

**Retention and Transfer Toolkit**  
**Case study: Amnesty International, April 2019**  
Amnesty International, International Secretariat:  
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## **Background**

Amnesty International's International Secretariat (IS) have a relatively well-resourced and mature information department. As a large, international organisation which creates an enormous volume of digital and electronic information, appraisal of records for long-term preservation is a challenge. Because the IS are committed to a digital records environment, it has been necessary for them to explore digital preservation in combination with appraisal of digital records. They have successfully set up SharePoint for the organisation and are moving away from shared drives and local servers, at the same time as finalising the set-up of Preservica, a specialist digital archive system.

As the IS prepare to ingest the first content into Preservica for long term digital preservation, their information team have had to make decisions around the appraisal and retention of born-digital records. The sheer volume of digital records mean that the same kind of appraisal techniques used for paper records just aren't possible, so they have chosen to adopt a macro appraisal model that looks more at collection level rather than the individual record level.

## **Approach**

The IS recognise the importance of managing the whole records lifecycle, and early intervention is a large part of their strategy. As much as possible, they are making appraisal decisions at the beginning of the records lifecycle. Before launching SharePoint, work was done to identify common content types and set up folder structures to help with macro appraisal and retention rules. Metadata and labels are applied to documents at creation, and users are responsible for choosing the correct content type and library location. This makes the appraisal process much easier, as retention rules can be automatically applied and managed at creation, and applied based on content type, site collection, or library.

The IS are maintaining good record-keeping practices, enforcing metadata application, using a clear collection strategy, and undertaking regular and ongoing training. By doing all this, they should have the solid foundation needed to make appraisal decisions much easier when considering transfer into Preservica.

## **Challenges**

Even with all this preparation, it is not always possible to know which records will be valuable in the future. This kind of decision ideally lies with the content owners themselves, who will have the expertise and context. Unfortunately, workers often don't have the time or inclination to apply retention rules manually, and due to staff turnover the owners themselves may have left by the time it comes to appraising the record.

The IS acknowledge that 'challenges are around process and people rather than technology, even with digital preservation'. They are taking care to ensure all staff are trained and there are proper policies and processes in place before any changes are introduced. As Information Manager, Fiona Bolt explained that 'all of this stuff depends on what we are doing about the training and the setting up. If you get buy-in and people really see and

understand the benefit of doing these tasks, then it should be easier down the road'. Ensuring people understand the purpose and benefits of a new digital preservation approach is vital to its success, and this includes maintaining senior stakeholder engagement and support, which can be difficult with large-scale ongoing projects like this.

As macro appraisal looks at a higher level than the individual record - be it project file, folder in a library, or SharePoint content type – there is an acknowledgement that some records may be preserved unnecessarily. Due to the volume of digital records, it is impossible to assess and appraise on an individual level, so appraisal decisions are applied to groups of records based on the business functions they relate to. Appraising at this high level does mean that the IS may end up preserving a greater number of records. To address this, carefully considered planning and strategy have gone into the information architecture and appraisal criteria, which should help minimise unnecessary preservation.

### **Key Learnings**

- The IS information team have made a lot of decisions and planned extensively before implementing any digital preservation strategy – they are making sure that proper processes are in place before actioning anything
- Understanding governance and ownership of records allows the right people to influence decisions around long-term value
- Training is hugely important – you need to make sure users understand what to do, and why it is important
- While having the technology and systems in place are necessary for long term digital preservation, having people who understand those systems and the content they hold is vital to effective appraisal
- Though it has taken time, it is 'so important that people understand that moving into this new world of centralised and more secure and monitored systems, you have to allow the right amount of time for it'.

Modern appraisal isn't just about setting up the right rules. Since appraisal decisions are now made earlier, how these are integrated into an organisation needs to be considered. The IS have found that rules alone do not guarantee long-term preservation of records they want to keep forever. Technology to preserve helps, but mostly, people are important – getting people to buy into storing things in the right place. Even with cutting edge technology and tools, the IS believes: 'we can't just hope that one day technology will rescue us', active people training has to happen first.