

## Digitisation without the pain: the work of HEDS

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Creating digital versions of materials in library and archive collections is becoming a mainstream activity. The World Wide Web, in particular, has provided a platform on which to showcase holdings and to provide online information services; a digital collection can involve a whole new audience across the world, with relatively little impact on the original materials. Funding initiatives encourage the creation of new content and yet to the uninitiated planning a digitisation project can be a frightening experience, seeming to require learning a new language and a whole new set of skills.

HEDS can help a digitisation project to avoid some of these headaches. From the initial consultation, through specification and production; HEDS staff can calm any fears, interpret the new language and generally break down the barriers to starting and running a successful project.

**HEDS (the Higher Education Digitisation Service) offers digitisation services not just to higher education; any government funded organisation or non-profit making body can take advantage of the services on offer.**

The services that HEDS present include the initial "First Response" service by which project co-ordinators can telephone for free advice about any aspect of a proposed or current project. As part of this service a member of the HEDS team may offer to visit to view the material and advise on suitable digitisation strategies. This is particularly appropriate for those projects which are preparing to submit funding bids - HEDS can provide accurate information for costings and task management. If digitising in-house is preferable to out-sourcing the work, HEDS can advise on setting up a digitisation unit, train staff and provide quality benchmarks.

HEDS also offers a full digitisation service. Digitisation projects that are either not large enough to warrant the expenditure of a digitisation unit; which are too large or complex to contemplate converting in-house; or where the project team simply do not want the effort of in-house scanning, can be digitised by HEDS using the most appropriate technology. The digitisation service broadly involves the project team delivering the originals to HEDS where the conversion is carried out according to a detailed specification negotiated in advance; after conversion and Quality Assurance the originals and the digital copies are sent back to the project team. By removing digitisation from the list of tasks performed by the project team, available staff time is made available for other skilled tasks such as the preparation and cataloguing of the material. Digitisation is returned to its proper place as a technological tool rather than being the focus of the project.

Operating since 1996, HEDS has been involved in several high profile national projects, encompassing many types of media and institutions. Projects include:

- The grey literature collection for the Refugee Studies Programme at Oxford University
- Pamphlets and microfilms for the British Library of Political and Economic Science
- Local history journals for the BUILDER project at Birmingham University
- Photographs and local history resources for the JISC Image Digitisation Initiative (JIDI)

Current non-HE clients include the Shetland Museum, for which HEDS is providing technical consultancy for the establishment of an in-house digitisation facility to convert fragile originals including glass plates; and the Courtauld Institute of Art which is using production services to create digital images of medieval stained glass from the *Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi*. A full list of current and recent projects is available from the HEDS web site (see below for URL).

HEDS personnel have been selected not only for their technical expertise but also for their background in the library community and their understanding of its special needs. The consultants, Simon Tanner and Joanne Lomax Smith, have previously worked in national, academic and corporate libraries and bring experience of working on projects within these libraries. In particular, HEDS is familiar with the problems surrounding preservation and the handling of rare and precious assets. HEDS is funded by the Joint Information

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**To find out more about HEDS please visit the web site at <http://heds.herts.ac.uk/> which contains frequently updated information about projects undertaken by HEDS along with guidance and case studies prepared by HEDS personnel.**

**To discuss any aspect of a current or planned digitisation project, without any obligation, please either email [HEDS@herts.ac.uk](mailto:HEDS@herts.ac.uk) or telephone 01707 286078.**

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