

The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.

Subject: Relationship of AOTA and ACOTE, an Associated Advisory Council of the AOTA Board of Directors

PURPOSE: To establish policy defining the independence and autonomy of the Accreditation Council of Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) with respect to all accreditation functions to include accreditation policy making, accreditation procedures, standards development, accreditation decision making, and the determination of accreditation status, aligned with Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors recommendations.

IT SHALL BE THE POLICY OF THE ASSOCIATION THAT:

1. Under the AOTA Bylaws, ACOTE is an Associated Advisory Council of the AOTA Board of Directors charged with establishing accreditation policy and procedures, and determining accreditation status. ACOTE is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as a programmatic accreditor for the profession of occupational therapy. ACOTE has complete autonomy in establishing education standards¹ for the purpose of evaluating and accrediting educational programs; developing and implementing policies, rules, and procedures for conducting accreditation reviews of educational programs; making accreditation decisions with respect to such educational programs; and providing for appeals of adverse accreditation decisions.
2. As an educational accrediting agency, ACOTE must have standards for accreditation that are sufficiently rigorous to ensure that it is a reliable authority regarding the quality of education provided by the programs it accredits. The education standards define the inputs, processes, and outcomes necessary to assure academic quality, student achievement, accountability for performance and transparency, and rigor and substantive and practical content of the educational programs for the occupational therapist and occupational therapy assistant. Educational standards are applied and compliance is evaluated through pre-accreditation and accreditation policies and procedures and standards for entry-level professional preparation. ACOTE's policies and procedures are subject to rigorous review and approval by both the U.S. Department of Education through its recognition process and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. ACOTE complies with 34 CFR section 602.16.
3. Under the AOTA Bylaws, the Representative Assembly is a designated body of the Board directly responsible for establishing professional standards and policies for AOTA (e.g., Code of Ethics, OT Practice Framework) and the profession, and the entry degree level requirement for entry into the profession. The Representative Assembly is prohibited from interfering with any accreditation decision or action by ACOTE.

¹ Details of ACOTE policies and procedures are provided in the ACOTE Accreditation Manual at www.acoteonline.org

4. ACOTE shall have authority and capacity to deploy sufficient resources in a manner that ensures ACOTE has adequate financial, staff, and operational resources to perform its accreditation functions efficiently and effectively within the overall AOTA budget. No material changes, additions or modifications to ACOTE's functions, responsibilities or approved budget expenditures shall be implemented by AOTA unless consented to by ACOTE. To ensure sufficient time for review and consideration by ACOTE, AOTA shall provide written notice of a proposed change, addition or modification to ACOTE and allow ACOTE ninety days in which to review and respond on the proposed change, addition or modification. In the event of an emergency or other urgent matter, ACOTE's response time period shall be shortened to forty-five days. If necessary, AOTA and ACOTE shall meet and attempt to resolve any differences on the issue. Any changes, additions or modifications approved shall be effective in the next fiscal year. AOTA and ACOTE recognize that this process is necessary to respect and preserve ACOTE's independence as required by Section 8 of this Policy.
5. ACOTE's revenue will be derived from fees paid by education programs applying for accreditation and/or currently accredited by ACOTE. ACOTE will develop its operating budget based on its programmatic plans, projected revenue, and expenses. ACOTE's budget will be included within the overall AOTA budget as a distinct program within AOTA. ACOTE shall prepare and submit an annual operational plan to support its budget. The ACOTE Chair and/or staff Director will participate in the AOTA Board review of the ACOTE budget. Once its budget is established, ACOTE shall be solely responsible for determining the budget expenditures to be made.
6. AOTA will procure liability insurance for ACOTE's accreditation operations, accreditation decisions, and actions, including the decisions of independent appeal panels. The costs for this coverage will be charged to the ACOTE budget. AOTA will indemnify ACOTE Council members, volunteers, staff, and independent appeal panel members for actions taken within the scope of accreditation. AOTA shall also provide insurance coverage for accidental injury or death for ACOTE volunteers while traveling for ACOTE business.
7. Based on an ACOTE policy-guided search process, ACOTE will offer recommendations for selecting a Director or Interim Director for the accreditation function, to ensure that the Director has the requisite knowledge and skills to support ACOTE functions. The Director and all other Accreditation staff shall be employees of AOTA and shall follow all AOTA Human Resources policies and procedures. AOTA recognizes that accreditation often requires highly confidential and sensitive information and accordingly, the Director and all Accreditation staff, and any AOTA staff coming into contact with accreditation information, must protect the confidentiality of accreditation information and processes.
8. ACOTE and AOTA shall have clear and effective controls against conflicts of interest or even the appearance of conflicts of interest with respect to the independence and autonomy of ACOTE in its conduct of accreditation duties and its accreditation decisions. All AOTA Board, staff, and consultants, and all ACOTE members, staff, and consultants shall execute such conflict of interest forms and make such disclosures as required by and in accordance with AOTA policy and ACOTE procedures.

9. Legal counsel has the requisite knowledge, skills, and experience to support and represent ACOTE's accreditation functions. As an Associated Advisory Council of the AOTA Board of Directors, ACOTE is not authorized to enter into any legal agreements or contracts, engage in any litigation, or otherwise take any action that is not in keeping with its status as a component within AOTA and not a separate legal entity. The AOTA Board and ACOTE will take steps to avoid any conflicts of interest. If a conflict of interest, or perceived conflict of interest arises, ACOTE policies and procedures will be utilized to determine if independent legal counsel for ACOTE is needed and to secure legal support, if required.

10. This Policy will be jointly reviewed by the AOTA Officers, Executive Director, ACOTE Executive Council, and Director of Accreditation at least every 3 years and/or when changes are made in requirement of the U.S. Department of Education, CHEA, or the DC laws for non-profit organizations that may affect this policy.

APPROVED BY THE AOTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS JUNE 14, 2019; AMENDED APRIL 15, 2020; AMENDED APRIL 2, 2023.