This is the second year we have produced this Annual Report Summary to give all our stakeholders (both accredited providers and those with a wider interest in our work both in the UK and internationally) a clear account of our activities and, we hope, a deeper understanding of our achievements and challenges over the last year.

And, with the pandemic, what a challenging year it has been both for us as an incorporated charity and indeed for all those with whom we work either attempting to maintain their operations in such a difficult climate or adapting perhaps to online or other alternative approaches.

As you will see, in addition to making changes internally we have done whatever we could to assist our providers with additional seminars, by freezing accreditation and inspection fees or, where necessary, by agreeing ‘dormancy’ for their accreditation - and our new plans now include ways in which we will be working with our community to help them to, in many cases, rebuild their operations.

We also, during the year, took the opportunity to map out some of the wider issues for our strategic plan for the next five years which I am pleased to say was formally approved by our Council and published in February (2022).

BAC is, as I say, a charity and would not be able to operate effectively without the expertise not only of our staff and inspectors but also the time and dedication given so willingly and on a ‘pro bono’ basis by the members of our Council and Accreditation Committee.

Can I thank them therefore and all those who work with us and for us as we build the reputation and brand of BAC, help to improve standards, and give vital assurance and re-assurance to those who study and train in our accredited institutions.

Dominic Scott OBE
Chair of Council
Objectives and activities

The British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher Education is registered for charitable purposes and its objects are:

• providing a system of accreditation for educational and training institutions in order to promote public confidence in such institutions and their programmes of study; and

• assisting in the improvement and maintenance of the standards of accredited institutions through the offer of advisory and consultancy services principally in the field of further and higher education.
The governance structure consists of the Council, which is formed of the trustees, and acts as the Board of Directors. The Council meets three times a year.

To find out more about our current Council members visit our [website](http://www.example.com) for short bios:
Mr Dominic Scott OBE (Chair of Council)
Prof David Law (Vice Chair)
Dr Stephen Jackson (Honorary Treasurer)
Prof Mary Bishop
Mr Kevin Everett
Dr Anthony Manning
Dr Esther Huertas Hidalgo
Dr Nicola Mellor
Mr Marc Griffith
Dr Victoria Stec
Mr Alam Mahbubul

An Audit Committee provides financial and regulatory oversight. The Standing Committee is a subcommittee of the Council. The Standing Committee meets between Council meetings and more regularly during the pandemic than previous years to provide continuity and support the charity. The Standing Committee has, as members, the Chair of the Council, the Deputy Chair of the Council and the Honorary Treasurer. Duties of Nominations and Governance are discharged by the Standing Committee.

The responsibility for decisions on accreditation is overseen by the Accreditation Committee (AC). The AC is appointed by the Council and consists of members appointed by virtue of their experience and expertise with regard to educational standards. Dr Anthony Manning is the Chair of the Accreditation Committee. The Accreditation Committee receives the reports of completed inspections and takes decisions on the award or withdrawal of accreditation, making its recommendations based on BAC’s accreditation policy and procedures. It also regularly reviews the quality assurance criteria used by inspectors in making judgements and recommendations. The Committee had seven meetings this year.

In the period of review, Council members consider that they, together with the Chief Executive, and the senior management team comprise the key management personnel of the charity. None of the Council members receive any remuneration from the charity in connection with their role as Council members.

During BAC’s financial year 1 September 2020 – 31 August 2021 there was a pay freeze for all BAC staff.
Accreditation and inspection activity

The chart below gives details of the applications received, inspections carried out and awards of accreditation in the period September 2020 to August 2021 and compares these with the figures from the previous year.

% change from previous annual report

-83%  33%  3%  -7%  -7%
Other key achievements

BAC’s international activity includes the successful completion of the five-year project with the Higher Education Council of Bahrain and with the development of the Independent English Language Provider Scheme comes recent interest from a group of English language providers in Greece.

Governance arrangements have been strengthened through the introduction of a new role, Governance and Business Development Manager, whose responsibilities include the review and maintenance of Council and Committees.

BAC had its ENQA membership and EQAR registration renewed in February 2020 following a successful review process.

BAC started a review of their standards framework. Following the valuable work of focus groups involving staff, inspectors and providers, phase two is underway to prepare a proposal for an overarching framework of standards under which all BAC inspection schemes can be aligned.

BAC secured the chairmanship of an ENQA project about micro credentials. BAC will take the responsibility for the timely and successful delivery of the project output and host the final dissemination event at Wax Chandlers Hall London in Autumn 2022.
Operational response to the COVID-19 pandemic was as follows:

- BAC developed the ‘Back to Office Working Plan’ and appropriate Health and Safety and Covid secure audits took place. Office staff returned to some limited office working from 19 July 2021, working in two operational bubbles for the first six weeks with cleaning between each bubble workdays and reviewed after six weeks. Flexible working arrangements remains in place.

- Processes and inspections continued online in a way which maintains a robust approach to quality and standards for the foreseeable future. We supported our inspectors with this move to online processes through an online training event held in October 2020 also online was considered a short-term solution. From November 2021, BAC introduced a hybrid approach to inspections involving the use of both online and onsite inspection activities. However, we also retain the options of carrying out inspections totally onsite as well as totally online. Decisions about what approach to use will be based on a set of objective criteria, in order to ensure consistency.

- BAC staff continued to prioritise the support of our community with pragmatic solutions (e.g. FAQs on our website, offering individual discussions for providers with BAC staff and offering discounts/payment plans for inspections and accreditation fees where Provider business had been seriously curtailed). We offered our Accredited Providers a free facilitated workshop Building on Less Learned: From Emergency Response to Planned Action in October 2020.

- A series of free facilitated workshops were offered to Providers between October 2020 and June 2021.

