

The judges' perspective



- The criteria
- Must do better
- What we liked about the shortlist



Digital Preservation Coalition

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You're going to hear later this morning about what the shortlisted projects did, from the people who actually did the work. We thought it would be useful to tell you a little about what the judges felt about the entries and about the process in general. I'll talk first about the criteria we use to judge the awards. This will help to explain why we chose the projects we did for the shortlist and ultimately for the award. But I'm also interested to get your views on how these criteria might change – the DPC is reconsidering what it wants to promote through the award and this is likely to lead to a change in the criteria for success.

I'll say a little then about what types of things cause some entries to do less well than they might otherwise have done. These are very general observations, and aren't focussed on specific projects. And then I'll say a little about what aspects of each of the shortlisted entries we felt were particularly strong.

The gatekeeper criteria



- Must describe work finished by March 31st 2007
- Must be conducted in the UK or be of benefit to UK
- Form must be completed!
- Focus on born-digital resources



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There are effectively two sets of criteria. What I've referred to as the 'gatekeeper' criteria are really the conditions for entry. The entries must describe work which finished by March 2007. In reality this is a little vague, since many of the entries describe work which by its very nature will continue and evolve for many years to come. But we're clear that what we're evaluating is that part of the work which was complete at that date.

The work must either be conducted in the UK, or show benefit to the UK. Thus, a new tool being developed in (for example) Canada, but available for general use, is eligible, but the preservation of a Canadian digital asset for a Canadian audience would not be.

The entry form must be completed in full. A simple rule, one would think, but one that did cause some entries to fail. And finally, the project must 'focus on born-digital resources'.

Each of these has caused entries to be ruled out of consideration. We received at least one entry this year which requested funding for future work, rather than describing past work, for instance.

We're probably going to strengthen that last criterion since we regularly receive entries which relate entirely to digitisation programmes which, whatever their quality, we must rule out of scope. Some are stunning projects, and I'll say a little about one of them now.

The Kirkmann Harpsichord



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The Kirkmann harpsichord entry was one of those entries which we feel deserved an award from someone, but sadly not us. It described a conservation project which combined traditional techniques of conservation and restoration applied to a musical instrument with innovative digital techniques to preserve what one might describe as the significant properties of the instrument.

Even after restoration, this antique harpsichord is in a delicate state and not able to withstand the rigours of regular playing. The project thus captured samples of the all aspects of the instrument's sound – including the mechanical noises as well as the sound of the strings – and used them to produce a computer model of how the instrument produced sound.

This has been used to make commercial recordings of period pieces played on this digital emulation of the instrument...



.. And to allow visitors to the museum in which it is housed the ability to play the emulated instrument themselves. So, here was a really exciting and stimulating project which brought together traditional techniques and really innovative use of information technology to enhance the museum experience. Sadly it was completely outside our scope, but this judge at least found it fascinating enough that I couldn't resist bringing it to your attention.

Evaluation criteria



Clarity of aims and objectives of the project			
Exemplary digital preservation research/development			
Innovative digital preservation			
Takes into account previous or related work			
Shows a good understanding of digital preservation issues			
Provides clear practical benefit			
Provides long lasting benefits to digital preservation			
Clarity of methodology			



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Those projects that make it through the shortlist are evaluated against 8 criteria as shown here. The criteria themselves are made public, but the weighting that we apply to them has not – until now. These weightings have been subject to change each time, though, and are likely to change more radically before the next awards.

We place strong emphasis on projects of an exemplary nature – the sorts of things we can all learn from – and those which provide a clear practical benefit to someone. We're also keen to see that those benefits are long-lasting, that the project's aims are clear and that there is innovation of some sort in the project. That can take multiple forms – some entrants have invented or developed genuinely new things, whereas others innovate by taking known techniques and applying them in new areas.

But I'll begin now by talking about the attributes and mistakes that cause some projects not to do as well as they might do. I won't name names or single out particular projects for criticism – most of the things I'm going to mention are common problems.

What lets people down?



- Lack of clarity about objectives
- Lack of recognition of related work
- Failure to explain benefits
- Inability to take a wide perspective on work
- Claims that aren't backed by evidence
- Additional documents whose purpose wasn't clear



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So what has caused some projects to fail to make the shortlist ? The most common problem is a lack of clarity about what the entry is. This makes all other aspects of the judging very difficult. If we aren't sure what you were trying to do, it's very difficult to tell if you've done it well. Even when things are explained sufficiently well for the judges (who are, after all, meant to be domain experts) projects often struggle to explain themselves to a wider audience – something they need to do as part of the shortlisting process and something which the DPC is very keen to ensure.

We're also disappointed when people fail to recognise the work that they have built on, or work that could have helped them.

In other cases, people do a very good job of explaining **what** they did, but not **why**. We can see what you did, but what were your motives ? What benefit is anyone going to derive from it ?

The judges are also hard on projects that make claims that aren't capable of being backed up by some evidence. If you claim you have the grand solution to all digital preservation problems now and in the future (and we have seen entries like this) you need to have strong evidence to back it up.

A less common problem, but one worth noting, is presented by projects which do provide us with copious amounts of evidence, but don't tell us what it all is and why it's relevant. We have a lot to read and digest, and we prefer it if there's a roadmap of some sort.

