review processes. Policy related questions should be directed to the BAC.

The BAC reserves the right to make changes to its policies, procedures and other statements at any time.

# **Guidelines for Programme Approval for Providers of Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education and Training**

## **What is Programme Approval?**

Programme approval is a quality assurance process which ensures that a programme is appropriately designed and structured; adequately resourced; consistent with the provider's mission; and has stated learning outcomes and assessment strategies that are set at an appropriate level for the qualification awarded.

During the programme approval process, all facets of an education and/or training programme are evaluated *except* actual outcomes such as learner performance, feedback from learners, staff, and employers of graduates.

## **Programme Approval Period**

In the first instance, programme approval shall be for six (6) years. Depending on trends and developments in relation to the programme of study, for example, programmes in the area of Information Technology, a shorter approval period would be provided. Following the initial approval, should the provider apply for programme accreditation and is successful, that programme would not need to undergo further programme approval. However, if the provider fails to apply for programme accreditation or is unsuccessful, the programme will need to undergo another cycle of the approval process. The approval review process must continue until the programme is either accredited or discontinued.

## **Who conducts programme approval?**

Programme approval can be internal or external. Internally, programme approval should be carried out by the Programme Approval Committee, sub-committee of an Academic Board, or individual(s) assigned with this responsibility. The programme approval process should take place *before* a programme is offered for the first time. Thereafter, each programme must be monitored and reviewed periodically, usually towards the end of the period of approval or the duration of the programme.

Externally, the Barbados Accreditation Council (BAC) Act, 2004 gives the BAC the responsibility to validate or approve all new programmes of study being offered by providers operating in Barbados. Programme approval by the BAC provides external validation of the ability, in terms of inputs, of the provider to deliver a 'quality' programme.

## **Is programme approval the same as programme accreditation?**

No they are not! Programme approval may be considered a precursor to programme accreditation. It evaluates all aspects of an educational programme except actual outcomes such as student performance; feedback from students and teaching staff; and feedback from employers

of graduates of the programme. Actual outcomes are evaluated during the programme accreditation process. Each programme must be internally approved by a provider before it is subject to external review and approval by the BAC.

### **Benefits of Programme Approval**

Programme approval offers many benefits to providers, including:

- a. assurance that programmes meet specific standards;
- b. transferability of qualifications from one provider to another;
- c. national and international recognition of programmes;
- d. use of the BAC's stamp of approval for the duration of the approval for placement on the programme and marketing materials;
- e. listed on BAC's website together with links to the provider's website; and
- f. recognition in the BAC's BAClight newsletter which is published bi-annually and distributed extensively, by post and electronic means, locally, regionally and extra-regionally.

# **Criteria for Programme Approval**

Any provider seeking approval must comply with the Council's programme approval requirements.

## **Criterion 1: Official Authorisation**

The provider must provide evidence that:

- i. authorisation to offer the programme was granted by the Governing body, Head, approved Committee or relevant authority within the organisation;
- ii. programme approval has been granted by the Governing body, Head, approved Committee or relevant authority within the organisation; and
- iii. the programme is consistent with the organisation's mission.

Examples of evidence include but are not limited to:

- signed letter of authorisation from the relevant authority
- signed and dated Minutes of meeting of the governing body showing that authorisation was granted
- programme approval policy and procedures
- programme review policy and procedures
- composition of the Programme Approval Committee
- signed and dated Minutes of meeting of the Programme Approval Committee
- evidence the Programme Approval Committee or relevant programme approval authority has access to necessary specialised advice
- mission statement of the educational provider
- mission statement of the programme
- aims of the programme

## **Criterion 2: Programme Demand**

The provider must provide a market case showing that there is a demand for the programme.

Examples of evidence include but are not limited to:

- market case for each programme
- report on relevant market research undertaken
- results of a programme demand analysis

## **Criterion 3: Resources**

The provider must provide evidence of adequate human, physical, material, and financial resources to sustain the programme.

