Dig Digital.

Work Digital. Think Archive. Create Access.

A guide to managing digital data generated from archaeological investigations.

Infosheet #3 – digital archives in the UK

The Dig Digital guidance and resource is relevant to anyone collecting data as part of an archaeological project. When it comes to the nitty gritty, however, there is some variation depending on which country you are working in.

Differences across the UK do not substantially affect the everyday collection and management of the archive during project delivery. Regional variation between local authorities and monitoring organisations is not unexpected and pre-planning documentation should support a clear archive strategy from the outset. In addition, supporting documents and processes, such as the data management plan and Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives, will articulate project-specific needs.

The country a project is delivered in will impact the archive in specific areas and these largely relate to the intended repository. To provide some background, this case study summarises key differences across the UK, signposting the best places to check for detailed information about archives management for each nation.

The Dig Digital resource is an Archaeological Archives Forum guidance document that supports CIfA Standards and guidance. It was created by DigVentures, in partnership with CIfA, and funded by Historic England.

You can find the full resource online at: https://www.archaeologists.net/digdigital

OASIS

An important part of the digital archives process is the creation of appropriate levels of documentation and signposting, to make sure your project is findable – the first step in meeting FAIR principles. As part of the Dig Digital guidance, it is recommended that an OASIS index record is initiated at the start of the project, then regularly updated. Creating an OASIS record for each archaeological project is required by most local authorities within development projects, and national heritage bodies in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland also require its use, although OASIS is not used in Wales.

- **England** – OASIS form should be used for all project types on project initiation. Information entered through OASIS is shared with relevant HERs and Historic England. Research results can also be linked to the corresponding research framework.

- **Scotland** – OASIS form should be used for all project types on project initiation. Information entered through OASIS is interoperable with Canmore and shared with relevant HERs and the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (ScARF) panels. OASIS can also be used to submit reports to Discovery Excavation Scotland (DES).

- **Wales** – OASIS is not used in Wales. Project teams are advised to inform the relevant HER of any projects undertaken in their areas.

- **Northern Ireland** – OASIS form is used for licensed excavations and investigations. Designed to record project data linked to information from licensed excavations and investigations. The record forms part of reporting to the Historic Environment Division's Excavation Licensing Team.

Digital archive repositories

To meet the CIfA Standard in relation to archaeological archives, accredited professionals and Registered Organisations need to demonstrate that the project archive is *ordered, stable and accessible*. The intended repository should be able to provide assurance that digital archives are stored to *recognised standards for long-term preservation and made accessible for consultation*.

A simple way to achieve this is to deposit the digital archive element of your project archive with a trusted digital repository (TDR), as recommended within the CIfA *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives*. The recognised universal quality stamp that provides assurance that the repository fits the bill is the Core Trust Seal accreditation. However, there is a limited number of certified repositories in the UK and requirements for deposition within the four nations means it is not always possible to deposit with a Core Trust Seal certified repository.

Currently, there are two UK-based digital repositories that have gained Core Trust Seal certification and that regularly accept archaeological archives: the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) and Historic Environment Scotland (HES). In addition, the national repository for digital archives in Wales, RCAHMW, is working towards Core Trust Seal certification. In Northern Ireland, digital archive products should be deposited with HERoNI, which is not yet certified.

In summary, the headlines for each of the four nations are:

- **England** – there is no national repository required to be used for digital archives. Follow CIfA Standards and guidance, alongside requirements as outlined in the project design/WSI and the deposition guidelines of the relevant repository. Currently, the only certified trusted digital repository accepting archaeological archives in England is ADS. Deposition guidelines for ADS are available at: https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/deposit.xhtml

- **Wales** – the national repository for digital archaeological archives is the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW). RCAHMW are working towards Core Trust Seal accreditation. Standards for archaeological archives are covered by a National Standard and guidance, which includes an appendix specifically relating to digital archives produced by RCAHMW. Information relating to archives in Wales can be found at: http://www.welshmuseumsfederation.org/en/news-archive/resources-landing/Collections/national-standard-and-guidance-for-collecting-and-depositing-archaeological-archives-in-wales-2017.html

- **Scotland** – Historic Environment Scotland (HES) is the principal repository for archive material relating to all archaeological projects. The finds archive (including samples) needs to be declared through the Treasure Trove process but the documentary archive, which includes paper and digital materials, is managed directly via HES. HES have Core Trust Seal certification and will accept digital archives free of charge. Guidelines for depositors to HES are currently available via Canmore at: https://canmore.org.uk/content/depositors-information

- **Northern Ireland** – the Historic Environment Record of Northern Ireland (HERoNI) is the national repository for digital archives relating to all archaeological investigations undertaken. In Northern Ireland, a licence is required to search for archaeological material, including objects, if the search involves ground disturbance. This includes all archaeological excavations, which must be directed by a qualified archaeologist, as licensed by the Department for Communities. Current guidelines for report and archive deposition requirements can be viewed at: https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/archaeological-excavation-licence-documents. The Historic Environment Division (HED) are currently working towards specific guidance for the preparation and deposition of archaeological digital archives and collections.

Data management and deposition process

Each country or specific repository has a process for deposition, but irrespective of this, the use of a **data management plan** will support the management of the project archive and ensure that the right framework is in place from the outset.

All digital project archives deposited will need to be accompanied by project metadata, including:

- digital deposition form/collection-level metadata form

- technical documentation/file-level metadata

Finally, the data deposited in any repository will need to be organised, including storing the selected project archive within a logical folder structure and using a unique file-naming system.

As such, project workflow processes should ensure that appropriate information is recorded as data is collected and documented; this will make the deposition of the selected project archive as simple as possible.