

Abls Accreditation

The Accreditation Body for Language Services



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ABLS ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK 2011 © ABLs 2011

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The Accreditation Body for Language Services

About ABLS

The Accreditation Body for Language Services Ltd (ABLS Accreditation, referred to as ABLS in this document) established in 1993, believes that all students, in whichever way they study English, should be guaranteed a safe and effective learning environment. It exists to ensure through its inspections that high standards of teaching and training, as well as the requisite levels of additional and necessary support, are provided for the benefit and well-being of students.

ABLS recognises that English is taught in a wide variety of contexts and has always stood for diversity and choice. ABLS aims to provide an accreditation service which allows all providers of private and independently run English language services equal access to an external quality assurance system which is both rigorous and fair. ABLS does not extend its accreditation service to providers in receipt of public funding.

ABLS is an independent limited company which undertakes initial and repeat inspections of English language training and teacher-training providers to ensure that stringent quality assurance criteria (as defined in this document) and UK legal requirements are adhered to.

To guarantee equality for all providers, ABLS

- provides an independent inspection service.
- provides an inspection service for a diverse range of organisations such as those providing home-language tuition, study and cultural holidays and seasonal language programmes in addition to all year round language schools and teacher-training organisations.
- employs qualified and experienced inspectors.
- constantly reviews its inspection criteria.
- implements a programme of four-yearly inspections to ensure that the quality assurance criteria are strictly adhered to.

The aims of accreditation

The purposes of accreditation are:

- Standards monitoring of language providers to ensure the standard of provision to students is satisfactory.
- Compliance monitoring to ensure that organisations are abiding by the requirements of UK law and regulations as well as by ABLS regulations and requirements.
- A demonstration of the organisation's commitment to quality assurance and to professional development in all areas.
- By definition, a mark of quality of that organisation that is universally recognised by government agencies, industry agents and the market.

Achieving accreditation

The award of accreditation is dependent upon an ethos of meeting standards and of being compliance aware, as well as meeting the minimum standards within each of the areas outlined in Section 4.

Central to these requirements is a clear ethos of commitment to quality provision and this must be demonstrated in relation to the following:

- Management provision is organised for, and operates to, the benefit of the students.
- The learning environment is appropriate to the needs of the student and reflects a commitment to the learning activity. This includes the standard of facilities, equipment and staffing levels.
- Support to the teaching staff is professional, appropriate to the needs of that teacher and focussed on the need to provide a positive and effective learning experience for the student.
- Teachers are appropriately qualified and reveal compatibility and competence with regard to the level of the class they are teaching. This will be readily observable.
- Students are offered the opportunity and encouraged to take qualifications
- Basic Health and Safety rules are met, guaranteeing the well-being of the students.
- Accommodation arrangements (where provided) are managed and monitored effectively.
- Pastoral and welfare provision is in place and is known to the students.
- Legal requirements have been identified and met, allowing students to have confidence in the integrity of the organisation.

Accreditation is not awarded when:

- Significant weaknesses appear during an inspection with regard to the areas noted above.

- Public literature/statements do not match the observations or deliberations of the visiting inspector.
- Recommendations from a previous inspection have not been acted upon or there has not been an attempt to meet them and/or the provider has failed to inform ABLs of the progress being made in meeting recommendations within any given timeframe.
- A history of complaints/appeals against the organisation has presented itself.
- Allegations of serious misdemeanours, accountable to the organisation and/or its staff, have been investigated and upheld.
- Insufficient or unsatisfactory documentary evidence/records are kept.
- Agreement to undergo inspection within 3 months of the due date is not forthcoming from the organisation concerned (at the discretion of the Chief Inspector).
- There is evidence that a provider has acted in a manner that brings ABLs into disrepute.

Applying for inspection

Providers seeking accreditation

ABLS encourages providers who plan to submit an inspection application to contact the administration team. The purpose of this is to help the provider to decide whether it is appropriate to make the application at that time and to discuss the accreditation process.

It is also an opportunity to be made aware of what action it needs to take to maximise its prospects of being able to demonstrate compliance with the inspection criteria.

Eligibility of providers

Only organisations providing English language services will be considered for inspection. It is a requirement that tuition fees will be charged to the learner for all courses to be assessed during inspection. ABLS cannot inspect providers receiving funding or from within the state sector.

It would be normal for a provider to have been offering the courses to be assessed for a minimum of one year before applying for inspection. If an exception is made to this rule all conditions set by ABLS must be strictly adhered to and in the event of this not being the case accreditation can be withdrawn with immediate effect. The decision to carry out an inspection or not is at the discretion of the Chief Inspector.

Scope of accreditation

When accreditation is granted, it will only relate to those premises and products assessed during the inspection.

Where providers operate from:

- one main administration site with permanent additional centres all sites will be subject to inspection.
- one main administration site with temporary seasonal centres, these will be inspected using appropriate sampling methodologies.

If an organisation has more than one centre bearing the same name each centre will be subject to a separate inspection. Accreditation is not transferable.

Accreditation will only be extended to the courses and services provided during inspection. Any significant changes to the course profile or range of services must be reported to ABLS and may result in a re-inspection at cost to the provider.

New applications

When the provider feels that it is ready to be inspected, the ABLS Administrator should be contacted and an application to be accredited form should be submitted with the registration and administration fee, as published on the website. This amount is non-refundable in all cases. ABLS will check the application and contact the provider should additional information be required. In the case of a provider operating from one site it may be possible for two inspectors to conduct the inspection on one day. ABLS will assess the number of days that should be allocated for the inspection and contact the school in advance of raising an invoice. The full amount payable for the inspection must be paid 28 days before the agreed inspection date or immediately if for any reason the date of an inspection is agreed less than 28 days before the agreed date. It is normally possible to arrange for the first inspection of a provider (the initial inspection) within six to eight weeks of receipt of a completed application.

Accommodation services

Where a provider organises and/or takes payment for home-stay accommodation (defined as a place of student residence where tuition does not occur) this will also be inspected using appropriate sampling methodologies regardless of the ages of the students.

Other accommodation services will be inspected in the same manner.

