Archive Service Accreditation Committee: Roadmap to developing Archive Service Accreditation: inclusive practice within the national standard for archives 2021-2024 and beyond

Vision
The Archive Service Accreditation programme encourages archive services to embed equality, diversity and inclusion across the breadth of their work: their organisational context, their collections and their stakeholder engagement.

Rationale
Archive Service Accreditation develops over time and in response to challenges and priorities facing the archives sector. A lack of explicit support for inclusive practice within the standard was raised with the Committee in 2019 by the Archives and Records Association (UK & Ireland), as not reflective of the archive sector's development and needs.[1]

Committee agreed that this was an area where further work would be welcome, noting that inclusive practice had a role across services' activity and that archive services were actively working in this area. Updates would therefore be needed across the three modules of the standard, to ensure that archive services embed equality, diversity and inclusion in multiple areas. This includes supporting archive services in their work to remove barriers to participation, reach new audiences and think innovatively to engage more, and different, people with their work and in their collecting practice.

Why in this way?
The approach is a phased one, initially working within the requirements of the current Accreditation standard, then including a specific focus on equality, diversity and inclusion in the programme's scheduled ten-year review (2023).

This approach recognises both the need for the programme to continue to develop, and the extreme challenge of the impact of the pandemic on the archive sector. The decision to phase change is in part a pragmatic one; it also allows an initial accumulation of evidence around inclusive practice within the sector to inform future change. With Accreditation partners offering an increasing range of sector support for inclusive practice, the archive sector will be enabled to move forwards as the standard evolves.

Given current financial challenges for many archive services, the Committee feel that is important to underline the need for archives to continue to think and act in a way that focuses on their communities and current and potential audiences. Services need to preserve this capacity at a time when they are having to make difficult choices about what activities can be sustained during a time of budget reductions.

The Accreditation Committee are clear that during the first phases of change they will welcome archive services which look ahead, going beyond the requirements of the standard: showing what can be achieved, to inform future expectations within a revised standard.

Definitions
The following represents the Archive Service Accreditation Committee's intentions in developing the standard further.

Equality, diversity and inclusion refers to addressing the impacts of inequality and exclusion which may come from discrimination around the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 ((1) Age, (2) Disability, (3) Gender reassignment, (4) Marriage and Civil partnership, (5) Pregnancy and maternity, (6) Race, (7) Religion or belief, (8) Sex or (9) Sexual orientation). The Equality Act 2010 also gives the duty to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not and to foster good relations between them.

Exclusion may also arise through factors such as socio-economic background, educational background, lack of digital access and geographic isolation. While some factors are consistent across the population, others are differently distributed across the UK, its regions, nations and communities. Individual archive services serve communities which have a different balance of these challenges, and their responses will take account of communities needs' and expectations.

Inclusive practice encompasses the legal requirements around equality, and the recognition that a diversity of experiences, voices and understandings strengthens any organisation. But it also goes further, to remove barriers and actively to seek engagement with communities and views which have not previously been included. For collections institutions, this specifically comprises considering what is collected or not collected, and how it is described, as well as the people involved with the collections, whether as workforce or as audiences.

Communities: Archive Service Accreditation is based on the concept of communities that 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 communities served will extend beyond the formal boundaries of its responsible body (government, educational institution, private or voluntary organisation). The archive service 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 services and embraces both users and other stakeholders.[2] For the purposes of this work, we have chosen to refer to 'communities' plural to emphasise the need to engage across this range of different groups and individuals, with diverse needs and interests. An archive service's communities extend well beyond those who already routinely use the service.

Figure 1 Roadmap overview

Phase one (2021-22):

Working within the structure of the existing standard, incremental change is made to support archive services to reflect their work on equality, diversity and inclusion in their applications and reviews.

- 1A Underlying guidance and phrasing of existing questions updated to reflect changes in sector practice seen in recent applications. This offers more direct encouragement to address equality, diversity and inclusion in Accreditation submissions. These updates specifically relate to existing requirements on collections development, collections information, access and engagement policy and planning.

- 1B A small number of new questions are tested with a range of archive service types to explore further aspects of equality, diversity and inclusion. These expand the current questions relating to workforce, collections development and user procedures.

- 1B Archive services are invited to pilot the combination of the updated guidance and the proposed new questions. This is an opportunity to reflect on their own work and inform the future development of the standard, including asking where the updates do not give sufficient space to cover their work and plans.

- 1B An external challenge approach is created to explore what an overtly inclusive standard for archives could look like.

