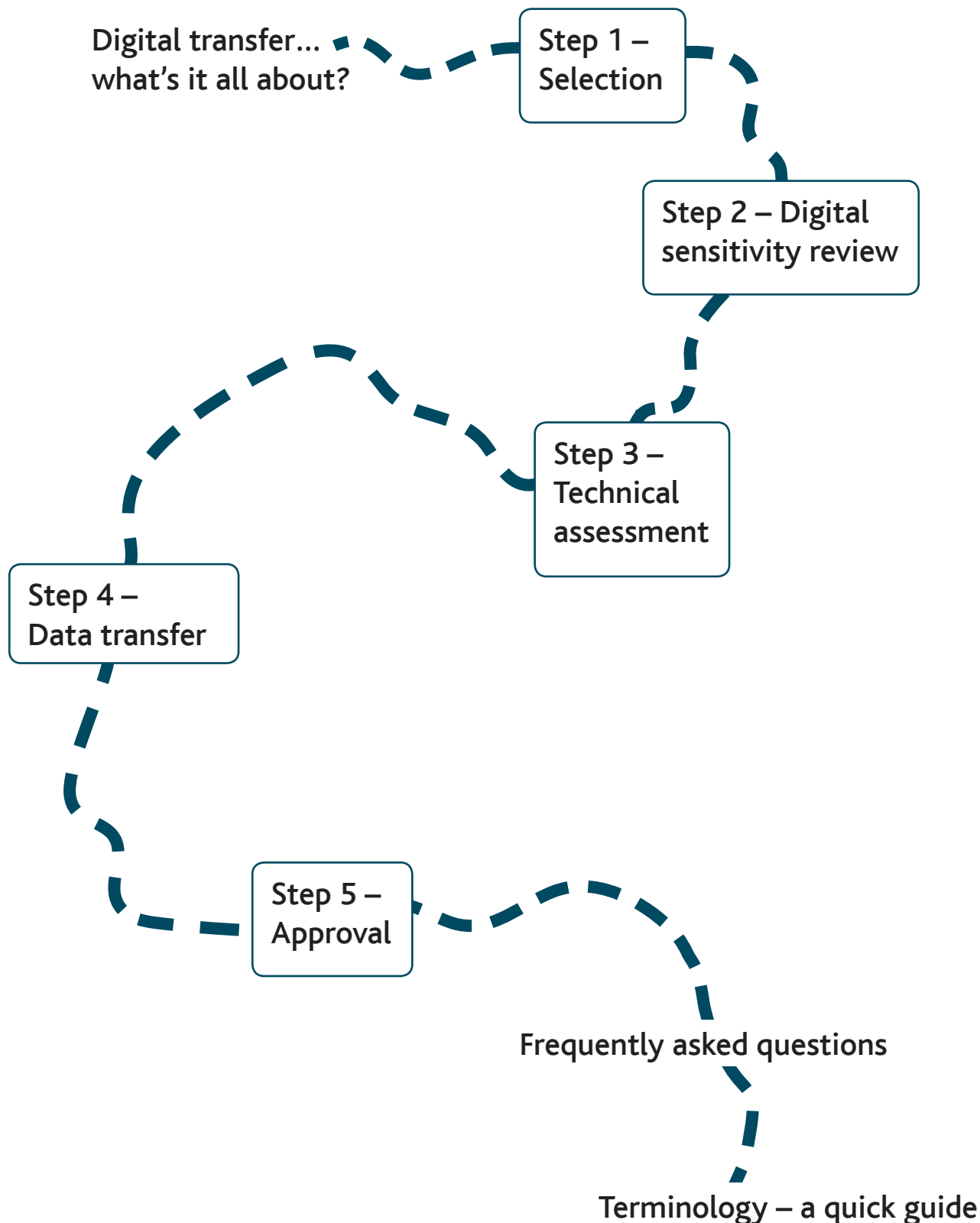


# Digital transfer road map



## Digital transfer... what's it all about?

An increasingly important development of The National Archives' role is to acquire, preserve and make available digital information that has been created in government departments. We need to ensure that this information is selected and preserved until it is ready to be transferred to The National Archives. We also need to facilitate the digital transfer of this information, to ensure its survival and to deliver open information to the public.

As the volume of digital information transferred to The National Archives increases over the next few years, we will need to automate as much of the process as possible if we are able to cope without a huge increase in staff. The National Archives would simply not be able to absorb the increased volume of digital information by scaling up its existing semi-manual processes.

