



**MUSEUM**  
ACCREDITATION

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Supporting Guidance for Accreditation  
Standard November 2024

# Accreditation: Eligibility and How to Apply

November 2024

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# Welcome to the Accreditation Scheme

Thank you for your 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 download the Accreditation Standard and a range of guidance and resources in the [Accreditation Guidance Library](#).

## The application process – overview

The Accreditation Scheme has a two-stage application process:

### 1. Eligibility Questionnaire

We first check whether your organisation meets key eligibility criteria and is eligible to apply for Museum Accreditation.

We ask applicants to submit an Eligibility Questionnaire, a copy of their governing document and confirmation of commitment to making an Accreditation application within a three-year period.

We'll normally let you know the outcome of the eligibility review within six weeks.

If we confirm that you are eligible to apply, you'll have up to three years to prepare and submit an Accreditation application. If your organisation is not eligible to apply, we'll provide feedback on why this is and, if relevant, which eligibility criteria you need to address ahead of a new eligibility questionnaire submission.

### 2. Accreditation application

Museums that are eligible to apply need to prepare and submit an Accreditation application evidencing they meet each of the requirements of the Standard.

In some cases, we'll simply need confirmation that you have the relevant policies, plans and procedures in place. In others we'll ask you to upload specific documents.

**If you do not submit an application within three years, then your eligibility to apply will expire.** You'll need to send in a new Eligibility Questionnaire if you wish to continue with plans to participate in the Accreditation scheme.

# How to use this guidance document

This document explains how to apply to the Accreditation Scheme as a first-time applicant.

The [Eligibility](#) section talks about the eligibility criteria and submitting an Eligibility Questionnaire.

The [Your Accreditation application](#) section provides guidance for eligible museums making their first 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 Eligibility Questionnaire or Accreditation application.

## Eligibility

In this section we'll talk about the eligibility criteria and completing your Eligibility Questionnaire.

## Who can apply?

Museum Accreditation is an inclusive Standard. It's used by all types of public museums - from small volunteer run organisations to national institutions. Eligibility refers to the rules on who can apply to the Accreditation Scheme.

**To be eligible to apply to the Accreditation Scheme, your organisation must meet the following criteria:**

- Be based in the UK, Isle of Man or Channel Islands
- Meet the Museum Association (1998) definition of a museum: 'Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.'
- Be in a physical site/space/building which is open to the public regularly
- Enable the public to see and engage with your museum's collections
- Have an appropriate constitution which supports the long-term purpose of a public museum. The constitutional entity must legally mean that the museum:
  - Exists for public benefit
  - Can demonstrate its collections and assets are appropriately protected

- Has powers to operate a museum and hold collections and assets, these powers must be transparent and should not include the ability to distribute assets or profit for private gain
- Is subject to statutory regulation or judicial process in relation to its conduct
- Must be a permanent entity with a long-term purpose
- Be committed to making a full application for Accreditation within three years

## Who cannot apply?

**The following types of organisations will not normally be considered eligible:**

- Privately owned museums and historic houses
- Commercial galleries
- Science centres
- Natural and archaeological sites, historical and industrial buildings, sites, monuments and heritage centres without associated long-term collections
- Institutions displaying live specimens, for example zoos and botanical gardens
- Educational loan services
- Venues for temporary exhibitions without long-term collections on display
- Record centres
- Libraries and archives including sound, film and photographic archives
- Online museums

## Eligible and ineligible constitutions

A governing document is a legal document setting out an organisation's aims and how it is administered. It may be a trust deed, constitution, rules, memorandum and articles of association, conveyance, will, Royal Charter, scheme of the Charity Commission or other formal document.

To be eligible for the Scheme your governing document needs to include powers to operate a museum and to hold collections, and evidence that collections are appropriately protected.

To check whether your constitution is eligible, please use the **Quick Reference Guide to Museum Constitutional Requirements** flowchart in the [Accreditation Guidance Library](#) This may help identify if you need to make any amendments to your constitution before applying for confirmation of eligibility. We can't offer legal advice, but you may wish to consult a suitably qualified legal adviser to take your specific circumstances into account.

