



Designation Scheme FAQs

General

Q. Why should we apply?

The application process has been found to be of benefit for all applicants as it enables professional staff to review the strengths and weaknesses of their organisation's collection, revise collection policies and develop improved approaches to collection management and service to the public.

Successful applicants have reported that the increased status given to their collections by the peer recognition process has been of value to them both internally and externally. Designated status has been used by organisations to promote their collections and their work.

Designated status offers enhanced ability to raise funds to support the collection/s. Designation is an endorsement recognised by funding bodies such as HLF and AHRC and by the consultation document on the 1954 Hague convention. Museum collections can also benefit from the DCMS/Wolfson Museum and Gallery improvements grants and from the Renaissance in the Regions, Designation Challenge Fund

Designated collections receive preferential terms under the Open Individual Export Licence, exempting them from the requirement for an export licence for loans within the EU.

Designated collections can also benefit from a reduced level of minimum liability for the Government Indemnity Scheme (GIS) to encourage loans for exhibitions.

Eligibility

Q. My collection meets the criteria for a 'National' collection set out in the Accreditation scheme. Does it therefore automatically qualify for Designated status?

No. The Designation Scheme seeks to identify the quality and significance of a collection, regardless of the size and status of the parent organisation. Whilst it is expected that National collections will be of national importance and international interest, they may not meet the benchmark for pre-eminent quality and significance as set out in the Designation criteria.

Q. Should an organisation with both library and archive material submit an application as a library, archive or both?

Only one application should be submitted. However the application should make clear whether it is for the collection as a whole or for individual museum, library and archive collections, in which case a separate statement of quality and significance should be submitted for each collection in question.

Q. How should a local authority record office apply for Designated status?

There are two options.

The first option is to apply for Designation for individual collections. The second option is to apply for the whole collection, singling out individual collections. In this case, you would have to argue for the breadth of the collections e.g. significance for region, how the material contributes nationally and internationally, connecting the threads between all holdings and discrete collections – this is a much harder job for the person writing the application. The decision would be the Panel's on what they believe meets the criteria – they might decide to 'cherry pick'.

Q. Can an institution include collections on loan to it in its Designation application? Can an institution include the collections it has loaned to another institution in its application?

The answer to both questions is possibly yes, but it depends on the circumstances. There is no straightforward answer.

The first question would typically apply to an archive which holds on deposit / long term loan the archives of a private individual or family or commercial organisation and wishes to include them in the application for Designation. If these collections form an integral part of the "story" being told by the collection which is the subject of an application and if there is good reason to believe that they will remain there, then they can be included in the host institution's application

In the case of the second question, an institution which has items out on loan can include them in their application. It would generally be this organisation, which owns the collection i.e. which has legal title to it, that is the one who should submit the application. However, since the application includes information about care of the collection, staffing, public access, etc., then the institution which houses it is likely to be involved in the preparation of the application in some way. Quite how much involvement will depend on the kind of agreement between the two parties.

Making an Application

Q. How can I make a joint museum application?

The Scheme welcomes applications from established and formalised partnerships of museums which clearly regard their collections as a single entity. Full details of the requirements for joint applicants are given in the guidance notes, which, along with the application form are available from

http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising_standards/designation/applying_for_designation.

Only one application should be submitted regardless of whether you are applying for Designation of the whole or part(s) of the collection. Joint applicants must submit a single application only.

Q. How should universities with multiple collections apply?

For administrative reasons, MLA prefers not to handle multiple applications from the same institution and where different departments within the same institution are considering applying for Designation, we would encourage them to talk to one another first. Co-operating on one application will also save the applicants' time by avoiding duplication of effort on the common parts of the application form.

We do understand that it may not always be appropriate for departments or institutes to combine their applications, e.g. differences in governance, or timing of the submission of applications, and we will accept separate applications.

Our recommendations, however, are as follows:

Whole collection as one entity

If the University is submitting all its Special Collections as one entity for Designation, then it should submit one application in which it must demonstrate the coherence of the whole collections and the relationships between the constituent parts.

Several named collections

The University should submit one application which names and demonstrates the significance of each collection individually. The Panel may Designate all, some or none of these collections.

Departments / institutes – whole collection or named collections

Each institution within the university must make its own decision about the relevance, or not, of linking or separating collections in the application. The degree to which the departments or institutes are connected either by subject or in the university structure may have a bearing on the decision.

Q. How many copies of my application should I submit, and in what format?

Applicants must submit two **identical** copies of their application (including supporting evidence):

One unbound, unstapled paper copy submitted by post.

One scanned or electronic copy submitted by email.

Panel Process

Q. Who will sit on the Designation Panel? Will there be regional Panels or just a National one?

There is a list of Panel members available on the MLA website. The panel is made up of a balance of museum, library and archive senior professionals. The majority of these have been recruited through open advertisement and the remaining members have been selected by MLA to balance the spread of knowledge and expertise.

Q. Will all applications be considered by the panel?

Yes, all applications will be considered, there is no 'sifting' procedure. Committee members will assess applications based on submissions from the applicants, and evidence from any site visits which have been judged necessary.

Vision for successful Designated collections

Q. If only one collection is designated out of all holdings, the organisations' governing body might consider the rest of the holdings not to be important.

Designation is very much seen as an advocacy tool for collections within MLA, having the effect of profile raising, which can only be a positive thing.

In the past Designation for one or more parts of a collection museums have also benefited other collections held by the same organisation in terms of leveraging funding.

Q. What level of sharing expertise and advice will be expected from Designated Collections?

We are expecting that those with Designated collections should show a willingness to take a lead within the sector, either in relation to subject expertise or in relation to skills and practical experience.

Designated museum collections are expected to take a role in the development of subject specialist networks (for which Renaissance in the Regions funding is available). These networks can be cross-domain partnerships.