

The needs of institutions regarding the digital materials they create and acquire vary considerably. This handbook is intended to provide a bridge between broad, high level overviews and explicit, detailed guidelines applicable to the needs of a specific institution. The strategic overviews are intended to link to operational activities in order to reinforce the need to develop practical procedures grounded firmly in the business mission of the institution. The handbook provides pointers to where to find further guidance and to assist in developing policies and practices which are most applicable to the individual institution.

Ideally, the handbook should be used as a mechanism to help focus thoughts, increase overall understanding, promote training, and act as a catalyst for further action. Nothing will preclude the need for each organisation ultimately to commit the necessary resources to an action plan but this handbook is intended to oil the wheels of that process. While the challenges may seem daunting initially, the overall message of the handbook is that it is possible to take action now, and to make significant progress towards developing the infrastructure that will greatly improve future prospects for quality digital materials being created at this time. It is neither possible nor necessary to wait until all challenges have been overcome before action is taken. Nor is it necessary to wait until the long-term costs are clearly known. It is often never known precisely how much it costs to preserve traditional collections nor has it been necessary to resolve every obstacle definitively before developing effective preservation programmes.

If, as seems clear, society is to rely on assured access to digital as well as non-digital sources of information, then the ways and means of providing assured and continued access must be found.

A range of tools has been used in the handbook, both because of the inconsistent level of existing guidance and also the range of user needs. For some aspects, such as digital imaging, there are numerous excellent sources of practical guidance, while other operational requirements are less fully developed at this stage. All can be expected to change and evolve fairly rapidly so the handbook is advocating an overall approach to preserving digital resources based on sound principles and policies rather than prescriptive formulae. As the crucial importance of digital preservation becomes more widely recognised, an increasing number of valuable sources of guidance are appearing at a rapid rate. While potentially incredibly valuable, their proliferation can make it bewildering to decide which ones are likely to be most applicable for a given situation.

By selecting key See Exemplars and Further Reading in each section, the handbook should

make it easier to navigate through existing sources of advice, guidance and options. In addition to pointing to existing sources of guidance, a combination of decision tree, summary checklists, selected case studies, and commentary have been used. These are intended to stimulate and promote further thought and discussion but above all, to stimulate action by institutions to develop digital preservation management policies and strategies appropriate to their needs.

The handbook is intended for a wide and diverse audience, from those who are only beginning to consider managing digital materials to practitioners who have already accumulated considerable theoretical and/or practical experience. It has been written with the intention of allowing quick and easy access to the most appropriate chapters.

Each chapter is preceded by an 'at a glance' guide to its intended primary audience, their assumed level of knowledge, and the purpose of the chapter. The table below is intended to help in deciding which chapters are likely to be of most relevance. It is however not intended to be rigidly prescriptive and anyone wishing to, can of course read the handbook in its entirety!

All readers are encouraged to read [Introduction](#), which provides the background to the development of the handbook and guidance on how it is to be used. A set of definitions and concise explanations of key concepts is provided in

[Definitions and Concepts](#)

and a glossary of acronyms and initials use by organisations and projects throughout the handbook is provided in

[Acronyms and Initials](#)

of the Introduction. Finally a topic index at the back of the handbook allows readers to identify and locate key subjects covered.

Figure 1

Recommended Sections and Audiences

Audience	Recommended Sections
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Anyone requiring a subject	Introduction
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Creators and Publishers	Digital Preservation	Organisational Activities	and	Media
a and Formats				

Funding agencies	Digital Preservation
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Operational managers [Internal Strategies](#) , [Organisational Activities](#) and [Media and Formats](#)

Operational staff [Organisational Activities](#) and [Media and Formats](#)

Senior administrators [Internal Strategies](#)

Third party service providers [Internal Strategies](#) , [Organisational Activities](#) and [Media and Formats](#)