

Archive Service Accreditation: Frequently Asked Questions

What is Archive Service Accreditation?

Archive Service Accreditation is a UK-wide standards scheme which supports improvement and development for archive services. It is an externally validated standard which provides a badge of recognition for accredited archive services.

Accredited archive services provide a high level of service to their stakeholders, preserve their collections in line with national standards and are robust, sustainable services which plan and deliver ongoing improvement.

Who manages Archives Service Accreditation?

Archive Service Accreditation is supported by a partnership of Archives and Records Association (UK & Ireland), Archives and Records Council Wales, Arts Council England, National Records of Scotland, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Scottish Council on Archives, The National Archives, and the Welsh Government through its CyMAL: Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales division.

The scheme is overseen by the Archive Service Accreditation Committee. The committee is composed of members who are either nominated by the UK Accreditation Partnership or recruited externally through open competition. Members of the Accreditation Committee are current or recently retired archive sector practitioners.

The Committee is responsible for awarding accredited status through regular Accreditation Panels composed of Committee members.

Who can apply for Archive Service Accreditation?

Archive Service Accreditation is aimed at organisations which hold and make accessible archive collections, whatever their constitution, and covers both private and public sector archives.

Eligible institutions vary from dedicated archive services, through integrated heritage services, to institutional archive and records management services which may primarily serve internal customers. See the *Eligibility Guidance* for full information about eligibility criteria.

My archive service is part of another archive service./ My archive service has multiple branches./ My parent organisation runs multiple archive services. How should we apply?

Decisions about the most sensible format to apply in complex governance setups are at the discretion of the applicant service(s). In general, the deciding factor will be how closely the services are run together. If the balance of service governance, staffing and collections management is separate but front of house is shared, separate applications are probably sensible. Equally, if the service operates as one unit delivered through a number of service points in different locations, one single application is likely to work best. The application form is designed to allow both these options.

If you are responsible for applications for more than one service where some elements are shared, you can make an initial application for one service and then cross-refer in subsequent applications to where information has already been submitted.

One note: If your archive service operates one or more outstores, you must include those outstores in your accreditation application. Outstores are part of the wider archive service and will not be accredited separately.

How can a single standard apply to archives of many different types?

The standard is underpinned by the concept of scalability, which is described in detail in the *Scalability Guidance*. The *Guidance* on completing applications for accreditation offers scaled guidance on expectations for different sizes and types of archive service.

Two connected concepts support making the Archive Service Accreditation standard fully flexible: the archive service's mission statement and its identified community. A mission statement identifies the role and purpose of the service, and refers to its community.

Archive Service Accreditation works with the following definition of community:

“The concept of a community which the archive service is constituted to serve. In this specific sense the word ‘community’ does not necessarily refer simply to the population of a political unit or physical area (e.g. a local authority or town). For many archive services the community will extend beyond the formal boundaries of its responsible body (government, educational institution, private or voluntary organisation). The archive will probably serve multiple communities: local, national and international; different communities of researchers and of other types of direct and indirect users and of non-users. Different elements of the community may attract different priorities, types and levels of service. The ‘community’ to be served is defined through the stated purpose of the archive service.”

Archive Service Accreditation makes constant links to the mission and community of the applicant service, ensuring that what is required for the standard also works for individual services.

What are the benefits?

Archive Service Accreditation provides an archive service with a mark of external recognition and an endorsement of their service.

- Going through the process of accreditation allows archives to review their service against a nationally recognised standard of archive management. They have the opportunity to consider policies, plans and procedures, identify areas of strength and areas of weakness for further development.
- The standard provides a robust framework to facilitate forward planning, improving procedures and policy and reducing organisational risk.
- The process helps archive services adapt and respond to user needs and interests and to support workforce development.

- Requirements are scaled to the mission and scope of the archive service and feedback is offered at an appropriate scale, offering guidance for future service development.
- Accredited status is a badge of recognition which demonstrates quality of services to supporters, donors and grant-making bodies, strengthening funding applications, attracting philanthropic giving and fostering investor trust.

Does the scheme support existing standards such as PD5454?

The scheme was developed with reference to existing standards and codes of practice including PD 5454, PAS197 and 198 and ISAD(G). The relationship is outlined in the *Guidance* for applicants, which specifies particular requirements. An example is the requirement for many archives to aim to meet PD5454:2012.

When can I make an application?

Each home nation partner is responsible for managing applications to Archive Service Accreditation in their own area.

In England we plan to roll out the scheme over an initial period of four years. To manage the flow of applications we will ask archive services to indicate when they apply for accreditation. We will do this with a short survey in Spring/Summer 2013 and you will be invited to apply according to your preferred group.

What should I think about before making an application?

The timing of your application may be influenced by the following:

- Service review
- Service move
- Museum Accreditation application or submission
- Planned capital project
- Budget year
- Strategic planning timetables of your parent organisation

You should also allow yourself enough time to prepare for Archives Service Accreditation. Although some services will find they have much of the required evidence to hand, many services will need to go through a process of planning and development over several months or indeed years. Preparing for Archive Service Accreditation is an important part of the process and will help your service to be stronger and more effective even before you make an application.

