



# Writing a Collections Development Policy and Plan

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## **Writing a Collections Development Policy and Plan**

This guidance should be read with reference to *Collections Development Framework and Guidance: Understanding Collections Development*. It is designed to be a practical guide to implementing collections development policy and planning, including for those working towards Archive Service Accreditation.

The guidance provides a suggested approach and a series of questions to help you to define policy and plan. They allow for a range of approaches, recognising that collections development will be approached differently in archive services of different types and sizes.

### **1. Collections development and Archive Service Accreditation**

Archive Service Accreditation is the UK Standard for Archive Services and looks at how well an archive service performs in three areas: in organisational health, collections management, and providing access to collections for a range of stakeholders.

The standard was designed to fit closely with other frameworks and standards already in use in the archive, museum and library sectors. In terms of collections management, Archive Service Accreditation adopted as primary reference the recommended structure for an integrated Collections Management Framework laid out in PAS 197:2009 i.e. a framework of policy, plans and procedures.

The standard also borrows much of the terminology relating to the management of collections i.e. collections information, collections care, collections access and most importantly in this context, collections development.

The standard also uses the module structure of the Museum Accreditation Standard (2011). Content within each section complements the Museum Accreditation Standard but does not mirror it exactly. There is a direct relationship in the requirement to have Collection Development Policy, and archives in museums should also refer to the museum template provided for such a policy.

#### **Requirement 2.2 of the Archive Service Accreditation Standard states that:**

*'The archive service has a co-ordinated approach to collections development activity, guided by coherent policies, plans and procedures. The approach should cover both analogue and digital materials, where relevant, and be approved by top management, or an appropriate delegated authority.'*

#### **Requirement 2.2.1 of the Archive Service Accreditation Standard states that:**

*'The archive service has a clear policy on collections development, covering the acquisition (passive and proactive accruals), appraisal and deaccessioning of material'*

#### **Requirement 2.2.2 of the Archive Service Accreditation Standard states that:**

*'The archive service can provide a plan which details the actions that are being taken to appraise and rationalise existing holdings and to identify gaps and priorities for future collecting, in line with its policy on collections development.'*

Developing a response to these requirements is the focus of this guidance. It can however be used in any context to develop policy and planning around collections development, as the principles are transferrable.

## 2. Policy, Plan or Procedure?

Understanding the scope and content of a policy, plan or procedure and the relationship between these can also help clarify the scope and content of the policy itself.

With reference to the [Archive Service Accreditation Guidance](#):

**Policy:** Describes the overall intentions and directions of an organisation. Provide a framework for organisational planning and action. Can be written in the form of a statement, may require the endorsement of the organisation's governing body. It should address the whys.

**Plan:** Sets out the objectives of an organisation and identifies the actions needed to achieve those objectives, in line with the organisation's policies and in order to deliver its mission statement. Planning documents should link with and be consistent with the policy to which it relates. Examples are strategies (3-5 years), business plans annual, departmental/individual action plans (often related to projects or reporting cycles)

**Procedures:** Describe a specified way to carry out an activity or a process in order to deliver a particular output or outcome. Procedures may be documented in the form of operational guides, manuals, handbooks, instructions etc. Procedures should be consistent with the policy to which they relate.

It is recognised that many organisations have their own in-house procedures and guidelines for developing and writing policies. For small archive services or for those archive services who are integrated within a wider collections organisation, the Collections Development Policy may be part of an overall Collections Management Policy for the archive or be integrated within the policies of the wider organisation. Archive Service Accreditation does not specify a template or preferred format for such policies.

## 3) Developing a collections development policy

This section will take you through the key steps of writing and developing a policy.

Remember that your policy should cover both analogue and born digital collections.

Step	Activity	Notes and questions to consider
1	Define the aim and scope of your policy	Be clear as to why you are writing the policy and what you want to include.

