

Moving to MARC 21

Following a consultation by the British Library in 2000, the UK library and information community expressed a preference for a move from UKMARC, the national cataloguing format maintained by the British Library since 1975, to the **MARC 21** bibliographic format developed by the Library of Congress and the National Library of Canada after merging their respective national formats.

MARC 21 has become the format favoured by other national libraries and by online bibliographic utilities and their end-users; is the format supported by the majority of library systems; and offers participation in an international bibliographic community following common standards, and the advantage of copy cataloguing at much reduced cost and with no need to maintain conversion programs.

The British Library undertook to support libraries and other organisations, including overseas users of UKMARC, in preparing their implementation of MARC 21.

The consultation, which provided the impetus for the adoption of MARC 21, was documented in a **survey of UKMARC users** in 2000.

To address concerns raised by UKMARC users, the Library prepared a 'white paper' **The MARC 21 format and the UK library community**, which put forward proposals on how to facilitate the transition to MARC 21. The Library was not in a position to undertake direct training in MARC 21 itself but undertook to provide conversion tables and related material to support catalogue conversion, which are described below and are available from the Library's web site.

The Library planned to implement MARC 21 as its cataloguing system in 2004, which has recently been accomplished. Although BL cataloguing data will henceforth be originated in MARC 21, the Library has undertaken to maintain UKMARC exports of the British National Bibliography (BNB) for up to three years depending on demand.

It was decided that there would be no further development of the **UKMARC format** (the final update being issued in November 2002) and of the **UKMARC Exchange Record Format** both of which remain available here.

Conversion tables and character sets

In order to support the consistent and accurate mapping of UKMARC data to MARC 21, the British Library has prepared conversion tables covering all UKMARC fields and content designation, including those used in the British National Bibliography (BNB) - full up-to-date information is provided [here](#).

The Library has also prepared the **Exchange character set in UKMARC and MARC 21 records**, showing where differences exist that users of the conversion tables would need to take account of in their planning.

How does MARC 21 differ from UKMARC?

To provide users with an overview of the differences between UKMARC and MARC 21, the Library has prepared a topic-based guide **Changing the record**.

In autumn 2002 a series of workshops on the transition to MARC 21, also called *Changing the record*, was organised by the Library in partnership with the BIC Bibliographic Standards Technical Sub-group, the CILIP Cataloguing & Indexing Group and the Scottish Library & Information Council. [Slides](#) and [notes](#) (PDF format) from the workshop presentations can be viewed on this site.

Name authority headings

Alignment of name headings when converting records from UKMARC to MARC 21 was one of the concerns addressed by the 'white paper'. The British Library has been working, since 1994, to align its authority file with that of the Library of Congress, under the [Name Authorities Co-operative \(NACO\)](#) so that, when its own MARC 21 implementation took place in 2004, the majority of headings were already shared.

To support users with the retrospective alignment of headings, the Library has established a web based resource [BNB name headings and their NACO equivalents](#) which matches over 1300 name headings with their equivalents in MARC 21. This enables users to check if a heading is the same or if it is different in MARC 21 when planning catalogue amendments. Selected headings include personal and corporate names many of which are shared by the BL and LC through NACO.