



# Strategic Plan 2019-2022

# The British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher Education

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2019 - 2022

### Foreword by the Chair

This is the British Accreditation Council's second strategic plan - and is being published now as an **interim version** given the degree of change in the UK's regulatory environment; the uncertainties surrounding Brexit; and the opportunity provided by arrival of a new Chief Executive (currently under recruitment) to succeed Paul Fear who has so successfully led the organisation over the last nearly five years.

Our aim is to review, refresh and update the strategy by the end of this year but our key priorities are unlikely to change:

- To continue to provide an assurance of quality for students (including trainees and professionals) on the widest range of academic, vocational and often specialist programmes, in the UK and at UK-linked institutions around the world.
- To assist those institutions to promote themselves, with the help of the BAC brand, which distinguishes them from others who have not been subject to such careful inspection: and
- To contribute, nationally and internationally, to debates on quality and good practice.

As you will see BAC now accredits 226 institutions in 20 countries around the world, 37 offer primarily higher education but additionally we offer and indeed provide a distinctive service to some 187 institutions (mainly in the UK) who offer courses at other levels and extensively short courses in a host of subject areas.

In the UK accreditation by BAC entitles institutions to 'sponsor' students for what are known as 'Short-Term Student Visas' (SVS) - an integral and essential part of the UK's immigration system and this formal recognition by the UK government is something which we and our accredited institutions much value.

But it is important to remember that our schemes are, unlike some others in the UK and many others in other parts of the world, entirely voluntary and that in the final analysis institutions look to and value our accreditation as a benchmark of quality, a way of helping to maintain and improve standards and a sign of their commitment to quality and value for all those they serve.

Our schemes therefore fulfil a hugely important purpose and so can I acknowledge and thank all those who contribute so essentially to this endeavour - my fellow trustees who contribute (again on a completely voluntary basis) quite remarkable experience and expertise, those who serve on our accreditation committees, our staff and our inspectorate who together, as one community, do so much to ensure our governance is effective, our systems efficient and our standards and judgements rigorous, fair, transparent, recognised and respected.

**Dominic Scott OBE**  
**June 2019**

Interim

## Background

The British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher Education (BAC) was founded in 1984 with the assistance of the British Government to accredit independent Further and Higher Education institutions.

BAC's role has changed over the years adapting to regulatory changes so that today BAC fulfils a different function to that when it was first started. In the UK BAC has a key role in accrediting education and training providers through its accreditation activities as well as supporting the Short -Term Study Visa regulatory framework.

Internationally, BAC continues to see increasing demand for its accreditation activities across the spectrum of education and training activity.

As a charitable institution BAC has a specific responsibility to meet its Charitable Objects;

To 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.

BAC is well placed to meet the responsibilities of our Charitable Objects with a highly experienced inspecting body, a knowledgeable and flexible staff and the financial resources necessary to support our work.

## The British Accreditation Council's Vision

BAC wishes to promote strong, high quality independent higher and further education and training. It believes that the accreditation of institutions against standards based on the best current UK practice can contribute to that aim. BAC envisages itself as being a leading practitioner in the provision of internationally recognised accreditation and related consultancy services in the field of higher and further education and training.

## The British Accreditation Council's Mission

BAC's aim is to provide globally respected and rigorous inspection-based accreditation to enhance the standards and quality of independent further and higher education and training providers. It also offers a bespoke consultancy service. BAC also aims to be recognised by UK and overseas governments as an influential voice on standards and quality for the independent education sector.

As well as providing clear guidance to prospective students, we want to encourage continuing improvement in the general standard and quality of independent further and higher education in the UK and internationally.

While the BAC is not a membership organisation, and indeed must maintain an objective distance from institutions to preserve the value of our accreditation, we are nevertheless dedicated to helping colleges in their efforts for continual improvement.

# The British Accreditation Council's Values

## **Trust**

We will act in a way that invokes trust and confidence of all internal and external stakeholders. We will offer informed advice, guidance and support to students and colleges, along with other individuals that have expressed an interest in the independent education sector

## **Respect**

We will seek to remain a well-respected and trusted organisation by ensuring high standards of performance throughout our inspection, accreditation and consultancy work

## **Integrity**

We will be objective, honest and transparent in our provision of quality services to our customers and stakeholders

## **Accountability**

We will take full responsibility for all of our employees, systems procedures and processes, taking prompt and appropriate action to resolve queries or problems that may affect our customer service and care

## **Transparency**

We are open and transparent about the work we do and how we do it. In our communications with customers we will explain clearly and authoritatively our standards and requirements in an open and honest manner.