How will my application be assessed?

Applications are assessed by lead bodies or their representatives in the home nations, led by the Welsh Government, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, National Records Scotland and Scottish Council on Archives, with The National Archives acting as lead assessor body for England.

Each home nation body is responsible for assessing applications in their own area. In England your application will be reviewed by an assessor at The National Archives.

The assessor will review how far your service meets the Accreditation Standard based on the information you have supplied in your application and accompanying documentation and will make a recommendation to the Accreditation Panel based on an assessment

A minimum of 25% of applications will receive also an onsite validation visit by an assessment team, which may include a peer reviewer.

What is a validation visit?

The validation visit is an opportunity for the assessment team to discuss with you key aspects of your application and look at some additional documentation eg emergency plan. The team will also look at onsite facilities, including repositories and reading rooms.

What is the Archive Service Accreditation Panel?

The Archive Service Accreditation Panel is comprised of members who are drawn from the governing Archive Service Accreditation Committee. Panels meet several times per year to review recommendations and award Accredited Status.

When will I learn the outcome of the application?

We aim to inform you of the likely outcome of your application within three months of the receipt of your application, as long as we were aware in advance of your intention to apply. The outcome of your application will be formally given following the decision of the Accreditation Panel.

As part of the application process you will receive feedback based on your application which will support the future development of your service.

What are the possible outcomes from an application?

Applicants may be accredited if they meet the standard in full, or provisionally accredited if their application falls down in a limited number of areas. In this case, they will be asked to demonstrate these areas have been addressed within a set time period.

Archive services which are not accredited after their application will be welcome to reapply once they have been able to address the reasons for not being accredited.

Where can I get help with my application?

You should look at our web pages initially.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/accreditation.htm>

In England: If you are a publicly funded archive service then our Engagement Team can provide advice. If you are non-publicly funded archive service then our Private Archives Team can advise you.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/ask-question.htm>

Up to date contact details for the lead bodies in the other home nations are available on the accreditation web pages.

Will I need to renew my Accredited Status?

You will be asked to submit an interim return after 2-3 years and a full accreditation application after a further 2-3 years.

I disagree with the outcome of my application. What can I do?

Archive services which are not accredited after their application are welcome to reapply once they have been able to address the reasons for not being accredited. In England your Engagement Manager can help you develop your service towards the Accreditation Standard.

How does accreditation relate to Place of Deposit status?

Places of Deposit will be expected to apply for accredited status, which will provide the ongoing assurance that the relevant standards are being met. For more information, please see the separate guidance note: *The Accreditation Standard and Places of Deposit*.

How does accreditation for archive services relate to museum accreditation?

Archive Service Accreditation has been developed to align effectively with and complement the Museums Accreditation Scheme. Both share the same focus on organisational health, collections and stakeholders and their experiences. Both schemes have the same ethos of helping to raise standards and award achievement.

We are a museum with a significant archive collection. We are already accredited as a museum. Do we also need to become accredited as an archive?

If the primary purpose of your organisation is to be a museum then it is appropriate that you apply for Accreditation under the museum scheme and your application may encompass all your collections, including the archives.

If you are a museum that is also a recognised Place of Deposit, then you will need to fulfil the requirements of the Archive Service Accreditation scheme in addition to those of museum Accreditation.

If you are not a recognised Place of Deposit but wish to apply in addition to the Archive Service Accreditation scheme then you are welcome to. This is a choice rather than a requirement. The schemes have been aligned so that the submission of relevant information from one is applicable to the other.

How does accreditation for archive services relate to The National Archives *Standard for Record Repositories* and the self-assessment programme for local authorities?

Accreditation for archive services replaces the *Standard for Record Repositories*. It also replaces self-assessment, which last ran in 2010.

How does Archive Service Accreditation work for archive services in the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands ?

Archives services based in the Isle of Man or the Channel Islands are welcome to apply for Archive Service Accreditation. The National Archives acts as the default assessor body for these archive services. However, archive services in the Isle of Man or Channel Islands may opt to be assessed by another home nations assessor body (i.e. CyMAL: the Welsh Government, National Records of Scotland/Scottish Council on Archives or Public Record Office of Northern Ireland) and should contact them directly to make arrangements if this is the case.

How was Archive Service Accreditation developed?

The scheme was developed through a process of co-creation with the archives sector and its stakeholders, in which the potential content of the standard was discussed through a series of public debates, online and at workshops. The standard, application process and guidance were tested during 2012-13 with a range of archive services reflecting the diversity of the sector in the UK.

The development process was guided by the Archive Service Accreditation workstream with partners from: The National Archives, Arts Council England, Welsh Government through its CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales division, National Records Scotland, Scottish Council on Archives, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Archives and Records Association (UK & Ireland) and Archives and Records Council Wales.

Is there a charge for applying for Archive Service Accreditation?

Assessor bodies have agreed there will be no charge for either administering or assessing services as part of accreditation for applicants.