So, having looked at the downside, I'll now talk about what the judges **liked** about each of the shortlisted entries.

What we liked - LIFE



- Costing - a problem that needs work
- Strong and varied case studies
- Potential for further work
- Builds on previous work
- Something we felt we could use
- Collaboration



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LIFE was looking at the problem of costing, and understanding a modelling of costing. This was an area that we all agreed was sorely in need of work, and the team were to be congratulated on taking it on. They utilised a strong and varied set of case studies to gather information and to present their findings in a variety of contexts. The project was carried out in a way that showed clear pointers to the (extensive) further work that needed to be done, and it also built well on relevant work both within the digital preservation field and outside it. (And the usefulness or otherwise of this work was made clear in the project's outputs.)

This was one of a number of projects which more than one of the judges felt would be directly relevant to us in our own work. It was something that we had already had occasion to recommend to colleagues. These are both good signs that the project's work has broad, and potentially long-lived, impact. We would have liked to see more solid analysis of the economics and its heartening to note that the team plans to do this in their follow-on funded project.

Finally, it was notable that the project involved collaboration between a national institution and a university library, and had consulted even more widely during its work (and drew funding from a national academic funding body.)

What we liked - Audit



- Builds on lots of work
- Very sound understanding of a range of issues:
 - Technical
 - Organisational
 - Social
 - Economic
- Potential long-term benefit
- Broad collaboration and community validation



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The audit and certification entry built on a huge body of existing work and added significantly to it, in an area that is becoming of increasing interest and concern. They demonstrated a sound and deep understanding of a range of issues, from the esoterically technical through organisational, social and economic issues, all of which potentially have an impact on the ability of a given repository to be able to carry out – and demonstrate that it is carrying out - its mission in the long term. It was clear to us that there's a likely long-term benefit to the work, however it is eventually carried forward.

We would have liked a little more clarity as to what was the subject of the entry, as distinct from the work on which the entry was building. But we were impressed by the broad collaboration which had brought forward this work and the community validation which it had already received.

What we liked - Paradigm



- Purpose very clear
- Built on strong non-digital foundation
- Useful and varied outputs
- Very clear approach, and they stuck to it
- Strong use of relevant standards
- Collaboration



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The Paradigm project impressed us from the outset as one whose purpose was very clear, and which was adhered to throughout the project's life. With such clear goals, it is much easier to judge whether or not something is a success. Paradigm built on a strong non-digital foundation, taking a familiar problem (that of personal papers) from the world of traditional materials in libraries and archives and looking at its implications in a digital environment.

The project's outputs were useful and varied, although not all of them were available in final form at the time of the judging and hence they could not all be taken into account. Nonetheless, this was another project which a number of the judges saw as delivering benefits which they could utilise and recommend to others. As well as having clear goals, the project's approach to achieving those goals was also clear and was adhered to throughout the project. They build on relevant standards and again demonstrated a useful collaboration.

The astute may by now be detecting a theme. Although collaboration is not remarked on in the invitation to enter, and it does not appear anywhere in the criteria used for evaluating entries, all of the shortlisted entries (but not all of the entries overall) involved collaboration between institutions in some scale. This probably has something to say about the strategies needed for tackling digital preservation problems today. It certainly reinforces one of the key aims of the DPC – to foster collaboration when it is of benefit.

What we liked - web curator



- Clear outcomes, clear goals
- Rapid and practical development
- Clear path to further improvement
- Thinking about workflows
- Builds on existing tools
- International collaboration



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The web curator tool was another project which impressed us with its clear goals, and clearly-achieved outcomes. The clearly-articulated and well-focussed goals, along with a practical approach, allowed it to conduct an impressive software development project extremely rapidly. This was all the more impressive given the extreme geographical separation of the collaborating partners, in New Zealand and the UK. Until we start receiving entries from inter-planetary collaborations, this is likely to be the furthest-spaced set of collaborators we're going to see in a DPC entry!

There was a clear path to further improvement and development of the toolset produced, which builds on existing tools by providing a clear, well-structured user interface to manage them. Much thought had been given to workflows and how the tool could help to manage them in an efficient way. As we move from small-scale projects to large-scale digital preservation activities, such thinking will be of increasing importance.

What we liked - Pronom/Droid



- We can see the benefits for us
- Clear goals, well executed
- Encourages community contribution
- Clear development path
- Meets a long-recognised need
- Collaborative spirit, open approach



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PRONOM and its partner tool, DROID, were another project which many of the judges saw as delivering direct benefits to them and their organisations. The goals of the project and its long-term development path were again clear, and in this case they were particularly well executed. PRONOM meets a need – for format registries – which has long been recognised in the community. TNA were to be congratulated for taking action instead of talking about action in this area. Moreover, this entry demonstrated collaboration in a wider sense, one which was ongoing. As well as involving TNA with external developers, PRONOM encourages community contribution to its store of knowledge and the open-source nature of the tool encourages community development of that aspect as well. Making the system available as a web service gives back to the community the knowledge which they have contributed, in a form which is far more valuable than text pages on a web site. This led us to believe that the benefits are likely to be long-lived, and was one of the factors that led this entry to be a worthy winner of the award.