

Archives Accreditation Scheme

Stakeholder briefing

February 2012

The new Archives Accreditation standard is currently being developed in partnership with archive sector stakeholders across the UK. It will provide a framework for benchmarking performance and support development planning. It is intended to replace a number of existing benchmarks including Self Assessment for local authority archives. Archives Accreditation is central to the *Archives for the 21st Century* priority to develop better and more effective services and increase sustainability within the sector.

This briefing provides an update on developments to date and outlines how to contribute to the co-creation of the new standard.

Background

Accreditation schemes encourage and recognise excellence by certificating the achievement of best professional practice.

In a time of exceptional financial constraint and competition for resources, the need for archives to demonstrate their public value robustly and consistently has never been greater. Archives Accreditation will help organisations become more adaptable, resilient and sustainable by embedding a culture of sector-led continuous improvement, focusing on the needs of users and local communities and on producing best value for money.

Archives Accreditation is a key deliverable of Archives for the 21st Century in Action.

Progress to date

The archive sector in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, has come together to progress proposals for a new accreditation scheme for archive-holding organisations across the UK. There has been a considerable amount of preparation work carried out to date.

In April 2010 the Museums Libraries and Archives Council and The National Archives commissioned a scoping study to investigate possible models, delivery mechanisms and costs for a new accreditation scheme. The second phase which explored development options and an overall framework for the scheme was completed in March 2011.

Writing and piloting the scheme will take place during 2011-2013. The archive sector will play a central role in the creation and testing of the scheme.

Funding for the next two phases has been secured by The National Archives with support from the Welsh Government – CyMAL and the Scottish Council on Archives.

- November 2011 - May 2012 - Stage 3: Co-creation
Development of Standard and requirements
- April 2012 - Stage 4: Piloting

An Archives Accreditation workstream made up of representatives from the strategic organisations and professional bodies for archives across the four nations has been established to help guide the development process. The partner bodies include The National Archives, Arts Council England, the Welsh Assembly Government, through its CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales division, National Records Scotland, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, the Archives and Records Association, the Archives and Records Council Wales and the Scottish Council on Archives.

Current activity

The current phase of Archives Accreditation development is the sector-led development of the Standard to meet the needs of archives and their users. This co-creation process will result in a practical working Scheme that delivers support and encourages development where it is most wanted and needed. The co-creation timetable is as follows:

November / December 2011

- Introducing the Accreditation Development process
- Open invitation for volunteers from all types of archives and archives stakeholders across the UK to contribute their expertise and drive the participation in the co-creation.

January / February 2012

- Introductory workshops for the lead volunteers outlining progress to date and the online co-creation process.
- Open webinar to introduce the online process

February / April 2012

- Online discussions and creation of the archives accreditation standard

May 2012

- Standard agreed

June 2012

- Begin piloting the scheme

The process has been designed to ensure that all types of archives and archives stakeholders can actively participate in the design of the standard, no matter in which part of the UK they live, or whether they are able to take time away from their work base. In response to our open invitation for people interested in taking part in the development workshops we received expressions of interest to lead the participation from a wide range of archives stakeholders, representing a cross section of skills and experience and different archive types.

We are confident that the resulting mix of in-person workshops and online discussions will allow everyone to participate in this process as easily as possible. This innovative approach will be evaluated and use it to inform future collaboration and engagement with the sector.

Getting involved

The online discussion platform is now live and will run until the first week in May. Go to www.dialogue-app.com/archivesaccreditation to find out who is discussing what and make your contribution. It's very straightforward to join. Each week new sections of the new standard will be introduced ready for constructive debate and discussion. It does not require huge amounts of time – but regular short incisive contributions and responses drawing on your experience and expertise. Please do get involved and encourage your colleagues to contribute too.

Further information and updates can be found at:

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/our-services/archives-accreditation-scheme.htm and on Twitter: **#archivesaccreditn**

The project team also continue to brief stakeholder groups on progress. Please do get in touch if you'd like us to speak with your stakeholders.

