

Feedback summary

DPE/Planets/nestor joint training event 'Principles of Digital Preservation: a hands-on approach'

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The first joint DPE/Planets/nestor training event, 'Principles of digital preservation: a hands-on approach', was held at the National Library of Lithuania, Vilnius, on 1-5 October 2007. The event introduced participants to a number of key digital preservation principles and provided them with an opportunity to apply this knowledge through a number of hands-on exercises. The course was held in cooperation with the international conference "Communication of memories in archives, museums and libraries: the interaction of science, policy and practice", providing participants with further networking opportunities to meet other researchers, international experts and practitioners across disciplinary and national boundaries. The event was targeted at practitioners and researchers from the archives, libraries and museums sectors, as well as other institutions such as data archives, government departments and businesses with an interest in the topic.

Twenty one participants and five trainers attended the event. At the end of the course participants were provided with a feedback form to complete. Nineteen forms were returned, giving a response rate of 90.5%. The following is a summary of the responses.

About the event

The first seven questions related to various aspects of the event. Participants were asked to provide ratings between one and five with one being poor and five being excellent.

1. How effective were the speakers in delivering their sessions?

1=0

2=0

3=16%

4=63%

5=21%

2. How would you rate the teaching methods?

1=0

2=5%

3=11%

4=42%

5=42%

3. How would you rate the structure of the event?

1=0
2=0
3=0
4=37%
5=63%

4. How useful was the background documentation?

1=0
2=5%
3=16%
4=37%
5=42%

5. How would you rate the organisation of the event?

1=0
2=0
3=0
4=26%
5=74%

6. How would you rate the discussions and participation of the attendees?

1=0
2=11%
3=16%
4=52%
5=21%

7. How well did you feel that the event addressed the main topic?

[18 responses]

1=0
2=0
3=5%
4=56%
5=39%

8. Was the cost acceptable?

Y=18

N=1

9. Did this event meet your expectations? If not, why not?

Y=19

N=0

10. What will you be able to take from this event back to your own organisations?

All participants responded positively to this question. The majority highlighted knowledge of the principles of digital preservation and new ideas on how the problem could be addressed as being the key things they would be able to take back to their own workplaces. A number of participants also highlighted specific sessions as providing useful information. Five responses stated the preservation planning process as being a helpful approach for their work, whilst three noted file formats and two metadata. One participant noted that their organisation would be interested in the work of Planets.

11. What else would you like to have seen covered at this event?

Eleven participants provided responses to this question, with a variety of answers. Two participants said that they would have liked more technical information, whilst another would have liked more information on dissemination, usability and access. The use of examples was also highlighted by several participants (3 mentions), with requests for demonstrations, more practical recommendations and examples, or alternatively a more detailed focus on one specific example. One responder mentioned more group work, and another requested a larger variety of information than just that provided in the presentations. Refinement of exercise and group work could therefore be a possible way to make future improvements. Finally, three participants specifically commented that they were satisfied with the course and could not think of any changes.

12. What did you like best about this event?

Eighteen participants responded to this question. A significant number highlighted more general aspects of the event (5 mentions), such as organisation, speakers, structure and teaching methods. The file formats and preservation planning sessions received specific praise, with one participant commenting how they found the low level of technical information in the former session the most helpful.

Eight participants gave specific attention to the exercises and practical work, complementing the way this teaching method encouraged them to think about digital preservation for themselves. Finally in relation to this two attendees commented on the social aspect of the event and how they enjoyed meeting and working with the other participants.

13. What did you like least?

Only nine participants responded to this question, with no one aspect receiving a large amount of criticism. Four comments were made on the presentations, with the tempo of particular sessions noted as tedious. One participant also commented that the explanation of the Planets project was too wide in relation to the topics covered at the event.

Two participants commented on the varying language skills and technical background of participants being an obstacle, making discussions and agreements during exercises more difficult.

One participant highlighted the lack of background documentation as an issue, with the material on Moodle not linked directly enough to the individual sessions and not made accessible early enough. Other points noted in individual responses were the quality of handouts, the lack of time and the weather!

