Wrap Up Report | 2026 Annual Event

Event Title: Sustainability
2026 UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association Annual Event
Event Date(s): 15 - 16 June 2026
Event Location(s): University of Southampton & Online
Academic Year: 2025-26
Today's Date: 04/11/26
Report Prepared By: Jenny McHugh, Kristen Schuster and Dawn Kanter

Staffing & Partnerships

Organising Committee & Local Organiser Chairs

James Baker (University of Southampton), Dawn Kanter (School of Advanced Study, University of London), Jenny McHugh (School of Advanced Study, University of London), and Kristen Schuster (University of Southampton)

Programme Committee Members

Steven Gamble (University of Southampton), Vicky Garnett (DARIAH-EU/Trinity College Dublin), Samuel Pegg (University of Southampton)

Additional Support

Giota Alevizou (King's College London), Nathan Cornish (University of Southampton), James Cummings (Newcastle University), Delphine Demelas (University of Southampton), Scott Feher (University of Southampton), Will Foden (University of Southampton), Alexandra Giles (University of Southampton), Louise Hallman (University of Southampton), Graeme Kemp (University of St Andrews), James

MacDonell (University of Southampton), Órla Murphy (University College Cork), Krzysztof Mikulski (University of Southampton), Laurisa Sastoque Pabon (University of Southampton), Evangelia Paschalidou (University of the Aegean), Larissa Terranova (Inside AI & ChatGPT), Justin Tonra (University of Galway), Charlotte Tupman (University of Exeter), Valentina Vavassori (British Library), Ellie Wakefield (University of Southampton), Sharon Webb (University of Sussex), Jane Winters (School of Advanced Study, University of London)

Event Description & Details

Sustainability

The last decade has seen an expansion of how we understand sustainability working across the arts and humanities. In addition to longstanding issues in digital humanities and cultural heritage in sustaining infrastructures, research teams and projects, other vital societal issues have emerged including digital preservation, climate justice and ethical computing. These pose important considerations for digital humanities and digital cultural heritage research and practice, which the DHA has promoted through Community Interest Groups, governance working groups and other activities. As this year's host, the University of Southampton was well positioned to support creative and critical conversations about sustainability, since it hosts a network of institutes investigating digital and computational practices, including the Software Sustainability Institute and event co-organisers the Digital Humanities Hub.

This year's event invited contributors to reflect on the theme of **Sustainability, in its broadest conceptualisation.** We encouraged contributions addressing practices, methods and theories that promote sustainability, from researchers and practitioners in digital humanities and digital cultural heritage. Our aim was to promote interdisciplinary conversations about these critical issues, and to foreground these as an opportunity to share and create best practice. Since issues of sustainability require grassroots, community responses, we were interested in fostering broader understandings of digital methods, practices and technologies that enable critical reflections about how sustainability in digital humanities and digital cultural heritage intersects with broader social justice perspectives.

The Association is working to develop an approach to sustainability that supports partnerships, networking and creative practice across the humanities, cultural heritage and cultural and creative industries. As such, we encouraged submissions from interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral teams – where research software engineers, computer and data scientists, cultural heritage professionals, community

representatives, designers, artists and other practitioners form a key part of the research team. We welcomed contributions that reflected on positive collaboration strategies and outcomes. At the same time, we invited submissions that considered both the challenges and affordances of sustainability in digital humanities, for example in terms of languages, outcome expectations and working cultures.

We invited all those using digital methods and strategies in the arts, humanities, cultural heritage sector and creative & cultural industries to submit a proposal. We particularly welcomed proposals from students and early-career researchers and professionals. In addition to proposals in any of the formats outlined below, we also encouraged submissions that took a creative-critical approach or didn't fit in 'traditional' conference formats. This included proposals that made use of eXtended reality (XR), virtual or augmented reality (VR/AR). We also welcomed workshops and tutorials that promoted conversations and practices around repair culture and climate literacy.

