2021 Draft Recommendations: Sustainable Data Practices for Artists and Art Stakeholders (v1)

Feedback to any or all of these recommendations is welcome by email before 31 Dec 2021.

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Given the current and growing importance of the digital cultural heritage landscape to the lives of working artists, my research addresses how contemporary UK artists use the Internet and digital information in their practices. More information on the project is available here, here and here, and slides from a Sep 2018 presentation at MIT covering aims, sample and key findings are available here. I'm very happy to send further contextual information / answer any questions on request.

The research is based on approximately 150 hours' worth of case study-length interviews with DACS Payback[1] members (i.e. contemporary professional visual artists working in various visual artforms, from many age brackets, from across the UK). My research suggests the following recommendations for the following six groups of stakeholders:

1. Artists
2. Art funders
3. Art education providers
4. Art advocacy organisations such as DACS, Artquest, artists' unions, etc.
5. Information science and research data advocacy organisations
6. Government

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Feedback to any or all of these recommendations is welcome by email (laura[at]codata[dot]org) before 31 Dec 2021. Please make feedback specific and actionable. Any suggestions for points that you feel should be added are also welcome. Please state your contact details and specify to which stakeholder group you belong. Recommendations are numbered for easy reference. Thank you for your input – it is greatly appreciated.

Please also contact me if you have any questions about this work, or if you have feedback on improving / creating a version of this text for dyslexic people, or would like to translate the text into another language.

1. Recommendations to Artists

My research has found that artists generally already produce immense cultural and economic value on very limited resources (time, money, energy) and it is important to avoid imposing an apparently heavy burden

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[1] https://www.dacs.org.uk/for-artists/payback

of new responsibilities on this group. Instead, the suggestions are intended to support existing practice, and to respond to points that were raised regularly by interview participants.

1.1 Artists are encouraged to undertake reflective activity on their work on as regular a basis as resources allow (for example, annually) either alone or with peers;

1.2 Reflection on practice could include mapping the artist's tasks and activities to the Workflow Analysis Model that will be published with final reporting of this work (please email laura[at]codata[dot]org to be notified when this is available). This is a simplified view of the key groups of tasks and skills that artists are regularly responsible for. Comparing an artist's own activities with this model can deliver a clear view of any skills gaps, which can then be brought to the attention of advocacy organisations and CPD training organisations;

1.3 Those artists that teach may also be able to consider using the Model with their students and / or current teaching curriculum in order to identify skills gaps and advocate for skills support in the curriculum at their institution;

1.4 Artists are urged to review all user agreements to which they have signed up, for all digital services and platforms in which they store or transmit any digital information or digital objects such as images. This is to ensure artists understand all the ways in which each platform or service can use, store, and potential sell or share the user's digital information;

1.5 Artists are encouraged to talk to their funders and advocacy organisations about including the costs of curation and preservation of their digital objects as part of any funding proposal;

1.6 Artists should be aware of the high level of risk to portable digital media such as USB sticks and plug-in external hard drives. These tools are useful and affordable but highly at risk of loss or breakage, and if used, should be kept carefully and in strict accordance with manufacturer instructions, not all kept in the same location, clearly labelled, and hold only one of several identical copies of digital information. Material kept on such portable media should be regularly checked (at least annually) and important files should be copied onto a fresh disk every five years or so to guard against loss or corruption of files;

1.7 Artists should review the advice published by the Library of Congress[2] and Purdue University on preservation of personal digital materials. Whilst these resources are written for people dealing with family photographs and the like, each one clearly spells out the basic principles and key challenges of digital archiving various types of file, and the guidance on digital images is particularly relevant;

1.8 Artists can benefit from high quality publicly-funded tools for the preservation of digital objects, and to get recognition if you make things available and other artists use them. Examples include:

   1.8.1 The Zenodo platform for self-deposit, description and storage of valued digital objects, which has easy sharing buttons and persistent online locations for each thing you deposit.

   1.8.2 The ORCID service is a free way to create an online identifier that will connect you to your digital objects regardless of whether you move country or job, and will ensure that your online work is identified with you rather than with another person with a

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[2] Ironically at the time of publication this linked webpage was suddenly unavailable. The hosting institution reported that access will be restored quickly. If necessary, however, a copy is available at https://web.archive.org/web/20210811114700/https://digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/.

similar name. Whilst aimed primarily at researchers, anyone who is keen to be recognised by a scholarly audience can use this service, and there is compatibility with Zenodo.

    1.8.3 [Creative Commons licensing](#) is a way to provide a clear visual mark on online digital objects such as images or writing. In the UK, a creative work does not need to be labelled with a copyright symbol or other mark to be copyrighted – copyright is automatic when a creative work is made. However, the clear badging provided by Creative Commons makes the work visibly copyrighted which can help to communicate your copyright and your conditions of use to anyone from any country. A CC license clearly specifies what can and cannot be done with the resource.

