

# Collection Care and Preservation Policy Version 2.0

10 December 2021

**Document Control**

Title	<b>Collection Care and Preservation Policy</b>
Prepared By	<b>Susan Corrigan</b>
Approved By	<b>Laura Mitchell</b>
Date of Approval	<b>15 December 2021</b>
Version Number	<b>2.0</b>
Review Frequency	<b>Annually</b>
Next Review Date	<b>December 2022</b>

**Document Owner**

This document is owned by

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**Status Control**

Version	Issue Date	Status	Prepared By	Role	Reason for Amendment
2.0	November 2021	Draft	Susan Corrigan	Head of Preservation	Refresh of 2017 policy, to reformat, update language and reference digital
	17 November 2021	draft	Susan Corrigan	Head of Preservation	Draft to accept updating of references by Hazel de Vere
	29 November 2021	Draft	Susan Corrigan	Head of Preservation	Draft to accept updating of related documents by Iida Saarinen
	01 December 2021	Draft	Susan Corrigan	Head of Preservation	Drafting to take account of comments from Garth Stewart and Linda Ramsay, and to add in digital appendix
	10 December 2021	Draft	Susan Corrigan	Head of Preservation	Drafting to take account of comments from Laura Mitchell

**Document Reviewers**

The document is required to be reviewed by:

Role	Sign-off Required(Y/N)
Head of Conservation	N
Head of Digital Records Unit	N

**Distribution List**

This document has been distributed to:

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If you have suggested amendments please make them to **<team responsible for document>**.

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## 1. Purpose

This policy articulates the general principles which underpin the care, conservation and preservation of records held by the Keeper of the Records of Scotland. These principles are aligned to national and international standards and good practice.

This policy has been approved by the Deputy Keeper of the Records of Scotland (the Deputy Keeper). It supports the following part of the National Records of Scotland's Strategic Vision for the Archives and Record Keeping Function: *Selecting, preserving, and making available to our customers and stakeholders the national archives of Scotland in whatever medium, to the highest standards.*

## 2. Aim

This policy sets out how NRS will preserve the national collections, as set out in the Strategic Vision for the Archives and Record Keeping Function:

**Trusted:** keeping the national archives, and the information they contain, safe, secure and appropriately accessible to our customers and stakeholders;

**Storage:** Providing the final new storage building that NRS will require in order to ensure that NRS has sufficient and suitable archive storage for all present and future physical holdings;

**Collection:** Developing, managing, and caring for our collection to reflect our customers' and stakeholders' needs and our national archival role.

## 3. Scope

This policy covers all accessioned records for which the Deputy Keeper is the Information Asset Owner.

'Record' means anything in which information is recorded in any form.

## 4. Towards a Format-Neutral Approach to Collections' Care

As a first step towards an all-formats approach to collections' care, in 2018 NRS created Preservation Branch within Information and Records Directorate. The branch encompasses the conservation, storage management and digital records teams.

We recognise that we have significant work to do in integrating our collections' care across formats, and that we are not yet in a position to create an approach to collections' care which is format neutral. This policy, therefore, focuses mainly on non-digital formats. We describe our approach to digital collections' care at Appendix D.

## 5. General Principles

Whether through direct work with the collections and/or their environments, or by ongoing vigilance, the ongoing care of the record collections is the responsibility of everyone who engages with them, irrespective of roles.

The collections should be appropriately protected irrespective of their location or use.

Risk management is integrated into conservation and preservation decision-making to ensure that:

- risks to the collections are accurately identified;
- conservation and preservation actions are targeted appropriately;
- the controls put in place are effective in the medium to long term;
- conservation and preservation actions provide benefits in proportion to the costs involved;
- there is an ongoing review to ensure risks are identified and assessed, and that mitigation strategies continue to be effective;
- health and safety is effectively managed in all activity associated with caring for collections.

Collection care and, more specifically, conservation decision-making considers the record and the materials it is made from. Factors for consideration include:

- significance (e.g. the tangible and intangible values attached to the record);
- the functionality of the record;
- the uses to which the record might be put.

Collection care and conservation work must be transparent. Staff are accountable for:

- recording decisions about conservation and preservation actions, and ensuring that this information is available for use in the future;
- taking a minimal intervention approach;
- responsible use of resources.

