Review and refresh of the Archive Service Accreditation programme - phase 1

Executive summary report

Version	Description	Authors
14 March 2024	First draft created for Dr Melinda Haunton	Kevin Bolton
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28 March 2024	Feedback from the Accreditation Programme	Kevin Bolton
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1. Introduction and methodology

Archive Service Accreditation is the United Kingdom (UK) management standard for archive services, supported by the UK Archive Service Accreditation Partnership of the Archives and Records Association (UK), Archives and Records Council Wales, National Records of Scotland, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Scottish Council on Archives, The National Archives, and the Welsh Government. The programme provides a Standard and supporting documentation, which can be freely used by archive services to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to develop and improve over time.

Archive Service Accreditation was developed collaboratively through a co-creation process with archives across the United Kingdom in 2012-2013. The first awards were made in November 2013. As the programme neared its 10th anniversary, the Accreditation programme partners wished to review and update the programme through further sector consultation, addressing areas which have been identified as requiring further focus including four themes: embedding inclusive practice, digital preservation delivery, environment and sustainability, and audiences and future user expectations.

The National Archives on behalf of the UK Archive Service Accreditation Partnership commissioned Kazky (a trading name of Kevinjbolton Ltd) to carry out the first phase of the review - consultation and research. The Kazky team consisted of Kevin Bolton, Larysa Bolton, Caroline Sampson and Sarah Wickham, and. They were supported by Dr Safina Islam of the Ahmed Igbal Ullah Education Trust on the embedding inclusive practice theme.

The research aimed to:

- Understand how well the current standard and delivery model meets the needs of archive services and current archival practice.
- Identify what changes and improvements may be needed to keep the standard and delivery model relevant to archive services and their ongoing development.
- Use the results of consultation to develop recommendations for phase 2 identifying further work areas and approaches to delivering the required change.

The review methodology consisted of four strands: desktop research (September 2023), interviews with partners and stakeholders (September-October 2023), survey (October 2023-January 2024), and focus groups (January-February 2024).

The review was funded by the Welsh Government, the National Records of Scotland, and The National Archives.

2. Findings

Embedding inclusive practice

The desktop research highlighted the importance of the If Nothing Changes, Nothing Changes report by Maya Sharma, Marta Riccardi and Safina Islam of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust to this review since it was the only research we identified that was able to clearly articulate what effective inclusive practice and change in the sector looks like. This research explored anti-racism, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the heritage sector (archives and museums) in England. It included an online survey aimed at heritage organisations (59 responses); interviews with representatives of community groups (eight interviews), heritage organisations (14 interviews) and sector networks and funders (eight interviews); and three focus groups with heritage organisations.

The report recommends "Actively driv[ing] change through goals, responsibilities and accountability... Targets and goals are an essential part of driving action. It is important that any EDI outcomes, goals and targets are embedded into organisational business and planning cycles (such as Accreditation renewal for museums) to support progress and successful outcomes." Section 7.2 of the report includes recommendations for sector support organisations that are relevant for Archive Service Accreditation:

- Provide clear guidance as to what effective EDI work looks like, and provide tools, training and advice to support consistent improvements and high standards.
- Prioritise and provide EDI focused training and development.
- Match the supportive enabling approach with action to ensure minimum standards are defined and met - perhaps developing a framework of minimum requirements or standards relating to EDI which is monitored and has consequences for not meeting.
- Work collaboratively with other sector support organisations on this, as a shared approach will result in greater consistency and impact.

The consultation found that **inclusive practice is viewed as important and should be included in the Archive Service Accreditation Standard**. Areas highlighted as relevant included diversifying collections, inclusive cataloguing/collections information, diversifying audiences and access, inclusive recruitment, and embedding EDI in policy development & action planning.

In general, it was felt it should be **embedded across the whole Standard and not just one section, although its absence in Section 1 (Organisational health) was noted by some in the partner/stakeholder interviews.** The need for any new requirements to be **scalable** for

different sizes of service and flexible to meet the **local and service context** emerged strongly.

