I am grateful for the opportunity to write to you on how the prospect of withdrawing from the EU is affecting my organisation,

The Digital Preservation Coalition is a not for profit membership organisation with a special focus on the tools, techniques and policies necessary to ensure that digital objects are accessible beyond the limits of technical, organisational or media obsolescence. It is owned and operated for the benefit of its members and is active in 4 distinct ways: advocacy, research, training and partnership.

The DPC was founded in 2002 as a joint venture between a range of UK public sector institutions including the British Library, National Archives of Scotland (now NRS), JISC, RCUK and the Public Records Office (now the National Archives). We have since grown to have 61 members, mostly in the UK and Ireland but with significant groups of members farther afield, including the United Nations, NATO, UNHCR and the European Central Bank. We are based in Scotland but with global reach relating to a rapidly growing sector.

Digital Preservation is a global challenge with impacts on all sectors of the economy, on government, research, the law and culture. From an economic perspective digital preservation is a rapidly expanding but immature market, populated just now by innovators and early adopters. Memory institutions – those libraries, archives and records offices that preserve and maintain culturally important collection – have typically been among the earliest adopters of emerging tools and solutions as have major research institutions. It is currently characterised by innovators transferring solutions developed for these early adopters and applying them to regulated industries and regulators.

In practical terms the UK, and Scotland in particular, enjoy a significant world lead on this topic. Research at the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh has been particularly exemplary and a number of high profile Scottish agencies – National Library of Scotland, National Records of Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland – have contributed to and benefited from that research. In 2009 the Digital Preservation Coalition established an office in Glasgow. We have grown in spite of the recession to a point where we now employ 6 staff – 4 in Glasgow and 2 in York.

Over the course of the DPC’s existence we have benefited at large from partnerships through and with the European Union. Digital Preservation is generally recognised as a global challenge: one DPC member recently quipped ‘there is no UK-only solution to digital preservation’. Thus, following the principal of subsidiarity, the EU has been a driving force for research and development in this international field. UK agencies, DPC members among them, have received tens of millions of pounds of research grants through the EU’s Framework Programmes and now through Horizon 2020 to establish world class preservation infrastructure for high value – often irreplaceable - digital collections.
In specific terms the DPC has received around 800,000GBP of funds from the EU in the last five years – just short of half of our annual budget. Intangible benefits from participation in EU-funded projects have arguably been greater than the financial ones. The DPC has risen in profile and in competence as a result of these projects, developing a wide network of contacts and establishing a distinctive presence within an international community. Although impossible to calculate, DPC has probably benefited to around the same amount from participation in EU activities led by our members and others in the Digital Preservation Community. For example, a number of members use their involvement in EU projects to pay their annual subscriptions, while the DPC is regularly invited to comment on and review EU initiatives.

The implications for the DPC of Brexit are striking and we fear that these concerns may be representative of challenges facing other sectors. In short:

1. If we are unable to access EU funds we will not be able to sustain our growth trajectory and it is uncertain that we would be able to continue to be as prominent within our professional networks.

2. Our contribution to research activities is typically ‘value added’. So instead of leading primary research or hosting vital infrastructure, DPC represents the community of users within research and development actions. Thus we offer community validation of concepts and services, collaborative agenda building and highly targeted dissemination outlets. Partners will simply look elsewhere for such value-added research support.

3. Promises have been made by the UK government that universities will continue to receive financial support to supplement the research funds from the EU. It is not clear whether this also extends to research active not-for-profit agencies like DPC.

4. The expertise on which our organisation relies is global and recruiting and retaining these skills is challenging. Concerns about immigration were expressed – at times unpleasantly – throughout the EU referendum campaign. If DPC is not able to continue to recruit staff internationally then our capacity to be a high-performing world class organisation will rapidly be compromised.

Nonetheless the DPC is a highly mobile organisation so, in order to resolve these issues it would be relatively simple for the DPC to relocate. The Board is therefore currently considering options about the positioning of the DPC post-Brexit. These include:

- ‘Do nothing’: keep our legal base in England, hope that the UK holds together, exit the EU but remained involved in EU programmes through EEA/EFTA of equivalent.

- ‘Administrative move’: move the legal basis and our core administrative functions to the Republic of Ireland, but keep our operational base in Scotland / England.

- ‘Wholesale move’: move the whole operation outside of the UK.
• ‘Brexit means Engxit’: move our legal base to Scotland / NI and remain in the EU as part of a new constitutional settlement

• ‘International office’: establish a separate office with a legal existence of its own inside the EU with a member of staff (% FTE) based within a member institution.

• ‘Merger’: Seek a merger with an equivalent party inside the EU and use that as a base for an extended, new organisation

I am sure you will understand that none of these options are without disruption. Several of them would also involve high-value and specialist staff and facilities being removed from Scotland, or investment that otherwise would come here being placed elsewhere. Consequently if we seek to retain the current levels of investment in Scotland it seems imperative that Scotland remain within the EU, as mandated by the popular vote of 23rd June.

At this point, however, more challenging than the outcome of Brexit is the lack of clarity on how best our small organisation might respond. Although in no hurry to leave the EU, the lack of certainty as to what the implications is perhaps more damaging. Projects and partnerships, which take years to develop, are on hold. Clarity on how to respond is vital.

I am grateful again to you for the opportunity of presenting this short case study on how Brexit is affecting my organisation. I am happy to provide clarification on any of these issues.