Collections care and conservation processes are subject to ongoing improvement, including:

- reviewing and refining processes;
- identifying opportunities for innovation, experimentation and research in order to advance treatment practice;
- applying a collaborative approach to problem solving;
- taking an open-minded approach to treatment decision making.

We recognise the importance of sustainability in all aspects of collections' care and conservation.

All conservation work will be based on professional standards, codes of practice and ethics. This includes the principles of treatment work being reversible and distinguishable.

NRS will provide appropriate equipment and training for staff to work safely with the collections. NRS will comply with all responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act, 1974.

## 6. Categorisation of Collections and Objects

The collections contain a wide range of organic materials such as paper, animal skins, wax etc., which undergo a continual and inevitable natural ageing process. Handling directly affects the life expectancy of such material and hastens this ageing process.

Many records in the collections are vulnerable, rare or fragile e.g. parchments, seals and photographic collections. In the interests of preservation, where these can be copied onto more resilient and accessible media, a surrogate copy of the record will become the principal access medium.

In some cases, at point of production, a record may be assessed to be unfit for production or at risk. Records which are unfit for production will be withdrawn from access, and those which are at risk will be made available subject to handling restrictions. Further details can be found in the [Fragile Records Policy](#) published on the NRS website.

In practice, the records requested for the search room take priority. The NRS operates under a principle of 'conservation for access'; all requests are logged but priority is given to records frequently requested and those records which support the digital access programmes.

#### 7. Preventive Conservation

NRS recognises that preventive conservation is the most effective means of preserving the large number and diverse range of materials and object types in the collection. It takes a 'whole collection' approach to ensuring collections are protected in the present and for the future.

The aim of preventive conservation is to minimise deterioration and damage to collections by managing risks to the collection.

Preventive conservation potentially draws on knowledge from materials science, building science, chemistry, physics, biology, engineering, systems science and management and requires involvement of almost all staff at some level. Its success depends on collaboration between staff and disciplines across the organisation.

Preventive conservation is relevant at all stages of the record's life and encompasses:

- provision of stable environments in storage, while on display, in transit and while in use
- protection from physical damage through appropriate support, housing and handling
- integrated pest management
- readiness to respond appropriately to events that put collections at risk, by identification and management of risk, including disaster response planning
- ensuring that all staff and collection users are trained to appropriate levels for their interaction with and/or management of the collections or individual items.

#### 8. Risk Management

The importance of managing risks to our collections is represented in the NRS Corporate Risk Register, and in the NRS Information Risk Register.

Operationally, the assessment and management of risk is a key part of planning and prioritising conservation and preservation activities. This risk-based approach applies at all points of collections' care, and throughout we seek to reduce the risks to our collections.

Appendix C gives descriptions of condition assessment categories, which are mainly used at item-level, but also can be applied at series or collection level.

## 9. Storing Collections

All collections benefit from storage in environmental conditions that:

- limit the onset or speed of chemical reactions that cause deterioration or damage
- limit physical damage from fluctuations that cause physical changes in materials
- limit exposure of sensitive materials to chemical and particulate materials that will react with them chemically or physically.

The most appropriate environmental conditions will vary depending on the composition of the individual collection or object.

The maintenance and management of our storage environments is a shared responsibility and includes: advice on appropriate storage conditions; maintenance of plant and equipment to meet requirements; integrated pest management; appropriate housekeeping regimes; selection and provision of appropriate storage support systems; training in handling and collection movement for staff working in storage areas; provision of appropriate security for storage environments; disaster and business continuity planning.

Storage of collections will be in keeping with established good practice and in line with our role as a national institution.

## 10. Displaying and Exhibiting Collections

When objects are on display, they are vulnerable to additional risks due to: removal from their normal storage environments; necessary exposure to light; increased handling during exhibition preparation, installation and de-installation; local micro-environments within display furniture; possible exposure to volatile organic compounds from off-gassing if exhibition furniture manufacture lead-ins are insufficient; possible increased environmental fluctuations and increased dust levels due to human presence.

