

MAKING THE CASE/
UNIVERSITY OF KENT
DIGITAL PRESERVATION
CASE STUDY

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1. Background and context

The University of Kent's Special Collections & Archives manage the University's unique and distinctive collections so that they are preserved and accessible for the benefit of teaching, scholarship and society. Located in the Templeman Library on the Canterbury campus they collect, curate, and manage material for the benefit of teaching, scholarship and society.

In 2015 the Information Services department at the University of Kent ran a 'Digital Asset Management Review' project. This project had various work packages and outcomes, one of which was the development of a Digital Curation Policy, finalised in 2017.

This policy, alongside the other outcomes of this project, provided a solid basis for Kent to develop our practice related to digital curation and preservation. We became Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) members in 2017, and were awarded Archives Accreditation status in 2018.

In 2020 the policy was due for review to ensure it was up to date and in line with best practice. In order to bring this policy in line with standards within the wider archives community, we decided that it should be replaced by a specific Digital Preservation policy and strategy. This new policy would sit alongside our existing Special Collections and Archives Collections Management Policy, and work to ensure we effectively manage and preserve the digital objects within our care. We are still in the process of having the new Digital Preservation Policy and Strategy documents formally approved, but hope to complete this by the New Year (2022).

2. Who do you need to speak to in your organisation?

Information Services uses a policy framework to manage the strategies, policies, regulations and guidance that they have responsibility for. As described above, we had already completed a large project that looked at how we would manage our digital assets, so no further project was required when we came to review our existing Digital Curation Policy.

Our first step was to discuss within our core team how we viewed the existing Digital Curation Policy, and how we saw this contributing to both our day-to-day practice, and our future as an Accredited Archive service. We reached a consensus that we would benefit from replacing the existing Digital Curation Policy with a more focused and clear digital preservation policy and strategy, in which we could clearly set out our key principles, objectives, and practical implementations for digital preservation.

We then spoke to our IS Policy Manager to ensure we understood how the governance of the new policy should be approached, and that we were using the correct policy/strategy templates. Once we had had this conversation, we could begin drafting the documents.

Once we had a working draft of the policy we tabled it at a relevant governing group

meeting called Research Technologies Development Group. Members of this group include colleagues from Research Support, Research Services, Library collections, and IT. There the group were able to provide feedback on the draft and advise on how they saw the policy being governed in future. We also shared the draft with our Departmental Leadership Group for comment.

The initial draft of the Digital Preservation Policy differed to our original Digital Curation Policy, in that it only focused on digital materials under the care of Special Collections and Archives. The previous policy had also included how we would manage research outputs and research data. The rational for this change was that we are currently in a period of change in how we manage our digital assets, and as one of the main steers for our review was our archives accreditation, we decided it made sense to focus on this aspect initially. It is likely that this may change and that our Digital Preservation Policy may widen to include research outputs, research data, and beyond in future.

We have now submitted our reviewed draft to our Departmental Leadership Group, who will consider the changes and determine whether to approve implementation of the new documents or recommend further changes.

3. Knowing what you have and where it is

We use a number of tools to help us understand what we have in our collections, including our accession and catalogue records, collection inventories, and collection surveys. Much of this was already established when we set out to create our policy. However, we are currently working to produce a Digital Asset Register that will document all of our digital collections, and provide information such as their location, total size, formats, and when we last integrity checked the assets. This is still very much in progress, but once completed it will be a core resource to support ongoing preservation of our digital collections.

At the moment we are listing collections as a whole, rather than assets individually, and as our collections often contain a variety of formats within them we are yet to assign risk levels. However, this is something we plan to include retrospectively and we are currently investigating the most appropriate way to document it.

4. Understanding the benefits of Digital Preservation

Special Collections and Archives have a duty to our depositors, our institution, and our community, to preserve and protect all of our collections, and digital preservation is an important component of this. It's vital that our staff understand the benefits of digital preservation, so that we can all effectively follow best practice and advocate for its value.

The University of Kent employ a Digital Archivist as part of the Special Collections

and Archives team who sits on the previously mentioned Research Technologies Development Group, where they can advocate for best practice, raise any issues affecting our digital collections, and discuss emerging concerns or initiatives.

Being members of the DPC has really helped us to develop and share our understanding, as our staff are able to attend training events and then disseminate the information to colleagues. Recently, three of our staff members have taken part in the excellent Novice to know-How training offered by the DPC as part of The National Archives' digital capacity building strategy, 'Plugged In, Powered Up,'. In addition, we also do our best to participate in community events, such as The National Archives DALE programme, and World Digital Preservation Day.