Remember to read and understand the documentation for each of these tools and make sure that you are happy with your choices for each digital resource you put online;

1.9   If in doubt, artists should consult DACS for more information on UK copyright issues: https://www.dacs.org.uk/knowledge-base/frequently-asked-questions.

2. Recommendations to Art Funders

2.1   Develop and share an up-to-date understanding of artists' contemporary working practices, on an iterative basis recognising that art work continues to evolve. This includes the full range of activities and skills required by artists to search for, retrieve information on, and respond to funding calls, and to effectively research and make work, and carry out communication activities;

2.2   Commission qualitative and quantitative research to achieve this where there are gaps in the knowledge landscape for your intended audiences;

2.3   Allow resources (funding, practical assistance) for artists to understand funding opportunities and develop quality proposals in response, particularly those with lower profile practices, those with challenges such as dyslexia; and under-represented groups;

2.4   Make policy, guidance, instructions and other communications available in dyslexia-friendly formats;

2.5   Allow resources (funding, time, guidance) for artists to create documentation of sufficient quality in appropriate formats, when this is required in order to submit a proposal;

2.6   Consider open submission platforms / methods when requesting documentation and other materials (including digital objects) as part of the proposal process. Use only platforms with visible and usable licensing options for submitted content, rather than stipulating the use of commercial platforms with complex terms of use. Platforms that do not ensure protection of users' data and / or copyright in their submissions and / or do not allow visual and simple licensing indications of user contributions should be particularly avoided;

2.7   Be clear in all policy documents and relevant communications about your policy on user data including visual and other digital objects submitted as part of funding proposals: this includes specification of whether, when and how data and digital objects will be destroyed, whether and how data and digital objects will be kept and/or re-used, and a plain-language statement of any copyright or licensing implications for artists in regard to any material submitted by them to you;

2.8 Ensure all staff members understand your policies on user data including their individual responsibilities;

2.9 When designing submission and communication processes, aim to minimise the amount of unpaid labour these processes oblige artists to undertake;

2.10 Consider in consultation with artists whether in-person attendance is required at meetings, or whether digital communication methods might be more efficient or appropriate. If in-person presence is desired, make funding available for artists' time and for travel expenses where required;

2.11 In project budgets submitted by artists, encourage the inclusion of a budget line specifically for medium to long-term archiving solutions for the safe preservation of key project outputs, in order to keep these digital cultural heritage objects findable, accessible, understandable, attributable and reusable for future generations;

2.12 Explore feasibility of an open, sustainable digital archive for deposit by funded artists which allows easy upload and description of a wide range of formats, provision of persistent identifiers for deposited items, and the ability to access holdings by the widest possible audience. Zenodo provides an excellent example of such functionality. Any such platform should also be publicly funded (rather than commercial), have long term preservation and sustainability planning in place and provide users with the means to apply descriptive metadata and clear unambiguous licences to uploads.

3. Recommendations to Art Education Providers - Higher Education Institution (HEI) or Continuing Professional Development (CPD) contexts

3.1 Acknowledge that there are currently real barriers to excellence in art-making posed by economic and skills challenges that are not currently directly and accessibly addressed by many art schools and other training providers;

3.2 Acknowledge that artists are already depending on effective digital object creation, retrieval, use and re-use to engage in the cultural heritage economy and sustain a career. These skills are no longer additional – they are *central to survival in art making now*. Fostering skills in this area is part of preparing students/learners to sustain a career in professional visual art making and underpins excellence across art forms without in any way restricting conceptual or methodological choices;

3.3 Develop and share understanding of artists' contemporary working practices on an iterative basis, recognising that art working practices continue to evolve, including activities at all levels of the Workflow Analysis Model presented in this study. Some suggestions include:

    3.3.1 Collaborate with funding bodies and art advocacy organisations to benefit from their research on members' / users' requirements and practices.

    3.3.2 Commission qualitative and quantitative research to achieve up-to-date understanding of current art working practices where there are gaps in the knowledge landscape for your intended audiences;

3.4 Develop or reinforce preliminary understanding of the basic concepts of digital curation, digital preservation and information literacy across the workforce in order to be able to advocate to/advise students and learners. The Digital Curation Centre's Curation Lifecycle

[Model](#) lays out the idea of the reiterative, ongoing phases of digital object care; the Digital Preservation Coalition's [Getting Help webpage](#) provides an overview of key terms and ideas in non-specialist language, and their [Digital Preservation Handbook](#) includes an accessible glossary of terms and concepts; and the CILIP Information Literacy Group's [School Resource Sheets](#) – particularly those on undertaking online search and on copyright - are good starting points for staff awareness and also for use in the training room. The British Library also offers [guides to copyright and IP](#) for general audiences. [Appleton et al (2017)](#) offer some good ideas for information literacy teaching in the tertiary education art school context. All these resources are free to access online.

3.5   Regularly review current curriculum offerings rigorously in the light of a full and up-to-date understanding of artists' skills requirements, and by mapping current regular curriculum coverage (excluding the content of occasional / guest lectures) to the activities and skills presented in the Workflow Analysis Model presented in this study (email laura[at]codata[dot]org to receive this when available), as a simple way to identify any gaps in training coverage.

