

# INDEPENDENT HIGHER EDUCATION SCHEME DOCUMENT



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

RAISING STANDARDS IN THE  
GLOBAL EDUCATION MARKET

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**This document must be read in conjunction with the Accreditation Handbook**

# 1. Introduction

**BAC accreditation is a voluntary quality assurance scheme for independent providers of further and higher education and vocational training courses.**

The Independent Higher Education (IHE) accreditation scheme is designed for those institutions that deliver full degree programmes. This scheme covers both institutions based in the UK (IHEI-UK) and internationally (IHEI-International).

The inspection standards and key indicators are intended to be specific to the delivery of higher education, in part informed by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education's (ENQA) European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015), and the responsibilities of partner organisations set out in the [Handbook for the Quality Management of Collaborative Provision](#) developed by the Council of Validating Universities.



Further information on how the IHE scheme standards align with the ESG 2015 can be found in Appendix 1.

The revised edition of the IHE accreditation scheme standards has been informed by the contribution from the Higher Education Focus Group. BAC acknowledges the work of the group and offers thanks to its members.

# 2. Eligibility for accreditation

## 2.1 General requirements for institutions applying for accreditation as independent HE providers

- The institution is able to provide evidence of its financial stability.
- Effective control of the institution is the responsibility of an accountable management.
- The institution is led by a proprietor or designated principal/director, who must have clear contractual responsibilities for the running of the institution and for the quality of its work.
- There are no grounds for believing the proprietor, principal/director or any other senior manager to be unfit to have responsibility for the institution (e.g. an assessment of any previous position held at another institution known to BAC, in particular any institution that consistently failed to meet BAC's standards or that failed to repay debts owed to BAC).
- The institution has provided a relevant education programme for a minimum period of two years. Exceptionally, BAC may accept an application from an institution that has been operating for less than two years, although this would normally only be available to an institution that is part of a larger organisation that itself meets the requirement.
- Accreditation relates only to a specific institution and may not be used in relation to larger organisations unless all branches have been awarded accreditation. BAC reserves the right to decide whether it is more appropriate for organisations to seek accreditation in total or in respect of their separate parts.
- Accreditation by BAC does not remove the obligations of accredited institutions to comply with relevant local statutory and regulatory requirements.
- Any contractual agreements between BAC and an accredited institution, or any disputes arising out of the award, refusal, or withdrawal of accreditation by BAC, shall be subject to English law.
- BAC's evaluation of the institution will not assess the role of the awarding body itself and will not include, for instance, an assessment of the curriculum, the assessment procedures used in determining the final grades awarded, or the quality management procedures used by the awarding body.
- In the course of the inspection, programmes that are ancillary to the main education programmes (such as language support or the development of study and research skills) will also be evaluated.

## 2.2 UK institutions

The IHEI-UK accreditation scheme is available to any private institution that is wholly or predominantly offering full degree programmes at the level of higher education, normally in partnership with a university, and that offers its students a range of resources appropriate to those studying at the level of higher education.

## 2.3 International institutions

Any independent educational institution operating outside the UK that is eligible to apply for accreditation as an IHE institution **must** be able to demonstrate that it holds national or federal approval or a licence to operate wherever it does so.

2.3.1 If the institution awards its own degree programmes, the institution must be able to demonstrate that degree programmes are recognised and externally quality assured by either:

- the national accrediting authority of the country in which the institution is operating; or
- an international programme accrediting organisation that is listed by European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) or recognised by the United States (US) Department of Education.

2.3.2 If the institution has its degree programmes awarded on behalf of another organisation this must be through a formal collaborative partnership with either:

- a United Kingdom (UK) Higher Education institution (HEI) with degree-awarding powers. The HEI must be a Recognised Body as defined by the Department of Education and the list found at [www.gov.uk/check-a-university-is-officially-recognised/recognised-bodies](http://www.gov.uk/check-a-university-is-officially-recognised/recognised-bodies); or
- a Royal Chartered Body recognised as such within the UK; or
- a university whose programmes are recognised by their national accrediting authority or an international programme accrediting organisation listed by EQAR or recognised by the US Department of Education.

2.3.3 If the institution is in common ownership with a BAC-accredited higher education institution operating in the UK, this will meet BAC eligibility requirements, although the institution must still be registered and have a licence to operate in the country in which it is operating.

The final decision on the eligibility of an institution seeking international HE accreditation rests with BAC. If the institution does not meet any of the eligibility requirements stated above but would

still like to pursue international accreditation, please see the details of the BAC International Centre scheme or contact BAC to discuss your situation.

## 3. Accreditation process

**Accreditation is based on an inspection of the full range of an institution's current provision and will also require evidence that the management is capable of maintaining acceptable standards during the period of accreditation and operating within the requirements of relevant local legislation.**

Prospective institutions undergo a first level of scrutiny by BAC staff at the application review stage and then are required to undergo a rigorous inspection.

The full inspection assesses the institution and its provision against BAC's minimum standards. The full inspection report is then considered by the Accreditation Committee that decides to award, defer, or refuse accreditation.

