



# **The Designation Scheme for Museums, Libraries and Archives**

## **Application Procedure**

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council  
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The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) is the lead strategic agency for museums, libraries and archives.

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## About the Scheme

MLA's Designation Scheme celebrates the leading museum, library and archive collections in England: those that are deemed to be of outstanding national and, may be, international importance. Designated collections represent a vital part of our national cultural and artistic heritage.

By identifying our most significant cultural assets, Designation helps to guard against neglect or disposal of national treasures. It also promotes awareness of the importance, richness and variety of the collections held in museums, libraries and archives, so they can inspire and be fully enjoyed by many generations to come.

The award of Designated status is based on independent assessment.

## Aims of the Scheme

The Scheme recognises that organisations with Designated status care for a significant part of England's cultural heritage. It seeks to identify where collections of outstanding significance are held, in order to enhance our knowledge and understanding of England's cultural assets.

The Scheme also sets out to raise standards across the sector. Organisations holding Designated collections are expected to work towards the provision of high-quality services which deliver the fullest possible access to those collections, and to take a leadership role in the sector by helping other organisations in such ways as sharing expertise, offering advice and lending objects or materials.

## Benefits to applicants

Designation brings a range of benefits. Amongst them are:

### a) *Strengthened support from governing bodies*

There is strong evidence from those who have benefited from Designation since 1997 that it demonstrates the value of collections to a governing body, and this has been of help to managers lobbying for support. The scheme has also helped local authority managers undergoing performance assessments to make the case for continued support for their Designated collections, while those in universities have successfully used their Designated status to underline the value of a collection to senior members of the university, the Higher Education sector generally and to the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Drawing up the application helps the applicant to identify areas where core services supporting pre-eminent collections are of a satisfactory standard, and where they are not. The process gives the applicant the opportunity to consider the needs of their most important collections as part of strategic or forward planning, and to make the case for greater support to their governing bodies and to funding organisations.

### b) *Enhanced ability to raise funds to support the collection/s*

Designated status should be celebrated in its own right, as a valuable acknowledgement of the recognised importance of a collection, and an opportunity to raise its profile with visitors and stakeholders. This accolade is of great value in supporting applications to potential supporters and benefactors, trusts and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

**c) *The creation of a local focus for advocacy and awareness-raising***

A major aim of the scheme is to encourage the dissemination of information and expertise amongst museums, libraries and archives with Designated collections and beyond.

**d) *Reduced level of minimum liability for the Government Indemnity Scheme (GIS)***

The GIS allows the public access to objects within the UK which might not otherwise be available, by providing borrowing institutions with an alternative to the considerable cost of commercial insurance. It means that the institution can arrange to borrow objects from non-national institutions and in the event of loss or damage, compensation will be paid to the owner by the Government.

Under the terms of the Scheme institutions with Designated collections, which meet GIS standards, benefit from a £5,000 maximum liability, which relates to all claims made within an institution's financial year. Further information can be obtained from the Manager of the Government Indemnity Scheme at MLA and at:

[http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/cultural/objects/government\\_indemnity](http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/cultural/objects/government_indemnity)

### **Definition of a collection**

In the context of the Designation Scheme, a collection is: material evidence, such as a group of objects, records, books or other media, together with associated information which, however they were originally collected or accumulated, form an integrated, coherent assemblage.

It is recognised that the word collection is used with different meanings in museums, libraries and archives. It is generally used in the singular throughout here but it can refer either to a single collection or to one which encompasses several individual collections within it.

### **Who can apply?**

Non-national institutions not directly funded by a national government department may apply for Designation of all, or an identifiable part, of their museum, archive or library collection/s.

Museums must meet the Accreditation or Registration Phase II standard, and libraries and archives must be working towards the appropriate standards. The organisation applying for Designation must also demonstrate that they have secure occupancy of their premises, are financially stable and have a range of public services.

For libraries and archives:

- A collection held on deposit will be eligible provided that the applicant can demonstrate that the collection is held for the public good and with no unreasonable restrictions on access. Applications for collections which wholly comprise public records\* are ineligible for Designation: where public records form a proportion of archives in a single collection, however, or are part of a group of collections for which Designation is sought, applications will be considered.

MLA will confirm eligibility before an organisation is invited to make a full application.

Where two or more institutions are working together to maximise available resources and increase use of their respective collections, they may submit a joint application. In such cases, they must be able to explain how their collections complement and enhance each other and to demonstrate the benefits which accrue to users as a result of their working together. It is expected that each partner will hold a significant proportion of the collections, and that these proportions will be similar in terms of Quality and Significance. For further information on joint applications, see the section on Collections Management and Service to the Public, page 17.

