

Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom: COVID-19 Update for museums in England and Frequently Asked Questions

[This is a live document which will be amended and added to as the situation unfolds – last updated: 29 January 2021]

Summary:

What's our current status?

To support all Accredited museums in the UK, their current Accreditation award status is being **further extended for an additional 12 months to 1 April 2022**.

When does this come into effect?

Immediately, until 1 April 2022.

Is our organisation Accredited?

You can check if your organisation is Accredited here:

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/accreditation-scheme/about-accreditation#section-1>

Whether your organisation holds a Full or Provisional award you're still formally Accredited and have access to the benefits of the Scheme, for example funding opportunities and support from Museum Development organisations.

Does Accreditation status affect funding opportunities?

All UK Accreditation Partners will have individual funding programmes available. Please contact the organisation who assessed your application to discover funding opportunities and eligibility criteria.

All museums who hold an Accreditation award (Full or Provisional) are still able to apply for funding which uses Accreditation status as an eligibility criterion.

Why can't the scheme reopen fully?

For the Accreditation Scheme to fully reopen, museums need to be open to the public and in a position to look beyond the immediate crisis. We want the timing of the reopening to be supportive to the sector, and know that while some museums have been able to update policies, plans and procedures during their closure, for many museums the priority is still facing ongoing challenges, with an urgent focus on fundraising and restructuring.

We continue to be committed to the UK standard for museums and believe that the 2018 standard provides a useful shared framework. The requirements won't be changing, but we've heard and understand that some aspects of guidance may need updating to better reflect the impact of COVID-19 and reinforce our commitment to inclusivity and relevance.

We want to be supportive while you work through your challenges and plan towards reopening and recovery, so we won't be undertaking significant change reviews until April 2022 to give you time to review and reassess your options.

What is happening with returns?

Accredited Museums are expected to demonstrate they maintain the national standard by providing a regular return. At this stage, we are not able to confirm our revised returns schedule in England.

We understand museums will need greater flexibility with their returns deadlines and want to explore whether a more risk-based approach could help.

Although unconfirmed, our intention is to invite returns from October 2021 onwards. We will continue with the 6-month invitation window, so museums won't need to provide a return immediately when we reopen. You'll still have time to prepare ahead of the first (estimated) deadline in April 2022.

We'll contact you if your museum currently holds the award and you've made a return which is in progress and under assessment already. We'll ask you to review your form and documents ahead of when we reopen for returns but you won't be expected to resubmit before 1 April 2022 unless you're ready sooner.

Temporary closures due to COVID-19:

Will our museum status be affected if we've had to close to the public?

No. Please be reassured that museums which are temporarily closed will continue with their current status.

Current award status will automatically rollover to 1 April 2022, regardless of whether you've had to close temporarily or were already closed – for example as part of planned redevelopment works.

What if lockdown has meant my museum will close permanently?

We recognise that sadly some museums may close permanently due to the impact of COVID-19, and if this happens, they cannot maintain their Accreditation status.

If your museum has closed to the public indefinitely and you do not have a plan for reopening, you cannot meet the eligibility criteria for the Scheme or Section 3 User and Experiences of the Standard (Museums, galleries and historic sites must be a physical site/space/building, which is open regularly with access to the collection for a minimum of least 20 days per year).

If you wish to withdraw voluntarily as Accreditation is not currently a priority for your organisation, please let us know and we will process this from 1 April 2021. This doesn't close the door if you wish to apply again and enter the process from the start in the future.

Museums experiencing difficulties should contact Museum Development organisations to access and discuss additional support. If you are an NPO in England, please contact your Relationship Manager who will also be able to offer advice.

If your organisation does close permanently please let us know and we will process a withdrawal from the scheme once we reopen on 1 April 2021.

Can we withdraw from the Scheme?

Museum Accreditation is a voluntary scheme, and a governing body can make the decision to withdraw from the Accreditation Scheme.

