

Feedback summary

DPE/Planets/CASPAR/nesstor joint training event 'Starting out: preserving digital objects – principles and practice'

National Library of the Czech Republic, Charles University
Prague, Czech Republic
13-17 October 2008

The joint DPE/Planets/CAPAR/nesstor training event, 'Starting out: preserving digital objects – principles and practice', was held at the National Library of Czech Republic and Charles University, Prague, on 13-17 October 2008. 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. In addition to the face to face training students were also provided with one week pre-course training and one week post-course training through the DPE moodle. The course was held in cooperation with the "WePreserve" Forum, providing participants an insight into cutting-edge research and development activity from a number of European Commission funded projects and 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 sector, as well as other institutions such as data archives, government departments, legal and commercial sectors with an interest in the topic.

Twenty seven participants and eleven trainers attended the event. At the end of the course participants were provided with a feedback form to complete. Twenty five forms were returned, giving a response rate of 92.6%. 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?

[note: only 23 responses out of a possible 25 were received for this question]

1=0
2=0
3=13%
4=83%
5=4%

2. How would you rate the teaching methods?

1=0
2=0
3=36%
4=52%
5=12%

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

1=0
2=0
3=13%
4=39%
5=48%

4. How useful was the background documentation?

[note: only 24 responses out of a possible 25 were received for this question]

1=0
2=12%
3=25%
4=46%
5=17%

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

[note: only 24 responses out of a possible 25 were received for this question]

1=0
2=0
3=0
4=21%
5=79%

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

1=0
2=0
3=16%
4=44%
5=40%

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

Y=25
N=0

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

All participants responded to this question. The majority highlighted that they would take back to their own workplaces a better understanding of the key areas of digital preservation, a broad overview of the issues surrounding it, knowledge about current digital preservation initiatives in Europe. A significant number of participants also mentioned gaining an understanding of existing standards and

toolkits, the need for preservation planning and documentation, helpful ideas regarding the development of strategic initiatives in their own countries. Some participants highlighted specific sessions as providing useful information. Six respondents stated the preservation planning process as being a helpful approach for their work, whilst three noted OAIS model and two file formats. One participant indicated that their organisation would be interested in seeking contacts with Planets. One noted that there is the need for other colleagues to attend similar training events.

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

Seventeen participants provided responses to this question. The majority highlighted the need for more practical examples (7 participants), hands-on exercises and case studies (6 participants). Two participants indicated that they would have liked more technical information, more topics about hardware and methods of data storage, whilst another two would have liked to hear more about web archiving. One participant specifically commented that he was satisfied with the course and could not think of any changes.

10. What did you like best about this event?

[Please note that participants could provide more than one answer to this question.]

All participants responded to this question, with a variety of answers. A significant number of participants highlighted the value of the social elements of this event. In particular, several stated that they enjoyed meeting other participants from range of institutional backgrounds, working with them, discussing and exchanging knowledge (7 participants). Four participants mentioned that they liked the speakers, topics and material available on Moodle. The sessions on file formats (8 participants, DRAMBORA (5 participants), PLATO (2 participants) and digital preparation and requirements (1 participant) received specific praise, with one participant commenting that he discovered so many tools during the event which could help to build a trusted digital repository.

Six participants remarked on the organization and overall atmosphere of the event. One respondent mentioned the group work and practical exercises as being the most valuable aspects of the course. And finally one participant noted the importance of all four projects coming together to collaborate demonstrating their way of handling digital preservation.

11. What did you like least?

Twenty participants responded to this question, but only one aspect received a large amount of criticism. Eight participants commented that course was too intensive and sessions too long, it was hard to concentrate, especially in the afternoons. Four participants also commented that some sessions were too long or too technical and as a result it was hard to retain all of the information presented. One participant also commented that some speakers were hard to understand, cause their voices were too quiet.

Two participants highlighted the lack of background documentation as an issue, with the recommended readings not made accessible early enough. Other points noted in individual responses were that there was an overabundance of food, the lunch breaks were too long, that they did not like moving from one place to another and one participant commented on the mattress in their accommodation.

12. How did you hear about this training event?

An organisation or institution (please specify): -

- National Library of the Czech Republic – 3
- HATII (University of Glasgow) – 2
- Slovak National Museum – 1
- Colleague – 9

- Web search – 1
- Planets website – 0
- DPE website – 1
- CASPAR website - 2
- Nestor website – 1
- WePreserve website - 0
- Other – 5

The other methods included learning about the event from various mailing lists and discussion groups.

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 six attendees hearing through the library, museum or university (they were members of staff or students from these organisations). This highlights the importance of the brand we have built surrounding WePreserve in relation to the success of our events.

The evidence of four responses stating the DPE, CASPAR and nestor websites as their source indicates the growing use of these sites as a place to learn about current events and developments in digital preservation. In contrast no attendee noted the Planets or WePreserve websites as alerting them to the event. Mailing lists and discussion groups were also very popular sources of information, with 5 attendees mentioning them.

13. What motivated you to attend?

Participants could provide multiple answers to this question. By far the most popular reason for attendance was an overall interest in digital preservation (20 participants), showing a continued need for introductory courses in this field. This was also the most common answer to be provided on its own (9 participants). The next most popular reason was an interest in DPE, Planets, CASPAR and nestor projects who ran the event (6), emphasising the importance of the training activities for these projects. Location (5) and speakers (4) were also a significant reason.

14. Additional comments

Only five participants provided additional comments, and the comments were very diverse. Participants asked for more interesting events like this (1 participant), for a course on the preservation tools (1 participant) and for more information in Moodle before training event starts (1 participant). One participant commented that this event could benefit from shorter presentations and more hands-on experience. Finally one more participant commented that was too many hand-outs.

About you

15. Who do you work for?

Again multiple answers to this question were possible. The sector with the most attendees was the library community (13), followed by academic institutions (4). 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. Presence of four participants from academic institutions indicates increasing interest in digital preservation from this group. Two participants from archives, commercial companies and consultancy also attended the event. There was one participant from Nongovernmental organization and one from Research council. Alternative sectors and demographic groups could be successfully targeted in the future if an alternative dissemination strategy is followed.

16. What is your function?

The participants of this training event held very diverse roles. Five participants identified themselves as librarians, and three as analysts and/or consultants. Individuals from more technical posts were also well represented with two system administrators, a support engineer, a web archivist and an IT specialist. The remaining positions listed were Digital curator, Project manager, Manager of archivists and IT, Digital preservation department assistant, Digital Repository developer, Director-library advisor, Scientific associate, Researcher and two Students.

Conclusion

The overall feedback confirms that this training event was a great success. The organisation was highly rated, and the course met all participants' expectations, providing them with useful knowledge to take back to their own institutions. Participants particularly appreciated the informal exchange of ideas and group discussions with other researchers, international experts, and practitioners. The sessions also generated interest in current developments and solutions, including those from the DPE, Planets, CASPAR and nestor projects.

The structure and speakers received high praise as well. Though the lecture format could prove too intensive and tiresome at times. Participants expressed a desire for more practical examples and would appreciate more hands-on exercises involving specific preservation tools and case studies. These comments clearly demonstrate the value of providing hands-on exercises to the learning experience of the attendees.

Another issue, which requires refinement in future iterations of this course, is the earlier access to background documentation. Earlier access to recommended readings would result in the students better understanding and mastering the teaching material presented during the course itself.

By providing students with the opportunity of meeting colleagues and exchanging information and experiences of digital preservation, we hope to have helped establish and develop a new community of future collaborators that will endure for years to come.