- BAC staff and Council members have been encouraged to attend online Quality Assurance events to support their development and engagement in the wider quality assurance debates.

Covid-19 Impact on financial controls

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the financial performance of the charity. As a result of the imposed government restrictions, many providers have had reduced numbers of students enrol which has impacted on their income, we have seen an increased number of withdrawals from schemes, as well as an increase in requests by client institutions to be placed on dormancy or to arrange payment plans.

BAC has carefully considered these requests and has supported providers who currently need the most financial support.

Also in response to the Covid-19 restrictions, BAC has been required to postpone a number of inspections.

The impact of Covid-19 has led to lower than expected income and has also impacted on the charities cash flow. In response, the charity has taken steps to ensure that there are sufficient levels of cash available. As to the long-term impact to income, we believe the charity will see a short period of reduced income, but it is believed the pandemic should not impact on the survivability of the charity.

"Processes and inspections continued online in a way which maintains a robust approach"
"...it is believed the pandemic should not impact on the survivability of the charity"
More financial details can be found in the full annual report available here. Due to an increase in the income from investments BAC achieved a reasonable surplus which will be used for the benefit of the community and providers as part of a new development fund.

The deficit for the year before gains on investments was £29,606 (2020 – £9,153).

The operational deficit has increased by over £20,000 for two key reasons:

(1) Reduced income from accreditation fees and lower number of inspections taking place and,

(2) increased expenditure on providing new workshops and services to providers free of charge.

BAC took the decision not to raise accreditation or inspection fees this year although some increases in 22/23 will be inevitable. Overall accreditation fee income has decreased by approximately 19%, largely due to the fact that many providers have either not been able to continue to operate, have paused operations or have seen a reduced number of student enrolments. Some providers have opted to withdraw or a number have opted to place their accreditation on dormancy until Covid-19 pandemic restrictions are no longer in place. Inspection fee income has reduced in the year by 5% as a result of the change in schedule for planned inspections. The change in income is not likely to impact the organisation, as the expenditure will have also reduced in line with this.
Future plans

During Autumn 2021, a new Strategic Plan for the following five years was developed for approval by Council at the February 2022 meeting.

BAC staff moving to home working meant some project plans such as the alignment of BAC overarching Standards slowed and others such as online ways of working increased in speed of development. During the summer of 2021 some reconciliation and evaluation took place.

BAC learning from the pandemic responses resulted in hybrid approaches to future office working, Committee / Council meetings and inspections from September 2021. ‘Return to office working arrangements’ were reviewed in September 2021 with flexible working now embedded within the BAC culture and a hybrid approach to inspection methodology presented at the annual inspector’s event and Council during October 2021.

The development of the next five-year BAC strategic plan consolidates previous strategic direction but has been influenced by three elements of sound business practice: Environmental, Societal and Governance factors.
Strategic plan 2021–2026

The strategy has now been agreed with the following strategic objectives:

1. BAC will **invest in its growth** by expanding products and services to add value to current accredited providers and to attract a wider range of new providers.

   This will be achieved through:
   
   • Completion of the Standards Review Project and the creation of an overarching framework of standards
   
   • Additional promotion of the BAC brand to assist providers’ marketing and competitive advantage
   
   • Further activities focused on quality enhancement or best practice support for providers
   
   • The addition of a liaison scheme
   
   • The addition of subject level accreditation/micro credentials scheme
   
   • Providing support/learning/training to providers that wish to enhance their engagement and support of students.

2. BAC will continue to **grow and diversify**, especially global and European activities.

   This will be achieved by:
   
   • Building on successful inspections overseas, e.g. Nepal, developing regional activities and potential working with ministries through free and paid projects
   
   • Developing a portfolio of activities to promote BAC
   
   • Actively engaging with ENQA, e.g. chairing the ENQA working group on micro credentials
   
   • Development of a seed funding opportunity for providers: small grants for teaching and learning initiatives with the proviso of sharing the results with the wider community.
BAC will actively engage in the development of its ethical responsibilities.

This will be achieved through:

• A review of our investments
• A review of our policies and working practices
• Calculating our carbon footprint and taking steps towards zero carbon emissions
• Implementing ways in which we can lead the promotion of environmental responsibility and by being open about our sustainable development goals
BAC will continue to develop good practice in its integrated use of the data and information collected from BAC inspections and other work.

This will be achieved by:

- The purchase and use of a CRM system and the development of more detailed financial information to make inspection and accreditation fees more transparent
- Moving to collect reports for inspections through Sharepoint and having all information uploaded to an online portal
- Using thematic reports to influence the direction for the development of inspection methodologies as well as themes for enhancement workshops
- Conducting governance reviews as endorsed by Charities Good Practice and in preparation for increased work with potential growth of activities.
- Investigating the possibility of using governance software for managing the work of the Council and committees.

BAC will continue to promote and be active in the quality assurance community.

This will be achieved through:

- Webinar series, publications, facilitated workshops, and other enhancement activities
- Stakeholder events
- The development of an online learning platform
- The development of our own micro credentials
- Attendance and contribution of papers and presentations at conferences
- Participation in working groups and regulatory meetings (involving the government as appropriate)
1. Developing and reinforcing BAC strategic directions
2. Revising the Standards Framework to apply for all BAC schemes
3. Unifying Schemes under the revised Standards Framework
4. Strengthening the BAC community through national, European and international initiatives.

Governance
5. Reviewing and maintaining of Committees
   - Council
   - Standing Committee
   - Audit Committee
   - Accreditation Committee

Inspections
6. Maintaining and digitalising processes
7. Scheme reviews and thematic reviews

Operations
8. Re-evaluating job posts and responsibilities
9. Annual audit of financial accounting
10. Securing premises including H&S