



The Designation Scheme

*Guidance for
applicants*



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Cover image: Globe of Mars, by Ingeborg Brun, 1913. Credit: The Whipple Museum

Opposite: Ehret painting Linn correspondence. Credit: Linnean Society of London

Overleaf: Ancient Worlds. Credit: Manchester Museum

In putting this guidance together we have consulted widely. We would like to thank the following individuals and organisations for their input and help:

Archives & Records Association
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The British Library
BT Archives
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English Heritage
Freemason's Museum & Library
Heritage Lottery Fund
Historic Libraries Forum
Hunterian Museum, Royal College of Surgeons
Museums Association
Museums & Galleries Scotland
The National Archives
National Museums Directors Council
The National Trust
National Historic Ships
National Football Museum
Natural History Museum
Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
UNESCO Memory of the World Committee
University Museums Group
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Introduction to the Scheme

The Designation Scheme exists to identify and celebrate collections of outstanding resonance that deepen our understanding of the world and what it means to be human.

The Arts Council is passionate about collections and their ability to impact upon and enrich our lives, and the Designation Scheme is an important and visible assertion of our belief in their enduring cultural value.

We are extraordinarily fortunate in England to have a dazzling array of important museum, library and archive collections, and the Designated collections cover such diverse areas as political and ecclesiastical archives, art history, literature and theatre, economics, the history of transportation on land and on water, and the medical profession. They demonstrate eclectic tastes and intellectual journeys, the emergence of disciplines and theories and the careers of our famous figures. They bring art, science and industry together in stimulating contexts. Our collections illuminate who we are and they are an irreplaceable resource.

Opposite (clockwise from left):

Botanical model, black mulberry, by Auzoux, c.1875.

Credit: Whipple Museum

William Blake, *The Ancient of Days* c.1824.

Credit: The Whitworth Art Gallery

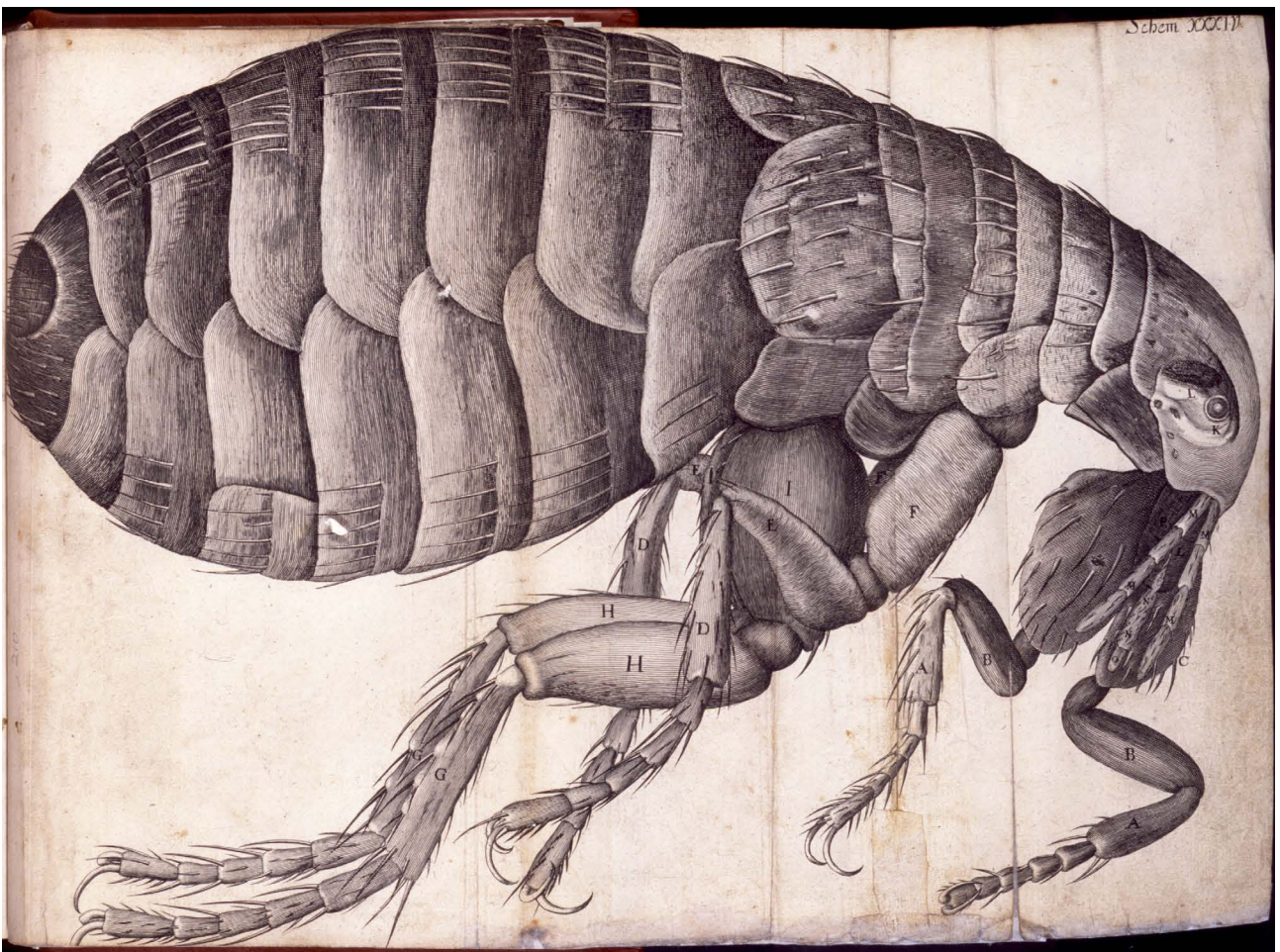
A flea from Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*. London, 1665.

