

Response to the consultation on Subject Standards

Introduction

Thanks to everyone who took the time and trouble to respond to this consultation. We are very grateful for your feedback, which we are taking into account as we consider our next steps. Before we turn to what happens next, here is a summary of the responses we received.

The Library posed three proposals for comment.

1. The British Library proposes to adopt FAST selectively to extend the scope of subject indexing of current and legacy content. [See responses](#)
2. The British Library proposes to implement FAST as a replacement for LCSH in all current cataloguing, subject to mitigation of the risks identified in the background paper; in particular, the question of sustainability. [See responses](#)
3. The British Library proposes to implement Abridged DDC selectively to extend the scope of subject indexing of current and legacy content. [See responses](#)

We asked respondents to calibrate their answers to the following questions for each proposal on a scale of 1-5: where 1 is very negative and 5 is very positive:

1. What is your response to the proposed change?
2. How would you characterise the impact of the proposed change on your business?
3. How would you characterise the impact of the proposed change on your use of British Library metadata?

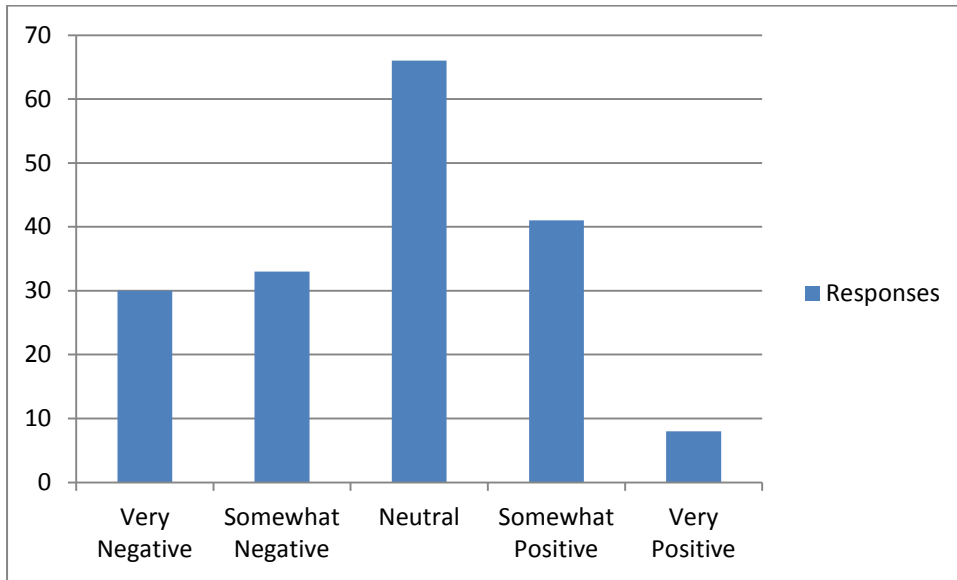
Responses

A total of 60 responses were received. Thirty three respondents specified their geographical location:

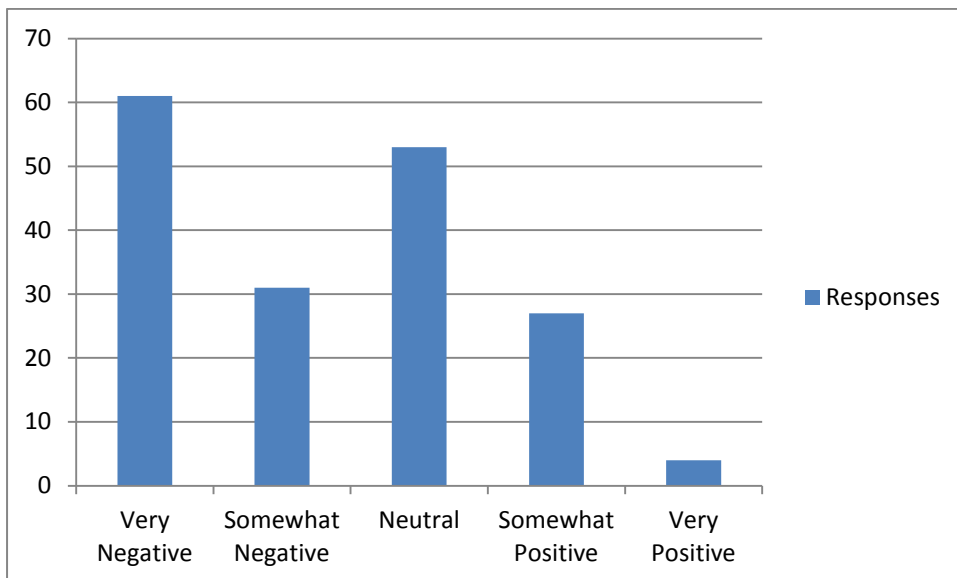
Country	Respondents
UK	21
USA	6
Ireland	3
Belgium	1
Canada	1
New Zealand	1

The following charts give an aggregate view of the responses to each proposal. A full breakdown of the responses to each question and all of the comments received is given in the Appendices.

