

Selection from:

LETTER OF THE MINISTER AND THE STATE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SCIENCE

To the President of the House of Representatives

The Hague, 5 July 2005

1. Introduction

Current events acquire increased significance when viewed in conjunction with longer-term developments. Progress is virtually impossible without careful subsistence and consolidation of that which has been achieved. These general observations particularly apply to science and culture. An open, unimpeded access to the results of scientific research and the data collected to this end is fundamentally important to the progress of science and to the social and economic use of research. Without the notion of continuity, contemporary culture lacks the excitement and inspiration needed to prevent cultural life from withering away. Access to all relevant information and an unhindered development of opinions are essential for a public administration that is controllable and vitally democratic. Social processes, such as democratisation, participation and civic integration, are more likely to succeed if citizens in need of information or wanting to learn more about a specific subject know how to find it without too much difficulty.

The Government is aware of the importance of diligence towards information resources in which our knowledge of science and culture is stored, which is why the coalition agreement *Meedoen, meer werk, minder regels (Participate, more work, less rules)* has set itself the objective of renewing and strengthening the knowledge infrastructure of the Netherlands, as well as promoting the cultural infrastructure¹. A solid knowledge infrastructure cannot survive without sustained investment in long-term preservation of information. For this reason, as well as with a view to the European Lisbon objective regarding our knowledge-based economy, the Government has made funds available for the preservation of scientific and cultural collections. The budget increases from one million euros in 2004 to eight million euros in 2007 and subsequent years. A budget of two million euros is made available for 2005.

Permanent preservation of the printed heritage, «our national memory», and the related and topical issue of digital preservation mainly concerns scientific and cultural policies. Hence this joint policy letter, as agreed in *Meer dan de som. Beleidsbrief cultuur 2004–2007 (More than the sum. 2004-2007 Policy letter on culture)*. This letter further details our plans in this field, as drawn up in close consultation with the National Library of the Netherlands, the National Archives of the Netherlands and the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage. These three institutes are all active in this field.

With this message, we continue the path set by some of our predecessors. At the end of the 1980s, the first alarming backlogs in the preservation of our printed cultural heritage came to light. Two large-scale projects were set up to turn the tide: the Delta plan for Cultural Preservation, to realign the storage conditions in museums and national archives, and the Metamorfoze programme, mainly focused on printed conservation in libraries. In 1990, the House of Representatives was kept informed of the developments by the then Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Culture (WVC), Hedy d'Ancona, by means of a letter on *Behoud papieren materialen in archieven en*

bibliotheken (the preservation of printed materials in archives and libraries). In 1995, Aad Nuis, the then State Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, reported on the progress in a letter on *Papierconservering in bibliotheken (Printed conservation in libraries)*. That same year, he addressed the digital preservation in another letter¹.

The focus of this policy letter is the printed conservation and the digital preservation in the libraries and archives sector. We will briefly focus on the related theme of the academic heritage at the end of this letter. In 2005, the House of Representatives will receive a separate letter on audiovisual heritage. The Council for Culture recently delivered an opinion on film preservation.

2. Sustainable preservation: state of affairs

2.5 Digital preservation

In addition to our printed heritage, the rapidly growing volume of original digital and digitised documents also requires attention. The question of conservation is as urgent and fundamental with regard to this material as it is with regard to paper. There is a potential risk that the past two decades will become known as the most poorly documented period of the past century. The rapidly succeeding introductions of ever new equipment, new software and new data carriers form an increasingly serious problem in terms of connection, continuity and shelf life. Many organisations have been relying on digital information for years, while there are hardly any suitable methods available to store this information on a long-term basis.

A few large-scale national and international programmes have been set up to guarantee the access of digital material and to thus concretely shape digital preservation. In the Netherlands, the National Archives of the Netherlands, the National Library of the Netherlands and other government bodies are active partners in this field. The Electronic Government project, which is a cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the digital archives management and the long-term sustainable storage are examples of such projects and subjects. They ensure that important steps will be taken in the coming years to counter the imminent loss of large amounts of digital information.