Credit: Chetham's Library

Right: Papilio menelaus (Ins Linn).

Credit: Linnean Society of London







The award of Designation stimulates pride, support and cohesion within an organisation. It raises the profile of the collection nationally and internationally, and can open the door to new revenue streams, including Arts Council programmes.

During 2013–15 the Designation Scheme was reviewed and in 2014 we published *Pearls and wisdom*, our vision for the future of the Scheme. The review reasserted the founding principles of national significance and quality as key attributes of a Designated collection and supported the importance of maintaining a high bar for participation in the Scheme. An additional emphasis on research value is now an explicit requirement in order to demonstrate the importance of the collection to deepening and supporting an understanding of its subject matter. The Designation Scheme re-opened in April 2015.

This guide will show prospective applicants how to apply and how the process will be managed. The Arts Council is committed to being open and clear about the way we make our decisions. In the case for Designation, final decisions are made by our independent panel of distinguished practitioners, who are appointed by the Chair of Arts Council England.



Left:

Decorative tiles, Hobbs Fish
and Chips shop.

*Credit: Black Country
Living Museum*

Above:

Tiger 131.

Credit: The Tank Museum

Right:

Dudley and Dowell Foundry,
Cradley Heath, 1972.
*Credit: Paul Hill, Library
of Birmingham*

Overleaf: Jockeys before the race,
Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas,
Oil, essence, gouache and pastel
on paper, c. 1878-9.

*Credit: The Barber Institute
of Fine Arts*





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Important information

Who can apply?

Appropriately constituted museums, libraries and archives in England are eligible to apply for the Designation Scheme. This includes specialist libraries and archives or libraries formally linked to local authorities or eligible bodies such as universities and religious organisations. However national organisations funded directly by central government are not eligible to apply.

Organisations or individuals without charitable status are not eligible to apply. Applicant collections must be held in trust for the public.

Definition of a Designated collection

The definition of a Designated collection is:

“ *A nationally significant, coherent assemblage of items; held in trust in the long-term for public benefit. A Designated collection is an essential research resource for its subject.* ”

In order to make a decision on whether your collection meets this definition, the Designation Panel will judge it against the published criteria.

These criteria will be used to decide whether the subject of the collection or the story it tells is of national significance, whether the content of the collection is sufficiently extensive and coherent to comprehensively represent the subject in question, and whether the collection is an essential research collection which contributes to the public understanding of the subject.

Application and assessment process

Designation is an application-based Scheme. Applicants put forward a collection for the award of Designation through the process outlined in this guidance.

The application process has two stages. The application forms for both stages are online and are available on the Arts Council website. The two-stage process has been designed to ensure that applicants are guided at an early stage as to whether the collection they are putting forward is appropriate for the Designation Scheme. Information submitted will be assessed at both stages. Each question has a particular word count. Please check each form for guidance on word counts before preparing your answers.

