

National Library of Scotland

The Library's approach to selection for digitisation

Background

Strategic Priority 2 of the [Library's 2015-2020 strategy](#), 'The Way Forward', states that by 2025

'We will make it easier to access our collections ... and have a third in digital format'

and will

'... identify the main collection areas for digitisation and take action to make that material globally available'.

This paper broadly outlines the approach the Library will take to achieve this, giving a statement of purpose, outlining the guiding principles and setting the priority criteria for material selection.

Why the Library digitises its collections

The Library's One Third Digital Programme Board recognises that through the digitisation of its collections the Library will make a significant and lasting contribution to global knowledge and the memory of the world. The resulting digital resources will promote opportunities to advance learning, foster and develop new research, innovate, drive economic development, and enjoy our cultural heritage.

In undertaking this work the Library strives to digitise its resources in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible, while taking into account the needs of the collections and their audiences.

The fundamental purpose of the programme is to digitise and provide access to useful collection materials. In 2025, we will know that we have executed the programme successfully because the 2 million digitised resources will provide the highest potential for use and value to our audiences.

Benefits of the programme and its outputs

1. A significant proportion of the Library's physical collections will be made openly accessible to people everywhere, except where there are obligations in terms of compliance, rights, ownership etc
2. Wider access to, and dissemination of, our collections will democratise access to them and encourage their use and re-use
3. By providing digital access to the physical collections, their value will be enhanced and extended. They can be digitally manipulated, analysed, transformed and republished to create new knowledge, new contexts and new works

4. Digitisation facilitates new opportunities for digital curation, co-curation and partnerships such as online exhibitions and uniting disparate collections
5. Digitisation supports, where desired, the preservation of the physical originals through reducing handling
6. Timely digitisation addresses the risk of potential future unavailability of the physical originals for digitisation due to material deterioration or equipment obsolescence.

Selection prioritisation criteria

In line with our Collecting Policy and related documents, the following criteria influence material selection to accommodate the Library's strategic priority (2.2) to 'identify the main collection areas for digitisation and take action to make that material globally available', as well as the strategic priority (1.2) to 'digitise the national bibliography of Scotland'. Digitisation proposals may come from a range of sources, whereas final assessment and selection will be in context of collection curation.

Criteria based on material types

- **Shelfmark-led** – we will give priority to shelfmark-led selection, supporting strategic aims through high quantity bulk digitisation at collection or shelfmark level
- **Unique to the Library** – we will give priority to items which we know are unique to the Library
- **Rare and iconic** – we will give priority to collection areas that are strong in rare and/or iconic materials
- **At risk** – we will continue preservation-led digitisation to ensure access to items which are at risk of deterioration or obsolescence (for example nitrate film, magnetic tapes, fading manuscripts, brittle items, photographs)
- **Local history** – we will give priority to texts, maps, newspapers, archives, sounds, and moving image materials from around Scotland which would have specific geographic appeal, addressing the Library's national remit
- **Gaelic/Scots** – we will continue to select materials written in Gaelic and Scots to meet the Scottish Government's strategic aims (Gaelic Language Plan, Scots Language Policy), to accommodate known demand, and to benefit relevant audiences
- **Scottish writers** – we will add to the digitised corpus of works by Scottish writers, including those that newly enter the public domain.

Criteria based on motivations

- **Visibility** – we will actively seek out invisible or under-used collections where we can see potential for added value from digitisation
- **Accessibility** – we will continue access driven selection where materials require special or unusual equipment for consultation (for example film, sound recordings, microforms)
- **Patron-driven** – we will continue to digitise on request, whether selection is driven by individuals, commercial partners, or within (research) collaborations
- **Audience-driven** – we will consult regularly with target audience groups to gauge their needs and to help ensure that digitised collections have the highest potential for use and value in the future
- **Project-driven** – we will continue to digitise materials required for Library access projects such as exhibitions and displays, web features and online learning resources and to enable Reader Services' developments

- **Income** – we will continue to identify items with commercial and income generation potential for the Library and for wider economic contribution
- **Multiple aims and approaches** – our selection process will be driven by a mix of multiple aims and approaches; some will drive research outputs, others will have wider appeal; some will be known-demand, others will aim to generate demand.

Externally driven selection for digitisation

We regularly receive external requests for digitisation of our own collections and occasionally for digitisation of collections we do not own which may be held elsewhere. In line with our Collecting Policy and related documents, we accommodate such requests in the following ways, always reserving the right not to proceed with a proposal.