## 4. Accreditation cycle

**Accreditation for the IHEI scheme is valid for four years. Accredited institutions are notified six months before the end of the accreditation period so that an inspection can be arranged and the institutional report can be presented to the Accreditation Committee for consideration of reaccreditation before the accreditation period ends.**

## 5. Inspection process

**A full inspection is arranged following successful completion of the first stage of the application process. An inspection team with appropriate experience for the institution being inspected is formed and normally consists of three members: a lead inspector, a team inspector, and a student inspector. It is usual practice for the inspection to take at least two days, but the days allocated and the number of inspectors will reflect the breadth and size of the institution's provision. With newly-accredited institutions, an interim**

**inspection is organised in the first year of accreditation. For accredited institutions, an interim inspection is organised in the middle of the four-year accreditation cycle.**

Institutions are required to complete and submit a self-evaluation report assessing their quality assurance mechanisms against specific criteria based on the standards contained in Section 11 prior to the inspection being conducted.

### 5.1 Inspection areas

A full inspection covers the following seven inspection areas:

- Governance, Strategy, and Financial Management
- General and Academic Management and Administration
- Teaching, Learning, and Assessment
- Student Support, Guidance, and Progression
- Premises, Facilities, and Learning Resources
- Quality Management, Assurance, and Enhancement
- Online, Distance, and Blended Learning

### 5.2 Minimum standards

The minimum standards for IHE accreditation are set out in Section 11. Details of the documents that will need to be supplied and reviewed during the inspection are listed at the end of the relevant inspection area. The staff members whom the inspectors will want to hold meetings with will be confirmed during the inspection planning stage and/or during the inspection.

### 5.3 Legal and regulatory compliance

All new applicants and those applying for reaccreditation are required to sign a declaration stating that the institution complies with all relevant statutory requirements in force in the country of operation, in connection with such matters as health and safety, safeguarding, employment law, copyright, disability provision, equal opportunities, planning consent, data protection, and public liability. It is the institution's responsibility and the personal responsibility of the head of the institution to ensure that all requirements are met. BAC inspectors will not inspect the above areas but will note any observed breach of regulations. BAC requires that all accredited institutions comply fully with all statutory requirements, and evidence of noncompliance will provide the Accreditation Committee with grounds for refusal of accreditation.

## 6. Programmes and awards

BAC does not validate or accredit programmes or qualifications. BAC's policy is that institutions should offer courses leading to approved external awards granted by recognised awarding and degree-awarding bodies. Further details on the award of degrees can be found in the Accreditation Handbook.

## 7. Accreditation fees

Annual accreditation fees based on the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students are due in September of each year. The exact fee payable depends on the number of students enrolled at the institution over the previous year. Accurate enrolment figures must be supplied to BAC once a year on request. If such figures are not supplied by the deadline given, the full maximum accreditation fees will be charged. Failure to pay the annual accreditation fees by the given deadline on the invoice will result in suspension and the possible withdrawal of accreditation.

## 8. Accreditation statements and marks

**Institutions that have been awarded accreditation may use the statement of accreditation in their promotional materials, subject to certain conditions.**

Acceptable forms of the statement are:

- "accredited by the British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher Education as an Independent Higher Education Institution"
- "accredited by the British Accreditation Council as an Independent Higher Education Institution"
- "accredited by BAC as an Independent Higher Education Institution"
- "BAC-accredited as an Independent Higher Education Institution".

Once accredited, institutions may use the BAC accreditation mark of the Independent Higher Education Institution accreditation scheme in their promotional materials, subject to certain conditions. The standard accreditation mark features the BAC logo, colour-coded to the specific accreditation scheme, and the word 'accredited'.

## 9. Contacting BAC

Further guidance and details of the generic requirements and responsibilities for BAC-accredited institutions can be found in the Accreditation Handbook.

Please contact [info@the-bac.org](mailto:info@the-bac.org) for further information.

## 10. Glossary

### Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

A general term used for the award of credit on the basis of demonstrated learning that has occurred at some time in the past. This learning may have come about as the result of a course, self-directed study, or experience either at work or in leisure pursuits.

### Appraisal

A meeting in which an employee discusses his or her progress, aims and needs, including for training and development, at work with his or her manager or employer. This should operate regularly, often on an annual basis.

### Assessment

A generic term for processes that measure students' learning, skills, and understanding.

### Enhancement

The process by which provision, processes, and policies are improved to have a positive impact on the learning experience of students undertaking study. This is commonly achieved through internal mechanisms that an institution puts in place to continually review and improve practice.

### Feedback

This could be academic feedback following assessment and could be formal (written) or informal (tutorials and oral) feedback. Feedback is also obtained from different stakeholder groups. This could be in the format of end-of-programme questionnaires or surveys from the students, internal committees with student and staff representation, or employer groups where the relevance of the provision to meet local or national requirements is discussed.

### Independent learning

In addition to the contact hours with academic staff, students will be expected to undertake independent learning. Independent learning places

increased educational responsibility on the student for the achievement of objectives and for the value of their goals. This can be facilitated through the provision of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) and ensuring that sufficient resources are made available to students to study independently.

### Moderation

The process by which the institution ensures that there is consistency in marking at module level (for examinations and assignments) and that it conforms to institution-wide grade and mark descriptors.

#### External moderation

A moderation process carried out by someone other than a member of staff of the institution. In the UK, an external examiner would typically be part of the external moderation process ensuring consistency in marks.

#### Internal moderation

The process of ensuring that assessment criteria are applied consistently by markers and that there is a shared understanding of the academic standards that students are expected to achieve. Examples include taking a sample of the modules or second-marking all assessments.

### Pastoral support

A service that gives help and support to students as well as providing information, advice, and guidance about activities outside the standard academic teaching.

### Provision

The courses or programmes of study offered by the educational institution.

### Publicly available information

Information that is available publicly by means of an institution's website, noticeboards, and published reports.