The importance of having training, guidance, and resources on inclusive practices to help archive services with any new requirements was also highlighted. Although the desktop research highlighted several good inclusive practice resources and guidance, very few of these are currently referenced in the Archive Service Accreditation Guidance. They are also held in different places so can be difficult to navigate and find.

Digital preservation delivery

The desktop research highlighted the range of digital preservation benchmarking tools available to archive services. Some focus group participants felt the **Digital Preservation**Coalition's Rapid Assessment Model (DPC RAM) showed better evidence of planning and progress than the NDSA Levels of Digital Preservation.

The consultation produced differing viewpoints on digital preservation. Some survey respondents and stakeholders/partners felt that there needs to be a **minimum standard or the Standard needs to be stronger**. However, others thought it important, especially for those archive services with limited resources, to be able to **show they are working towards meeting the requirements**.

In the focus groups, all participants felt there should not be a minimum standard, but a small minority felt that a minimum standard might be appropriate for Type 2/3 services, or holders of digital Public Records. More participants felt that expectations might be higher in proportion to the size of the service, for Places of Deposit, and/or where services have a larger or increasing proportion of overall holdings in digital form. There was a consensus that assessment should focus on how services understand and manage their risks in their context. For some participants, Archive Service Accreditation should require evidence of continuing progress with digital preservation, including in relation to providing access.

Focus group participants also emphasised how Archive Service Accreditation had been a **good tool for leverage and advocacy within a parent body for some services**, and resources for digital preservation had been secured – although this was not the case for all services.

Environment and sustainability

The desktop research highlighted the <u>Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change</u> which **distinguishes between adaptation (or adjustment)** to actual or expected climate change,

and **mitigation** or activities limiting emissions of greenhouse gases/reducing their levels in the atmosphere.

As with inclusive practice, the consultation found that it was **viewed as important and should be included in Archive Service Accreditation**. However, the importance of **scalability and recognising the constraints** archive services face was emphasised. Suggestions on what this could look like varied but included showing awareness & strategic planning, understanding digital preservation impact, building design/location and delivering small "wins."

Focus group participants suggested that environmental sustainability and carbon cost "filters through everything" and could appear throughout the application form. On balance, there was a preference for a single open question linked to forward planning in Section 1 (Organisational health): What are your plans? What would you like to achieve? What are the environment-related risks to collections?

Across all the focus groups there was a **clear demand for sector-specific guidance, carbon literacy training, and more information about what others are doing**. The desktop research highlighted several resources which are relevant to archive services, although current archive-specific resources tend to focus on collections care and digital preservation.

Audiences and future audience needs

The desktop research found there is perhaps surprisingly a lack of standards or guidance relating to access and engagement to archives. However, there is good audience development guidance from the wider cultural sector.

The consultation found that Section 3 Stakeholders and their Experiences is the section applicants struggle the most with. They can find it **confusing and it requires greater clarity** in terms of the language used. It also needs to recognise **wider forms of access more strongly**. For example, internal use, public inquiries/internal reviews, engagement/outreach, community engagement, remote/digital access and digital engagement. The importance of audience development and audiences and engaging new audiences was also highlighted by some in the stakeholder/partner interviews and the survey.

Programme delivery and other themes

In general, the **quality of the delivery of the programme was rated very highly** in all areas by survey respondents. Respondents praised the programme staff and the support provided. A small number of survey respondents thought the timescales for revalidation and

reapplication were too frequent, but others highlighted this as working well. The **importance of the assessment visits** also emerged from the focus groups.

Interestingly, none of the partners talked about the importance of **inclusive practices in the delivery of the programme** (although we did not prompt on this). However, one of the Committee members highlighted the importance of ensuring the Committee is representative. One of the external stakeholders also highlighted the importance of this. For example, are the assessors and peer reviewers inclusive practitioners? Are they representative of society?

3. Recommendations

These recommendations for phase 2 of the review identify further work areas and approaches to delivering the required change.

