Building bridges: advancing research culture through Digital Humanities collaboration

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Building Bridges: Advancing Research Culture through Digital Humanities Collaboration

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What is Digital Humanities (DH)?

DH is the critical study of the intersection between digital technologies, disciplines in the Arts and Humanities, and scholarly communication. Research in DH may involve using digital tools and software to interpret and address quantitative and qualitative research questions and/or applying critical traditions to assess digital technologies.

As a discipline, DH draws on expertise from many different sectors. Accordingly, DH projects are often collaborative. They may involve researchers in the humanities and social sciences, computer scientists and information scientists, GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums), professionals and creative practitioners.

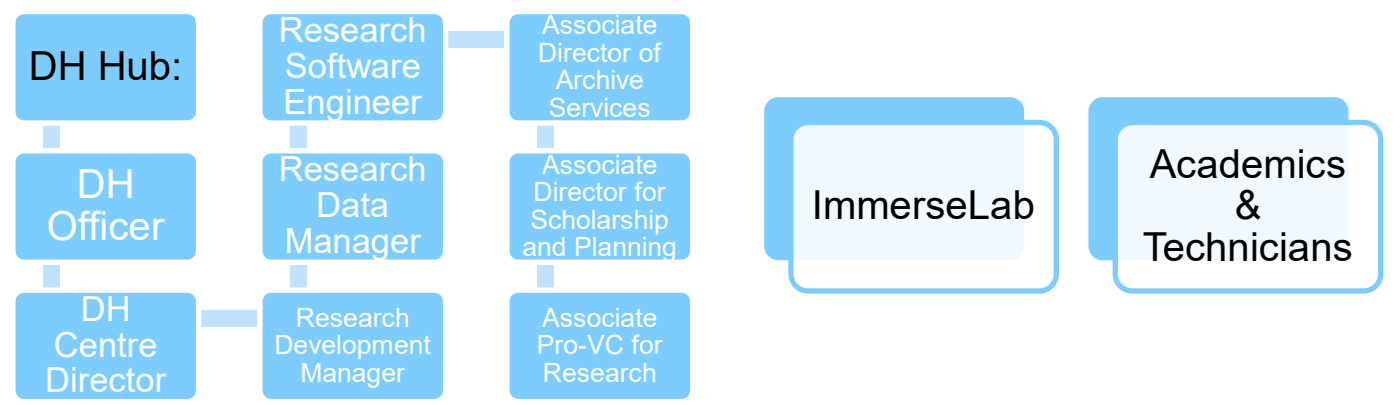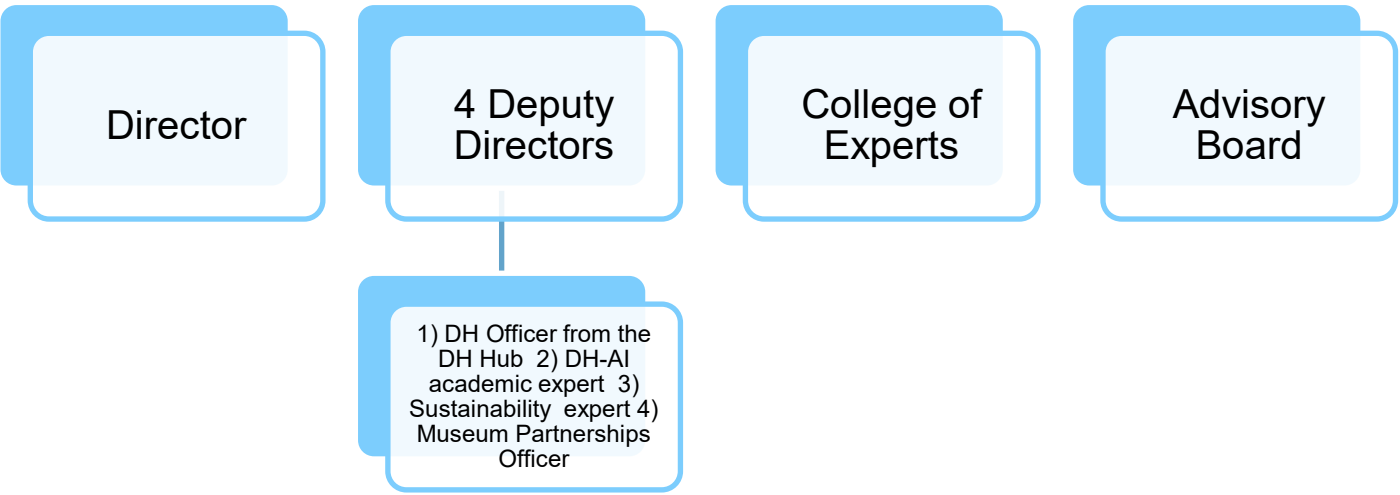## The DH Centre at Reading

The DH Team

The Interdisciplinary Research Centre in the DH at Reading features an innovative governance model, which distinguishes from existing research centres at Reading and other HEIs in the UK. Its ownership is shared between academic and professional staff, fostering collaboration within a unified structure that strengthens collegial research culture and ensures long term sustainability.