Examples of evidence include but are not limited to:

- qualifications, experience and courses to be taught by assigned programme staff
- programme budget including projections for income and expenditure

- comprehensive development plan indicating the anticipated plan for development of the programme; current status in that development; and schedule for provision of resources to effectively deliver the programme
- Materials/Resource Requirement Plan
- programme budget

**Criterion 4: Documentation**

The provider must submit a programme specification document with details of the following:

- i. awarding body/institution for the qualification;
- ii. educational provider responsible for teaching (if different);
- iii. any accreditation by a professional body;
- iv. name of the final award;
- v. programme title;
- vi. aims of the programme;
- vii. programme outcomes – knowledge and understanding, skills and other attributes;
- viii. teaching, learning and assessment strategies to enable the achievement and demonstration of the programme outcomes;
- ix. programme structure and requirements, levels, modules, credits, and awards;
- x. criteria for admission to the programme;
- xi. assessment regulations e.g. grading scheme, moderation, honours classification;
- xii. support for student learning; and
- xiii. date on which the programme specification was written or revised.

For additional details, please refer to the Council’s *Guidelines for Preparing Programme Specifications*.

# **Programme Approval Process**

## **What is the process for programme approval?**

1. The provider must complete and submit an application form with all relevant documentation to the BAC.
2. The BAC will review the application form and supporting documentation and advise the provider on the status of the application.
3. The programme will be reviewed by a team of professionals including independent consultant evaluators contracted by the BAC who have specialist knowledge in the relevant field.
4. The provider will receive a report on the outcome of the evaluation and a statement on the approval or non-approval of the programme.
5. The provider will receive a Certificate of Approval for each programme approved by the BAC.
6. Where the programme was not approved, re-application and the payment of the requisite fees shall apply, after the relevant amendments have been made to the programme.
7. A provider that submits a programme that is granted 'Conditional Approval' by the BAC will be given a period not exceeding one (1) calendar year to correct the deficiencies identified and to re-submit the programme for approval. No additional fees will apply.
8. Re-application and the payment of fees will be required for programmes that are not approved on the expiration of the one (1) year period of 'Conditional Approval'

## **Process for sub-baccalaureate, baccalaureate degrees and related qualifications approval**

When a provider applies to the BAC for programme approval, it must provide the following supporting documentation with the completed application form:

- Authorisation to offer the programme by the governing body or relevant authority
  - Internal programme approval
  - Consistency of the programme with the mission of the provider
  - Market demand for the programme
  - Availability of resources - human, financial, material to facilitate the programme
  - A detailed programme specification
- 
- The name of the awarding body/provider for the qualification;
  - The teaching provider (if different);
  - Details of any specialised accreditation;
  - Name of the final award;
  - Programme title;
  - Aims of the programme;
  - Programme outcomes – knowledge and understanding; skills and other attributes;
  - Teaching, learning and assessment strategies to enable outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated

- Programme structure and requirements, levels, modules, credits and awards;
- Criteria for admission to the programme;
- Information about assessment regulations e.g. grading scheme, moderation, honours classification;
- Support that will be provided for student learning; and
- Date on which the programme specification was written or revised.

With the exception of doctoral programmes, the process will comprise:

- a. The submission of details (outlined above) on the new programme for initial evaluation by the Council.
- b. The programme approval process may include a two (2) day evaluation visit by an approval team. The team will consist of:
  - One independent Chairman (appointment to be made by the Council);
  - Two evaluators, local or overseas, from a similar discipline;
  - One senior member of staff from the applying provider, but from a different discipline; and
  - Two representatives from industry, commerce or the local/regional professional body.
- c. The evaluation of certificates and diplomas at the undergraduate and post-graduate level may involve the use of a smaller programme approval team.
- d. In addition to (a) and (b) above, programme approval for *doctoral programmes* must meet the following outcomes:
  - i. Resources: The capacity of the provider to support sustained delivery of the programme, in all delivery modes, with regard to appropriate staffing, teaching, facilities, physical resources and support services;
  - ii. Research: The adequacy of provision of research facilities and support of staff involved in research, the level of research activity of staff involved in the programme and of ways by which the research-teaching links are made in the curriculum; and
  - iii. Evaluation and Review: Monitoring improvement following evaluation and review, and for determining whether the programme shall continue to be offered.

## **Post Approval Process**

Providers will need to ensure that:

- The course/programme is being implemented and managed as planned and presented at the time of approval;
- Appropriate consideration is given to any recommendations made by the Council. (Providers will need to justify why recommendation (s) are not implemented.)
- Any modifications made to the approved programme are consistent with the intent of and the ongoing development of a quality programme; and
- The Council is made aware of issues affecting the satisfactory provision of the programme.

During the first cycle of a programme, providers will be expected to submit annual programme evaluation reports to the Council. The Council also reserves the right to make announced and unannounced visits to monitor the progress of the programme.