The development, maintenance and management of display environments are shared responsibilities that include all those noted for storage as well as the following elements: appropriate physical support for objects on display; micro-fade testing for items on display and advice on lighting based on the results of this testing; managed movement of collections between storage environments, conservation and exhibition preparation areas and exhibition spaces, and return to store; briefing of borrowers on interaction with exhibits; and advice for, and contribution to, public programmes.



## 11. Moving Collections

Movement of collections in whole or part, for whatever reason, introduces additional uncertainty and thus increases risk. This is especially the case if the records are travelling out of their usual environment. NRS has trained staff, and appropriate equipment and vehicles to mitigate these risks.

When records are in transit they are exposed to greater risks due to: increased handling during packing and preparation, in transit, and unpacking; movement and freight/cargo handling; local micro-environments within packing; environmental fluctuations.

NRS is committed to planned and documented record collection moves carried out by trained and experienced staff and/or inducted contractors with appropriate training in moving and packing collections, and in the use of moving equipment and lifts as required. Planning is vital in any move. The level of advance planning and process documentation will range in complexity, depending on the situation. Sound risk identification, assessment and treatment is required as part of the planning phase of any move and will be documented. Removing record collections from their normal environments may involve compromise on some of the environmental and care standards. Planning should include an understanding of the implications of such compromises and the preparation of options to minimise any risks flowing from them. This may result in a statement outlining 'non-negotiables' and areas where compromise might be achieved if necessary.

When items are on loan to other organisations, the shared responsibility for the care of the NRS collections is covered by a loan agreement and other associated documentation.

NRS is committed to meeting the terms of loan agreements to care for items on inward loan from other organisations or individuals.

## 12. Access to Collections

While the principal modes of access are in person in the search room, and online digital access, NRS also provides outreach and public programmes, and exhibitions and displays, all of which involve varying degrees of access to the collections.

When records are made available for access they are exposed to additional risks due to: removal from their normal environment; exposure to light; poor handling; vandalism; misplacement. NRS is committed to reducing these risks by staff training programmes and by the use of targeted surrogacy.

Access other than via exhibitions is provided by the NRS search rooms. It is managed according to protocols and procedures, which are designed to protect our collections, including: supervised access; handling training; provision of handling aids e.g. gloves, book supports, object cradles, weights etc.; barriers to restrict or prevent handling; security provision.

## 13. Collections in Disasters or Emergencies

Events that can have detrimental effects on collection items can have serious impacts on business continuity for collections-based organisations. NRS is committed to minimising these impacts through readiness and pre-planning.

The protection of collections against the threat or occurrence of a disaster is dealt with through NRS Incident Management procedures.

For effective responses to emergencies and to ensure appropriate action to salvage collection records from a disaster situation, the NRS Incident Management procedures and the Archives Disaster Response Plan need to be complementary and updated regularly, to ensure they remain relevant and that roles and responsibilities are appropriately assigned and understood.

Salvage training exercises and/or emergency scenario planning events are to be carried out at least annually.

Response to emergencies is a shared responsibility, and will be co-ordinated through NRS Incident Management processes. The primary salvage roles will normally be undertaken by Conservation Services, and associated collections' staff. Depending on the scale of the event and its impact, however, wider assistance and support will be sought through NRS's Incident Management protocols.

In the event of an emergency, care of the collections may require people to act outside their normal roles with guidance from Conservation Services.

In the event of an emergency, assistance may be required from agencies external to NRS, and provision for this is managed by NRS's Incident Management protocols. External support agencies include: reciprocal agreements with the four other national collections in the Edinburgh area, other local disaster networks and commercial providers.

#### 14. Treatment

NRS is committed to the care of its collections. In support of the preventive conservation programmes, conservation staff also direct and undertake: collection maintenance and surveys, including rehousing projects; treatment of individual records and groups of records.

Conservators will prepare options and recommendations for proposed treatments or maintenance work. Justifications for the preferred option/s, the implications of the treatments on the physical and chemical integrity of the record/s, and the impact of the treatment on significance, will all be articulated to assist in informed decision-making. The treatment approach will be based on minimal intervention. Decision-making will be recorded as part of the conservation treatment. Irrespective of scale, all record treatments will be designed to: preserve significance; be cost effective, and be carried out to high professional standards.