Inclusive practice

- 3.1 A new equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) requirement is added to Section 1
 (Organisational health) of the Standard which outlines how, in the words of *If Nothing Changes, Nothing Changes*, EDI work is "at the heart of organisational activities" of the archive service and that it has "a clear vision of the change it wants to see, and priorities, actions, (monitored) targets and resources to realise this change". This should include how the archive service has
 - Embedded EDI in its mission statement, policies, plans, and procedures.
 - Conducted an assessment of current EDI levels.
 - Created an action plan to deliver change with transparent and explicit goals, responsibilities, and targets.
 - Allocated financial and/or staffing resources to deliver the change.
 - Identified governance arrangements and/or responsibility for delivering the change.
- 3.2 The **existing requirements of the Standard are updated** to reflect that, in the words of *If Nothing Changes, Nothing Changes,* EDI should be embedded "into all aspects of" the archive service. For example, this should include (not an exhaustive list):
 - 1.6 Resources: workforce (inclusive recruitment and employee lifecycle).
 - 2.2 Collections Development (inclusive collecting, making collections representative).
 - 2.3 Collections Information (inclusive cataloguing)
 - 3.2 Access Plans and Planning (understanding needs, diversifying audiences, and access).
 - 3.3 Access Information, Procedures and Activities (inclusive access).

- A greater emphasis on working respectfully and ethically with communities in Sections 2 and 3 of the Standard and the Guidance.
- 3.3 Update the guidance, application form, and glossary to reflect the above including examples of the evidence required for each requirement and how these can be applied in a scalable way. The evidence provided must focus on demonstrating impact and change in the archive service, rather than inputs such as processes or outputs. It needs to demonstrate the difference it has made.
- 3.4 The Archive Service Accreditation Partnership should **critically reflect on whether it can lead by example on inclusive practice.** For example, could the Partnership and its partners meet relevant parts of the new Standard? What does the Partnership need to do to be able to lead by example? Delivering recommendations 3.1-3.3 above and demonstrating there will be consequences if these are not met in itself will also demonstrate that the Partnership is providing sector leadership on this matter.

Reasoning: 3.1 and 3.2 are based on the recommendations in *If Nothing Changes, Nothing Changes*. The importance of EDI strategy, planning and commitment and the themes in 3.2 also emerged from the consultation. A new separate requirement is critical since it will help drive change and improvement and means that there are consequences (an unsuccessful Archive Service Accreditation application) of archive services not meeting it. In the words of *If Nothing Changes, Nothing Changes* there should be "consequences for heritage organisations that do not meet their diversity commitments."

The importance of scalability was emphasised during the consultation, and this is reflected in 3.3. The importance of evidence demonstrating impact and change developed from our conversations with Dr Safina Islam of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust. 3.4 emerged from some of the stakeholder/partner interviews and focus group discussions.

We also advise that once the new EDI elements of the Standard have been in place for a while (e.g. after 5 years and/or 10 years) a review(s) is undertaken. Over time, archive services will hopefully be able to demonstrate more EDI maturity and the Partnership should capture that more nuanced change as they grow.

Digital preservation delivery

3.5 Add the **Digital Preservation Coalition's Rapid Assessment Model** in the guidance/application form as an alternative option to using the NDSA levels of digital preservation.

- 3.6 Consider introducing **some minimum standards for certain types of archive services** e.g., type/size of archive service, proportion/significance of digital collections.
- 3.7 For remaining archive services, update the guidance and application form to **bring out risk management more strongly**. For example, if the archive service does not have a coherent digital preservation function it will need to demonstrate a full understanding of the risks arising from the situation, explain how these risks are managed, and have actions to enable digital preservation.
- 3.8 For assessment, allow scoring of digital and analogue collections differently in Section 2 (Collections).

