FAST Forward

Adopting the Faceted Application of Subject Terminology vocabulary

STATEMENT

In 2015/16 the British Library consulted on the future of our subject indexing systems. Specifically, we asked stakeholders for their views on the following proposals:

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

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.

The response to the first question was neutral. In general, stakeholders had no serious concerns about the selective use of FAST. The response to the second question was generally negative. Respondents had two main concerns:

- the quality and specificity of FAST relative to LCSH
- the sustainability of FAST, which was at that time an OCLC research project rather than a service

During the 6 years that have elapsed since that consultation, the British Library has continued to apply LCSH to UK Legal Deposit for the British National Bibliography, while extending the application of FAST. FAST has enabled us to assign subject index terms to legacy descriptions and apply subject indexing to an extent that would not have been possible with LCSH. In the course of this work, we have seen no evidence that an array of FAST headings performs significantly differently from a suite of LCSH strings.

The work we have undertaken with OCLC and the FAST user community to develop the FAST Policy and Outreach Committee has given us confidence that FAST will be a sustainable standard for the foreseeable future

We believe that the time is now right for FAST to replace LCSH as the subject indexing standard for all British Library cataloguing, including BNB. This change will be introduced incrementally starting in the 3rd Quarter 2022 and is the culmination of a process which began in 2015.

This decision has not been taken lightly. It has been driven by the following challenges:

Increasing demands on cataloguing

- Growth of legal deposit intake
- Bulk digitisation
- Backlog reduction
- Race Equality Action Plan
- Great resign/retirements

Audience expectations

- Integration of discovery services
- Linking to other vocabularies
- Keyword not browse

We recognise that this represents a significant change for users of our metadata. But we firmly believe that FAST will provide a flexible and sustainable solution to meet the changing needs of the Library and its stakeholders. Please consult the document below for further information about the proposed changes.

Kind regards,

Andrew MacEwan & Adele Pease

Head of Metadata

FAST Implementation Project

JUSTIFICATION

FAST was designed as a subject system for Web applications and is a better fit with current discovery systems and user expectations than string-based indexing systems. FAST's Persistent URIs and faceted structure provide a good fit with linked data applications and support mapping of FAST terms to other vocabularies.

FAST follows a different syntax from LCSH but currently shares the same editorial process as LCSH and retains its semantics and terminology, providing backwards compatibility.

There is an expectation that many experienced cataloguers at the British Library will retire over the short to medium term and we have taken the view that training new staff in FAST will provide a better return than continued investment in LCSH. FAST offers substantial savings on training and application. Cataloguers with experience of subject analysis can be trained to apply FAST in an afternoon and the costs of supervision and quality review are significantly less than LCSH. Cataloguers can focus their expertise on subject analysis of the item in hand, rather than the syntax of string construction and the minutiae of special cases. These productivity gains will be vital to recover from lockdown and respond to increasing demands of legal deposit, bulk digitization, and making our metadata more inclusive.

Implementation and roll out

The transition to FAST headings will be incremental, starting from July 2022.

July 2022	Training British Library cataloguers to apply FAST to legal deposit material
August 2022	Commence dissemination of BNB records with FAST headings instead of LCSH headings
October 2022	Commence dissemination of Cataloguing in Publication (CIP) records with FAST
2022 onwards	FAST replaces LCSH in other data supply contracts let by the British Library

Note that we will retain all LCSH headings on records derived from Library of Congress, OCLC, etc.

IMPACT

Weekly BNB

Entries are arranged by DDC number so there will be no impact on discovery. The weekly BNB includes headings from a number of schemes including LCSH, FAST, BISAC Subject Heading and BIC Subject Schema.

Current Cataloguing

Cataloguers should be aware that starting in August 2022 new BNB records disseminated by the British Library may not contain LCSH strings.

Subject Indexing

There should be no impact on the scope or quality of indexing.

Tibble, Steven. *The crusader strategy*. 2020.

Subject Heading	LCSH / LCGFT strings	FAST Array
Topical	Crusades – 12th Century	Crusades
Topical	Strategy – History -- To 1500	Strategy
Topical		Military policy
Geographical	Jerusalem (Latin Kingdom)-- Military policy	Middle East—Jerusalem (Latin Kingdom)
Chronological		To 1500
Form/Genre	Informational works	Informational works
Form/Genre		History

Comparison of subject and form/genre index terms for LCSH and FAST

Copy Cataloguing

If selection criteria for copy cataloguing include LCSH, changes may be required to selection profiles or element weightings.

Discovery

There will be no impact on Explore the British Library. FAST uses the same vocabulary as LCSH and is indexed with LCSH. FAST headings and LCSH headings are already present in the details view.

Author: Steven Tibble, author.

Subjects: Crusades -- 12th century; Strategy -- History -- To 1500; Military policy; Crusades; Strategy; Jerusalem (Latin Kingdom) -- Military policy; Middle East -- Jerusalem (Latin Kingdom); To 1500; Informational works; History; Informational works;

Dewey: 909.07

Publication Details: New Haven : Yale University Press, [2020]

Copyright Details: ©2020

Support

Use of FAST for Subject and genre/form access is endorsed by the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC). FAST headings are already widely disseminated. OCLC transforms LCSH to FAST for records contributed to WorldCat.

FAST training is available from the British Library.

The FAST vocabulary is freely searchable using SearchFAST , FAST is also available for bulk download in MARC XML or RDF or as linked data from the FAST API. OCLC also provides a number of other tools for assignment of FAST headings and conversion of LCSH to FAST.

The FAST Policy and Outreach Committee has prepared a *Quick Start Guide to FAST*

The British Library is currently the coordinator for the SACO FAST Funnel, which provides a route for development of FAST terminology.

For further information about FAST click here