### Quality culture/quality ethos

A set of institutional values or a culture of commitment towards quality through the institution's processes and policies.

### Safeguarding

A term used in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland to denote measures to protect the health, well-being, and safety of children (who are defined as people under the age of 18) and vulnerable adults (see separate entry).



## Stakeholders

This typically refers to groups who are invested in the welfare and success of an institution and its students.

### Internal stakeholders

Internal stakeholders include current students, faculty and academic staff, the administrative support staff, and advisory boards or committees such as the governors or trustees.

### External stakeholders

External stakeholders would typically be the local community, employers of graduates, potential students or applicants, and governments or funding bodies.

## Student outcomes

This can refer to either the individual or student cohort outcomes with reference to the intended goals of a course or programme of study or the actual academic achievements of the students. This is often benchmarked against key performance indicators set by the institution.

## Student-centred learning

Students influence the content, materials, and pace of teaching. The student is placed at the centre of the learning process. Students may lead learning activities, discuss topics that interest them, and engage in learning experiences outside the classroom, such as internships or online classes.

## Validation arrangements

Validation is where a university with degree-awarding powers, in the UK, awards the degrees taught at another institution. This would typically be a further education or alternative provider that does not have their own degree-awarding powers. This should be a formal written arrangement with the terms of the agreement clearly defined. It should list the date that the agreement was signed and have an end date. The arrangement is expected to identify what provisions are in place if either party chooses to terminate the agreement, so should include a 'teaching out' arrangement to ensure that students are able to complete their studies.

## Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs)

A VLE is an electronic depository of the information that students will be learning throughout their programmes. For example, a typical VLE in the UK would contain lecture presentations, teaching materials, links to further information, and a discussion forum. The VLE is populated by the university staff and is essential for high-quality online or distance learning provision.

## Vulnerable adults

An adult who is unable to function cognitively or adequately undertake basic day-to-day functions without the help or oversight of someone not impaired in these ways, or who is unable to protect him/her self against significant harms or exploitation.

# 11. Minimum standards for the Independent Higher Education Institution Accreditation Scheme

## Inspection area – governance, strategy, and financial management

### Minimum standards 1–3

- 1. The institution is effectively and responsibly governed.**
  - 1.1. The overall organisational structure, including the role and extent of authority of any owners, directors, or governing body, is clearly defined, documented, and effectively communicated to stakeholders, including governors, management, staff, and students.
  - 1.2. There is an identified senior committee, with decision-making authority on academic matters, which protects the integrity of academic freedom.
  - 1.3. The link between governance and management is clearly articulated and documented.
  - 1.4. Internal stakeholders develop and implement policy through appropriate structures and processes, which include the involvement of external stakeholders.
  - 1.5. An explicit procedure for risk assessment is implemented. This results in a risk assessment statement, which is regularly reviewed and updated.
  - 1.6. Effective action is taken by the governing body and senior managers in response to the outcomes of regular risk assessments.
  - 1.7. All relationships with other educational organisations are defined formally and are fully transparent to meet those organisations' requirements.

- 1.8. There are clear channels of communication between the governing body, the executive, academic management, staff (including those working remotely), students, and other stakeholders.

## 2. The institution has a clear and achievable strategy

- 2.1. The institution has a clear strategy for the development of its higher education provision, which is supported by appropriate implementation plans and financial management and takes into account the quality of the student experience.
- 2.2. There is provision for stakeholder input, including governors, management, staff, and students, to inform the strategic direction of the institution.
- 2.3. The strategy is well communicated to all stakeholders within and outside the institution.
- 2.4. The governing body and senior management conduct a regular and systematic review of their own performance and the institution's overall performance, and each review is measured against strategic targets.

## 3. Financial management is open, honest, and effective

- 3.1. The institution conducts its financial matters professionally, transparently, and with appropriate probity.
- 3.2. The institution's finances are subject to regular independent external audit.

### Documentation

- Up-to-date organogram or outline description of the staff structure, with names of post-holders and individual roles
- The strategy/development plan including strategic targets
- List of committees/boards together with their terms of reference and membership
- Minutes of relevant committee and/or board meetings
- Minutes of staff meetings
- Detailed job descriptions for all senior, academic, and administrative staff
- Up-to-date signed contracts/agreements of employment for all staff
- Documentation on risk planning and completed risk assessments
- Documentation explaining the link between governance and management
- Financial planning documentation
- Performance data maintained by the institution, for example, examination pass rates/stakeholder feedback scores/attendance rates
- Documentation relating to policies and procedures for informing stakeholders of the response made to their feedback
- Key policies underpinning the running of the institution, for example, relating to staff recruitment, staff performance monitoring and staff development, quality assurance, assessment, and student welfare
- Staff and student handbooks
- Staff personnel files and records
- Other management and administrative policies, procedures, and systems
- Annual performance reviews against strategic targets at institution and department levels

## Inspection area – general and academic management and administration

### Minimum standards 4–10

#### 4. The institution is effectively managed

- 4.1. The management structure is clearly defined, documented, and understood by all stakeholder groups, including governors, management, staff, and students.
- 4.2. There are clearly delineated responsibilities and reporting arrangements at institutional, faculty, departmental, programme, and course levels.



- 4.3. There is an appropriate and effective committee structure, with appropriate reporting lines to inform management decision-making.
- 4.4. Committees have clear and appropriate terms of reference and meet regularly. The meetings are accurately recorded with clear action planning.
- 4.5. The institution has formal mechanisms to monitor the information that it provides internally and externally and to make any enhancements deemed necessary to ensure that the information is accurate and fit-for-purpose.