Email accreditation@artscouncil.org.uk with confirmation you wish to withdraw, such as a record of the decision by your governing body. These will be processed on a rolling basis without needing to go to an awards panel. Until you receive email confirmation of this, Accreditation status will remain with the expectation that the Standard will be maintained in line with your individual museums' policies.

You will not be entitled to the benefits of the scheme. You can apply again in the future if you wish but you will need to start afresh from the eligibility stage.

Eligibility:

Will the eligibility process remain open?

Eligibility has remained open throughout the UK for museums, galleries and heritage organisations considering new applications to the scheme.

Eligibility questionnaires can still be submitted and assessed during this period. Museums can access Museum Development support. Eligible applicants will have up to three years to submit a full application, with new applications processed in England from 1 April 2021.

In England, the first stage is to complete an eligibility questionnaire and return it to accreditation@artscouncil.org.uk. Please refer to the published guidance and talk to the Museum Development team first. Arts Council England makes final decisions on eligibility, working closely with Museum Development teams.

You'll find more information here: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/accreditation-scheme/accreditation-how-apply>

Has eligibility changed?

Eligibility criteria for the scheme remains the same. There have been some temporary adjustments in response to government restrictions.

Museum Accreditation eligibility criteria includes providing opportunities for public access and engagement with your assets and collection. This can still be shown in a range of ways, including digital content or online learning.

To be eligible your organisation must be a physical site/space/building, which is open to the public regularly, so please include your opening arrangements. We understand that your museum may have closed temporarily due to COVID-19 restrictions, however your museum will need to have reopened at your full application.

For museums who are currently removed and excluded due to deliberate non-compliance, the eligibility process remains open at the end of the five-year exclusion period.

We are considering an application to Museum Accreditation. What does it involve and is it suitable for us?

If you're a non-Accredited museum or heritage organisation looking to find out more about the scheme, your regional Museum Development team will be able to offer help and support. They will be able to tell you more about what the scheme is, why it's important, what the benefits are, what's involved in applying for and maintaining Accreditation, why not all museums are suitable and where to find out more.

Before sending in an eligibility questionnaire, we recommend you talk to your regional Museum Development team for initial advice and to see if it is the right fit and timing for your organisation.

How can Accreditation help us?

We see the benefits of Accreditation as an organisational health check and a strong foundation for development. It can provide a framework to self-assess, implement change, and inform and shape your current and future planning. Focusing on your core purpose, your communities and your foundation policies and plans is part of planning for a dynamic and sustainable future. We want to improve our advocacy and help you use Accreditation to lever support within your organisation.

Working Towards Accreditation:

We haven't yet applied but are planning to. What do we need to do?

If you are currently recognised as Working Towards Accreditation you will be able to apply from 1 April 2021. You should apply when your museum is open again.

The scheme is closed to new applications until April. If you wish to submit an application sooner, this will not be assessed or awarded while the scheme is closed.

Grantium will be available for you to do this and you'll need your 'T' number to get started.

You can check if your organisation is formally recognised as Working Towards Accreditation and your 'T' number here: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/accreditation-scheme/about-accreditation#section-1>

We haven't applied yet, but our circumstances have changed, and we wish to withdraw from the process. Is this possible?

Accreditation may no longer be a priority for you, or you may not have the capacity to complete the application. We recommend you speak to your regional Museum Development team.

If a significant change has taken place in your organisation, please check it meets eligibility criteria for the scheme. Advice can be offered by your relevant Museum Development provider. You may be required to complete an updated eligibility questionnaire if an important change has taken place.

If you decide to withdraw please contact us at accreditation@artscouncil.org.uk so we can update our records. You can apply again in the future if you wish, but you will need to start afresh from the eligibility stage.

Do museums currently Working Towards Accreditation have extensions?

Museums formally recognised as Working Towards Accreditation normally provide an

application within three years of the date eligibility is confirmed. Flexibility will be offered to those actively working on Accreditation and accessing Museum Development advice and support.