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\* 'public records' are records of central government and the courts of law defined in statute, under the Public Records Act, 1958

## **The Designation Criteria**

The primary criteria of the Scheme are Quality and Significance, with the secondary criteria being Collections Management and Service to the Public.

### **Quality and Significance**

To be Designated, a collection must be outstanding in terms of its evidential, aesthetic, scientific, historical, cultural, literary or economic importance. It must demonstrate richness and variety and, where appropriate, the uniqueness or rarity of individual items or groups of items.

Collections which merit Designated status must demonstrate that they:

- provide in-depth coverage.
- provide richness in terms of the broad range and quality of individual items.
- are nationally significant and may be internationally significant.

### **Collection Management and Service to the Public**

Organisations with Designated collections should be working towards high standards of collections care, security, documentation/cataloguing and services to the public. In this context, the assessment will primarily consider services to the public to be those which relate closely to how collections are used.

It is recognised that not all museums, libraries and archives enjoy the same levels of resources and that many will have weaknesses in some areas when the application is made, such that they may not currently satisfy the desirable requirements. They must, however, meet the essential requirements. (See the section: Meeting the Collection Management and Service to the Public criteria, page 16).

Organisations must publish information on the existence of the collection/s, the location, opening times and arrangements, and services and facilities. There is no minimum requirement for opening times, but the arrangements must be appropriate to the nature and location of the institution. Some organisations will have limited opening times due to operational, security and/or legal reasons. In such cases, the organisation must show that these arrangements are appropriate to both the users and the collections, and that any restrictions are regularly reviewed. Remote electronic access alone may not be sufficient, but it is accepted as an additional means of access to the collection/s.

## **The Assessment Process**

### **Designation Panel**

The Designation Panel is comprised of independent experts who include members of the MLA Board as well as experienced professionals with expertise in museums, libraries and archives. At least half of the 12 Panel members are recruited through open competition.

The Panel makes the decision on whether or not to award Designated status based upon the content of the applications and the assessments from expert advisers for the subject and for Collection Management and Service to the Public.

The Panel members consider first whether a collection meets the primary criteria of Quality and Significance, before giving consideration to whether the secondary criteria, Collection Management and Service to the Public, are met. They assess the case made in the application and the evidence presented to support that case, not simply the importance of the subject or field which the collection covers. Where a collection has a narrow focus, the Panel considers the comprehensiveness with which the collection covers the subject and whether the application demonstrates that the items within the collection are important in a wider context.

## **Decisions**

There are 3 possible outcomes from the Panel, which are:

*Application is Successful* – the application demonstrates that the collection fully meets all the criteria.

*Application is Deferred* – the application does not fully demonstrate that the collection meets all the criteria, but may be able to do so if enhanced by a supplementary statement. This could, for example, be in the form of further evidence of the significance of the collection. The application is retained by MLA, and will be placed before the Designation Panel again on receipt of the supplementary information from the applicant. It should be noted that MLA can give no guarantee that Designated status will be awarded on submission of this supplementary statement. Applicants have 12 months in which to supply the supplementary statement; if it is not received by MLA within that period, then the applicant will have to make a new application if it wishes to go ahead with seeking Designated status.

*Application is Unsuccessful* – the application does not meet criteria sufficiently to merit Designated status. The decision letter will provide a rationale for the decision to assist the collection holders in the future development of the collection.

All applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application and the reasons for decisions, within 30 working days of the Panel meeting.

## **Appeals procedure**

Appeals against the Panel's decision will only be allowed if the applicant can show that the published assessment process has not been followed, or there was a failure to consider a material fact that was both available to the Panel and relevant. Successful appeals will not automatically result in Designation for the collection but the Designation Panel will reconsider the application.

A copy of the Appeals Procedures document is available to all unsuccessful applicants on request.

## **The Award of Designation**

### *Announcement*

A press release announcing the successful applicants will be issued after all the applicants have been sent their decision letters.

### *Designation certificates*

Successful applicants will receive a certificate and a plaque to confirm the status of their collection, along with a media relations toolkit containing templates for press releases as well as general press and marketing advice. MLA staff will be willing to attend ceremonies as appropriate.

*Review of Designated status*

If there are material changes in an organisation's circumstances which affect the Designated collection/s, the organisation should inform MLA of these changes as soon as possible. If it seems that a change to the status of the collection/s would be necessary, the case will be put before the Designation Panel at their next meeting.