14. How did you hear about this training event?

An organisation or institution (please specify): -

- National Archives of Poland – 2
- Library – 2
- Vilnius University Library – 1

Colleague – 9

Web search – 1

Planets website – 0

DPE website – 3

Nestor website – 0

Other – 1 (“email and conference”)

Participants could provide multiple answers to this question. The most effective method was clearly word of mouth, with nine attendees learning about the event from a colleague. Promotion by individual institutions was also successful, with five attendees hearing through a library or archive (it was not clear if they were members of staff from these organisations).

The evidence of three responses stating the DPE website as their source highlights the growing use of this site as a place to learn about current events and developments in digital preservation. In contrast no attendee noted the Planets or nestor websites as alerting them to the event.

15. What motivated you to attend?

Multiple answers were again accepted for this question. By far the most popular reason for attendance was an overall interest in the topic (16), showing a continued need for courses of this nature. This was also the most common answer to be provided on its own. The next most popular reason was an interest in DPE/Planets/nestor who ran the event (6), emphasising the importance of the training activities for these projects. Location (4) and speakers (4) were also a significant reason, and one participant noted the hands-on aspect of the course as being a key cause of interest.

16. Are you likely to attend other DPE/Planets/CASPAR events in the future?

Seventeen responses were provided to this question, with fifteen attendees saying yes and two saying ‘maybe’. One participant commented that their attendance would be dependent on the topic, location and budget of their organisation.

17. Additional comments

Only two participants provided additional comments. One asked for access to the reading earlier, a point which had been echoed by another participant in a previous question. The second answer requested “more time to rest”, highlighting the intensive nature of the course.

About you

18. Who do you work for?

Multiple answers to this question were possible. The sector with the most attendees was the library community (11), followed by archives (5). Given the nature of the conference linked to the event, the backgrounds of the speakers and the promotion channels used, this result is not surprising. The presence of four participants from academic institutions represents the increasing interest in digital preservation from this group. One participant from a commercial company and one from a public sector organisation also attended.

19. What previous experience, if any, does your institution have in digital preservation?

Fifteen participants responded to this question. A variety of experience was listed, including digitisation of scientific journals, sound records and manuscripts, along with the archiving of digital documents and datasets. One participant commented that they were involved in some ongoing projects but that these were not well thought through. Two responses stated an involvement in digital preservation projects, indicating that this type of course is of value even to those already involved in digital preservation activities.

Three participants stated that their organisations were just starting work on digital preservation, indicating a reason for their attending a digital preservation training course at this stage. Four participants stated that their institution had no previous experience in digital preservation.

20. How many people does your institution employ?

The figures in this response varied widely, from four people within an individual department to 1000 within an academic institution. The vast majority of participants who came from libraries said that their institution employed between 200 and 500 people, whilst archives had slightly smaller numbers ranging from 50 to 200. The general figures do indicate that participants were mostly from larger organisations.

21. What is your function?

Seven participants were Librarians, whilst four were Archivists/Digital Archivists. Individuals from more technical posts were also well represented with two Technicians, an IT analyst, a Software Developer and a Consultant for library and archive software. The remaining positions listed were Digital Archive Builder, Administrator and Bibliographer.

Conclusion

The overall feedback confirms that this training event was a great success. The organisation and structure were highly rated, and the course met all participants' expectations, providing them with useful knowledge to take back to their own institutions. The sessions also generated interest in current developments and solutions, including those from the Planets project.

The speakers and teaching methods received high praise. Though the lecture format could prove tiresome at times the examples and group work were a definite highlight of the event. Some refinement of these activities could be one possible improvement for future courses.

Background documentation was also rated as useful, though some comments indicate earlier access to these types of materials would have allowed participants to ensure better preparation for the individual sessions.

The keenness to attend future events is final proof of the positive effect of the course, both in terms of the quality of training provided and the enjoyment of the event for attendees.