The Centre brings together the DH Academic Community of Practice (CoP), the cross-research service DH Hub and the ImmerseLab. The Centre is based in the School of Humanities, but it supports research across all research themes and disciplines. While the Hub is part of the Centre, it remains a distinctive service within the Library, ensuring sustainability and mitigating risk. The ImmerseLab is a production, testing and research facility to investigate the latest developments in VR, AR and MR.

Organisational Structure of the DH Centre

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Director    4 Deputy    College of   Advisory
            Directors   Experts      Board

        1) DH Officer from the
        DH Hub  2) DH-AI
        academic expert  3)
        Sustainability expert 4)
        Museum Partnerships
        Officer
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DH Hub:   Research          Associate
          Software          Director of
          Engineer          Archive         ImmerseLab   Academics
                            Services                     &
DH        Research          Associate                    Technicians
Officer   Data              Director for
          Manager           Scholarship
                            and Planning
DH        Research          Associate
Centre    Development       Pro-VC for
Director  Manager           Research
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A Stronger Institutional Integration

Many DH Centres exist as standalone research units, often disconnected from core university departments. Our approach is different:

- The shared ownership of the Centre between the academic community and professional services ensures deep integration into the University structures.

- We recognise the crucial role of research enabling staff, library professionals, research software engineers, data specialists, and digital infrastructure experts in DH research.

- The Hub – a permanent Library service – will continue as a distinctive and integral component within the Centre, ensuring stability and sustainability. This strategic positioning mitigates risk, as it benefits from established institutional support as well as additional staffing resources through secondments.

- We prioritise collaboration between academic and professional services colleagues, creating a truly interdisciplinary model that extends beyond traditional academic department.

Activities

- **Enhance Interdisciplinary Digital Research** by engaging scholars across multiple disciplines and bridging the Humanities, Social Sciences and Sciences.

- **Pioneer a new collaborative governance model** of shared ownership by academic and professional services leaders.

- **Contribute to the University's Strategic Research Priorities** such as Open Research, AI Ethics, and digital (including environmental) sustainability.

- **Facilitate grant capture** by providing structured support for funding applications.

- **Support the life-cycle of research projects** from beginning to completion, including development of outputs and post-project archiving.

- **Offer DH Fellowships** for researchers and professional services staff.

- **Training** for researchers and professional colleagues to upskill in DH methods.

- **Build National and International Partnerships**

- **Facilitate Collaborations with our national museum partners** (BM, NHM and Kew).

- **Grow Institutional Capacity** by actively promoting opportunities and attracting candidates for externally-funded independent post-doctoral research fellowships, especially in support of ECRs.

- **Contribute to the University's Research Culture Programme** by promoting and inclusive and collaborative research environment that fosters knowledge exchange, collegiality, and cross disciplinary engagement.

DH and Research Culture

- **Fosters Interdisciplinary Collaboration**: As an inherently collaborative and interdisciplinary field, DH brings together researchers from across the arts, humanities, social sciences, and STEM, enabling team-based approaches and new methodologies that enrich research culture.

- **Connects Diverse Partners**: DH actively engages with a wide range of partners beyond traditional academic boundaries—such as libraries, data managers, research support staff, heritage institutions (GLAM), and community stakeholders—strengthening the research ecosystem through inclusive and holistic collaboration.

- **Promotes Team Science in the Humanities**: By embedding teamwork into project design and execution, DH challenges the lone-scholar model and promotes sustainable, collective research practices that align with evolving expectations in academia.

- **Aligns with Open Research Principles**: DH supports transparency, accessibility, and reusability of research outputs through practices such as open access publishing, data sharing, and open-source tool development, reinforcing commitment to Open Research.

- **Drives Methodological Innovation**: Through the integration of digital tools, computational methods, and critical perspectives, DH introduces new ways of researching, visualizing, and interpreting data, contributing to a culture of innovation.

- **Supports Responsible and Inclusive Research Practices**: With a strong focus on ethics, accessibility, and social justice, DH fosters a reflective research culture that is attuned to power dynamics, representation, and equity in knowledge production.

Contact information

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