

Abstracts

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Title: ERA: Capturing Edinburgh's Research

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Abstract: Every year postgraduate researchers at the University of Edinburgh produce a large body of research material. While some of this material is published commercially in books and journals, much is not, and it remains largely invisible because of the dominance of the print and microform formats for thesis literature in the UK. It is clear that the current demand for access to thesis literature is inhibited by both physical restrictions and cost. In the digital age we are learning the importance of being impatient.

Many universities around the world are now taking steps to capture the research output of their own academics. Since the vast majority of this research output is created in digital format, it is now possible to capture it using web-based digital repositories. Edinburgh University Library is currently funded by the UK's Joint Information Systems Committee to run the Theses Alive! project [www.thesesalive.ac.uk] which is investigating the issues surrounding the use and management of electronic theses and dissertations in the UK. Initially the project is based at Edinburgh University, but will eventually involve other partner institutions in a UK-wide pilot study, including Cambridge University, Cranfield University, Leeds University and Manchester Metropolitan University.

Later on this year, Edinburgh University Library intends to launch an online digital repository of theses and dissertations from Edinburgh (Edinburgh Research Archive or ERA). Before this service is adopted university-wide we are embarking on smaller scale pilot projects to see what challenges and problems may lie in store for the creators, users and administrators of electronic theses.

This paper offers a practical insight from our firsthand experience into some of the key challenges faced whilst building and populating the Edinburgh Research Archive including; choice of software platform, addressing students needs, intellectual property and prior publication concerns, organisational and institutional policy change needed to support and achieve electronic submission of theses and long term sustainability.