2.6. Digital archive collections

The Government has a specific responsibility in terms of the careful preservation of its archives. The government bodies are the caretakers according to the Public Records Act. Having the archive repositories, the government bodies are responsible for the preservation, management and accessibility of archives. The statutory duty of care of the Central Government's archives rests with the National Archives of the Netherlands. Government archives increasingly consist of digital material, to which the Public Records Act applies in full. The statutory responsibilities regarding digital archiving are further detailed in the regulations pursuant to Articles 11, 12 and 13 of the Public Records Decree. The regulation pursuant to Article 12 is particularly important for the orderly and accessible state of archives, digital form included. In view of the specific problems in this area, a pilot project is currently carried out within the framework of the Covenant on Archives to evaluate the impact of this regulation on the technical, substantial and organisational aspects of digital preservation. The Information and Heritage Inspectorate has an important and structural role in assessing the

Government's digital archiving. The inspection report *Een dementerende overheid? (A government suffering from dementia?)*, recently debated in the House of Representatives, pointedly illustrated this issue¹.

In terms of preservation, important initiatives have been taken in recent years to respond to technological developments, which, incidentally, do not only constitute threats, but also provide opportunities. One example is the Digital Storage Testbed, a project recently completed and a joint initiative of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. The purpose of this project was to safeguard the continuous accessibility of government information. In addition, it enabled government bodies and market participants to make functional designs for digital archiving systems. Following on from the Testbed project, the National Archives of the Netherlands is now carrying out the Repository XXI Century project, which is aimed at the development of a newly automated system for the transfer of archives and long-term storage, for keeping digital material accessible and for making it available to a wide audience. With the expertise it has acquired from its Digital Sustainability Knowledge Centre, the National Archives of the Netherlands also supports digitisation projects of other government bodies.

The objective is to improve the quality and accessibility of digital government archives «at the source» so as to meet the requirements imposed by the laws on archiving. The major issue involving digital preservation will thus become better manageable for the future.

2.7. Digital scientific and cultural heritage

The permanent storage and availability of digital information for study and research is the responsibility of the National Library of the Netherlands. The National Library of the Netherlands has a statutory duty to keep a copy of all publications published in the Netherlands. The same applies to digital publications. The implementation of this duty is approached via two tracks.

First, the National Library of the Netherlands has developed an infrastructure together with IBM, the so-called electronic repository (e-repository), which is suitable as a storage facility for over 200 million electronic publications. In so doing, the National Library of the Netherlands has acquired a leading position, both nationally and internationally. As of 2003, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science provides over 1.1 million euros each year towards the operational costs of this system.

Secondly, the National Library of the Netherlands participates in a study into solutions for keeping electronic publications accessible in the long term, thereby working closely with libraries in Europe and the US, and is represented in various international working groups. The National Library of the Netherlands is the first in the world to conclude agreements with large scientific publishers, such as Elsevier and Kluwer, for the long-term preservation of digital scientific journals. As a result, nearly 80% of the world production of digital journals will have been stored in the e-repository within just several years, thus ensuring the sustainable access of outcomes of scientific research worldwide. A global pattern is expected to emerge in the coming years, with a limited number of «safe places», such as the e-repository, sustainably preserving and maintaining access to the world's production of electronic academic literature. The ambition of the National Library of the Netherlands is to be a part of that. It also

cooperates with the Dutch university libraries, the Dutch Research Council (NWO), the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the SURF cooperative on the DARE project, which stands for Digital Academic Repositories, for which the Government provided two million euros. The objective is to set up a shared infrastructure and provide services for digital recording, accessibility and the distribution of Dutch academic research results. The National Library of the Netherlands furthermore launched a pilot project for a national storage service of digital images of Dutch Cultural Heritage Institutions to ensure a long-term preservation and re-use of those images. The pilot project is carried out in cooperation with IBM and a number of Cultural Heritage Institutions and will be completed in 2005.

