

Public Data Policy for a Public Data Corporation: A response from the DPC

About us

1. The Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) is an advocate and catalyst for digital preservation, ensuring our members can deliver resilient long-term access to digital content and services. We are a not-for-profit membership organisation and our primary objective is to raise awareness of the importance of the preservation of digital material and the attendant strategic, cultural and technological issues. We support our members through knowledge exchange, capacity building, assurance, advocacy and partnership. We draw our members from the UK and Ireland and have series of alliances with organisations across the world. Our vision is to make **our digital memory accessible tomorrow**.

Summary of our response

2. This response should be read in conjunction with our contribution to the recent consultation on Open Data. In this we stated the view that 'open data' needs to be planned for the long-term otherwise the opportunities that it creates will be unsustainable and underdeveloped. Four practical implications follow from this principle which will need to be adopted by the Public Data Corporation: open data needs to be signposted predictably so that links and references to data are resilient; open data needs to be robust in terms of format, media and description to avoid the inadvertent disruptions caused by obsolescence and media failure; changes to open data need to be tracked and published to ensure that the integrity and authenticity is not lost; open data needs to be predictable in form enabling comparison of performance through time and facilitating the creation and refinement of analytical tools.

3. In short, we believe there is **no meaningful access without preservation**. By preservation we mean all of the actions required to maintain access to digital materials beyond the limits of media failure or technological change. Those materials may be records created during the day-to-day business of an organisation; "born-digital" materials created for a specific purpose; or the products of digitisation projects.

4. We **welcome the explicit statement about the value of data**. We note and support the focus on access and the benefit and value that flows from this. **We offer our assistance in identifying and resolving issues of resilience and continuity that may arise**.

Charging for PDC Information

5. DPC has no particular view on the best way to balance the objective of increasing access to data whilst remaining within constraints of affordability. However if access is to grow year on year, then the PDC will need to consider and resolve core issues of digital preservation at an early stage. Digital technologies have short lifecycles and preservation actions are path dependent. Digital archaeology – the process of reconstructing inaccessible data from disintegrated traces - is highly specialist and unlikely to be affordable or appropriate in all but the most unusual cases. Therefore, the PDC needs to ensure that longevity is embedded at an early stage in the data lifecycle.

6. DPC has no particular view on which datasets will create particular benefits.

7. DPC has no particular view on which model is to be preferred. However the costs of preservation need to be factored into any business model or the revenue sought will not be sustainable. (For a brief review of the economics of digital preservation see Kilbride 2011, for a more substantive analyses see BRTF 2010).

8. DPC has no particular view as to the additional services outside of the core public tasks. However it is essential that such services do not jeopardise the long-term commitment which the PDC must make to ensure the viability of the data that it publishes.

9. DPC has no particular view on alternative options to balance the Government's objectives. However it is essential that in considering any alternatives the government does not inadvertently create impediments to the long-term management and accessibility of data.

Licensing

10. The DPC agrees that greater clarity, consistency and simplicity in licensing are desirable. Rights management is a core element to ensure digital continuity so decisions about rights and licensing should avoid sudden discontinuities which may inadvertently inhibit the efficient and appropriate exploitation of data through time.

11. DPC has no particular view on which licensing model is most effective or on the advantages or disadvantages that accrue from these different approaches. Experience in managing data for the long-term is that this is generally made simpler where a single common licence is shared across data sets. However the proliferation of data types and rights associated with them shows that this is rarely achieved and that uses are often more diverse than envisaged at the point of deposition.

12. The DPC takes a long-term view about the simplification and changes in licensing. We believe that though there may be disruption in the short term that this is likely to be rewarded with robust and more stable opportunities in the longer term.

Regulatory Oversight

13. The DPC has no particular view on the current regulatory environment or on the timescales appropriate to their delivery.

14. However we are concerned to ensure that oversight includes appropriate assessment of the capacity of the PDC to deliver long-term commitments. Independent analysis of policy and practice for data retention, provision and deletion are likely to be required. This might best be delivered by ensuring in the first instance that the board of the PDC is properly aware of the long-term challenges to data management, and by ensuring that long-term issues are addressed by a designated senior executive within the corporation. To help achieve this goal we would welcome the PDC as a member of the DPC.

Notes about this response

15. Although full members of the Coalition, The National Archives have not contributed to this document.

References

Blue Ribbon Task Force 2010 *Sustainable Economics for a Digital Planet: Ensuring Long-term Access to Digital Information* online at: http://brtf.sdsc.edu/biblio/BRTF_Final_Report.pdf last access 07/11/2011

Kilbride, W 2010 Too big to fail, in What's New 39, Digital Preservation Coalition, York, online at <http://www.dpconline.org/newsroom/whats-new/765-whats-new-issue-39-november-2011#whatswhat39> last access 07/11/2011

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