All museums Working Towards Accreditation with a deadline during 2020 and 2021 will be offered an additional 12 months to do apply, this extension is automatic and does not need to be requested.

New Applicants:

We have already applied, and are under assessment and awaiting a decision. What next?

We are phasing the reopening of the scheme and will partially reopen by end of April 2021. This will apply for new applications in England, as we want to ensure these museums can have access to the benefits of the Scheme as quickly as possible. Your applications are a priority for us and will be fast tracked for assessment.

You will have received an automatic notification from Grantium or an email from an assessor, informing you where in the process your application has reached. We'll return your application to you so you can update and review this. Your documents need to be up to date and may have to be reviewed before you send them in again, because our assessment is based on your current situation.

You'll need to apply when your museum is open again so you can demonstrate how you meet section 3 of the Standard. You'll be able to resubmit from 1 April 2021 onwards; we will not be undertaking any assessments or awards before this date.

Site visits:

Are site visits still going ahead?

Site visits to all new applicants will remain as part of the assessment process and for returns as part of our quality assurance. We will be flexible on timings and these will not be undertaken until it is safe to do so.

For new applicants, we can progress your application to an awards panel if you are open to the public. If we can make a site visit as part of our assessment of your application, we will. If this isn't possible due to COVID-19 closure or government restrictions, we are exploring options for virtual visits.

UK Accreditation Partners will explore options for online visits pre-panel, using the existing site checklist as part of the quality assurance process, and schedule an on-site visit within 12 months of the award.

Provisional reviews:

We have the Provisional award and our deadline is before 1 April 2022.

We've already submitted our documents for our provisional review. What do we need to do?

In England, you'll be able to resubmit from 1 April 2021 onwards. We won't be undertaking any assessments or awards before this date. Your current status will roll on automatically until 1 April 2022, so you don't have to do anything immediately but if you're ready to go sooner you can.

You'll be contacted by a Relationship Manager or museum development colleague to discuss your specific situation and identify when it's best for you to resubmit.

We'll return your application to you so you can update and review this. Your documents need to be up to date and may have to be reviewed before you send them in again, because our assessment is based on your current situation. You'll need to apply when your museum is open again so you can demonstrate how you meet section 3 of the Standard.

Our Provisional review deadline is coming up. Do we still need to do this?

Your current status will be extended until 1 April 2022 automatically.

Those with a Provisional Accreditation award, will be offered the same extension as organisations currently holding a Full Accreditation award.

The deadline to report against Required Actions and Areas for Development will be delayed by 12 months. The original return deadline is on the award outcome letter.

If you're ready to go sooner and your documents are up to date, you'll be able to submit your application from 1 April 2021. You won't lose any information you've previously submitted, but you may need to provide some updates. If that's the case, we'll return your application to you to make the changes.

Significant change reviews:

You'll all be making important and often difficult decisions about your sites and services. There will be no significant change reviews until 1 April 2022.

Accreditation returns:

If you are expecting to receive an invitation to make an Accreditation return this year you will not receive this nor be expected to submit a return. You will be contacted when the scheme re-opens fully for returns (we are aiming for this to be from 1 October 2021).

We have already submitted a return and are still awaiting a decision. What should we do?

Your current status will be extended until 1 April 2022 automatically.

We know that a lot has changed in response to COVID-19. We need an up to date understanding of how this has impacted your organisation and how you're planning for recovery. We can't complete our assessments and make award decisions based on old and out of date information. We will return your submission back to you so you can update your information and resubmit. You will not lose your earlier submission.

You are not expected to work on this immediately, and we understand it may not be a priority at this time. Our intention is that you will be able to resubmit from 1 October 2021 (the new deadline would be **1 April 2022**, but you could choose to resubmit anytime between October 2021 and March 2022).

Our return deadline has passed, and we haven't made a submission on Grantium. Our return is overdue. What should we do?

