

# QAA External Validation of the COBIS Patron's Accreditation and Compliance Scheme







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**COBIS is thrilled to have received commendation for its well-established Patron's Accreditation and Compliance scheme by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).**

Having first launched in 2017, and now with over 240 schools having completed or booked quality assurance visits, the Patron's Accreditation and Compliance scheme (PAcc) has established itself as a rigorous, collaborative, non-judgemental and trusted process for schools in 59 countries. The scheme is rooted in school improvement, based on collaboration and partnerships between advisors and schools, and draws on the very best of British and international practice. Designed to adapt and reflect the uniqueness of each school, whilst adhering to a rigorous set of standards, the scheme supports schools with a British educational ethos on their development journey.

As part of our commitment to quality and continual improvement, last year COBIS commissioned the **UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)** to engage in a comprehensive and intensive review of the Patron's Accreditation and Compliance scheme. COBIS welcomes external scrutiny, and embarked on this review as a chance to be independently validated by internationally recognised quality assurance experts and as an opportunity to identify any areas for potential service development and enhancement.





## Why QAA?

**QAA is an independent charity working to benefit students and educational institutions, and are world leading experts in quality assurance.**

They are trusted by education providers and regulatory bodies to maintain and enhance quality and standards, and offer independent peer reviews for international institutions. These reviews assess if quality assurance processes meet international best practice, leading to accreditation from QAA. COBIS and QAA have many commonalities in terms of values, vision, philosophy, governance, ambition, international outlook and their commitment to safeguarding, high-quality academic standards, and of course to quality assurance. This synergy meant that QAA was best placed to provide quality assurance and externally validate COBIS' scheme.

## Summary

**Through a combination of desk-based analysis, live observation and in-depth interviews with stakeholders, the QAA found that at their core, COBIS' Patron's Accreditation and Compliance (PAcc) Standards are stretching, internationally contextual, fit for purpose, and in multiple complementary ways, are aligned with UK Government BSO inspection Standards.**

The QAA concluded that the COBIS standards are **thorough and rigorously applied**, and that the focus on assessment against the standards combined with the development of a supportive relationship through the whole accreditation and compliance process is greatly appreciated by schools and enables them to enhance their processes for the benefit of their students.





In the report, the QAA found that the **ongoing dialogue with the school, alongside commendations and recommended next steps** is a key strength of the COBIS approach. When comparing with the best practice in similar quality assurance standards, e.g. the BSO Framework 2018-23, it was found that COBIS PAcc Standards align well with BSO. But the QAA also believes that PAcc Standards **stand independently as a viable model for helping British international schools evolve an all-school holistic approach** to teaching and learning with a safe protected student at its centre.

In summary, the QAA found that the distinctive approach to **rigorous testing against standards in alignment with the development of a trustful supportive relationship** is a key strength of the COBIS approach.

This thorough external examination of the scheme supports COBIS' mission to operate with a deep commitment to school improvement, to help schools and students thrive, and to influence and promote the export and growth of world class British education worldwide.

For more information on the Patron's Accreditation and Compliance standards and process, including evidence submission, collaboration with LIPs/PAs and the school visit and report, **please visit the COBIS website.**



## The process and methodology

**QAA's review of the Patron's Accreditation and Compliance scheme took place from July 2022 to February 2023, and consisted of:**

- An in-depth evaluation of the COBIS Patron's Accreditation and Compliance Standards, including a comparison with the best practice in similar quality assurance standards, e.g. the BSO Framework 2018-23
- Desk-based analysis of process documentation, including scrutinising the operating guidance, policies and procedures, templates and any other supporting materials to make sure they are working as intended
- A review of the training and support available to Lead Improvement Partners (LIPs) and COBIS Peer Accreditors (PAs)
- A review of case studies which included schools at different stages of the COBIS PAcc process
- Live observations of online/onsite Compliance and Accreditation visits
- Interviews with LIPs and PAs, COBIS Senior School Leaders and the COBIS management team

A key part of the QAA methodology was the observation of Compliance and Accreditation visits. Observing the process in practice was essential to gain a deeper insight into the scheme. Observations were conducted at three schools, with two visits taking place virtually, and one in-person. These observations allowed the QAA team to test theory against practice, and to speak directly to the schools involved about their experience of the scheme first-hand.