Home language tuition

Where an organisation provides home language tuition (defined as a place of student residence where tuition does occur) lesson observation will occur in addition to the normal procedure for inspecting home-stay accommodation. ABLS will expect to have full access to

the main administrative site and to carry out a rigorous sampling of the provision. Due to the nature of this provision it would be unusual for an inspection to be conducted on one day only.

In-company provision

In-company provision of language services will be inspected in the same manner as that available at the organisation's own premises.

Change of ownership, premises and key personnel

All providers are required to inform ABLS immediately of any change in ownership, premises and key personnel; accreditation is not automatically extended to a business under new ownership or in new premises. In such cases ABLS will re-inspect, at the provider's cost, before accreditation is re-confirmed.

Existing accredited providers

ABLS will notify the provider within three months of the expiry date of the accreditation period that a re-inspection is required. ABLS aims to find a mutually convenient time for the inspection, giving the organisation a minimum of four weeks' notice.

Conduct of the inspection

The length of the inspection is determined by the size of the school. The minimum duration of an inspection is one day with normally the attendance of two inspectors. However, depending upon size, complexity or other circumstances, ABLS may, at its discretion, increase the number of inspectors/length of the inspection visit.

A minimum of three weeks prior to the inspection ABLS administration must receive the documents, materials and information listed below. This information is essential in enabling the inspector to get to know as much as possible about the provider before the day of the inspection and to assist in the planning of the inspection programme.

Failure to provide all this information by the deadline may lead to an extension or cancellation of the inspection at the provider's cost.

Prior to the inspection the lead inspector assigned to the particular organisation will contact the provider to make introductions and discuss the plan for the visit.

List of pre-inspection materials

- A copy of all publicity material and fees
- Website address
- Other relevant brochures

- A copy of all forms sent out to students
- A copy of all application forms
- All welfare documentation e.g. student handbook
- A copy of all placement tests used
- A copy of the complaints procedures
- A copy of the equal opportunity policy

- Information on the different types of accommodation provided, including addresses
- A list of all homestay / home tuition providers used by the school in the past year
- Copies of any contracts with accommodation providers (including homestay and home tuition)

- Timetable of courses during the week of inspection
- Timetable of courses on the day of inspection (including staff names and room numbers where possible). If there are any changes to this list on the day of inspection, an updated list should be given to the inspector on arrival.

- Any other documents that provide an insight into the running of the organisation.

Providers should supply a profile of all managerial and administrative staff detailing :

- Name
- Position
- Areas of responsibility
- Start date with organisation
- Qualifications
- Experience

Providers should supply a profile of all academic staff who have worked for the organisation in the last year detailing :

- Name
- Position
- Start date with organisation
- Qualifications
- Experience
- Any notes detailing unique working patterns

If any academic staff member does not have TEFL/TESOL qualifications, a written rationale for employment must be provided for each staff member. This justification is a critical aspect of the assessment of academic standards and should be completed as extensively as possible.

Nature of inspection

The lead inspector will agree a timetable for the inspection with the provider in advance and will include the following activities :

- a meeting with the person in overall charge of the management of the organisation
- a meeting with the Academic Manager
- a meeting with the person responsible for health and safety issues
- a meeting with the person responsible for student welfare
- a meeting with a representative group of students
- a meeting with the academic staff
- a tour of the premises
- a visit to a representative selection of the accommodation offered
- observation of a representative selection of classes
- a final feedback meeting with the management.

Prior to inspection, the organisation should collate the following documents for assessment by the inspector/s:

- Licences e.g. ERA, CLA, NLA
- Records of fire escape practices
- Any fire authority documentation
- Planning permission (where appropriate)
- Accident / Incident Book
- Employer's Public Liability Insurance certificate
- Returns to Companies House
- Data Protection registration
- Evidence of National Insurance and PAYE payments
- Evidence of the monitoring of student attendance and that systems in place for informing UKBA of non-attending visa national students
- Risk assessments for all premises and activities

- Contracts or letters of appointment for all staff
- CVs for all staff
- Qualifications for all staff (or rationales where necessary)
- Job descriptions and all handbooks and policies relating to staff
- CRB checks & ISA policy documents

- Copies of student work
- Student retention data
- Records of student attainment
- Copies of syllabus and work records
- All academic management records (observations, testing, etc)

- Records of external examination results
- A directory of resources and equipment

- All lessons require lesson plans and copies of all materials provided to students to be made available for each inspector

- All accommodation records, policies and contracts

Easy access to these documents will help to make the inspection an efficient process and afford the inspector/s a more accurate perspective of the organisation. Other documentation and material may be offered for inspection by the organisation.

It is important to note that the inspector/s may request:

- to hold meetings with any of the organisation's staff or relevant individuals
- to see any other document or piece of information relevant to the organisation's activities
- to change the inspection timetable during the day for the purposes of efficiency and to support the inspection's validity

The inspector/s will provide an estimate of expenses in advance of the inspection. Following inspection, ABLS will invoice the provider for these expenses.

The inspection report and outcomes

There are four possible outcomes to an inspection.

1. ABLS may award accreditation following publication of the report.
2. Accreditation may be deferred until the provider has actioned all the mandatory points required in the report within the given timeframe.
3. A follow-up inspection, at the provider's cost, may be required to allow for a period to address significant failure to meet criteria or to (follow-up on) assess any provision which the provider was unable to demonstrate satisfactorily on first inspection. ABLS will notify the provider in advance as to whether this follow-up inspection will be conducted by one or more inspectors.
4. Accreditation may be refused and no further inspection would be considered for a minimum of one year.

Following the inspection, the inspector completes a written report which is moderated by a second inspector. After this stage is completed, the report is reviewed and signed off by the Chief Inspector and sent to an appointed accreditor/s drawn from the voting members of the Management Committee. Assigned accreditors will have no vested interest in the inspection result.

The recommendation is considered and the decision regarding accreditation is then confirmed to the ABLS Administrator who handles the final stages of the process and liaises with the provider.

ABLS aims where possible to make the results of an inspection available to the provider concerned between six to eight weeks after the inspection has taken place. ABLS has a policy of notifying providers of results earlier wherever possible.

The initial report is forwarded to the school with a letter outlining accreditation status. In the event of there being mandatory action points, evidence regarding these should be returned to the Administrator in all cases. The evidence is then sent to the lead inspector to be checked. Once all the evidence has been accepted by the lead inspector the report is bound, signed and

stamped and a top copy with covering letter sent to the school.

