Assessment Report

Wandsworth Council Lifelong Learning

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Standard Met
Assessor's Name	Alistair Hudson
Evidence Gathering/Assessment Date/s	22/09/2025 – 24/09/2025 (2.5 days)
Client ID and Assessment Reference	C11413 – PN203060
Accreditation Review to be conducted by	30/09/2028

METHODOLOGY

Evidence gathering	2 days at WCLL's centre in Wandsworth and 0.5 day remote. Most interviews were in person, with some Teams calls and telephone calls
Staff interviews	15, including the Head of Service and Deputy, plus a wide range of managers and staff from across WCLL
Recipient interviews	30 – 15 in small groups via Teams for a range of programmes, and a further 15 learners in an ESOL level 1 class
Partner interviews	3
Document review	A suite of documentation was provided, including: Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), Service Plan, the website, impact data, IAG marketing materials, learner records, case studies, collated feedback, staff job descriptions and a selection of policies.

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Detailed Findings

Element 1: PURPOSE

IAG contributes to the organisation's aims

Wandsworth Council Lifelong Learning (hereafter 'WCLL' or 'the organisation') is the adult education service of the south London borough of Wandsworth, operating from a centre in the heart of the borough. The WCLL mission statement emphasises the importance of the organisation's robust learner and community focussed core values and culture: 'The Lifelong Learning team aims to improve the employment, skills, career development, the quality of life and wellbeing of residents in the borough, making Wandsworth a vibrant, prosperous learning community'. WCLL is strongly focussed on inclusivity, and is rooted in its local communities and their education and skills needs, supporting wider council priorities such as 'A Fairer Wandsworth' and 'A Compassionate Wandsworth'.

The organisation delivers a curriculum with four main strands:

Part-time Community Learning programmes ('Community'). Some of these are delivered in the community by subcontractors best able to reach target communities. Increasingly, courses are delivered direct by WCLL, with recent developments including courses in cost of living related topics such as Sewing and Cooking on a Budget

Apprenticeships in standards such as Business Administration and Teaching Assistant, for both Wandsworth Council employees and apprentices working for other local employers

Accredited adult provision ('Classroom') in a range of employability and vocational topics, as well as English, Maths, ICT and ESOL

A Work Experience programme for local schools, engaging around 1,400 young people in the most recent academic year. The service for young people has recently been enhanced with the addition of programmes tailored for young people at risk of being Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), called Jumpstart, and a Trailblazer programme for the Care Experienced.

Integral to WCLL's delivery model is an end to end Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) service that is given a high priority and profile across the organisation. WCLL has held accreditation to the **matrix** Standard for a number of years, with a successful accreditation review in 2022.

Three years later, this accreditation review took place in an atmosphere of positivity from managers and staff. The organisation achieved a 'Good' Ofsted outcome in April 2025, which recognised and celebrated the organisation's achievements and indeed WCLL has maintained a 'Good' rating since 2016.

Values of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are highly visible throughout the work of the organisation, with targeted promotion to harder to reach cohorts, with the

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different groups' participation and results recorded and celebrated in the performance documentation. EDI has been identified as an organisational strength (See 'What is Working Particularly Well' below for further evidence of EDI).

Formal structures for legal requirements such as Safeguarding and Prevent are robust and these are translated into day-to-day practice. In particular, learners described feeling safe in their classes, with no bullying or conflict and learners of all backgrounds and abilities described being made to feel welcome (See 'What is Working Particularly Well' below for further evidence of this culture of safety). Furthermore, staff made a link between creating a 'safe space' for learners and the creditable retention and achievement rates for vulnerable groups.

Learner wellbeing is a key theme running through WCLL's learner-centred practice. Staff described how they discuss wellbeing with learners and provide support and referral as appropriate. All are clear, thanks to well established Safeguarding protocols, on how to deal with wellbeing issues and how to escalate. Learners described the accessibility and good quality of wellbeing support, including referral to external support on a range of issues including housing, domestic violence and money. Numerous examples of the importance placed on staff wellbeing were provided (See 'What is Working Particularly Well' below). Aside from formal processes including access to the wider council's Employee Assistance Programme, staff described a culture where managers and colleagues are approachable and willing to support, including in response to stressful or sensitive situations such as Safeguarding cases.