## Key findings

### QAA's key findings and commendations of the scheme include:

- The standards challenge and stretch schools and drive development
- The credibility of the scheme was emphasised by school leaders interviewed
- Although COBIS operates a non-inspectorial process, it is rigorous in its testing of a school's approach to standards and is particularly searching in its testing of safeguarding
- The COBIS approach offers a 'bespoke', non-judgemental development path for schools through non-prescriptive language, that allows schools to express their individuality and tell their story
- Experiential training for experienced peer accreditors as part of Lead Improvement Partner (LIP) selection and recruitment adds value to the scheme
- Continual bespoke support for Lead Improvement Partners (LIPs) enables continuous updating and ongoing professional development
- COBIS invests in the long-term relationship between the LIP and the school
- COBIS matches the needs of the school as identified through self-assessment with the expertise of external LIPs
- The scheme emphasises the development of a professional, positive and productive environment for the Accreditation visit
- The one and three-year meetings maintain the momentum of developments prompted by the Compliance and Accreditation visits



The QAA found that the COBIS PAcc standards **add value to the development of schools in 7 specific areas:**

1. Efforts to support the safeguarding for all pupils and staff across safer recruitment, child protection, mental, physical and emotional health, and wellbeing for all
2. The quality of the curriculum and its ability to enable all pupils to learn and develop. This includes COBIS' focus on British educational values
3. The quality of teaching that enables pupils of all abilities and levels to engage with the curriculum
4. The potential enhancement of the quality of assessment to enable pupils to progress via engagement with UK assessment styles
5. The personal development of all pupils and a focus on a wide range of extra-curricular activities and enrichment opportunities
6. The school's ability to enhance the delivery of information that is fit-for-purpose to parents
7. The effectiveness of leadership and management with a focus on how school leadership embraces the wellbeing and performance of staff and students, and how senior leadership engages and communicates with all stakeholders

## Further areas for COBIS development

It was observed by the QAA that the COBIS approach and ethos has the capacity to grow significantly in a differentiated and expanding school marketplace and recommends that COBIS consider how the current approach to resourcing could be developed to ensure any increase in volume is sustainably aligned with the capacity of the organisation.

Ensuring that COBIS internal resource matches demand from the sector is central to **COBIS' Strategic Development Plan 2022-2025**, and we will continue to consider the volume of team members on upcoming compliance visits.





## Conclusion and next steps

**The findings and recommendations of the QAA are wholeheartedly welcomed by COBIS, and the report commends areas which we have been proud of since the launch of the scheme. As we try to do in our own quality assurance process and PAcc reports, we see COBIS' ethos and approach reflected accurately in the report.**

COBIS is dedicated to supporting schools around the world, and we are delighted that our Patron's Accreditation and Compliance scheme has not only withstood the scrutiny and rigour of the QAA process, but has been roundly commended for its approach and its impact. It has been found to not only be a viable alternative to other international accreditation and inspection schemes, but a high-quality and recommended option.

Colin Bell, COBIS CEO, says

*"COBIS has a reputation for operating in a healthy culture of scrutiny. For that reason, COBIS welcomes external scrutiny. While we have always believed in the strength of the Patron's Accreditation and Compliance scheme, it is invaluable to have QAA's firm approval and complementary external validation. Their review was diligent and in-depth, and I wish to thank everyone involved in the quality assurance process from start to finish, including the QAA team, our hard-working Lead Improvement Partners and Peer Accreditors, the COBIS Accreditation team and the schools who took part. This report demonstrates our deep commitment to long term school improvement, what sets our scheme apart from the others, the impact and value which schools will gain from engaging with our quality assurance scheme. Ultimately, the QAA report and judgement will serve to further enhance and strengthen the global credibility of COBIS and its high-quality member schools."*





COBIS Chair, The Rt Hon Lord Knight of Weymouth, Jim Knight, said of the announcement

*“Quality assurance from QAA will further enhance the reputation of Patron’s Accreditation and Compliance with Ministries of Education and regulators worldwide. It will enhance the reputation of the scheme with current and potential members of the school workforce and families who choose to access high-quality British international schools overseas. This will also serve to strengthen the wider brand of the British education sector on a global scale, which is a vital part of COBIS’ mission.”*

Vicki Stott, Chief Executive of QAA said of the process,

*“It is clear to us that the COBIS Patron’s Accreditation and Compliance scheme is a valuable process for all participants, and it is evident that there is a tremendous amount of goodwill towards to the scheme amongst schools and leaders. This was clearly reflected in the interviews conducted, and in the impact the scheme has had on schools. At QAA, we are confident that this is an opportunity for COBIS to further strengthen and develop the scheme, in the COBIS spirit of continual improvement.”*

This external validation strengthens the COBIS mission to continue to grow and maintain its position as the highest quality network of British international schools worldwide, to operate with a deep commitment to school improvement, to help schools and students thrive and to influence and promote the export and growth of world class British education. COBIS is confident in the future of the Patron’s Accreditation scheme, and looks forward to extending the scheme to many more schools in the coming years.

For more information, please visit the **COBIS website**.