## **The Application Process**

This is a two-stage process:

Stage One: Applicant completes the 'Intention to Apply and Eligibility Form' and submits it to the Designation Manager. MLA confirms that the applicant is eligible and provides a timetable for submission of an application.

Stage Two: Applicant completes the 'Application Form' and submits it to the Designation team.

### **Stage One- Intention to apply and eligibility**

Before considering an application, applicants should be confident that their collection or collections will meet the standards required for Designation and that they will be able to provide sufficient evidence and supporting information.

Before a full application for Designation can be submitted, all potential applicants must complete 'An Intention to Apply and Eligibility Application form'. This can be downloaded from

[http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising\\_standards/designation/applying\\_for\\_designation](http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising_standards/designation/applying_for_designation)

The purpose of this form is to inform MLA about the applicant's organisation, their collections and enable their eligibility for the scheme to be checked. At this stage the information provided will not be seen or considered by the Designation Panel. However, MLA will summarise the eligibility information from this form for the Panel if a full application is made.

Libraries and archives must submit the specified documents with their form. Museums must have full Accreditation or Registration Phase II to be able to apply, and therefore MLA will already have copies of their documents.

### **Guidance on specific questions on the 'Intention to Apply and Eligibility form'**

#### **Question 7**

Designated collections should normally be a significant percentage of an organisation's holdings. Small parts of an organisation's overall collections may be Designated, but MLA needs to understand the reasons for such an application.

#### **Question 8.1: Governance and Financial Management (Libraries and archives only)**

The organisation must have an acceptable constitution, and a copy must be submitted. Examples of the types of constitutions which are deemed acceptable are given in the box below.

- Those based on an Act of Parliament.
- Those based on a Royal Charter.
- Those based on Local Government Acts and/or forming the subject of a local authority resolution. If it is not possible to locate the original committee minute an alternative would be a declaration by the Chief Executive of the authority to the effect that the authority operates a library under the powers of the Public Libraries & Museum Act (1964).
- Those based on the Public Records Act (1958).
- Those based on the formal decision of a University Council, Governing Body or Court. If it is not possible to locate the original committee minute an alternative would be a declaration by the Vice-Chancellor/Secretary of the university to the effect that the university operates a museum, library or archive under the powers of the university charter or other governing instrument, or the deed constituting the trust on the university.
- Those based on an acceptable memorandum and articles of a company with charitable status limited by guarantee and with no share capital.
- Those based on an acceptable deed of trust of a charitable trust.
- Any constitution which is charitable, which meets the criteria set out in this document, including the non-distribution of profits, and which is acceptable to the MLA.

An organisation applying for Designation must show that it has a sound financial basis to enable it to provide the necessary resources for effective collections management. A copy of two years accounts must be submitted.

Libraries and archives which are constituted as charities must submit audited accounts for the last two years available, in the form required by charity law.

All other libraries and archives, including those operated by local authorities and universities must provide copies of statements of the previous two years' expenditure. These statements must have been validated by an authorised signatory. If the organisations finances are consolidated within a larger organisational or departmental financial system, the applicant must supply an estimated summary of relevant expenditure for the previous two years.

### **Question 8.2**

If the organisation managing the collection is different from the owner of the collection, a signed copy of the formal agreement between the two bodies must be provided. Examples of this could be where a charitable trust owns the collection and has a separate management company, or where the collection-owning organisation houses, exhibits and manages another collection on their owners' behalf.

The accounts of both bodies for the previous two years must also be submitted.

### **Question 9.1: Ownership of collections**

To be eligible for Designation the collections must be in public ownership or alternative arrangements must be made to safeguard the collection, and the collection must be accessible to the public.

### **Question 10: Secure occupancy**

Organisations holding Designated collections must be able to manage them effectively, and secure occupancy of premises is an essential requirement for this. There is no minimum period for the occupancy arrangements, but there must be written occupancy terms for the buildings in which collections are held. These must be sufficiently long-term to provide security of the collection and enable forward planning.

### **Submission Guidelines**

The completed 'Intention to Apply and Eligibility' form and any supporting documents must be e-mailed to [designation@mla.gov.uk](mailto:designation@mla.gov.uk). In addition a signed copy of the form must be sent to:

Sarah Waldron, Designation Assistant  
Museums, Libraries and Archives Council  
Grosvenor House  
14 Bennetts Hill  
Birmingham B2 5RS

It is important that the information on the form and supporting documents emailed to MLA is exactly the same as the paper copy. To assist MLA, digital documents submitted with the form must have file references in the following structure:

Name of collection- title of document

E.g.: Barchester Archive- Consitution

All applications will be acknowledged on receipt.