		<p>Why are you writing the policy, what do you want your policy to achieve?</p> <p>Who are your audiences for the policy: for example, archive service staff, funders, depositors and potential depositors, researchers? What do they need to know?</p> <p>How will your policy provide effective guidance for collections development planning and support staff in making decisions about acquisitions and disposals?</p> <p>How will it link with collections information, care and access policies?</p>
2	Research the content and consult where necessary	<p>What is the current approach of the archive service? How can this be reflected in the policy?</p> <p>Are there legacy issues in past collecting practice which the policy seeks to address?</p> <p>How do acquisition, appraisal and deaccessioning/disposal link together? Do they currently work well together or conflict?</p> <p>How does collections development currently relate to collections information, care and access? Are there areas of conflict which the policy should address?</p> <p>How does collecting relate to other archive services collecting in the same thematic and/or geographical areas? Are there gaps between approaches or any areas of overlap? How can these be clarified?</p> <p>Are you writing a policy which covers multiple types of collection? If so, have you also consulted guidance on other forms of collections development, e.g. Museum Accreditation collection development policy template?</p>
3	Develop the structure and content of the policy	<p>How will the archive service's approach be reflected in the policy?</p>

		<p>Is a change in policy needed to develop collections which reflect the collecting remit? Who do you need to agree this with if so?</p> <p>Should the policy cover appraisal and deaccessioning approaches, or is there related policy documentation for such areas?</p> <p>How is this best communicated? What format or style is best suited to your content?</p> <p>Have you looked at other examples of collection development policies to see how other collecting institutions have reflected their activity?</p> <p>What resource is potentially available to deliver collection development?</p>
4	Write the policy	Will your policy be easily understood by non-archivists if these are part of the intended readership?
5	Policy sign-off	This will depend on the management structure within your organisation and how powers of approval are delegated within the management structure. Obtaining approval for the policy by a more senior manager within the management structure can mean generating interest and creating visibility for what you are doing, achieving advocacy for your archive service
6	Publicise and communicate your new policy	<p>Who needs to know about your new or revised policy? Who needs to know the detail and who needs simply to be aware that it exists? You may consider staff, senior management, depositors, funders, researchers here.</p> <p>If you have changed the policy significantly, do you need to take a more proactive approach to communicating this to some stakeholders – such as potential depositors, or archive services collecting in a related area?</p>

		<p>What is the best way to communicate this for each audience? You may consider websites, intranets, newsletters, email, face to face or in a meeting/training session. It is good practice to publish a collection development policy so that depositors and other collecting institutions can understand your remit. If your repository holds personal data, publishing the policy may also be part of the transparency required under the General Data Protection Regulation.</p>
7	Policy review	<p>Reviewing your policy on a regular basis ensures it remains current and reflects the aims and needs of your archive service. Policies should include a review date to make this transparent.</p>

#### 4) Policy Scope and Content

This section will help you to decide what to include in your collections development policy, remembering that every archive service is different and not every suggestion may be relevant to your service and situation. There is no model template or structure for a collections development policy, but some of the following are likely to be relevant:

Content	Notes
<p>Providing context to your approach – the importance of collections development to your archive service</p>	<p>Stating why collections development is important will help to engage your audience and make it clear how collections development helps the archive service to achieve its aims. This is an opportunity to state the purpose of your archive service, and the collecting remit it exists to fulfil.</p> <p>Linking collections development to the overall mission, purpose and aims of the archive service and how it relates to other areas of collections management can strengthen this further and provides evidence of how the archive service functions and provides access.</p> <p>This might be expressed through a statement reflecting the archive service’s overall commitment to collections development, to fulfilling its collecting remit and to how developing collections makes the work of the service possible.</p>
<p>Providing context to your approach – the importance of your collections development policy</p>	<p>Stating why a collections development policy is important and how the archive service will use the policy in the course of its work is also crucial.</p> <p>Explaining how your policy influences your collections development planning can demonstrate the link between policy and plan, the difference the policy will make in practice.</p> <p>Examples might include guiding what the archive service is able to collect, and how it seeks out new accessions; what pressures exist which mean that</p>