The event also provided an opportunity for researchers, professionals, practitioners and students from Ireland and the United Kingdom to deepen existing relationships and create new pathways for collaboration. Attendees had the opportunity to engage with the Community Interest Groups.

Timings			
Start Time (First Day)	09.00	End Time (First Day)	18.30
Start Time (Last Day)	09.00	End Time (Last Day)	16.00

Attendees			
Total Registered (In-person)	90	Total Attended (In-person)	75
Total Registered (Online)	161	Total Attended (Online)	Online attendance was across multiple streams and an overall attendance figure not captured
Total	251	Total	

Attendees by Type			
United Kingdom	Rep. of Ireland	Rest of Europe	Outside Europe

165	12	16	37	
Higher Education	GLAM	Cultural & Creative	Technology	Other
165	94	34	42	16

** We are conscious that some attendees registered more than once, for various reasons. Therefore, figures registered may be slightly higher. Additionally, attendees could identify as working in multiple sectors, therefore totals under 'Attendees by Type' may be higher than total attendees.*
In future years, we propose to review the geographic breakdown for this reporting. Our raw data shows, for example, that no delegates attended this year's Annual Event from Northern Ireland, and this should be reflected in the above.

Event Planning Timeline

- **Summer 2025**: Venue agreed
- **23 October 2025**: Date agreed
- **5 November 2025**: Date and venue announced
- **October-November 2025**: CFP drafted
- **4 December 2025**: CFP published
- **30 January 2026**: CFP closed, peer review begins
- **23 March 2026**: Bursaries announced and opened
- **9 April 2026**: Paper acceptances sent out
- **24 April 2026**: Speaker registration open. Bursary deadline (extended. Original date 13 April 2026)
- **10 May 2026**: Speaker registration closed
- **14 May 2026**: Bursary results announced
- **25 May 2026**: In-person registration closed
- **27 May 2026**: Draft programme agreed and sent to authors
- **8 June 2026**: Online registration closed
- **10 June 2026**: Final programme and event logistics info sent
- **15-16 June 2026**: Event
- **16 June 2026**: Event feedback form sent to attendees

Event Evaluation Questions

Did this event meet its purpose/goal(s)? If it did not, why?

Yes, the 2026 Annual Event met its goals. The event was an opportunity for attendees to share research (at various stages of progress), develop new collaborations and hear new approaches to conceptualising and practising sustainability. Papers, pitches, posters and workshops showcased ideas and work from heritage sector professionals and academics from across a range of career stages, and demonstrated the various ways sustainability can inform creative and critical approaches to digital humanities work and practice. The plenary added to these conversations, and contributors shared their expertise and insights from their work, including in libraries and transnational infrastructure management.

Feedback from the event (below) specifically celebrated the collaboration, discussion and diversity of topics covered. Attendees provided several examples where networking in Southampton led to further collaboration around the subject of sustainability afterwards, demonstrating the event's success and positive impact on the community.

Did this event meet the diversity, equity and inclusion benchmarks set out by the Association?

All of the Association's events aim to meet the benchmarks for diversity, equity and inclusion set out in its Goals and Benchmarking for Inclusion, Equity and Diversity working paper. Several sections of that document relate specifically to events.

Bursaries – We committed to allocating at least 20% of event budgets toward bursaries. This year we spent 33% of our budget on bursaries (20%) and travel/accommodation funding for event participants (13%).

We had a total of 25 applicants for bursaries, 72% of which were speakers. 39% of applicants were students and 46% identified as early career researchers or practitioners. The majority were from the UK (60%), with only 4% from Ireland and 36% from further afield. The majority of applicants (60%) described themselves as from either a Higher Education or academic background.

Accessibility – The Association aims to make its events as inclusive and accessible as possible; we try to ensure that this is at the heart of the event planning process. For the 2026 Annual Event, a wheelchair accessible venue was selected. Our ticket options included a concession ticket for 'Student, Early Career & Independent Scholar', while

attending the plenary only, or attending the event online, was free. (In future years, we may consider extending eligibility for the concession ticket, for greater inclusion.) During the registration process, we enquired about dietary requirements and accessibility needs in advance. After the event, we provided a post-event feedback form and will use attendees' comments to inform our accessibility approach for future events.