The MLA will confirm your eligibility for the scheme within 30 days of receipt.

## Stage Two- Application for Designation

Once MLA has confirmed your eligibility, an application for Designation may be submitted in accordance with the timetable.

The timetable, with dates of Designation Panel meetings, is published on the MLA website at:

[http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising\\_standards/designation/applying\\_for\\_designation](http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising_standards/designation/applying_for_designation)

All applicants must complete an application form which can be found at:

[http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising\\_standards/designation/applying\\_for\\_designation](http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising_standards/designation/applying_for_designation)

Only one application should be submitted regardless of whether an application is being made for Designation of the whole or part or parts of a collection.

Applicants should ensure that the explanations given are concise and relevant, and that they are within the word limit for each question.

The application should direct the Panel to look at the supporting evidence as appropriate. Supporting evidence must be concise and relevant. It may not, for example, be useful to submit a complete copy of your collection catalogue. A summary description, or relevant extracts, along with written testimonies of quality and significance from acknowledged experts may be more helpful to the Panel.

### **Joint applications**

Joint applicants are also asked to submit a single application but this must include responses related to each of the partner's collections. It is expected that each partner will hold a significant proportion of the collections, and that these proportions will be similar in terms of Quality and Significance. The application must enable the Panel to:

- understand the proportions of the collection that are held by each partner.
- judge the Quality and Significance of the parts of the collection held by each partner.

### **Guidance on specific questions in the 'Application for Designation' form**

#### **Section B: Collections**

##### **Question 7**

Designated collections should normally be a significant percentage of an organisation's holdings. Small collections within a much larger holding can be Designated, but applicants must explain why only this particular collection/s merits Designation.

## **Section D: Meeting the Quality and Significance Criteria**

The primary criteria of the scheme are Quality and Significance. To be Designated, a collection must be outstanding in terms of its evidential, aesthetic, scientific, historical, cultural, literary or economic importance. It must demonstrate richness, depth and variety and, where appropriate, the uniqueness or rarity of individual items or groups of items.

Collections which merit Designated status must demonstrate that they:

- provide in-depth coverage.
- provide richness in terms of the broad range and quality of individual items.
- are nationally and, if appropriate, internationally significant.

Applicants must also put the collection into context by explaining its relationship to any other collections held by the organisation and to the work of the organisation.

This section provides the main detail of the application for Designation and is where applicants should show concisely how their collections meet these criteria.

If an application is being made for one or more individual collections within an organisation's holdings, please include evidence related to each single collection.

### **Evidence and supporting documents**

It is very important to provide evidence to support any statements made, to ensure the Panel can consider them. The evidence presented in the application should be clearly linked to any relevant supporting documents.

As not all members of the Panel will see all the supporting documents, please ensure there is sufficient evidence within the application form.

Certain supporting documents must be enclosed and these are already entered in the appendix list on the application form.

In this section examples of recommended evidence are given. Applicants are not expected to provide an example of every type of evidence suggested, and the Designation Panel will also consider other types of evidence, provided that its relevance is clearly explained. However, a successful application is likely to be supported by most of the recommended evidence.

Certain supporting documents must be enclosed and these are already entered in the appendix list on the application form.

Please remember that appendices should only contain examples of particularly relevant evidence, and providing excessive amounts of evidence will not be helpful to the Panel. Any application considered oversized will be returned for simplification.

### **Question 13: Quality**

This is the opportunity for applicants to make the case for the quality of their collection/s. Please address all the areas indicated and provide evidence to support the case for Designation.

Assessments of quality relate to the comprehensiveness of the collection's coverage of its subject area, geographical area or community.

The collection may fall into either of the two descriptions given below:

- A collection which demonstrates unique/outstanding depth/richness in its coverage of a single subject, geographic area or community. This type of collection will cover the widest appropriate range of material within a given subject area.
- An entire collection which demonstrates outstanding breadth and variety and **gives a comprehensive overview** of every aspect of one or more geographic areas, subject areas or communities.

For applications for the Designation of an entire collection giving a comprehensive overview, it is particularly important to explain how the elements of the collection:

- all relate to and illustrate their main theme
- relate to each other
- can be described as a coherent whole

The description should also demonstrate the quality and the relative strengths and weaknesses of each sub-collection.

For example, applications related to social or industrial history, or to the history of a given locality or geographic area, must include a considered overview of the quality of the collection which argues the case within a national and, if appropriate, international context.

