

Wednesday 24th September 2003
The National Archives, Kew

[Programme](#)

Report on the DPC Forum, Archives: adapting to the digital age. Held at the National Archives, Kew, Wednesday 24th September 2003.

Around 40 participants attended the 7th DPC Forum, which was held at the National Archives, Kew. The Forum was timed to coincide with Archives Awareness month so it was appropriately held at TNA and focussed on archives in the digital age. It also coincided with the anticipated Autumn internet launch of TNA's PRONOM database

(<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/preservation/webarchive/default.htm/pronom/documentation.htm>)

Update 26 September 2007

This link no longer active; information on PRONOM can be found at

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/aboutapps/pronom/>)

and the UK Central Government Web Archive

(<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/preservation/webarchive>)

Update 03 October 2007

New location:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/preservation/archivedwebsites.htm>). Demonstrations of both of these were provided to participants in the afternoon sessions.

David Thomas, Director, Government and Archive Services at TNA, chaired the Forum and in his welcome and introduction, noted that TNA was in a process of change but now has "real stuff" to show, as opposed to abstract discussions. The following sessions, which preceded demonstrations of PRONOM, the Digital Archives, and tours of TNA, were informative, thoughtful, and stimulated lively discussion.

Session 1: Electronic Records Management

Richard Blake, Head of the TNA's Records Management Advisory Service, placed ERM in a strategic framework. He stressed that this was an issue affecting any business, not just archives, if material is to be held for more than five years, preservation issues will inevitably arise. It is necessary to ensure that records are kept useable, whether they are being kept for twenty years or taken into an archive for permanent retention.

He referred to BS ISO 15489, which is the first international standard for records management. There were however some problems in applying this standard in practice as it doesn't define in enough detail what each of the four key characteristics (authenticity; reliability; integrity; usability) is. The presentation looked at issues associated with each of these four characteristics and the major theme running through each of these was the need to ensure that records management systems function within a strong intellectual framework that articulates such details as, for example, what additions and annotations are permissible. It needs to go beyond "just buying the technology" in order to ensure that the authenticity, reliability, and integrity of electronic records are not to be challenged in future. The TNA provides a guidance role for and most of these are available from the TNA website. Finally, Richard noted that in such a new and rapidly evolving area, we have to accept that mistakes will be made but we should at least be able to understand why we made them.

Stuart Orr, Assistant Director in the Information and Workplace strategies Directorate of DTI provided a useful case study of how ERM was implemented in DTI. The problem was that there had been a practice of increasing devolvement in government departments during the previous government. This had led to difficulties in sharing information and storing it in non standard ways. The Secretary of State for DTI, Patricia Hewitt, recognised the need for improved means of sharing and storing information so that a better service could be provided for those seeking information from DTI. The Matrix project was developed to address this problem and was rolled out across 22 sites within the U.K, with c. 5,000 users. The presentation described what Matrix will and will not provide, for example it will be expected to support collaborative working but it will not introduce the paperless office. It will also not work unless there is investment of time and effort, people need to input quality information and this is difficult to control in a devolved environment. Around 60 people worked on the Matrix project, including a full-time communications manager. A step-by-step approach was taken, beginning in May 2000, with plan and prototype, leading on to testing, trailing, and finally leading to rollout in May 2002. Bringing staff on board and providing training were seen as key elements and Stuart said that they could have invested even more in training. In terms of long-term preservation, DTI still has a lot of questions. They are looking to TNA for advice and are conscious of the need for caution before investing in preservation infrastructure.

Session 2: Collecting and preserving digital materials

Kevin Schurer, Director of the UK Data Archive and the recently established Economic and Social Data Service provided a fascinating historical overview of the first 35 years of the UK Data Archive. Kevin noted that the UKDA is not a legal repository in the sense that TNA is but their service goes well beyond data delivery so there are synergies between the two. There are many changes that have occurred in the 35 years since the UKDA was established. The material has diversified so that not only survey data, but, for example, sound recordings and pictures are now included in data collections. The number of users has increased greatly and has doubled over the past few years. Formats have changed, in particular since the mid 1990's. Until then, magnetic tape was the dominant input and dissemination medium. CD-ROM's and web delivery have now become much more prevalent. There were still older forms, such as punched cards in the collection and a new punch card reader was purchased recently (though it had been difficult to locate!). While preservation was not seen as an issue when the UKDA was being set up in the 1960's, it has become an issue because of the emphasis on providing research material to the academic sector. This inevitably leads to preservation issues needing to be addressed in order to keep the material useable. The Data Exchange Initiative was seen as a potential bridge between the need to push material out in user friendly formats, while still retaining data in XML, which makes preservation simpler to manage. The XML schema will commence in early 2004 and will be a two year project. While the UKDA was working with a limited sub-set of digital information, it must still deal with most of the challenges which legal archives need to address, because of their remit to provide access to research materials. Kevin provided copies of the UKDA's preservation policy to participants [Note: this will be available from the member's pages on the DPC website in the near future].

David Ryan, Head of Archive Services at TNA gave the final presentation of the morning. David described the TNA's work on web archiving. There were two broad types of approach to web archiving, selective and harvesting, and David outlined the pros and cons of each before describing the approach being taken by TNA. This was to evaluate a number of technical approaches, develop a selection policy for websites, work with government departments to develop guidance, and develop long-term preservation strategies. The Modernising Government white paper provided the impetus for using the web as a communication mechanism with its target of all Government services being available online by 2005. The spin-off benefit of this is that preservation and presentation are brought together, people can see both the benefits and the limitations of what current technology can provide. Issues include the size of the domain, estimated at c.2,500, though this is difficult to track as not all are called .gov.uk; increasingly dynamic (and therefore more complicated) content; copyright; and legal deposit.

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9.30	Registration and Coffee
10.00	Introduction and welcome, David Thomas
	Session 1 - Electronic Records Management - Chair - David Thomas
10.15	Electronic Records Management - the role of TNA (PDF 191KB)
Richard Blake	
10.45	Introducing ERM at DTI (PDF 1.6MB)
Stuart Orr	
11.15	Short break
	Session 2 - Collecting and preserving digital materials - Chair - David Thomas
11.30	The UK Data Archive and the Experience of Digital Preservation (PDF 311KB)
Kevin Schurer	
12.00	Collecting Government websites at TNA (PDF 1.3MB)
David Ryan	
12.30	Lunch
13.30	Stream 1: Demonstrations of Digital Archive and PRONOM
by Adrian Brown and Jo Pettitt	
	Stream 2: Tour of TNA led by Kelvin Smith
14.30	Short Break
14.40	Stream 1: Tour of TNA led by Kelvin Smith
	Stream 2: Demonstrations of the Digital Archive and PRONOM
	By Adrian Brown and Jo Pettitt
15.40	Discussion and final wrap-up
16.00	Close