

Working with your Accreditation Mentor

A guide for museums

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Arts Council England

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Introduction

Welcome to **Working with your Accreditation Mentor – a guide for museums**. The guide is designed to help you understand the role of your Accreditation Mentor and provide you with links to resources that will help you and your Accreditation Mentor work together. You should read this guide in conjunction with the **Accreditation Mentoring Handbook**, a parallel guide for mentors.

The full Accreditation guidance can be found in the **Museum Accreditation Standard 2018** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-arts-museums-and-libraries/uk-museum-accreditation-scheme/accreditation-guidance-library#t-in-page-nav-2>) and the **Supporting Guidance 2024 – Accreditation: How to meet the Standard** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-arts-museums-and-libraries/uk-museum-accreditation-scheme/accreditation-guidance-library#t-in-page-nav-2>) on the Arts Council England (ACE) website.

Museum Accreditation is a UK-wide Standard. Partners from Arts Council England, Northern Ireland Museums Council, Museums Galleries Scotland and the Welsh Government work together to deliver the scheme across the UK, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. Each nation manages the scheme and assesses applicants in its own region. ACE manages the Committee of the UK Accreditation Partnership and shares the online application platform, Grantium, with all four nations.

The Accreditation Standard is designed to be inclusive and of use to all types of public museums – from small, volunteer-run organisations to national institutions. The requirements are tailored to each museum's size and type, and information about **scalability** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-arts-museums-and-libraries/uk-museum-accreditation-scheme/accreditation-guidance-library#t-in-page-nav-2>) can be found on ACE's Accreditation pages.

The UK Accreditation Partnership thanks all those who give their time to support and give confidence to their mentored museums, helping them achieve and retain the trusted and nationally-recognised Museum Accreditation Standard.

What is an Accreditation Mentor?

In order to meet the Accreditation Standard, those museums which do not employ a museum professional are required to appoint an Accreditation Mentor. This will ensure the governing body has access to professional museum advice.

Accreditation Mentors support museums to achieve and retain Accredited Museum status by providing independent professional advice, acting as a volunteer for the museum. As such, they're not a free member of staff, nor are they a trustee (although museum trustees who are eligible may carry out the additional role of Accreditation Mentor).

Some parts of the UK provide Accreditation Mentoring through a pool of museum professionals with a variety of experience, or through museum sector support providers. And some local authorities provide Accreditation Mentoring to a number of museums in their area through council-run museums or county museums advisers. A museum would have to ensure this advice is being formally received and acted upon by the governing body to confirm it meets the Standard.

Why does our museum need an Accreditation Mentor?

To meet **Standard 1.3 for Organisational health: A satisfactory structure for your governance and management**, you need to show that you have access to museum professional advice.

The supporting guidance says:

We want to see appropriate levels of staffing and expertise for your museum and that there's a clear line of communication between the museum professional and your governing body. The level of advice in place should be appropriate to the size and scope of your museum. For smaller museums, without paid professional staff, this requirement can be met by appointing and acting on the input of a Trustee with museum professional experience or an Accreditation Mentor.

A museum professional is defined within Accreditation as having:

- At least three years' experience of working in museums as an employee, at curatorial/ managerial level. This experience can be across any of the three areas within the Standard: organisational health, managing collections, or users and their experiences
- A commitment to personal learning and development to show how they're keeping their knowledge, skills and experience up to date.

We expect the Accreditation Mentor to attend at least one meeting of the governing body a year and visit the museum at least once a year. We'll ask for an Accreditation Mentor report to accompany your application or return. This can be uploaded to the online form or provided separately to the Accreditation assessing organisation.

What's the difference between an Accreditation Mentor, a trustee and other museum advisers?

The Accreditation Mentor works individually with your museum to support the governing body in meeting the Accreditation Standard. They will advise you on your Accreditation application and Accreditation returns, and provide ongoing support so that the museum continues to meet the Standard.

