



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

RAISING STANDARDS IN THE  
GLOBAL EDUCATION MARKET

# BAC 2021–2026 Strategy



# Foreword by the Chair

When we published our last strategic plan in June 2019, no-one could have predicted the tsunami of challenges that the sector, our accredited institutions and BAC would face. Some had to reduce their activities or adapt, sometimes quite radically. Others have had to pause their activities entirely. But all of us have had to re-think our ways of working and how we can continue to provide the best possible service to our clients and customers.

Throughout this time, our top priority has been to give whatever support we could to enable providers to continue their activities where possible during what we all hope will be or will have been only a temporary period.

We have also used the time to ask some fundamental questions and to develop, over the last six months, this new strategic plan as a vision for the future and road map of how we see BAC developing over the next five years, the ways in which we can further strengthen the sense of community between our accredited providers and the support we can provide to them as they rebuild and recover.

Our fundamental aims and key priorities, however, remain the same:

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

As you will see, BAC now accredits 205 institutions in 21 countries around the world. Thirty-nine of them primarily offer higher education but we also offer and provide a distinctive service to some 166 institutions (mainly in the UK) who offer courses at other levels and short courses in a host of subject areas.

In the UK, accreditation by BAC entitles international students on visitor visas to study at our accredited institutions – 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 value greatly.

It is important to remember that our schemes are, unlike some others in the UK and in other parts of the world, entirely voluntary. In addition, 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 an important purpose. So can I acknowledge and thank all those who were essential 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 a 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**  
February 2022

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# 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 today, BAC fulfils a different function to the one it did when it was first started. In the UK, BAC has a key role in accrediting education and training providers through its accreditation activities and supporting the regulatory framework of short-term study visas. It also offers a bespoke consultancy service.

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

As a charitable institution, BAC has a responsibility to meet its charitable objects; to provide a system of accreditation for educational and training institutions in order to promote public confidence in such institutions and their programmes of study; and to assist 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.

With a highly experienced inspecting body, a knowledgeable and flexible staff and the financial resources necessary to support its work, BAC is well placed to meet the responsibilities of its charitable objects.

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# Vision

BAC wishes to promote strong, high-quality independent higher and further education and training. It is our belief that the accreditation of institutions against standards based on the best current UK practice can contribute to that aim. BAC sees 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.

# Mission

BAC aims to provide globally respected and rigorous inspection-based accreditation to enhance the standards and quality of independent further and higher education and training providers. BAC also aims to be recognised by the UK and overseas governments as an influential voice on standards and quality for the independent education sector.

In addition to providing clear guidance to prospective students, we want to encourage continuous improvement in the general standard and quality of independent further and higher education in the UK and internationally.

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



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# Values

## Trust

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

## Respect

We will strive 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 when providing 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 communication with customers we will clearly and authoritatively explain our standards and requirements in an open and honest manner.

## Ethical

We will ensure that we act honestly and fairly within our professional relationships. We will respect the dignity, diversity and rights of individuals and groups of people that 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, which further enhances 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 way their institutions work. BAC encourages the sharing of good practice amongst accredited institutions, therefore 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 that have met and maintained BAC standards are attractive to other institutions as potential partners because of the management systems that will be in place and the transparency that the published inspection reports provide. This encourages confidence in the institution and supports inter-institutional cooperation.

**Governments, Employers and Regulators** – BAC accreditation acts as an authoritative mark of quality for governments, regulators and buyers of educational provision. BAC accreditation reduces the risks that governments face and increases transparency and institutional accountability.

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

**Capacity Building** – BAC works directly with governments and NGOs to build quality assurance capacity, and our work as an institutional accreditation organisation develops and sustains the providers' quality assurance capacities.

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# Strategy and objectives 2019–2021

## Challenges

Two years ago, no one could have foreseen the crisis ahead and the effect subsequent national lockdowns would have on organisations. The global coronavirus pandemic dictated how many organisations developed. Providers have either been unable to continue operating, have had to pause operations or have seen a reduced number of enrolments. Providers who were able to move to online or blended delivery wondered how they could assure the quality of these services. Providers were looking for a sustainable way to continue operations.

For BAC, the effect of the pandemic included BAC staff working from home from March 2020, in line with government guidance. This meant some project plans such as the review of the BAC standards slowed and others such as online ways of working saw an increase in speed of development.



## Key achievements

Chief Executive Dr Janet Bohrer joined BAC in October 2019. During her first two years at BAC she developed and worked within three strategic priorities:

**Priority 1:** To develop our ways of working

**Priority 2:** To develop how we engage others, particularly digitally

**Priority 3:** To develop our work in Europe and internationally

In line with these strategic priorities, BAC developed and achieved a number of objectives during this period:

- To support institutions, BAC **adapted the dormancy procedures** for accredited providers. We did this in recognition of the value of BAC accreditation in helping providers re-start their operations as soon as possible.
- Having moved inspections online, we have learnt a lot and have recognised the significant benefits of the online approach. As of November 2021, BAC **introduced a hybrid approach to inspections** involving the use of both online and onsite inspection activities.
- **The BAC community was strengthened** through the 2021 BAC webinar series, which attracted over 120 delegates, and a series of free facilitated workshops. These were offered to providers between October 2020 and June 2021, in support of a quality assurance enhancement agenda.
- 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.
- **The first BAC Annual Report was designed and circulated** with the annual invoice requests for accreditation fees, with plans to continue this publication.
- BAC staff and Council members attended online quality assurance events to support their development and **wider engagement in the quality assurance debates**.
- 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.
- **Flexible working** is now embedded within BAC culture, and Council and committee meetings are now online or hybrid events. New office premises were sourced at Wax Chandlers Hall, London.

We are now more aware than ever of the need to further enhance the value we provide to institutions and to develop and reinforce BAC's strategic direction.



# Strategic plan 2021–2026

The development of the strategic plan has been influenced by three elements of sound business practice: [Environmental, Societal and Governance](#).

The strategic direction of BAC can be summarised through the following five strategic pillars:

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





## 4

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.

## 5

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)



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