Additionally, we expanded the accessibility of the Annual Event from previous years. We added a section on access needs to the event web page and created a bespoke form to report any incidents anonymously. We included a quiet room for participants to be able to decompress in, and provided information and guidance on prayer rooms and a place for parents to breast pump if needed. We offered an option for speakers to add their pronouns to name badges. Finally, we used more accessible formatting for our wrap-up report to make the document easier to navigate, and alt text for our logo.

Participation – We have several benchmarks for participation, looking at the makeup of attendees at the event. Around 66% of attendees were from Higher Education and 37% were from GLAM institutions. About 17% of attendees were from the technology sector and 14% from the cultural and creative industries.

Programming – We want our programming to reflect the diversity of Ireland and the UK, including in terms of geography, sector and career stage. Below is the breakdown of presenters* across three measures, as identified by themselves. Where presenters identified multiple sectors, they are counted more than once.

**Data is per paper as opposed to per presenter. Included in the data are accepted papers that were included in the programme. (The data does not include rejected, withdrawn or invited papers.) The total number of papers is 55.*

Geographic Breakdown

- Republic of Ireland - 5
- Scotland - 3
- Wales - 1
- England - 24
- Other - 22

Sector Breakdown

- Higher Education - 40
- GLAM - 16
- Tech - 8

Creative & Cultural Industries - 4
Other - 5

Career Stage
Early Career - 23
Student - 11
Other - 21

The Association is committed to widening participation through cross-sector collaboration and including contributions from professionals and academics across different career stages and organisational types.

Although we did collect EDI monitoring data (e.g. ethnicity, gender, etc.) at registration, we did not collect this data for presenters as distinct from attendees. In future years, we might consider reporting on this data, to provide further insights into inclusion, particularly with respect to traditionally under-represented groups in digital humanities research.

Were there any issues in the planning stages of this event?

We are grateful to all our colleagues who contributed to the planning of this event, including members of the organising and programme committees, colleagues at the School of Advanced Study and University of Southampton, peer reviewers and presenters.

The organising committee was made up of colleagues from the University of Southampton and the School of Advanced Study, who worked well together on co-ordinating budgets, managing peer review, logistical arrangements, and more. The local organising team at Southampton should be commended particularly for their flexibility and collegiality supporting the technical aspect of the event and finalising the programme.

This year we developed more templates and documentation to support event planning, however, gaps were also identified, to be addressed in advance of future events.

The event timeline presented a challenge and slipped throughout the planned stages, impacting peer review, registration, bursary deadlines and the publication of the programme. The bursary deadline was extended, but this conflicted with the close of registration. This was caused by the limited capacity of the organising committee and

we recommend that the committee's number be expanded in the future, as well as event timelines reviewed.

Questions around capacity – specifically, the number of presenters expected to attend the event as distinct from the number of authors on accepted papers - impacted how we advertised and promoted the event. This can be improved in future by collecting information on number of presenters at paper submission stage. We might also look to collect presenters' technical requirements at an earlier stage.

The last thing to note is that this year we were not able to provide accommodation for delegates at the discount rate as we did in 2024 and 2025 in Cork and Glasgow. However, we did not receive any requests for this, and the attendee feedback did not comment on its absence.

Were there any issues on the day(s) of the event?

There was some confusion over links to hybrid sessions and around which sessions were available online. It is possible that this led to reduced attendance online and may also have affected speakers. For the next event, we would aim for greater clarity on which sessions online registration provides access to. We should also share information with speakers about the limits of the space and/or technology available.

How well did we improve on the areas identified after last year's event?

While the 2025 Annual Event was a success in many respects, this year we were able to build upon it by developing further templates and documentation to support future event planning. This included templates for the call for proposals, peer review guidance and plenary planning.

