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Policy paper

# Accreditation for online education providers

Updated 20 March 2023

**Applies to England**

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The online education services sector for children in England has grown rapidly in recent years. This type of provision is currently unregulated.

Many providers now offer a full curriculum and may represent a child's main or only source of formal education.

The Department for Education (DfE) is introducing an accreditation scheme to reassure children, parents and local authorities of the quality of education and safeguarding arrangements offered by these providers.

## New accreditation scheme

DfE is establishing the online education accreditation scheme (OEAS) to incentivise online education providers to meet high standards of education and safeguarding arrangements their students and, through public reporting, to share best practice across the sector.

We consulted on this scheme in September 2019, with our [response to the consultation](#) published on 10 June 2020.

The OEAS is a non-statutory scheme. DfE encourages all eligible providers to engage with the scheme on a voluntary basis.

The scheme consists of 2 essential elements:

- the establishment of non-statutory standards for online education provision
- inspection of providers against those standards by Ofsted, acting as the quality assurance body appointed by the department

## Quality assurance

[Ofsted](#) acts as the quality assurance body for the OEAS.

Between November 2021 and January 2022, Ofsted consulted on its [role as quality assurance body for the online education accreditation scheme](#). It has now published its response to that consultation, alongside an [inspection handbook](#) to support providers in understanding how inspectors will approach their visits.

## How the scheme works

The scheme works in the following way:

1. Providers [apply for accreditation](#) by submitting relevant information online to DfE.
2. DfE will pass application details to Ofsted to carry out suitability checks.
3. Subject to the outcome of suitability checks, Ofsted will carry out an accreditation visit to assess compliance with the standards.
4. Following an accreditation visit, DfE will decide whether to award accreditation to the provider.

**Providers wishing to join the scheme can now [apply for accreditation](#).**

All inspection reports will be published by Ofsted and accredited providers will appear on the [Get information about schools \(GIAS\) register of schools and colleges in England](#).

Providers will pay a fee for the suitability checks and accreditation visits. The fee structure for the scheme is set by Ofsted, and has been outlined in its response to the consultation on its [role as quality assurance body for the online education accreditation scheme](#).

## Qualifying providers

The scheme is open to providers that:

- teach online only on a permanent basis
- provide a full curriculum or represent a child's main or only source of education

have at least one full-time pupil of compulsory school age on roll based in England (irrespective of the number of learners based overseas)

- have a physical presence in England, registered with [Companies House](#) or the [Charity Commission](#)

Providers wishing to apply for the scheme should read the following documents:

- guidance on [how the scheme works](#)
- guidance on the [online education standards](#)
- Ofsted [inspection handbook](#) - how inspectors will approach their visits

All qualifying providers are invited to [apply for accreditation](#).

## Implementing the scheme

The scheme launched in 2 phases.

### Phase 1

Phase 1 launched on 31 January 2023, with the purpose of giving providers time to familiarise themselves with the guidance on how the scheme works and on meeting the standards.

### Phase 2

The scheme opened to applications from providers that meet the qualifying criteria on 20 March 2023.

Ofsted will conduct up to 15 inspections per term. DfE reserves the right to place a hold on applications if we receive more than we can process in a term.

Online providers wishing to be placed on the department's notification list about the scheme can email [OEAS.enquiries@education.gov.uk](mailto:OEAS.enquiries@education.gov.uk).

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