

**CULT, 2 December 2014**

**Documentary heritage: conservation, access and public**

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The National Library of Wales was founded by Royal Charter as a charity in 1907. It is a copyright library, and holds extensive manuscript collections as well as fine art, photography and film/video/sound. It has played a prominent role in defining Welsh national identity. It operates bilingually, holds material in some 250 world languages, and employs 300 people. Its analogue and digital services are provided free of charge to users. Its objectives are to *preserve* the nation's *heritage* for the *public benefit*.

I shall speak from the experience of my own institution, but the three key concepts embedded in the Charter are of far broader significance:

*Preservation* - now includes preservation and conservation of digital and born-digital materials as well as traditional analogue private and public records;

*Heritage* - the redistribution of power within nation states is shifting the definition of what constitutes the heritage that requires preservation, and by whom;

*Public benefit* - we are no longer in the Reithian days when national institutions defined the cultural diet of the public. The challenge is to build from the ground up, in physical and virtual communities, a set of requirements that we must provide for as public services.

An integrated approach to documentary heritage at this point in time refers to at least three different but related groups of priorities, viz.

1. the integration of the security, preservation and conservation of public and private records with a strategic approach to digitisation and the improvement of public access to documentary materials;
2. the integration of good practice in each of the above areas of expertise with research/structural funds networks across state frontiers;
3. the integration of institutional practices, public demand and governmental priorities. Given that c. 90% of our funding comes from Welsh Government via an annual Grant in Aid, areas of current development include contributing to a 'cultural offer' for domestic and international tourism, support for business (creative industries in particular), education, digital literacy, tackling poverty and public health.

The core of my evidence will be drawn from these three themes.

Each of these involves the integration and continued enhancement of skills and strategies in the context of severe financial restrictions.

The extent to which the heritage sector can continue to carry out its social functions rests to a considerable extent on its capacity to extend its sources of funding from its traditional, Government-supported model and develop a more diversified, and sustainable, set of funding-streams (including from e-commerce, crowd-funding, donors). That in turn requires a renewed partnership with our existing and potential users. Ultimately, that can only be successful if the cultural strategy we develop is both international in extent and spans a broadly-based range of institutions and cultural disciplines.