In the case of a new provider, the Administrator will forward a pro-rata invoice for accreditation fees together with an annual declaration and return to be completed and returned to the office. The provider is then sent a copy of the ABLS Accreditation logo to be used on all promotional material.

The Administrator will inform the UKBA of the outcome of the inspection.

The decision on accreditation

The inspector/s will make a recommendation in the report as to whether :

- accreditation should be awarded (outcome 1),
- the accreditation decision is deferred (outcome 2) and in some cases a follow-up inspection carried out (outcome 3)
- accreditation is refused (outcome 4)

In light of the contents of the report and after discussions with the inspector/s and moderator, the Chief Inspector will make the final recommendation regarding all outcomes.

It is the experience of ABLS that it is rare for providers to achieve unequivocal accreditation.

Deferred accreditation can indicate that although overall general provision is satisfactory, the provider is not fully meeting the minimum requirements in all seven criteria and enables the provider to address the mandatory action points contained in the report in the knowledge that should these be addressed satisfactorily by the set deadlines, accreditation will be awarded. It should be noted that in some cases this stage may also require a follow-up inspection, as described in outcome 3, before a final decision can be reached.

Accreditation is refused when the overall general provision is not satisfactory, a significant number of the minimum requirements are not being met and it is the opinion of the inspector/s that a period of deferral would not be sufficient for the provider to rectify the identified deficiencies and weaknesses.

New accreditation applications

If the first inspection (the initial inspection) is successful, accreditation will normally be granted for a one year period only. The provider will then be subject to a second full inspection one year later or at a time indicated by ABLS.

If a provider has undergone the initial first inspection at a time of year when student numbers are low the inspectorate may instruct that the second full inspection takes place when student numbers are predicted to be higher.

It is important for the new provider to understand that the second inspection follows the full-inspection format and the inspection may result in further mandatory action points. Deadlines will be given for the meeting of these requirements and a follow-up visit, at the provider's cost, may be necessary to confirm that all weaknesses have been addressed. If the provider fails to perform during this re-inspection, accreditation can be immediately withdrawn.

Following a satisfactory outcome to the second full inspection, ABLS will normally implement a four-yearly inspection cycle to ensure that the standards and compliance criteria are maintained.

Existing accredited providers

Following a successful outcome to the second full inspection the provider will normally be placed on a four yearly cycle. Please refer to the following section with regard to 'Maintaining accreditation'.

The ABLS accreditation marque

Following confirmation from the ABLS Administrator that unconditional accreditation has been approved, a provider offering EFL courses may display the marque below in its electronic and print marketing:



Specialist providers

ABLS may, at its discretion, agree to inspect other organisations offering a language provision not referred to in this document.

A specialist provider will be assessed against the criteria outlined in this document. In the event of an inspection being successful the provider will be entitled to display a variation of the ABLS logo which clarifies with regard to the specialist course being offered. Accreditation will only apply to the provision inspected.

An existing accreditation is not transferable to any other provision until a successful full-inspection has been conducted. In line with the ABLS terms and conditions, if a provider plans to offer any other provision, the Administrator must be immediately informed.

Maintaining accreditation

The achievement of accreditation is an important stage in maintaining standards within the industry. However, ABLS has a duty to ensure that standards are maintained throughout the period of accreditation.

To this end, all accredited providers are required to participate in an ongoing monitoring process in order to retain their accredited status and failure to comply fully could lead to loss of accreditation.

There are four key monitoring methods :

1. Monitoring of compliance with requirements set out in inspection reports. Requirements are expressed as 'mandatory' and 'advisory' action points.

Mandatory action points are concerned with issues which are central to the accreditation process and which must be addressed if the organisation is to achieve accreditation

Advisory action points identify issues that the organisation should consider if it is to demonstrate good practice (although no evidence is required to meet accreditation outcomes)

2. Interim visits : ABLS carries out at least one interim visit during the four-year inspection period. The provider will be notified of these visits and a mutually convenient date arranged in consultation with the provider.

The aim of these visits is to monitor that the provider is maintaining compliance with the accreditation criteria requirements. The inspection will be organised in the same manner as any other inspection except no documentary evidence need be provided prior to the inspection day. ABLS will determine the number of inspectors to be employed. The inspector/s will focus on key areas of provision but will particularly assess legal requirements, welfare and any areas of concern identified in the previous inspection. The inspector will contact the school to agree a timetable and may need some operational information to do so. Documentation requests may be made during the inspection to assist in an accurate assessment of the organisation. The cost of interim visits will be covered by the annual fees paid by the provider to ABLS.

3. Unannounced visits : ABLS reserves the right to make unannounced visits to any provider as deemed necessary at no cost to the provider. Such visits will sometimes be made following complaints or appeals received by ABLS about the individual provider. If the complaint is upheld then the provider will be responsible for all costs of the unannounced visit and any subsequent follow-up inspection.

4. Annual declaration and return : all accredited providers are required to complete an annual declaration and return which includes data on the number of students enrolled, retention and achievement to the date of the return. This provides ABLS with up-to-date information about the organisation, its programmes, its staff and the student body. Failure to submit an annual declaration and return may result in the suspension or withdrawal of accreditation.

The annual declaration requires the provider to confirm that it is complying with all current statutory and legal requirements relevant to the provision of its services are being complied with and that all the requirements set out by ABLS are being met.

The annual return requires organisations to provide information under the following headings and specifically to highlight any changes which have occurred since the last inspection or the submission of the last return:

- Organisation details
- Ownership and management
- Premises
- Staffing and key personnel
- Programmes offered
- Student numbers including details of country of origin, age, visa status
- Student retention
- Student progression
- Examination results
- Provision for students with disabilities
- Evidence of compliance with new or amended legislation

It should be noted, however, that it is obligatory for the provider to immediately notify ABLS in writing of any significant changes or potential changes as listed above.