**The following organisations provide a range of Accreditation approved resources including information on governance and constitutions:**

- Association of Independent Museums <https://www.aim-museums.co.uk/>
- Collections Trust <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/accreditation/>

**Some types of constitutional entity do not support the long-term purpose of a public museum:**

### **Constitutional forms likely to be eligible**

- Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee (CCLG)
- Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and Scottish CIO (SCIO)
- Public Service Mutuals (if CIO or CCLG)
- Local Authority Museums (may be the Principal Authority or a Town, Community (Wales) or Parish Council where authority has been delegated)
- Joint Management Arrangements
- Organisations constituted by Royal Charter
- University Museums (where other eligibility criteria are met)
- Act of Parliament

### **Constitutional forms that are potentially eligible**

This will depend on the extent to which the constitution supports the long-term purpose of a public museum,

- Charitable Trust
- Community Benefit Society (also known as BenCom)
- Community Interest Companies Limited by Guarantee (CICLG)
- Public Service Mutuals (if CIC or BenCom)

### **Constitutional form that are ineligible for Accreditation**

- Unincorporated Association (Voluntary/Community Organisation with no separate legal identity of its own)
- Private and Public Company Limited by shares
- Partnership and Limited Liability Partnership
- Community Interest Companies Limited by Shares
- Co-operative Societies
- Special Purpose Vehicles and other short-term structures

## Common reasons governing documents are ineligible:

- **Constitution does not include powers to hold collections and does not differentiate between corporate property and accessioned collections.**

We need to see reference to holding collections and protecting them by treating them differently from other property held by the organisation (that is corporate property / assets used in the day to day running of the organisation which can be disposed of at any time).

Emphasising a clear distinction between your corporate assets and accessioned collections can provide an important safeguard in the event that the organisation is wound up on insolvency. Where a constitution states that a primary purpose of the organisation is about holding and making a heritage collection accessible for public benefit, then an insolvency practitioner may be more likely to dispose of that property last and if possible, freely to another charitable organisation with a similar purpose. You would need to add a resolution to your governing document around the power to build up and safeguard a collection for the public benefit over the long-term. That would be sufficient for Accreditation purposes. You could also include a paragraph stating that the organisation is committed to managing the collections in line with sector standards, for example the UK Museum Accreditation Scheme and Spectrum: The UK Collection Management standard.

There is no recommended set wording for the clause. It isn't essential to see the word 'collection'. Acceptable alternatives include, 'objects', 'items', 'heritage assets' or, 'archive', though we would want to understand if it is a museum or an archive in practice.

- **Constitution does not give powers to operate a museum**

The main objects in your constitution refer to aims such as educating / encouraging and promoting public awareness and knowledge.

To meet Accreditation eligibility criteria your governing document needs to include explicit powers to operate a museum within either its primary objectives or a subordinate clause.

In practical terms this would mean adding a resolution to your governing document around the object to operate a museum for the benefit of the public and primarily focused on a specific theme.

There is no recommended set wording for the clause. Each museum would need to decide on the best wording according to their particular circumstances

# Completing your Eligibility Questionnaire

This section of the guidance explores the eligibility criteria in more detail and provides prompts to think about when filling in the Eligibility Questionnaire.

You can **download a copy of the Eligibility Questionnaire** from the [Accreditation Guidance Library](#)

## **Question 1. Is the museum based in the UK, Isle of Man or Channel Islands?**

We'll ask you for the name of your museum – please tell us the name you use to market your museum. We need the museum address details to check the museum is eligible to participate in the Scheme based on its location.

## **Question 2. Does it meet the agreed definition of a museum?**

- The Museums Association definition of a museum (1998) is: 'Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.'
- This definition includes art galleries with collections of works of art, as well as museums with historical collections of objects.
- We'll ask you to briefly describe how your museum meets the above definition. Think about your organisation's aims and purpose, your collection, and how you reach and engage people and communities. (Up to 300 words).

