Archives and Research Collections

Digital Preservation Policy

This policy serves as a statement of

- Archives and Research Collections (ARC) commitment to the longevity and ongoing use of digital content in its care;
- The principles by which our approaches to digital preservation are informed.

This policy encompasses the preservation of digital materials held by the Borthwick Institute for Archives; the University of York Rare Books Library; and the University Art Collection.

1. Policy

Mission:

1.1 Digital preservation encompasses the activities, tools, and processes necessary to ensure continued access to authentic digital content for as long as is necessary. A successful digital preservation programme is one that:

- supports the use of selected digital objects and collections for communities both internal and external to the University;
- is rooted in principles of technical, operational, and environmental sustainability, allowing us to create procedures and systems that balance current resources and needs with the needs of our users and our future users;
- is both scalable and responsive, recognising that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to digital preservation.

Principles:

1.2 Our approach to digital preservation is guided by the following principles:

- Digital preservation is not purely a technical problem to be solved. Rather it is a complex set of activities that incorporates technical, organisational, social, and ethical dimensions.
- Digital preservation is not a binary state in which something is preserved, or it isn't. Rather, it exists on a spectrum and is a property of the ongoing policies and procedures that we use to manage our digital objects that either increase or decrease their longevity.[1] Recognition of this helps ensure a digital preservation programme that is agile enough to respond effectively to various digital content and formats.
- To develop and support a responsible, sustainable digital preservation programme, available resources must be strategically allocated in response to the most pressing threats and risks.
- A sustainable digital preservation programme recognises that the preservation of digital objects and collections has an environmental impact. Preservation decisions must be taken within this wider environmental context to balance the use of current resources with our future needs.

Requirements:

1.3 SELECTION AND TRANSFER

1.3.1 Digital objects and collections will be recommended for preservation at the appropriate point in their information lifecycle. Selection is based on factors that may include legal and regulatory requirements and the organisational, informational, historical and/or cultural value of the objects and collections in question. The following technical factors may also impact our appraisal decisions:

- Our ability to preserve the digital object or set of digital objects adequately given our technical expertise and infrastructure;
- The level to which a digital object or set of digital objects can be preserved.

1.3.2 Recognising that digital preservation exists on a spectrum, we will take a tiered approach to preservation. Based on appraisal of the digital objects and collections in question, this approach enables us to determine what level of preservation activity is appropriate and the duration for which objects and collections should be maintained.

1.3.3 Given the challenges associated with digital preservation, early communication with potential donors, content creators, and other partners is crucial and will be undertaken wherever possible.

1.4 PRESERVATION PLANNING AND PROCEDURES

1.4.1 In order to manage digital objects selected for long-term preservation

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[1] https://library.utoronto.ca/sites/default/files/utl_digital_preservation_policy_final.pdf

appropriately, ARC will take all reasonable measures to develop and implement procedures that support the following properties:

1. Resilience:
Reducing the risk of data loss by establishing systems and practices for
   a. Managing an adequate and appropriate number of copies of data;
   b. Recovering verified copies of data in case of data loss;
   c. Supporting ongoing maintenance and viability of all systems and workflows.

2. Authenticity:
   a. Taking steps to determine the provenance of a digital object and whether it is what it claims to be;
   b. Fully document this process and any subsequent action to maintain a complete audit trail.

3. Integrity:
   a. Taking documented and regular steps to ensure that digital objects are not altered or corrupted over time or in transit.

4. Usability:
   a. Providing sufficient metadata to allow digital objects to be located, retrieved, and interpreted;
   b. Providing access systems that support innovative and accessible methods of use.

1.4.2 Different digital objects and collections will have different requirements as to which actions are needed to support their ongoing preservation. Actions will be selected based on regular risk analysis that evaluates the ongoing viability of a range of factors, including but not limited to file formats, tools, systems, workflows, organisational structures, and policies.

1.4.3 We maintain a complete record of preservation work undertaken during the ingest process and as a result of enacting preservation plans. Original digital objects are maintained and preserved.

