

Press Release Number Two - 27th February 2002

Coalition launches at House of Commons to secure the future of digital material

27th February 2002 Embargoed until 8pm 27.02.02. Coalition launches at House of Commons to secure the future of digital material

The Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) announced an action plan to ensure that the digital information we are producing is not lost to current and future generations. The key messages were:

- To ensure that our long-term dependence on digital technology is backed up by safe preservation and enduring access to the vast, and growing, amounts of digital information we now have.
- We cannot continue to rely on heroic efforts alone to safeguard our digital heritage: it must become a mainstream service for our institutions at national, regional and local level. We must work urgently to preserve our heritage of digital information before we leave a "digital gap" in history.
- Publishers need trusted repositories for their electronic journals and books, for their business to survive: government needs electronic records systems to serve the public and provide a record for future generations; researchers and students need to know that relevant Web sites, electronic reports and data will be kept and will remain accessible for citation and future use.

Speaking at the House of Commons launch reception on Wednesday 27th February 2002 were Rosie Winterton MP, Loyd Grossman and Lynne Brindley. They stressed the need for urgent and concerted action to ensure future access to the UK's digital cultural heritage and information. Rosie Winterton, MP, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, outlined the key issues:

"The culture of the UK is increasingly in digital form. We can all access the internet daily, send e-mails and download information at our PCs, or watch digital TV. For many of us, our

workplaces rely on electronic systems. But electronic material, as everyone knows, is fragile and easily lost. Paper may seem old-fashioned, but you can store a book, or a written record, and be reasonably sure it will still be there, and legible, in many years time. You cannot do that with a CD or a floppy disk.

The main aim of the DPC is to ensure that our long-term dependence on digital technology is backed up by safe preservation and enduring access to the vast, and growing, amounts of digital information we now have."

She announced that the Government is taking key steps to ensure that the information economy will be safeguarded into the future, in line with its *Modernising Government White Paper*.

"I am happy, as Minister for the Public Record Office, that the PRO is taking a leading role in the work resulting from this agenda. One of the PRO's most vital tasks is to provide for the proper preservation of records, so that future generations can benefit from them.

With that in mind I am very pleased to say that the PRO will be tendering next month for the purchase of a storage system for electronic records, in line with its new e-preservation strategy. Additionally, the PRO is providing advice on sustainability for electronic records across government. "

She also emphasised the important role of the devolved administrations in the UK and international efforts.

"I am pleased also that the devolved administrations are playing a full part in this new coalition -, organisations from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are working together as members of the DPC, to address issues of relevance to all and to promote best practice in digital preservation.

Internationally, UNESCO issued a digital preservation resolution last year and digital preservation is a key issue for cultural agenda in the Spanish presidency of the EU. There are extensive programmes for other national governments such as the USA, Australia and the

Netherlands in researching and building electronic archive and library systems."

The broadcaster and author Loyd Grossman (Chairman of the Campaign for Museums and a commissioner for Resource: the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries) spoke in support of the digital heritage and our memory institutions. He also gave examples of digital preservation challenges.

"Last year marked the 30th anniversary of email. But it is salutary that we do not have the first email message, and no knowledge of its contents other than it was in upper case. Contrast this with how much we know about the first telegram (now digitised and on the web) or telephone message. Email took many years to become today's pervasive form of communication and we are now beginning to realise how digital materials are more ephemeral than traditional materials and sometimes the significance of key developments in new technologies may take several years to be recognised. The implications for our intellectual and cultural record and for their preservation are profound

"The BBC Domesday Project of the mid-eighties is another particularly good example of the digital preservation challenges that face our institutions. BBC Domesday was launched to celebrate the 900th anniversary of the original Domesday book with the idea of capturing a massive range of information on the social, environmental, cultural and economic make up of the UK. Contributions from researchers and thousands of school children from across the country were recorded onto two 12" video discs which could be viewed using a special BBC Microcomputer. The project was a landmark in terms of both its scale and its technological achievements. As a multimedia resource and interactive learning tool it was unsurpassed.

Yet despite those achievements, the problems of hardware and software dependence have now rendered the system obsolete. While the 12" video discs are likely to remain in good condition for many years to come, the 1980s computers which read them and the BBC Micro software which interprets the digital data have a finite lifetime. With few working examples left, the information on this incredible historical object will soon disappear forever."

He stressed the importance of an urgent and collaborative approach to the challenges being faced:

"We cannot continue to rely on heroic efforts alone to safeguard our digital heritage: it must become a mainstream service for our institutions at national, regional and local level. We must work urgently to preserve our heritage of digital information before we leave a "digital gap" in history."

"The Digital Preservation Coalition was formed in July 2001 to promote collaboration within the UK and internationally to address digital preservation issues, to share experience, and to develop solutions. The current challenges involved in digital preservation are such that few individual institutions can address them independently. Almost all of the work going on in relation to preserve digital information is developmental, and it is vital that we all work together, and learn from what others are doing. This is common sense; but it makes business sense too, as it means that the limited resources we all have at our disposal can be pooled to give much better results and benefits."

Lynne Brindley, Chair of the DPC and Chief Executive of the British Library spoke of the challenges facing members of the Coalition and the actions they are taking:

"It is relatively easy to understand the implications of the preservation of our print, archival paper and published heritage. But increasingly the BL and other institutions in the UK are collecting digital materials that their users will similarly expect to be available for the long-term. Publishers need trusted repositories for their electronic journals and books, for their business to survive: government needs electronic records systems to serve the public and provide a record for future generations; researchers and students need to know that relevant Web sites, electronic reports and data will be kept and will remain accessible for citation and future use.