GDPR regulations are of utmost importance across WCLL, particularly so as its stores a wealth of data on learners, some of whom are vulnerable. With very little in the way of paper documents remaining (following the rollout of the PICS system), management and staff were confident in describing compliance with legal requirements for data storage. These systems are reinforced by the wider council's GDPR policies. Learners confirmed they were satisfied with how their data is used, are happy it is protected and understand the need for data to be held for their own benefit.

The legal requirements of Safeguarding are universally understood, and designated Safeguarding leads within WCLL are highly visible and proactive, with learners confirming they know how to raise issues. Staff are also fully aware of, and understand, other legislation relevant to their role. As well as Safeguarding, they described the importance of Health and Safety and Equality and Diversity, and how legal requirements such as Prevent and British Values are integrated into their practice. There is also a strong emphasis on e-safety, which has a high profile in Learner Handbooks and other documentation. Work Experience staff fully understand health and safety requirements in the workplace, and indeed this is a central aspect of their work.

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Element 2: RESOURCES

Resources invested enable the delivery of high-quality IAG

The delivery of IAG continues to be a top priority for all management and staff, with all clearly understanding, and able to explain, their role in providing IAG support throughout the learner journey. IAG delivery is a key accountability for all staff, though as stated in Development Suggestions below, it could be given greater emphasis in job descriptions. Staff are clear on boundaries and how and when to refer, either externally or internally to a specialist such as one of the IAG Career Advisers, to ensure a seamless service delivered appropriately.

Key staff have qualifications appropriate to their role from a range of industry bodies, including a number of specific IAG qualifications across the team. All staff interviewed, whether new to the organisation and IAG delivery or more experienced, displayed the inter-personal skills and behaviours, as well as the curiosity, needed to provide a high quality IAG service. All delivery is within the overriding WCLL culture, in particular the mission of 'Improving the employment skills, career development, the quality of life and well-being of residents in the borough'.

Underpinning the definition of roles, skills and competency is a values base demonstrated by all staff (described further in 'What is working particularly well' below). Staff described how both WCLL's and the wider council's values are incorporated into all aspects of their work with learners, and a learner-centred approach was evident in all assessment interviews. Staff also spoke knowledgeably about local and national strategy and priorities and how they work to achieve progress in priority areas.

All staff described their entitlement to Continuous Professional Development (CPD), and how managers are always open to their suggestions. There is a suite of compulsory training, and many examples were provided of developmental CPD. Several staff described their own journey through WCLL from sessional tutor roles to management, supported with tailored CPD along the way. (See further examples in 'What is working particularly well' below.)

Staff have often been in post for a number of years, with very little staff turnover, meaning staff bring wide experience to service delivery. While budgets are inevitably tight and more staff would be welcome, staff and learners described a well resourced service where those in need of support of all types are able to access a bespoke service in a timely manner. WCLL has robust management and governance, with full participation from the Head of Service and Deputy, an Advisory Group and a Development Group, and wider council management and political structures.

The IAG offer is very much enhanced by all parts of WCLL working with a plethora of specialist partners, ranging from employers to specialist services within the council, Jobcentre Plus offices, schools and charities. In particular, subcontractors are chosen for their ability to engage and work with target communities from the deaf to those in hardest to reach postcodes. The Work Experience team functions so well

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because of the in depth relationships developed with both schools and employers, creating confidence in WCLL. Partners confirmed their willingness to work with WCLL, due to the organisation's responsiveness and good communication. Internal partnerships across this small, agile organisation work well, with clear role definitions and good communication to ensure learners receive a holistic IAG service.

Information resources have been developed considerably since the last assessment, with a range of IAG information in online and paper formats, using clear and accessible language, alongside the website (though the website is a Development Suggestion – see below). All staff were keen to share their resources, both online and paper-based, many of which are also highly visible on noticeboards around the WCLL centre. Staffing resources are clearly sufficient, including for the labour-intensive delivery of individual IAG sessions for all new learners, a service that is particularly valued by learners.