1) Externally driven selection of National Library of Scotland collections

We may agree to externally driven selection for digitisation of our owned collections under the following circumstances:

- 1.1 Where a commercial publisher wishes to create a commercial digital product which may be subject to an exclusive period (embargo) and may result in the payment of royalties to the Library
- 1.2 Where an organisation/institution pays the Library and we prioritise their choice of material for our digitisation programme. Such requests may comprise related elements such as a web feature, outreach activities, or a learning resource
- 1.3 On a case by case basis, where there is an organisation/institution with which we share a (collaborative) interest and where therefore digitisation may be carried out without charge
- 1.4 Where the request for digitisation falls within our standard charged-for copying services. Some collections held in the Library on deposit are within the scope of these services.

2) Externally driven selection of externally owned materials

We may agree to externally driven selection for digitisation of externally owned materials under the following circumstances:

- 2.1 Where such materials fill gaps within our physical and/or digital collections, and where there is a curatorial responsibility to make the decision to have those gaps filled. Such digitisation will be based on our intention to own all digital files, retain them as part of our digital collections, and make them available to the public according to our standard procedures
- 2.2 Where there is a curatorial responsibility to retain a digital copy of the externally owned materials to form part of our collections, and where this is in agreement with the external organisation, institution or individual. This may, for example, be the case where the original material is at risk and where there are no other reliable means of providing access to that material

2.3 Where there is a partnership or collaboration for which we agree to act as the digitisation hub, in keeping with our broader strategic aims. This may be with or without an interest to retain a copy of the digital files representing externally owned materials

All digital copies of externally owned materials which we wish to retain as a result of the above listed circumstances will have the same curatorial oversight as physical copies would.

Principles for digitisation

Material selection for digitisation will be based on the following seven principles.

Principle 1: Rights

We will apply a pragmatic and risk-based approach to assessing the copyright status of items, and their eligibility for publishing. This will be facilitated by a rolling copyright assessment framework for published and unpublished literary, dramatic, musical, and artistic works, adopting a model for assessment based on the date a work was created.

The Library's position is that works can normally be digitised irrespective of whether copyright status limits or inhibits access, including for preservation purposes (under s.42A CDPA). Access to digitisations may be limited (e.g. to dedicated onsite terminals in accordance with s. 40B of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (CDPA) as amended) or open and public (e.g. via the Library's website).

Where the copyright assessment framework identifies published works to be in-copyright the Library's default position will be that such works will not undergo rights clearance unless dedicated resources can be identified to clear rights of bespoke materials to accommodate specific events or commitments.

Principle 2: Duplication of existing digital copies

We will limit the amount of resources spent on investigating existing digital copies, particularly below collection level, unless such investigation is technically viable.

We therefore reserve the right to ignore overlap with materials available through the following three types of resources, unless such overlap occurs at collection level, or at shelfmark level of significant quantity:

- External resources and platforms, such as Google Books, Internet Archive, Project Gutenberg, or HathiTrust
- Electronic resources which do not form part of our permanent digital collections, for example resources we subscribe to, or which we could decide to subscribe to or purchase in the future
- Electronic resources which do form part of our permanent digital collections.

Principle 3: Location of capture

We will digitise collection materials at our premises in a dedicated space that complies with collection security requirements and accommodates the most efficient and effective workflow set-up.

Materials will leave our premises (complying with standard assessments and procedures) if exceptional circumstances arise which cannot be accommodated on-site within reason, or if it is cost-effective to do so.

Principle 4: Collections care

All materials proposed for digitisation will undergo a timely high-level assessment carried out by the Digitisation Conservator. This will aid the identification of the type and level of work required prior to digitisation.

The level of conservation treatments undertaken to enable digitisation will be sufficient to meet digitisation needs but will not exceed these needs. We will endeavour to minimise the risks of collections being damaged during digitisation. However, in order to allow digitisation to proceed, we will accept that the risk of damage during digitisation cannot be eliminated altogether.

Principle 5: Metadata

Sufficient bibliographic metadata at item level will exist prior to capture. This will ensure the unique identification of items being digitised, with sufficient description to validate the item. The creation of such metadata will be linked with work on our Hidden Collections programme. Further descriptive metadata may be required for resource discovery of and access to the digitised collections.

Principle 6: Entirety

We will digitise all selected collections and items in their entirety, not in parts. This includes digitisation on demand through a paid service where such demand (and consequent payment) is only for parts of an item.

Principle 7: Resources

Digitisation is a strategic priority for the Library and, as a first step, we will aim to undertake activities using existing resources.