1.5 TRAINING AND ADVOCACY

1.5.1 In order to fully support the development of a digital preservation programme at the University of York, ARC is committed to ensuring that all digital preservation activities are carried out by trained staff and will provide opportunities for staff to develop and enhance their digital preservation knowledge and skills. Similarly, staff across ARC will actively raise awareness of digital preservation issues and approaches across and beyond the University and provide training as appropriate.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy covers digital objects created, acquired or stewarded by ARC in any of the following capacities:

- Records created about and as a product of the University's transactions and activities, transferred to the University Archive due to their lasting evidential and historical value and in line with agreed Retention Schedules.
- Digital objects and collections created outside of the University and acquired or stewarded by ARC in line with defined collection development criteria.
- Digital surrogates held within the Library and Archives collections and digitised to facilitate preservation and/or access to unique or rare content.

3. Policy Implementation Documents

3.1 This policy is supported by and should be read in conjunction with the following policy and implementation documents:

- ARC Access to Archives policy
- ARC Collections Care and Conservation policy
- Archives Information Policy
- ARC Collections Management Policy
- ARC Learning and Outreach policy
- Borthwick Institute for Archives Collection Development Policy
- Borthwick Institute for Archives Digitisation Policy
- University of York Information and Records Management Policy
- University of York Selection and Appraisal Policy

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Digital preservation is a highly collaborative endeavour that reaches across each functional area of Library and Archives, and includes multiple partners across the University, external organisations and groups, and our communities of depositors and users. In addition to the responsibilities incumbent on the Digital Preservation Archivist, other roles are as follows:

Archives and Research Collections Staff:

4.2 All Library and Archives staff share responsibility in supporting the preservation of digital objects and collections created, acquired, or stewarded by ARC. Staff play an important role in the following areas:

- Identifying and recommending digital objects and collections for mid-to-long-term preservation;
- Communicating with content creators, depositors, users, and other partners to

inform and facilitate digital preservation workflows:
   a) Communication with content creators and depositors before and during the transfer and acquisition process is especially important. The appropriate staff will take a role in gathering this information as informed by guidance provided by the Digital Preservation Archivist.
   b) Similarly, in collaboration with relevant staff and partners, including, where appropriate, the University Archivist and Records Manager, the Digital Preservation Archivist will develop and share up-to-date guidance for content creators that provides advice on how to best manage their digital content to guard against loss or damage;
- Engaging in digital preservation workflows and procedures as appropriate, and communicating challenges and needs;
- Advocating for and supporting access to digital objects and collections as appropriate;
- Communicating training needs related to digital preservation and digital archives to ensure that staff possess an appropriate level of knowledge of the principles underpinning this work;
- Advocating for and championing the importance of digital preservation at the University of York.

Donors, Depositors and Content Creators:

4.3 Donors, depositors and content creators are the source of objects and collections identified as requiring some level of digital preservation and play a critical role in preserving those materials. They may be internal or external to the University. They are responsible for the effective management of materials before their transfer to ARC, for providing appropriate levels of description for those materials, for articulating any policy or funder-imposed preservation requirements, and for working closely with the appropriate staff to ensure successful transfer of the materials.

External Partners:

4.4 ARC contracts with external partners and service providers from outside the University to produce digitised content, provide additional digital preservation services and/or support for digital preservation activities, including the augmentation of hardware or software capacity and providing development expertise or technical support for existing systems. The roles and responsibilities of these partners are contractually defined and may vary substantially over time.

Users:

4.5 Preservation strategies affect access capabilities. We encourage donors, depositors, content creators and users to communicate how different modes of access affect research and use, and will actively work with donors, depositors, content creators and users to provide appropriate access mechanisms as requested.

IT Services and the Digital Technologies and Innovation (DTI) Team:

4.6 IT Services and the Digital Technologies and Innovation Team support the implementation, maintenance and security of local servers and systems employed by the digital preservation programme. IT Services and DTI work closely with the Digital Preservation Archivist and other staff as needed to understand requirements and ensure systems are operational and optimised for efficiency.

5. Oversight

5.1 The Archives and Research Collections Leadership Team oversees policy implementation.

Document History and Status

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