## 5. The institution is administered effectively

- 5.1. The size of the administrative team is sufficient to ensure the effective day-to-day running of the institution.
- 5.2. The administrative support available to the management is clearly defined, documented, and understood, and is appropriately focused to support its activities effectively.
- 5.3. Administrative policies, procedures, and systems are well documented and disseminated effectively across the institution.
- 5.4. Classes are timetabled and rooms allocated appropriately for the courses offered.
- 5.5. Data collection and collation systems are well documented, effective, and accurate.
- 5.6. Comprehensive administrative records are organised and stored efficiently, easily accessed, and used effectively.
- 5.7. Students' records are sufficient, accurately maintained, and up-to-date.
- 5.8. Staff records are sufficient, accurately maintained, and up-to-date.
- 5.9. The institution has a robust security system and policies in place for protecting the data of its students and staff.
- 5.10. The institution has processes through which it verifies that the student who registers on the programme is the same student who participates in the programme and completes and receives the credit.
- 5.11. There are secure and efficient procedures for the administration of examinations and other means of assessment.

- 5.12. There are effective procedures for internal and external moderation at pre- and post-assessment stages.
- 5.13. The institution makes student records and transcripts available to its students in a timely manner.
- 5.14. There is a policy on the collection and refund of students' fees, which is implemented effectively.

## 6. The institution employs and continues to support appropriately qualified and experienced staff

- 6.1. There are appropriate policies and effective procedures for the recruitment and continuing employment of suitably qualified and experienced staff, which are designed to ensure the safety of the learners.
- 6.2. All staff are suitably qualified and experienced, understand their specific responsibilities, and are effective in carrying them out.
- 6.3. There are clear and appropriate job specifications for all staff.
- 6.4. There are effective procedures for the induction of all staff.
- 6.5. All staff are treated fairly and according to a published equality and diversity policy.
- 6.6. Staff have access to an appropriate complaints and appeals procedure.
- 6.7. Management monitors and reviews the performance of all staff, through a clearly documented and transparent appraisal system, which includes regular classroom observations of teaching staff.
- 6.8. The professional development needs of staff are identified through appraisal and other means, and measures are taken to support staff to address these and gain appropriate additional qualifications where relevant.

## 7. Academic management is effective

- 7.1. There are appropriate procedures for the proposal, design, and validation of programmes of study, which take into account the mission of the institution.
- 7.2. Intended learning outcomes for all programmes are clearly articulated, understood by students, and publicly available.

7.3. There are regularly scheduled and recorded meetings of academic staff where academic programmes are reviewed.

7.4. There is an appropriate policy and effective procedures for the acquisition of academic resources to support programmes.

7.5. Commissioning of course materials is managed effectively, and materials and the budget are checked to ensure standardisation and consistency across the provision.

7.6. Students are encouraged to take an active role in the development of the academic provision to ensure student-centred learning.

## **8. The institution takes reasonable care to recruit and enrol suitable students for its courses**

8.1. Entry requirements for each programme are set at an appropriate level and are clearly stated in the programme descriptions seen by prospective students.

8.2. Students are informed as to the necessary language requirements for entry into programmes.

8.3. A formal application process ensures that students meet the entry requirements and any claimed qualifications are verified.

8.4. All students' application enquiries are responded to promptly and appropriately.

8.5. Prospective students are properly briefed on the nature and requirements of the programme(s) in which they are interested and provided with appropriate advice on choosing their programme.

8.6. Students receive a proper initial assessment, which includes language ability, to confirm their capability to complete the programme(s) in which they are enrolling.

8.7. The institution makes it clear to applicants that they are responsible for checking that they have the skills and knowledge required to study on the chosen course.

8.8. The institution has a clear policy on the accreditation of prior learning and prior experiential learning, which is brought to the attention of prospective students and is effectively implemented.

8.9. Any recruitment agents are properly selected, briefed, monitored, and evaluated.

## **9. The institution encourages and supports its staff to undertake research and other forms of scholarship and to engage in other professional activities**

9.1. The institution encourages academic staff to undertake research in relevant fields and to publish their findings.

9.2. Academic staff are encouraged to engage in research and/or scholarship that informs their teaching.

9.3. There is a fair and transparent procedure for staff to seek financial support for their research and other professional development activities.

9.4. The institution provides time for staff to meet regularly to share and discuss current research activities and, if appropriate, invites external speakers.

## **10. Publicity material, both printed and electronic, gives a comprehensive, up-to-date, and accurate description of the institution and its curriculum**

10.1. Text and images provide an accurate depiction of the institution's location, premises, facilities, and the range and nature of resources and services offered.

10.2. Information on the programmes available and their assessment and progression are comprehensive, accurate, readily accessible, and up-to-date.

10.3. There are effective procedures to update information on a regular basis to ensure its relevance and accuracy.

10.4. The information provided ensures that students are well informed of the status of the qualifications offered, including the awarding body and level of award.

10.5. Students are informed of the full cost of all programmes, including costs of assessments, activities, and any required materials.