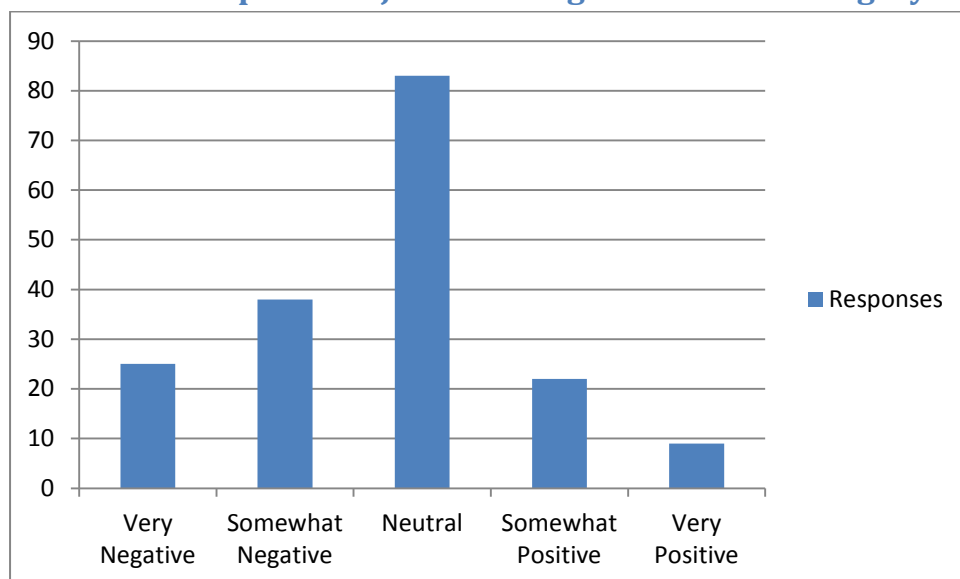
The British Library proposes to adopt FAST selectively to extend the scope of subject indexing of current and legacy content.



The British Library proposes to implement FAST as a replacement for LCSH in all current cataloguing, subject to mitigation of the risks identified in the background paper; in particular, the question of sustainability



The British Library proposes to implement Abridged DDC selectively to extend the scope of subject indexing of current and legacy content.



Evaluation

Respondents are mostly cautious or negative about the proposals. It is evident that the second proposal, for FAST to supersede LCSH as the Library's standard for subject indexing, caused the greatest concern as this would have the biggest impact on users of our records and on collaborative partners.

Some respondents expressed interest in the potential efficiencies of FAST as an alternative to LCSH, but this was tempered by concerns about sustainability and governance. Strong concern was also expressed about the quality and fitness for purpose of FAST.

The overall response appears more neutral in relation to DDC, but several respondents noted that they are not DDC users. The concerns expressed by DDC users about the potential impact of change, including relabeling of stock and additional classification work, are very significant.

Next Steps

FAST

FAST is being assigned in selected retrospective conversion and backlog clearance projects and to some born-digital resources. We do not expect this to have any negative impact on users of our metadata or out catalogues, as these are resources for which subject indexing could not otherwise be provided.

We met with OCLC in April to discuss the results of our survey. During the meeting we registered our interest in FAST as an alternative to LCSH, but made clear our concerns regarding its development path and sustainability.

We will be undertaking testing to evaluate the efficiency and quality of FAST relative to LCSH. This testing will include comparative time-and -motion and retrievability studies. The outcomes will be reported in autumn 2016.

Dewey Decimal Classification

The Library has no plans to change application of full DDC with regard to current products and services.

We see opportunities to improve discovery and other services by the retrospective application of broad Dewey to materials that do not have any classification numbers, including legacy data and uncatalogued resources. We may also apply broad Dewey to current content streams for which DDC is not currently provided. We do not expect this to have any adverse impact on users of our metadata services.

In general, we have found that abridged Dewey does not currently deliver the efficiencies that we need, but it is being successfully applied to UK theses through the ETHOS service.

