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Submitted to Budget Scrutiny 2024-25: Funding for Culture
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3 What is your name?

Name:
William Kilbride

4 What is your email address?

Email:
William.kilbride@dpconline.org

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Organisation

Organisation details

6 Name of organisation

Name of organisation:
The Digital Preservation Coalition

7 Information about your organisation

Please add information about your organisation in the box below:

The Digital Preservation Coalition is building a welcoming and inclusive global community, working together to bring about a sustainable future for our digital assets.

We are a registered company (4492292) and charity (SC051077), based in Scotland and operating globally.

We enable our members to deliver resilient, sustainable and useful long-term access to digital content and services, helping them to access and use digital materials beyond the limits of technical obsolescence, media degradation and organizational change. We raise awareness of the strategic, cultural and technological challenges which our members face, independent of the interests of solution providers, and we encourage collaboration for mutual benefit and the greater good.

We sustain and deliver these aims through advocacy, community engagement, workforce development, good practice and good governance. These actions create, empower, structure and extend a global community, working together for a sustainable digital legacy. This ambition for the greater good underpins our charitable purpose.

Our Strategic Plan defines five objectives:

Community: by offering a warm welcome to all agencies and individuals with an interest in digital preservation and providing an efficient and effective platform for meaningful and sustained professional exchange.

Advocacy: by working towards a climate of public and institutional policy which is better informed and better inclined towards digital preservation.

Workforce Development: by providing opportunities for our members to acquire, develop and retain competent and responsive workforces that are ready to address the challenges of digital preservation.

Good Practice: by supporting our members towards greater maturity in digital preservation through knowledge exchange, continuous improvement, horizon scanning, advice on standards, authoritative publications, and engaging and informative events.

Accountable, Sustainable and Dynamic Governance: by maintaining and enhancing our organizational functions and structures to ensure good governance.

Key questions

8 In our pre-budget report last year, the Committee described the operating environment of the culture sector as facing a "perfect storm" of long-term budget pressures, reduced income generation, and increased operating costs. How has this evolved over the last 12 months? What impact has the Budget for 2023-24 had on the culture sector?

Please provide your response in the box provided.:

The background to the 2023-4 budget was characterised by under-investment and only limited recognition in government about the challenges of ensuring the preservation and long term usability of digital collections in the cultural sector. This was amplified by the growth of technical debt among institutions arising through short-term investment, as well as the recognition of cyber-security as the largest and most immediate threat facing many if not all our cultural institutions. The 2023-4 budget did little to address these gaps: kicking some significant problems down the road. Meanwhile evidence shows that volumes of data created by the cultural sector have continued to grow, with the greatest increases in un-structured formats that tend to defy established workflows in preservation and data warehousing. So, instead of getting out ahead of the preservation challenge, the problem has only accumulated in the meantime. 2023-4 has been another missed opportunity.

9 Our report also concluded that that this crisis provides an opportunity to accelerate innovative solutions to the budgetary pressures within the sector. What progress has been made on this in the last 12 months? And at a time of limited resources, what other innovative approaches could the Scottish Government take forward to support the culture sector?

Please provide your response in the box provided.:

A commitment to innovation is welcome. This is often-times interpreted as a pivot towards technologies that will simplify or streamline operations. It is true that technology, effectively deployed, can have a significant and positive impact on budgets: but the longer-term use and deployment of digital resources has to be factored into the up-front costs. There is no evidence of additional support to the preservation of digital resources arising from the digital turn implied by the drive to innovation in the cultural sector. Therefore, when investing in technology to innovate solutions The Scottish Government should make efforts to measure, manage and reduce technical debt, such as by better strategic investment in digital preservation.

10 The Committee called for the forthcoming refreshed Culture Strategy Action Plan to provide a clear and strategic sense of how the Scottish Government is working to ensure a more sustainable future for the sector. How should the refreshed Culture Strategy Action Plan help to inform future budgetary decisions within the culture sector?

Please provide your response in the box provided.:

Digital assets are born vulnerable. The risks that they face are exacerbated by short-term decision making where a cheap, quick-fix solutions are preferred to more expensive but more sustainable and properly engineered solutions which will ensure integrity and enable use for the long term. The refreshed Culture Strategy Action Plan could help inform better budgetary decisions by encouraging agencies to address issues of digital preservation and technical debt so these can be addressed within a meaningful time scale. The Scottish Government should make efforts to measure, manage and reduce technical debt, such as by better strategic investment in digital preservation.