## Documentation

- Up-to-date prospectus, course brochures, and other marketing material
- Detailed Curricula Vitae (CVs) for all staff including all academic/teaching staff that include evidence of academic and teaching qualifications
- Staff appraisal procedures and completed documentation
- Evidence of continuing professional development/training opportunities and individual development logs
- Completed student application forms and any learner contracts
- Briefing materials for agents
- Detailed up-to-date list of programmes available
- A detailed timetable of the courses/classes taking place at the time of the inspection
- Whole course/academic year plans/schemes of work
- Module/course descriptions
- Timetables for all courses
- Students' academic appeals and grievance procedures
- Agreements with awarding bodies
- Evidence of monitoring of teaching/training staff, including completed classroom observation records
- Copies of external examiners' reports for the previous three years for each academic programme, or from the start date if the course has not been available for that time
- Student files with details of registration, enrolment, attendance, and qualifications
- Policy on accreditation of prior learning, including experiential learning for prospective students
- Samples of administration correspondence with students

## Inspection area – teaching, learning, and assessment

### Minimum standards 11–13

#### 11. Academic staff are effective in facilitating student learning

- 11.1. Lecturers have the required subject knowledge, pedagogic, and communicative skills and experience to teach both the course content and level of course to which they are allocated.
- 11.2. The allocation of teaching staff to courses provides for a consistent learning experience and delivery is monitored to ensure consistency.

- 11.3. The programmes and their constituent courses are delivered and assessed in ways that enable students to succeed by developing the knowledge and skills that will be required for final examinations or assessments.
- 11.4. Teaching sessions are appropriately informed by module descriptors and relate to defined intended learning outcomes.
- 11.5. Academic staff are effective in recognising individual learning needs and preferred learning styles and adapting their delivery to meet these.
- 11.6. Academic staff use a mixture of group and individual activities to encourage the active participation of all students and effectively support their learning.
- 11.7. Students are encouraged and enabled to develop independent learning skills.
- 11.8. Students and academic staff have access to appropriate learning and study materials as well as other resources, and the institution encourages and supports their use.

#### 12. Assessment is fair and appropriate for the level and nature of the courses, and students receive timely and supportive feedback on their work

- 12.1. Students are provided with an assessment schedule, in which required coursework and revision periods are detailed in advance with clear submission dates.
- 12.2. Assessment strategies are relevant to the content and nature of the courses and focused on measuring students' achievement of the intended learning outcomes.
- 12.3. Assessment tasks are clearly written, indicating what students need to do to meet stipulated levels of achievement.
- 12.4. Students receive detailed and supportive verbal and written feedback on their assessments and overall performance and progress, which are effectively monitored.
- 12.5. The institution takes appropriate steps to identify and discourage cheating, including plagiarism and other misdemeanours, and to penalise offenders.
- 12.6. There are clear policies and procedures for students to claim mitigating circumstances and to appeal against marks awarded.

### 13. Student materials are appropriate to the medium of delivery and are effective

- 13.1. Course materials are designed for a specific and clearly stated level of study.
- 13.2. Course materials are appropriately presented and sufficiently comprehensive to enable students to achieve the programmes' objectives.
- 13.3. Course materials are accurate and reflect current knowledge and practice and are regularly reviewed and revised.
- 13.4. Programme designers make effective use of appropriate teaching aids and learning resources.
- 13.5. The provider makes effective provision for students to access all resources.

#### Documentation

- A list of students on site on the day(s) of the inspection, broken down by level of English competence (where relevant), gender, age, country of origin, programme, and start date
- Completed lecture plans
- Sample placement/initial tests, including completed documentation
- Records of student progress
- Summaries of results/grades awarded for the previous three years for each academic programme, or from the start date, if the courses have not been available for that time
- Documents relating to external moderation
- Assessment procedures/samples of assessment methods/assessment tools
- Samples of marked students' work with feedback to the learner

## Inspection area – student support, guidance, and progression

### Minimum standards 14–19

#### 14. Students receive pastoral support appropriate to their age, background, and circumstances

- 14.1. There are appropriate staff members responsible for student welfare who are accessible to all students and available to provide advice and counselling.
- 14.2. Students are given an induction to the institution and their programme of study and guidance on the use of facilities such as the library and IT provision.
- 14.3. Students receive appropriate information on the pastoral support available to them, including the provision of emergency support.
- 14.4. The institution has policies to avoid discrimination and a published procedure for dealing with any abusive behaviour.
- 14.5. Staff are available to assist students to resolve issues of a general and/or technological nature. All enquiries from students are handled promptly and sympathetically.
- 14.6. There are effective systems to communicate with students outside of class hours.
- 14.7. Effective safeguarding arrangements are in place and are regularly reviewed to keep all participants safe.
- 14.8. Effective arrangements are in place to protect participants from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

#### 15. Students receive appropriate academic support and guidance

- 15.1. Students have appropriate access to teaching staff outside teaching and learning sessions.
- 15.2. Students have access to appropriate support to enable the regular review of their academic progress.
- 15.3. Assessment outcomes are monitored to enable the identification of students who are not making satisfactory progress, and prompt intervention is made where appropriate.

- 15.4. Academic support, advice, and guidance on alternative programmes are provided to students who are judged not to be making sufficient progress and/or who wish to change their pattern of study.
- 15.5. Students have access to appropriate advice and guidance on careers and further study and any professional body exemptions that may be available.
- 15.6. The institution has a fair complaints procedure that includes an external adjudicator, for example, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) in the UK, and students are informed how to submit a complaint.
- 15.7. Students are advised of BAC's complaints procedure.
- 15.8. Instructions and suggestions on how to study are made available to assist students to learn effectively and efficiently.
- 15.9. Students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are identified so that appropriate support can be provided.

