

The Appraisal of Digital Records: Assessing More Than Value

This paper will discuss some of the key findings of InterPARES, an international collaborative research project about the long term preservation of authentic digital records. Appraisal was studied primarily as an archival function in the course of the first phase of the project, which focused on preservation, and as a function integrated in the entire records life-cycle in the second part of the project, which studied digital records from creation to preservation.

Although the research has demonstrated that digital records need to be appraised as an integral part of all the records of a creator, and that the values that are taken into consideration and the methodology for assessing them are not different from those that apply to all traditional records, it was quite clear that, with digital records, we should assess much more than values, and that, as a consequence, the processes necessary to carry out appraisal are more complex than the traditional ones and subject to several variables.

The presentation will show through reference to concrete case studies how, after having identified the digital components, the formal elements, the attributes, the characteristics and the degree of acceptable change of the digital records that are the subject of appraisal for continuing preservation, the appraiser needs to examine their behaviour and use over time, assess the functional requirements to be maintained, verify their accuracy and authenticity on an ongoing basis till the moment of transfer to the preserver, establish the feasibility of preservation in light of the technical capabilities and the resources of the preserving body, and determine the most appropriate format of transfer and mode of acquisition. In the process, it will be demonstrated that solutions to digital appraisal are dynamic and specific and require detailed plans for each given body of records.