2.8. Internationally

Methods for permanent preservation of digital material are only relevant when applied worldwide. Digital preservation is therefore a global issue that needs to be tackled internationally. The various aforementioned initiatives have a distinct international dimension. In addition, there are a number of projects and developments worth mentioning in the international context.

The National Archives of the Netherlands maintained an open network with the Swiss Bundesarchiv and the universities of Glasgow and Urbino within the ERPANET project for the exchange of information on digital accessibility and preservation. This was fully funded by the European Commission. Within the framework of the aforementioned Testbed project, the National Archives of the Netherlands is cooperating intensely with the national archives in Europe, the US and Australia.

The National Library of the Netherlands has a decisive role in the international standardisation and the worldwide research into the accessibility and preservation of digital scientific information. Moreover, it has been intensely involved in the preparation of the position of the Dutch Government with respect to the motion on digital heritage for UNESCO. This «Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage», which is widely supported in both the library sector and the archives sector, was adopted by UNESCO in 2003. The charter calls for Member States to place the storage of the digital heritage high on the national policy agendas. The Netherlands Commission for UNESCO is currently making an inventory of possible themes for 2005 involving digital heritage and digitisation. During the Dutch EU presidency in the second half of 2004, the 25 European Member States discussed the advisability of setting up one single European digital cultural area. Its ingredients will be formulated in a new action plan after 2005, as a follow-up to the Lund action plan for the digitisation of heritage. One of the themes is the long-term preservation of digital information resources. Without a sustained availability of and access to digital and digitised information resources, the European digital cultural area cannot take form, which is why it is important to make arrangements on cooperation in the field of digitisation, digital archiving and standardisation.

This was addressed during the Dutch EU presidency at the conference entitled «Towards a continuum of digital heritage. Strategies for a European area of digital cultural resources», held on 15 and 16 September 2004 in Scheveningen, the Netherlands. The results of this conference were used as input for the Council for Culture Ministers, which adopted a new 2005-2006 Culture work plan on 16 November 2004 that prioritised the digitisation of heritage.

In addition to this cultural perspective, and in order to achieve a new infrastructure for the long-term preservation and permanent accessibility of electronic academic publications within Europe, a European policy is needed in the field of research infrastructures. This field is one of the pillars of the European Research Area. The National Library of the Netherlands organised a conference on this subject during the Dutch EU presidency focusing on the importance of research into and the development of such an infrastructure within a European framework. On the basis of the Presidency Conclusions in the Competitiveness Council of 26 November 2004, the European Commission will further develop this theme in view of the Seventh Framework Programme. As a result of its conference, the National Library of the Netherlands will develop further initiatives as input for the Dutch position for this framework programme.

4. Finances

Extra funds were made available as of 2007 on the basis of the 2003 outline agreement for the preservation of scientific and cultural collections, including the sustainable digital preservation, rising to eight million euros. The budget increases from one to two to three million euros for the 2004-2006 period. The three institutes involved in this will draw up/have drawn up spending proposals.

As of 2007, a total annual amount of two million euros will be available to the archives sector for activities in the field of sustainable preservation. An amount of 4.5 million euros per year will be made available to the library sector to accelerate the completion of the conservation programme for libraries. The National Library of the Netherlands will use the remaining resources for research & development to benefit digital preservation. It acts as coordinator and funds manager.

In addition to these extra funds, the institutes involved have their regular budgetary resources for sustainable preservation. They originate from various funding, such as the science budget and the memorandum on culture budget.

5. In conclusion

The huge area of concern involving sustainable preservation justifies - as already stated - continuous effort and attention, both because of the still existing, extensive backlogs in printed conservation and because of current, digital developments. We are well aware of this. With the policy outlined above, we believe we are making a responsible and substantial effort in this area.

*The Minister of Education, Culture and Science,
M. J. A. van der Hoeven
The State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science,
M. C. van der Laan*