## **16. International students are provided with specific advice and assistance**

- 16.1. Before their arrival, international students receive appropriate advice on travelling to and living in their chosen country of study.
- 16.2. On arrival, international students receive an appropriate induction on issues specific to the local area.
- 16.3. Information and advice, which is specific to international students, continues to be available throughout their time at the institution.
- 16.4. Provision of support takes into account cultural and religious considerations.
- 16.5. Where possible, students have access to speakers of their own first language.

## **17. Student attendance is measured and recorded regularly and effective remedial action taken where necessary**

- 17.1. There is a clear and published policy on required student attendance and punctuality.
- 17.2. There are effective procedures and systems to enforce attendance and punctuality.

- 17.3. Accurate and secure records of attendance and punctuality, at each session, are kept for all students.
- 17.4. Data on attendance and punctuality is collated centrally and reviewed regularly and absences followed up promptly.

## **18. Where residential accommodation is offered, it is fit-for-purpose, well maintained, and appropriately supervised**

- 18.1. Any residential accommodation is clean, safe, and of a standard that is adequate for the needs of students.
- 18.2. Any residential accommodation is open to inspection by the appropriate authorities.
- 18.3. A level of supervision is provided that is appropriate to the needs of students.
- 18.4. Students are provided with advice on suitable private accommodation.

## **19. The institution provides an appropriate social programme for students and information on activities in the locality**

- 19.1. Students are provided with appropriate information on opportunities for participation in social events and other leisure activities that may be of interest.
- 19.2. The social programme is responsive to the needs and wishes of students, and activities have been chosen with consideration of their affordability.
- 19.3. Any activities organised by the institution are supervised by a responsible representative with suitable qualifications and/or experience.
- 19.4. Students are encouraged to develop and participate in extramural activities and, when studying remotely, the activities include appropriate use of online forums or channels.
- 19.5. The institution supports and encourages peer interaction through a variety of channels, e.g. social network forums and channels.



## Documentation

- Induction packs for home and international students
- Initial guidance documents for students
- Attendance records
- Evidence of attendance monitoring, including class registers for each course/programme
- Complaints policy and procedure documentation
- Policy documents related to discrimination, bullying, and abusive behaviour
- Students' social programme
- Careers advice and guidance documentation
- Policies relating to preventing radicalisation and extremism
- Safeguarding policy
- Background checks for staff, for example, the Disclosure and Barring Service in the UK
- Records of staff training in safeguarding
- See safeguarding checklist for further documentation
- Documents related to residential accommodation
- Information for students relating to qualifications and awarding bodies

## Inspection area – premises, facilities, and learning resources

### Minimum standards 20–25

#### 20. The institution has secure possession of and access to its premises

- 20.1. The institution has secure tenure on its premises.
- 20.2. The institution has the legal right to use its premises for the delivery of higher education.
- 20.3. Where required, the institution has access to suitable external premises for academic or non-academic purposes of a temporary or occasional nature.

#### 21. The premises provide a safe, secure, and clean environment for students and staff

- 21.1. Access to the premises is appropriately restricted and secured.
- 21.2. The premises are maintained in an adequate state of repair, decoration, and cleanliness.

- 21.3. There are specific safety rules in areas of particular hazard (e.g. science laboratories) that are brought to the attention of students, staff, and visitors.
- 21.4. General guidance on health and safety is made available to students, staff, and visitors.
- 21.5. There is adequate signage inside and outside the premises and general information is displayed effectively.
- 21.6. There is adequate circulation space for the number of students and staff accommodated and a suitable area in which to receive visitors.
- 21.7. There are toilet and handwashing facilities of an appropriate number and acceptable level of cleanliness.
- 21.8. There is adequate air conditioning, heating, and ventilation in all rooms.

#### 22. Classroom and other learning areas are appropriate for the programmes offered

- 22.1. Classrooms and other learning areas provide adequate accommodation in size and number for the classes (e.g. lectures, seminars, tutorials) allocated to them.
- 22.2. Classrooms and any specialised learning areas (e.g. laboratories, clinics, workshops, studios) are equipped to a level that allows for the effective delivery of each programme.
- 22.3. There are facilities suitable for conducting assessments such as examinations.

#### 23. There are appropriate additional facilities for students and staff

- 23.1. Students have access to sufficient space and suitable facilities for private individual study and group work.
- 23.2. Academic staff have access to sufficient personal space for preparing lessons, marking work, and consultations with students.
- 23.3. Students and staff have access to space and facilities suitable for relaxation and the consumption of food and drink where appropriate.
- 23.4. Students and staff have access to secure storage for personal possessions where appropriate.



- 23.5. There are individual offices or rooms in which academic staff and senior management can hold private meetings and a room of sufficient size to hold staff meetings.
- 23.6. Administrative offices are adequate in size and suitably resourced for the effective administration of the institution.

#### **24. The library is appropriately stocked and provides a fit-for-purpose learning resource for the student body**

- 24.1. There is sufficient provision of learning materials including books, journals and periodicals, and online materials.
- 24.2. There are clear, systematic, and effective means of ensuring the adequacy and currency of library stock to reflect staff and student needs.
- 24.3. The library has sufficient space for student independent study and group working.
- 24.4. There is a well-organised lending policy.
- 24.5. The library is adequately staffed with appropriately qualified and experienced staff.
- 24.6. Library opening times are sufficient to encourage and support students' independent learning.