Significant steps are being taken at the BL and at other DPC member institutions to begin this process. For example the BL are working with IBM in building a digital library store, and with the publishing industry and other UK copyright libraries on the voluntary deposit of electronic publications, in advance of legislation for digital deposit. However there is still much to do."

The concept of long-term digital preservation is new and poses new technological and policy changes. When the average life of a Website is some six weeks, and the life-cycle of new technologies is measured in only singleton years, the concept of long-term access to digital content being measured in hundreds of years is, to say the least, challenging."

She will announce that the DPC would be making an online version of the handbook *Preservation Management of Digital Materials* available on the web in May and set out the future agenda for the DPC.

"The forward agenda of the DPC is ambitious. We will build on tonight's event for further awareness raising. We are addressing the practical issues of archiving web-based resources and holding a members forum in March on the issue to share experience of web-archiving projects. We intend to hold a forum with industry to encourage more involvement of the private sector in our work; we are seeking funding to develop a UK digital preservation survey establishing current and future needs and capacity in the UK. Our members are working collaboratively to develop skills, tools and ways of ensuring that records, e-publishing and research data only available in digital form are kept."

For all this activity we will seek further membership, sponsorship and funding of projects, both from public institutions and from those industries which will directly or indirectly benefit from our work."

Notes to editors:

- The DPC is a consortium of 19 major UK organisations which aims to ensure that digital archiving is kept on the policy agenda. Information about its work can be found at www.jisc.ac.uk/dner/preservation [September 2007: disabled as the link is no longer active]. Organisations on the board of the DPC include the British Library, Consortium of University Research Libraries, Joint Information Systems Committee of the Higher and Further Education Funding Councils (JISC), National Archives of Scotland, OCLC (Online Computer Library Centre), Public Record Office, Public Record Office for Northern Ireland, Resource: the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, and the University of London Computer Centre. Associate members of the DPC include: Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers, Central Information Technology Unit for Northern Ireland, Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils, National Electronic Library for Health, National Library of Scotland, National Library of Wales, Publishers Association, Research Libraries Group, Trinity College Library Dublin, Wellcome Trust Library.

- The CAMiLEON research project jointly funded by the UK Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and the US National Science Foundation (NSF), is investigating methods of preserving complex digital objects like BBC Domesday.

- The Digital Preservation Coalition has been sponsored by the Joint Information Systems Committee

- Further information about the reception can be obtained from Anna Arthur or Tom Coupe at Anna Arthur PR on 020 7637

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Ends.

Press Release Number One - 29th January 2002

The Future of Digital Content: DPC sets out agenda to save the UK's digital heritage and information

29th January 2002 For immediate release

The Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) announced today that it is hosting a launch reception at the House of Commons on **Wednesday 27th February 2002** as part of its activities to highlight digital preservation, and the work of the Coalition and its members. The evening will raise awareness of the importance of urgent and concerted action to ensure future access to the UK's digital cultural heritage and information. Preservation of digital culture and information is now recognised internationally as a major challenge and issue, with calls to action being issued by organisations such as UNESCO and government bodies such as the US Congress. Over the past decade, the conversion of many types of content into digital formats has resulted in a massive increase in its accessibility. However, this accessibility only exists for material which is current: digital content which is no longer contemporary is in danger of being lost for ever. The fragility of digital media, the need to develop new skills and expertise, and above all the inevitable technological obsolescence of digital storage techniques combine to create a formidable series of challenges. If the status quo is maintained, there is a very real danger that much of the informational content available online and in other digital forms will be inaccessible for future generations. The challenges involved in digital preservation are such that few individual institutions can address them independently. The DPC was formed in July 2001 to promote collaboration within the UK and internationally to address these issues and to develop solutions. It has been instrumental in promoting the importance of digital preservation, encouraging dialogue, and developing practice between the myriad stakeholders involved, from content providers to publishers to archiving organisations. Key speakers at the House of Commons launch include broadcaster and author

Loyd Grossman

(Chairman of the Campaign for Museums and a commissioner for Resource: the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries),

Rosie Winterton

, MP, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department and

Lynne Brindley

, Chair of the DPC and Chief Executive of the British Library. The reception will provide

attendees with an understanding of the importance and urgency of action to save digital materials, and offer practical suggestions as to how institutions, policy makers and opinion-formers can themselves ensure that digital preservation is placed high on the agenda.

Notes to editors:

- The DPC is a consortium of 17 major UK organisations which aims to ensure that digital archiving is kept on the policy agenda. Information about its work can be found at www.dpconline.org

Organisations on the board of the DPC include the British Library, Consortium of University Research Libraries, Joint Information Systems Committee of the Higher and Further Education Funding Councils (JISC), National Archives of Scotland, OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), Public Record Office, Public Record Office for Northern Ireland, Resource: the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, and the University of London Computer Centre.

- For UNESCO and digital preservation activities discussed at its 31st annual conference meeting see

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001239/123975e.pdf>

Information about the US Congress Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program can be found at

<http://www.loc.gov/today/pr/2001/01-006.html>

- Further information about the reception and other related events during the week beginning 25th February can be obtained from **Anna Arthur PR on 020 7637 2994**

Ends.