

THE BRITISH LIBRARY



# Unlocking The Value

The British Library's Collection Metadata Strategy  
2015-2018

## Summary

***“Our vision is that by 2020 the Library’s collection metadata assets will be comprehensive, coherent, authoritative and sustainable, enabling their full value to be unlocked for improved content management, greater collaboration and wider use of the collection.”***

**Collection metadata** is an umbrella term for the metadata used to: manage, access, preserve and describe the collection. This document unites strategic discussion of the Library’s collection metadata activities and identifies the necessary foundational principles, priorities and governance structures by which management of our metadata assets can be improved to deliver wider business benefits and support the delivery of our core purposes and programmes.

**Collection metadata** is both a key asset representing centuries of person years of investment and a potential enabler for current operations and future developments. However, despite its strategic importance for numerous stakeholders, the potential value held within collection metadata for service improvements and enhanced collection management remains under exploited.

**The Collection Metadata Strategy** identifies the key priorities required to start unlocking the latent value in our collection metadata. A core objective will be its transformation from a passive by-product to an active enabler offering greater efficiency, interoperability and utility.

The priorities are:

- ◆ **Drive efficiencies in the creation, management and exploitation of collection metadata** *to support delivery of the Library’s strategic priorities and programmes*
- ◆ **Improve the Library’s return on investment in its collection metadata assets** *by ensuring their long term value is maintained for future activities*
- ◆ **Open up more of the Library’s collection metadata** *to improve access to Library content and promote wider re-use*

The strategy also includes the governance and metrics required to manage implementation of the priorities together with high level objectives for the period. Due to the rapidly evolving operational environment, implementation detail will be covered by annual plans for each financial year and informed by contemporary Library priorities.

## Purpose

This document identifies the strategic principles, priorities and governance structures by which our metadata assets can be managed efficiently to support delivery of our wider strategic objectives. The strategy will be supplemented by annual implementation plans describing the tasks required to achieve strategic priorities, address legacy issues and meet future requirements. A roadmap summarising activities currently planned for the period of the strategy has also been produced to accompany this document.

## Context

The metadata used to describe, manage and preserve our collection is a key Library asset representing centuries of investment. Delivery of the Library's core purposes and key strategies is underpinned by the efficient use of collection metadata. However, despite its strategic importance for numerous internal and external stakeholders, the potential value locked within our metadata for improved collection management and enhanced services is under exploited.

## Stakeholders & Uses

Collection metadata and the services it supports are valued by a wide range of internal and external stakeholders. Uses of collection metadata can be direct or indirect while users may obtain access directly from the British Library, via third party intermediaries or service providers.

## Challenges

Effective management of collection metadata as a corporate asset is a responsibility for everyone involved in its procurement, creation or dissemination. Our challenges include:

**Multiple incompatible standards and systems** - *We must rationalise outdated and unconnected metadata systems and standards, which can result in complex, fragmented and incoherent services, by developing common approaches.*

**'Legacy' metadata unfit for current business requirements** - *We need to find innovative, automated methods of migrating older collection metadata to support current business requirements to deliver more effective inventory control, digital preservation, resource discovery and collection analysis.*

**Unlocking 'hidden' metadata** - *We must create a programme of activities enabling the value locked in over 2 million collection descriptions in printed or non-standard metadata to be realised for new digitisation initiatives, resource discovery and wider audiences*

**Delivering efficiencies for metadata creation and management** - *We must find creative ways to realise possibilities offered by new information sources to improve the quality of older metadata and devise sustainable processes for metadata creation and maintenance including digital rights and preservation management*

**Improving opportunities for access** - *We must increase the amount of collection metadata available to the wider community via contributions to cooperative platforms, exposure via common APIs, shared national service infrastructure and Government supported open data initiatives*

**Supporting wider strategic objectives** - *We must develop new approaches supporting both collaborative initiatives and efficient search of a single collection without compromising the rationalisation of systems and standards*