Trustees have a specific job defined in charity law. If any of your trustees have professional museum experience (defined on p.15 of **How to meet the Standard**

(<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-arts-museums-and-libraries/uk-museum-accreditation-scheme/accreditation-guidance-library#t-in-page-nav-2>)) they can take on the additional role of being your Accreditation Mentor. A Mentor Agreement would still be needed in this case.

Although your governing body may have very well qualified and experienced people from different backgrounds, the Standard requires you to have access to professional museum advice.

Other museum advisers may provide Accreditation resources and training. Their responsibilities include developing opportunities, promoting museums, and supporting good practice. You may also receive support from staff from a larger museum in your area, the national support organisation in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and bodies such as Collections Trust. In England a regional museum development provider (often shortened to 'MD') may employ Museum Development Officers (MDOs) who work to support museums and the museum sector.

In all cases your first point of contact for professional museum advice in relation to Accreditation should be your Accreditation Mentor. They can signpost you to other sources of support.

How do we find an Accreditation Mentor?

You may find it useful to draw up an advertisement to attract a potential Mentor to your museum. Make it an interesting and useful opportunity, and contact your national or regional Museum Development support provider (see table) to ask about networks which could advertise the role. An advertisement template is included in the downloads.

You can also approach possible Mentors directly, or talk to larger museums to offer an opportunity to their staff.

If your museum is specialist in its collections or approach, you could contact a **Subject Specialist Network** (<https://www.subjectspecialistnetworks.org.uk/>) to ask them to advertise your vacancy among their members. The Army Museums Ogilby Trust (AMOT), the Museum Ethnographers Group, the Group for Education in Museums and the Society for Museum Archaeology are examples of this sort of network.

If you have specific areas to tackle in your Accreditation application or return, such as governance or improving your learning provision, it might benefit you to look for an Accreditation Mentor with experience in that field. Use the Accreditation planning prompt in the templates to check the areas in which you need most support.

If your museum already has an Accreditation Mentor, but you have lost touch with them, your national Museum Development provider who will have a contact list of Accreditation Mentors:

Scotland
Museum Galleries Scotland
accreditation@museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk

Wales
The Welsh Government
MuseumDevelopment@gov.wales

Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Museums Council
devofficer@nimc.co.uk

England
Arts Council England
accreditation@artscouncil.org.uk

Our Accreditation Mentor is provided by the Local Authority or is also our Museum Development Officer – how does that work?

In some parts of the UK, Local Authorities with larger museums and a long tradition of providing support to the smaller museums in their area will nominate an Accreditation Mentor for museums. In parts of England, Museum Development Officers, County Museum Advisers or similar have been established historically as Accreditation Mentors, although this dual role is diminishing.

In these cases, you will still need an Accreditation Mentor agreement and to ensure they meet the requirements of the Standard.

Starting to work with your Accreditation Mentor

Accreditation Mentors act in a voluntary capacity for the museum. This is true even if they perform the role as part of a paid role elsewhere.

To formalise this, the museum should introduce the Accreditation Mentor to the organisation in the same way as any other volunteer, and you should check they are properly covered by the museum's liability insurance policies (in case they are hurt or made ill while volunteering for the museum).

Your Accreditation Mentor will need to learn about specific aspects of your museum, and this can be covered in an induction covering the points in the checklist below.

Museum induction checklist

When introducing your Accreditation Mentor to your museum, please consider including these items in your induction:

Have we provided our Accreditation Mentor with:

- A copy of our governing document (e.g. Constitution, Articles of Association)?
- A set of minutes from the governing body or relevant committee for the last six months?
- The last set of audited accounts?
- An organisation chart? To show how teams/individuals relate to the governing body and any committees.
- Contact details of relevant people e.g. Trustees or staff members who lead on Accreditation?
- Any annual reports or similar to acquaint them with the work of the museum?

- Any written policies and plans we already have? (New Accreditation applicants may not yet have these.)
- Marketing materials, museum guide etc.?
- Our volunteer handbook, induction materials, code of conduct (if we have them)?

