

Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre

Digital Preservation Policy

January 2017

1. Introduction

The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre (AIURRRC) aims to collect, preserve and provide access to archive material relating to the BME communities of Manchester. An increasing amount of this material is in digital format. It is imperative that we find ways of preserving these digital records and making them accessible to future generations.

At present digital material across the archives sector is at risk of being lost, due to factors such as the rapid obsolescence of hardware, software and storage media, the lack of the resources and skills required to manage the preservation of such material and uncertainty about technical and infrastructural requirements. Best practice is developing quickly in the area of digital preservation and any policies and procedures written now can only reflect current thinking and research. However, as part of the University of Manchester and partners in the Archives+ initiative based at Manchester Central Library we are able to draw on the expertise and infrastructure of these larger organisations and are well-placed to meet the challenges presented by digital preservation.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline what we can hope to achieve in the way of preserving digital material and to clarify what donors and other stakeholders can expect from us in this area. It also explains what we cannot do or guarantee at present with the current capacity of our organisation.

3. Selection, appraisal and acquisition

There are some over-arching issues we must consider when acquiring digital material.

Firstly, digital material is fundamentally different from physical material in that there is rarely a single original item that is passed from donor to repository. Often digital donations will be copies of files that also remain at the source/with the donor, and as such may be subsequently changed at the source. This means the idea of 'the original' record must be rethought.

Secondly, the way digital material is created means there is often a greater volume of it than there would be with physical material, including duplicates, incrementally different versions of the same file, and content in more than one file format. This means selection and appraisal processes can be lengthy.

Thirdly, digital material carries the risk of digital viruses, which pose a significant risk to existing material. Rigorous virus scanning and digital security measures are required to safeguard existing digital archives and wider IT systems.

Fourthly, there is a vast range of digital formats that exist and have existed, and repositories may not have the software to access and assess older or more specialist formats. Migration of file formats is a possibility but this has resource implications that will need to be considered before a donation is accepted.

Ideally, new approaches to acquisition and appraisal should be found. In the future we aim to be more proactive in influencing the *creation* of digital material, and to specify, in consultation with donors, users and stakeholders, the themes, subjects and activities that we wish to collect and the formats that are most suited to digital preservation.

3.1 We will appraise digital material and will develop new policies and practices for doing so, reflecting the quantity and nature of records.

3.2 We will enforce strict virus scanning and digital security measures to identify compromised material before it enters our digital archive.

3.3 We will seek to work with donors to encourage good practice on the creation and care of digital records and will produce written guidance.

3.4 Sufficient metadata (e.g. file name, file format, software requirements) about donated digital material is required for identification, access and preservation purposes. The service cannot guarantee long-term preservation without it and will produce guidance for potential donors.

3.5 We cannot guarantee to preserve password-protected material unless the ability to access the material is provided.

3.6 We will seek to establish the position with regard to rights over the digital material and will require permission to convert and/or migrate material for preservation purposes when necessary.

3.7 In certain circumstances it may be preferable for the donor to donate hard copy versions of their records. We will advise when this might be appropriate.

3.8 We will seek to develop procedures for the capturing and preservation of websites as evidence of the activities of societies and organisations.

3.9 We cannot return digital material to the creator/donor once it has been donated; this will be reflected in the agreements negotiated at time of donation.

3.10 In most cases digital film archives have specific skills and storage requirements. We advise potential donors speak to our colleagues in the North West Film Archive for advice.

4. Migration

Ongoing maintenance of digital material may include migration of content from an older or soon-to-be-obsolete file type to newer or open source file types.

4.1 Deposited digital material will be saved in the AIURRRC's network within the University of Manchester's ICT infrastructure and any migration activities will be managed there. We will take advice from the digital preservation team at University of Manchester Library about preservation file formats.

4.2 Given uncertainty over future preservation formats and the time-consuming nature of ongoing digital migration work, unless absolutely necessary we will keep deposited digital material in its native format (ie the format in which it was donated).

4.3 Given our current capacity we will only accept donations of mainstream file formats that, if necessary, can be easily migrated to open source formats without the need for specialist software

4.4 Donors will be encouraged to convert digital material to preferred formats prior to donation. We will produce guidance on this.

5. Storage and maintenance

5.1 We will record technical metadata to assist in long-term management of digital material.

5.2 All digital material will be stored on the University of Manchester server which is backed up daily. Material will also be stored on an external hard drive, stored securely in the AIURRRC, for preservation purposes.

5.3 If digital material is deposited on CD or DVD, the files recorded on the CD or DVD will be treated as in 5.2. The original CD or DVD will be destroyed or returned to the depositor (apart from in the unusual circumstance that the disk itself is of historical value).

5.4 Checksums (sum of digits in a digital object) will be used periodically to check data integrity. We will develop a policy regarding this.

6. Access

6.1 We will work towards online access to donated digital material. In the short term access to digital material will be via an access copy on CD/DVD in the public searchroom at Manchester Central Library.

6.2 Certain series of records will be copied to CD/DVD for access purposes by default; most digital material will be copied for access on demand.

6.3 Checksums should be employed before and after each 'use' of a digital object to ensure data integrity. We will develop a procedure for doing so.

7. Standards

7.1 We will produce a list of acceptable file formats and storage media for potential donors, using current best practice as a guide.

7.2 When describing digital material international standards for cataloguing will be applied.

7.3 When capturing technical metadata current international standards will be applied.

8. Disaster planning

8.1 We will assess risks to digital material and build this into our disaster planning.

9. Monitoring and review

9.1 Best practice and technical developments are changing quickly in this field. This policy will therefore need to be reviewed annually.

Date of next review: January 2018