MUSEUM ACCREDITATION

Supporting Guidance for Accreditation
Standard November 2024

Accreditation:
Returns Information Sheet

Introduction

Thank you for your continued interest in Museum Accreditation, the UK Standard for museums and galleries.

The Scheme sets out nationally agreed standards of good practice for the sector. It is managed as a partnership between Arts Council England, the Welsh Government, Museums Galleries Scotland and the Northern Ireland Museums Council. Each organisation is a national development agency for museums.

You can find out more about the aims and benefits of the scheme in the Accreditation: How to Meet the Standard guidance.

This information sheet is designed to support Accredited museums prepare their Accreditation Return.

You'll find links to essential guidance and templates, and tips on getting started.

The Your Accreditation Return application section provides advice on key areas of the application.

The Assessment and Decision section explains what happens after you submit your application, and how we made decisions.

The Support and Advice section provides information on who to contact if you have any questions while preparing your application.

What is an Accreditation Return?

Once Accredited we'll periodically invite you to demonstrate that your museum is continuing to meet the Standard. This is called an Accreditation Return and will typically take place every five years.

Your assessing organisation will email your Accreditation Return invitation six months before the submission deadline. You'll submit your application using the Grantium online application portal.

Your current Accreditation award remains in place until an updated assessment is reviewed by an Accreditation Panel.

Preparing your Return provides an opportunity for self-assessment.

You'll need to double-check that your policies and plans are up to date and compliant with the Accreditation Standard. You'll review your current performance, and the progress made since your last award. The evidence we require will vary according to your museum's size and type. You will also need to attach relevant approval of policies and plans.

Accreditation guidance and resources

To prepare your Return you'll need to use the following essential guidance and resources in the [Accreditation Guidance Library:](#)

- **Accreditation: How to meet the Standard** – the main guidance document for the programme. It explains how to demonstrate that your museum is meeting the requirements.

- **Accreditation Standard: Documents Checklist** - lists the documents you'll need to have in place.

- **Accreditation: Museum scalability indicators** - some requirements are tailored according to museum size and type. To select your museum size and type, compare your museum against the characteristics outlined in the document.

- **Collection Development Policy template** - your policy must be in line with the approved template. If you make changes to the wording, please be prepared to demonstrate where the relevant clauses are represented. We can apply flexibility with the wording where a museum has updated clauses to align with the MA Disposal Toolkit.

- **The application form question set** - you can download a reference copy to help you prepare. However please note we can only accept applications submitted online using Grantium.

- **Accreditation questions - National and nationally-styled** – reference copy. UK National museums must complete additional questions. These open up on the application form if you select your museum type as 'national'. Museums using a Nationally-styled marketing approach and name must also complete additional questions. These open up on the application form if you select 'yes' when asked whether your museum has a nationally-styled name.

- **Getting Started on Grantium** & **Completing Your Application Form**

- **The Collections Trust website** hosts Accreditation resources covering the three broad areas of museum activity: organisational health; collections; and users and their experiences. Under these main headings you'll find details of the requirements of the Standard along with relevant resources: http://www.collectionstrust.org.uk/accreditation/

Getting started

You'll have six months in total to prepare and submit your Return application. Here are some tips on getting started:

Read and familiarise yourself with the Accreditation Standard and accompanying guidance and resources.

Review your policies and plans as soon as possible - are they up to date and compliant with the Accreditation Standard? If any need updating, ensure you build in enough time to get evidence of their approval from your governing body. Please note that we cannot accept draft versions of documents.

Read your last Accreditation award letter. We'll ask you to provide an update on your progress against any areas for improvement / development listed.

Involve colleagues and stakeholders throughout your planning and preparation. Policies and plans need approval from your governing body. It's important that staff and volunteers who are responsible for an area of work are familiar with any new procedures that relate to it.

If you have any questions or need help, please contact your Accreditation assessing organisation, or local Museum Development provider. You can find their contact details in the Support and advice section below.

Accreditation mentors are experienced professionals in the sector, who help smaller museums achieve and retain Accreditation. If you have an Accreditation mentor, arrange regular catch ups for support throughout the application process.

Get set up on Grantium - you can find information tailored to the Accreditation Scheme in the Accreditation Guidance Library.

Your Accreditation Return application

In this section you'll find advice on key areas of the application.

It's important that the information you provide is an accurate reflection of the policies, plans and procedures you currently use.

Please make sure your security reviews, emergency plans and other policies and plans cover all premises (including off-site ones) that hold collections.

Required actions/areas for development screen

You'll provide an update on progress against any Areas for Improvement / Development listed in your last Accreditation award letter. You'll need to confirm they have been completed or provide an update on why they are no longer relevant. If you are still working on an Area for Improvement / Development please tell us about the progress you've made and the expected completion date. Please note that Areas for Improvement are now referred to as Areas for Development on Grantium. If you need a copy of your last award letter please contact your assessing organisation.