	<p>collecting (and where relevant deaccessioning) need to be carefully considered; how actively records are being created in the collecting remit and therefore how actively collecting is needed; what approaches the service takes to this (including any guiding theories which the archive service follows); providing evidence of the approach to potential funders.</p>
<p>Providing context to your approach – the role of the policy in context of other policies/plans</p>	<p>Explaining how collection development fits in with the other work of the archive service can underline that collections fundamentally affect what the service can do.</p> <p>Examples might include outlining where gaps in collections inhibit potential work with groups unrepresented in the archives; where material is held which is not now part of the collecting remit or is unappraised and is contributing to collection care and building costs</p>
<p>Providing context to your approach – historical background and legacy issues</p>	<p>Explaining the background to your current situation with regard to collections development can provide essential additional context to your approach. You may wish to clarify any legacy issues in terms of gaps and strengths in how your collections represent your collecting remit. This can explain priorities for future action and guide planning.</p>
<p>Providing context to your approach – legislative and legal context</p>	<p>Collecting, particularly when it includes transfer of title, requires an archive service to have a sound legal basis for accepting collections. Identifying the decision of your governing body and/or the statute(s) under which you collect clarifies the position and underpins your collecting activity.</p> <p>Legislation which restricts access to records and requires certain classes of record to be collected is not likely to be familiar to all your stakeholders.</p>



	<p>Outlining the legal basis on which you hold some records and any general legal issues around your collection development will clarify some areas of your work and on what basis records can be accepted. This can be particularly helpful in dealing with new depositors who are not familiar with your work.</p> <p>Examples might include whether your service holds any classes of record by statute (e.g. Public Records Act 1958, Local Government Act 1972, Parochial Records and Registers Measure, manorial or tithe documents, material accepted in lieu of inheritance tax etc).</p> <p>It is helpful to outline on what basis your service accepts (or does not accept) additions to collections (for example internal transfer, indefinite or fixed-term deposit, purchase, gift) and to explore what legal factors affect new accessions and how these are managed (e.g. transfer of intellectual property, negotiating non-standard access restrictions, information to depositors regarding Freedom of Information provisions where relevant).</p> <p>If you do accept items on loan, it will be helpful to outline your approach, at a policy level. This is particularly the case if you intend to charge depositors in respect of storage and access while records are deposited and/or levy a retrospective charge if records are withdrawn.</p>
The collecting approach	<p>As collection development involves actively reviewing your collecting remit and how you meet it, it is useful for your policy to state the basis of your collecting approach, to ensure you are transparent about what your service does and does not do. This is especially the case if you seek to be proactive in</p>

	<p>particular areas, and/or have an approach to deaccessioning part of your holdings.</p> <p>If you follow particular archival theory, it may be appropriate to reference this, although this depends on the audience for your policy.</p> <p>Cross-referencing to an appraisal policy, or at least outlining the approach to appraisal, adds transparency to your activities and can help to manage expectations about the quantity and quality of material you collect.</p> <p>Considering what resource is available for collecting can guide your approach and manage expectations around your capacity. It can also act as an advocacy tool to argue for additional resources.</p> <p>If you are able to or would consider purchasing archives, ensure that this is specified. It may be useful to identify key funding support for this, such as a dedicated budget or Friends group, to demonstrate how these support your approach.</p>
Analysis of collections	<p>An analysis of collections held and how fully they represent the collecting remit forms the basis for collection development activity, and thus the plan which will put the policy into practice. At policy level it is useful to give headlines from such an analysis.</p> <p>For example, are there particular time periods, sectors, themes or geographical areas which clearly fall within the collecting remit but are poorly represented in the collections held? Are some areas particularly well represented and a major research focus, in need of active development, while other rich collection areas are largely complete or not a high priority for development in current circumstances?</p>

	<p>It is also useful to identify at a policy level any areas which are not a priority for active collecting and where deaccessioning may occur. Signoff of such a policy gives institutional support for what may be sensitive decisions.</p>
<p>Identifying priority areas for collecting</p>	<p>Your collections analysis may have highlighted a number of areas where there are gaps in collecting or where collections might be reviewed. However it is unlikely that all will be equal priorities, or that you will have capacity actively to address all of these areas at once. Making clear at a high level what your priorities are will help to communicate your approach, and should guide your development planning.</p>
<p>Identifying limitations on collecting: media accepted</p>	<p>You should outline any limitations on media which can be accepted into the archive, and particularly relationships with other institutions collecting in related fields. For example, a regional film archive or local museum may take audio-visual or object collections, and you may have a formal agreement on this. It may also be useful to cross-refer to any media-specific guidance on depositing, for example guidance for depositors with digital material to guide them in what may be an unfamiliar area, even if they already deposit analogue records with you.</p>
<p>Identifying limitations on collecting: the wider collecting picture</p>	<p>Very few collecting archives have such a clear collecting remit that they never have to discuss with others the boundaries of collecting. This is important to ensure that collections are coherent, kept together, and that the collecting remits of individual archives and related bodies are clear to potential depositors.</p> <p>Where your collecting has a geographical dimension, it is essential</p>