A great many collections held in museums, libraries and archives contain important material that can tell interesting stories and illustrate many subjects, however most will not meet the criteria for Designation. The two-stage process helps applicants and Arts Council England to consider whether particular collections are appropriate for the Scheme, and enables Arts Council to offer appropriate advice and support during the application process.

Decisions on the award of Designated status are made by a panel of respected and senior practitioners. These appointments are made by the Chair of Arts Council England and awards of Designated status are made by the panel on behalf of Arts Council England. The Designation Panel usually meets twice a year. There will be an advertised deadline for applications. Please refer to the Designation Scheme pages on the Arts Council website for further details.

Stage 1:

Criteria for making the case for Designated status

To apply for Designated status you must firstly demonstrate that your organisation is eligible to apply, and that the collection you are putting forward *has the potential* to meet our definition of a Designated collection and meets all of the criteria at Stage 1, as set out below. To do so, we ask you to complete a Stage 1 application form.

We can only accept applications for a single collection; you cannot submit more than one collection per application.

You can apply for a particular collection within the overall holdings of your museum, library or archive, but you must ensure that the collection in question is a coherent assemblage of items with a focus on its particular subject matter.

You can answer the questions about your organisation and its research principles within the context of your entire holdings if appropriate, but a good application will explicitly reference the nominated collection and it will be identifiable in supporting documentation. The questions are as follows:

1. Eligibility

Your organisation must meet the criteria set out in [Who can apply?](#). If the organisation does not meet the eligibility criteria, assessment will not be continued.

2. National significance

We ask you to describe the significance of the subject itself and its lasting impact on society and give examples of how the primary source material in the collection supports your statement. If you are successful at Stage 1, you will be asked to expand upon this statement in detail at Stage 2. You may wish to read the developed criterion at the top of page 17 to help you construct this statement.

3. Collection context

- Scope and scale

We ask you to provide information about the scope and scale of the collection, including its size, types of material and subject matter covered.

- Coherence and accessibility of collection

We ask that you provide details of how your collection is coherent and publicly accessible

- Fit within the wider context of the subject.

With reference to comparator collections held elsewhere, you must explain where the collection fits within the wider context of its subject matter.

- The structure and remit of the holding organisation.

You must provide the context for the collection: its governance structure, who owns the collection and arrangements for how it is held in trust for public benefit.

4. Collections research potential

At Stage 1, we also want to know, in broad terms, whether the organisation holding the collection supports the principle of research activity, and what level of research activity is currently taking place. We appreciate that organisations might be at very different stages of development, and this requirement is explored in more depth at Stage 2. You may find it helpful to read the developed criterion on page 19 to help you with answering this question.

Documentation to support your application

These documents are compulsory:

We ask you to submit your constitutional document to help the Panel understand the context in which your organisation holds the collection.

We also ask you to submit your research policy or, if you do not currently have a policy, to provide evidence of your organisation's research principles and its commitment to research. This may be in the form of a mission document or forward plan. At Stage 1, you may wish to describe how researchers can consult items from the collection.

What happens once you have submitted your Stage 1 application?

When we have received your application, we will first check it for completeness and we may ask you for more information at this stage. We ask for the contact details of the person who is best placed to respond to this request. We also ask for the contact details of the most senior staff member, as we will write to them with our decision at Stage 1.

Your application will then be assessed by an Arts Council officer and a recommendation will be put to the Designation Panel along with a full copy of the application.

The Designation Panel will consider the application at the first available opportunity. The panel normally meet twice a year.

The panel will decide whether the collection has the potential to make a case for Designation and the applicant will receive a decision letter.

Stage 1 outcomes:

The applicant will be advised in writing of one of the following outcomes:

Application has been approved and a Stage 2 application can be submitted.

Or

Application has not been approved, and has not met the criteria. This will include information about how the application has not fulfilled the requirements.

A successful outcome at Stage 1 will not automatically lead to a successful outcome at Stage 2. Stage 2 applications must be submitted by successful Stage 1 applicants within 12 months of approval. If a Stage 2 application is not submitted within this timeframe, the Stage 1 pass will have lapsed and will need to be successfully completed again if the applicant decides to apply for the award of Designation in the future.

