

Museum Accreditation: what's new?

Presentation notes, Annette French, Manager, Museums Accreditation

MDY: Accreditation day: Thackray Medical Museum 15/01/19

Introduction

30 years on and we're celebrating with a newly refreshed Scheme. We know Accreditation has been transformative, is highly valued and brings many benefits.

But looking a bit tired and overloaded over the years – the scheme is now clearer, more streamlined and welcoming. Much of the review work has been behind the scenes, improving our processes, the way we work and creating new IT systems. It's been a UK Partner project, led by ACE but we've really listened to you...thank you.

What's changing? New returns timetable.

A new returns cycle...good news it's extended from 3 to 5 years. Thanks to your feedback! More sustainable, realistic at both ends and came out in survey. You can find your new return deadline on the ACE website or talk to your local MD team.

We're still wrapping up some of our backlog assessments and of course they'll be slotted in at the end of the new cycle, so they'll still benefit from the 5 year change.

What's changing: a new definition of Accreditation

We've got a new definition for the Standard.

- The Museum Accreditation Scheme is the UK industry standard for museums and galleries.
- It tells everyone involved with a museum that they're doing the right things to help people to engage with collections, and protect them for the future.
- The Museum Accreditation Scheme does this by making sure museums manage their collections properly, engage with visitors, and are governed appropriately.

We've gone back to first principles and agreed this with UK Partners and sector colleagues.

Agreeing the purpose then allowed us to clarify the requirements of the Standard and the process in terms of how they relate to this core purpose. It's now more focused and streamlined.

What's changing: the Standard

It's not been a fundamental rewrite of the 2011 Standard. We've looked at improving its focus, tone and structure. We've decluttered with more emphasis on articulating the requirements and the rationale behind them.

We've achieved better balance across all three areas of the Standard: Organisational health, Managing collections and Users and their experiences

These are arranged as 3 sections as before and we've used a more logical grouping for better flow within the document.

What are the key changes to the Standard?

Section 1: Organisational Health

- Environmental sustainability policy statement isn't a separate requirement. We expect this to be reflected within the museum's forward/business plan.
- We've made it clearer that forward plans and business plans are the same thing.

We've made some changes to the compulsory elements within the forward plan (eg previous forward plan and analysis of environment). This improves alignment with ACE NPO business planning requirements and allows for more variation in tailoring plans to suit the museum's own organisational needs.

- Access to professional advice- we've changed our criteria so it's more flexible. Professional experience can be demonstrated over three years, not five. We've removed the need for a professional qualification and are clearer that there's a wide range of ways to demonstrate a commitment to continuing personal development. Museum professionals (including museum mentors) are now able to serve on a museum's governing body as a voting member.

Section 2: Managing collections

- Our approach to expert security assessments is more flexible, taking a more risk-based approach where museums are finding it difficult to source expert security advice.
- We've introduced better alignment with Spectrum 5.0 for our requirements around collections documentation planning, policies and procedures.
- We haven't changed the current Collections Development Policy template. We last reviewed this in 2014 and it's been reprinted for use with the new Standard.

Section 3: Users and their experiences

- A new requirement has been introduced for an access plan
- There's less duplication in this section

What's changing: Guidance

We're replacing our suite of guidance documents with a single combined guidance document, to be published next month. This will be shorter and friendlier in tone so it's more accessible. We'll make it clearer how our expectations differ for the type and size of museum. Where individual requirements are scaled we'll explain what we expect to see for assessment. We'll include our key assessment questions, so you can see what we're looking for. We've heard that museums found the range of requirements too long and confusing, so we'll help them to prioritise these. We're including more information on how the process works and range of award outcomes. Our assessors will share some top tips.

We'll signpost other sources of help and guidance too. We've worked with Collections Trust to refresh our approved list of Accreditation resources. These have now been updated so it's a handy one stop shop!

What's changing: business systems

We want to improve the online application system and respond to feedback from the review, so this will change. We want to ensure that revised Standard is right before committing to the new online system.

A new online application system hosted by Arts Council England on behalf of UK Partnership, will be available from Spring 2019, ahead of deadline for submission of returns. In England the first batch of returns will be due by end May 2019. We'll be moving the application and returns process to a new portal, Grantium.

We know the timing of the opening for the new system is tight for the first set of invites, so we've already built in an extra month's leniency. Based on a November invite we'd normally work to an end of April return deadline but we're accepting to end May 2019.

It's been tailored to our needs, and we'll provide accompanying technical guidance to help walk people through the online form.

We won't have a hard copy version of the form available but we will share a list of the questions to help you prepare offline. If you have specific access requirements ACE can help you with these.

What's changing: eligibility

We've published up-to-date guidance on appropriate constitutions for public UK museums to reflect changes over recent years. The number of legal structures available for museums has increased. Some are better-suited than others...and the intention is to give a better steer around this.

In line with review principles of trying to streamline where possible – there are fewer eligibility criteria now – however there is more emphasis on the governing documents/constitution as the review highlighted the importance of this. For Accreditation 2018 the criteria are: that the museum is based in the UK, Isle of Man or Channel Islands and that it meets the Museums Association definition of a museum. It has to be a physical site/space/building which is open to the public

regularly and where the public can see and engage with the museum's collections and it must be set up with an appropriate constitution which supports the long-term purpose of a public museum.

The constitution is a key document – for the running of the museum and for Accreditation purposes. It will be looked at, at both stages – as part of the eligibility review and then as part of the Accreditation assessment – which is often 3 years' later.

We no longer require a forward/business plan (but it can be used to evidence the commitment to making an application for Accreditation within a three-year time period) and we no longer require two years' or indeed sight of any accounts.

We're working more closely with Museum Development colleagues so they'll help support decision making and we can signpost support more easily. We're introducing more flexibility with less focus on annual extensions centrally. It's more of a local decision with museum development to check in as they like over the 3-year period and see what targeted advice and training can be offered.

What's changing? Advocacy and communication

We have been asked by the sector to help promote the Scheme more and adopt a more celebratory approach.

We have already introduced subtle changes which have been well received.

We'll highlight positives not just recommendations in outcome letters. We want to talk about areas of development not areas for improvement. We want to be trying to support museums through change, and sound less impersonal and bureaucratic. Our key aims are to be clear, open and supportive (realistic, decisive and knowledgeable, understanding, honest, fair, empathetic and flexible).

A recurring theme in the feedback we have received has been about the tone of our communications and the need to vary it depending on the types of museums we are liaising with. We understand that a letter which lands on the desk of a Head of Collections Management in a National Museum needs to be written differently than one that arrives at the home of the Chair of a volunteer-led museum.

- We've commissioned an audit of our communications and materials and produce training and guidance to ensure our tone hits the right note.
- We have added more on our website on the benefits of Accreditation for different audiences. Museums can use this to create press releases to celebrate their achievement of Accreditation.
- We will apply this work to all our communications, the Standard, our guidance and our webpages

What's changing? Mentors

- New name- Accreditation mentors
- More flexible criteria- no need for a professional qualification, just demonstrate you're keeping up to date through CPD.
- Shift from 5 to 3 years relevant experience.
- Can be on the board or museum's governing body.

Summary

This is just an overview of some of the key headlines. Do have a look on the website, talk to your museum development team and watch out for news and updates through their newsletters etc. We're working with museum development to support events in your region so the team is getting out and about more as well.

Any questions in the meantime please contact the central Accreditation inbox accreditation@artscouncil.org.uk