After releasing the call for proposals, we organised drop-in information sessions to support early career colleagues, those new to digital humanities, or other interested colleagues. We also organised drop-in sessions for peer reviewers to ask questions about good practices when providing feedback to applicants. This format was then used for other initiatives across the Association, such as the small grants scheme.

Posters and demos were located in the main building that the event was hosted in, to maximise opportunities for delegates to interact with their creators.

If we did it again, how could this event be improved?

In response to the feedback and technical issues experienced, the hybrid element of the event needs greater focus in the planning stages in order to streamline online participation, including interactions between online and in-person elements. We should also provide a clearer steer for online participants when they join a session about muting their mics and how to ask questions (e.g. raise hand vs. comments).

As mentioned above, increasing the number of colleagues on the event organising committee would be beneficial in terms of capacity to meet the event timeline. This was particularly pressured prior to the appointment of the Association's Community Manager.

The costs of the Annual Event are not currently covered by ticket income, and we are very grateful to our funders and sponsors who have enabled the event to take place. In the current economic climate, we are conscious of the need to ensure the event's financial viability and sustainability, for example, by continuing to explore multiple funding options.

Other suggestions to improve the planning and organisation of the event include considering the implications of holding the event on a Monday (with respect to travel and preparation); considering approaches to AI use in event proposals; revising the event planning timeline - including publicising the programme earlier on, to enable delegates to arrange their travel effectively and to attend based on their interest in the programme; and sharing clearer messaging for attendees in the run-up to the event about whom they can ask about the venue, travel and more.

We also suggest a few changes around bursaries, including that they should be advertised much earlier (prior to registration) and awarded earlier. The Association should also explore options for paying awardees in advance. We hope that these considerations might help to reduce barriers to potential applicants as well as to successful applicants in being able to take up their awards. The Association will also review the information required as part of the application process for bursaries and clarity of messaging around eligible costs. Finally, we might seek feedback from awardees on the application process and value of attending the event.

On-the-day improvements might include apportioning dedicated support among the organisers for hybrid participation, in-person participation and email communication (as opposed to general event support); including more contingency planning for last-minute changes of availability; and enabling event chairs to become experts in their rooms, with easier access to materials.

What went well or what would be worth carrying forward to other events?

A strength of the Annual Event continues to be its collegiality and the opportunity to network with researchers and practitioners from a breadth of backgrounds and sectors. Many discussions led to further collaboration, for example, through an event or Community Interest Group. The Association might consider ways to further cultivate networking opportunities as well as how to capture these kinds of impacts.

The plenary panel was a real highlight of the event and the plenary organisers did a great job of bringing together stakeholders from outside of traditional Higher Education roles, to share their insights. We would like to see this diversity continue in the future. The moderation of the event was also very successful, with thanks to our chair.

The student helpers were brilliant and it would be beneficial to include student helpers in future events as a way to engage with the community at the host institution.

Despite the challenges with the hybrid element, the technical setup of the rooms was excellent for the purpose and the sound was of good quality.

Thanks to a suggestion by members of the programming committee, we were able to develop a more robust way of reporting potential misconduct. Although this has yet to be tested or required at an event, it is good to have a mechanism in the future. This, in concert with the additions we made to accessibility (listed above), were important steps forward in ensuring the event continues to be inclusive as the organisation grows.

Throughout the event, the run-up and its aftermath, we had a lot of engagement with our social media channels across all platforms. This was particularly notable on our newest platform, LinkedIn, which led to an increase in followers. Through LinkedIn, we were also able to capture more organic feedback throughout the planning and delivery of the event, such as the positive message we had about our peer review process:

> *What struck me more than the acceptance itself was the generosity of the reading. A Global North DH conference engaging seriously with a Global South pedagogy not as a case study in constraint, but as a practice the field might learn from is the conversation I have been hoping to have.*

There was also an increase in the number of people signing up to the mailing list and registering their interest in membership.

