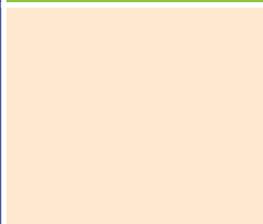
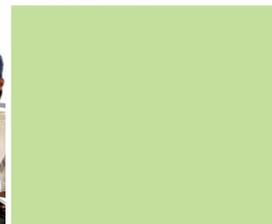


# ONLINE, DISTANCE AND BLENDED LEARNING SCHEME DOCUMENT



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL FOR INDEPENDENT FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

# CONTENTS

- 1. INTRODUCTION.....1
- 2. ELIGIBILITY FOR ACCREDITATION .....2
- 3. ACCREDITATION PROCESS .....2
- 4. ACCREDITATION CYCLE .....2
- 5. INSPECTION PROCESS.....2
- 6. PROGRAMMES AND AWARDS .....3
- 7. EXTENSION OF COLLEGE ACCREDITATION .....3
- 8. ACCREDITATION FEES.....3
- 9. ACCREDITATION STATEMENTS AND MARKS .....3
- 10. CONTACTING BAC.....3

APPENDIX A:  
MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR ONLINE, DISTANCE  
AND BLENDED LEARNING ACCREDITATION .....4

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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

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

The Online, Distance and Blended Learning accreditation scheme is designed to offer a tailor-made quality assurance scheme which recognises the particular qualities and distinctive character of providers which deliver teaching and learning through a variety of media.

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## 2. Eligibility for accreditation

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**Any independent education or training institution operating outside the UK is eligible for accreditation as a provider of online, distance and blended learning provided that the following requirements are met:**

- The provider is established as a deliverer of online, distance or blended learning programmes.
- The provider is licensed by a local, regional, or national licensing agency if such licensing is mandatory and/or holds accreditation from a nationally recognised educational or professional body and/or meets all mandatory requirements to operate.
- The provider is able to provide evidence of its financial stability.
- Effective control of the provider is the responsibility of an accountable management.
- The provider 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 provider. Such grounds may include an assessment of any previous position held at another institution/provider known to BAC, in particular any institution/provider which consistently failed to meet BAC's standards or which failed to repay debts owed to BAC.

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## 3. Accreditation process

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For comprehensive information on the whole of the accreditation process please see the Accreditation Handbook.

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## 4. Accreditation cycle

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Online, Distance and Blended Learning accreditation is valid for three years. Accredited providers are notified six months before the end of the accreditation period so that a full inspection can be arranged and the institutional report presented to the Accreditation Committee for consideration of re-accreditation before the accreditation period ends.

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## 5. Inspection process

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A full inspection is arranged following successful completion of the first stage of the application process. The inspection process for online, distance and blended learning providers takes into account the special circumstances in which such providers work. The inspection falls into two distinct phases. The first is a computer-based assessment of the provider's website, online materials both publicity and learning and a scrutiny of learners' work. The second phase involves a visit to the main office of the provider where the inspector meets with the management and administration to inspect documentation and to discuss the provider's systems and policies. The duration of these visits will be determined by the breadth and size of the provider's services. If the provider offers blended learning which involves a face-to-face component, the inspector will visit the delivery venue on a separate occasion to inspect the premises and observe the teaching. With newly-accredited providers, an interim inspection is organised in the first year of accreditation. For accredited institutions, an interim inspection is organised in the middle of the three-year accreditation cycle.

Institutions are required to complete and submit a self-evaluation document assessing their quality assurance mechanisms against specific criteria prior to the inspection being conducted.

### 5.1 Inspection areas

**A full inspection covers the following inspection areas:**

- Management, Staffing and Administration
- Teaching, Learning and Achievement
- Learner Support
- Management of Quality
- Premises and Facilities (face-to-face components)

### 5.2 Minimum standards

The minimum standards for the Online, Distance and Blended Learning accreditation are set out in Appendix A. Details are provided of the documents which must be supplied and reviewed and of the staff members who the inspector/s will interview during the inspection.