#### **25. The information technology resources are well managed, effective, and provide a fit-for-purpose learning resource for the student body**

- 25.1. There is appropriate technological access and sufficient connectivity to enable students to study flexibly.
- 25.2. Students have effective online resources that assist with their learning, optimise interaction between the institution and the student, and enhance instructional and educational services.
- 25.3. There is provision of appropriate, up-to-date software and virtual learning environments that reflect the needs of the programmes.
- 25.4. There is an effective means of ensuring the renewal of hardware and software to ensure efficiency and currency.

- 25.5. The institution has access to the services of an experienced Information Technology (IT) technician who can ensure that systems are operative at all times and provide support to students, academic staff, and students and staff working remotely.
- 25.6. The provider makes effective provision for students to access conventional and online resources.

#### **Documentation**

- Floor plan of each site being inspected
- Health and safety guidance for students, staff, and visitors
- Number, specification, location, and accessibility of computing and related IT resources
- A guide to the library and IT facilities
- Catalogue of library stock

### **Inspection area – quality management, assurance, and enhancement**

#### **Minimum standards 26–28**

#### **26. The institution regularly obtains and records feedback from students and other stakeholders and takes appropriate action where necessary**

- 26.1. The views of all stakeholders are canvassed and recorded regularly, considered objectively, analysed and evaluated thoroughly, and, where necessary, appropriate action is taken.
- 26.2. Student feedback is obtained through appropriate formal student representation mechanisms.
- 26.3. The institution has appropriate formal feedback mechanisms to inform all stakeholders of any action taken as a result of their feedback.

## 27. The institution has effective systems to review its own standards and assess its own performance

- 27.1. All quality management policies and procedures are clearly documented and are brought to the attention of staff and, where appropriate, students and other stakeholders.
- 27.2. The institution's quality assurance policies and procedures appropriately inform its strategic management.
- 27.3. The principles of quality assurance are embedded throughout the institution to ensure a quality ethos
- 27.4. The institution undertakes regular and systematic monitoring of its operations and reviews all aspects of its performance against clearly specified and appropriate performance indicators.
- 27.5. Management compiles regular reports that present the results of the institution's reviews and incorporate action plans.
- 27.6. Particular attention is paid to the quality of the student learning experience and to ensuring that there is fair treatment of all students.
- 27.7. The nominated course leader produces an end-of-session, end-of-semester, or end-of-year course report that includes measures of student satisfaction, completion rates, and achievement levels.
- 27.8. The nominated programme leader, drawing upon reports from its constituent courses, produces an annual programme report, which includes analysis of year-on-year results on student satisfaction, achievement levels, completion rates, and progression to further study or employment.
- 27.9. Key performance indicators include an analysis of student outcomes in terms of year on-year performance, which highlights any significant variations.
- 27.10. General performance reports include an analysis of year-on-year data, including student satisfaction, retention and achievement, staff performance (including research and other forms of scholarship), and a review of resourcing issues.
- 27.11. Review and revalidation of programmes on a regular basis involves external assessors as appropriate.

27.12. Institutional systems ensure the effective consideration of programme reports and that appropriate actions are incorporated into action planning.

## 28. The institution has a strong commitment to, and procedures that facilitate, continuing enhancement of its provision

- 28.1. Good practice is effectively identified and disseminated across the institution.
- 28.2. End-of session course and annual programme reports include improvement and ongoing developments made and identify further areas requiring enhancement.
- 28.3. Action plans for enhancement are implemented and reviewed regularly within the institution's committee structure.

### Documentation

- Internal quality assurance documentation, including copies of any policies used as a means of quality management
- External quality assurance documentation (ISO, IIP, etc.)
- Annual performance reviews against strategic targets at course and programme levels
- Programme re-validation reports
- Samples and summaries of any learner and other stakeholder feedback, including completed feedback questionnaires
- Copies of annual reports to the awarding bodies for the previous three years for each academic programme, or from start date if the courses have not been available for that time
- Copies of audits and academic reviews carried out by or on behalf of the awarding bodies or partnership institutions
- Action plans for dealing with stakeholder feedback
- Notes from external audits

## Inspection area – online, distance, and blended learning (if applicable)

### Minimum standard 29

#### 29. The institution has suitable staff to ensure the successful delivery of online and distance learning

- 29.1. Staff have an understanding of the specific requirements of online, distance, and blended learning.
- 29.2. Academic staff are properly and continuously trained with respect to provider policies, student needs, instructional approaches and techniques, and the use of appropriate instructional technology
- 29.3. Tutors have an understanding of the special challenges and demands of online, distance, and blended learning.
- 29.4. Staff ensure students are made aware of the necessary level of digital literacy required to follow the stated programmes.
- 29.5. Instructions and suggestions on how to study and use the online tutorial materials are made available to assist students to learn effectively and efficiently.

## 12. Further information on meeting the inspection areas

### How to include externality in quality assurance

The involvement of external peers in quality assurance arrangements is a distinctive feature of the British approach. In the UK, it is a commonplace requirement that at the institutional, course, and programme level, providers of higher education engage external peers to contribute to their quality assurance processes. Externality contributes to each institution's internal arrangements in a number of ways, such as:

- Creating shared understanding and consensus across the higher education sector about curriculum areas and qualifications, providing assurance of comparability for stakeholders;
- Ensuring that the development of curricula and subject areas is informed by best practice and is up-to-date;

- Providing some necessary checks and balances to support key quality processes, such as programme approval, monitoring, and review, assessment of the student, and providing assurance of standards, equity, and fairness for stakeholders.