The effectiveness of conservation actions is a shared responsibility between Conservation Services and the business area or project for which the work is being

done. Project time-lines and resource availability may impact conservation planning. Therefore our aim is to engage at the earliest possible point in order to ensure optimum treatments for the collection items, or the proposed use of the object.

#### 15. Research

Conservation and preservation research is important for the development of NRS's approach to caring for collections and for the professional development of its staff.

Conservation and preservation research projects will be assessed against:

- research criteria;
- relevance to NRS strategic priorities;
- scope;
- duration;
- resource requirements;
- ability to produce results that can be disseminated within and outside the NRS.

#### 16. Collections Care Outreach

As a national collecting institution, NRS has a role to play in providing information on care of collections to the public, owners and stakeholders and to other organisations. Outreach can take a variety of forms, including answering enquiries and providing advice, workshops, presentations and training programmes.

#### 17. Staff Roles and Responsibilities

##### 17.1 Preservation Branch - Conservation team

Manages the preservation of the collections, incorporating preventive conservation, treatment and maintenance of collection items, exhibition support and preparation, research and outreach.

Provides specialist advice to NRS colleagues, and stakeholders on the preservation of the collections, on acquisitions and their conservation implications and authenticity, and on materials analysis.

Works collaboratively with other areas of NRS to ensure that optimum care of the collections is achieved in treatment and preventive conservation, and assists other areas to contribute to the care of collections.

Works with NRS Procurement to supply everything to do with the storage and packaging of records, to meet professional standards, promoting good practice and preservation.

Provides advice and works collaboratively with other areas of NRS to ensure documentation, storage and movement of the collections is achieved, and assists and contributes to the care of collections.

Conservation staff are responsible for maintaining the currency of their conservation knowledge and skills' base. NRS will support their professional development within the parameters of wider corporate development plans.

NRS encourages and supports Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers (PACR), the professional practice assessment for conservation professionals, and the achievement and maintenance of accredited status.

#### 17.2 Archive Attendant teams

Public and staff access to the records is supported by the archive attendant teams, who operate from the storage buildings. Following standard, organisation-wide systems, the teams handle all record productions and returns, in order to meet service turnaround times while adhering to good handling practice.

#### 17.3 Preservation Branch - Record Location Service and Van service

The administration and recording of all record moves and location changes or additions is handled by Preservation Branch. This function includes routine record moves between NRS sites, and specialist record moves both on-site and off-site. The Record Location System Owner is the Director of Information and Record Services.

#### 17.4 Preservation Branch – box making service

NRS's box making service is integral to good preservation. The service provides standard and bespoke boxes made using specialist materials. Occasionally, boxes are supplied to external customers, at cost.

#### 17.5 All staff

In the course of their daily duties, all NRS staff should be vigilant about risks to the collections including the condition and any storage issues, reporting this to Conservation Services or by using internal reporting mechanisms as appropriate.

Staff training is undertaken regularly, and staff are encouraged to seek advice and training from Conservation Services in order to better understand risks to collections and to more accurately interpret changes to collections on display.

### 18. Implementation

This policy will be implemented through liaison and agreement between relevant business areas within NRS. Implementation will include induction and training and development, and ongoing review of procedures specific to conservation and preservation projects.

### 19. Coverage

This policy applies to all activities associated with the care and preservation of the NRS collections.

### 20. Related Policies

The following policies inform, or are informed by, this policy:

- NRS's Strategic Vision for Archives and Record Keeping Function;
- NRS Business Continuity Management System;
- NRS Incident Response and Recovery Plan;

- NRS Collections Development Policy;
- NRS Collections Information Policy;
- NRS Collections Management Policies;
- Guide to Accessioning Records in the NRS;
- NRS Accessions Management Checklist;
- CALM Conservation Categories;
- NRS Collections' Care work plans;
- NRS Outreach and Learning Strategy;
- NRS Public Access Policy;
- NRS Exhibition procedures;
- Records Transfer Policy (Policy on the Transfer of Records of Local Interest to Local Custody).

#### 21. Monitoring

This policy will be monitored through the reporting mechanisms within Information and Records Services Directorate, including regular IRS Team Leaders meetings.

Statistics are collected for preventive conservation work on records, including: pest treatments; records assessed and stabilised for storage; environmental data for storage areas; for exhibitions-related work, including records installed and de-installed; record condition reports; environmental data for exhibition and transport of collections.