Element 3: OFFER

There is a clear description of the IAG on offer and this is promoted to those who may access it

The WCLL IAG offer is described in clear and accessible language in learner documentation, in posters around the WCLL site and on the website. The IAG service is furthermore described in the Learner Handbook, again in upbeat language. The Handbook also covers in the same way IAG-related topics such as careers advice and progression, health and safety, complaints and feedback, Safeguarding and Prevent, as well as EDI and how to access emergency support.

Learners all confirmed that they fully understand the IAG offer, with the fact that all learners have a meeting with an IAG Officer as an integral part of the Admissions process ensuring that the service is particularly high profile from the beginning of the learner journey.

WCLL defines the types of learner it aims to reach and has a range of activities in place to target these learners, in line with council, London-wide and national priorities. The organisation also measures the participation of target groups, with detailed breakdowns by employment status, gender, ethnicity, disability and various protected characteristics in the SAR and other documentation. As well as traditional advertising through leaflets and newsletters, WCLL works with groups and initiatives within its extensive networks as well as with the council. The council relationship has been particularly fruitful since the last assessment, with buy-in for, and therefore promotion of, WCLL by the appropriate council cabinet member, who emphasises that the service is 'a high quality, accessible and inclusive adult learning and skills offer'. WCLL engages with services such as Housing, Libraries and the Refugee Service to promote its service. The organisation works with Jobcentre Plus, schools and employers and exhibits at careers fairs. Subcontractors are also specifically chosen due to their ability to reach target groups. In addition, the organisation keeps pace of changing engagement methodologies and the best ways to reach potential and existing learners through social media and other virtual means. The

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website remains a key engagement tool, hopefully soon to be refreshed and made more user-friendly (See Development Suggestions below).

Element 4: DELIVERY

IAG is delivered to support progress and enable transitions

There is no question that IAG provision has evolved over the last three years to ensure it remains relevant and meets the changing needs of learners. Every staff member recognises that they play some part in IAG delivery, with clear role definition. IAG is embedded in all delivery across WCLL, and the learner journey includes rigorous initial IAG, delivered one to one, to ensure the chosen programme is right for the learner.

Prior to the formal IAG session, IAG is available by telephone and in person for those who wish to discuss their options or are not comfortable with online enrolment. Otherwise, the enrolment system is now fully digital.

The robust initial assessment includes an 'IAG and Enrolment Form' leading in turn to an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). Mental health and medical needs are captured such as learning difficulties or disabilities such as dyslexia and dyscalculia or autism. The learner's goals are also identified at this stage, ranging from a need for Functional Skills for career progression to a desire to improve social skills. One tutor summed up this approach to IAG as simply, "What do they want to achieve and how can we support them to get there?".

Effective use of quality assured information sits at the core of the service and, as highlighted above, the organisation continues to maintain and manage its information resources to meet the defined needs of learner types.

On programme IAG depends on the length of the course, with regular reviews of outcomes achieved, the setting of new goals, and an end of programme review.

Signposting and referral to specialist organisations within the council and beyond for a range of needs is also embedded in the service.

All staff showcased their own IAG delivery and how they refer specialists such as Careers IAG Advisers, ensuring a seamless IAG offer. The Careers IAG Advisors aim for all learners to be able to access individual appointments, and staff described how they are sufficient resources to meet this aim for all learners who want or need an appointment.

The assessment highlighted that across the service IAG touch points build upon previous interventions, with progress monitored at reviews and future targets set. Here the focus is upon IAG delivery keeping the learner motivated, with aspirations intact.

Throughout the assessment, it was clear that WCLL continues to invest in a content rich portfolio of IAG to help learners enjoy their experience, flourish personally and transition to their destination of choice. The management team clearly made the links between IAG and its contribution to the WCLL Three Year Strategic Plan and wider

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council objectives and values: 'Think Bigger; Embrace Difference; Connect Better; Lead by Example; Put People First".