## **Ethical**

We will ensure that within our professional relationships we act honestly and fairly. We will respect the dignity, diversity and rights of individuals and groups of people we associate with

# The Role of the British Accreditation Council

A range of stakeholders' benefit from the work of BAC including:

**Students** – BAC helps students to make an informed choice about where to study. The BAC approach of published standards, rigorous inspection and the sharing of good practice encourages institutions to improve their quality, further enhancing students' learning opportunities and experience.

**Accredited Institutions** – Accredited institutions benefit from the candid information about themselves that BAC accreditation gives them. It provides leaders with a clear insight into the working of their institution. BAC encourages the sharing of good practice amongst accredited institutions so disseminating new ideas, raising standards and encouraging collaboration. The BAC quality mark is valuable for attracting students and can put institutions at a competitive advantage.

**Partner Institutions** – Institutions which have met and maintain BAC standards are attractive to other institutions as potential partners because of the management systems that will be in place and the openness that the published inspection reports provide. This encourages confidence in the institution and supports inter-institutional co-operation.

**Governments, employers and regulators** – BAC accreditation acts as an authoritative mark of quality for governments, regulators and buyers of educational provision. BAC accreditation reduces risk for governments and increases transparency and institutional accountability.

**Professional Bodies** – BAC accreditation reduces risks of association and membership for professional organisations through the transparency of the accreditation process.

**Capacity Building** - BAC works with governments and NGO's directly to build quality assurance capacity and our work as an institutional accreditation organisations develops and sustains providers quality assurance capacities.

# The Strategic Plan 2015-18

The 2015 – 2018 Strategic Plan set out several objectives that guided decision making and the allocation of resources over the three-year time period.

## How successful were we in meeting our 2015-2018 objectives?

By October 2018 BAC wanted to ....	Met?
Become the first-choice independent institutional accreditor in its target markets	Within the UK, as measured by the number of accredited institutions – yes. BAC is the largest accreditation organisation in our target market sector.
Be seen as a strategic and reliable partner by relevant UK governmental and statutory bodies	BAC continues to fulfill a statutory role with the UK in regard to the supervision of institutions who wish to enroll international students under the Short-Term Study Visa route.
Have strengthened its position as a leading international accreditor of further and higher education institutions	Yes. BAC now accredits providers across 20 countries. As part of our ongoing internal quality assurance and to support international quality assurance we are full members of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), INQAAHE (the International Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and we are listed on EQAR (The European Quality Assurance Register).
Have achieved a 22% increase in the number of accredited institutions	No. We have a relatively stable number of accredited institutions at around 230. Within the UK we accredit approximately 200 providers. Internationally, we are steadily expanding.
Have maintained financial breakeven across all operational activities	Over the three-year period covered by plan BAC posted one year of surplus with two years of operating deficit arising from investment in expanding the operational capacity of the organisation.
Have increased annual revenue by 35% and invest any surplus revenue in support of the objectives of BAC	BAC revenue increased by 39.5% over the period covered by the Strategic Plan.
Have maintained an appropriate financial reserve	Yes. BAC holds significant reserves, exceeding minimum requirements. BAC is well placed to continue to invest in its quality assurance activities in order to support the BAC Charitable Objectives.

## Over the three-year period of the plan BAC made significant progress in other areas:

Description	Detail
Enhancing the value of accreditation for stakeholders	BAC has undertaken significant investment to support organisations communicate what BAC accreditation means. This has enabled those organisations that have used the materials to highlight the benefits of accreditation in terms of transparency and the rigour of their internal quality assurance mechanism. This increases confidence amongst accredited institutions stakeholders.
Internal Quality Assurance	<p>A great deal of effort and time has been, and continues to be invested, in our internal quality assurance procedures. These include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A redrafting of the Inspectors Handbook. Undertaken with a team of BAC inspectors and involving two working meetings held in two locations to allow the inspectorate to have their input into drafting</li> <li>- Monitoring inspections – BAC now conducts regular monitoring inspections designed to support the BAC inspectorate in the interpretation and application of BAC standards and processes and to share good practice</li> <li>- Spot check inspections – we now have a program of spot check (unannounced or very short notice) inspections of randomly chosen providers</li> <li>- Report editing – reports now undergo a significantly enhanced editing process designed to support consistency in the application of standards and language.</li> <li>- Additional support to the Accreditation Committee in their deliberations helping to ensure the consistent application and interpretation of BAC accreditation standards</li> <li>- Due diligence – we have enhanced our due diligence processes to identify applications at an early stage that require extra support and advice before being considered for accreditation</li> <li>- Scheme reviews – we are reviewing all BAC accreditation schemes to reflect best practice and retain their relevance. We are doing this through Stakeholder Groups. These bring together experienced practitioners from industry, quality assurance experts and BAC staff to review and update our accreditation schemes.</li> </ul>
Governance Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BAC undertook a review of its governance structure leading to a significant restructuring to better reflect current best practice and strengthen oversight.</li> </ul>