## **Question 3. Is the museum a physical site/ space/building which is open to the public regularly?**

- Your museum needs to be a specific physical site or space where the public can experience interpreted collections in a long-term/permanent exhibition.
- Tell us about your museum site or space and the opening arrangements. Is your museum open regularly to the public?
- Please also include your website details. We'll look at any information you've published online about your opening arrangements. (Up to 300 words).

## **Question 4. How are the public able to experience and engage with the museum's collections?**

- Tell us about the different ways that the public experience your museum's collections – this could include temporary exhibitions, guided tours, talks, online resources.
- We're looking to see that there is clear public access to the collections and that your organisation fulfils its public purpose. (Up to 300 words).

### **Question 5. The museum must have an appropriate constitution**

- In this section we'll ask you to tell us about your governing body and governing document.
- We'll ask about your type of constitution and which regulatory framework your museum operates under (e.g. Charities Commission / Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator).
- You'll need to send a copy of your approved governing document with your completed Eligibility Questionnaire. Please ensure you send up the most up to date version. We'll check it matches the details on the website of your regulatory body.
- We'll ask you to outline how your constitution meets each of the constitutional criteria. Where relevant, please indicate the particular clause within your constitution that meets the criteria (up to 500 words):
  - Exists for public benefit
  - Can demonstrate its collections and assets are appropriately protected
  - Has powers to operate a museum and hold collections and assets, these powers must be transparent and should not include the ability to distribute assets or profit for private gain
  - Is subject to statutory regulation or judicial process in relation to its conduct
  - Must be a permanent entity with a long-term purpose
- Where a **hybrid management model** exists, you'll need to provide copies of any agreements between the governing body and the managing organisation. This might include documents such as a management or service level agreement, or a collections loan agreement.
- In cases **where running a museum is not the main purpose of an organisation**, e.g. a police authority or a university / higher education establishment, we'll require additional information. If the governing body has set up a managing committee to manage the museum please provide any agreed terms of reference, and information about the line of authority and approvals link from the governing body to museum activities.

### **Question 6. Are you committed to making an application for Accreditation within three years?**

- Tell us your target date for making an Accreditation application. To ensure the date is realistic, please familiarise yourself with the Accreditation Standard and the [Accreditation: How to Meet the Standard](#) guidance.
- Outline your timeline to applying, listing the key milestones involved in preparing your application. You'll need to build in time to develop all the required policies and plans and get the relevant signed approvals in place.

- As evidence of your commitment to apply, we can accept a copy of your forward or business plan which references preparing and submitting your Accreditation application within a specific timeframe. Alternatively we can accept a letter from trustees or minutes from your governing body or management committee where you've discussed preparing an Accreditation application by a specific date. (Up to 300 words).

## Submitting your Eligibility Questionnaire for review

The completed form needs to be signed by a member of the governing body or by an individual authorised to sign on behalf of the governing body.

Please email your completed Eligibility Questionnaire, governing document and evidence of proposed application date to your UK Partner assessing organisation. You'll find the relevant email address listed on the Eligibility Questionnaire.

## The eligibility review process

We'll assess the information you provide against the eligibility criteria to decide whether your museum is eligible to apply for Accreditation. If any additional information is needed, the reviewer will get in touch with you.

**We will usually let you know the outcome within six weeks.**

If your museum is marketed using a nationally-styled name, we may arrange a site visit. This is to confirm that you provide comparable facilities, collections and services to National Museums. For further information on nationally-styled museums please see the Accreditation Guidance: [Museum Scalability Indicators](#).

## If your museum is eligible to apply

You will be confirmed as Working Towards Accreditation. You'll have up to three years to prepare and submit an Accreditation application.

You'll be given a reference number to use on all communications with us. This number will begin with a 'T'. We'll add your museum details and eligibility expiry date to the externally published list of applicants Working Towards Accreditation.