Reasoning: Using Digital Preservation Coalition's Rapid Assessment Model (3.5) emerged from the focus groups. During the consultation, some felt there should be a stronger emphasis on the implementation of digital preservation and/or minimum standards. However, others thought it important, especially for those archive services with limited resources, to be able to show they are working towards meeting the requirements. 3.6 and 3.7 offer a compromise - minimum standards for certain services and a focus on risk management/improvement for others (which matches the approach Accreditation takes with analogue collections). 3.8 developed from the stakeholder/partner interviews and focus groups - as strong performance in one area might mask weak performance in the other, and risked not driving essential improvement.

Environment and sustainability

- 3.9 **Determine and define the most appropriate terminology** to use for this theme and apply it consistently in the documentation. "Environmental sustainability and carbon cost" was used with the focus groups. Include the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change distinction between adaptation and mitigation.
- 3.10 **Update Requirement 1.3 Forward Planning in the Standard** to incorporate archive services showing an awareness of environmental issues. Incorporate a new question in Section 1 (Organisational health) to enable services to demonstrate what this means in their context, and what forward plans they are making.

<u>Reasoning:</u> The distinction between adaptation and mitigation emerged from the desktop research. The idea of a new question (3.10) emerged from the focus groups. Survey respondents also emphasised the importance of showing awareness and planning. This

theme will need to be looked at again in future reviews to reflect changing priorities and challenges. An incremental approach like that adopted for digital preservation was recognised as valuable.

Audience and future audience needs

- 3.11 **Review and simplify the language of Section 3** (Stakeholders and their experiences) to ensure clarity and consistency across the Standard, Guidance, application form, and glossary.
- 3.12 Update the Guidance to make it clearer about the different types of access that can be incorporated (e.g., search room, enquiries, digital use/engagement, internal use, statutory use, outreach/learning, and community engagement etc.). The application form will need streamlining and updating to make it easier for applicants to articulate this. For example, this could include supplementing 'policies, plans and procedures' with prompts, checkboxes, and free text questions. As with inclusive practice, this may include focusing on impact and change, rather than inputs.

<u>Reasoning:</u> The issue of language and clarity (3.11) emerged strongly from the survey and focus groups. The importance of incorporating different types of access (3.12) more effectively also came out strongly across the consultation. Having a stronger focus on audience development also emerged from parts of the consultation – we have not included specific recommendations about this (as the Standard and Guidance do already cover this) but hope that delivering recommendations 1.2, 3.11 and 3.12 will bring this out more strongly.

Delivery of the programme

- 3.13 Consider **publishing more advocacy materials** for Accreditation, with information disseminated about trends, examples of change, improvements etc.
- 3.14 Communicate clearly the **role and purpose of the visit** to applicants.
- 3.15 A process for **checking in with unsuccessful applicants** is put in place.

<u>Reasoning:</u> The value of the data and evidence of changing trends and emerging initiatives emerged in several focus groups (3.13). There is a perception that routinely collating, interpreting, and sharing these data and evidence in the form of regular reports would contribute to overall levels of awareness across the sector, create a useful advocacy tool

and play a part in driving change and improvement. The possibility of aggregating data gathered from accreditation submissions alongside data gathered from the now The National Archives-led Local Authority Benchmarking Exercise (England and Wales) was viewed as offering opportunities to enhance the data set and to streamline data collection for services; inputting data once to serve more than one purpose. The role and value of the assessment visit (3.14) emerged as a strong discussion theme in all focus groups, with a tendency for participants to seek to expand their role. This may in part result from the difficulties some experience currently in finding appropriate places on the application form to submit evidence, preferring instead to "show and tell" with an assessor. The assessors' focus group highlighted a gap in accreditation programming with respect to unsuccessful applicants (3.15), in that while sector lead bodies may offer support by way of follow-up, the programme itself makes no provision for so doing. This may deter unsuccessful applicants from trying again.

Sector support bodies

3.16 Sector support bodies in the United Kingdom **develop training, resources, and guidance to support archive services** in meeting any new requirements in the Standard – especially in the areas of inclusive practice and the environment.