Element 5: OUTCOMES

There is a clear understanding of the difference IAG is making to those receiving it

WCLL learners see their outcomes recorded in their ILPs, with a selection of these files being reviewed during the assessment and clearly showing personal, learning and career goals recorded at the beginning of the journey, with outcomes measured and evaluated at reviews and upon course completion, though (as described in 'Development Suggestions' below), these could sometimes more fully record the undoubted outcomes achieved. Outcomes resulting from a WCLL journey clearly vary according to the type of learner, subject and level studied. Some programmes, such as 'Problem solving and decision making' have a specific personal development outcome as their aim, yet a broad number of outcomes could be seen across the provision, whatever the programme title and are recorded on ILPs as well as being described by staff, learners and partners, and captured in feedback exercises and case studies. These include: improved confidence and self-esteem; improved resilience and wellbeing; a range of employability skills including building skills for work or volunteering; interpersonal skills; improved mood and mental health; making friends; supporting children's development; team working; and time management.

In addition, tutors and other staff described a range of positive individual outcomes obtained by learners, thanks to IAG support and signposting by WCLL staff, from overcoming family problems to mental health issues, as well as issues around housing, money and pregnancy.

Learners played an important role in the assessment, and confirmed the breadth of outcomes achieved, with many emphasising how their WCLL programmes were enabling them to return not just to learning, but to engagement with wider society. Comments included:

"My tutor is amazing. We've done a lot on life skills, CVs, covering letters. It's very friendly and I've made new friends";

"It's an inclusive learning environment, very encouraging and so supportive. I am happy and feel safe here";

"I'm on a longer course and they make time for reflection – I am now able to comfortably reflect on my own style. It builds confidence in a lot of areas";

"I had a lot of anxiety but they built my confidence and I've progressed from level 2 to level 3";

"The tutor is exceptional. We're always exchanging messages. There was so much support through my recent bereavement";

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Element 6: IMPACT FOR THE ORGANISATION

There is a clear understanding of the intended and actual impact of IAG delivered

Performance measures are constantly updated in documents such as the SAR and QIP. Management and staff were confident in sharing the performance data for their areas, and made a clear case for how the IAG service makes a positive contribution to these figures. Examples from recent years included:

- Attendance at 87%, with measures in place to drive this creditable figure higher still such as working with learners who struggle with attendance (often for work or family reasons)
- 'Classroom' retention at 94.3% and achievement at 90.8%
- 'Community' retention at 92% and achievement at 91.7%

Keeping the above four measures above 90% is a testament to the organisation's IAG support to its learners, especially as these figures have been achieved against a backdrop of strongly increasing learner numbers ('Classroom' from 467 to 945 unique learners in two years, and 'Community' from 1,831 to 2,194)

- Apprenticeship achievement has increased from 60% to 78.6%, now well above the national average of around 60.5%.

In addition, WCLL monitors data for target groups. This includes:

- 29% of learners from the most deprived wards (target 28%)
- 72% of learners are unemployed at the start of their courses, with a 93% achievement rate
- 16% of learners are Learners with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities (LLDD) (on target), with an achievement rate of 96%
- 64% of learners are from ethnic minorities (target 56%), with 90% achievement.

Looking at performance data as a whole, many measures have improved considerably from three years ago and WCLL is ambitious to deliver further improvements through ongoing development of IAG and other aspects of its service.

Element 7: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

All aspects of IAG planning and delivery are subject to ongoing review and evaluation

Accreditation to the **matrix** Standard is just one of many quality improvement tools used by WCLL, with quality improvement staff describing dynamic quality processes that are fully integrated into the organisation's striving for continuous improvement.

Management, including the Quality Improvement Manager, work intensely in the curriculum and lead on service and curriculum development, including the development of resources that meet learner needs on current topics. Management described how staff ensure that IAG is embedded in the curriculum through training and observation of tutors.

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Other continuous improvement methodologies include a detailed and frequently updated SAR and QIP. Quality improvement work is monitored by the Monitoring and Advisory Group, which includes cabinet-level council representation.

Staff and management described the constant evolution and improvement of their service, with ongoing consultation internally, with learners, the council and a range of local and national stakeholders, as well as data analysis, to identify need and therefore service evolution. More examples are provided in 'What is working particularly well' below.

