

Book Review: The Institutional Repository

Richard Jones, Theo Andrew and John MacColl. Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2006. 247pp. ISBN 1-84334-138-7

I wish that this book had been available a year ago when I was first getting to grips with the concept and operation of an institutional repository (IR). What I needed then, and is supplied in this book, was a comprehensive description of the background and context of an IR, coupled with a very practical guide to its implementation.

The book is written by a trio of authors well qualified to advise on the design and implementation of an IR. Their joint experience of creating, supporting and promoting the Edinburgh Research Archive is at the heart of this text.

The first chapter of this book compares the IR with the digital library. Different types of repository are discussed, and some of the key questions about IRs are addressed – including the role of IRs in the scholarly communication process, the significance of metadata, and the contribution of IRs to research impact. These are themes to which the later chapters will return.

Chapters 2 to 6 cover the full range of issues involved in implementing an IR. Beginning with making a case for the establishment of an IR, the authors then cover technologies and technicalities, workflow and administration, advocacy and intellectual property. Collectively, these elements produce a useful handbook for those considering building an IR for their institution.

Chapter 7, a case study of the Edinburgh Research Archive, draws together the theory and practice recommended in the earlier chapters.

Six appendices profile the major open source software packages available, each written by authors representing the product developers. Helpful glossaries of abbreviations and definitions complete the work.

The authors manage always to emphasise the underlying principles of implementing an IR. Thus they focus on how to evaluate different software packages, rather than recommending any one specific package; they provide guidelines for choosing a file format to support, rather than dictating their own preferences; and they give help in identifying the risks arising from intellectual property rights, rather than offering specific legal solutions. This approach should increase both the book's potential audience (international) and its period of usefulness.

Some of the value of this book lies in its detail. For example, the tables in Chapter 1 which give instances of digital libraries, disciplinary repositories, IRs and learning object repositories, enable readers to see for themselves the different types of repository. In other areas, the authors' ability to link practice to theory adds value to the existing literature and greatly enhances the reader's understanding. The advocacy model, based on Rogers' innovation diffusion theory, is a case in point. Given the acknowledged difficulty of gathering repository content, a deeper understanding of the roles of the

innovation itself, the social context and the communication channels is likely to be invaluable in planning an effective advocacy strategy.

If the book has some drawbacks, they arise mainly from the authors' limited perspective, that of innovators at a major research university. Thus the book is entirely focused on IRs in universities, and predominantly on research output in the form of e-prints and e-theses. The particular needs of those implementing IRs at other types of institution, or of those building IRs for other types of content, such as learning objects or administrative materials, are not addressed.

Some of the book's recommendations are undoubtedly counsels of perfection. For example, the suggestion that one should "make test installations of the software packages that pass preliminary evaluation" (p.74) is unlikely to be practical for more than a very short shortlist of products. As IRs become more commonplace and the functionality of the software is perfected, librarians are much more likely to call on the experience of earlier adopters in making their decision and to allow the software itself to guide their practice.

From a practical point of view, the book would benefit from a few minor additions. An implementation roadmap or checklist and a summary of practical tips for advocacy activities would both be useful. I would also like to see greater emphasis on the role of OAI harvesters in enhancing the visibility of IR content, ideally supported by a list of OAI compliant search tools.

These minor objections notwithstanding, this reference book successfully fills a significant gap in the literature. I recommend it.

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