Suspension, withdrawal, review of accreditation

Accreditation may be suspended, withdrawn or put under review if:

- serious complaints or appeals against the provider are upheld following investigation by ABLS
- serious weaknesses are identified at inspection

For example:

- where there is evidence of an accredited organisation assisting in the illegal entry of immigrants.
- where all of the 'observed' teaching is poor
- where there is evidence that accommodation is not satisfactory and the provider refuses to take action.
- mandatory action points have not been completed by the stated deadlines or other conditions set by ABLS have not been met
- promotional materials are found to be misleading
- the annual declaration and return are not completed and submitted
- annual ABLS fees or any other payments due to ABLS are not received
- the provider has brought ABLS into disrepute

Accreditation under review

The accreditation status of a provider may be put under review, normally for a period of a year, as a result of serious concerns by ABLS with regard to the provider. A review does not necessarily result from an inspection. During this time the provider will remain accredited, but will be subject to an action plan with strict time frames as instructed by the inspectorate. Failure to comply with this plan could result in immediate withdrawal of accreditation.

The ABLS Complaints Procedure

All accredited providers are expected to have a complaints procedure which is readily available and made known to students, staff, agents and parents. In the event that a school's internal complaints mechanism does not provide a resolution then a complainant may invoke the ABLS complaints mechanism. All accredited providers have a duty to ensure that staff, students, agents, parents and other concerned bodies are aware of how to contact ABLS and access the complaints mechanism.

All complaints to ABLS must be received in writing in English and signed by the complainant. The complaint should record whether action has already been taken directly with the provider concerned and state whether the complainant is happy for the complaint to be copied to that organisation.

The process for dealing with the complaint

The complaint will be recorded and referred to the Principal of the provider organisation.

The Principal will be expected to report in writing to ABLS within 30 days of receipt by the Principal as to what action is proposed. The Principal will be expected to report in writing within a further 30 days as to whether the action led to the resolution of the complaint.

If the complaint is still unresolved it will be passed to the Chief Inspector. The Chief Inspector will investigate and if he/she considers the complaint has been satisfactorily handled by the provider he/she may recommend that the complaint be dismissed. In this case the costs of the investigation will be met by ABLS. If, however, the Chief Inspector considers there has been unsatisfactory performance on the part of the provider he/she may recommend a full or partial re-inspection. In this case all costs are met by the provider.

If the provider is not satisfied by the resolution reached by the Chief Inspector, it may ask for the case to be reviewed by the Management Committee. The Management Committee will review the documentation and arrive at a decision which will be final.

The inspection criteria

There are seven inspection criteria which will be addressed during the inspection :

- Legal requirements
- Premises & facilities
- Management & administration
- Academic management
- Classroom management
- Academic resources
- Welfare

In the following sections, information is provided regarding the aspects of provision which will be covered during the inspection and guidelines on how providers should approach the visit of the inspectors.

A list is provided at the end of each section below of the core documentary evidence that will be requested by the inspector in assessment of that section.

Further evidence can be requested by the inspector during the inspection.

In addition to providing documentary evidence of the policies and systems in existence at the organisation, the provider must also be able to demonstrate how these are utilised, implemented and disseminated to all stakeholders.

In each case the inspector will summarise the section and comment on how it relates to the ABLs standards.

Legal requirements

Standard

The organisation must demonstrate that it is meeting all statutory and legal requirements connected with the operation of its business.

Key areas of concern

These relate specifically but not exclusively to such areas as:

- Health and Safety
- Planning consent
- Security of tenure
- Child protection
- UKBA regulations
- Employment law
- Copyright regulations
- Insurance
- HMRC obligations

Core documentary evidence

- Permission, property deeds, rental agreement or lease for all premises
- Certificate of employers' liability insurance
- Clear evidence of first aid procedures and practice in line with the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981
- Where appropriate, full planning consent for premises
- Compliance with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Certified accounts
- CLA licence and/or instructions to staff
- ERA licence and/or instructions to staff
- NLA licence and/or instructions to staff
- Registration with the Information Commissioner
- Records of National Insurance and tax payments
- Annual return to Companies House
- Attendance registers
- CRB disclosures for all staff working with under-18's
- All necessary risk assessments for premises and operation of basic services
- Evidence of appropriate fire safety precautions including fire evacuation policy, records and publicity
- First aid certificates
- Accident and incident book
- Visa national records, action taken and publicity of policies

Assessment criteria

Company responsibilities

- (1) Premises information demonstrating continuity of provision
- (2) Employer's public liability insurance valid and displayed
- (3) Risk assessments for building and general operations
- (4) Accident / incident book
- (5) First aid box
- (6) First aid at work provision met
- (7) First aid access well-publicised
- (8) Data Protection registration
- (9) Evidence of PAYE return
- (10) Evidence of Companies House return
- (11) Suitable consideration has been demonstrated toward students and visitors with special needs
- (12) Compliance with ISA requirements
- (13) Portable appliance testing has been completed and is valid

Emergency planning

- (1) Escape instructions in place
- (2) Fire risk assessments
- (3) Clear procedures for fire drills, including head-count
- (4) Records of alarm test and fire drills maintained appropriately
- (5) Sufficient fire fighting equipment
- (6) Evidence of fire equipment checks

Administration of visa nationals

- (1) Reasonable measures are taken to ascertain visa national identity and financial position prior to course start with a copy of passport and visa maintained on record during studies
- (2) Data on attendance and performance are collected and analysed on a frequent and systematic basis
- (3) Evidence of communication with visa nationals regarding on course performance is updated regularly
- (4) Warning mechanisms regarding poor attendance/performance are in place
- (5) Process(es) for informing UKBA are in place
- (6) All above points are made explicitly known to students prior to course
- (7) All visa nationals are enrolled on courses requiring at least 15 hours supervised daytime study per week
- (8) All relevant courses lead to an award made by a suitably recognised body

Licences

- (1) ERA
- (2) CLA
- (3) NLA
- (4) TV

Premises & Facilities

Standard

The premises must provide a safe, clean and comfortable learning environment for the students. ABLS recognises that not all providers have the need for educational premises per se. However, the premises must be fit for the purpose they are being used for and must be honestly represented in marketing material.

Key areas of concern

All areas used by staff and students must be fit for purpose and accessible (e.g. heating, lighting, ventilation, décor, size).

Where appropriate, spaces should be provided for students' relaxation. Food preparation areas should be hygienic. Adequate clean toilet facilities must be provided with hand-washing facilities.