This guidance note has been produced to assist institutions to demonstrate externality to BAC. It is aimed at institutions who may be unfamiliar with UK custom and practice. While BAC will not require externality to take exactly the same form as is common in the UK, in order to achieve BAC accreditation, an applicant institution will be required to demonstrate that it has, or plans to have, fit-for-purpose arrangements in place for externality. For example, documentation will be required to evidence the following BAC key indicators:

- **5.12** There are effective procedures for internal and external moderation at pre- and post-assessment stages.
- **26.1** The views of all stakeholders are canvassed and recorded regularly, considered objectively, and analysed and evaluated thoroughly, and, where necessary, appropriate action is taken.
- **27.11** Review and revalidation of programmes on a regular basis involves external assessors as appropriate.

Ensuring that your institution and the provision that it offers benefit from external input allows you to demonstrate to your stakeholders that the quality of your provision is not wholly self-referencing but is subject to scrutiny from appropriately qualified individuals from outside the institution. It helps the institution to have confidence that its provision will support learners in meeting the required standards for each qualification so that graduates and employers have confidence in it. It also allows the institution to benefit from good practice within the sector and in the employment market. Externality therefore also contributes to quality enhancement and quality improvement.

When designing programmes, having formalised external review is beneficial and standard practice in the UK. External review is one of the ways in which an institution benchmarks its academic provision, learning experience, and outcomes against expectations and standards for comparable qualifications. It is not consultancy but part of an institution's quality assurance process.

Nevertheless, it can also be developmental, as an external reviewer can provide recommendations on how to strengthen provision as well as act as a 'critical friend'.

## Ways to demonstrate externality

- If your institution has a **franchise** or **validation agreement** with a UK university, then, as part of their quality assurance mechanisms, they are likely to conduct regular academic reviews of your provision. You could include copies of their reports as part of your evidence.
- If your awarding body or government has a requirement for **external examiners** to be used, then you will be able to use the external examiners' reports to demonstrate this.
- If your institution has any provision **accredited by a Professional, Statutory, or Regulatory Body**, then they may have provided you with a formal report at the time of accreditation and further documentation on the reaccreditation/continued accreditation. This could also include the minutes from the regular meetings that will be held. This is further documentation that you could utilise to demonstrate your externality.
- External reviews could be demonstrated by **peer reviews** from colleagues at other institutions and **employer or stakeholder groups** focused on specific aspects of your provision. You would need to ensure that the reviewers or group members had the appropriate qualifications and subject knowledge to undertake reviews.
- If your institution is required to have **accreditation from your national accreditation agency**, then the report or documentation provided from them could be another way of demonstrating externality.

External peer input into an institution's quality assurance arrangements should not be seen as an alternative to rigorous application of internal processes and practices. It is important to look for external people who can add value without seeking to impose their own views or opinions.

## Committee and meeting recording

All institutions will hold regular meetings. As part of their internal structures, it is expected that there will be formal committees, which may relate to academic matters, forums with attendance from both students and staff, and staff meetings. These meetings will be at a variety of levels, from university senior management to departmental staff meetings. For a meeting to be effective, it is important to ensure that the meeting is recorded accurately. If a meeting has an agenda that is circulated in advance, then the meeting record should reflect the agenda items. The record should be accurate, provide a brief summary of the topic of discussion, and include agreed actions that reflect the outcomes of the meeting.

This guidance note has been produced to outline the key information that should be included in a formal record of a meeting to assist institutions when considering what BAC inspectors would expect to see. For example, documentation will be required to evidence the BAC key indicator below:

- **4.4 Committees** have clear and appropriate terms of reference and meet regularly. The meetings are accurately recorded with clear action planning.

### Information required:

Organisation of the meeting

- Title of meeting (e.g. Student and Staff Committee)
- Date and time of meeting
- Chair (meeting lead)
- Attendees: (full names)
- Minute taker: (full name)

### Description of the meeting

- Agenda items or allocated topic number
- Brief overview of discussion
- Actions agreed (if required):
- List the action that needs to be taken
- Name of responsible person
- Date action must be complete
- Date of next meeting
- Status of document (draft/final, etc.)

# Appendix 1– Scheme mapping against the European Standards and Guidelines

BAC Standards & Key Indicators							
European Standards & Guidelines 2015 Internal Quality Assurance	Governance, Strategy, and Financial Management (KI 1–3)	General and Academic Management and Administration (KI 4–10)	Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (KI 11–13)	Student Support, Guidance, and Progression (KI 14–19)	Premises, Facilities, and Learning Resources (KI 20–25)	Quality Management, Assurance, and Enhancement (KI 26–28)	Online, Distance, and Blended Learning (if applicable) (KI 29)
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	1.1–1.10					26.1–26.13 27.1–27.5 28.1–28.4	
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	7.2, 7.3 10.4					26.2, 26.8, 26.11	29.1
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching, and assessment			11.10 12.2				
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition, and certification	2.1	5.3 8.1 10.2, 10.4					
1.5 Teaching staff		6.1, 6.8–6.10	11.1 13.1–13.5			25.6	29.2
1.6 Learning resources and student support	2.2	7.6	11.10	14.1–14.4 15.1–15.14 16.1–16.5	22.1–22.3 24.1–24.6	25.1–25.5	
1.7 Information management						26.4–26.12 27.1–27.5	
1.8 Public information	2.4	10.1–10.5					
1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes	2.2	7.2		15.10, 15.11		26.4–2.13	
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance			12.6			26.13	



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