	<p>to state this and useful to clarify how any boundary changes/overlaps are managed.</p> <p>In an institutional archive, it is often appropriate to identify related institutions which may collect in close collaboration. For example, membership institutions which do not aim to collect personal papers of members may direct them to an alternative subject-specific collecting archive. The archive of a major business may have relationships with repositories holding records of branches, or earlier records of businesses which later merged into the company.</p> <p>If there are particular archives or other heritage/information bodies where you have specifically agreed collecting areas or an agreement to consult on a case by case basis as to the best home for new collections, it may be useful to specify this in your policy.</p>
Transfers and ongoing accruals	<p>It is useful to highlight the ongoing business of collecting from existing depositors, as this forms a core part of collection development. It may be useful to outline the approach to ensuring the records of your parent organisation are appropriately preserved, and to explore accruing collections including ongoing transfers under statutory provisions. This makes transparent the resource commitment involved and what you may expect from depositors who already have a relationship with your archive service.</p>
Contact with depositors	<p>Many archive services aim to keep in touch with depositors, particularly those with large deposited collections or those with ongoing accruals. It may be helpful to explore the support you offer, and your expectations in return.</p>

	<p>Examples might include a newsletter for depositors, regular depositor events, or a request for depositors to inform you of changes of address. Setting expectations around internal transfers is also helpful: for example, publishing information on an intranet as a first step to arranging transfers. Arrangements for creator access to transferred/deposited records may be described, or cross-referenced to a policy focused on access.</p>
<p>Principles and methods for accessioning and deaccessioning</p>	<p>It is useful to outline the approach you take to accepting items into the collection and to any removal. You should indicate the ethical considerations which apply and how you ensure these are followed.</p> <p>For example, if you have a collections panel which considers offers of material on a regular basis, it is useful to outline this so that frontline staff are not under pressure to make instant decisions. It may be helpful to outline your approach to offers, including an expected timeline to respond, or to cross-refer to relevant information for depositors. If you have a handling collection which is not intended for permanent preservation, it is useful to explain this and the basis on which items are added to the collection.</p>
<p>Conditions on acquisitions</p>	<p>There are a number of statements around conditions on acquisition which may be essential to specify as points of principle. This applies especially to donations and deposits from outside your parent organisation.</p> <p>It is unethical to accept records without clear and valid title, and this should be stated, according to the Archives and Records Association Code of Ethics. You should also commit to managing acquisitions supported by external grant</p>

	<p>funding within the terms and conditions of that grant.</p> <p>Other examples which may apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The archive may not accept highly specialist records which its staff and resources cannot interpret</li><li>- Large collections may be transferred only with finding aids if they would otherwise be inaccessible and hard to catalogue</li><li>- Some archive services will not accept archives which will not be available for public access immediately, or will not accept records which are closed access indefinitely</li><li>- Funding may be sought to support cataloguing and preservation of certain collections, or to expedite this</li></ul>
Review period	<p>All policies should receive regular review, and the date of expected review should be included in the policy. An appropriate period for collection development policy review may be 3-5 years, depending on wider business planning cycles.</p>

## 5) Developing a collections development plan

Archive services work within a range of planning processes. There is no single model template or structure for a collections development plan, and it may be part of a wider document such as a Forward Plan. You may find it useful to follow some of the steps above in developing a plan as well. In addition, there are steps you can take to ensure that the plan helps the direction set in the collections development policy become a reality.