Have we introduced our new Accreditation Mentor to:

- The Chair and Treasurer/chief finance officer?
- Members of the governing body and relevant committees?
- Staff and volunteers? Especially those who will be involved in developing the collections and access policies and the plans needed for Accreditation.

Have we arranged for them to see:

- The museum?
- Collections storage and 'behind the scenes' areas?
- Any separate buildings that the museum uses?

And have we:

- **Signed an Accreditation Mentor agreement?** You will need to provide a copy of this in your Accreditation application.
- Added our Accreditation Mentor to the circulation lists for minutes of meetings, AGM notices, museum events?
- Inducted them via your usual volunteer procedures, including key policies such as Health and Safety, Data Protection?
- Checked that, as a volunteer, they are covered by the museum's insurance?
- Given them access to online files (if appropriate)?
- Asked them to set up a Grantium account so that they can see the museum's online Accreditation application? (This is possible, but not compulsory.)
- Come to an arrangement about paying expenses? (It is expected that travel expenses will be paid by the museum.)

What should we expect our Accreditation Mentor to do?

Although formally a volunteer of the museum, it's important to remember that the museum will get the most value from the Accreditation Mentor by seeing them as a critical friend who will provide a detached, independent, professional view.

The Accreditation Mentor's role is to help the museum meet the Accreditation Standard, so the advice and support they give to your museum must be clearly linked to the Standard's requirements. The Accreditation Mentor's role is to advise the museum's governing body, not to complete the Accreditation application for them. That responsibility sits with the museum.

Unless they have been formally appointed as a trustee, an Accreditation Mentor should not attend every meeting of the governing body or they could become classed in law as a de facto trustee.

The Standard requires the Accreditation Mentor to attend at least one meeting of the governing body a year. It is expected that the role will occupy about four days a year, including at least one visit to the museum. Otherwise, support will include ad hoc responses to the museum between the 'core' visits and meetings, providing professional advice on a range of areas of practice and indicating where additional advice and resources can be found.

When the museum is applying for Accreditation or submitting a return, the Accreditation Mentor will write a report for the assessing organisation. A template and sample report are provided in the Accreditation Mentoring Handbook. Wherever they are in the UK, museums submit their Accreditation application or return via Grantium, Arts Council England's application portal. It is then assigned to the relevant assessing organisation.

Accreditation Mentors are not expected to volunteer for general museum activities such as events, fundraising, stewarding and tea-making!

The Accreditation Mentor Agreement

We have provided a template agreement to give you a clear outline of expectations of the museum and its Accreditation Mentor.

It expects the museum to proactively involve the Accreditation Mentor by inviting them to key meetings, including those of the governing body, keeping them informed by sending minutes and newsletters, and allowing them access to all areas of the museum's work.

Remote mentoring

Consider whether the support you receive from your Accreditation Mentor might be carried out remotely.

There is a nationwide shortage of mentors – and a shortage of time that they can contribute to the wider museum world – so remote mentoring may give your museum better access to your Accreditation Mentor's time. And it may be the only option if your museum is in a remote part of the country.

Although the Standard requires one visit a year, there may be opportunities for your Accreditation Mentor to provide the bulk of the support via attendance at online meetings, phone calls, etc.

Key points in the relationship with your Accreditation Mentor

There are times when you will need to involve your Accreditation Mentor more intensively.

Your museum's first Accreditation application

The Accreditation Mentor may be involved at the first stage – seeing if your museum is eligible and becoming a ‘Working Towards Accreditation (WTA)’ museum.

Museums are then given three years in which to develop a full application. This is when you are likely to need the most support from your Accreditation Mentor as they advise you on developing your policies, plans and procedures.

The Accreditation Mentor will submit a report as part of your application, looking at the main areas of organisational health, managing collections, and users and their experiences. They may share this with you – and are encouraged to do so – but they may submit it directly to the Accreditation assessing organisation.

