

## **Accreditation Verification Visits – a two part article about what to expect (first published by Emuse London, 2013)**

### **An Accreditation visit – the fear factor!**

**Ever worried about the prospect of an Accreditation verification visit? Morwenna Rae, Curator at Dr Johnson's House, London, reflects on her recent experience of a visit from an Assessor.**

'People in the museum world seem keen to reassure us that Accreditation visits are not like Ofsted inspections. I'm an ex-teacher and having been through both now, I thought I'd test this argument.

Despite what I was told, there were definitely similarities in my preparations. This included a weekend of frantically tidying the office/classroom. The days spent making a beautifully indexed folder with every single piece of paper someone could possibly need – mainly so I didn't have to reveal the interior of the filing cabinet. Waking up the night before from a chilling inspection-related dream...

And on both occasions, it transpired, I had wound myself into a state of nervous tension for absolutely no reason at all! Any similarities with Ofsted ended when the visit began, as Accreditation was far more pleasant. The Assessor, Sarah. Turned out to be a personable, chatty person who had worked in museums. She had realistic expectations of what was possible in an independent museum with two staff, tight budgets and no storage space. At no point did she silently glide into a room, scowl, make some notes and glide out again without making a comment or eye-contact (an Ofsted experience that I will never forget).

I never felt that we were being judged against an impossible one-size-fits-all set of criteria, or that I would be criticised for acknowledging problems – providing we had a plan to deal with them. In essence, the visit involved going through the paperwork that I'd been notified about weeks in advance, showing Sarah the house and chatting about our day-to-day management and plans for development.

The bit of the day I'd dreaded most was the check on the accessions register. That dream I mentioned was about not being able to find my favourite item in the collection. I'm assured that everyone dreads this bit; wouldn't it be embarrassing if you couldn't find something? It was fine. Not only was Sarah realistic about the practicalities, she picked that very teapot from my dream, which, to my relief, had a full accession record and was exactly where it should have been.'

**Morwenna Rae, Donald Hyde Curator at Dr Johnson's House, London.**

Dr Johnson's House was awarded full Accreditation in March 2013. For more information, please visit <https://www.drjohnsonshouse.org/>

## **Accreditation Visits – there's nothing to fear!**

### **An Accreditation Assessor speaks to Emuse London about what to expect from a Verification Visit as part of the Accreditation process.**

'If the impending Accreditation visit strikes fear into the heart of your museum, my first bit of advice would be not to worry. It is rarely as bad as you might think!

A visit is designed to check facts, look at significant changes (such as a Heritage Lottery Fund redevelopment or re-opening after a closure) and uphold the quality of the Accreditation award. Half the visits conducted by assessors are targeted, and the other half are chosen at random to ensure a good cross-section and fairness in who we visit.

Museums are given at least two weeks' notice, and will be shown the checklists used by Assessors beforehand. You will also be given preliminary assessment feedback, along with any questions the assessor might have. There are no trick questions and everything is done transparently.

The visit will be conducted at a date convenient to both parties, and a Museum Development Officer or Accreditation Advisor may attend. You could also invite your Museum Mentor if you have one.

A visit can take between half a day to a full day to complete, and you will be asked lots of questions. Your Assessor will be friendly, and will also answer questions. Don't be scared to ask, we don't bite!

Your visit will be broken down into three parts: a paper-based document check, a site tour and a collections audit. We can do this in whatever order is most convenient for your organisation.

The audit is often the section that people worry about most. However, we are flexible and can accept photographic dated evidence up to a week after the visit if you cannot find something on the day.

Accreditation is here to support your museum as part of the Arts Council's wider museum development programme. Your Assessor is not out to trip you up. A visit

is designed to build bridges between museums and Accreditation, and to support you in the valuable and vital work that you do.'

**Sarah Menary, Accreditation Assessor, Arts Council England, Birmingham.**

**Published in London Emuse Newsletter, 26 July 2013.**