Unlike paper records, digital records are very vulnerable and will not survive without active intervention. We cannot leave digital records on a shelf in an archive – they need active management and migration to remain accessible in the long term.

We now have a **Digital Repository System (DRS)** in place capable of providing secure long-term storage as well as a mechanism for transferring digital information from government departments to The National Archives. The five-step digital transfer roadmap sets the scene around what government departments need to do in order to undertake a digital transfer.

### Step 1 – Selection

You have probably noticed that working digitally brings with it new challenges in managing your information and records.

Information will be created in far greater volumes, be held in lots of different file formats, and it may be hard to form a clear view of what should be held on to and for how long.

Some of the digital information you hold and no longer require for ongoing business use will be suitable for permanent preservation at The National Archives, but much of it will not. The storage and preservation of digital records is costly, so it is important to ensure that only the right records are selected for preservation.

The best time to decide whether to keep or dispose of a digital record is at the point of creation. Ideally, the user would file the record in a folder in a structured file plan, which has already been assigned a retention period, or marked for disposal or permanent preservation at The National Archives.

If disposal criteria have not been built into your file plan, rather than attempting to assess the content and importance of your digital information, one record at a time, it is better to make high-level selection decisions based on an analysis of the structure and functions of your organisation.

The National Archives has developed three key tools to help you make these high-level selection decisions:

1. **Operational Selection Policies (OSPs)**
2. **What to Keep Schedules**
3. **Appraisal Reports**

**Operational Selection Policies** cover specific departments and types of record and are a guide to the kind of record The National Archives generally expects to select. They are available on our website.

Developing a **What to Keep Schedule** will help you to assess the value of your information and to decide how long it needs to be kept. The National Archives will be able to talk you through this process.

Compiling an **Appraisal Report** will help you to analyse the functions of your organisation in order to make selection decisions. Please consult The National Archives' website for further information about Appraisal Reports.

## Step 2 – Digital sensitivity review

Records that get selected for preservation at The National Archives will at some point be made freely available for members of the public (such as academics, family historians and anyone else with an interest).

Often this will happen as soon as the records are transferred to us. However, sometimes whole records or parts of records will need to be held closed for a period. The National Archives will be able to offer advice on what sort of information should be closed on transfer (that is, information covered by Freedom of Information exemptions).

Identifying sensitive information in a digital context does present challenges. This is because collections of digital records tend to be larger in volume, making them more difficult and time consuming to review. The records are also likely to be younger in age than the paper records you review, making them more likely to contain sensitive information.

Business units will usually hold the knowledge and expertise around the sensitivities and the context of the information they produce, so should be encouraged to flag the sensitivity at the point of creation. This will help inform the sensitivity review once the information is ready to be transferred to The National Archives.

Undertaking a risk assessment on those records selected for permanent preservation will help you ensure that your sensitivity review is carried out at an appropriate level for the type and volume of information being transferred.

Before you undertake your review you might want to consider the following:

- At what level of sensitivity will review take place? Is folder level sufficient or will it need a line by line review?
- What volume of records is involved?
- What formats are you dealing with? Text, image, video, audio and so on.
- What types of sensitivities are associated with the information? Personal, policy, threat to national security and so on.

The National Archives is currently researching tools to assist with sensitivity review but there is no magic wand. Your risk assessment will ultimately dictate the level of human intervention needed to undertake your sensitivity review.

It is the responsibility of the transferring department to conduct a sensitivity review on all records selected for permanent preservation at The National Archives and this needs to be undertaken prior to transfer.

## Step 3 – Technical assessment

Before any digital transfer can take place we need to undertake a technical assessment of the records that have been selected for permanent preservation and the system(s) that currently host those records.

This is so that we fully understand what it is you are transferring to us in order that we can ensure its long term preservation and presentation to the public (where the records are open).

In most cases the majority of the information we require on what types of systems and formats you are using can be gathered by The National Archives from your Information Asset Register, What to Keep and/or Retention Schedules prior to the selection stage.

Where you are uncertain of the different formats of information you hold we may recommend that you deploy our **DROID tool**, which will assist with automatic file format identification.

You may be able to undertake a digital transfer using our Digital Repository System (DRS) if you have access to the **Government Secure intranet (GSI)**. If your department doesn't have access to a GSI PC we can discuss alternative methods of transfer at this stage.