## **Changes to Programmes Approved by the Council**

After programmes have been approved, it is possible that the provider may make changes, some of which would need to be approved by the Council. Below is a summary of changes that must be approved by the Council and those that do not need to be approved by the Council.

### *A. Programme Changes that Do Not Require Council Approval*

- Changes to individual component descriptors;
- Changes to the credit value of components – whilst retaining the overall credit value of the programme;
- Changes to assessment criteria within components;
- Introduction of new components; and
- Deletion of components.
- Updating of component descriptors and learning outcomes to maintain currency of the qualification with changing context; and
- Updating of reading lists.

Although the above changes do not require approval by the Council, the provider is required to inform the Council when such changes are made for records purposes.

B. Programme Changes that Require Council Approval

- Change of title;
- Minor changes to the structure of a programme;
- Introduction of a new delivery mode, for example, shift from face-to-face to distance delivery;
- Introduction of mid-programme exit qualification(s);
- Introduction of a new delivery site;
- Changes to regulations concerning entry requirements and cross-crediting arrangements;
- Changes to the level or credits of the programme or its associated qualification(s);
- Changes to the programme outcome statement;
- Significant changes to the structure of the programme; and
- Introduction of a new major/specialisation area.

C. Programme Changes Requiring Evaluation by an External Team and Approval by the Council (specific for degree and other relevant qualifications)

- Introduction of a new delivery mode;
- Significant changes to the structure of the programme;
- Introduction of a new delivery site; and
- Introduction of a new major.

The provider must inform the Council in writing of all changes to the programme approved by the Council. It is expected that the following information be included in the communication to the Council:

***Overview of proposed changes:***

- Rationale for the changes
- Internal and external consultation and support for the changes
- Evidence of internal formal approval by the relevant committee or individual(s)
- Details of the changes

***Proposed Implications of changes:***

- Resources requirements
- Staffing requirements
- Systems requirements
- Regulations amendments, if applicable
- Transition arrangements for students
- Quality management system

**Who Evaluates the Programme?**

The programmes are evaluated by evaluators which are sourced by the BAC.

**Are all post-secondary/tertiary programmes eligible for approval by the BAC?**

All programmes that lead to qualifications awarded by a provider or an awarding body operating in Barbados are eligible for programme approval by the BAC. Programmes leading to qualifications awarded by transnational or foreign-based providers, particularly those awarded in collaboration with local providers, may be eligible for recognition by the BAC.

**How can a provider apply for programme approval?**

Application forms for Programme Approval are available from the BAC or may be downloaded from its website ([www.bac.gov.bb](http://www.bac.gov.bb)).

**What are the fees for programme approval?**

To facilitate the programme approval and review processes, the BAC has established fees as shown below:

<b>Description</b>	<b>Bds\$</b>
<b>Local /Caribbean Single Market (CSM)</b>	
<b>Initial Programme Approval</b>	
Associate Degree, Diploma, Certificate	800.00
Degree (Bachelor and above)	1,000.00
<b>Foreign/Non-CSME</b>	
<b>Initial Programme Approval</b>	
Associate Degree, Diploma, Certificate	1,500.00
Degree (Bachelor and above)	2,500.00
<b>Annual maintenance</b>	
• Local/CSM	200.00
• Non-CSM	300.00
<b>Direct Costs</b> – the provider will bear the full economic cost as it pertains to ground transportation, travel, airfare and accommodation	
Administrative fee (15% of total costs)	

## Short Course Approval

A short course is defined by the Council as:<sup>1</sup>

- a) Qualifying to be assigned not less than one (1) credit, but less than thirty (30) credits;
- b) A credit is a unit of academic measurement for a prescribed course or set of courses for which a particular qualification is awarded. It is expressed in terms of number of contact (teaching and or experience gathering) hours, for example one credit usually represents one hour of contact time each week for one semester of at least 15 weeks. One credit is therefore equal to a minimum of 15 hours of teaching or lecturing time.
- c) A credit with regard to laboratory work, three hours is usually considered equal to one hour. The 15 hours of lecture/teaching time may be conducted over a period of at least 15 weeks of contact time.
- d) A coherent group of different courses that have a common thread will qualify for the assignment of credits.

