



## **Report on the Future of Bibliographic Control : British Library response to the Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control**

The British Library welcomes the Report on the Future of Bibliographic Control. We commend the Working Group on its thorough analysis of the current situation and for delivering a thought provoking report, which makes an important and definitive contribution to current debates within the library and information science profession.

We agree it is vital for all libraries to consider the future direction of our bibliographic policies and practices and re-examine our priorities for the future. These are issues the library and information science profession must address to ensure that libraries continue to play a major role in the information landscape for forthcoming generations of researchers.

We have kept our comments here to a generally high level. We have tried to organise these under the main headings of the original report.

### **1. Increase the efficiency of bibliographic production**

#### **Need for clear business models**

We strongly agree with the principle of using data from the rest of the supply chain. The British Library has successfully worked with commercial bibliographic agencies for over 25 years in the production and dissemination of CIP data for UK imprints. This data flows into a range of core British Library bibliographic products and services.

However, we believe this works successfully because it is based on clear commercial and contractual relationships. While we feel there may be more potential in future for mutually beneficial 'not for profit' partnerships with publishers, the supply chain and bibliographic agencies, we feel our success to date has been based on putting these arrangements on a clear contractual footing. This has allowed us to specify that trade metadata, flowing into library services, is 'fit for purpose' within the contexts of resource discovery and collection management.

While re-use of trade data is desirable, a large scale change to such a model implies different overheads rather than none at all. Our experience, coupled with that of our commercial data aggregators and other partners, shows that support for separate publisher

feeds is still necessary even when all suppliers use Onix, thus necessitating multiple conversions.

Even with well formed metadata the content can be highly variable. We would support the development of transitional business models that can be shared with the rest of the library community, so the full cost/benefits to LC, to the supply trade and to the rest of the community are fully understood. The whole community must understand how 'more substantial cost recovery' and reducing 'barriers to sharing' (1.1.4) will work alongside each other, particularly with regard to their own current business and cost models.

### **Impact on the wider library community**

The report envisages a new position for LC as partner rather than leader in an increasingly collaborative bibliographic community. We acknowledge and support LC's need to make changes in its current policies and practices, but would recommend potential partners are given sufficient time to understand the impact of changes on their role and to make necessary adjustments in parallel, whether to business models, operations or infrastructure. This is not to give others a veto on change, but rather to encourage a stronger sense of partnership and ownership of a more collaborative system for all concerned.

### **Impact on users of library catalogues and collections**

We agree fully that as individual libraries and as a bibliographic community we need to eliminate redundant work, particularly effort that does not add any value to the user experience. We support the need to better understand and research how users want to interact with libraries in the future. We particularly welcome all additional research into new resource discovery models and the effectiveness of different services from a user perspective to allow us to evolve our policies and operational models (1.1.5).

### **Internationalisation of bibliographic models**

We appreciate that the report must be primarily focussed on the LC's role within the United States, but we wish to stress the benefits of an international perspective in developing new operational and business models. Publishing is increasingly international in scope and there is significant overlap in national publishing outputs, particularly within the English language publishing world. So if we are looking to models relying heavily on the publishing world for core bibliographic descriptions, it is essential that these are applicable internationally. We already have strong international collaboration and data sharing in key areas, such as international authority control, which can serve as excellent models for new international operational models too.

## **2. Enhance access to rare and unique materials**

We agree with the need for stronger focus on making accessible the rare and unique materials within library collections. The need to clear backlogs in cataloguing and to retrospectively convert older catalogues in print and card formats to make the data

available online is a key component of British Library strategy. Some level of data online is better than none in a networked world.

We agree that digitisation holds the key to widespread access, but also supports preservation of the materials. There are now several large scale mass digitisation operations underway across the world. We feel there needs to be more widespread dissemination of 'best technological and operational practice' for mass digitisation within the general library community. This would enable the community to establish common models for digitisation and related metadata projects and to ensure the digitised objects are discoverable and accessible as widely as possible. We must ensure that descriptive metadata for digitised objects, whether manually or automatically generated, can be harvested and work alongside traditional bibliographic metadata in network level discovery services.

The context of rare and unique materials is also important for researchers. What inspired them? What replicates them? How do they relate to other publications? Making efficiencies in providing core descriptions will allow us to redirect library resource to value added activities. More importantly, we should open up the opportunity to wider communities to add value to description and discovery through providing Web 2.0 services such as tagging and wikis within our core catalogues and discovery services. We see a need for a collaborative effort to establish non proprietary and transportable tagging standards linked to bibliographic data to ensure as wide a benefit from Web 2.0 enrichment as possible.