# Strategic Plan Target Outcomes 2019-2022

BAC will:

- promote the value of accreditation to all stakeholders
- work to achieve its Charitable Objects across a wide range of education sectors by adopting strategies that reduce cost barriers to gaining BAC accreditation
- expand its accreditation activities for the benefit of stakeholders in the UK and internationally
- continue to review and develop its quality standards to ensure they remain in the forefront of UK and international quality assurance development
- participate in internal quality assurance fora to contribute to the development and sharing of good practice

# Priorities and Developments - UK

The British Accreditation Council is firmly rooted in the accreditation of UK-based independent education institutions.

## Key Objectives

- To maintain BAC's market share
- To continue to raise the profile of the BAC at governmental and institutional level
- To ensure that BAC can meet the rapidly changing needs of Professional, Vocational, Further and Higher Education institutions as the regulatory and operational environment evolves
- To maintain the levels of transparency, integrity and efficacy of UK accreditation activity

## Action Plan for Achieving these Objectives

We will

- ❖ work with UK training providers to offer accreditation services which meet their changing and developing needs
- ❖ continue to develop materials to support the communication of the benefits of accreditation to all stakeholders
- ❖ involve stakeholders in the review and development of BAC UK based accreditation schemes
- ❖ work actively with governmental and non-governmental organisations to support and promote good academic governance and transparency in the UK training and education sector
- ❖ working with our stakeholders, we will continue to develop our internal quality assurance procedures to support the efficacy of BAC accreditation

## Measuring our Achievement

By 2022 BAC will know it is achieving these objectives because:

- the number of UK accredited institutions will be maintained or increased compared to 2019
- BAC will have participated in a range of fora and be represented in discussions and consultations at a national level
- revenue from UK accreditation and related services will continue to significantly contribute to the running costs of BAC
- BAC will have completed a review of its UK based accreditation schemes in conjunction with its stakeholders
- BAC will regularly review, update and report on its internal quality assurance processes

## Priorities and Developments – International

The BAC currently accredits institutions in more than 20 countries and has supported the development of sovereign accreditation services in four countries.

International demand for internationally-recognised accreditation services is increasing as students, parents, institutions and governments demand greater and more reliable information and improved standards of education. The rapid development of transnational education is likely to support this trend.

BAC is one of two UK-based institutions which has the international recognition necessary to participate in the quality assurance of transnational education.

### Key Objectives

- to increase the number of international institutions holding BAC accreditation
- to identify and work with, international institutions in order to develop accreditation and related activities
- to raise the international profile of BAC amongst students and other key stakeholders
- To maintain the levels of transparency, integrity and efficacy of our international accreditation activity

### Action Plan for Achieving our Objectives

We will

- ❖ develop communication channels to keep BAC accredited institutions abreast of new developments and informed of international education trends
- ❖ develop links and, where appropriate, partnerships with international quality assurance and accreditation associations
- ❖ engage actively in broadcasting the benefits of accreditation to international vocational, further and higher education institutions, students and other stakeholders
- ❖ actively seek appropriate opportunities for the accreditation of individual institutions overseas
- ❖ actively promote the value of accreditation to all stakeholders including students
- ❖ seek opportunities to build on the experience gained from our international consultancy gained from advising and supporting national governments

### Measuring our Achievement

By 2022 BAC will know it is achieving these objectives because;

- there will be a substantial increase in the number of institutions seeking BAC accreditation
- revenue generated by international institution accreditation will match income generated from UK accreditation activities
- BAC will have developed communication channels to better serve and support its international activities
- BAC will have completed a review of its international accreditation schemes in conjunction with our stakeholders