## Legal and regulatory compliance

All new applicants and those applying for reaccreditation are required to sign a declaration stating that the provider 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 provider's responsibility and the personal responsibility of the head of the organisation to ensure that all requirements are met. BAC inspectors will not inspect the above areas but will note any observed breach of regulations. Although the compliance with statutory requirements is not a BAC minimum standard, evidence of non-compliance will provide the Accreditation Committee with grounds for refusal of accreditation.

## 6. Programmes and awards

BAC's policy is that providers should offer courses leading to approved external awards granted by recognised awarding bodies. BAC does however accept that there may be instances where there is no appropriate external awarding body and that the provider will only offer internal awards.

BAC's inspectors will consider the accuracy of any claims made by institutions as to the level and status of any internal awards. This will include a requirement for evidence of the extent to which the institution's internal awards are accepted for the purposes of employment or further study. BAC encourages institutions to involve external moderators in the assessment where appropriate.

## 7. Extension of college accreditation

BAC accredited colleges which have decided to offer online, distance and blended learning programmes as an additional service may be eligible for a modified inspection process. Colleges are advised to contact BAC to discuss.

Institutions which hold accreditation from other accrediting bodies and have decided to extend their provision into online, distance and blended learning are invited to contact BAC to discuss the options available.

It is BAC's intention to minimise the burden placed on institutions which hold approved accreditation and to tailor inspection requirements to meet individual circumstances. However, only those providers which meet BAC's stated criteria for online, distance and blended learning, whatever their accreditation status, will be awarded online, distance and blended learning accreditation.

## 8. Accreditation fees

All providers awarded accreditation under this scheme will qualify for the online, distance and blended learning provider accreditation fee, which is based on total learner numbers. Annual accreditation fees are due in September of each year. Failure to pay the annual accreditation fee by the given deadline on the invoice will result in suspension and the possible withdrawal of accreditation.

## 9. Accreditation statements and marks

Providers which have been awarded Online, Distance and Blended Learning 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 Online, Distance and Blended Learning Provider"
- "accredited by the British Accreditation Council as an Online, Distance and Blended Learning Provider"
- "accredited by BAC as an Online, Distance and Blended Learning Provider"
- "BAC accredited as an Online, Distance and Blended Learning Provider"

Once accredited, providers may use the BAC accreditation mark of the ODBL 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'.

## 10. 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.

## Inspection area - management, staffing and administration

### Minimum standards 1-4

#### 1. The provider is effectively managed

- 1.1 The management structure is clearly defined, documented and understood, including the role and extent of authority of any owners, trustees or governing body.
- 1.2 Senior managers are suitably qualified and experienced, understand their specific responsibilities and are effective in carrying them out.
- 1.3 Senior managers have an understanding of the special requirements of online, distance and blended learning.
- 1.4 There are clear channels of communication between the management and staff, especially those working remotely.

#### 2. The administration of online, distance and blended learning is effective

- 2.1 Administrators are suitably qualified and experienced and understand their specific responsibilities and duties.
- 2.2 The size of the administration team is sufficient to ensure the effective day-to-day running of the provision.
- 2.3 Offices are adequate in size and resources for the effective administration of the provider.
- 2.4 The administrative support available to the management and learners is clearly defined, documented and understood.
- 2.5 Policies, procedures and systems are well documented and effectively disseminated.
- 2.6 Data collection and collation systems are effective including the logging of tutor and learner submissions.
- 2.7 Learner and tutor records are sufficient, accurately maintained and up-to-date.
- 2.8 The provider has a robust security system and policies in place for protecting the data of its learners and tutors.
- 2.9 Satisfactory procedures are in place for the administration of examinations and other means of assessment.

#### 3. The institution employs appropriate managerial and administrative staff

- 3.1 There are appropriate policies and effective procedures for the recruitment and continuing employment of suitably qualified and experienced administrative staff.

- 3.2 Experience and qualifications claimed are verified before employment.
- 3.3 There is an effective system for regularly reviewing the performance of staff.

