



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

October 27, 2021

Gary Puckett, PhD
Executive Director
Council on Occupational Education
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Building 300, Ste. 325
Atlanta, GA 30350
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Dear Dr. Puckett:

I am writing to inform you of my decision on the accreditation recognition of the Council on Occupational Education (COE). U.S. Department of Education (Department) staff and the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) have each made a recommendation to me. These recommendations were made under section 114 and 496 of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, and pursuant to relevant statutory and regulatory provisions.

The Department staff recommend that I continue COE's recognition as a nationally recognized accrediting agency at this time, require COE to come into compliance with 34 C.F.R. §602.15(a)(3) within 12 months of the date of this letter, and submit a compliance report due 30 days thereafter that demonstrates the agency's compliance. NACIQI concurred with this recommendation, and additionally recommended that I require COE to come into compliance within 12 months of the date of this letter with 34 C.F.R. §602.20, and submit a compliance report due 30 days thereafter that demonstrates the agency's compliance with both criteria.

As required, I considered the full record, which included the agency's petition, the final staff report from Department staff, and the transcript of the agency's appearance before NACIQI on July 28, 2021. After careful consideration of applicable law and regulations and the record before me, I concur with the recommendations of NACIQI.

Accordingly, I continue the Department's recognition of COE as an institutional accrediting agency within the scope of recognition as detailed below, with up to 12 months from the date of this letter for COE to achieve compliance and submit a compliance report within 30 days thereafter documenting compliance, and to permit the Department and NACIQI to review and make final recognition recommendations in light of the compliance report procedures set forth in 34 C.F.R. Part 602, Subpart C. This compliance report must address the following:

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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

34 C.F.R. §602.15(a)(3) – The agency must demonstrate that it has both academic and administrative personnel included on all site visit teams. Current rosters do not demonstrate that an academic and administrator are appropriately included.

34 C.F.R. §602.20 – The agency must demonstrate that it has meaningfully engaged with its obligations under section 602.20 to enforce its accreditation standards with respect to complaints of fraud and criminal activity at Florida Career College. According to the NACIQI transcript, the agency noted that it's placed the Florida Career College on notice, is closely following and discussing quarterly updates, and is independently looking into the issues raised in the lawsuit on predatory recruiting and job placement fraud. The agency should provide evidence that it is monitoring compliance with its standards and actions its taking to evaluate compliance in light of the lawsuit.

Scope of Recognition: The accreditation and preaccreditation throughout the United States of postsecondary occupational education institutions offering non-degree and applied associate degree programs in specific career and technical education fields, including institutions that offer programs via distance education.

You should submit your compliance report using the Department's electronic submission system. The system can be accessed at:

<https://surveys.ope.ed.gov/erecognition>

I trust that COE will be able to come into full compliance with both of the criteria cited above by the deadline, and document compliance in its compliance report within 30 days thereafter. Indeed, representatives of COE indicated during the NACIQI meeting that the agency has already taken steps to address compliance with 34 C.F.R. §602.15(a)(3), and I anticipate its concerted attention with respect to compliance with 34 C.F.R. §602.20 as well. However, I wish to remind you that if COE does not do so, the Department may be compelled to limit, suspend, or terminate COE's recognition. Such action is required because of section 496(l) of the Higher Education Act, a provision added in 1998, that requires the limitation, suspension, or termination of any agency found to be either in noncompliance with the criteria for recognition or ineffective in its performance with respect to those criteria. Alternatively, the law allows the agency to be given up to 12 months to come into compliance. If the agency fails to come into compliance within the specified time frame, the law requires termination of the agency's recognition, unless it determined that the time frame for coming into compliance should be extended for good cause. The period the Department is providing in this letter for achieving compliance within the criteria cited above constitutes the maximum time frame (12 months) that the law allows you to correct the deficiencies noted in the Department staff analysis and identified by NACIQI.

Sincerely,

Jordan Matsudaira
Deputy Under Secretary