If you have never undertaken a digital transfer before, we might also need you to undertake a **metadata** export exercise. During this exercise we will ask you to provide a sample of metadata from your Electronic Document Records Management System (EDRMS) to us in **XML** format that we can test on the DRS.

The National Archives' core metadata requirements are minimal (file name, creation date, file structure) and should be present in any EDRMS. The metadata export exercise helps us to understand how and where your system keeps this metadata. This is important for us to know once we come to recreate your file structure within the DRS.

Don't worry if you are not using an EDRMS, The National Archives can work with you to produce a more manually created list, using our metadata template.

## Step 4 – Data transfer

Once the metadata export exercise is complete you will be ready to transfer your records and associated metadata to The National Archives.

Before you transfer any data files to The National Archives, you must first confirm that they have been virus checked. Next we will need to package your records using our custom-built **Packaging Utility**.

Once packaged your records will either be transferred using the DRS or copied to a National Archives approved media for transfer via a secure courier.

You will receive a Stage 1 receipt email from The National Archives once we have successfully unpackaged your data.

## Step 5 – Approval

After all your records have been successfully received by The National Archives we will need to put them into quarantine for a period of 30 days.

Although you will have already undertaken a virus check, placing the records in quarantine for a set period of time gives our virus software a chance to update and locate any viruses that were not detected prior to transfer.

At this point we will also perform a quality check of the metadata and the records themselves to ensure all is present and correct.

You will then receive a Stage 2 receipt email confirming the successful transfer, at which point The National Archives has legal custody of your records.

## Frequently asked questions

### Can datasets be transferred in this way?

No. Owing to new developments in government policy flowing from the [Making Public Data Public](#) policy, The National Archives has reviewed its approach to the selection and transfer of datasets for permanent preservation.

Government departments are now being encouraged to publish as much open data as possible on their websites as part of the government's transparency agenda. This will enable The National Archives to automatically harvest data for permanent preservation, as part of the UK Government Web Archive.

In order to make your data machine-reachable, so that it can be incorporated into the UK Government Web Archive, it must not be hidden behind a login, nor require any other user activity to reach the data, such as selecting from a drop-down list or entering a postcode. Please refer to the Central Office of Information (COI) web standards and guidelines, in particular:

- [\*Exposing your website to search engines \(TG122\)\*](#)
- [\*Underlying data publication \(TG135\)\*](#)
- [\*Archiving websites \(TG105\)\*](#).

For further advice on how to make your datasets publicly available please refer to the Transparency Board's [Public Data Principles](#).

### What is The National Archives' metadata standard for digital transfer?

The National Archives doesn't have a metadata standard for digital transfer. As only 2–5% of all government records come to The National Archives, departments should be assessing what metadata they need for their own internal business purposes and not just what The National Archives requires for transfer.

The metadata that is generated for a department's own business purposes will drive what we take for transfer – our core requirements are minimal (file name, creation date, file structure) and should be present in any system.

## What formats will The National Archives accept for a digital transfer?

The National Archives will where possible always try and accept records in their native format, i.e. the format they were first created in. Assessment of the formats you hold can be made prior to the selection stage using your Information Asset Register, What to Keep and/or Retention Schedules where we can provide further guidance on specific transfer issues with regard to formats.

## Terminology – a quick guide

<b>Digital Record Object Identification (DROID)</b>	A tool used at The National Archives to automatically identify file formats
<b>Digital Repository System (DRS)</b>	System enabling government departments and agencies to transfer digital records to The National Archives
<b>Digital Transfer Manager</b>	Staff member at The National Archives who oversees the digital transfer process, including the area of digital sensitivity review
<b>Extensible Markup Language (XML)</b>	Computer language used to help share data across different computer systems and programs
<b>Government Secure intranet (GSI)</b>	The wide area network that connects UK government departments, enabling them to communicate electronically up to Restricted level
<b>Information Management Consultant (IMC)</b>	Staff member at The National Archives who appraises and selects records, and assists with applications for retention and closure
<b>Metadata</b>	Technical or cataloguing information about digital or paper records
<b>Packaging Utility (PU)</b>	Software used to package electronic records for transfer
<b>Record Manager (RM)</b>	Departmental staff member responsible for loading metadata and packaging digital records for transfer to The National Archives