In future years, the potential of the Annual Event to prompt other types of engagement might be explored further, for example, through blog posts or social media takeovers around or during the event.

Our sponsors, The Social History Archive, were brilliant and collaborative as usual. They remain valuable supporters of our work.

With respect to sponsorship in general, we also developed a clear template to guide our approach.

Any other reflections?

Overall the event was successful and remains an excellent addition to the digital humanities calendar, bringing together researchers and practitioners from various different sectors and disciplines. Although accessibility was significantly improved this year, there are still some areas for improvement, particularly around sharing deadlines and information further in advance.

We will also be committing to increasing the amount of time in the planning stages to reflect on feedback and build in changes, and to recording how these changes were implemented, in order to best demonstrate to the community the value of their feedback.

Attendee Feedback

Overall, feedback from the 2026 Annual Event was overwhelmingly good, with the majority of respondents describing the event as either ‘excellent’ or ‘good’. Attendees mentioned that among the highlights were “the community”, “incredible people”, and the “interdisciplinarity of the engaged professional/academics”. One response mentioned the “sense of community…and the openness in which people engage with other people’s work”. This is a running theme throughout the feedback, as another delegate said that they enjoyed the “quality of the discussions and the openness of participants to engage critically with emerging questions in Digital Humanities. I also appreciated the supportive and welcoming atmosphere created by the organisers”. Others noted the atmosphere of “collegiality and respect” and accessibility measures such as the quiet room that we added this year.

Interestingly, just under 70% of the people who provided feedback had not previously engaged with any of the Association’s other activities, such as funding schemes or Community Interest Groups, suggesting that the event did a good job of growing the Association’s network of members and collaborators. The majority also felt that the

event helped them connect with other people of the same or different background, and left them feeling inspired to find out more about sustainability in digital humanities. Workshops continue to be a popular format, thanks to their interactivity and discussion that facilitated collaboration. Several attendees said that the “time management was perfect” and described the event as “very well organised” with “fantastic student helpers”. One delegate even said the event was “one of my favourite conferences”.

Attendees seem to have found out about the event in a range of ways, but the most common seem to be via word of mouth and social media, although it’s worth noting that via mailing lists was not an option on the survey (and could be added next year). When asked how the event helped them develop professionally, attendees mentioned developing experience as a facilitator and peer reviewer and gaining methodological insights and feedback to improve their work. Attendees also made connections that are already having an impact - for instance, several attendees noted their intention to apply for the Association’s call for new Community Interest Groups.

However, the feedback mirrored the feelings of the organisers that the delivery of the hybrid components presented some difficulty. For example, it was noted by an online attendee that communication around what would and wouldn’t be available for online attendees was unclear and it was felt that we should “just stream everything”. Another person noted that they didn’t feel they were able to fully participate “owing to the issue joining the channels”. In-person attendees also did not enjoy the online elements, with one person noting that they “felt fragmented from the main conference due to limitations of tech and so on.” As this was also a pressure point in 2025, it would be worth reviewing how this is handled for future events.

We had a few other comments that are worth reflecting on because they relate to the accessibility of the event. One person noted that more clarity about the programme was needed in advance because they “nearly didn’t attend because of the lack of information and not having been before - but I’m glad I did.” Sharing information in advance is an area for the organisers to work on, to ensure the event is accessible to new attendees. Another person said they found the language of the abstracts inaccessible and “almost unfathomable language”, albeit acknowledging that this is not a specifically digital humanities problem. The organisers could nevertheless encourage speakers to use accessible language in the future.

We also had a number of suggestions that might improve the event. The majority of these related to the online/hybrid aspect of the event. For instance, a respondent suggested having a pre-event technical check for online presenters to ensure a smooth delivery experience. Other online attendees mentioned that they would have liked to

have the option to interact with their peers more. Suggested solutions included sharing contact methods between speakers, or facilitating other forms of online interaction such as an online social event. Beyond the hybrid elements, attendees suggested that we develop a feedback form specifically for Association events.