

Preserving UK Digital Library Collections

Digital access has many advantages over paper-based access in terms of convenience and functionality. However there are still challenges in ensuring that digital resources will continue to be accessible in future years. Preservation and access to this information is dependent on impermanent media and technologies and adapting or re-engineering existing organisational and legal frameworks. The long-term preservation of research collections in digital form is therefore an issue of increasing concern to research libraries and institutions around the world.

Experience in preserving digital library collections is accumulating rapidly but it should be stressed is still relatively recent. Historically digital library developments in both the UK and elsewhere have to date primarily focussed on improving access to collections. Relatively few have engaged in preservation of digital materials per se or investigated the long-term access and preservation implications of digitisation (although a number of them have investigated the separate issue of digitisation to produce surrogates for use in the preservation of analogue originals).

A series of important UK digital preservation research studies, pilot projects, and initiatives, are detailed in this presentation. They are as follows:

Journals licensing and archiving

- National Electronic Site Licensing Initiative (NESLI)

Current and future preservation programmes in the UK

- Consortium of University Research Libraries Exemplars in Digital Archiving (Cedars)
- Preservation Management of Digital Materials Workbook
- British Library and legal deposit
- the JISC programme 2001-2
- UK Digital Preservation Coalition

Substantial lessons have been learnt in the UK from pilot and research projects, and from other sectors and countries in last five years. Much remains to be done and arguably we are now moving into a new phase of development. Significant investment in digital content is now beginning to drive forward the agenda to address the long-term

preservation of digital publications and resources. The next few years will see the UK moving from pilot projects to digital preservation services across a range of sectors and institutions. Developments overseas are beginning to take a similar direction. I expect collaborative activity to identify solutions and share responsibilities for digital preservation to be increasingly prevalent both within the UK and internationally. The development of the Digital Preservation Coalition has significant potential to provide additional momentum to this process.

The introduction of voluntary & statutory legal deposit in the UK will be very important in securing a framework for the preservation of many of our electronic publications. However it will clearly not be a panacea for securing preservation and access for all areas of our electronic record, particularly given the importance of international publishers and global information industries. Over the next decade it is likely that a range of responsibilities for the preservation of different collections and classes of material will emerge for electronic materials (as can be seen in traditional print collections today). The development of a national strategy for digital preservation and an infrastructure to implement this seems increasingly feasible in the UK. This will be an essential component of the distributed national collections which are beginning to emerge.

With increasing globalisation of electronic information, some arrangements are likely to be more international and may well lead to new forms of archiving institutions and organisational partnership. JSTOR is a potential example of new forms of archiving institutions and partnerships which may emerge.

UK institutions have a long history of exchanging research and development outcomes, and working closely with the allied organisations in the US to address common issues. Current collaborations in the digital preservation arena include the Camileon project on the use of emulation which is jointly funded by JISC and the NSF.

This session with the Mellon e-journal archiving initiative in the US provides an opportunity to learn about and compare current initiatives in the UK and the US, discuss future directions, and consider how to address the challenges of digital preservation of globally published and networked information.

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