3.6   Embed advocacy (i.e. awareness-raising) and training (i.e. skills provision) in digital information search, retrieval, creation, storage, use, re-use and archiving/preservation as credit-bearing core competences in the curriculum of undergraduate and graduate taught programmes, grounded in examples and use cases relevant to art making. If you are in the university context, consider approaching the teaching team of any digital curation programmes or digital-friendly archival science programmes, or the institutional research data management team, to investigate possibilities for collaborative teaching or training.

3.7   Promote advocacy in digital information search, retrieval, creation, storage, use, re-use and archiving/preservation to individuals undertaking postgraduate research programmes (in the higher education context) and to artists in professional practice (in the CPD context);

3.8   Collaborate with digital preservation, information literacy, digital curation, digital archive, digital librarian and research data management professionals to develop advocacy messaging and to locate or develop training materials and/or courses appropriate for your audience. These advocacy and training interventions should be prepared and delivered in language appropriate to the visual art making domain.

3.9   If you are operating within the university context, contact the university library, archives and research data management services departments to locate institutional expertise to support the development of advocacy and training resources.

4.   Recommendations to Art advocacy/representative organisations

4.1   Acknowledge that artists are already depending on effective digital object creation, retrieval, use and re-use to engage in the cultural heritage economy and sustain a career. These skills are no longer additional – they are *central to survival in art making now*. Fostering skills in this area is part of helping artists to sustain a career in professional visual art making and underpins excellence across art forms;

4.2   Advocate to funding bodies for development of cohesive, ethical policy in digital object creation, retrieval, storage, preservation, use, and re-use;

4.3   Seek opportunities to collaborate on skills development for artists in effective digital object creation, retrieval, use and re-use;

4.4   Where funding allows, commission qualitative and quantitative research to achieve this where there are gaps in the knowledge landscape for your members;

4.5   Make policy, guidance, instructions and other communications available in dyslexia-friendly formats;

4.6   Be clear in all policy documents and relevant communications about your policy on members' data submitted to you: this includes specification of whether, when and how data and digital objects will be destroyed, whether and how data and digital objects will be kept and/or re-used, and a plain-language statement of any copyright or licensing implications for artists in regard to any material submitted by them to you;

4.7   Ensure all staff members understand your policies on membership data including the individual responsibilities of staff members for ethical data stewardship;

4.8   Consider in consultation with artists whether in-person attendance is required at meetings, or whether digital communication methods might be more efficient or appropriate. If in-person presence is desired, make funding available for artists' time and for travel expenses where possible.

5.   Recommendations to Information Science and Research Data Advocacy Organisations

5.1   Remember that not everyone who might benefit from your work / research findings / training materials / advocacy resources is based in the sciences. Further, some potential users (including lone researchers, citizen scientists, sole traders and artists) are not working in the institutional context but could still find information sciences and digital information skills very useful. Truly useful principles can be applicable in new contexts: consider your language and terminology in order to be as broadly applicable as possible and, ideally, get feedback on your final text from a mixture of users from different domains before publication;

5.2   Devote some resources specifically to the production of non-specialist language versions of deliverables including research reports, training materials and policy advice, so that these resources are accessible to and usable by those who are not from an information sciences, library and archives, or computing background. This could be in the form of a non-specialist language summary, the inclusion of a glossary at the beginning of the deliverable, or by creating versions of the entire deliverable written for different user groups. Collaboration with artists and those who advocate for artists is likely to help with finding terminology and examples meaningful to artists.

5.3   Expand sustainability efforts to support long-term access to digital preservation, digital curation, research data management and information literacy guidance, advice, training materials and research reports online. Too many projects and programmes of activity disappear from online access a year or two after funding ends. The key deliverables at least should be deposited in a digital object repository such as an institutional research repository with public open access to its holdings, or another long-term stable storage environment that provides a stable online identifier such as a DOI or URI.

6. Recommendations to Government

6.1 Government professes to value the cultural heritage sector. The growth of this sector contributes excellent value to the economy, but is largely based upon unfunded labour of artists. In order to ensure that visual art talent can be identified and supported as sustainably and ethically as possible, government funding for the arts, particularly those funds made available to artists themselves, must be protected in real terms, and opportunities identified for expansion of such funds;

6.2 Government-published statistics (from each of the four nations of the UK; the UK; and the EU) on visual artists are incredibly important for understanding the size and profile of the creative professions. The current granulation of categories in these published datasets is so large as to be almost useless for understanding the creative professions in any but the broadest terms. In particular, the current UK government approach of subsuming the entire 'cultural sector' into the enormous spread of the expanded remit of the UK Government's Department of 'Digital, Culture, Media and Sport' is a backwards step for clarity and usability of these datasets, and shows very little useful accommodation of the cultural heritage professions. The statistical bodies concerned should continue to refine and improve the methods used to gather and describe these statistics, in order to give as much flexibility and accuracy as possible, and allow fine-grained views of the creative professions.

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