- 1C Outcomes of this testing, piloting and challenge work are reported to Committee in 2022. Where possible, updated questions and further guidance updates are incorporated into the live programme thereafter
- 1C Where testing indicates that updated approaches do not fit into the current structures of the Accreditation programme, these outcomes are fed into future planning for the programme

An important element of this phase is reflection. Archive services testing questions and piloting updates will be invited to comment on the limitations of this approach and what it does not allow them to discuss, as well as the support they would require to understand how changes potentially apply to their service and how they can develop their work. An external challenge approach will be developed to invite reflection on what a fully inclusive standard for archives could look like. These reflections will be core to developing phase two.

Sector support (2021-2023)

While phase one is live, Accreditation partners will continue to develop their support for the archive sector, based in part on feedback received throughout phase one. Responses will reflect partners' national and sector roles, and may include advocacy, guidance, training, grant funding and support for new routes into archives work, such as apprenticeships. Partners will incorporate review of levels of sector knowledge, skills and behaviours including confidence and further needs in this area into their ongoing sector activity.

Phase two (2023-24)

Phase two is a full review of the content of the Archive Service Accreditation standard, due after ten years of operation. It takes account of the archive sector's changing requirements and the environment in which it operates. A leading design principle of the revised standard will be a focus on the impact of each archive service within its communities. Other areas for redevelopment are likely to include the reflection of digital practice in the standard, emerging new access and engagement practices in the wake of the pandemic, and updates to reference standards such as PAS197 in the decade since Accreditation was launched.

This phase will be a major piece of archive sector co-creation. It will not be conducted by the Accreditation partners directly, but will be externally commissioned. Contractors will be required to demonstrate how they will engage a range of voices in the redevelopment of the standard, as well as using the outcomes from phase one of development.

Detailed roadmap

This planning uses the Accreditation Committee annual programme governance meetings (May) as reporting points to give structure to the development timetable.

	Roadmap stage	Activities	Participants	Outputs
Phase one	**1A Updated guidance (May 2021)**	Committee approves updates to guidance for existing questions and light updates to wording (e.g. community becomes communities in many cases)	Accreditation Committee and partners	Updated guidance
	1B Testing new approaches (Q3-4 2021)	A small number of new questions are tested through an online survey Archive services are recruited to pilot the full suite of guidance updates plus new questions to reflect on the cumulative impact of the change and its capacity to reflect their work and plans Begin an external commentary and challenge process to explore what an inclusive standard could become	Partners and archive sector Partners and relevant external bodies including Archive Disruptors, Archives Unlocked Board and agencies beyond the archive sector through a structured consultative process	Test responses to new questions and the impact of fuller updates to guidance Wider critique of approach Further updated and improved guidance
	Reporting on pilot and testing phase (2021-22)	Outcomes of testing are reported to Committee with implementation recommendations	Programme team, reporting to Accreditation Committee	Recommendations for implementation of phase one and development of phase two

	Roadmap stage	Activities	Participants	Outputs
	Updating live programme (2021-22)	Implementation of any further updates to existing programme, based on testing outcomes	Applicants and award holders	Active use of updated programme, response to new and revised questions Committee has continual oversight, notes on issues for phase two
	Sector support (May 2021 onwards)	Accreditation partners through their sector activities offer a range of support to archive services in developing their inclusive approaches Assessors and Committee receive relevant training	Partners and archive sector	Support including guidance and training, ongoing work on new routes into archive sector employment
Phase two	**Development (2022)**	Phase one experience and understanding of critiques of standard leads to development of an approach to the new Accreditation standard, embodied in a tender for a full review	Partners and Accreditation Committee	Invitation to tender, capturing the critique and experience of phase one as well as other areas requiring review
	Co-creation and piloting (2023)	External consultants appointed with a specific focus on inclusion within the standard, and develop co-creation/drafting approach to creating revised, updated and transformed	Consultants, archive sector, relevant external bodies with appropriate funding from partners	A clear direction for change, centring communities within the programme

	Roadmap stage	Activities	Participants	Outputs
		standard including with external challenge		
	Reporting (Q1-2 2024)	A revised approach is developed based on co-creation	Consultants, partners, Accreditation Committee	A full revised standard and updated application questions, guidance and other support
	Phase two go-live (2024)	Accreditation applications under the previous standard are potentially paused to allow for transition (date tbc) and then reopened under the new standard and programme. New applicants and award-holders work to the new standard.	Partners, Accreditation Committee, programme team	Active use of the new standard and programme

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[1] Archive Service Accreditation Committee Annual Meeting 2019, item 12: https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/archive-service-accreditation-commitee-minutes-may-2019.pdf

[2] Archive Service Accreditation: *Guidance* 2020 https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/archive-service-accreditation-guidance-2020.pdf