**Creating corporate solutions for increasingly complex issues** - *We must initiate greater standardisation in the sourcing, description, management and dissemination of 'system neutral' collection metadata. Solutions must support: greater levels of granularity, complex and dynamic relationships between local and remote holdings and digital preservation requirements for long term persistence in resource identification.*

**Skills development and maintenance** - *We must acquire and maintain the skills required to exploit new opportunities arising from a rapidly evolving range of non-traditional sources, standards and technologies to meet the challenges arising from managing and preserving digital content*

## Standards

Standards underpin the creation and dissemination of collection metadata. Standardisation and consistency become increasingly important as our dependency upon automated digital processes grows. Maintenance of competing standards increases

operational complexity and cost since specialist skills and infrastructure are replicated to support multiple formats. In addition, our ability to provide a consistent user experience is diminished by the problems arising from attempting to harmonise incompatible data.

## Implications

Collection metadata has evolved from basic catalogue descriptions to include content licensing, preservation and access information. Its continuing development is driven by the challenges of: digital migration, rising audience expectations and diminishing resources. Traditional metadata generation, management and dissemination methods are not scalable or appropriate in this new environment. Fortunately, the new global, digital landscape offers new possibilities for service enhancement via standardised infrastructure and open licensed data sources.

We must therefore create innovative and sustainable new approaches in which collection metadata can evolve from performing a passive role to one in which it becomes an active enabler of efficiencies for increasingly complex and time critical operational processes.

## Strategic Fit

The British Library Act, (1972, Ch. 54) records the organisation's corporate responsibility to be "a national centre for reference, study and bibliographical and other information services." This core requirement resulted in the Library offering metadata services from its foundation. In addition to recording UK publishing output via the *British National Bibliography* these services also served to increase the international visibility of our collection. The Library's ability to comply with key Government initiatives relating to public bodies (e.g. *Open Public Data, Freedom of Information (FOI) & Public Sector Information (PSI)*) is also underpinned by its metadata resources.

Effective management of collection metadata also supports the delivery of key Library strategies, notably IT and Digital Preservation. Delivery of the Library's core purposes also depends upon the possession of suitable collection metadata; specifically:

**Custodianship** – *Curation and preservation of the national collection requires well maintained collection metadata for secure inventory control and access*

**Research** – *Research of all kinds is supported and stimulated via the use of collection metadata for*

*resource discovery, document delivery and data mining.*

**Business** – *Innovation can be stimulated via the release of open metadata for commercial exploitation in line with Government public sector requirements*

**Culture** – *Engagement with the wider community via exhibitions is underpinned by the use of collection metadata to identify suitable content and support related web resources*

**Learning** – *Schools and other academic institutions are assisted via our release of free descriptive metadata to support efficiencies in the creation of their library catalogues*

**International** – *We work with partners around the world to exchange metadata, advance development of international standards and host standard identification agencies.*

## Our Vision

*Our vision is that by 2020 the Library's collection metadata assets will be comprehensive, coherent, authoritative and sustainable, enabling their full value to be unlocked for improved content management, greater collaboration and wider use of the collection.*

## Strategic Principles

To establish a foundation for the Strategy, a set of core principles were agreed to guide its development, and implementation. The principles require that:

- ◆ The Library defines and implements a management strategy for collection metadata, as it does for other key assets.
- ◆ The level of detail and availability of collection metadata should be governed by operational service requirements, collection security, preservation and audit.
- ◆ All collection metadata should be hosted on one of the Library's Strategic Metadata Repositories.
- ◆ All collection metadata should be created and managed in compliance with recognised international and industry standards.

- ◆ The Library must be responsive to expectations of users and other stakeholders.

Creation of core principles was followed by the development of strategic priorities to enable the British Library to maximise the return on its investment in collection metadata and realise its full asset value.

