



Being an Accreditation Mentor – a guide



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Introduction

The museum sector is a supportive one, with a culture of mutual co-operation. Colleagues willingly share their knowledge and experience to guide and advise peers in other museums, ranging from supporting a museum and its board through its long term development, strategic interventions for a specific purpose, specialist subject support or an individual looking for guidance in their current role or for career development. These exchanges can be through a one-off query or a relationship with another museum lasting over many years.

The Accreditation Mentor role is a very specific and defined one within this wide-ranging sector support. It is there to support a museum in meeting and maintaining Arts Council England's Accreditation standard - the nationally agreed standard that ensures all museums are sustainable, focused and trusted, and recognised by the public, funders and governing bodies.

Museum Development North (MD North) is funded by Arts Council England (ACE) to provide museum development activity to support museums in the North of England. We are part of Museum Development England, the network of five area Museum Development providers, majority-funded by Arts Council England, working together to create thriving museums by raising standards, driving excellence and training people.

The Accreditation standard underpins our delivery programme – all of our programmes and support can be mapped out against the different sections of the standard and so supports participating museums to meet the standard. Priority museums for our support are Accredited museums or those Working Towards Accreditation that are not regularly funded by Arts Council England or central Government i.e. the smaller museums that require an Accreditation Mentor.

MD North is also contracted by ACE to deliver specific Accreditation advice to enable museums to achieve and maintain Accreditation. Supporting museums that require Accreditation Mentors, and supporting the Accreditation Mentors themselves, is a part of this work.

This handbook has been written by MD North for museums in the North and current and potential Accreditation Mentors for museums in the North. It is designed to be read in conjunction with the existing ACE [Accreditation mentor handbook](#). It summarises the main points from the original handbook, gives updates on what has changed from the original content since the Accreditation standard was updated in 2018, and outlines the arrangements and support available from MD North as well as other current sources of support for Accreditation Mentors.

Museum Development North
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What is an Accreditation Mentor?

The Accreditation Mentors scheme partners experienced museum professionals with smaller museums to help support them in meeting the Accreditation Standard.

The Accreditation Mentor:

- Acts as a 'critical friend' to the Museum
- Provides support and advice relating to Accreditation from their own expertise
- Confirms the Accreditation application and Accreditation return, providing a report as part of the Accreditation return
- Works with the museum to establish what other areas of expertise are required to meet and maintain Accreditation standards
- Acts as an 'advice co-ordinator', identifying sources for advice from their own networks or through other professionals
- Acts as an advocate for the museum and helps to develop links and relationships with the wider museum profession

What are the benefits of being an Accreditation Mentor?

For the mentor, it's a good source of Continuing Professional Development and can help with career development. If you've usually worked in larger museums or non-independent museums you can gain a different perspective of the sector. You can become a valued source of support for another museum and share your professional experiences. In return you also gain new skills and knowledge as you learn from the museum you're mentoring how they work as trustees, volunteers and with the third sector.

It's a way for you, personally, to give something to the wider sector outside of your day-to-day role.

It's also a way for the mentor's employer to play a bigger role - it might fit within the museum's own plans, remit or aims to support the wider sector, specific geographical area or subject specialism – museums are a supportive sector!

For national and nationally-styled museums, for their own Accreditation returns they must show how their professional staff provide expert advice to other museums, galleries and collections. Committing the time required for their staff to be Accreditation Mentors is one way of demonstrating this sector support.

Why do museums need an Accreditation Mentor?

Not all museums have experienced museum professionals on staff. Section 1 Organisational Health of the Accreditation standard requires a satisfactory structure for governance and management (1.3).