The related fees for short course approval are as follows:

<b>Description</b>	<b>Bds\$</b>
<b>Initial Programme Approval</b>	
Local/CSM	200.00
Foreign/Non-CSM	300.00
<b>Direct Costs</b> – the provider will bear the full economic cost as it pertains to ground transportation, travel, airfare and accommodation	
<b>Renewal</b>	
Local/CSM	150.00
Foreign/Non-CSM	300.00
<b>Maintenance</b>	
Local/CSM	100.00
Foreign/Non-CSM	200.00
Administrative fee (15% of total costs)	

### When are fees payable?

Programme approval fees are payable on submission of the application to the BAC. Where the approval process includes a visit by an external evaluation team, these fees must be paid to the evaluator(s). The provider is responsible for all costs associated with the visit of evaluators, including airfare, hotel accommodation, and professional fees.

Where no external visit is involved, the fees payable to the external evaluators must be paid to the evaluator upon receipt of an invoice from the evaluator. The evaluator's invoice based on agreed fees will be sent to the provider through the BAC.

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<sup>1</sup> The Barbados Accreditation Council acknowledges the works of the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ)

# **Programme Review**

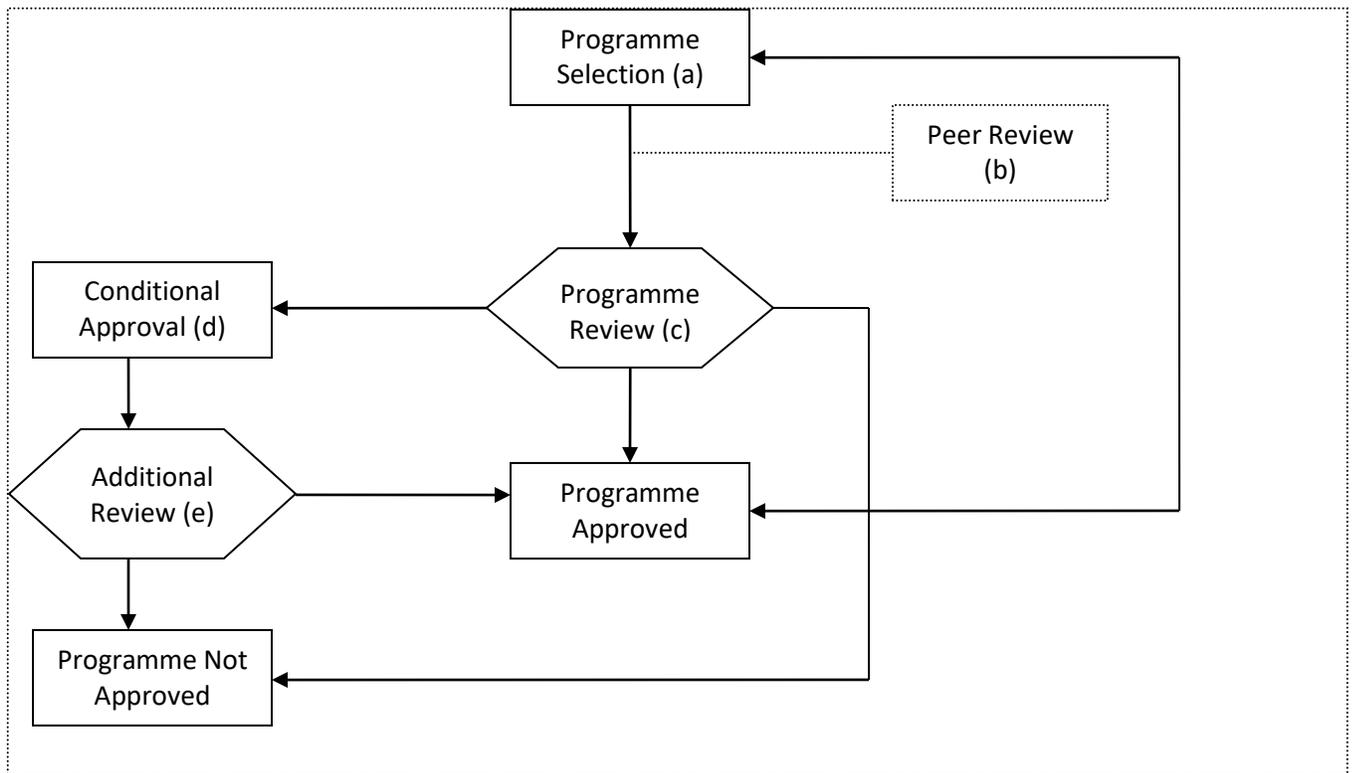
At the end of the initial programme approval period, unless the programme has successfully undergone an evaluation for the purpose of accreditation, the provider will need to re-apply for programme approval and undergo the programme review process.