The size of the teaching rooms must reflect the size and type of group taught in them. They should be reasonably soundproof and provide a satisfactory learning environment. The furniture should be adequate and suited to the purpose it serves.

All social programme activity must be operated in line with statutory requirements and best practice.

In all advertising, the organisation must promote itself in an accurate manner.

Core documentary evidence

- Floor plan of premises
- Certificates of training in food preparation
- All marketing publications and all websites
- Risk assessments for all social programme activities
- Qualifications for any specialised activity supervision

Assessment criteria

Public facilities

- (1) Sufficient 'break-out' social space within premises
- (2) Sufficient number of toilet facilities for maximum provision
- (3) Sufficient range of toilet facilities for type(s) of provision
- (4) Sufficient sanitary waste systems are in place

Fire equipment and practice

- (1) Fire doors in place
- (2) Fire doors kept closed
- (3) Fire doors unobstructed
- (4) Fire doors labelled
- (5) Access to exterior escape route from upper floors if necessary
- (6) Escape instructions displayed in each area (including classrooms)
- (7) Main escape routes clear and unlocked
- (8) Alarm system in place and maintained
- (9) Smoke alarms fitted and tested

Decor and fixtures

- (1) Rooms of sufficient dimensions to meet stated group sizes
- (2) Premises in good decorative condition
- (3) Classrooms sufficiently soundproofed against external noise
- (4) Furniture used by students and teachers is fit for purpose
- (5) Classrooms equipped with adequate whiteboard or other devices
- (6) Rooms are adequately heated and ventilated

Activity programme

- (1) Adequate recreation space for number and type of student
- (2) Risk assessments for all on-site and off-site activities
- (3) Suitably qualified staff are employed for the activity programme
- (4) Suitable staff ratios are maintained for activities

Advertising and marketing

- (1) Accurate description of premises, facilities and services in print material
- (2) Accurate description of premises, facilities and services in electronic material
- (3) Clear guidelines are provided as to the maximum number of students in classes
- (4) Clear guidelines are provided as to course fees and refund policy
- (5) All claims of accreditation and validation will be accurate

Management

Standard

The organisation must be managed effectively and appropriately for the type of business being conducted with due concern being paid to the rights of its staff and students and the requirements of outside agencies.

Key areas of concern

It is expected that the management team will have qualifications and experience appropriate to their function.

Staff contracts must specify terms and conditions of employment including pay, holiday and pension entitlements, sickness arrangements, hours of work, and disciplinary and grievance procedures.

Senior managers should ensure that staff and students are aware of the provider's equality of opportunity policy. Records should be kept to show that the policy has been brought to the attention of those concerned e.g. the date on which the document was issued, in which format and that the staff/student member has read it. It may, for example, form part of a code of conduct or a job description.

ABLS does not determine the content of such policies. However, it is expected that managers are familiar with UK law relating to such areas and that such policies demonstrate sensitivity to such matters.

Where possible the organisation should demonstrate commitment within their practices/provisions e.g. the provision of ramps for disabled access (where building regulations/conditions allow) or employment practices that show commitment to equal treatment of all groups – aspects which will be readily accessible at inspection.

Employers must not discriminate against an actual or potential employee on the grounds of gender, sexual identity, marital status, disability, age, race, religious belief or trade union membership.

Core documentary evidence

- Enrolment form
- Staff handbook
- Contracts, letters of appointment

- Code of conduct/grievance procedures/disciplinary procedures
- Equality of opportunity and diversity policy and procedures
- Policy on student absences and punctuality
- Procedures for registering, monitoring and assessing performance of all students
- Staff list with qualifications and relevant experience
- Job descriptions
- Induction policy/procedures for new teachers
- Evidence of PAYE and N.I returns
- Rationales for staff without requisite qualifications

Assessment criteria

Employment documentation (applying to all staff)

- (1) CV's are held on record
- (2) Copies of certificates/qualifications are held on record
- (3) Original(s) of qualification(s) seen and annotated accordingly
- (4) Job descriptions in place and distributed
- (5) Contracts or letters of appointment issued & returned signed
- (6) CRB checks are held on record
- (7) Suitability declarations are held on record
- (8) References taken for all staff
- (9) Rationales accepted for teaching staff without minimum ELT qualifications

Staff rights and responsibilities documentation

- (1) A code of conduct document exists
- (2) A written grievance policy exists and is fully publicised
- (3) A written equal opportunities policy is in place

- (4) A written disciplinary policy exists and is fully publicised
- (5) Access to the ABLS complaints procedure is made known to staff and key suppliers of services
- (6) A clear management structure is maintained

Student records

- (1) Attendance registers exist, are retained centrally, are up-to-date and support UKBA requirements
- (2) A written absence policy exists and is well-publicised to staff and students
- (3) Enrolment forms, containing next of kin and contact details, are retained for all students
- (4) Student records are maintained and up-to-date
- (5) Diagnostic/entry tests
- (6) End of course attainment results are retained centrally
- (7) An end of course report is issued to each graduate
- (8) Achievement data of students collated and stored centrally
- (9) Data on retention (post course intentions/destination) is collected and stored
- (10) Records of student feedback are retained and assessed

Academic standards

Standard

The organisation must provide its students with real learning opportunities and have systems in place for monitoring students' learning and progress and quality assuring the performance of its teachers.

Key areas of concern

ABLS expects that students will be made aware of the qualifications and experience of teaching staff. It is recognised that a wide variety of qualifications and experience may be appropriate; however teaching staff should hold an ELT certificate resulting from a course of at least one hundred contact hours and a minimum of six hours' observed teaching practice. All qualifications must be validated by a university or internationally-recognised examination board. All teachers should be able to demonstrate a clear grasp of ESOL methodology and the ability to implement it in the classroom.

If, in exceptional circumstances, an organisation employs teachers who do not have a TESOL/TEFL related qualification, the provider will need to submit written evidence to the inspector setting out the reasons why the provider has employed each non-TEFL qualified member of staff. Acceptance of this explanation will be at the discretion of the inspector and in line with his/her observation of teaching and learning sessions.