## Strategic Priorities for Collection Metadata - 2015-2018

### Strategic Priority 1: Drive efficiencies in the creation, management and exploitation of collection metadata to support delivery of the British Library's strategic priorities and programmes

We will support improved asset management, sustainable workflow efficiencies and enable new opportunities for collaboration and partnership by:

- ◆ **Managing a structured reduction in the number of collection metadata standards and systems** *to deliver reduced operational cost and complexity*
- ◆ **Developing new collection metadata creation and enhancement processes** *enabling efficient exploitation of third party data sources e.g. automated extraction, crowdsourcing, embedded metadata in content and bulk enhancement*
- ◆ **Implementing accurate and flexible rights management metadata** *for both content and description to improve reuse of the collections*
- ◆ **Creating a central best practice resource and a horizon scanning function** *to improve consistency and efficiency in the exploitation of collection metadata*
- ◆ **Developing new collection metadata management information tools** *to support accurate assessment of collection strengths and weaknesses*

### Strategic Priority 2: Improve the Library's return on investment in its collection metadata assets by ensuring their long term value is maintained for future activities

We will ensure the Library obtains the best value from its collection metadata investment by:

- ◆ **Collaborating with international partners** *to ensure relevant collection metadata standards are developed and implemented to support operational efficiency and preserve long term value*
- ◆ **Ensuring collection metadata accurately and persistently incorporates information required to deliver wider strategic objectives** *and support IT and Digital Preservation strategies and other key initiatives*
- ◆ **Developing processes to identify and prioritise collection metadata enhancements** *that will enable delivery of our key strategic objectives*
- ◆ **Managing long term risk to integrity of collection metadata** *against short term efficiency measures*
- ◆ **Creating collection metadata maintenance, enhancement and QA processes** *supporting increased operational efficiencies*
- ◆ **Ensuring licensing of third party collection metadata assets are:** *negotiated with a long term view, accurately documented and securely stored*

### Strategic Priority 3: Open up more of the Library's collection metadata to improve access to Library content and promote wider re-use

We will guarantee Government and community expectations are met by:

- ◆ **Ensuring suitable collection metadata is available** *to enable and support new shared service initiatives, research and commercial collaborations*
- ◆ **Increasing opportunities for interaction with our collection metadata** *to demonstrate the wealth of the collection and its relevance for all communities*
- ◆ **Making sure our collection metadata is visible and accurately represented** *via all key national and global resource discovery or document delivery channels and platforms*

- ◆ **Taking steps to expose any remaining collection metadata assets** (e.g. cards, printed, database) that are currently unavailable for resource discovery, partnership or collection management
- ◆ **Ensuring accurate and timely rights metadata is available** to support the sharing or purchase of any digital content that we make openly available via the Web.
- ◆ **Making sure our collection metadata is openly available** in compliance with current Government best practice for the public sector and any related legislation (e.g. PSI)

## Delivering the Priorities

### Governance & Support

A new governance structure has been created to support implementation of the Strategy consisting of:

- ◆ **The Collection Metadata Strategy Group (CMSG)** - a senior group under the 'One British Library' programme chaired by the Head of Collection Management.
- ◆ **The Collection Metadata Advisory Group (CMAG)** - an expert group with representation from collection areas across the Library responsible for advising the CMSG on technical issues and chaired by the Metadata Standards Manager.
- ◆ **The Collection Metadata Processing Group (CMPG)** - a group responsible for resolving operational metadata issues in line with the Metadata Strategy and chaired by the Head of Content and Metadata Processing.

In addition, a Collection Metadata Implementation Group has been created together with the post of 'Head of Collection Metadata' with responsibility for delivery of the Strategy.

### Implementation

Annual implementation plans supporting delivery of the strategic priorities will be developed. Related business cases will be coordinated with wider strategic activities and scheduled to fit with corporate planning and financial schedules.

