Digital Preservation Policy for Leeds University Library

Introduction

Leeds University Library's mission is to collect, create, deliver, and preserve collections for current and future research, learning and teaching activities. Collections historically managed by libraries were acquired in physical form, but increasingly content acquisition is of digital files. Digital content is at risk of being lost or unusable due to rapid changes in technology and infrastructure. There is a reputational risk if the Library does not address and mitigate the risks presented to the storage and access to digital content.

The Digital Preservation Policy was developed in 2014 due to changes in services and involvement in projects eg CEDARS[1], AQuA[2] and SPRUCE[3]. In the five years since the original policy was developed the digital content landscape has grown significantly to now encompass eight repositories, a research data service, mass digitisation[4], commercial partnerships, and a digitisation studio.

The challenges facing us are the rate of technological change, the potential exponential growth of material deposited into our care, and expectations for access. The aim of the Digital Preservation Policy is to set principles, activities and actions around digital preservation to set guide objectives for the upcoming year. Reviewing our approach to preservation annually will enable us to develop a flexible infrastructure and actively engage with the community of users internally and externally.

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[1] CURL Exemplars in Digital Archives
http://web.archive.org/web/20041011141405/http://www.curl.ac.uk/projects/cedars.html
[2] AQuA (Automating Quality Assurance) https://openpreservation.org/about/projects/aqua/
[3] SPRUCE (Sustainable Preservation Using Community Engagement)
https://openpreservation.org/about/projects/spruce/
[4] UK Medical Heritage Library (UKMHL) https://archive.org/details/leedsuniversitylibrary

Strategic Planning

Digital Preservation is a distributed activity between the Library and IT with specific groups and individuals responsible for elements of the life-cycle. Digital preservation may be one of many activities an individual is responsible for within their remit so coordination and communication across teams is essential to the delivery and safeguarding of content. As the digital preservation landscape is constantly changing so will roles, responsibilities and designated leads for a specific area. Strategic planning includes defining current capacity within the library, defining roles and responsibilities and forecasting future needs and staffing. Planning for preservation activities across the Library is coordinated through the Digital Preservation Group.

Key Principles of Digital Preservation Activities

A. Assessment, action and longevity

1. Collect and appraise digital content in accordance with Leeds University Library Collections Strategy[5].

2. Collect content in its original form when possible.

3. Periodically assess digital content for digital preservation risks and assess risks identified.

4. Act to ensure the longevity of data when clear risks have been identified but avoid pre-emptive or unnecessary preservation actions.

5. Always retain the originally deposited data or sufficient information to enable re-creation of the original if format migration or other transformations become necessary in order to ensure continued access to the informational content.

6. Avoid prescriptive restrictions on particular file formats which may encourage depositors to apply their own (unplanned and undocumented) preservation actions.

7. Provide guidance to depositors when possible about arrangement and conventions and best practice.

B. Fixity and integrity

1. Encourage depositors to create and provide content with verifiable manifests (providing advice and tools where necessary).

2. Create verifiable manifests for deposited collections that do not have them as early as possible.

3. Periodically verify the integrity of collections and replace damaged data as appropriate.

C. Storage

1. Maintain at least three copies of each data object, with at least one copy in a geographically separate location.

2. Introduce different technology choices to avoid common mode failure across all stored copies.

3. Prevent malicious damage by restricting access to the data and storage infrastructure.

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[5] Leeds University Library Collections Strategy https://library.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/download/144/collections_strategy

4. Avoid anyone having access to alter or delete all copies of any data.

5. Periodically validate the integrity of each copy of data objects, replace damaged objects as appropriate.

6. Materials held for the short-term require storage, documentation and deletion protocol.

7. Avoid vendor monoculture and understand how metadata and files can be migrated.

D. Metadata

1. Descriptive, technical and preservation metadata sufficient for known and projected. Preservation requirements will be captured and preserved in appropriate systems[6].

2. Metadata will be indexed when there is a clear functional need for access or preservation, otherwise it will be preserved as a collection object.

3. Metadata will be managed according to local and international standards, such as PREMIS.

E. Access

1. The library endeavours to make material openly available whenever possible.

2. Material will be accessible under the terms agreed with the depositor/owner and the legislative framework within which the University operates.

3. Requests to access restricted material will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. This process will be monitored based on the frequency and number of requests.

4. Licenses and rights statements will be captured within metadata.

Strategic Digital Preservation Priorities

The following objectives will support the delivery and embedding of digital preservation within the Library and wider University for long term access, conservation, and preservation of Library collections.

Objectives

1. Secure existing digital collections including digitised special collections and repository content (subscription and e-journals are out of scope).

2. Survey and stabilise Special Collections born digital archival collections stored on portable media.

3. Embed appropriate digital preservation processes in the Library's digitisation workflows.

4. Embed processes and mechanisms for accepting, ingesting and preserving digital collections.

5. Embed comprehensive support for bit stream preservation across services.

6. Embed digital preservation and sustainability into the culture of the library and the principles of collection care.

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[6] Descriptive metadata for all Special Collections content will be held in EMu; digital objects and preservation metadata held in EPrints. Metadata and objects for WREO and WRRO will be held in EPrints.

7. Review digital preservation roles and responsibilities.

8. Continue to build the skills and infrastructure of the Library by collaborating in national and international digital preservation activities.

9. Review roadmap for digital collection development.

Approach

1. We will prioritise preservation efforts based on assessment of preservation risk, assessment of collection value and available preservation resource.

2. We will use a formal and documented means of assessing and accepting digital content.

3. We will provide advice and guidance to creators, depositors, and donors of content.

4. We will use a secure process for transferring records into storage and then managed appropriately (including integrity checks) to fulfil donor, funder or institutional requirements.

5. We will map out processes to capture and describe content in systems managed by the library.

6. We will define a timetable for retention if there is a requirement based upon the content type or collection.

7. We will monitor and survey the rate and type of content coming into the Library and weigh this against content already held when deciding priorities.

8. We will monitor digital content acquisition to plan future preservation activities.

9. We will join up digital preservation and curation activities within the Library and the University when possible.

10. We will train all staff across the Library involved in the digital preservation workflow.

11. Risks associated with establishing and implementing the digital preservation policy (in addition to non-action) will be monitored.

Evaluation and review

This policy will be reviewed annually by Digital Preservation Group (DPG) and Library Senior Management Group (SMG) and be modified more frequently by the DPG as needed to reflect current priorities, infrastructure, research or investment if there are periods of rapid change.