Future Developments

We are currently working on our plans for further evaluation of FAST , in light of the concerns raised by the survey, and we aim to report on this work later in the year. Information will be posted on the British Library Website and usual channels.

Appendix 1: The British Library proposes to adopt FAST selectively to extend the scope of subject indexing of current and legacy content

[Back to Introduction](#)

Answer Options	Very Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Very Positive	Response Count
What is your response to the proposed change?	13	10	15	16	6	60
How would you characterise the impact of the proposed change on your business?	7	14	23	14	1	59
How would you characterise the impact of the proposed change on your use of British Library metadata?	10	9	28	11	1	59
Please use this space for your comments or to provide additional information						18
<i>answered question</i>						60
<i>skipped question</i>						0

“We mostly use BNB records, which have LCSH.”

“Having responsibility for metadata creation and acquisition in a legal deposit library with a similar interest in adopting FAST to improve operational efficiency and extend the scope of subject indexing I am fairly positive about the proposal and would welcome a report at an appropriate time on its impact. Although there is still nervousness in the library community about the loss of precision in searching this seems a sensible decision given the resources available to libraries and the fact that most have moved towards reliance on new generation discovery systems and away from classic OPACs”

“Sustainability is our main concern, but definitely interested in its advantages as could save cataloguing time.”

“British Library Metadata isn't our first choice because we are outside of the UK so it wouldn't be as significant as it might otherwise be for us but I think that adding the metadata to any record is great”

“We would prefer to use other sources of metadata should this proposal be introduced”

“That this is selective and not across the board implementation”

“Any extension of the scope of subject indexing of current and legacy content in the British Library will be of some benefit to users, British Library

metadata for legacy content is not widely used by us for cataloguing purposes, so we have characterised the impact as “Neutral” in this respect.

“If FAST is added to LCSH, we would ignore it, so we have no strong view on it”

“We obtain our bibliographic records from BDS (Bibliographic Services) so I think it would need to be fully tested and accepted as a proper service, before they would roll it out to customers.”

“Fast headings are too general to be meaningful as index terms”

“Obviously we don't have to adopt what the BL does, but we do like to comply with the BL as much as possible and so if we were to adopt FAST instead of LCSH it would have major consequences for us. And for what?”

“We use full LCSH”

“Faceting with FAST removes context and you no longer know what geographic place or form heading goes with each subject.

I would like to know more about 'selectively'

“If adopted selectively while continuing to apply LCSH, as is done by OCLC, I wouldn't really have much of a problem with it. all did their own thing.”

“First, I, as cataloger for a small public library have no use for the British Library. Second, FAST subject headings can be so nebulous as to be meaningless. I once saw a FAST subject heading for World war II as "War", wow that's really helpful if for all wars we have "war" as a subject heading as if we wanted a keyword search instead of a subject search. I also remember seeing as a subject heading for World War II and Nazi policy as "holocaust", just that, nothing else. What if I wanted to know about sacrificial ceremony in the twentieth century? It would pull that book within my result list. FAST headings=worthless. I strip all FAST headings from my bib records.”

“FAST is already used in OCLC as a supplement to existing LCSH fields”

Appendix 2: The British Library proposes to implement FAST as a replacement for LCSH in all current cataloguing, subject to mitigation of the risks identified in the background paper; in particular, the question of sustainability

[Back to Introduction](#)

Answer Options	Very Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Very Positive	Response Count
What is your response to the proposed change	23	11	11	12	2	59
How would you characterise the impact of the proposed change on your business?	20	11	19	8	1	59
How would you characterise the impact of the proposed change on your use of British Library metadata?	18	9	23	7	1	58
Please use this space for your comments or to provide additional information						24
<i>answered question</i>						59
<i>skipped question</i>						1

“Very interesting prospect; lots of potentially positive repercussions; some concern about loss of precision; more exploration of risks and local implementation necessary before coming to a final conclusion.”

“This library is heavily reliant on BNB records and will therefore see the impact of the proposed change on a large scale. Looked at in terms of resource discovery it is increasingly clear that our end-users are likely to notice very little change since they increasingly rely on keyword searches and filtering of results. As a librarian I have serious concerns about the sustainability of FAST while it remains an OCLC Research project. This position is a barrier to wider adoption that will have an even greater impact on the library community as they develop plans to make more use of linked data. The next couple of years will be a critical period for exploring the wider use of FAST and VIAF through the linked data capabilities of new generation systems so the OCLC stance is increasingly problematic. Sustainability is our main concern. Would continue to use BL metadata. Would need time to train staff and introduce the change, in particular those involved in the Shared Cat. Prog.”