The academic manager in EFL operations is expected to have at least a Diploma in ELT/TEFL (level 7 NQF)¹ and the experience that would enable him or her to give good advice to new teachers and to assess their performance. In ESOL operations the minimum requirement is a Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong

¹ The qualification will be issued by a nationally-recognised validation body and include at least five hours' observed teaching practice. Equivalents may be offered as part of a rationale but must be recognised to be at the same level of study and inclusive of relevant teaching practice (e.g. PGCE in a relevant field). Qualifications lacking an integral observation module (e.g. Masters in ELT/TEFL) can be supplemented separately but the individual must be observed for five hours by a well-qualified ELT practitioner who is external to the organisation in question.

Learning Sector (DTLLS, level 5 NQF)² and significant experience. A rationale may be submitted for assessment for individuals who do not meet these requirements.

Teachers' planning must reflect the needs of the students and be based on the results of tests or questionnaires given to the students before the course commences. All such tests/questionnaires should be retained by the organisation as part of a student's record.

A good record of the work and attainment of each student must be maintained that would allow the teacher to write a meaningful report at the end of a course if requested. It is expected that students will be appraised or assessed formally at various points throughout their course of study.

The Academic Manager must demonstrate careful monitoring of teaching quality to ensure that standards are reached and maintained. ABLS expects procedures for the observation of teaching and learning to be in place and the completion of documentation to demonstrate that these procedures have been implemented. Where formal appraisals are carried out, records of these appraisals should be kept.

If the organisation administers public, or external, tests or examinations, policies for the administration and conduct of the tests are required.

Maintenance of a high standard of teaching is dependent on new teachers being aware of the expectations of the organisation. A policy and set of procedures for the induction of new teachers should be in place.

In-service and external training and development are to be offered e.g. providers and their employees should keep up to date with new developments in TESOL/TEFL.

² The qualification will preferably be held in conjunction with a certificate in EFL/ESOL (NQF level 5). In the absence of this qualification, academic managers will need to evidence substantial ELT experience (four years or more).

Core documentary evidence

- Course outlines/syllabuses
- Timetables
- Evidence of teachers' planning
- Records of teacher-appraisal and evidence of professional development
- Testing procedures and documents
- Student records
- End of course report or certificate of attendance, as appropriate
- Samples of students' work
- Attendance registers
- Student feedback and questionnaire results
- Provision for learners with special needs

Assessment criteria

Student assessment and progress systems

- (1) A comprehensive pre-course testing system is in place and applied universally
- (2) An accurate and reliable student placement system is applied
- (3) A student movement policy is in place and applied universally
- (4) Records of test achievement are retained
- (5) Homework is regularly offered and assessed
- (6) External examination preparation is offered

Class dynamics

- (1) Teaching group sizes suitable to courses
- (2) Group size reflects publicity
- (3) Groups sizes are appropriate for the ability levels of students
- (4) Procedures for covering teacher absence are maintained

Teacher support and guidance

- (1) Effective induction procedures are in place
- (2) Clear information provided on expected standards
- (3) Awareness of UKBA policies and procedures, as listed under 3.6 above
- (4) An adequate staff communication strategy is in place

Staff training and development

- (1) A regular and detailed teacher monitoring system is in place and documented
- (2) A regular staff appraisal system is in place and documented
- (3) Sufficient staff development (CPD) opportunities are provided

Classroom management

Standard

Lessons must be planned and delivered in such a way as to provide each individual student with the chance to learn in a meaningful and enjoyable way.

Key areas of concern

Thought should be given to the length of lessons. Very long periods of teaching should be avoided especially with younger students.

Teachers must plan their lessons thoroughly. Each lesson must take into account the level, ability and the mix of students.

Lessons should involve a variety of activities to keep the students' attention. This can be achieved through the use of authentic materials, audio and visual aids and, where appropriate, games.

Teachers are expected to be sympathetic and helpful and to be sensitive to the needs of the students.

Individual learning styles should be taken into account when planning lessons.

Core documentary evidence

- Individual lesson plans
- Schemes of work
- Samples of classroom materials

During inspection all teachers should prepare to provide a copy of their lesson plan, classroom materials and register for the inspector for each lesson running during inspection.

Organisations should inform teaching staff that no personal comments will be made in relation to observations made during inspection. Students should also be informed of the reason for the inspector's presence.

Assessment criteria

Lesson management

- (1) Quality lesson plans produced
- (2) Lesson lengths appropriate to students
- (3) Lesson plans are developed in context of course syllabus
- (4) Good variety in lessons
- (5) Individual learning styles are catered for
- (6) Order and punctuality good
- (7) Teaching reflects what is advertised
- (8) Use of appropriate teaching aids

Resources

Standard

The organisation must provide resources of a type, quality and quantity fit for purpose.

Key areas of concern

Adequate resources are essential for efficient and effective teaching. The organisation should be clear in publicity material about who is responsible for providing any course textbooks and what happens to the books at the end of the course.

A variety of textbooks should be made available to enable teachers to choose the best source for each topic they teach. Teachers should also be encouraged to prepare and share their own teaching materials.

Teachers should have access to a wide variety of teaching aids and a list of all teaching/learning resources held by the provider should be made available.

Audiotapes, videos and DVDs are valuable teaching resources that should be readily available to teachers. A minimum of one audio device per teaching area is expected.

It is good practice to provide access to computers and the internet for students.

There should be a clear policy regarding the availability of reference books and dictionaries. A well-managed library is an asset to an organisation.

Core documentary evidence

- Lists of physical resources
- Lists of learning and teaching resources

Assessment criteria

Study Framework

- (1) A clear and practical syllabus is in place
- (2) Evidence of accurate application of the syllabus
- (3) Sufficient schemes of work in place for specific classes
- (4) Clear attempts to link classroom learning with opportunities to improve outside the classroom
- (5) Samples of students' work are retained

Materials

- (1) Textbooks are used
- (2) In-house texts or materials are available
- (3) Appropriate textbooks are used for the type of student and course
- (4) A catalogue of teaching materials is maintained and up-to-date
- (5) Sufficient AV/ICT materials available
- (6) Sufficient AV/ICT equipment in each classroom
- (7) Computer access is freely available to students

Student welfare

Standard

The organisation needs to show that it understands and makes provision for the special needs of students who are studying away from home in a foreign country.