Stage 2:

Criteria for Designated status

If you are successful at Stage 1 and are invited to complete a Stage 2 application, there are three criteria which you must address. These are:

1. National significance

You must demonstrate that the subject matter that your collection addresses is of national significance, and that it has had a recognised and lasting impact on society.

2. Outstanding quality

For the collection to be considered of outstanding quality, you must demonstrate that the collection's material is extensive and coherent in its coverage of the subject and is uniquely placed to illuminate it.

3. Research value

You must also explain how the collection makes, or will make, a major contribution to the public understanding of its subject. You must demonstrate that the collection is an essential research collection for its subject, and that it either has a realised research value already, or that it has the potential to have a realised research value.

These criteria are explored in the following sections. All three criteria must be fully met in order for the application to be successful.

We recognise that significance and quality will be bound together in terms of the overall narrative which your collection tells, but for the purposes of the application and assessment process we have separated them out so that we can provide prompts and advice on how best to structure your case. The sentences in **bold** set out the criterion which your submission needs to respond to in any given question.

The sentences in *italics* are prompts and suggestions rather than specific requirements. Not all prompts will be applicable to all collections. They indicate the type of evidence and

explanation that we will be seeking in support of the case for your collection. You may wish to include additional information. Whatever information you submit in support of your case, please ensure that it is strictly relevant to making the case for Designated status.

If you are applying for a collection which you believe is significant in an international as well as the required national context, it may help to strengthen your application so you must clearly state this and explain such significance throughout.

National significance: criteria explained

- **the collection is focused on a subject of national significance that has had a recognised and lasting impact on society.**

Explain why the subject matter that your collection addresses is of national significance, building on the case you made at Stage 1. **You must describe the significance and lasting impact of the subject.**

At this stage, we do not want you to focus on the collection, although you may reference it in your explanation. We want you to focus on the subject matter itself.

You may wish to consider:

Your case may include reference to: particular episodes in history; a chronological story; geographical or economic development which had a profound national impact; the evolution of particular communities or schools of thought, or the impact on individuals or groups connected to the subject matter; or the development of a scientific or artistic movement or form.

You may wish to note authoritative reference material which demonstrates the significance of this subject.

Outstanding quality: criteria explained

- **the content of the collection is central to the understanding and appreciation of the subject**
- **the primary sources in the collection directly evidence that subject**

At this stage, we want you to focus on the collection and explain its depth and richness, expanding upon your statement submitted at Stage 1.

You may wish to consider:

Does the collection include a rich variety of items of direct relevance to its subject and illustrate the subject's full breadth and depth?

Does the collection include material of particular individual merit, such as key items of outstanding historical or aesthetic importance, or items particularly representative of the subject type and/or items that are rare or unique?

Can you describe the overall coherence of the collection, particularly in relation to the subject matter?

For collections related to a movement or a science or an industry, how does the material show how thought, theory and inventions had an impact, and how industries, processes and production evolved?

Does the collection contain key primary sources to demonstrate the foundation and lasting impact of a particular movement or school of thought?

For collections related to natural sciences, does it include type specimens and examples which may have been described, referenced or cited in scientific literature?

You may wish to describe the collection's provenance and any gaps in the collection which influence its coherence. How do you manage any gaps in the collection's coverage of the subject matter (for example, loans, digital copies, etc).

You will most likely find it useful to consult the current list of Designated collections and consider how your application relates to relevant collections already recognised by the Scheme.

Research value: criteria explained

- **the collection is, or has the potential to be, an essential research collection for its subject**
- **the collection makes, or will make, a major contribution to the public understanding of the subject**

We are looking for evidence that the collection is used to support primary research that would not otherwise be possible.

You may wish to consider:

How the collection is central to advancing public understanding and scholarly knowledge of the subject that it represents.

Has the collection benefitted from being the subject of research and from contributing to wider research?

Does the collection have an established or developing reputation as a research resource?

Has research based on the collection led to any particular impact on the subject itself?

Are you working, or planning to work, with any comparator collections already identified?

Can you provide evidence that the collection has a strong history of having been accessed by a wide range of users?

For collections with only unrealised research potential – who is the collection of interest to, and how do you know that it is?

What key research partnerships are in place, or would need to be in place, to develop the collection's potential?