***Required supporting document***

**A published Acquisition Policy or Collections Development Policy. This must be accompanied by a signed and dated minute indicating its acceptance by the governing body.**

***Suggested supporting documents***

- Lists of relevant published material and loans.
- Written confirmation or testimony of the quality of the collection from independent experts who are acknowledged authorities in their field.
- Citations for the collection in published material.

**Question 14.1: Significance**

To be Designated, a collection must also be of outstanding significance for contemporary national life, and/or culture and art. Culture is used here in its broadest sense, including for example the study of history, humanities, learning, economics, science, technology or medicine. The collection must be shown to be central to the study, understanding and appreciation of a particular subject area, geographical area or community, both in a national and international context.

*Recommended evidence*

- Details of the relevant history and provenance of the collection.
- The significance of loans made from the collection, if relevant.
- Relevant information on related collection held, which cover some of the following points:
  - The importance of the key historical events or people covered as shown through the collection, within a national and international historical context.
  - Demonstration of how the collection provides unique material evidence of key developments in the growth and structure of human society and its relationship to contemporary national life.
  - Why the types, industries, and processes covered are important and how this is shown through the collection.
  - How the collection demonstrates the importance of the developments of scientific thought or invention they cover.
  - How the collection demonstrates the importance of the economic or learning theories it covers.
  - An explanation of the significance of the national or international movements/schools of thought, e.g. artistic or literary movements, covered in the light of the collection.
  - The importance of the collection to scientific research and understanding.

*Suggested supporting documents*

- As under 'Quality' above, although the relevance of cited passages must be explained in the application.
- An objective statement on the intrinsic importance of the collection from independent experts who are acknowledged authorities in their field.

**Question 14.2: Comparison with other collections**

Applicants must demonstrate how the Significance of their collection compares to other collections of similar material in the UK and, if appropriate, abroad.

*Recommended evidence*

- Publication references for comparative data.
- Extracts from non-published sources.
- Objective statements on the relative importance of the collections from independent experts who are acknowledged authorities in their field.

## **Section D: Meeting the Collection Management and Service to the Public criteria**

### **Overview**

This section provides information how an applicant's collection is managed and used. If the collection meets the Quality and Significance criteria, the evidence provided in this section will be taken into account by the Panel when deciding whether to award Designation.

Organisations with Designated collections should be working towards high standards of collections care, security, documentation/cataloguing and services to the public following the principles set out in the PAS 197: 2009, Code of practice for cultural collections management. Please visit: <http://www.bsigroup.com/en/Standards-and-Publications/How-we-can-help-you/Professional-Standards-Service/PAS-197/>

In this context, the assessment will primarily consider services to the public to be those which relate closely to how collections are used. It is recognised that not all museums, libraries and archives enjoy the same levels of resources and that many will have weaknesses in some areas when the application is made, such that they may not currently satisfy all the desirable requirements set out below; they must, however, meet the essential requirements.

If they do not yet meet all the desirable requirements, applicants must demonstrate that they are working towards requirements worthy of the high quality collections they hold; they must therefore identify areas where improvement is needed, and provide evidence of their intention to address such weaknesses in formally approved policy and related strategic planning documentation.

However, to be successful in obtaining Designation for a collection, applicants must be able to meet most of the desirable requirements.

All applicants are also expected to:

- identify clearly their own strengths and weaknesses.
- show a clear strategic vision, which will enable them to reach the highest standards.
- demonstrate their capacity to work with other organisations by sharing expertise and advice, and offering and receiving loans (where appropriate).

Accredited or Registered museums have already provided evidence to MLA that they can meet all the essential requirements and should concentrate on showing how they meet, or are working towards, the desirable requirements.

### **Joint applications**

Working in partnership with an organisation whose collection complements one's own can be of great benefit to the collections' users, as well as to the partner organisations. However, the partnerships must be robust and be able to demonstrate a successful track record of managing the partners' collections as a single entity. Evidence should include the following essential requirements:

- A joint partnership agreement signed by all partners. This should show that the partners have shared aims for the development and use of the collection, and include evidence from the strategic forward plans of all governing bodies.
- An integrated approach to access to the collection, to include progress towards a single public access system, e.g. joint website or printed catalogue.
- A research strategy which includes:
  - Evidence from users to show that the coherence of the whole collection is stronger than the inter-institutional barriers.
  - Evidence that the majority of researchers of the material held by one body would normally require access to that held by the others.
  - Academic and other literature which clearly shows that the collections are considered as a coherent whole by fellow professionals and academics.
- A straightforward 'internal' loan system and regular loan arrangements backed by appropriate care arrangements for items loaned.
- A system for sharing professional expertise and other skills.

