GLOBAL COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION & QUALITY ASSURANCE, INC.

Diverse Traditions. Shared Standards. Global Excellence.

APPLICABILITY OF STANDARDS

How GCTEQA applies standards across different institutional models

GCTEQA evaluates institutions against the standards and criteria that reasonably apply to their legal structure, educational scope, delivery model, learners served, and stated mission.

Purpose

This guide explains how GCTEQA determines whether a standard or criterion applies to a particular institution. The framework is designed to be rigorous while recognizing that institutions may differ in size, mission, legal form, credential level, geography, and instructional model.

Core Applicability Principles

- Applicable standards are not waived merely because an institution is small, new, faith-based, online, or nontraditional.
- A criterion may be rated **Not Applicable** only when it does not reasonably apply to the institution's approved scope or operating model.
- The institution should explain why a criterion is not applicable and provide supporting context when needed.
- A Not Applicable finding is not the same as a deficiency and is not a substitute for missing evidence where the criterion actually applies.
- Material institutional changes may cause previously inapplicable criteria to become applicable.

Examples of Applicability

Institutional Situation	How Applicability May Differ
100% online institution	Campus-specific facilities evidence may be limited, while online learning, identity verification, technology, accessibility, cybersecurity, and continuity expectations become especially important.
Institution serving minors	Safeguarding, child-protection, reporting, and age-appropriate safety expectations apply.
Non-degree continuing education provider	Degree-granting criteria may not apply, but legal authority, truthful credential descriptions, curriculum quality, learner protection, records, and public accountability still apply.
Degree-granting university	The institution must document the lawful basis for each degree level and type offered.
Institution operating in multiple jurisdictions	Authorization and regulatory evidence may be required for each jurisdiction where applicable.
Mission-driven or religious institution	Mission and theological/religious identity are reviewed in a mission-sensitive manner without lowering applicable quality expectations.

Institution Responsibilities

- Identify the institution's legal structure, locations, delivery methods, credentials, and learner populations accurately.
- Explain any requested Not Applicable determination.

- Notify GCTEQA when substantive changes alter scope or applicability.
- Provide evidence for every criterion that reasonably applies.

Reviewer Responsibilities

- Apply published standards consistently and without favoritism.
- Consider institutional context without weakening applicable requirements.
- Document the reason for any Not Applicable finding.
- Avoid imposing requirements unrelated to the published standards or the institution's approved scope.

When Applicability Changes

New locations, new delivery methods, service to minors, new degree levels, ownership changes, major program expansion, or other substantive changes may alter which standards or criteria apply. Institutions should review GCTEQA substantive-change requirements before implementing material changes.

> **Applicability is contextual; accountability is not. Every institution must demonstrate compliance with the requirements that reasonably apply to its operations and approved scope.**

Public Notice: This guide is a summary. The current Accreditation Standards Manual, Eligibility & Scope Policy, Substantive Change Policy, and other applicable GCTEQA policies control.