“FAST is worthless. All context is lost in the system. This is a disaster waiting to happen. There are good reasons why the Americans have been resistant to it.

This would be a detrimental step for the British Library to take”

“Our system can't make use of FAST at the moment so we'd have to add LCSH but I think that this is a temporary situation. I think all systems will use FAST soon. If it's the best quality record otherwise, we'd use it and add the SH.”

“We feel this will lead to content with a lack of precision in subject headings and negatively impact discovery. The loss of the relationship between the subject headings within a record will reduce the quality of search results. We are also concerned that there would be two sources of authority files that a cataloguer might have to check against (should the community in the UK follow suit). Would the LMS need to have both LC and Fast? We have concerns about the support and commitment that would be provided by OCLC in maintaining FAST.”

“That this is not synchronized or coordinated with oclc or lc”

“We would welcome a simpler subject heading system, but we have a number of concerns about the current state of FAST, and its possible future development. Taken together, these concerns have led us to the “Very Negative” responses to the above questions. We are also concerned that as a Legal Deposit library we may also be expected to implement FAST for Shared Cataloguing records. We have put our concerns to the FAST Team at OCLC and have received helpful responses, which have been incorporated into our comments below (with appropriate attribution).

Our two main concerns about FAST as a replacement for LSCH in British Library metadata for current cataloguing can be summarised as follows:

- 1) FAST may not provide reliable collocation. Our investigations into FAST suggest that it might be less good than LCSH for achieving and maintaining collocation (i.e., making sure that bibliographic records in our system do not use different terms for the same purpose or the same term for different purposes). We derive thousands of records from the BNB for batch-upgrading brief records in our system, the majority of them created by the BL, and if these records arrive with no subject headings except FAST headings we could not possibly add LCSH manually. This would result in time in a significant proportion of records in the University of Oxford union catalogue with no LCSH, and this would result in problems for readers in retrieving all records on their subjects in those cases where the LCSH heading differs from the FAST heading (e.g. ‘Rhone River (Switzerland and France)’ and ‘Europe–Rhone River’).
- 2) FAST does not have the coverage of the LCSH/LCNAF subject system. We are concerned whether FAST can provide all the terms that are needed by the BL for its current cataloguing at the time when they are needed. There is currently no official mechanism for getting new terms added to FAST. (The FAST Team at OCLC recognises that FAST may need a separate process for managing the creation of new headings, but states that no such mechanism is in place at this time.) We would hope that FAST would commit to more frequent updating. At present it is committed to updating only twice per year,

although the FAST Team at OCLC state that a monthly update is typical. Frequent updating would be required to incorporate new NACO and LCSH terms in a timely fashion and remove the need for cataloguers to check other sources than FAST (e.g. LCNAF) for recent NACO records. (The FAST Team at OCLC have stated that the currently monthly updates include newly established LCSH terms and changes to FAST headings derived from LCSH and NACO headings based on the changes to the source LC records. They also note that there is sometimes a delay in adding and/or changing geographic, title and event terms since these often require manual review.)

Our other observations on FAST, gleaned from recent investigations by our staff and communication with the FAST Team at OCLC are as follows:

- a. It appears that some of LCSH's 'form' headings have been used to generate both form and topical terms in FAST. This often gives correct results, but not in cases where LCSH has separate headings for form and topical use. For instance, LCSH has 'String quartet' as a topical heading and 'String quartets' as a form heading, but FAST has both 'String quartet' and 'String quartets' as topical headings, as well as having 'String quartets' as a form heading. Bibliographic records might be split between the two 'topical' headings. (The FAST Team at OCLC closely monitor changes to headings where the LCSH form is tagged as 150/650, especially music and literature headings, and have stated that FAST headings based on LCSH music and literature headings will be reconciled with LCGFT when the Library of Congress cancels affected LCSH.)
- b. FAST authorities do not have scope notes nor links to narrower terms (which often give a good indication of scope). This could increase the risk of having multiple terms with the same coverage and/or using the same term for different purposes. For instance, LCSH has 'Dental anthropology' as a narrower term for 'Dentition', and the scope note for 'Dentition' says "Here are entered works on the physiological process of the growth and development of teeth in vertebrates. Works on teeth from the anthropological point of view, including their evolution and comparison, as well as the teeth of particular peoples are entered under Dental anthropology." But the FAST record for 'Dentition' has no scope note and no x-ref to 'Dental anthropology', so it is reasonable to expect that 'Dentition' will sometimes be used where 'Dental anthropology' would be appropriate. (The FAST Team at OCLC have stated that they will explore the possibility of adding narrower terms to FAST authority records.)
- c. FAST's single file for names, topics, form, etc. means that form or topical terms may be buried among corporate bodies, and only 10 results are displayed per screen in the SearchFAST web interface. For instance, 'string quartet' has 214 results. Sorting by relevance (number of uses) does not show the form term on the first screen and sorting by facet puts it several screens in. This could increase the risk that cataloguers will fail to find the most appropriate heading. (The FAST Team at OCLC have pointed out that the SearchFAST interface has a feature to limit by facet, so that the 214 results can be limited to the single form facet 'String quartets'.)