This is met by demonstrating to ACE:

- An organisation chart that shows all the people that work at the museum, including volunteers and paid staff, covering the front of house through to the governing body, and the relationships between them
- Who has the authority and responsibility to approve decisions. This might include decisions delegated to sub-committees, staff or volunteers
- Clear agreements with staff and volunteers setting out their roles and responsibilities
- **Evidence that the governing body has access to museum professional advice**

For all local authority, national and nationally-styled museums and larger independent museums access to professional advice will come from paid staff. Smaller museums may have to access the advice through a different route by appointing an Accreditation Mentor.

Whilst all museums must meet the same Accreditation standard, the requirement to demonstrate this is scaled so that returns and expectations are proportionate to the size of the museum's operations.

Smaller museums, referred to as type 1 in the Accreditation guidance, are operated entirely, or mostly, by volunteers, and are usually supported by an Accreditation Mentor to meet the standard. Some type 2 museums may also require an Accreditation Mentor.

The evidence submitted by the museum to ACE to prove that they have access to professional advice in place, through the appointment of an Accreditation Mentor, comprises:

- A signed mentor agreement and signed minute confirming the appointment
- A mentor report to accompany application and returns

Who can be an Accreditation Mentor?

To be an Accreditation Mentor you must have:

- At least three years working in museums, with experience at curatorial/managerial level
- A commitment to personal learning and development to show how you're keeping your knowledge, skills and experience up to date

Mentors can have experience working across any of the three areas within the standard: organisational health, managing collections, or users and their experiences.

As Accreditation covers all aspects of a museum's business it's unlikely you'll have the full range of professional skills to advise on all areas with the same level of expertise. You're not expected to be an expert on everything!

Whilst one museum professional must fulfil the role of Mentor to sign off the museum's Accreditation application or return, you don't have to work alone. You may invite colleagues to help on specific areas or bring relevant expertise into the museum in other ways.

If you work for a museum and are carrying out the role in work time you should have management support for you to commit to the days required to carry out your mentor role. Alternatively you may choose to carry it out in your own time outside of your paid role.

What is the time commitment for being a mentor?

Be prepared to spend more time with your museum in the first year as you get to know it, but as a general rule mentors can assume a potential commitment of up to four days a year.

Support is given online, in emails and calls, but to meet the requirements of the standard the Accreditation Mentor should:

- Receive the papers for every governing body meeting
- Attend at least one meeting of the governing body a year
- Visit the museum at least once a year
- Carry out an annual review with a trustee and senior manager
- Write an Accreditation Mentor report to accompany the museum's application or return.

There is advice in the Museum mentor handbook on drawing up a working agreement with the museum to establish boundaries on what and how the mentor relationship will work, for example when you can and can't be contacted. This helps clarify your role and what each party can expect from the other from the outset. The handbook also gives more details on the mentor/museum relationship.

The mentor role is advisory – you are there to act as a 'critical friend' and as a source of support and advice to the board. However, there may be times when you will get more involved or help deliver something practically. These instances should be time limited and not become a long term practice.

What isn't required from an Accreditation Mentor?

Accreditation Mentors are limited in their time and are appointed for a specific purpose. The Museum mentor handbook outlines what isn't expected e.g. the museum should not involve you in internal politics, treat you as another volunteer or honorary curator or expect an unreasonable amount of your time.

You don't have to provide all advice yourself, instead acting as an 'advice co-ordinator', identifying sources for advice from your own networks or through other professionals.

There is a balance to strike with the available time you have for the mentor role. Appointing an Accreditation Mentor is not a 'tick box' exercise for the museum to meet the standard but not involve you or seek your advice. However, you should also not be asked to get involved in the detail of writing policies and procedures, your role is to advise on the requirements of the standard to ensure all documentation is compliant.

Becoming an Accreditation Mentor for the first time does not compel you to a long term time commitment. There is no time limit to being a mentor and many mentors have been with their museum for many years. Mentoring roles often develop into excellent working relationships that provide benefits to the mentor and stability for the museum. But there are also many legitimate reasons for standing down as a mentor. Your own personal circumstances might have changed, the museum's needs may have changed or you feel you have 'done your bit'.