Returns Checklist screen

The Returns Checklist screen lists the 21 requirements of the Accreditation Standard. When you tick a requirement number this opens up a corresponding section within the application form.
To comply with the Accreditation Scheme, your policies and procedures must be reviewed at least every five years. A plan is a live working document and should typically be reviewed and updated on a more regular basis.
You'll see that 12 requirements are pre-ticked Returns Checklist. As it's likely to have been over five years since your last award, we'll expect you to tick most if not all of the other requirements. This will enable you to tell us about changes in these areas since your last application. In some cases, we'll simply need confirmation that you have the relevant policies and practices in place. In others we'll ask you to upload specific key documents.

The Collections Development Policy template

The Collections Development Policy template (2014) contains standard clauses that all museums should include. Many of these relate to the legal responsibilities of museums and the wording has been checked so museums don't have to seek separate legal advice. Using the Accreditation template as the basis for your policy also means museums have a shared language in relation to acquisition and disposal.

The clauses in your policy don't have to be in the same order as the template. You can arrange them in a way that makes sense for your organisation. We'll read your policy to carefully check that any changes to the template clauses don't dilute the meaning of the wording. Where you have made changes to the wording or order please be prepared to demonstrate where the relevant clauses are represented in your policy.

We can apply flexibility with the wording where a museum has updated clauses within their policy to align with the updated MA Disposal Toolkit
For full details of how to meet Requirement 4.2, Collection Development Policy, please see the Accreditation: How to Meet the Standard guidance.

Combining policies and plans
You can combine policies and plans in a way that suits your organisation. For example your collections care and conservation policy may be part of a wider collections management policy. If multiple policies are combined you'll need to let us know where to find each individual policy. Please tell us the section / page number. You may wish to provide a cover document with an explanation for the assessor.

Applications from an individual site managed by a museum service

We award Accreditation to venues not services. If you belong to a group of museums operated by a corporate body, such as a local authority service, then we'll ask each individual museum to apply.

When providing updates on Areas for Improvement / Development you'll need to report on progress against both the actions outlined for the group of museums, and for each museum individually.

On Grantium, museum service applicants can choose to submit applications for each of their sites via a single Applicant profile for the main body, or they can set up an Applicant profile for each individual site.

Where you share documents with other museums in the group, and you are applying for multiples sites at the same time, you can nominate one site as the lead museum. (This could be the largest by budget or visitor number, or whatever works best for your service). You can upload the shared policy documents to the lead museum's application form. All other museum sites can then cross-reference this in their applications when they are asked to upload a document again. For example you can upload a Word document to explain 'The following requirements / documents are attached to application reference ACCR-XXXX for XXX museum'.

National museum authorities

If you're applying on behalf of a national museum authority such as National Trust or Historic Environment Scotland, you'll be taken through a two-stage assessment. We'll first ask you to provide a central application covering elements which are managed service-wide such as corporate policies and plans. If you're at an individual property, we'll then ask you to provide a simplified version of your application covering the site-specific detail.

Key tips on using Grantium

We can only accept applications submitted using the Grantium. The Grantium homepage address is: https://applications.artscouncil.org.uk/frontOffice.jsf

To log on to Grantium for the first time you'll need to create a personal **User Account**. This is unique to each individual user and acts as your personal signature. Your User Account log on details should not be shared with anyone. An **Applicant Profile** represents your museum or art gallery. Your applicant profile reference will begin with a **5**XXXXXXX.

When you set up your Accreditation application form in Grantium, make a note of your **Project Number beginning ACCR-** . This will help you locate the form when you log off and log on again. If you need to contact us with a query about your application, please reference your Project Number.

You need to fill the Accreditation application form **in page-by-page order**. The responses you give to questions early in the form inform which questions and prompts open up later in the application form.

You can work on your application form and begin uploading things as early as you like – nothing will come to us until you press 'submit' on the final screen of the application form.

Assessment and decision

When you submit your Accreditation application, you'll receive an **automatic email notification** via Grantium confirming we've received it. If you don't receive a notification within an hour of submitting please first check your junk mail folder, and then email enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk quoting your ACCR- application project number.

Your application will be allocated to the assessing organisation for your geographic area: Arts Council England, the Welsh Government, Museums Galleries Scotland or the Northern Ireland Museums Council.

The decision on your museum's Accreditation status will be made by an Accreditation Panel.

We aim to have a decision on your application within six months of receipt. If we don't have a complete application and everything we need for our assessment this might take longer.

Assessment

We'll assess your application against the requirements of the Accreditation Standard and the associated guidance documents.

Your assessor will carry out an **initial review and may request additional information,** e.g. the documents available on request, or around statutory or legal requirements such as safeguarding policies. The request for information would be sent via Grantium to all User Accounts linked to the Applicant Profile.

The four possible outcomes

The assessor will recommend one of the following four outcomes to the Accreditation Panel:

- **Full Accreditation**

Your application demonstrates you are meeting the Requirements of the Standard. The assessor may add Areas for Development to the award recommendation. These will relate to a specific requirement where the museum is compliant but could make improvement. These are primarily applied in the spirit of development to help a museum focus on key areas, but can also be used to informally flag an issue for future monitoring.

- **Provisional Accreditation**

You have previously held Full Accreditation but are currently unable to demonstrate that you meet all the Requirements of the Standard.
The assessor has identified Required Action(s) which you will need to respond to by a set timescale (a short-term deadline of between 3 and 12 months).