These last two requirements may not be fully in place at the time of the application, in which case applicants must provide evidence, including a timetable, of progress towards achieving them.

## Collection Management

### Question 15.1: Care of Collections

#### ***Essential requirements***

All applicants must demonstrate that they have carried out an assessment using Benchmarks in Collection Care (by including a summary in their application) and that they are working to improve the requirements for their collection. The document can be found on the Collections Link website at:

[http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/collections\\_care/benchmarks](http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/collections_care/benchmarks)

Applicants will be expected to show that they are working towards the standards relevant to their collection/s. Where the collection contains a mix of material, the applicant should indicate which standards they are using.

- Museums must meet the Accreditation or Registration Phase II Standard. [http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising\\_standards/accreditation](http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising_standards/accreditation)
- Archives must work towards The National Archives (TNA) Standard for Record Repositories. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/standard2005.pdf>
- Museums and libraries which are responsible for the care of manuscripts, photographic or film material should make sure that they meet appropriate archival standards. [http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/preserve\\_materials/archives](http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/preserve_materials/archives)

#### ***Desirable requirements***

Applicants will be expected to demonstrate that they are aware of, and are working towards, the standards below and that they have a clear timetable for their implementation.

- Good and/or Best Practice as described in MLA's Benchmarks in Collection Care. [http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/collections\\_care/benchmarks](http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/collections_care/benchmarks)
- Collections are managed in accordance with the principles set out in PAS197: 2009, Code of practice for cultural collections management, British Standards

Institution. <http://www.bsigroup.com/en/Standards-and-Publications/How-we-can-help-you/Professional-Standards-Service/PAS-197/>

- Museums and Galleries Commission Standards in Museum Care as appropriate. These documents can be found on the Collections Link website at:  
[http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/conserv\\_e\\_objects/standards\\_colls\\_care](http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/conserv_e_objects/standards_colls_care)
- BS 5454:2000 Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents, 3rd edition, British Standards Institution, 2000.

*Recommended evidence*

- A summary of a self-assessment carried out using Benchmarks in Collection Care.
- A statement of the current standards of collection care.
- Targets for requirements of care for the collection over the next 3 years.
- An analysis of strengths and weaknesses in collection care.

*Required supporting document*

**A Collection Management Plan and/or Policy. This must be accompanied by a signed and dated minute indicating its acceptance by the governing body.**

**Question 15.2: Documentation, cataloguing and internal research and communication related to the collection**

***Essential requirements***

All: There should be at least one appropriately qualified member of staff, and the collection/s within this application must be sufficiently catalogued or documented to enable the Quality and Significance to be assessed.

- Museums: Documentation to either the Accreditation Standard or to the Museum Registration Phase II standard, and published material on the collection.
- Libraries: Catalogued to Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 2nd edition, AACR2 level 1.
- Archives: Compliance with Essential elements for exchange and sharing of descriptive information, as ascribed by International Standard for Archival Description, (General) ISAD (G), as a minimum.

***Desirable requirements***

- All: A range of general and scholarly publications, and an informative website. Evidence that the collection is actively used for teaching and research. Where backlogs in documentation exist the organisation must be able to demonstrate that it is making progress to tackle these; for example, five-year documentation plan.
- Museums: Wide range of SPECTRUM procedures in place, with no or few backlogs in basic Registration/Accreditation-level documentation.
- Libraries: The whole collection is fully catalogued to AACR2 level 3 and classified.
- Archives: Appropriate level of cataloguing to enable full access to collections in line with ISAD (G) compliance.

*Recommended evidence*

- Numbers of staff with responsibility for the collection/s, expressed as FTEs if possible
- Details of the qualifications of staff e.g. specialist knowledge of the collection, professional qualification etc. **N.B. Please do not send in staff CV's or personal details.**
- Description of the documentation of the collection, including the proportion meeting the Desirable Requirements.
- Museums: Details of documentation to either the Accreditation Standard or the Museum Registration Phase II standard.
- Libraries: Details of the completeness of cataloguing to AACR2 level 3 and classification.
- Archives: Demonstration of the level of ISAD (G) compliance.
- Description of information available from website, including examples as appropriate.

***Required supporting document***

**An appropriate strategy document such as a documentation plan, which analyses the strengths and weaknesses in documentation.**

*Suggested supporting materials*

- Job Descriptions of staff with responsibility for the collection
- Lists and examples of relevant publications.
- Supporting letters from active researchers
- Museums: Example records from a Collection database.
- Libraries: Examples of Collection Level Descriptions complete to such standards as those of the Research Support Libraries Programme.
- Archives: Samples of entries from the database, showing how they map to ISAD(G) headings.
- Excerpts from readily accessible, comprehensive, descriptive catalogues.