What is working particularly well

A number of strengths/areas that are working particularly well were identified during the assessment, which are detailed below. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- Values of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion clearly permeate the service. The main adult education provision has a long history of working with those who are most disadvantaged, from the most deprived wards, the unemployed, the disabled and those who are new to the UK. EDI work concentrates not just on the recruitment of hard to reach learners, but on developing a curriculum that meets their needs, with for example a range of courses focussed on alleviating the cost of living. Choice of subcontractors is also based around reaching target disadvantaged groups. Since the last assessment, further developments have seen the introduction of programmes aimed at NEET prevention and care experienced young people, ensuring opportunities are available at WCLL for those in need across all ages (1.2)

- Throughout the assessment, all management and staff showcased a highly learner-centred culture and ethos. Tutors and management, from a range of subjects and levels, all described a holistic IAG service covering topics well beyond the course subject matter, and how their role is key in delivering positive outcomes. This passion was also evident in support and administrative staff. Staff furthermore praised a sense of coherence and belonging, and happily described their personal and wider organisational values. They also praised organisation-wide communication, the range of staff meetings and events, which further promote the sense of a united service with a strong purpose: 'making Wandsworth a vibrant, prosperous learning community'. (1.1, 2.4)

- WCLL learners come from a vast array of backgrounds and bring with them a range of life experiences. One thing that united all learners was how safe they said they felt at WCLL. Many learners have experienced trauma in the countries they have left behind, while others face difficulties and indeed trauma in their lives in the UK. WCLL has succeeded in creating a safe space for all. Learners described coming to classes not just to learn but to come to a welcoming environment free of any bullying and where staff and learners are friendly. This is a huge benefit for learners with such a wide range of experiences and enables

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them to focus on learning. One member of staff simply described WCLL as "safe, caring and nurturing". (1.3)

- All staff interviewed confirmed that they welcome the emphasis on their wellbeing and the support they need to enable them to support the learners. There is a formal Council Employee Assistance Programme, which staff appreciate and use, but even more welcomed by staff is the individual support from line managers and senior managers, with all confirming that their wellbeing needs are understood. Several staff members disclosed stressful and traumatic issues for which they had received support that had enabled them to stay in work and continue to support their learners. As one staff member simply stated: "It's such a supportive environment and a great place to work". (1.4)

- Many examples were provided of staff training, progression and development, with a particular emphasis on practical developments such as autism awareness, mental health and the use of AI. Staff described how management approve training and development requests, or as one said, "They see something in you". These development opportunities, along with the wellbeing support described above, have clearly aided staff retention, with many key staff in post for a number of years now, and staff satisfaction recorded in council surveys being much higher than the council average. (2.5)

- WCLL has made great advances since the last assessment in ensuring that all learner records are digital. Staff praised the PICS system as being user-friendly and avoiding duplication, for example when a learner progresses to a second programme. The use of PICS ensures that all staff have access to learner records as needed, enabling them to provide a fully informed IAG and learning service, and saving valuable administration time. (2.8)

- Staff and management described quality management and continuous improvement as fully integrated and "on a permanent loop". With Quality Assurance given a high profile within senior management, an emphasis is placed on quality being at the heart of service and curriculum development, including resources that meet learner needs on a range of IAG topics. Staff described constant service evolution, or as one manager said, "We're always evolving. We don't sit still", with this ethos described further in live documents such as the Three Year Development Plan. A particularly robust example of quality-focussed service evolution is the development of the programmes for young people at risk of being NEET and the care experienced. These developments are positive in themselves, and also represent diversification of income streams and future proofing the organisation. In addition, staff described a supportive quality service where they are listened to and their ideas developed, all part of this wider quality assurance and continuous improvement culture. (7.1, 7.2)