#### 4. Publicity material gives a comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate description of the online, distance and blended learning offered

- 4.1 The website and other publicity material give an accurate description of the online, distance and blended learning courses offered.
- 4.2 All advertising materials and images provide an accurate description of any training offered.

### Documents required (where appropriate)

- Up-to-date organogram
- Minutes of relevant committee or board meetings
- Minutes of staff meetings
- Detailed CVs for all managerial and administrative staff
- Staff appraisal procedures and completed documentation
- Staff Handbook
- Course descriptions
- Correspondence with learners
- Up-to-date, signed contracts of employment for senior, academic and non-academic staff
- Briefing materials for agents if used
- Up-to-date prospectus and marketing material
- Completed learner application forms and any learner contracts
- Stakeholder feedback forms
- Completed feedback forms
- Action plans for dealing with stakeholder feedback
- Annual performance reviews

### Interviews required (where appropriate)

As part of their assessment, inspectors will hold interviews with the following:

- Principal/director
- Senior administrator

## Inspection area - teaching, learning and achievement

### Minimum standards 5-9

#### 5. Management of the programme is effective

- 5.1 There is a suitably qualified manager with experience in online, distance and blended learning who has responsibility for teaching, learning and achievement and management of the tutor body.
- 5.2 The provider has a sufficient number of qualified tutors to give individualised instructional service to each learner.
- 5.3 The provider has a robust tutor recruitment system which is designed to ensure the safety of the learners. The recruitment process for tutors working remotely includes a face-to-face (i.e. skype) interview.
- 5.4 The allocation of tutors to courses provides for a consistent learning experience and delivery is monitored to ensure consistency.
- 5.5 Realistic deadlines are set and communicated well in advance to learners.
- 5.6 Delivery methods are sufficient to attain the stated programme objectives and intended learning outcomes; suitable supplementary study aids have been considered where appropriate, whether via investment in technology, additional tutor support, issuing extra study materials or offering face-to-face learning sessions.
- 5.7 The programme reflects current knowledge and practice. Internal programme reviews are conducted on a periodic basis.
- 5.8 The programme is sufficiently comprehensive for learners to achieve the stated programme objectives and its content is supported by sound research and practice.
- 5.9 Commissioning of course materials is managed effectively and materials are checked to ensure standardisation and consistency across the provision.
- 5.10 Learner assessment is guided by published grading policies and a marking system that includes prompt return of accurately, fairly, and consistently graded assessments.
- 5.11 The provider uses assessment strategies which demonstrate the achievement of defined learning outcomes.
- 5.12 The provider takes appropriate steps to identify and discourage cheating and plagiarism and penalise offenders.
- 5.13 Learners have appropriate access to tutors for learning support.

#### 6. Tutors have an acceptable level of subject knowledge and pedagogic skill

- 6.1 Tutors are appropriately qualified and experienced.
- 6.2 Tutors have an understanding of the special challenges and demands of online, distance and blended learning.
- 6.3 Tutors have a level of subject knowledge, pedagogic and communicative skill which allows them to deliver the content of programmes effectively.
- 6.4 The appraisal procedures for tutors incorporate regular monitoring of tutor feedback.
- 6.5 Tutors are properly and continuously trained with respect to provider policies, learner needs, instructional approaches and techniques, and the use of appropriate instructional technology.

#### 7. Tutors respond to the individual learning needs of learners

- 7.1 The academic backgrounds and particular needs of learners are taken into account in the delivery of the programmes which build on former learning or experience.
- 7.2 Learners are encouraged and enabled to develop independent learning skills.
- 7.3 Tutors respond to different learning needs of learners where appropriate, taking various learning styles into account in their planning and delivery of courses.
- 7.4 Tutors employ effective strategies to check learners' understanding of concepts and programme content.
- 7.5 Learners are made aware of the necessary level of digital literacy required to follow the stated programmes.