### **3. Position our technology for the future**

We fully endorse the views expressed in the report on developing our technology in a variety of ways:-

- The need for a non-MARC carrier, probably XML based.
- The need for the future focus to be on Web-based development. For library standards to be expressed in machine-readable and machine-actionable formats and for the extension of the use of standard identifiers (primarily URIs) for data elements in records.
- The importance of work on freely available crosswalks and conversion programs etc to improve the flow of data from one format to another
- The need to see 'machines' (or rather APIs) as important users of data, with the protocols that allow systems to interface with others being seen as important as the formats used within them
- The need for work on management information to underscore/measure the value libraries add to the supply chain
- The need to 'translate' subject standards for the Web/RDF world e.g. via SKOS and develop crosswalks to other controlled vocabularies

We believe there must be a stronger focus on adopting wider industry standards where possible and moving away from proprietary 'library' solutions, which lock in library data and close off other data sources to us. While we must engage strongly with library system

vendors in the development of 'next generation' library systems, there is a strong need to see wider information players (e.g. Google, Microsoft & LibraryThing) as collaborators as well as libraries and their traditional system and infrastructure partners.

This is a complex area and requires significant investment in infrastructure now to deliver economies of scale and better services later. Efficiencies in current operations can contribute to this investment.

The one recommendation we do not endorse is to suspend work on the development of Resource Description and Access (RDA) (3.2.1) until more large scale testing of FRBR has been carried out and the business case for moving to RDA has been satisfactorily articulated.

We do not agree that FRBR has not been tested as a model. FRBR has been extensively tested over the decade since it was published. VTLS has developed its Virtua system to support FRBR entities and relationships. OCLC and RLG conducted extensive research into FRBR entities and relationships using available bibliographic data. AUSTLIT has been running a service based on FRBR for several years. The FRBR Review group and CIDOC have already developed a formal object oriented expression of FRBR which is closely linked to the museum sector's CRM model. The FRBR model is also being followed by metadata projects, e.g. DC Scholarly Works Application Profile; DC Images Application Profile.

We believe that what is holding FRBR back is not a lack of testing; but a shortage of 'FRBRised' data. This will remain the case so long as our cataloguing rules, exchange formats and systems remain "flat".

We see RDA as an important driver to deliver the necessary change across the bibliographic community and create discovery services that work in ways that are more meaningful to users. We support the further exploratory work that has already been the subject of joint discussions between JSC and DCMI (3.2.1.2). The development of RDA is also based on international partnership, so careful consideration and consultation will be required before any major change in direction should be considered.

#### **4. Position our community for the future**

We fully agree and support the recommendations to develop a range of discovery services through enhancement of data, addition of user content, and data mining of transactional data such as circulation and navigational 'tracking'.

While we do not feel that more FRBR testing is essential before RDA development can be completed (see comments at 3 above) we strongly support the desire to realise the full potential of FRBR to improve discovery services for library users. As the management of identities of manifestations, of works and of agents is critical to the success of realising efficiency of exchange between sectors, we would suggest broadening the 'test plan' to encompass more active and collective engagement with the rights management industry

and publishers who are leading developments on new identifiers such as ISTC and ISNI. These have the potential to add critical value and to be of benefit throughout the whole publishing and supply chain to the user.

We agree that LCSH is costly and cumbersome, but it has provided some level of consistency for over 100 years with regard to traditional bibliographic data, so a careful process is required to replace it with a system which is more cost effective to apply and will interoperate with increasing amounts of automatically generated 'subject' data. We support the recommendations to improve LCSH structure and hierarchy, especially via links with classification schemes. We agree with decoupling of strings in some contexts e.g. to exploit faceted browsing and discovery. However, we feel we need more research is needed to determine how full subject analysis of resources can be achieved more cost effectively.

## **5. Strengthen the library and information science profession**

We agree that as libraries work within an increasingly complex information environment, we need proof of the value of bibliographic control. We strongly support the need for objective evidence and ongoing research into the cost effectiveness and benefit of bibliographic control to resource discovery and collection management.

We see the need for a strong international dimension to an evidence based approach, as different situations will continue to apply in different geo-political and language groupings and we all have much we can learn from others experiences. The BL already works with LC on cost comparison models to support benchmarking studies and would be very supportive of continuing and extending this work.

We must ensure that incoming generations of LIS professionals are fully prepared for the increasing complexity of the information environment within which they will work and develop their careers and again we believe there is a strong international dimension to this. We feel we need stronger development of skills across a wide range of metadata, technology and service issues to allow us to work effectively as fully hybrid libraries and increasingly as purely digital libraries.

We agree we need to share our future thinking with the wider profession – current and future – to inform and stimulate ideas about the future of bibliographic control for a digital information environment.

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