Key areas of concern

The organisation must show awareness of its responsibilities in terms of caring for its students by providing access to any relevant advice and help connected to the needs and particular circumstances of its students.

The qualifications, experience and CRB status of the person(s) named as responsible for welfare, accommodation and social programmes should match their duties. There should be a clear job description.

Students should be aware of who is responsible for welfare and what they have to do in an emergency.

A detailed register of home-stay accommodation must be kept. A policy and system of implementation for selection and inspection of homestay accommodation must be in place which takes into account student concerns and welfare as the first priority.

All those who have close contact with students under 18 or vulnerable adults should comply with current legislative requirements. It is expected that individual student preferences are taken into account in allocating accommodation.

There must be a clear home-stay host's agreement that lays out the duties and responsibilities of the organisation and the host. Students should be given guidelines for behaviour where appropriate.

Home-stay hosts should ensure that they have valid insurance cover.

Documentation, usually in the form of a Students' Handbook, should be provided which includes information and advice on living in the UK and local area.

Core documentary evidence

- Names, qualifications, experience, CRB disclosures and ISA documentation, where applicable, for those responsible for pastoral care, welfare, accommodation and social programmes
- Complete record of residential accommodation occupation
- Complete home-stay register, with those highlighted that are being used in the week of the inspection
- Accommodation record details
- Policies for selection and inspection of accommodation
- Contract between provider and accommodation provider

Organisations are required to demonstrate that staff and students have been made explicitly aware of policies and procedures relating to the above and, where appropriate, how to access those procedures.

Assessment criteria

Welfare management

- (1) There is a named staff member responsible for welfare in all aspects of the organisation
- (2) This staff member has completed formal training for this role
- (3) A job description for this position is in place
- (4) Students are issued with a handbook that includes information and advice on local, key services
- (5) All students complete an induction to the school and local area
- (6) Advice on police registration is available to all students
- (7) A complaints procedure is made explicitly known to all students
- (8) Students are made aware of the ABLs complaints mechanism

Junior welfare provision (relates to all students under 18 years of age)

- (1) A welfare policy for all junior activity is maintained and distributed widely
- (2) Adequate supervision of juniors outside class hours
- (3) Adequate systems in place to guarantee junior welfare during arrival and departure transfers
- (4) Adequate systems in place to guarantee junior welfare during transfers to and from school
- (5) Provision of an emergency number to all junior students
- (6) Provision of adequate care for ill junior students

Accommodation management

- (1) An accurate accommodation register for residential, homestay and home tuition accommodation exists
- (2) Records of regular accommodation inspections are maintained
- (3) A standard set of criteria are applied when assessing new accommodation
- (2) A grievance/complaints procedure is made explicitly known to hosts and students
- (3) Home-stay/Home-tuition code of conduct exists and is issued to hosts and students at least annually
- (4) Procedures for ensuring that students and hosts are able to voice concerns about each other
- (5) Hosts are aware of their responsibilities in connection with junior students
- (6) Hosts been advised to seek guidance from their insurance company with regard to hosting
- (7) Guidelines are in place to guarantee the student is included as a member of a homestay
- (8) A policy on junior curfew times will be available to students, parents and accommodation providers
- (9) Students of the same mother tongue or gender are not housed together unless requested
- (10) Adult and junior students are not housed together
- (11) CRB's and suitability declarations for

accommodation providers and other adult occupants on file

(12) The presence of all non-student occupants is assessed

(13) There is an awareness and respect of private fostering regulations

Accommodation standard

(1) Accommodation is suitable to the age, gender and cultural background of the students

(2) The condition, upkeep and cleanliness of the accommodation is good

(3) Sufficient and well-maintained bathroom facilities are available

(4) There are facilities for private time

(5) Suitable menus and quality of food are provided

(6) The accommodation provider is aware of ABLs complaints mechanism

(7) It is a safe environment for the age and type of student

(8) There are appropriate smoke alarms

(9) There are appropriate gas certificates and carbon monoxide sensors

Appeals and complaints procedures

Accreditation process

Organisations are encouraged to feedback on the inspection process. This feedback helps the inspection team to develop the inspection process. It is an important aspect of training and reviewing the performance of the inspection team and provides a mechanism for the quality assurance of the service offered by ABLs.

A feedback questionnaire will be sent to providers who are encouraged to return them directly to ABLs administration at the end of the inspection. Specific feedback on an inspection is not passed on to the inspector until after the report has been submitted. An organisation wishing to lodge a complaint regarding the inspection process can do so on this questionnaire or in writing to the Administrator within two weeks of the inspection date.

Accreditation outcomes

Right of Appeal

An organisation which is refused accreditation has a right of appeal, but it should be noted that this process can be lengthy and incur costs to the provider. Please note that the provider will need to settle all appeal costs before the appeal can proceed.

If the provider fails to submit an appeal against an inspection outcome within the given timeframe (see First Stage below) ABLs will deem the result to have been accepted and in the event of a failed inspection of an existing provider details will be removed from the website.

During the appeals process an existing ABLs accredited provider will continue to be listed on the website. An unaccredited provider remains unaccredited.

First Stage

The provider must lodge an appeal with regard to the report outcome in a written statement to the Administrator within two weeks of the inspection report being received. The statement must clearly define the grounds for the appeal. The matter will be reviewed by a member of the Management Committee who has had

not served as an accreditor to the disputed inspection report. The reviewer will examine the written statement and the inspection report and any other material considered relevant. The provider will not be invited to attend at this stage.

The result of this stage will be forwarded in writing to the ABLs Administrator, accreditors and the provider within 28 days of the appeal being lodged.

Second Stage

If the provider does not accept the decision at the First Stage the matter can be referred to the Appeals Panel who will examine the evidence at the earliest possible date.

Members of the Appeals Panel are normally drawn from voting members of the Management Committee. They will not have served as an accreditor or reviewer and will have no vested interest in the disputed inspection or subsequent result of an appeal. In order to ensure that proceedings are conducted in a fair and proper manner an external and independent chair will be appointed.

The panel is forwarded all documents relating to the appeal in advance of the hearing to be examined in advance and scrutinised at the hearing. The complainant is invited, and strongly advised, to attend the panel hearing.