**Service to the Public**

**Question 16.1 Access and learning related to the collection**

***Essential requirements***

- Services to those wishing to learn from the collection.
- Understanding of users (and non-users), collecting evidence about them and their needs, and showing how audiences are being developed.

- Physical access to the collection is provided in compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Online access (where available) should comply with PAS 78:2006, Guide to good practice in commissioning accessible websites, British Standards Institution.  
<http://shop.bsigroup.com/en/ProductDetail/?pid=00000000030129227>

***Desirable requirements***

- Good practice as outlined in Inspiring Learning for All: at <http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk> . Services must demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning. Progress in developing access through website and multi-media applications should be demonstrated.
- Museums: a rolling programme of updating permanent displays.
- Creation of all digital and online resources complies with MINERVA technical standards, (<http://www.minervaeurope.org/publications/technicalguidelines.htm>) and follows e-Government Website Design Guidelines (<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government/resources/handbook/introduction.asp>).
- Archives: Compliance with the Public Services Quality Group's Standard for Access to Archives.  
[http://www.nca.org.uk/research\\_and\\_development/access\\_standard/](http://www.nca.org.uk/research_and_development/access_standard/)

*Recommended evidence*

- Description of physical and online access available to the general public.
- Description of any plans to improve physical or online access.
- Information on displays, including an analysis of strengths and weaknesses.
- Details of users (and non-users of the collections), their profiles, how information is collected and regularly, and audiences are being developed.
- Details of past and future temporary exhibitions, education and outreach services, events, and loans out.

*Suggested supporting materials*

- Strategy documents related to learning, access, communication and interpretation.
- Strategy documents covering multi-media applications and websites.

**Question 16.2: Promoting study and understanding of the collection for public use**

***Essential requirements***

- Facilities for study and research; enquiry service.
- A clear understanding of the range of subject matter and audiences to which the collection is relevant.
- Plans to realise potential for greater use of the collection, either directly or indirectly.
- Contact with a wide range of experts and appropriate partners within and outside the domain and be able to refer to new areas of study and engagement.

### **Desirable requirements**

- A substantial body of published information and regular public use. The applicant can demonstrate that it encourages leading experts in the relevant field to study the collection.
- Connections with other museums, archives or libraries and other academic institutions, at a range of levels, to refer to new areas of academic study and engagement outside the collection's subject area.
- Encouragement of the use of its collection by the widest possible range of audiences.

#### *Recommended evidence*

- Details of the facilities available for study and research including any enquiry services.
- Statistics indicating national and international use of collections.
- Details of the range of subject matter to which the collection is relevant.
- Details of plans for realising greater use of the collection.
- Evidence of links to foster study with a range of appropriate partners from, for example, the cultural and academic sectors.
- Information on marketing, publicity and Internet access.

#### *Suggested supporting materials*

- Published guides to using the collection for research.
- Lists of published information by other scholars.

The following criteria relate to the organisation and its strategy.

### **Question 16.3 Role in the sector**

Applicants should explain here the contribution they make in their field, both relevant to the collection and more generally. This should be active leadership and regular participation in professional activities, and may be in sharing knowledge, participating in development activities, etc.

#### ***Essential requirements***

Taking part in developing and sharing expertise, developing and promoting standards, demonstrating leadership.

#### ***Desirable requirements***

Facilitating and publicising research in the field covered by the collection/s.

*Recommended evidence*

- Evidence of working with other institutions, e.g. standards-setting fora in the UK and overseas.
- Details of how research is promoted, facilitated and published.
- List of professional networks with which your organisation is actively involved. E.g. This could include participation in, or leadership of, Subject Specialist Networks.

*Suggested supporting materials*

- Examples of published research.
- Reports of work with community groups and schools where appropriate.

**Question 16.4: Partnership working**

Partnership arrangements in this context are different from those referred to earlier under “Joint applications”. These partnerships may be managed more informally, be of limited duration, limited to a narrower range of activities, or involve working with organisations in a different sector. However, they should be productive with clearly identifiable contributions to the partnerships and a range of beneficial outcomes.

***Essential requirements***

Recognition in the organisation’s strategic aims of the benefits of working in partnership with others to develop the care of and access to the collection.

***Desirable requirements***

A good track record of working in partnership with organisations in the same subject area or region, nationally and internationally to develop the care of and access to the collection.