What can I expect from the mentee museum?

It is the museum's responsibility to maintain the relationship and keep you informed.

They should appoint you following Accreditation standard requirements and as they would induct a trustee. They should invite you to trustee meetings with due notice and keep you informed. There should be a clear line of communication between you and the governing body.

Museums should agree with their mentor from the outset whether or not they will cover the mentor's travel expenses; these and other costs could be of particular consideration when the mentor works freelance, is providing support in their own time or has considerable travel costs.

How do I become an Accreditation Mentor?

If you are interested in becoming an Accreditation Mentor, complete the Expression of Interest form on Arts Council England's website. The information provided on the form will be reviewed against the eligibility criteria by ACE. The form can be found [here](#). You can also contact one of our Accreditation Advisers or Museum Development Advisers for an informal discussion about the mentoring role.

MD North keeps a list of available Accreditation Mentors and we match these with museums needing one. You can specify which area of the region you'd like your mentee museum to be in, and the areas of work you consider to be your specialisms.

It is the museum's responsibility to recruit an Accreditation Mentor. They identify that they need one, and either recruit themselves or ask MD North to identify a mentor for them. A museum might ask you directly to consider being their Accreditation Mentor, or you may know of a museum for whom you'd like to take on that role.

The decision to appoint you as an Accreditation Mentor is submitted to ACE and they approve and record the decision.

What has changed with the 2018 Standard?

The Museum mentor handbook, which is still in use now, was published before the Accreditation standard was revised in 2018. The following are the changes which came into effect in 2018 and are different from outlined in the 2011 handbook. Otherwise the handbook is still up to date.

They are now called Accreditation Mentors to make it clearer what they do

The original name was Curatorial Adviser but museums require advice and guidance in more than just collections issues and a mentor's experience can now come from across all three of the sections of the standard i.e. from expertise across the whole of museum practice. A previous name was Museum Mentor – it's now clearer Accreditation Mentors are for Accreditation support, not as a general source of guidance so mentors are able to focus their valuable time on supporting the museum to be Accreditation compliant.

The criteria to become an Accreditation Mentor are now more flexible

Professional experience can be demonstrated over three years rather than the previous five years and the requirement for a professional museum qualification has been removed. Mentors have to demonstrate a commitment to continuing personal development but there are many ways now of doing this.

Accreditation Mentors can now serve on a museum's governing body as a voting member

Previously, a mentor couldn't be on the board and a board member couldn't take up the role of a mentor. However, if you are both a trustee and an Accreditation Mentor for the same museum you still need a mentor agreement in place and to go through the full process of being recognised by ACE as an official Accreditation Mentor to meet the requirements of the Accreditation standard.

Where can mentors get support?

Arts Council England

ACE has a section on its website specifically for [mentors](#), including the Museum mentor handbook and templates to assist in your mentoring work.

Museum Development North

MD North is funded by ACE to deliver museum development in the North of England. We provide programmes, events and sources of support and advice for the sector, all of which fit within the Accreditation standard.

We also provide specific support around Accreditation. We have staff dedicated to giving Accreditation advice, run a programme of online Accreditation workshops, including one annual mentor network meeting, and have a specific Accreditation section on our website with information and support.

MD North coordinates and contributes to networks and you can use these to encourage your museum to participate in appropriate local, regional or national museum networks.

Museums that require an Accreditation Mentor are our priority for places on our workshops. If you're from a museum that is not a priority for our programme (museums not regularly funded by Arts Council England or central Government) you can still book a place on our workshops if your learning from them will directly benefit your mentor museum.

Collections Trust

One of ACE's Investment Principles Support Organisations, helping museums work with the information that connects audiences and collections, and providing advice on documentation standards. It provides training and its [resources](#) section is a central hub for information on Accreditation and other collections resources.

South West Museum Development

SWMD has resources specifically for [Accreditation Mentors](#).



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