After the Accreditation application has been assessed

You will receive an outcome letter from your assessing organisation which will contain recommendations on ‘Required Actions’ and ‘Areas for Development’. You will have a specified time to tackle these, and your Accreditation Mentor’s advice will be invaluable in helping you improve.

Note: Areas for Development were previously called Areas for Improvement and may be described as that in your last assessment outcome letter.

Yearly involvement and ongoing communication with the Accreditation Mentor

Your Accreditation Mentor is required to attend at least one meeting of the governing body and make one or more visits to the museum each year. You'll therefore need to invite them to the meeting and provide the relevant paperwork. (See checklist.)

The museum will continue to review its progress against the Standard through its forward planning process. It is the responsibility of the museum to keep the Accreditation Mentor informed via minutes of meetings, updates and requests for support. You'll need to involve your Mentor in the review of any plans, policies and procedures directly relevant to the Standard's requirements.

Accreditation return

The museum will be required to renew its Accreditation status by submitting an Accreditation return, usually about five years after the last application. This is not as onerous as the first application, but it is a good time to ask for your Accreditation Mentor's support as you review policies, plans and procedures. They will also submit an Accreditation Mentor's report.

Thanking your Accreditation Mentor

The UK Accreditation Partnership thanks all those who give their time to support and give confidence to their mentored museums, helping them achieve and retain the trusted and nationally-recognised Museum Accreditation Standard. Museums too can be grateful for the voluntary effort put in by Accreditation Mentors on their behalf.

Changes in your Accreditation status

When a museum closes to visitors for redevelopment, significantly reduces its provision to the public, changes its governance model (eg. becoming a charitable incorporated organisation) or makes other major changes, this will need to be reported to the Accreditation assessing organisation. Some major changes mean that the museum moves to a status of Provisional Accreditation while the changes take place.

Your Accreditation Mentor will need to be kept informed. They will support you to look at how the museum can continue to meet the Standard for organisational health, managing collections, and users and their experiences.

If there is the possibility of permanent closure, it is best to involve your Accreditation Mentor at an early stage; they will put you in touch with organisations that can support you at a difficult time.

Ending your Mentoring Agreement

Typically, Accreditation mentoring relationships come to an end because:

- The Accreditation Mentor's work or personal circumstances have changed and they can no longer maintain the commitment
- The museum's support needs have evolved so the Mentor's expertise is no longer a good fit
- The Mentor's skills have developed and a different museum is a better match for them
- A museum professional has joined the museum's staff or governing body, so a Mentor is no longer needed
- The museum has left the scheme.

Very occasionally a relationship may come to an end because of a serious disagreement or communication breakdown. Either party can call an end to the relationship. Rather than just let it peter out, a well-managed closure is usually helpful to both mentor and museum.

It's recommended that you hold a final meeting to:

- Review what has been achieved during the time the mentor and museum have been working together.
- Reflect on what each party both found useful about the relationship and what could have been different.
- Agree any follow up e.g. who will notify the local support or assessing organisation.

Unless the museum is now employing a museum professional or has recruited a trustee with this experience, you will need to recruit a new Accreditation Mentor.

Useful tools to use with your Accreditation Mentor

- Accreditation Mentoring Handbook
- Induction checklist
- Accreditation Mentor Agreement
- Accreditation planning prompt
- Accreditation Mentor advertisement template

Other Accreditation advice

- **ACE Accreditation guidance library**
(<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-arts-museums-and-libraries/uk-museum-accreditation-scheme/accreditation-guidance-library#t-in-page-nav-2>)
- **Collections Trust Accreditation pages**
(<https://collectionstrust.org.uk/accreditation/>)
- **NCVO Help and Guidance: Governance**
(<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/governance/>)
- **SCVO Guidance: Good Governance**
- **Charity Commission guidance**
(<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-commission-guidance>)
- **Subject Specialist Networks**
(<https://www.subjectspecialistnetworks.org.uk/category/find-a-specialist-network>)
- **AIM Success Guides**
(<https://aim-museums.co.uk/museum-101-success-guides/>)

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