Your current status will be extended until 1 April 2022 automatically.

Your museum should still be working on and updating a return. You can work on it via the portal if you wish, but you'll need to wait to submit when we re-open from 1 October 2021.

We won't expect a submission until 1 April 2022, and reviewing these will be a priority for us at that point, but museums are welcome to submit any time from 1 October 2021 if you're ready to do so.

Our return deadline has passed, and we've started a return application on Grantium but haven't yet submitted this. What should we do?

Your current status will be extended until April 2022 automatically. You'll receive a notification via Grantium.

You will not lose this work. You can carry on working on your return via the portal if you wish, but you'll need to wait to submit when we re-open from 1 October 2021. We'll expect you to update any documents so that the information is up to date and is an accurate picture of your organisation when you send it in.

We won't expect a submission until 1 April 2022, and reviewing these will be a priority for us at that point, but museums are welcome to submit any time from 1 October 2021 if you're ready to do so.

Award decision-making:

When will the next Accreditation panels be?

Unfortunately we are not able to confirm our Accreditation panel dates for 2021 yet. These will be responsive to need, and we aim to increase the frequency using e-panels as necessary. We hope to reinstate panels from June 2021 for new applicants, and from October 2021 onwards, initially prioritising any returns already submitted.

In exceptional circumstances (such as a compliance issue) we reserve the option to convene an extraordinary panel meeting before June 2021.

Can I still get a copy of my award certificate?

Hard copy certificates for museums will not be issued in England until Arts Council England offices re-open. Temporary alternative certificates (e-versions) can be issued by email.

Compliance:

Do we still have to follow Accreditation requirements during this time?

The expectation remains that Accredited museums meet the requirements of the Scheme in line with the museum's policies.

One of the main priorities is the health and safety of staff and visitors, meaning that current Government advice must be followed.

In difficult financial situations can we consider selling items for financial reasons?

We know that museums may have more questions about collections at risk; we will seek to provide greater clarity around the process and guidance on Accreditation and proposed sales from collections. We will provide an update and flow chart in March 2021.

Resources:

The MA's Disposals Toolkit and your own collections development policy is the best place to start. While there has been no change to the published guidance and process around disposals, we want to support your difficult conversations and provide advice on next steps – so that the expectations within the UK standard for museums are clear and transparent.

The collections development policy template has not changed and is published here: <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/resource/collections-development-policy-template/>

You'll find more information here:

- <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-museums/disposal-collections#section-1>
- <https://www.museumsassociation.org/collections/disposal-toolkit>
- <https://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics>

We know that you may need informal advice before following a formal route, and so would encourage open conversations with your regional Museum Development team and/or Relationship Manager so we can best support and advise you.

Advice and support in England:

How can we get Accreditation advice during this period?

The relevant Museum Development team will continue to provide Accreditation advice and support.

Find your regional contact here:

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/museum-development-programme/museum-development-providers>

Accreditation guidance documents are on our website.

Who is my assessor?

In England we are introducing assessment in Area, in line with other Arts Council operations. We are embedding Accreditation more fully in place-based work so we can better understand your needs, provide improved continuity and share information more easily with Museum Development colleagues and Arts Council Relationship Managers.

There have been changes to our team structure since the scheme was paused in April 2020. This means there's no longer a team of national assessors working across the UK, but a new role has been created: Relationship Manager (Accreditation). We will have Relationship Managers covering each of the Arts Council Areas.

An assessor will be in contact with you if we've already started an assessment.

Who can we contact?

If you have any questions, our Customer Services team are available via email:

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

The scheme will partially reopen on 1 April 2021, but it will take time to restart the processes. A member of the team will contact you about your return or application as soon as possible.

Arts Council staff are working from home and unable to accept any hard copy documents or receive post.

If you have any questions specifically on Accreditation, please do get in touch at:

accreditation@artscouncil.org.uk