Susan Corrigall  
Head of Preservation  
December 2021

## 22. Appendix A: References

PD 5454:2012; Recommendations for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Documents' (2012: ISBN 13: 9780580716003)

PAS 197:2009 Code of practice for cultural collections management ISBN 9780 613524;

PAS 198:2012 Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections ISBN 978 0 580 71315

BS EN 16790:2016 Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for protection of Cultural Heritage

BS 4971:2017 Conservation and Care of Archive and Library Collections

BS EN 16095: 2012 Conservation of cultural property - Condition recording for moveable cultural heritage

'Standard for Record Repositories' (The National Archives, 2004), supplemented by TNA's 'Framework of Standards (2004) [The National Archives' standard for record repositories](#)

European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations, *ECCO Professional Guidelines*, 2002

Russell, Roslyn and Kylie Winkworth, *Significance 2.0: A guide to assessing the significance of collections*, Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, 2010, [Significance 2.0: a guide to assessing the significance of collections \(arts.gov.au\)](#)

### 23. Appendix B: Definition of terms

The following definitions represent the common use of the relevant terms in the conservation profession.

#### Conservator

A conservator is a professional who has the training, knowledge, skills, experience and understanding to act with the aim of preserving cultural heritage for the future. Conservators contribute to the perception, appreciation and understanding of cultural heritage in respect of its environmental context and its significance and physical properties. Conservators undertake responsibility for, and carry out strategic planning; diagnostic examination; development of conservation plans and treatment proposals; preventive conservation; conservation-restoration treatments and documentation of observations and interventions.

#### Conservation

Conservation activities are aimed at preserving objects and their significance and may include preservation, conservation treatments, examination, documentation, research, treatment, preventive conservation, and education.

#### Conservation ethics

Conservation practice is guided by conservation ethics which outline conservators' obligations to maintain the integrity of the objects being cared for in the long term; to take into account the interests of stakeholders, including cultural and religious considerations; to preserve the values that contribute to the significance of the object; to record all actions taken to preserve/conservate the object; and to ensure that appropriate skills and knowledge are employed in all conservation activities.

#### Conservation treatment

Conservation treatments consist mainly of direct, or interventive, action carried out on cultural heritage material with the aim of stabilising condition, repairing damage and retarding further deterioration.

#### Disaster

A disaster is any unplanned incident threatening the structure or contents of an archive, with the potential to have a detrimental effect on collections, and which is beyond the immediate ability of the archive's staff and normal management structure to control. A disaster can be a large or small event.

#### Preventive conservation

Preventive conservation consists of the actions taken to retard or prevent deterioration of, or damage to, cultural material by control of its environment. This is done through the formulation and implementation of policies and procedures for the following: appropriate environmental conditions; handling and maintenance procedures for storage, exhibition, packing, transport and use; integrated pest management; emergency preparedness and response; and reformatting/duplication and surrogacy.

#### Preservation

The preservation of cultural property through activities that minimise chemical and physical deterioration and damage, and that prevent loss of information. The primary goal of preservation is to prolong the existence of cultural property.

#### Significance

'Significance' refers to the values and meanings that items and collections have for people and communities. Significance helps unlock the potential of collections, creating opportunities for communities to access and enjoy collections, and to understand the history, cultures and environments of Scotland.

#### Condition Risk Ranking

The condition of collections and objects is framed in terms of risk in *normal* use, i.e. the usual or most common use for those collections or records in their life at NRS. This provides a standardised set of condition definitions that can be applied across the NRS and which relate to the proposed use of the collection or the record. The definitions are set out in Appendix B of this document.