Step	Activity	Notes and questions to consider
1	Define the aim and scope of your plan	<p>Be clear as to why you are writing the plan and what you want to include.</p> <p>Why are you writing the plan and what do you want it to achieve?</p> <p>What is the audience and how will you share the plan?</p> <p>How does the plan link to your collections development policy and to other plans (for collections information, care and access)?</p> <p>How long should the plan last?</p>
2	Research the content and consult where necessary	<p>What elements of your collections development policy can be put into delivery from the start of your plan?</p> <p>What other preparatory work is needed before you can set policy priorities?</p> <p>What resource is available to support this element of your work? What are the connections with other areas such as access and engagement?</p>
3	Develop the structure and content of the plan	<p>Ensure that you work logically, connecting the mission of your archive service with high level aims, and shorter-term objectives, connecting these to the resource needed to deliver.</p> <p>Is this part of a wider planning process, e.g. to create a strategic or forward plan across the service?</p> <p>Do you have a single plan or a tiered approach (e.g. some high level elements are represented</p>

		<p>in a strategic plan and more detailed content in annual plans)?</p> <p>If you intend to publish your plan, is there detailed content which would not be suitable for publication and should be included in an annexe?</p> <p>Is this plan intended to cover internal transfers and/or external deposits? Does it effectively cover business as usual as well as any project work?</p>
4	Write the plan	Will the plan be easily understood by those audiences it is intended to reach? Is it purely an internal document?
5	Get the plan signed off	This will depend on the management structure within your organisation and the context in which the plan is being developed. It is likely that a long-term strategic plan for the archive service would be signed off at high level or through delegated powers to head of service, but annual work plans may have much less formal signoff.
6	Consider publicising your plan where appropriate	<p>What audiences did you intend the plan to reach and how can you now share it?</p> <p>Is there some content which is not appropriate to share?</p>
7	Review your plan	When does the plan need to be reviewed to make it a living document that guides activity?

## 6) Plan scope and content

This section will help you to decide what to include in your collections development planning, remembering that every archive service is different and not every suggestion will be relevant to your service and situation. There is no model template or model structure for a collections development plan, but some of the following are likely to be relevant. You may include collections development planning in another document, such as an appendix to your policy or as part of your overall service forward plan.

Before you begin, you should also consider the audience for your plan. Planning documents may be useful to share with stakeholders: knowing they are in a priority area could encourage depositors to contact you, funders to support your active collecting in particular area, or stakeholders to comment on areas you have not considered and should work into future planning.



However, there are significant sensitivities in some types of collections development planning. If you are collecting in an area where material routinely appears for sale, publishing an intention to collect certain subjects could inflate prices. An analysis of industry to identify key priority collections may also identify collections which are not priorities: if you publish this information, what will the impact be? In such cases, you may wish to structure your plan so that you can share an overview, with confidential appendices.

1	Set the context for your collections development plan	Your collections development plan should sit logically within a framework, reflecting your organisation’s mission and the aims set out in your collection development policy to identify objectives for the lifetime of the plan, and plan the actions and resources needed to deliver them. It should take account of other plans with a similar timeframe, as well as the collections development and other policies guiding collections management across the service.
2	Identify areas where you have insufficient information to inform your work or need further preparatory activity before you can act	<p>Proactive collections development depends on understanding how closely your existing collections fit your collecting remit. It may be that at present your service does not have this clarity, and you need to plan for this preparatory work to ensure future collecting is well targeted. This may form the majority of a first collections development plan.</p> <p>For example, undertaking a gap analysis in your collections can help you to understand strengths and weaknesses. This may reflect date coverage, media, identified functions of an organisation or area, or thematic elements. If you use index terms in creation collections information, this can give you an immediate overview of your collections.</p> <p>If you do not have policies for appraisal and/or deaccessioning, creating these may be part of your planning. If you now have such policies, you may consider reviewing collections which were accepted before such policies were set, to identify whether collections were inappropriately accepted or remain unappraised, with significant resource implications. This will inform future</p>

		<p>planning on how – and whether – you will address these issues.</p> <p>If your policy suggests collecting in a new area or in an area where there is potential to overlap with other collecting archives and heritage bodies, you will need to consult them about your practical planning as well as about setting policy direction.</p> <p>If you are not able to take in records in a particular format which is part of your remit and which do not have a suitable alternative repository, for example digital records, planning your approach to developing capacity in this area will be essential. This may not sit only within a collections development plan, but it will impact on your plans to acquire records in that format. It may need liaison with potential depositors to explain the position, and make arrangements for future transfer. This also requires resource which you will need to plan.</p>
3	Identifying priority actions arising from your policy	<p>Your collection development policy will have identified some priority areas for collection development over the coming years. Your plan should address these, although if there are a large number of areas and your plan covers a short period, you will need to prioritise further.</p> <p>Are there particular collecting areas identified in the policy as being top targets? Addressing these will depend on your service’s position and level of engagement with these areas already. You may be able to arrange transfer with records managers at a planned moment, or you may be right at the start of cultivating contacts and explaining the role of your archive service. It may be essential to conduct a survey or work with experts/key community groups in the area to discover whether there are surviving records at all.</p> <p>If appraisal and/or deaccessioning are priorities, these should also appear in the plan. You may be in a position to set targets,</p>