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Development suggestions

Development suggestions are offered in the spirit of continuous improvement and a way for an Assessor to add value e.g. where the service is of a high quality, development areas are offered to help the service be even better than it already is, or to give insight into practices seen elsewhere. There is no correlation between the number of strengths and development suggestions. Where development areas are greater in number this is not intended to indicate that the information, advice and guidance service is in any way lacking. These will form the basis for discussion at the Continuous Improvement Checks (CIC) conducted twelve and twenty-four months from the date of this Assessment, along with any other notable developments. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- While overall resources are good quality and user-friendly, several staff and, importantly, learners, described difficulties using the WCLL website, and how it would benefit from being refreshed. One learner described having recommended WCLL to friends who had given up their applications due to difficulties with the website. A review of the website does indeed show that, while all the necessary information is there, it could be made more intuitive and user-friendly. WCLL management are aware of the website issues. They are encouraged to prioritise the planned website upgrade, along with a wider review of digital promotion via social media channels. (3.2)

- IAG is clearly at the core of all WCLL programmes and takes place throughout the learner journey. There was however some confusion as the term 'IAG' is used internally to describe the initial sessions undertaken, and the relevant documentation completed, with all learners to identify their needs and goals and the best pathway for them. Some staff and learners therefore think of IAG as just initial IAG. The full breadth of end to end IAG covering the whole learner journey is well described in various documents, yet the concept of IAG referring solely to initial IAG prevails. The organisation may wish to redefine terminology used to ensure the full breadth of the IAG service is understood and valued by all. (2.1, 3.1)

- Personal development or 'soft' outcomes are one of the main benefits of a WCLL experience for many learners. These outcomes are celebrated in posters throughout the WCLL centre, in case studies, feedback exercises and were strongly highlighted by learners in interviews. Some ILPs reviewed could have been more fully completed, to capture and celebrate more of the undoubted personal development outcomes achieved by learners. WCLL may wish to consider this as it develops its service and related documentation. (5.1, 5.2)

- Management and staff described an IAG service that is embedded in provision and is a major aspect of all staff interactions with learners. Tutor job descriptions however do not describe in any detail the wide-ranging IAG for personal and professional issues that is so central to the service. When next revising these job

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descriptions, WCLL may wish to focus on the full breadth of the IAG service, to ensure consistency in understanding and provision of IAG, and in order to continue to profile the importance and value of IAG within the organisation. (2.1)

- Apprenticeship achievement rates have risen impressively over recent years and apprentices interviewed for this assessment were very pleased with their experience. However, numbers have fallen, in part because of a preference for stand-alone qualifications for teaching assistants. Another reason for falling numbers described by several staff was the lack of a Business Administration level 2, with level 3 being too specialised as an entry point for many potential apprentices. A new level 2 is being made available nationally, and WCLL is hoping to deliver it. The organisation is encouraged to prioritise this development, both to increase apprenticeship numbers and to provide pathways for learners who need a level 2 as an introduction to apprenticeships and as part of a development pathway and as part of wider inclusion initiatives. (4.2, 4.3)

- While IAG is undoubtedly robust throughout the WCLL learner journey, including discussions around progression, one senior manager did mention that they would like to develop Progression Maps. Similar maps are a useful progression IAG tool in other providers. Given the wide range of programmes available, these maps could enable learners to visualise their own possible pathways and excite them further about their WCLL learning journey. (4.3)

- While overall digitisation has developed considerably across the organisation, pockets of paper-based practice remain. For example, the Work Experience team records information during visits on paper, which then needs to be digitally recorded. A system of tablets for staff, with information directly entered during visits, could serve to streamline the service and aid service agility, while also being one of the final steps towards a fully digital service. (2.8)

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2. During the period of accreditation satisfy The Growth Company that the organisation continues to meet the requirements of the **matrix** Standard via the annual continuous improvement checks and the three-year accreditation review.

3. Complete annual continuous improvement checks in a timely way, it is expected these will be carried out annually by the accreditation anniversary date.

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5. Submit their Booking Form for re-accreditation to the **matrix** Standard at least 3 months prior to the accreditation anniversary date ensuring all pre on-site activity is completed in a timely way including planning, payment and interview scheduling. Accreditation Reviews are due 3 years from the anniversary accreditation date; it is expected that organisations will be assessed by this date or will risk being de-accredited.

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