## 24. Appendix C: Summary of NRS CALM User-Referred Item Assessment Categories

Rating	Item condition/user requirement
HIGH	<p>Documents in a weak and unstable condition; there is a risk of information loss, e.g. loose pages; cannot be accessed or copied; evidence of mould/mycological growth as a potential health and safety risk; require conservation treatment to prevent further loss; records with a specific access deadline.</p> <p>May be marked 'Unfit for Production' by Conservation, if not already designated</p>
MEDIUM	<p>Disfigured or damaged; usable for study; signs of deterioration and so continued use would cause further damage; images of this record in this condition would harm the reputation of NRS.</p> <p>May be marked 'Record at Risk' by Conservation, if not already designated</p>
LOW	<p>Disfigured or damaged but stable, e.g. heavily soiled; usable for study but may require further treatment to prevent eventual deterioration; packaging to be evaluated and upgraded; images of this record in this condition may harm the reputation of NRS.</p>

## 25. Appendix D: Description of NRS Approach to Digital Preservation

All born digital archive records are stored within the NRS Digital Repository, which is a managed preservation system. Day-to-day operations are the responsibility of the Digital Records Unit (DRU). Our Digital Repository and associated services have all been designed with the [principle of parsimony](#) in mind.

### **In-house systems**

We benefit from being based within a large data-driven institution, and have utilised corporate IT systems and processes to incrementally build our Digital Repository.

The Repository is based chiefly on our corporate IT network, which brings with it a host of attributes which support collections care:

- NRS has robust processes in place to protect the confidentiality, integrity and availability of data in its care e.g. NRS is [Cyber Essentials+](#) accredited, has a full suite of corporate Access Control Policies, secure backups regime etc. This means our Digital Repository is highly protected from malware and malicious intent
- Three copies of records in our Repository are maintained at three separate geographical sites, as a safeguard against loss, corruption, or malicious intent
- Repository storage is incrementally scalable, and acknowledged within the NRS Corporate Risk Register
- The Repository can be accessed remotely by DRU staff for preservation and access activities, via a secure Virtual Desktop Instance
- If the Repository's records are required to be moved in bulk, we have a scalable checksum procedure in place to ensure data is not altered in transit
- We will soon have the means of securely accepting digital archive transfers over-the-wire via a new corporate Managed File Transfer solution. This will become our *de facto* digital archive transfer route, and will automate many of the preservation processes detailed below
- We receive support services from NRS IT, or wider Scottish Government IT as and when necessary.

### **Preservation Focus**

To ensure digital records are preserved over time, we require depositors to engage with our file format and metadata requirements prior to transfer. This is the focus of our depositor liaison process – which is outlined in our Depositor Guidance – and ensures the records received are complete at the point of receipt, and that we have enough supportive information to preserve the records in the long term.

Once transferred, digital records are processed in order to ensure they:

- contain no malware
- are unencrypted
- are complete (checksums and manifest both checked)
- are characterised and suitable technical metadata obtained (file format PUID, size etc.)

Information provided by this process is stored along with collections, and used for preservation planning, access, and risk assessment. These processes provide us with the means to ensure minimum bitstream preservation and content preservation at point of transfer.

As yet, NRS has not migrated any digital records to newer file formats in order to prevent obsolescence, but an in-depth risk assessment of the digital records has been conducted and the aim is for migration actions to form part of our future workflows. When required, migration would be our preferred choice of preservation action.

The same principle of completeness influences our web archiving practices:

- we aim to capture as comprehensive a capture of selected websites as possible
- This is delivered via the careful scoping of web crawl settings and NRS staff investment in eyes-on quality assurance of web content
- So we do not rely upon our third party supplier for preservation, we routinely download a copy of the NRS Web Archive into our Digital Repository for permanent preservation
- Selection and appraisal for the web archive is intertwined with NRS's collections development, and a Working Group with Information and Records Services and Scottish Government representation meets quarterly to oversee this

### **Access**

As a rule, we will only ever provide access to a copy of any digital record in our care. Our current default access mechanism is to provide a copy to view either in our on-site Search Rooms, or via transportable physical media.

### **Related Policies**

The following policies inform, or are informed by, our approach to digital archiving:

- NRS's Strategic Vision for Archives and Record Keeping Function;
- NRS Business Continuity Management System;
- NRS Incident Response and Recovery Plan;
- NRS Collections Development Policy;
- NRS Collections Information Policy;
- NRS Collections Management Policies;
- Guide to Accessioning Records in the NRS;
- NRS Accessions Management Checklist;
- NRS Collections' Care work plans;
- NRS Outreach and Learning Strategy;
- NRS Public Access Policy;
- NRS Post-Survey Analysis for 'Found' Born-Digital Material;
- Depositor Guidance on Digital Transfer.