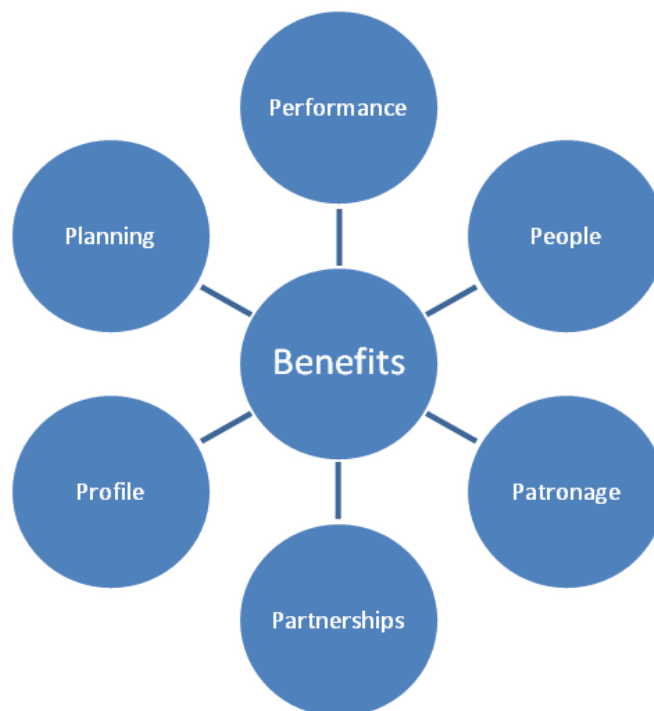
For further information about this and any other aspect of the accreditation development process please contact Anna Siddall anna.siddall@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

Questions and Answers

What benefits will Archives Accreditation bring?

Research at the scoping stage of Archives Accreditation identified a range of benefits for organisations and their governing bodies. These are summarised in the six P's:

1. **Performance:** a UK-wide quality standard which offers a benchmark and stimulus for gauging performance, recognising achievement, ensuring value for money and driving continuous improvement
2. **Profile:** a mechanism for raising awareness and understanding of archives, building confidence and credibility both within parent organisations and externally
3. **People:** a process to help archive-holding organisations adapt and respond to user needs and interests and to support workforce development
4. **Partnerships:** a tool to help archives examine their offer more widely and to encourage collaborative working within and between organisations
5. **Planning:** a robust framework for facilitating forward planning, improving procedures and policy, and reducing organisational risk
6. **Patronage:** a badge of recognition which demonstrates quality services to supporters, donors and grant-making bodies, strengthening funding applications, attracting philanthropic giving and fostering investor trust



What archives will be eligible?

The scheme will be open to all types of archive including business archives, charitable trusts, local authorities, universities, museums and other specialist organisations which also hold archives. The eligibility criteria will be tested in the co-creation and piloting phases.

What will the new standard cover?

We don't know precisely what the final standard will look like – that is dependent on the outcome of the co-creation phase (as we've already said, this is your chance to shape the future!) We are not starting with a completely blank piece of paper – there are a number of

existing archives standards and benchmarking tools to draw on. What we do have are the underlying themes, which give structure to the standard. These are the same as those established and tested in the Museum Accreditation Scheme:

- Overall management, governance and organisational health
- Users and their experiences
- Collections management and development

How will it be assessed?

It has been proposed that the assessment process will include peer review and approval by a peer panel. We will recruit peers during the pilot phase.

How does it fit with existing archives standards?

The new standard is not being created from scratch. It draws on existing standards with the intention that Archives Accreditation will eventually replace the TNA Standard and inspection regime.

How does Archives Accreditation link to Museum Accreditation?

In December 2011 Arts Council England (ACE) launched the revised scheme designed to act as a more focused development tool for museums aiming to improve. Accreditation has been benefitting all types of museums and their visitors since 1988. It sets the standard that museums and galleries should aspire to for the benefit of users, today and in the future. It sets out what good practice looks like and is the recognised quality standard for UK museums and galleries. www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/museums-and-libraries/museums/accreditation-scheme/ The new Archives Accreditation standard will align with the museum scheme and we're working closely with ACE to ensure we build on their recent experience revising the museum standard and to ensure processes are coordinated.

What is co-creation?

A significant departure is that the new standard will be written by those who work in or have an interest in archives as decision maker or user, together with the partners who will manage the scheme once it is operational. This process means that the new standard will be fully owned by the archives sector.

Can I have a copy of the consultation draft?

We deliberately did not produce a consultation draft – but instead a 'Destruction draft'. This document is the starting point for the sector, together, to construct the standard. The online platform allows anyone to contribute to this process, wherever they are and whatever the scale of their service. It does not require huge amounts of time – but regular short incisive contributions and responses drawing on your experience and expertise.

Further questions?

Further information about the project can be found at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/our-services/archives-accreditation-scheme.htm. We'll update it regularly as the project progresses. Alternatively, contact Anna Siddall, Transition Manager anna.siddall@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk 020 8876 3444 (x2044)