**If you do not submit an Accreditation application within three years, then your eligibility to apply will automatically expire.** If you still have plans to participate in the Accreditation scheme, you will need to send in a new Eligibility Questionnaire.

Please keep us informed if you experience any major change during your Working Towards Accreditation period, e.g. a change in constitution, or a site move. We will need to check whether the change impacts on your eligibility to apply.

## **If your museum is not eligible to apply**

If your organisation does not meet the eligibility criteria, we'll let you know why we have reached that decision.

The assessor will explain which of the Eligibility criteria you have not met, and if relevant, what steps you will need to take to address this in order to resubmit your Eligibility Questionnaire.

# Your Accreditation application

This section provides guidance for eligible museums making their first application. At eligibility stage you will have outlined your target date and timeline for making an application. Museums that are eligible to apply have up to three years to prepare and submit an Accreditation application.

## Getting started

**Read and familiarise yourself with the Accreditation Standard and accompanying guidance and resources.** You'll find an overview of resources in the [What information do I need to submit?](#) section below.

**Involve colleagues and stakeholders throughout your planning and preparation.** Policies and plans will 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.

**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.

**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.

## What information do I need to submit?

You will need to demonstrate that you meet all the requirements of the Accreditation Standard. Please make sure your security reviews, emergency plans and other policies and plans cover all premises (including off-site ones) that hold collections. You'll find guidance and templates to support you in the [Accreditation Guidance Library](#) including:

- **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 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.
- **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/>

## 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.

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 (e.g. the largest by budget or visitor number, or whatever works best for your service), and upload the shared policy documents to that particular application form. All other museums can then just cross-reference this in their applications where you're asked to upload a document again.

## 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.

## How do I submit the Accreditation application?

You'll submit your Accreditation application using the online application portal. Application system home page link: <https://grants.artscouncil.org.uk/frontOffice.xhtml> You'll find guidance on getting set up on the application system and completing the application form in the [Accreditation Guidance Library](#).

## Key tips on using the online application system

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 **5XXXXXXX**.

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** 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](mailto: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.

**We aim to reach 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 the application system to all User Accounts linked to the Applicant Profile.

We'll normally carry out a **site visit** for new Applicants. The assessor will get in touch to agree a date for this. Site visits are designed to be supportive and help us to gain a better understanding of the museum. You can find further information on site visits in the [Accreditation Guidance Library](#).

## Award recommendation

**If your application demonstrates you are meeting the requirements of the Standard the assessor will recommend an award of Full Accreditation.**

They may add Areas for Development to the award recommendation. These will relate to a specific requirement where the museum is compliant but could make improvements. 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.

**If you are unable to meet key areas of the Accreditation Standard criteria then the assessor will recommend that the application not be progressed at this time.** The assessor will explain which areas of the criteria you have not met, and

what steps you will need to take to address this. You can resubmit your Accreditation application once you have addressed the feedback.

## 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 Areas for Development.

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 an online notification.

The letter will list any Areas for Development 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 the online application system. 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 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 [online application system](#).

# Accreditation support and advice

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

## Scotland

### Museum Galleries Scotland

[Museum Accreditation - Museums Galleries Scotland](#)

Email: [accreditation@museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk](mailto:accreditation@museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk)

## Wales

### The Welsh Government

[Museum Accreditation Scheme | GOV.WALES](#)

Email: [MuseumDevelopment@gov.wales](mailto:MuseumDevelopment@gov.wales)

## Northern Ireland

### Northern Ireland Museums Council

[Museum Accreditation Scheme | N. Ireland Museums Council \(nimc.co.uk\)](#)

Email: [devofficer@nimc.co.uk](mailto: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 eligibility or 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](mailto: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](mailto:accreditation@artscouncil.org.uk) in the first instance.

## Support using the application system

You can find guidance tailored to the Accreditation Scheme on setting up a User Account, Applicant Profile and application form in the [Accreditation Guidance Library](#).

For help and support using the online application system please contact the Arts Council's Customer Services team. Email: [enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk)

You can also Use our Contact Form by visiting:

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