How does the collection relate to relevant holdings in other organisations? What working relationships and links do you maintain with these organisations and what additional benefits do they bring? You may find it helpful to refer back to the comparators which were included in your Stage 1 application.

You may wish to consider:

Has the collection been the focus for research within the last five years? This may have resulted in: academic publications; books or journals – scholarly and non-scholarly; or TV and radio broadcasts. A good application will cite key examples and describe each example based on research enabled by the collection.

Is the collection supported by an active community of subject experts or specialists that extends beyond the collection's geographical location?

Have items from the collection been the subject of any national and international collaboration (including loans) in the last five years?

Do you have the capacity to accommodate researchers? If so, please describe the extent of the resource. If not, please outline any plans to develop a research service.

Your evidence can refer to research which has already been realised, or that remains unrealised but is demonstrated to be feasible.

You should clearly identify the relevance of the research to the collection with reference to the national significance and outstanding quality statements. The best answers are qualitative as well as quantitative.

If you are only able to evidence research potential, you should explain why it has not happened to date, what your current plans are to realise it and how an award of Designated status might help.

Documentation to support your application

There are no compulsory supporting documents at Stage 2, but you may wish to include supporting evidence to bolster statements made in your application. Examples may include:

- letters of support. If you feel that letters of support would enhance your application, we can accept one in relation to each main criterion. You must identify which criterion each letter relates to and letters should constructively add weight to the application.

- collections development policy. You may find it helpful to refer to your policy, particularly in relation to the outstanding quality section.
- research policy/research principles. You will have already submitted evidence for this at Stage 1 as part of making the case for the research value of your collection. However, we suggest that you re-submit the document again with your second stage application as some time is likely to have elapsed between both applications and it may have altered, and because you are likely to make reference to it in the Stage 2 application.
- forward planning document. You may wish to submit a document which outlines your future activity if you are referring to these plans in your application – for example, if you are planning to develop research potential of the collection at any given time.

You must explain what the supporting documents demonstrate by cross-referencing them with the relevant answers in the application form.

What happens once you have submitted your Stage 2 application?

When we have received your application, we will first check it for completeness and we may ask you for more information at this stage. We ask for the contact details of the person who is best placed to respond to this request. We also ask for the contact details of the most senior staff member, as we will write to them with our decision at Stage 2.

Your application will then be assessed by an Arts Council officer and a recommendation will be made to the Designation Panel along with a full copy of the application. We will also commission expert advice on your application. This advice will be given to the panel alongside your application documents. The panel will also be informed of the outcome of any previous applications which have been submitted to the Scheme for the particular collection in question.

The Designation Panel will consider all of the evidence put forward and make a decision on whether Designated status is awarded. Partial or deferred awards will not be made.

The panel normally meets twice a year.

The applicant will receive a decision letter, stating one of the following outcomes:

a) Designated status has been awarded to the collection.

Or

b) Designated status has not been awarded to the collection.

Advice and guidance will be included for all decisions.

If an application is unsuccessful, this does not preclude any future submissions. However, when considering a subsequent reapplication, please ensure you consider and take into account the Designation Panel's comments.

Complaints and information requests

Complaints procedure

If you are not happy with the way we have dealt with your application, please contact us and we will discuss this with you. If you are still unhappy, you can ask us for a copy of our complaints procedure.

Details can be found in [Making a complaint](#), which is available on our website, www.artscouncil.org.uk, or by contacting our enquiries team by email to enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk or by phoning 0845 300 6200.

Please note that you can only complain if you believe we have not followed our published procedures when assessing your application. You cannot appeal against the decision.

Freedom of Information Act

The Arts Council is committed to being as open as possible. We believe that the public has a right to know how we spend public funds and how we make our funding decisions.

We are also listed as a public authority under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. By law, we may have to provide your application documents and information about our assessment to any member of the public who asks for them under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

We may not release those parts of the documents which are covered by one or more of the exemptions under the Act. Please see the Freedom of Information website at www.ico.gov.uk for information about freedom of information generally and the exemptions.

We will not release any information about applications during the assessment period, as this may interfere with the decision-making process.

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Right: York Helmet. Credit: York Museums Trust

*Back Page: Print illustrating the large salon of
the Moorish Villa, La Wilhelma, Stuttgart (Karl
Ludwig Wilhelm von Zanth, 1855). Credit: RIBA
Library Books & Periodicals Collection*