#### 8. Learners receive appropriate assessment and feedback on their performance and progress, which are effectively monitored

- 8.1 Programmes are planned to include a schedule of assessments, the procedures and criteria for which are available in writing and in advance to learners and tutors.
- 8.2 Assessment outcomes are monitored to enable the identification of learners who are not making satisfactory progress and prompt intervention where appropriate.
- 8.3 Learners are made aware of how their progress relates to their target level of achievement.
- 8.4 Additional support or advice on alternative programmes is provided to learners who are judged not to be making sufficient progress to succeed.
- 8.5 Feedback is given to individual learners on a regular basis, tailored to meet their specific needs and constructive in its nature and delivery.

## 9. Assessments are designed to support and encourage the learning process, as well as to monitor and establish the level of ability acquired by the learner

- 9.1 Assignments and assessments maintain an appropriate focus on any assessment objectives or statement of learning outcomes established by the awarding body.
- 9.2 Formative assessments appropriately reflect the nature and standards of summative examinations.

### Documents required (where appropriate)

- Course plans (schemes of work)
- Samples of marked learners' work
- Sample placement tests
- Records of learner progress
- Samples and summaries of any learner feedback questionnaires
- Documents relating to external moderation
- CVs for all teaching staff
- Evidence of tutor monitoring

### Interviews required (where appropriate)

#### As part of their assessment, inspectors will hold interviews with the following:

- Principal/director
- Programme managers
- Senior administrator
- Examinations officer
- Tutors (telephone or online interviews)

## Inspection area - learner support

### Minimum standards 10-13

#### 10. The enrolment process is comprehensive, transparent and supportive to applicants

- 10.1 Applicants are provided with enough information to enable them to make a judgement on their suitability for the course and the delivery methods and can discuss any concerns before enrolment.

- 10.2 Enrolment and application documentation is easily accessible and simple to complete and submit.
- 10.3 Learners are given advance information about course requirements and equipment for succeeding in the programme. The provider takes reasonable steps to ensure that learners accepted for enrolment meet these requirements and any claimed qualifications are verified.
- 10.4 Learners are enrolled on programmes under fair and transparent contractual terms and conditions. If only limited information can be made available, suitably extended refund arrangements should be in place.
- 10.5 The provider 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.
- 10.6 After enrolment, the applicant has the benefit of a stated 'cooling off' period during which they can cancel the enrolment.
- 10.7 Learners are made aware of the English language proficiency needed to study on and complete the programmes.

#### 11. Services provided meet the reasonable needs of learners

- 11.1 Instructions and suggestions on how to study and how to use the tutorial materials are made available to assist learners to learn effectively and efficiently.
- 11.2 Staff are available to assist learners to resolve issues of a general and/or technological nature. All enquiries from learners are handled promptly and sympathetically.
- 11.3 The provider ensures that learners understand any system requirements, and have access to appropriate technical advice to assist with technological problems which are the provider's responsibility.
- 11.4 The provider supports and encourages peer-interaction through a variety of channels, e.g. forums and Twitter.
- 11.5 Learners who are unable to make satisfactory progress through the programme are encouraged to continue and supported to achieve a satisfactory outcome wherever possible or offered an alternative programme.
- 11.6 Learners have access to a fair complaints procedure of which they are informed in writing at the start of the programme.
- 11.7 Learners are advised of BAC's complaints procedure.

## 12. Learner materials are appropriate to the medium of delivery and are effective

- 12.1 Course materials are designed for a specific and clearly stated level of study and include appropriate support when necessary.
- 12.2 Course materials are appropriately presented and sufficiently comprehensive to enable learners to achieve the programme objectives.
- 12.3 Course materials are accurate and reflect current knowledge and practice and are regularly reviewed and revised.
- 12.4 Programme designers make effective use of appropriate teaching aids and learning resources.
- 12.5 The provider makes effective provisions for learners to access conventional and online resources.

## 13. The technology used to deliver the programmes is fit for purpose and effective

- 13.1 The provider uses appropriate and readily accessible technology to optimise interaction between the provider and the learner and enhance instructional and educational services.
- 13.2 The provider has access to the services of an experienced IT technician who can ensure that systems are operative at all times and provide support to learners, tutors and staff working remotely.