- **Remove**

The museum is removed from the scheme, following a request to be removed. This might be because of capacity challenges, closure or the venue no longer meeting the definition of a museum. It may also be because the museum has not taken timely action to provide the assessing organisation with information we reasonably require. The museum can apply to rejoin the Scheme as a new applicant by completing an Eligibility Questionnaire.

- **Remove and Exclude due to deliberate non-compliance**

The museum or its governing body have made an irreversible decision or action which contravenes the Standard and goes against the shared ethical basis of the Scheme. This includes but is not limited to the unethical sale of accessioned museum collection items.
Excluded museums may apply for eligibility to rejoin the Scheme five years after removal for non-compliance. They must demonstrate that former non-compliant issues have been addressed through appropriately amended and compliant policies, plans and procedures. Museums continuing to deliberately contravene a requirement or requirements of the scheme are not eligible to reapply.

Decision panel

Completed assessments are scheduled for consideration at the Accreditation Decision panel. These are usually held every two months.
Panel members are drawn from the Accreditation Committee, a volunteer professional body of experts that acts as a representative of the museum sector in the UK.
Panel members review each assessment and make the final decision on the award outcome and any Required Actions and Areas for Development.
They may also defer a decision and request further information from the assessor.
There's more information on the Accreditation Committee on the Arts Council website.

Award letter

You will be formally notified of the panel's decision around two weeks after the meeting. We'll send your outcome letter by email or via a Grantium notification.
The letter will list any Areas for Development and / or Required Actions agreed by the panel.
We will also attach a copy of our terms and conditions for the award. You'll need to confirm your acceptance of these using Grantium. You should also read our **Post Award Information Sheet** which explains how to promote your award, and what to do if you're experiencing significant change.
If the panel has awarded Full Accreditation, we'll provide an award certificate normally within four weeks of you accepting the terms and conditions.

How long does the award last?

An award of **Full Accreditation** remains in place until an updated assessment is reviewed by the Accreditation Panel. Once Accredited we'll periodically invite you to submit a Return to demonstrate that your museum is continuing to meet the Standard.

An award of **Provisional Accreditation** can range from three months to a maximum of 12 months. The length of the award will depend on the museum's circumstances. Within the outcome letter you'll find full details of the deadline by which you'll need to respond to the Required Action(s). A further period of Provisional status can be awarded subject to satisfactory reporting in your Provisional Review application.

Your Accreditation Return deadline

Can I send in my Accreditation Return early?

After receiving your invitation, you can submit your Return as soon as you are ready. If you submit before your Return due date, we're more likely to be able to get your outcome confirmed sooner than if you wait until closer to the deadline.

What if we're having difficulty meeting the deadline?

There may be occasions where a museum experiences major change or temporary challenges which impact on their ability to meet the deadline. These could include workforce / governance changes and restructures, or a capital redevelopment. In these exceptional cases we may be able to offer an extension on your due date. Please contact your assessing organisation as soon as possible.

What happens if I don't submit my Return by the deadline?

Providing an Accreditation Return is a condition of your Accreditation award. If you do not submit your Return by the due date, we will contact you to discuss what happens next. We will normally recommend a short-term award of Provisional Accreditation. Within a set timescale we will expect you meet any Required Actions including providing an Accreditation Return. If you are unable to submit the Required Actions by the agreed deadline, we would normally recommend removal of the museum from the Accreditation Scheme.

Support and advice

Each UK Partner provides Accreditation advice and support within their geographic area. If you have any questions while preparing your Return application please contact:

Scotland
Museum Galleries Scotland
[Museum Accreditation - Museums Galleries Scotland](#)
Email: [accreditation@museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk](#)

Wales
The Welsh Government
[Museum Accreditation Scheme | GOV.WALES](#)
Email: [MuseumDevelopment@gov.wales](#)

Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Museums Council
[Museum Accreditation Scheme | N. Ireland Museums Council (nimc.co.uk)](#)
Email: [devofficer@nimc.co.uk](#)

England
Arts Council England funds a programme of Museum Development to support the delivery of the UK Accreditation Scheme in England. For advice at application stage, please contact your local Museum Development team. Contact details are available on their website:
[Museum Development North](#)
[Museum Development Midlands](#)
[Museum Development London](#)
[Museum Development South West](#)
[Museum Development South East](#)
UK National museums (governed by national legislation and directly receiving central or devolved Government funding) please contact accreditation@artscouncil.org.uk in the first instance.
Museums based in the **Channel Islands or the Isle of Man** please contact accreditation@artscouncil.org.uk in the first instance.
For queries relating to your Return deadline please email:
[accreditation@artscouncil.org.uk](#)

Support using Grantium

Guidance on setting up a User Account and Applicant Profile is available at the following link: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/grantium-support You can find information tailored to the Accreditation Scheme in the Accreditation Guidance Library.

For help and advice using Grantium please contact the Arts Council's Customer Services team. Email: enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk Telephone: 0161 934 4317 (10am-4pm) You can also Livechat by visiting:

https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/contact