Over the last two years, we have been carrying out assessment of our digital preservation maturity using the DPC's 'Rapid Assessment Model' and the NDSA 'Levels of Digital Preservation' models. By using these models, we can track our progress, and identify and prioritise areas for improvement. The results of these assessments can also work as an advocacy tool, or they can be used to benchmark our practice within the sector.

We hope that by refocusing our key principles and objectives with the new Digital Preservation Policy and Strategy, we can continue to promote best practice for digital preservation across the institution.

5. Elevator pitch

Digital objects are fragile and are susceptible to alteration, corruption, deletion, and technological and format obsolescence. To protect against these risks, action is needed to ensure digital objects remain authentic, accessible and useable in the long term.

Digital preservation is a core activity within the department of Special Collections and Archives in Information Services, as more digital collections are created and deposited. Digital preservation plays an important part in supporting the University's civic mission, by ensuring our digital resources are discoverable, accessible and authentic for the benefit of education, research and civic engagement.

We will protect our digital collections with the same diligence we would our physical collections. Although becoming a first class digital archive will take time, resources, and development, we aim to follow best practice and to demonstrate high quality and sustainable digital preservation services to the best of our ability. To achieve this have a dedicated member of staff to oversee our digital preservation practice. We engage with relevant organisations and the wider community of practitioners of digital preservation in the UK, we track our digital collections using inventories and a digital asset register, and we use assessment tools to ascertain the maturity of our

digital preservation practice and benchmark our service.

6. Writing a business case

As discussed above, we were not required to produce a business case for this policy change as we had done so previously with the Digital Asset Management project. However, we felt it might be useful to explain a bit about our project methodology here.

Information Services follows an in house variant of Prince2 project methodology. Projects are proposed to the Programme Board, and any agreed projects are added to the appropriate roadmap. The project manager then works with the project sponsor (usually a member of the management team) to write the business case. All business cases must include a project summary, background to the project (this includes objectives, risks, dependencies, and the alternative to doing the project), and the required resources to complete it. The business case is then debated between the project team and the Programme Board until it is agreed, and the project lifecycle begins.

7. Writing a DP policy and plan

As defined by the DPC, a “digital preservation policy expresses a set of principles which will guide an organization in the way it approaches preservation activities and responsibilities”.

When drafting our policy, we aimed to write it in plain English so that it would be understandable to anyone consulting it, not just those from an archival background. We consulted various policies from other institutions in the UK to give us a feel for what we should include in our policy, in addition to referring to guidance on both the DPC and The National Archives webpages. We also integrated some of the content from our existing Digital Curation Policy.

Our Digital Preservation Policy demonstrates Information Services’ commitment to digital preservation. It details Special Collections and Archives approach to preserving our digital collections, defining the principles by which digital preservation activities will occur, and includes the following sections:

1. Introduction
 - o Mission, definitions, purpose, organisational alignment, scope
2. Related policies
3. Key principles and objectives
4. Financial sustainability
5. Risks
6. Roles and responsibilities
7. Skills and training
8. Document review date

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As you can see from above, the policy outlines the background, principles and objectives for digital preservation, whereas our strategy details the specific actions we will take to protect and preserve our digital collections. In conjunction with the Digital Preservation Strategy, the policy aims to:

- Communicate and define the objectives, responsibilities, and actions that will help protect our digital objects in the long-term and mitigate risk.
- Provide a framework for Special Collections and Archives to effectively manage the digital objects in our care in line with agreed standards at all stages of their lifecycle.
- Raise awareness of the need for long-term preservation of digital objects under the care of Special Collections and Archives.

When writing the strategy, we found it useful to break down the activities we would be carrying out in to sections that aligned with the DCC Digital Curation Lifecycle Model. The strategy is broken down in to the following sections:

1. Vision
2. Scope
3. Context
4. Activities
 - Create or receive, appraise and select, ingest, preservation action, storage, access use and reuse
5. Document review date

We also included two appendices with the strategy:

1. A glossary
2. A breakdown of tasks aligned with each functional area of the NDSA Levels of Preservation.

We will plan our review dates for both the Digital preservation Policy and Strategy to coincide with our Archives Accreditation reviews, so that we can ensure they reflect our current practice.