### Documents required (where appropriate)

- Learner induction material
- Learner handbook or guidance documents
- Home stay documentation
- Samples of marked learner work
- Records of learner progress
- Samples and summaries of any learner feedback questionnaires

### Interviews required (where appropriate)

As part of their assessment, inspectors will hold interviews with the following:

- Principal/director
- Senior administrator
- Tutors (telephone or online interviews)
- Welfare officer

## Inspection area - management of quality

### Minimum standards 14-18

#### 14. The provider has effective systems to monitor its own standards and assess its own performance with a view to continuing improvement

- 14.1 There are effective systems for monitoring and periodically reviewing all aspects of the provider's performance.
- 14.2 Reports are compiled at least annually which present the results of the provider's reviews and incorporate action plans.
- 14.3 Reports include analysis of year-on-year results on learner satisfaction, retention, achievement, examination results and completion rates.
- 14.4 Action plans are implemented and regularly reviewed, with outcomes reported to the management.

#### 15. Learner progress is effectively monitored and the monitoring is linked to procedures to allow for prompt intervention where appropriate

- 15.1 Prompt action is taken when learners miss deadlines, when set, or work submitted is not of a satisfactory standard.

#### 16. The provider has a means of accessing and monitoring the views of learners and other stakeholders and takes appropriate action where necessary

- 16.1 The provider has effective mechanisms for obtaining feedback from learners and other stakeholders (such as staff, partner providers and employers) on all aspects of the provider's provision.
- 16.2 The feedback is regularly reviewed by management and action is taken where necessary.
- 16.3 There is a mechanism for ensuring learners know what action has been taken as a result of their feedback.
- 16.4 Opinions of learners are systematically sought as one basis for evaluating and improving tutorial materials, the delivery of instructions and educational services.

#### 17. There is a clear rationale for courses leading to unaccredited or internal awards

- 17.1 There is a clear statement of the level claimed relative to the NQF where applicable and evidence that learners who receive the award meet the stated requirements for that level.
- 17.2 There is evidence of the extent to which the awards are accepted for the purposes of employment or further study.

**17.3** External moderators are involved in the assessment process if appropriate to the level or programme being studied.

### **18. There are satisfactory procedures for the administration of examinations and other means of assessment**

**18.1** Evidence is provided that the requirements of the relevant awarding bodies in terms of examination security and administration are complied with.

**18.2** For internal awards, there are effective systems in place for examination security and administration, and clear procedures for learners to appeal against their marks.

**18.3** The provider has processes through which the provider verifies that the learner who registers in the programme is the same learner who participates in and completes and receives the credit.

### **Documents required (where appropriate)**

- Learner induction material
- Learners' handbook or guidance documents
- Internal quality assurance documentation
- Copies of any policies developed by the provider as a means of quality management
- External quality assurance documentation
- Learner files with details of registration, enrolment, attendance and qualifications
- Documents relating to external moderation
- Copies of annual reports to the awarding bodies for the previous three years
- Copies of any reviews carried out by or on behalf of the awarding bodies
- Evidence of tutor monitoring
- Staff appraisal procedures and completed documentation
- Stakeholder feedback forms
- Completed feedback forms
- Action plans for dealing with stakeholder feedback
- Internal annual performance reviews

### **Interviews required (where appropriate)**

**As part of their assessment, inspectors will hold interviews with the following:**

- Principal/director
- Senior administrator
- Tutors (telephone or online interviews)
- Learners (telephone or online interviews)

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## **Inspection area - face-to-face component (if applicable)**

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### **Minimum standards 19-27**

#### **19. The provider has secure possession of and access to its premises**

- 19.1** The provider has secure tenure on its premises.
- 19.2** Where required, the provider has access to suitable external premises for academic or non-academic purposes of a temporary or occasional nature.