The programme review will follow similar steps to the initial programme approval process.

## **Programme Review Period**

The period of review is in line with the programme approval which is shown herein under the sub-title ‘**Programme Approval Period**’.

## **Programme Review Model**



*Adapted from the State Agency Academic Programme Review Process Model, USA*

## **Notes**

- a. Programmes are selected for review on a cyclical or ‘triggered’ basis. Cyclical patterns are based on varying recurring time frames. ‘Triggered’ reviews occur in response to results from external factors, such as complaints.
- b. As programmes are selected the provider will be encouraged to undergo an internal peer review process.

- c. Programme reviews may take a variety of forms. They may include or not include a site visit by an external evaluation team. The evaluation process will be organised by the Council.
- d. Programmes which are approved conditionally are usually given a specific period of time, not exceeding one (1) year to make modifications or correct shortcomings.
- e. At the end of the conditional approval period, programmes may be expected to undergo an additional external review process.

**Programme Review Fees**

The fees for programme review are shown below:

<b>Local</b>	<b>Bds\$</b>
Associate Degree, Diploma, Certificate	400.00
Degree (Bachelor and above)	600.00
<b>Foreign/Non-CSME</b>	
Associate Degree, Diploma, Certificate	750.00
Degree (Bachelor and above)	1,250.00
<b>Direct Costs</b> – the provider will bear the full economic cost as it pertains to ground transportation, travel, airfare and accommodation	
<b>Administrative fee</b> - 15% of total costs	

**When are fees payable?**

Programme Review fees are payable on submission of the re-application to the BAC. Where the review process involves a visit by an external evaluation team, these fees must be paid to the BAC at least three (3) months before the date of the visit. The provider is responsible for all costs associated with the visit of evaluators, including airfare, hotel accommodation, and professional fees.

Where no external visit is involved, the fees payable to the external evaluators must be paid to the evaluator upon receipt of an invoice from the evaluator. The evaluator’s invoice based on agreed fees will be sent to the provider through the BAC.

# **Maintenance**

## **What is involved in the maintenance process?**

Providers will be required to pay the annual maintenance fee and submit a mid-cycle evaluative report on the approved programme to the Council as part of the annual maintenance requirements. The report should include, but not be limited to:

- a. Evidence to support that the provider has undertaken annual programme review and evaluation for all approved programmes.
- b. Evidence of recruitment, selection and admissions statistics for the programme;
- c. Assessment and progression statistics;
- d. Qualifications and attritions statistics, to include graduates, non-completions, employment;
- e. External assessment reports;
- f. Outcomes of student feedback;
- g. Reports from student representatives;
- h. Comments on action(s) taken as a consequence of the preceding year's annual programme review and evaluation;
- i. Evaluation of any changes to admissions and associated policies;
- j. Evaluation of any changes to the programme in respect of aims; intended learning outcomes; structure and content; assessment policy and methods of assessment; teaching methods and staffing;
- k. Identify programme issues raised by internal quality assurance mechanisms;
- l. Evaluate significant changes to programme regulations and administration;
- m. Evaluate significant changes to arrangements for providing student support;
- n. Evaluate any changes to work experience, employability skills and graduate employment;
- o. Evaluate significant changes to the programme arising from external feedback;
- p. Identify any resource issues relating to the quality of programme delivery; and
- q. Identify any future developments which may impact on the quality of the programme delivery.

Providers are required to submit their Mid-cycle Programme Maintenance Evaluation for all programmes approved by the Council by the anniversary date of the approval. The template for the report is contained in the Council's publication *Programme Approval Mid-cycle Evaluation Report Guidelines*.

Upon receipt of the above evaluation report, the Council will consider the report to determine whether:

- i. the programme is maintaining the level of quality at which it was first approved;
- ii. changes have been made to the programme which would affect the quality of the programme; and/or
- iii. the changes made to the programme necessitate an external evaluation of the programme.

### **What are the benefits of maintenance?**

Payment of the maintenance fees and submission of maintenance report offer many benefits for providers which include but are not limited to:

- a. discounts to BAC conferences/workshops;
- b. ongoing technical support/assistance; and
- c. free advertising in newsletters and on the Council's website.

