

A DIGITAL PRESERVATION POLICY FOR WALES

1. Introduction

The vast majority of records today are created in or converted to digital formats. This maximises efficiency of information use, editing and transfer, but in terms of long-term accessibility leaves records in a particularly fragile state, vulnerable to loss through mishandling and format obsolescence. This in turn results in the loss of information that would be of continued value to informed decision-making, democratic transparency, legal compliance and to our shared culture. Digital records cannot survive without robust management and shared strategies for their long-term preservation. This document sets out a policy for Wales to ensure longevity of digitally created records and culture.

2. Context

- 2.1. This Policy has been produced by Archives and Records Council Wales¹ in recognition of the significant strategic challenge digital preservation presents to organisations in Wales currently creating records, and to the archive services which are responsible for their permanent preservation. The proper care and management of digital records requires additional resource and new skills which are frequently not available within individual institutions, and where a collaborative approach is to be recommended.
- 2.2. A shared cultural history is a crucial and cohesive element of our unique and distinct Welsh identity. Archive institutions² in Wales have a vital role to play in safeguarding this history, by selecting and preserving records and documents, whatever their format, and making them available for access to audiences in Wales and beyond. In this way the informational value of the records is preserved, both as evidence of the functions and actions of record creators, and for the benefit of researchers now and in the future.
- 2.3. Such records continue to be created, and at an increasing rate. The rapid pace of modern technological change, coupled with business efficiency requirements, has led to digital formats becoming the standard platforms for creating records, where historically they took physical format. Digital records now therefore constitute a significant and increasing proportion of Wales' cultural memory.
- 2.4. The survival of digital records is not however straightforward. Digital records are not inherently human-accessible, and to access them requires appropriate tools in the form of hardware, software and storage media. Such records may be rendered irretrievable when newer and incompatible versions of these tools come into common use. This issue of technological 'obsolescence' is a significant threat to the continued accessibility and authenticity of digital records.
- 2.5. Archive institutions select records for permanent preservation on the basis of the value of their information content, irrespective of technological format. While the requirements for managing analogue formats are well understood and catered for, the management and preservation of digital records presents new challenges. Individually, many archive institutions currently lack the infrastructure, skills and resources required to address these.

¹ Archives and Records Council Wales was established in May 1995 as a representative body for institutions and organisations all over Wales involved with caring for archives. See <https://archives.wales/arcw/>

² Organisations with a role in the selection and preservation of archives are collectively referred to within this policy as "Archive Institutions". Such bodies may include local archive services, higher education institutions, museums, libraries, and national bodies such as the National Library of Wales and National Museum Wales.

- 2.6. The role of digital records as a part of our shared heritage and the role which archive institutions play preserving them are not well understood by stakeholders. Digital records are frequently misperceived as possessing little or no historical value due to their contemporary format and nature. Consequently the need for additional investment in the infrastructure and skills required to preserve these records also often goes unrecognised.
- 2.7. Archives and Records Council Wales (ARCW) has been working collaboratively through its Digital Preservation Working Group to understand and address these challenges. This Policy therefore presents a framework for an all-Wales digital preservation solution to enable continued access to our national digital heritage.

3. Policy Aims

- 3.1. To ensure digital resources of enduring value are selected for preservation and remain authentic and accessible in the future.
- 3.2. To provide a framework for the development of digital preservation strategies that can be adapted for use by organisations throughout Wales, irrespective of their size and capacity.
- 3.3. To raise awareness of the importance of effective Digital Preservation among archive institutions and practitioners, managers, information technology staff and stakeholders / decision makers.

4. Context for Digital Preservation in Wales

- 4.1. **Risk:** The nature of digital records means that the risks to their survival are more acute than is the case for physical records. Inaction on digital preservation threatens organisational governance and accountability and risks significant gaps in the Welsh documentary heritage. Without appropriate action vital records will become inaccessible; record creators will be unable to evidence their actions and demonstrate legal compliance; and information of value for future research will not be available.
- 4.2. **Policy:** The *Statement of Conservation Principles for the Cultural Heritage of Wales* commits all those who have responsibility for cultural heritage to advocate its value; contribute to, promote and employ current standards and best practice; manage collections based on their significance and condition; put sustainability at the core of conservation; develop skills and share knowledge; seek the resources needed for the care of collections and promote inclusive and responsible public access. This Policy endorses and implements these principles for digital media.
- 4.3. **Collaboration:** Archive institutions in Wales, working through the ARCW Digital Preservation Working Group, have recognised that a strategic all-Wales approach is vital in tackling digital preservation. It is only by pooling resources and staff expertise that the disadvantages inherent in working in small institutions with limited resources and staff time can be addressed. By working together on digital preservation activities, a standardised and sustainable professional approach can be achieved, providing assurance to stakeholders, and facilitating inter-operability.
- 4.4. **Standards:** To ensure digital resources remain authentic and accessible, archive institutions need to adopt a digital preservation strategy which provides a systematic framework for implementing preservation actions. Such strategies should be guided by professional standards and current best practice, in line with the technical appendix accompanying this policy.

4.5. **Accreditation:** Archive institutions in Wales are expected to achieve and maintain accredited status under the Archive Service Accreditation Standard. This includes providing appropriate standards of management and care for digital holdings.

5. Legal Status and Authority to Collect

5.1. Archive institutions collect, preserve and make accessible records and documents, regardless of format, that are deemed worthy of permanent preservation for historical and informational purposes. They do so in accordance with relevant local government legislation, foundation charters, and a range of information legislation including the Public Records Act (1958), the Data Protection Act (1998) and the Freedom of Information Act (2000).

5.2. Archive institutions should possess a Collection Policy which outlines their collection scope and remit, and which should define coverage for digital formats alongside analogue. Digital Preservation Policies and Strategies should align with these local Collection Policies, and policy links should be apparent.

6. Strategic Framework

6.1. Archive institutions will need to develop a more detailed and specific organisational strategy to deliver the aims of this Policy. This may be an individual strategic response, or refer to joint-working and co-operation to deliver specific aspects of the digital preservation workflow.

6.2. The framework for each institutional Digital Preservation Strategy should specify, as a minimum:

- Organisational context
- The scope of the digital content to be preserved
- Preservation objectives that will ensure that digital resources remain authentic and accessible
- Preservation standards and systems
- Preservation workflows and procedures
- Skills and training requirements / plans
- Roles and responsibilities
- Plans for resourcing and sustainability

7. Roles and Responsibilities

7.1. The adoption of this Policy, or a local adaptation, by an archive institution and its parent body, will recognise the commitment of the organisation to the effective preservation of its digital resources.

7.2. As part of the adoption of this Policy, senior management responsibility for strategic developments should be identified, together with appropriate resourcing to enable implementation.

7.3. The Policy and associated institutional Strategy should be linked to other organisation-wide information management strategies and integrated as part of associated workflows.

7.4. Where digital preservation services are provided on a collective basis (for example, through a shared storage facility), organisational roles and responsibilities, and the ownership of records should be clearly defined.

7.5. Where digital preservation services are contracted from a commercial provider, agreements should be established to address the possibility of loss, to allow for the retrieval of material in

the event of the termination of the contract, and to ensure compliance with relevant information legislation.

8. Future Development

- 8.1. The ARCW Digital Preservation Working Group is continuing to address the potential for an all-Wales digital preservation solution, in partnership with the National Library of Wales. Current developments are based on open-source software tools that allow users to process digital objects from ingest to access in compliance with the OAIS Reference Model.
- 8.2. This Policy will be regularly reviewed to ensure its continuing relevance and accuracy in light of these developments and wider policy and technological changes.