Final Stage

If the provider does not accept the decision of the Appeals Panel, the matter will be put to the next meeting of the Board, normally held quarterly, whose decision will be final.

Terms and Conditions

ABLS Administration and the provider will be notified in writing with regard to the outcome of all stages of an appeal.

If the appeal results in a partial or full inspection the investigating party will determine the terms and the conditions to be adhered to.

It is understood that the provider has accepted the terms of the above process when applying for inspection through ABLS Accreditation.

An existing provider when signing the Annual Declaration will also be confirming acceptance of these terms and will have studied the current Accreditation Handbook.

ABLS will follow the published procedure and no discussion can be entered into with regard to this.

Appeal Costs

Before the appeal can be addressed the provider will be sent an invoice outlining the cost of the appeal. These costs must be settled before the appeal can proceed. As a guideline, in the event of the provider operating from one site the cost will be equivalent to the fee for a one day inspection.

In the event of a provider operating multi-sites the fee will be equivalent to the fees for the disputed inspection.

Appeal Upheld

In the event of an appeal being upheld

- appeal costs will be returned to the provider.
- accreditation status may be granted/reinstated.
- full or partial inspection will be at cost to ABLS.

Appeal Not Upheld

If the appeal is not upheld

- the appeal costs will be retained by ABLS.

Appendix A

Statement of Equality of Opportunities Policy

The Accreditation Body for Language Services (ABLS)

ABLS understands that it has an important role to play in guaranteeing equality of opportunity, both as an employer and as an accrediting body. It therefore aims to promote equality in all its operations through recognition of the diversity of staff and student populations and to avoid unlawful discrimination.

Public legislation such as, but not limited to, the Race Relation Act (1976), the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) and the Age Discrimination Act (2006) will assist ABLS in delineating its equal opportunities policy.

ABLS is therefore committed to providing equality of opportunity and treatment for all, and will not unlawfully or unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly on the basis of gender, age, ethnic origin, religion or belief, race, sexual orientation and disability. It seeks to ensure that the policy is observed by all those with whom it works including employees, Management Committee members, schools, teachers and students. All such individuals and organisations are expected to demonstrate practical application of the policy where possible.

Any person or organisation who considers that he/she has not been treated in accordance with this policy should raise their concerns, in writing, with the Director of ABLS.

Equal opportunity employer

this policy covers all aspects of employment, from vacancy advertising, selection, recruitment and training to conditions of service and reasons for termination of employment. The objectives of the Equal Opportunity Employer Policy are to:

- Ensure that ABLS secures the best employees for the purpose of undertaking inspection activities.
- Ensure that no applicant or employee receives greater, or less, favourable treatment, and that, wherever practicable, they are given assistance to attain their full potential.

- Achieve an ability-based workforce, which reflects the mix of peoples located in this sector of the economy.

The cooperation of all employees and partners is essential for the success of this policy. However, ultimate responsibility for achieving the policy's objectives lies with the Management Committee of ABLS. Behaviour or actions contrary to the spirit and/or letter of the laws on which this policy is based is treated seriously and may lead to a range of disciplinary matters if such allegations are made and upheld.

To ensure that this policy is operating effectively (and for no other purpose) ABLS maintains records of employees' and applicants' racial origins, gender and disability (where they have submitted this information).

Monitoring and analysis of such records will provide the basis for appropriate action to eliminate direct and indirect discrimination and promote equality of opportunity.

ABLS will aim to create diversity of composition within the workforce which reflects that of the economic sector it works with.

Inspection activities

ABLS aims to promote equality of opportunity in all areas of its activity. All literature published by ABLS e.g. Accreditation Handbook or Inspection Report Form should be culturally unbiased and worded in such a way as to encourage providers to promote equal opportunities.

Inspectors are encouraged to look for Equality of Opportunities policy and practice/procedure when undertaking inspection visits. This forms part of the inspection criteria and schools are expected to demonstrate compliance in practice as well as in spirit.

Appendix B

Visa students and UKBA regulations

In the case of all students attendance registers must be kept and monitored each week by the DoS/Principal or by a responsible member of staff as designated by the Principal. Students who do not take up an offered place on a course of study and those who do not meet the UKBA attendance requirements must be reported to UKBA in accordance with its regulations. ABLS reserves the right to report any suspected irregularities by providers to the appropriate authorities and/or to withdraw accreditation from any provider proven to have acted in such a fashion.

Individual student counselling on immigration matters, including applications for extensions of leave to remain, must not be given unless the member of staff responsible is correctly registered.

As a guide, it is considered that absence from ten expected contact days is unacceptable. As a result, attendance and reporting non or poor-attenders to UKBA must be evident. It is expected that rules regarding attendance are made explicitly clear (in writing) to all students upon enrolment. A clearly stated policy on student absences and evidence of good practice in reporting absence of visa students is essential. Please note that all visa students must study on courses offering a minimum of 15 contact hours per week. This is actual time spent in the classroom undergoing supervised organised study and does not include breaks. Classes must take place during the day.

Visa students who do not commence or complete the course must be reported to the UKBA immediately. Providers must adhere to the UKBA regulations in relation to Tier 4.

Individual student records must be kept which should include details of the course studied, qualifications obtained, attendance and progression routes.

It is vital that the organisation has a system for collecting and collating data on student retention and student progress. In addition to this information being central to any organisation's internal quality assurance, it will also be required when completing the Annual Return for ABLS.

All courses that are attended by Tier 4 visa students should lead to a qualification from a QAA-recognised body or equivalent. Organisations are strongly recommended to seek advice on this area to ensure full compliance is attained.

As one of the recognised accrediting bodies for the ELT industry, ABLS is required to maintain close links to UKBA and inform UKBA of any organisational cases which demonstrate a significant failure to comply with statutory requirements with regard to the administration of visa students' studies.

Appendix C

The Association of British Language Schools

ABLS works in partnership with the Association of British Language Schools (ABLS Association) for the purpose of informing each other of developments within the industry that may impact the accreditation process or to share examples of best practice in terms of service and delivery to students. ABLS will inform the Association of successful accreditation applications.

Similarly, if ABLS withdraws accreditation from a provider who is a member of Association, the Association will be informed.

Providers accredited by any UKBA approved accreditation body can apply for membership of the ABLS Association.