- d. FAST has assimilated fully-established LCSH strings, so is a mixture of simple terms (e.g. 'Brewing industry' and 'Corruption') and strings (e.g. 'Bread industry–Corrupt practices'), but has no free-floating subdivisions so does not allow new strings to be created to parallel the established ones (e.g. 'Brewing industry–Corrupt practices'). This could be confusing for catalogue users. Even if it were permissible to decide locally to use only simple terms (e.g. to use 'Bread industry' and 'Corruption' as separate headings), we are not sure that this would actually be a good idea, because imported records would use strings and we might therefore have collocation problems in the catalogue. (The FAST Team at OCLC have stated that they periodically harvest new LCSH headings from WorldCat and convert them to FAST. They have also shown us a screen shot mock-up of a feature that would allow FAST users to propose provisional headings at the point of need for new headings that are consistent with established headings - so that 'Brewing industry–Corrupt practices' could be proposed - and they envision a similar mechanism for headings based on NACO names and for geographic headings. It is not clear how long it would take between a new heading being proposed and a new authority record being added to FAST.)
- e. Currently our cataloguers are allowed to create subject headings locally if they are covered by RDA rules (persons, corporate bodies, works/expressions, jurisdictions). It is not clear to us if this would be acceptable in FAST, and if so, what would happen with jurisdictions, which in FAST are not constructed according to RDA rules. We would want to see FAST rules for place names be made available for local use. (The FAST Team at OCLC are still considering how to manage locally-created headings, and note that some institutions are flagging locally-created FAST headings in WorldCat by appending their MARC organization code to subfield \$2 in the local FAST heading - (e.g. \$2fast/nic for Cornell). They have not yet responded to the question we put to them about jurisdictions not constructed according to RDA rules but have pointed us to <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/624025531> for information about place names.)
- f. We have noticed that some headings such as 'Children's stories, American' appear in FAST only as topical terms, presumably following recent developments in LCGFT. (The FAST Team at OCLC has stated that they have refrained from adding some high-use forms to FAST while LCGFT is in development, and acknowledge that they will need input from the FAST user community to help them determine the scope and content of the FAST form file, as LCGFT and the demographic group terms and medium of performance terms are more fully implemented.)
- g. We have observed that FAST does not use NACO headings for works/expressions (e.g., FAST uses 'Timon of Athens (Shakespeare, William)' whereas the LCNAF form is 'Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616. Timon of Athens', and 'Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (Great Britain)' in comparison to 'Great Britain. Children (Scotland) Act 1995'). This may interfere with collocation, and may also mean that such terms are not available for use if they have not been created in the FAST authority file.
- h. We have not found any evidence of other cataloguing agencies with experience of loading FAST updates to their own systems in such a way as to automatically update their bibliographic records, to maintain collocation between older and newer records. Our own systems staff have looked at this in the

context of Aleph, and report that it could be done but would be difficult and would involve a good deal of work. (We should perhaps also bear in mind that systems of the future will not have MARC indicators, etc., for differentiation.) Since we would not envisage converting the LCSH strings in older records to FAST headings, we would have to maintain parallel loads of LCSH and FAST records into our local ILS and avoid contamination of one set of records with another.

i. Some of our FAST testers have experienced problems entering searches in searchFast (e.g. keystrokes are not registered, and we suspect that when suggestions pop up keystrokes do not register for a few moments or are interpreted as selecting suggestions). (The FAST Team at OCLC has noted that this has been observed in other interfaces where the autocomplete feature is implemented, and may be the nature of the technology. They have undertaken to investigate this to see if some adjustments might make the interface more usable in this respect.)”

“FAST is not a replacement for LCSH. If records supplied to us lacked LCSH, these would have to be added.”

