

The Digital Preservation Coalition: Notes for Prospective Members

Introduction: digital preservation for all

Our generation has invested as never before in digital resources. They have grown in volume, complexity and importance to the point that our children are baffled by the inefficiencies of the analogue age. Pervasive, fluid and fragile: digital data is a defining feature of our age. Industry, commerce, government, law, research, health, social care, education, the creative industries, the heritage sector and private life depend on digital materials to satisfy ubiquitous information needs and expectations. Digital preservation is an issue which all organisations, particularly in the knowledge sector, will need to address sooner or later.

There are also external drivers which contribute to the increasing relevance and importance of digital preservation. In the research area, for example, grant funding bodies are beginning to impose conditions which require ongoing access to, and sustainability of, digital assets created through their funding programmes. There are also legal drivers which impact on the management of digital material e.g. Freedom of Information, Data Protection Act.

The Digital Preservation Coalition

The Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) is a not-for profit membership organisation whose primary objective is to raise awareness of the importance of the preservation of digital material and the attendant strategic, cultural and technological issues. Its vision is to *make our digital memory accessible tomorrow*. It acts as an enabling and agenda-setting body for digital preservation and works to meet this objective through a number of high level activities:

- Leadership, influencing and effective collaboration
- Sharing and disseminating knowledge
- Enriching our members' experience
- Empowering and developing our members' workforces
- Assuring the sustainability and effectiveness of the Coalition

The term digital preservation understood by the DPC and its members is defined as '*all of the actions required to maintain access to digital materials beyond the limits of media failure or technological change*'¹.

The deceptively simple key aims of digital preservation are:

- To keep digital assets secure for as long as they are needed.
- To ensure they can still be accessed, regardless of the inevitable changes in the hardware and software.
- To ensure that the assets remain an accurate rendering of authenticated content over time.

The DPC is an established company limited by guarantee under the UK Companies Act. It is managed through a Board of Directors. The current Chairman is Ronald Milne, Director of Scholarship and Collections at the British Library. An AGM is held each year to report new business and to communicate and disseminate information from and to the membership. The governance infrastructure includes Articles of Association, a Memorandum of Association and an Annual Report². The Coalition is funded by annual fees received from its members. There are two levels of membership; associate members at a subscription level of £2k pa and full members at £10k pa. It also seeks and receives funding from grant awarding bodies. The DPC currently employs 2 full-time members of staff.

The digital landscape has matured since the founding of the DPC in 2001 and the strategic priorities of its members have become more complex in line with these external changes. To ensure that the DPC's strategy continues to align with and support its members' needs the DPC has recently conducted a thorough review of its strategy and remit, and has published a new strategic plan 2009-11.

The DPC: Action and Impact

The DPC directs a range of activities which include publishing reports and guidelines, outreach events and commissioning technology watch reports. The output has included publication of 'Preservation Management of Digital Materials'³ and the seminal report 'Mind the Gap', the culmination of the UK Needs Assessment Survey work. In

¹ Preservation Management of Digital Materials: A Handbook. Beagrie, N. Jones, M. DPC, 2001

² Reports, minutes of board meetings and memoranda are available at www.dpconline.org. Articles of association are available to members and to prospective members on request.

³ <http://www.dpconline.org/graphics/handbook/topicindex.html>

collaboration with other stakeholders the DPC was instrumental in developing and delivering the 'Digital Preservation Training Programme' (DPTP) initiative. As part of its awareness and advocacy role the DPC sponsors a biannual award for excellence in digital preservation. The DPC has collaborated and advised other European countries in setting up similar national organisations modelled on the DPC's remit and goals e.g. the Netherlands Nationale Coalitie Digitale Duurzaamheid (NCDD).

DPC: a coalition

An unique aspect of the DPC and one of its great strengths is its breadth of membership⁴. There are currently thirty members ranging from national institutions such as the National Archives and the British Library to major HEIs such as University of Oxford. Membership also includes cultural heritage institutions such as the National History Museum, media organisations e.g. the BBC and funding bodies e.g. JISC⁵, RCUK⁶. Membership organisations including RLUK and the Society of Archivists are also members.

Each of these bodies has responsibility for the stewardship of a growing collection of digital assets and is also a digital content creator itself. These digital assets are increasingly core to the business needs of the organisation and they need to be managed and preserved to ensure sustainability over the mid to long term. The full list of members may be found in Appendix A.

Membership Benefits

In general terms, a membership organisation such as the DPC can:

- Undertake digital preservation activities more efficiently and effectively than individual organisations (e.g. advocacy and awareness raising, dissemination of information, current awareness)
- Provide a unified voice, covering many types of organisations and different sectors.
- Provide a sense of solidarity, encouraging and facilitating exchange of practical experience and exemplars of best practice.
- Share membership with fellow organisations with a common interest in digital preservation and draw on world-class expertise in the field from the archive, cultural heritage, education, IT, industry and library sectors.
- Provide an overarching body which, in concert with members, can respond to calls from funding bodies.
- Support the members' own strategic aims in the management of their digital assets.
- Members benefit through:
 - Attendance and priority registration at DPC events which are free or heavily discounted for members.
 - Option to attend DPC invitational events.
 - Priority access to reports and papers.
 - Access to all resources and services which the DPC offers.
 - Opportunity to shape and guide the work of the DPC
 - Full members, are given a seat on the Board which shapes the direction of the Coalition by developing the DPC's plan, specifying areas of work and reviewing progress against the plan.
 - For all members participation at the Annual General Meetings
 - Opportunity for knowledge exchange on relevant issues between members facing similar problems
 - Shared tool and policy development
 - Participation in a shared – and thus more credible - agenda for digital preservation

Through investment and active participation, the members ensure the strength and direction of the Coalition and achievement of its goals.

⁴ <http://www.dpconline.org/graphics/join/members.html>

⁵ <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/>

⁶ <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk>

Appendix A: Current Membership (April 2009)

Full Members

- British Library
- Cambridge University Library
- The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries
- Digital Curation Centre
- Joint Information Systems Committee of the Higher and Further Education Funding Councils (JISC)
- The National Archives
- National Archives of Scotland
- National Library of Scotland
- Public Record Office Northern Ireland
- Publishers Licensing Society
- Research Councils UK
- Research Libraries UK
- University of London Computer Centre
- University of Oxford

Associate Members

- BBC
- Centre for Digital Library Research
- Centre for e-Research Kings College London
- Corporation of London
- National Library of Wales
- Natural History Museum
- Online Computer Library Centre (OCLC Programs and Research)
- Oxford Archaeology
- Parliamentary Archives
- Portico
- Research Information Network
- The Society of Archivists
- Tate
- Trinity College Library Dublin
- UK Data Archive
- Wellcome Library

Office Bearers

- Ronald Milne, Chair (Director of Scholarship and Collections at the British Library British Library)
- Bruno Longmore, Vice Chair (Head of Government Records, The National Archives of Scotland)
- William Kilbride, Executive Director
- Carol Jackson, Administration and Events Manager

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