		<p>for example for appraisal of a number of collections over the plan's lifespan. This is less likely for deaccessioning, as ethical approaches to deaccessioning often require work with other bodies, such as the original owner, potential new homes for collections etc. However, the work involved requires resources which you should include in your plan, even if you are not able to set targets.</p>
4	<p>Identifying actions/opportunities arising from policy and planning in other areas</p>	<p>Collections development does not happen in a vacuum and very often it is possible to identify other activities in your service which are likely to generate new acquisitions.</p> <p>For example, planned community engagement or outreach on a particular theme may generate more offers of material, or you may need to plan active collecting in order to support longer-term intentions to engage with a group/area which is currently underrepresented.</p> <p>There may be foreseeable institutional change which is likely to generate transfers to archives: this may include estates changes, mergers and acquisitions, or the end of delivering some functions. A change from paper-based to digital delivery often means a paper backlog transferred at pace, as well as an increasingly urgent need to develop capacity to ingest and manage born-digital records.</p> <p>Decisions arising elsewhere in your service management may also direct collection development decisions. For example, a decision that a particular format cannot be preserved (e.g. VHS) will require action in terms of collection care, and perhaps production of surrogates, but also documenting any decision to dispose of the items.</p>
5	<p>Identify actions/opportunities likely to occur during business as</p>	<p>Although your policy will identify priority areas, most archives also need to plan for reactive collecting, as offers of transfers and deposits arrive. While you cannot entirely plan for what may be an uneven level of</p>

	<p>usual activity, and include these in your planning</p>	<p>unsolicited offers, there may be elements which you can realistically anticipate.</p> <p>For example, does your service have a formal process of deciding on accessions, such as a collections panel? This can take the pressure off frontline staff when a spontaneous offer is made, but it also implies resourcing a regular panel, and subsequent depositor and accessioning activity.</p> <p>If your service receives large numbers of deposits annually, it should be possible to arrive at an average number of deposits which can help to guide your resource planning. You may also be able to predict routine accruals from regular depositors or have activity planned like a quinquennial parish records survey.</p> <p>If you work in a large corporate context, it is likely that much collection development activity will result from institutional change which may be confidential until publicly announced. This can mean abrupt changes in resource requirements, beyond your control. You can however plan for how your service responds to institutional change: for example, if a function ceases, a site closes, a new team joins the company. Does this require a team making site visits? What processes do you have in place if records are transferred out with a former brand? Having presumptive plans and a sense of the resource required for these unpredictable yet foreseeable changes will help you to update plans in light of external changes. It will also help you to advocate for additional resource when required and to evidence the knock-on effect on previous plans if no resource is available.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Identify resources required to deliver the plan and set timescales</p>	<p>Resources for collection development primarily include staff time, and funding for acquisition and immediate preservation supplies. You should be able to identify lead staff members to take forward activity, and</p>

		<p>an indication of the commitment involved in progressing your actions.</p> <p>Routine activities such as managing offers of documents or appraisal may be easier to estimate than the time taken to cultivate new contacts or funding unexpected purchase opportunities as they emerge.</p> <p>If your collection development policy specifies particular commitments to depositors, whether ongoing contact or timescales for responding to offers of new collections, make sure these are included in your plan. These are part of the resource needed to deliver your policy.</p> <p>Set a date for review of your plan, and for monitoring progress. Plans are living documents which should respond to your service's real activity. Some elements will not be possible to deliver or will drop down your priorities, and key contacts will change. If your plan is going to continue to be a useful tool, it needs to reflect this.</p>
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## **7) Other sources of support**

For examples of active collections development in practice, please see *Collections Development Frameworks and Guidance: Case Studies*.

If undertaking collections development within a museum context, please see Arts Council England, *Collections Development Policy Template*:  
<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/accreditation-scheme/support-and-advice#section-2>.