ASPA Statement on Final Accreditation, Innovation, and Modernization Regulations

October 29, 2026

The Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) acknowledges the U.S. Department of Education's issuance of the final Accreditation, Innovation, and Modernization (AIM) regulations, scheduled for publication in the Federal Register on October 30, 2026. The final rule retains the substantive provisions of the August 2026 Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM), despite extensive public comments from higher education stakeholders, including ASPA and its members.

We share the Department's commitment to educational quality, student achievement, accountability, innovation, and reducing unnecessary regulatory burden. These principles have long been central to the work of specialized and professional accreditors, which evaluate educational programs preparing students for careers in fields critical to the nation's workforce, economy, health, and public safety.

Programmatic accreditation plays a distinct and essential role in higher education quality assurance. Unlike institutional accreditation, specialized and professional accreditation focuses on discipline-specific educational quality, professional competencies, licensure preparation, workforce readiness, and measurable student outcomes, including graduation, employment, and licensure examination performance. These activities help ensure that graduates possess the knowledge and skills necessary to enter professions that serve and protect the public.

ASPA remains concerned that several provisions of the final regulations may create unintended consequences for programmatic accreditors and the educational programs they oversee. In particular, expanded requirements governing the separation of accrediting agencies from affiliated professional organizations, restrictions on shared administrative resources, and new compliance expectations may increase operational costs without corresponding improvements in educational quality or student outcomes.

Specialized accreditors have historically maintained appropriate relationships with professional associations to support the development of educational standards informed by advances in professional practice, workforce needs, and public expectations. Preserving appropriate safeguards for independent accreditation decision-making is essential but must not undermine the value of professional expertise and collaboration in maintaining rigorous, relevant educational standards.

ASPA also believes that efforts to reduce regulatory burden must account for the cumulative impact of new requirements, particularly on smaller accrediting agencies and the programs they accredit. Requirements that increase administrative complexity or duplicate existing quality assurance activities risk diverting limited resources from student learning, educational improvement, and public protection.

The final regulations are generally effective July 1, 2027, with certain implementation and transition provisions. ASPA will continue reviewing the final rule and the Department's responses to public comments, engaging with its members to identify implementation challenges, and seeking clarification from the Department where necessary.

Accreditation is fundamentally about educational quality, student success, and public confidence. ASPA remains committed to ensuring that federal accreditation policy recognizes the unique contributions of specialized and professional accreditors and supports their ability to fulfill this mission effectively.

We look forward to continued engagement with the Department of Education, Congress, the states, and higher education stakeholders to advance an accreditation system that promotes innovation and accountability while preserving the professional expertise and rigorous quality assurance essential to students, employers, and the public.

Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA)
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