“Would be happier with more beta-testing, to understand the full implications of FAST- in relation to suppliers of Bib. records, different types of Library Management Systems. “

“I would not use the BL as a resource for metadata cataloguing records, I would go elsewhere e.g. Library of Congress”

“Pushes the work on to us to add LCSH. FAST is no better than COMPASS was.”

“We use full LCSH”

“The sustainability issue is worrying, but the real problem is the lack of precision and the (rightly, in my opinion) perception that FAST are "dumber LCSH" and can be provided by lower-grade staff.”

“We routinely import BL records and not having proper LCSH would definitely be a loss.”

“The risks you have identified mean I'm not "very positive"”

“We require LCSH to meet our customers' needs and expectations, so would have to add them ourselves (or rely on someone else adding them first) greatly increasing the time spent on those records.”

“I would have a different reaction if the same changes were being adopted worldwide”

“We use LCSH and LC classmarks as a benchmark for our records whether from scratch, copy cataloguing or vendors so we would need all these to share the same patterns. If this could be achieved (Classweb for example lets us correlate between 650s and 050s) then that would be ok, as long as the maintenance is guaranteed in the way the LCSH are.”

“We are in the initial stages of investigating the pros and cons of using FAST in our local catalog at this time. Our biggest concern, like yours, is OCLC's long-term support of FAST. I personally feel that they will only support it long-term if there is a greater level of use by national and large research institutions. Without the

adoption by a good number of those institutions there is no chance that OCLC will move this beyond the research stage.”

“First, I, as cataloger for a small public library have no use for the British Library. Second, FAST subject headings can be so nebulous as to be meaningless. I once saw a FAST subject heading for World war II as "War", wow that's really helpful if for all wars we have "war" as a subject heading as if we wanted a keyword search instead of a subject search. I also remember seeing as a subject heading for World War II and Nazi policy as "holocaust", just that, nothing else. What if I wanted to know about sacrificial ceremony in the twentieth century? It would pull that book within my result list. FAST headings=worthless. I strip all FAST headings from my bib records”

“We already use FAST for a significant proportion (over 25%) of our original cataloguing and have encountered no difficulties. We see the use of identifiers with FAST as a distinct advantage because it both simplifies maintenance and facilitates conversion to linked data. We've also configured our public catalogue to take advantage of FAST in facets: “

“We will continue to use LCSH, so removal of LCSH headings would create extra work for us locally.”

Appendix 3: The British Library proposes to implement Abridged DDC selectively to extend the scope of subject indexing of current and legacy content

[Back to Introduction](#)

Answer Options	Very Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Very Positive	Response Count
What is your response to the proposed change	10	11	25	8	5	59
How would you characterise the impact of the proposed change on your business?	7	14	28	8	2	59
How would you characterise the impact of the proposed change on your use of British Library metadata?	8	13	30	6	2	59
Please use this space for your comments or to provide additional information						18
<i>answered question</i>						59
<i>skipped question</i>						1

“We mostly use BNB records, which have full DDC.”

“The library does not make use of DDC.”

“The catalogue I'm working on is already a hybrid of DDC18 to DDC23. I would rather not have another edition of Dewey in the mix.”

“We do not use DDC.”

“We would prefer to use other sources of metadata should this proposal be introduced.”

“Same lack of uniformity with other outside practices”

“The University Library does not use Dewey Decimal Classification, but DDC is used by some of the college libraries.”

“We do not use Dewey (regrettably)”

“As the Abridged DDC has shorter numbers, it would require re-classification of existing stock. Our supplier provides us with a full cataloguing service, which means our stock arrives shelf ready, spine labels on books, dewey numbers assigned in the catalogue records. I feel that any changes to the

accepted Dewey, would obviously affect the library suppliers, and Bib. record suppliers “

“Abridged DDC will be too general and useless for most Academic Libraries”

“I don't know enough about Abridged DDC to comment on this.”

“Again pushing the work back to us.”

“How abridged?”

“We don't use DDC so it will have no effect. It shouldn't replace LCSH and LCGFT, however, which are important to us. “

“We rely on the detailed class numbers for our extensive collection of material and would be concerned at the loss of full DDC numbers for our users. “

“While it would be better to have the full Dewey in all cases, if an Abridged Dewey is applied in selective cases, it might not be a terribly bad thing (but simply a less than optimal thing).”

“Prefer to use Library of Congress Classification System”

“My library uses LC Classification, so would not be affected by this.”