While the rapidly changing operational environment makes it difficult to accurately predict all steps necessary for implementation of the strategic priorities, high level objectives for delivery by the end of the strategy period are presented in the accompanying *Collection Metadata Strategy Roadmap 2015-18* and include:

### Throughout

- ◆ **Key project and operational requirements for innovative collection metadata solutions will be supported**
- ◆ **Inadequate collection metadata will be improved** – via a targeted programme of automated interventions in line with business priorities
- ◆ **Government initiatives for open public data will be supported as they are implemented**
- ◆ **Collaborative metadata standards activity will be initiated or undertaken**

### 2015/16

- ◆ **Standard best practice will be established and embedded for collection metadata management and documentation** (e.g. licensing, digital preservation, digitisation)
- ◆ **Comprehensive audit of the Library's collection metadata assets undertaken and annual reporting measures established**
- ◆ **Collection metadata assets register created and hidden metadata assets identified and prioritised for further action**
- ◆ **Further open metadata sets will be released** (e.g. new printed music dataset, national bibliography enhancements)
- ◆ **Initial coordination and prioritisation with other strategic activities** (e.g. IT and Digital Preservation)
- ◆ **Assessment and prioritisation of metadata migration requirements** (e.g. sound recordings for *Save our Sounds*)
- ◆ **Implementation of automated metadata enhancement processes for non-print legal deposit e-books**
- ◆ **Examination of Digital Rights Management (DRM) metadata options in collaboration with the licensing team**
- ◆ **Horizon scanning function established to identify relevant external factors**

## 2016/17

- ◆ **Innovative and cost effective solutions** will be implemented to meet the challenge of sourcing or generating metadata for the expanding collection (e.g. overseas and historic collections)
- ◆ **Creation of an engagement plan** for participation in strategically important collection metadata standards
- ◆ **New technical options** for the persistent identification, hosting and management of collection metadata assets and related services will be identified and prioritized.

## 2017/18

- ◆ **Complexity of the current standards and systems infrastructure** will be reduced via structured convergence on an agreed set of supported standards and metadata repositories.
- ◆ **The quantity of collection metadata currently hidden or unavailable** to the community under open licensing will be significantly reduced

## Metrics

Suitable metrics will be developed and trialled in 2015/16 to enable the effectiveness of the strategy to be measured. These will be supplemented by an annual audit reporting the current state of the Library's collection metadata assets. The resources required to generate the metrics will be reviewed by the CMSG to ensure they are sustainable.

## Communications

The success of the Collection Metadata Strategy will require cultural and technical change. Due to the range of external stakeholders there will also be a requirement for wider visibility of metadata activities and participation in related standards and systems initiatives. It is proposed to address these requirements via the following measures.

- ◆ Creation of a new set of Collection Metadata web pages as part of the British Library's Web Redevelopment Programme
- ◆ A centralised British Library [email](#) support function for collection metadata queries.
- ◆ Use of [social media](#) to provide updates on progress
- ◆ Talks at external events to disseminate information about the Strategy

## Glossary

Term	Definition and Scope
<b>API</b>	An 'Application Programming Interface' is a set of protocols, routines or tools required for the creation of a software application.
<b>Collection Metadata</b>	'Collection metadata' is an umbrella term for the metadata used to: manage, access, preserve and describe the collection
<b>Hidden Metadata</b>	Collection metadata that is unavailable to someone to whom it would be of value.  Hidden metadata includes: printed catalogues; local databases that cannot be accessed through the discovery layer; metadata encoded in a specialised schema or format; metadata that is subject to restrictions on reuse or distribution.
<b>Legacy Metadata</b>	Inherited metadata that is not capable of satisfying use cases.  Legacy metadata includes: metadata that is being used for purposes for which it was never intended; metadata that has been converted from a printed format to a machine readable format; metadata that is not compatible with current standards. These categories are not mutually exclusive.
<b>Metadata</b>	Structured information that describes, explains, locates, or otherwise makes it easier to retrieve, use, or manage an information resource
<b>Open Data</b>	Data that is made available by organisations, businesses and individuals for anyone to access, use and share
<b>System metadata</b> <b>neutral</b>	Metadata that is independent of proprietary or system specific constraints that restrict opportunities for development or data migration.