

# Accreditation: The Way Forward

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's response to *The Development of Accreditation – Gauging the museum sector's response and Impact of the Museum Accreditation Scheme*

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## Accreditation: The Way Forward

Leading Museums, the MLA's national action plan for museums that puts visitors at the heart of future provision, identifies the development of Accreditation as one of its ten key areas for action. Accreditation is important to other actions, for example the future provision of Renaissance and its support for a national network for museum development.

MLA welcomes two new reports about Accreditation which indicate the views of more than 1000 stakeholders: *The Development of Accreditation – Gauging the museum sector's response and Impact of the Museum Accreditation Scheme*. This paper outlines MLA's view on how Accreditation should develop in response to the recommendations. As the recommendations of the two reports overlap in many areas they have been combined for the purpose of this response.

## Background on the two Accreditation reports

MLA commissioned Hopkins van Mil to facilitate consultation events and an online questionnaire during summer 2009 to test the reaction to plans to develop the UK standard. The findings from the consultation form the basis of their report. The second research report commissioned from Jura Consultants is based on detailed analysis of four years' worth of completed questionnaires about the impact of Accreditation on museums.

## Progress update on Accreditation

Following the reports, working parties of experts, chaired by Accreditation Panel members, are drafting new requirements for the standard from October 2009 – March 2010. After further consultation and piloting in Spring/Summer 2010, we are on track for launching the next phase of Accreditation in Autumn 2010. Go to [http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising\\_standards/accreditation/Developing\\_accreditation](http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising_standards/accreditation/Developing_accreditation) for more information on the working parties.

## MLA's overall response

Accreditation has proven its value over the last 21 years; the UK standard for museums is crucial for the long term success of the sector. MLA will simplify the processes relating to Accreditation and, where possible, these will be aligned. The standard will be re-presented as a more focussed set of requirements, and there will be increased flexibility for museums to demonstrate success. We will enable the consumer voice to be heard so that museums can demonstrate how they have responded to their communities.

## Recommendations

The recommendations are listed below with a more detailed MLA response in italics.

### **One size does not fit all**

*Accreditation is one standard but it is not one size. One assessment framework cannot fit all museums. MLA will ensure that the developed standard will remain scalable and that guidance will clarify the level of detail and activity required from different types and sizes of museum. Assessors and Panel members are trained and experienced in taking a view on what is appropriate. For example the needs of the British Museum in relation to forward planning will be very different from a village museum.*

### **Simplify and improve, don't develop new areas (yet).**

#### **Introduce development areas as options**

*We are looking at a step one, step two or modular approach where Accreditation is the foundation which encourages improvement. We are prioritising step one currently. For example, in England it is appropriate for museums with Designated collections to be meeting higher requirements around collections management and research. This would include Renaissance funded museums. We will also be looking at this as part of the Designation review in 2010/11.*

### **The application process should be streamlined**

*Only new applicants will need to apply from scratch. A revised and tailored two or three yearly reporting procedure will be developed to focus on supporting existing scheme members' development based on their own needs and objectives. Documentation that has previously been provided and has not changed, and documentation available elsewhere such as Council websites, Charity Commission etc, will not need to be submitted.*

*A revised application procedure for new applicants will be introduced using more user-friendly technology.*

### **MLA should consider the feasibility of multiple-site organisations being able to submit one application for the service**

*MLA understands the challenges faced by services running multiple sites, and will review the applicability of service level applications for Heritage Trusts, Local Authorities, Universities and other similar groups. These are currently only available to the National Trust and English Heritage.*

### **Further develop collections management section**

*This will be thoroughly reviewed by the working party – for example currently there is no information about the needs of digital collections.*

### **MLA should address the challenges regarding University museums and the access issues associated with their collections.**

*MLA notes this need, and access to collections as described will be investigated by a working group with university representation.*

### **Improve the visitor experience requirement**

*Museums are nothing without their visitors. The loyalty of visitors is crucial to their long term success. As well as moving the spotlight more onto the visitor experience, Accreditation will ensure that findings from consultation feed directly into forward planning to improve the offer to visitors and users across the piece.*

### **Harmonisation with other standards**

*Accreditation currently incorporates recognition of VAQAS (Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme) and the liP Award (Investors in People); MLA will investigate linking to relevant external standards to reduce duplication. Where links are appropriate, participation by museums in these schemes will be linked to specific Accreditation requirements with a view to 'short-cutting' reporting.*

### **Increased access to guidance and support**

*Collections Link and the MLA bank of case studies will be developed. We will work to ensure levels of support are maintained and made more effective.*

### **Articulate benefits to National Museums**

*It is a real strength of Accreditation that museums of all sizes in the UK participate. We need to do more across the board to articulate the benefits but particularly to the smallest and largest museums. For the Nationals, MLA sees Accreditation as part of their leadership role within the community of museums. DCMS and other government departments have a role to play here.*

### **Reconnect Accreditation with stakeholders**

*By strengthening and simplifying Accreditation we believe that it will increase the usefulness of the standard to other organisations looking to support well run museums.*

### **Promote Accreditation as a professional and public facing kite mark**

*Accreditation is first and foremost a professional badge but it should have public meaning. Appropriate branding will be developed to reflect UK coverage which is meaningful to museums, their funders and their users.*

### **Continue consultation process**

*Sector experts are developing the requirements of the updated standard. In Spring 2010 there will be a further opportunity for people to contribute their views on the draft standard before it is finalised. We will also pilot the standard.*

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