

entries and one cross-reference covering the subject of records retention are badly in need of sorting out.

If all that sounds like nit-picking, it isn't; it's groundwork for a point I think important to make. LIS professionals know that a poor index limits the usability of a book for reference purposes. We also claim, as one of our core skills, expertise in organising information for retrieval. Yet here we have a professional publication, about a new technique in information management and retrieval, in which the traditional, built-in tool of retrieval hasn't been made to function as it should.

That the defect blights an otherwise excellent book is disappointing. What bothers me even more, though, is this: if we do not, in our own professional literature, demonstrate the ability to make old methods work, what kind of message does that send about our abilities to cope with the new?

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Freedom of information: a practical guide to implementing the Act
Kelvin Smith. Facet Publishing. London. 2004
ISBN 1-85604-517-X 200pp. £39.95

If you don't already know the significance of the date 1 January 2005, you will do when you have read this book. This is when the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 and the FOI (Scotland) 2002 Act become fully effective, and when public organisations will have to make their information available. This book is for all those in public authorities, including central government, non-departmental public bodies, all tiers of local authorities down to parish councils, higher and further education, schools, police authorities and the National Health Service. At last the UK has FOI legislation bringing it into line with other countries.

Kelvin Smith is Head of the Cataloguing and Accessioning Unit and Records Management Consultant in the Records Management Department of the National Archives, and has been immersed in the subject for 6 years. He has succeeded in his aim to write a practical guide to enable those involved in enacting FOI for their organisations without fear or worry. The book focuses on implementation from a user's point of view, and has chapters on:

Background to the Freedom of Information Act
The legislation
Exemptions
Publication schemes
Enforcement and appeal

Records management
Data protection, human rights and other legislation
Staffing and training
Getting ready for Freedom of Information

The Appendices have the full text of the Codes of Practice under sections 45 and 46 of the Act, Definitions, and Further help and guidance.

The Act is retrospective, and organisations need to:

Know what information they hold
Manage their information holdings effectively
Have in place the infrastructure for dealing with FOI requests
Meet challenging deadlines in responding to individual requests for information
Proactively disseminate information through a publication scheme
Set up arrangements to handle complaints and appeals
Ensure consistency in discharging their duties under the Act.

For information professionals used to the reference interview, it is of note that you cannot make enquiries as to why the information is being sought or what it will be used for. However, if a request is ambiguous, you can seek reasonable clarification. Information can also be refused if it is exempt under the Act as defined by 'public interest' (although this is likely to be tested in law), if the request is a repeat, or 'vexatious'. Exemptions are covered in detail; Smith thinks that it can be considered that information is not reasonably accessible if it is available only in digital form, but unlikely that the reverse will be upheld.

The use of publication schemes will save time and money by providing information which authorities publish as a matter of course. Most organisations publish these schemes on their websites, and screenshots of schemes from different types of organisation are included. Smith recommends that authorities look more closely at version control of documents, as earlier drafts of documents may be required to be released. He considers it likely that some information about public servants in connection with their work will be accessible, for example phone number, work address, role, responsibilities and grade. He suggests making available summaries of released information on the Internet (a database of requests submitted under Canada's Access to Information Act is available at <http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/asroberts/foi>).

Smith emphasises throughout that the legislation will only be as good as the quality of the records that are subject to its provisions. Responsibility for capturing, maintaining and ensuring access to records rests

with the organisation as a whole. I found the chapter on records management particularly useful. Smith recommends that electronic records be appraised at an early stage to avoid the risk of the information becoming incomplete or unreliable, or changes in IT systems causing the loss of degradation of records. A model action plan for records management is included.

Chapter 7 is a good summary of other legislation affecting information, with a useful table and flow chart outlining differences between legislation, and where access to information is guided by different legislation. The chapter on staffing and training has a useful competency framework for records management staff, as well as sample presentations to use in training, which can be downloaded from a website for the book. Chapter 9 pulls together information from the preceding chapters into an implementation plan, and has a sample plan of a typical project. Smith suggests setting up a tracking system with standard metadata to describe requests and standard fields to record outcomes. This could be networked for particular groups of the public sector; I would have appreciated more detail on this idea.

The Code of Practice under section 46 of the Act requires all public authorities to have a records manager. I would suggest that any public authority affected by the FOI legislation also needs a copy of this book. If they look at the signs of an organisation fully prepared to meet the requirements of FOI (p.140) and find signs lacking, this book will greatly assist. Anything not covered in great detail in the book is covered in the recommended websites.

It is a dense topic, but the book is clearly typeset with good use of headings and white space to make it readable. My only quibble is the rather basic index.

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Building an Electronic Resource Collection: a practical guide. 2nd ed.

Stuart D Lee and Frances Boyle. Facet Publishing. London. 2004 ISBN 1-85604-531-5 176pp. £29.95

There are times when you might think that adding electronic resources to your library couldn't be more difficult. If it's not deciphering the licence agreement, or getting the online resource permissions set, it's getting the CD-ROM loaded onto the network, or worse still, finding the CD again after someone has borrowed it. Lee and Boyle's book, now in its second

edition, clearly meets a need among librarians.

It's full of clearly laid out checklists to the steps you need to take in implementing a digital resource. Those working in larger institutions will know much, or most, of this, but this doesn't detract from the value of the book as a concise, up-to-date introduction – in fact, if you want the quickest possible start, the whole book is helpfully summarised in bullet points in the last four pages.

There is a valuable glossary, explaining terms that help to mystify the subject, such as "e-TOC" (electronic table of contents), although I noticed the glossary doesn't include terms such as URL or Z39.50 – these might be well-known, but how about "persistent URL" (p.89)? It's full of sensible advice that represents best practice, such as keeping a list of desiderata for proposed additions to the collection. If you can involve your users in realising that the budget is finite, and that adding resources requires a competition for limited funds, then your users are more likely to respect sometimes difficult decisions.

Equally, there is very sensible advice (too little implemented to date in many collections) that the ideal gateway unites print and electronic resources, even if such an integrated gateway raises difficulties of interface design and federated searching: users will eventually want such a seamless resource guide, and this should include learning materials created by the department, including material held on a VLE. One (nameless) subject librarian, when asked about materials provided by lecturers such as extracts for course material, told me "I don't get involved in that kind of thing ... I leave that to the department to implement." One hopes he sees a copy of this book before long.

One of the problems faced by resource managers is multiple budgets. It is not unusual for the print and electronic budget to be managed separately, and Lee and Boyle are clear on the benefits of cataloguing and managing resources in a co-ordinated way wherever possible, to ensure common goals are met.

Very importantly, the authors stress the value of usage statistics. While it is not always easy to interpret online statistics, they nonetheless provide far more information than was possible with print, and yet many libraries fail to make use of the invaluable indicators available from online usage statistics on how much the material is used (or not used) – an invaluable tool for determining future collection strategy. Even turnaways, those who tried to access the resource but were refused access for whatever reason, may provide valuable information on levels of interest in the material.