#### **20. The premises provide a safe, secure and clean environment for learners and staff**

- 20.1** Access to the premises is appropriately restricted and secured.
- 20.2** The premises are maintained in an adequate state of repair, decoration and cleanliness.
- 20.3** There are specific safety rules in areas of particular hazard (e.g. science laboratories), made readily available to learners, staff and visitors.
- 20.4** General guidance on health and safety is made available to learners, staff and visitors.
- 20.5** There is adequate signage inside and outside of the premises and notice boards for the display of general information.
- 20.6** There is adequate circulation space for the number of learners and staff accommodated, and a suitable area in which to receive visitors.
- 20.7** There are toilet facilities of an appropriate number and level of cleanliness.
- 20.8** There is adequate heating and ventilation in all rooms.

### 21. Training rooms and other learning areas are appropriate for the programmes offered

- 21.1 Training rooms and other learning areas provide adequate accommodation in size and number for the classes allocated to them.
- 21.2 Training rooms and any specialised learning areas (e.g. laboratories, workshops and studios) are equipped to a level which allows for the effective delivery of each programme.
- 21.3 There are facilities suitable for conducting the assessments required on each programme.

### 22. There is an appropriate policy on learner attendance and effective procedures and systems to enforce it

- 22.1 There is a clear and published policy on learner attendance and punctuality, requiring that they attend at least 80% of their scheduled classes.
- 22.2 Accurate and secure records of attendance and punctuality at each session are kept for all learners, collated centrally and reviewed at least weekly.
- 22.3 Learner absences are followed up promptly and appropriate action taken.

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

- 23.1 Learners have access to sufficient space and suitable facilities for private study, including library and IT resources.
- 23.2 Tutors have access to sufficient personal space for preparing lessons, marking work and relaxation.
- 23.3 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.
- 23.4 Offices are adequate in size and resources for the effective administration of the provider.

### 24. Learners attending face-to-face components receive appropriate support

- 24.1 There is at least one named staff member responsible for learner welfare who is suitably trained, accessible to all learners and available to provide advice and counselling.
- 24.2 Learners receive appropriate advice before arrival.
- 24.3 Learners receive an appropriate induction and relevant information upon arrival.
- 24.4 Learners are issued with a contact number for out-of-hours and emergency support.
- 24.5 The provider has policies in place to avoid discrimination and a published procedure for dealing with any abusive behaviour.

### 25. International learners are provided with specific advice and assistance (if applicable)

- 25.1 International learners receive appropriate advice before their arrival on travelling to and living in the UK.
- 25.2 International learners receive an appropriate induction upon arrival covering issues specific to the local area.
- 25.3 Information and advice specific to international learners continues to be available throughout the programme of study.
- 25.4 Provision of support takes into account cultural and religious considerations.

### 26. Where residential accommodation is offered, it is fit for purpose, well maintained and appropriately supervised (if applicable)

- 26.1 Any residential accommodation is clean, safe and of a standard which is adequate to the needs of learners.
- 26.2 Any residential accommodation is open to inspection by the appropriate authorities, including Ofsted where learners under 18 are accommodated.
- 26.3 A level of supervision is provided appropriate to the needs of learners.
- 26.4 Separate accommodation blocks are provided for learners under 18.

## 27. Where home-stay accommodation is organised, the welfare of learners is ensured and the provider's relationship with hosts is properly managed (if applicable)

- 27.1 Due care is taken in selecting home-stay accommodation which both provides a safe and comfortable living environment for learners and is appropriately located for travel to the provider and back.
- 27.2 Any home-stay accommodation is inspected before learners are placed and is subject to regular re-inspection by a responsible representative or agent of the provider.
- 27.3 The provider has appropriate contracts in place with any hosts, clearly setting out the rules, terms and conditions of the provision.
- 27.4 Appropriate advice and support is given to both hosts and learners before and during the placement.

### Documents required (where appropriate)

- Current lease agreement(s)
- Floor plan of each site being inspected
- Booking documentation for delivery venues or training rooms

### Interviews required (where appropriate)

**As part of their assessment, inspectors will hold interviews with the following:**

- Principal/director
- Maintenance/facilities manager



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**Telephone:** 0300 330 1400 **Fax:** 0300 330 1401 **Email:** [info@the-bac.org](mailto:info@the-bac.org) **Website:** [www.the-bac.org](http://www.the-bac.org)

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