

## Summary

This brief document takes an introductory view of pre-digitisation project considerations. It is intended to be of use to resource management staff considering the digitisation of all or part of their collection.

## Deciding to Digitise

Amid the general enthusiasm for digitisation, it can be easy to get carried away and launch into a project without adequate thought or planning. Before deciding to digitise, you must first demonstrate that there is a need and that the project can be completed within an appropriate budget and timescale.

These issues are best addressed, as early as possible, within a feasibility study. The purpose of such a study is to define the

aims of the project and determine whether it is possible to meet these aims within the constraints of budget, time and current technology.

## Reasons to digitise

It is not enough to justify a project on the grounds that "everyone is doing it" or "we can get funding for it." There are better reasons for embarking on a digitisation project, which might include:

- Providing improved access to unknown or little used collections
- Offering better search and retrieval facilities for a collection
- Providing greater understanding of original works through improved indexing or some form of digital enhancement
- Creating resources that are tailored for use in learning and teaching
- Ensuring continued access to copies of fragile originals
- Enhancing the public knowledge, recognition or understanding of the collection



## Feasibility study

The initial task of the feasibility study is to establish the aims of the project, which should be initially derived from an assessment of 'user needs'. It is important to find out what your users expect and hope for from the digitisation process. While it might not be possible to fulfil every wish, there is little point in undertaking a project that cannot fulfil any needs at all.

Only once the user's needs are clearly understood can the aims of the project be established and matched with an appropriate workflow procedure, budget and timescale.

It is quite normal for there to be some compromise between what the project would like to provide and what can be produced within the time and budget. The important thing is that these compromises are consciously made and that all interested parties agree on what is to be delivered before the project is started. In some cases the feasibility study might show that a project will be impossible to complete, even with a compromised set of aims and deliverables. For these projects, it is always best to decide not to digitise and leave the task

until the situation has improved enough to make the digitisation a viable task.

A feasibility study can also test the proposed workflow process and ensure that there are no unconsidered challenges, such as original material being unavailable or too fragile. It is also good practice to include within the study a 'risk assessment', which should highlight possible problems and suggest methods of dealing with them.

## Evaluating the resources

The feasibility study must address issues of resourcing. No digitisation project should proceed without ensuring that it has sufficient resources to undertake, complete and support the project into the future.

Particular attention should be given to these issues:

- Is there enough budget and time available to complete the project?
- Are the original materials copyright cleared and if not are there any suspected problems with doing so?
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- Are all the originals available and are there any conservation issues that might affect their use?
- Will the proposed infrastructure be able to support the digitisation and deliver the end product?
- Can the project find staff with the appropriate skills?
- Does the project have the full support from the institute or owners of the collection as well as from staff and a user base?
- Can the institute provide ongoing support and digital preservation for the resource into the future, guaranteeing its long-term viability?
- Does the risk assessment show any other likely problems or difficulties for the project that have not or cannot be addressed?

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## Conclusion

If there are any doubts, it may be wise to postpone the project until it can be assured of better support. But if, having identified the need, established the aims, determined the necessary workflow and balanced the risks, you are able to confidently assert that the project can be delivered within time and budget, then you can 'decide to digitise'.