### **Annual Maintenance Fees**

The annual maintenance fees are shown below:

<b>Description</b>	<b>Bds\$</b>
Annual Maintenance <sup>2</sup> (CSM)	200.00
Annual Maintenance (Non-CSM)	300.00

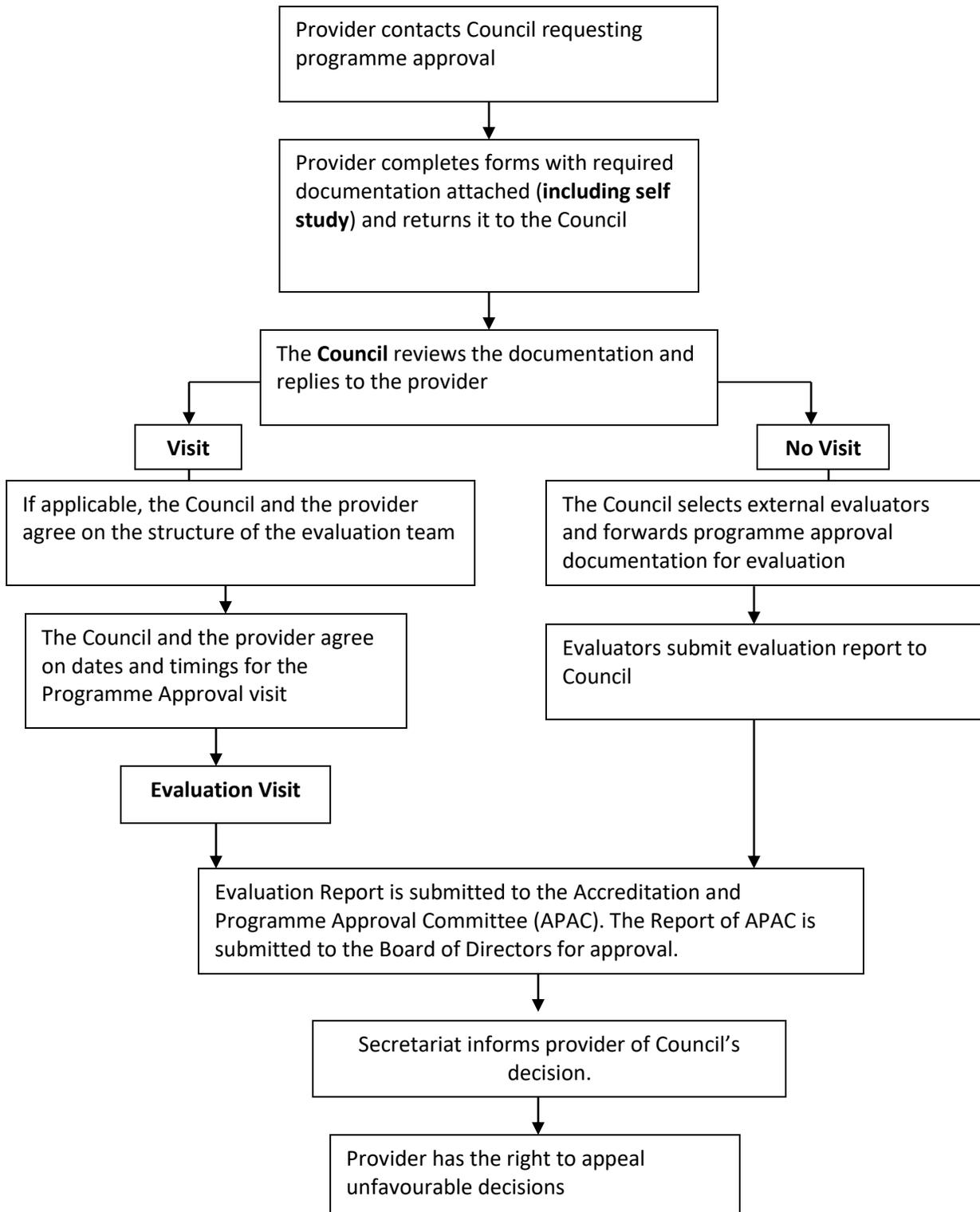
### **When are fees payable?**

Annual Maintenance fees are payable on the anniversary of the issuance of the programme approval by the BAC.

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<sup>2</sup> Annual maintenance relates to both programme approval and programme review

# Programme Approval Process Flow Chart



**For further information contact:**

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