*Recommended evidence*

- Through reference to appropriate strategic documents, providing evidence that your organisation fully recognises the benefits of partnership working in developing care and access to your collection.
- Information about partnership arrangements or co-operative projects, and the benefits obtained by:
  - Working with other museums, archives or libraries in the UK and overseas.
  - Working with other institutions including community groups and schools.
  - Participating in touring exhibitions, regular loans, sharing of expertise through training programmes and developing partnerships.

*Suggested supporting materials*

- Strategic plans
- Examples of successful joint projects.

### **Question 16.5: Strategic planning**

#### ***Essential requirements***

A comprehensive, long term strategic plan covering all the areas mentioned above under Collection Management and Service to the Public, which has been approved by the organisation's governing body.

#### ***Desirable requirements***

Both strategic planning and evidence of implementation of planning to deliver substantial improvements in all public service and collection management areas noted above.

#### ***Recommended evidence***

- Details of the areas under Collection Management and Service to the Public that the organisation's strategic plan covers.
- Evidence of implementation of the plan, such as work plans with planning targets and updates on progress.

#### ***Required supporting document***

**A strategic/forward plan or similar strategic document. This must be accompanied by a signed and dated minute indicating its acceptance by the governing body.**

## **Section E: Supporting Information**

This is the section where the applicant provides names of experts and details of the supporting information.

### **Question 17: Expert Advisers**

As part of your application applicants are asked to submit names and contact details for two independent and acknowledged expert advisers, one or both of whom may be approached for comment on your application. The Designation Panel also reserves the right to nominate additional experts to advise them as necessary. It is important that the nominated experts are not too closely associated with the applicant's organisation, so that the Panel can accept that their advice is totally objective. If applicants consider that all the appropriate experts have close ties with their institution, please seek advice from the Designation Manager. Letters of support from nominated Experts at the time of application will not be accepted.

Expert advisers are asked to comment only on the Quality and Significance of the collection. They will draw upon their own professional knowledge and expertise, referring to comparable collections both within the UK and overseas to assist the Designation Panel in understanding the importance of the collection. Experts will comment on the quality of a collection in relation to its evidential, aesthetic, scientific, historical, cultural, literary or economic importance. They will also comment on its

significance for contemporary national life, culture and art as well as on the richness and variety of a collection and describe where appropriate any unique or rare items or groups of items.

***Required information***

Applicant to submit the names and contact details for two independent and acknowledged expert advisers as part of the application.

**Question 18: Appendices**

*It is recommended that approximately 10 separate appendices of supporting information, directly relevant to the assessment criteria, should be included. Please note that the focus should be on quality and relevance of the content and not on quantity. Any application considered oversized will be returned for simplification.*

An appendix may consist of a single document e.g. your Forward Plan, or of a group of documents such as written testimonies of the quality of the collection. Applicants may submit relevant extracts from documents but please ensure that the source is fully referenced and that its relevance to your application is clearly set out.

Applicants wishing to provide letters of support as part of their appendices are advised that approximately 3 letters of support from objective experts should be enough to make the case. Ideally these letters should provide context on one or more of the Designation criteria of quality and significance; collections management; services to the public; and role in the sector.

It is important that supporting information emailed to MLA is exactly the same as the paper copy. To assist the Panel, digital documents should have file references in the following structure:

Name of collection- appendix number- title of document

Eg: Barchester Archive- Appendix 3-Forward Plan

The appendix number must be indicated in the top right hand corner of each supporting documents and this number must correspond to the number in the list of appendices.

Advocacy material, such as exhibition catalogues, may be submitted in hard copy only. In such cases 4 copies of each item must be submitted and they must be noted in the list of appendices.

Minutes of all relevant advisory meetings with MLA staff or Designation Panellists should be included as part of your supporting evidence.

Where indicated, policy documents should be accompanied by a signed and dated minute indicating their adoption by the governing body.

**Submission Guidelines**

The application, together with scanned or electronic supporting documents should be submitted by email. In addition, one unbound, unstapled, paper copy of the application and supporting evidence must be submitted. The electronic and paper copies must be identical.

The Designation Scheme for Museums, Libraries and Archives

Completed application forms must be e-mailed to [designation@mla.gov.uk](mailto:designation@mla.gov.uk).

## The Designation Scheme for Museums, Libraries and Archives

The paper copies should be sent to:

Designation Assistant  
Museums, Libraries and Archives Council  
Grosvenor House  
14 Bennetts Hill  
Birmingham B2 5RS

All applications will be acknowledged on receipt and checked for completeness. Incomplete applications may be returned.

Once the application has been assessed by MLA, the applicant may be asked to submit additional evidence or other material if this is necessary for the Panel to consider the application.