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From UDC to DDC: reclassification at the University of Bath

The University of Bath took the decision to commence the reclassification of Library stock from Universal Decimal Classification to Dewey Decimal in 2009. The project has been very Academic Services driven with the Cataloguing team's involvement growing as the project has expanded.

In case any University of Bath specific terminology creeps in here's a brief glossary:

T.S. or Technical Services – Acquisitions, Document Delivery, Periodicals and Cataloguing.

The 'workroom' is the office that houses the T.S. departments. It's open plan and cataloguing and acquisitions sit in the same area.

The following are terms we use for Academic Services!

'Upstairs' and 'levels' refer to the way the library is laid out. We don't have a single sequence for the stock but rather it's grouped by subject so the subject staff sit on the same level as their stock.

Infos: although the title slide of my presentation identifies me as an information librarian T.S. Infos are very rarely referred to as 'Infos' as we all do very distinct jobs where the A.S. Infos do very similar jobs but for different subjects.

Deweying and Deweyfication are probably not unique to Bath but they are ways in which we refer to the process of reclassification!

Library hierarchy

Within the library each floor has a faculty librarian with responsibility for two subjects and for the faculty represented (e.g. Level 5 is Humanities and Social Sciences) as well as overseeing the other subject librarians on the floor.

Technical Services is headed up by the Deputy Librarian and then it splits with a Bibliographic Services Librarian and a Serials and E-Resources Librarian. My line manager is the Bibliographic Services Librarian who is responsible for Acquisitions and Cataloguing. They take an overview of the project but most procedural decisions are down to me.

In cataloguing there are two part time library assistants – one works Monday to Wednesday and the other works Thursday and Friday so there's no overlap. This did cause some problems when the procedural changes were coming thick and fast as there was no direct communication between them about how they were dealing with things.

A brief history of the project

Traditionally in the library it has always been the Academic Services staff that have done the classification work. I'm trying to get it into Technical Services as I think it sits better with us but we'll see what comes out of the reclassification project!

Rumour has it that UDC was adopted by the first librarian because after the Second World War it was too expensive to buy things in from America and they couldn't afford the Dewey schedules. As UDC was considered similar and was cheaper they went with that. Whether this is true or not is questionable but I like the story.

New schedules were purchased haphazardly, if at all, and the ones in use started to be amended, annotated and changed. Before the reclassification project started it was worked out that 35 different classification variants were in use in the library!

UDC schedules 1943, 1961, 1972, 1985 and some UDC 1993
History was being classified to Dewey 20

As well as these there were 28 individual in-house schedules for different areas of stock designed by members of staff to cover areas where UDC was lacking.

Unsurprisingly this led to growing student dissatisfaction. In one month 44 enquiries at the Level 5 Information Point were related solely to UDC filing order when colons and brackets were used! Negative feedback was also starting to creep into the more official performance measures, including the annual LibQual survey. So this gave some impetus to the library to address the problem.

The other impetus was the possibility of making use of the shelf ready services offered by Coutts and Dawson.

Task group: formation and methodology

Following the negative feedback in the LibQual survey the library Communications Task Group recommended that classification be reviewed with the aim of implementing a simpler, more intuitive system.

A task group was formed to look at the problems and work out a strategy for moving forward with the aim of having a better classification system.

They looked first at a review that the Graduate Trainee had done that year of the state of classification in the library. It was a very comprehensive report that included background, options and a questionnaire.

They also conducted a literature review looking for reports on how other libraries had handled reclassification and/or retro-conversion projects and also studies on how students actually search for and find materials. While there wasn't much around on these areas there were several ongoing projects that were identified. LIS-link was used to send questions and ask for experiences. Responses were mixed and 'success' was harder to quantify for some more than others.

They also looked at how much it would cost per book to either out-source classification or to keep it in house. It would have been £1.75 for a fully shelf-ready book with classmark and record from Coutts. The cost/time analysis for internal cataloguing, processing and classification averaged out at 33 minutes per item and the cost would be £4.63.

Of course, the other financial consideration was how much a new scheme would cost; initial outlay and then any updates that might be published.

Task Group: identifying options

The Task Group had 6 interlinking areas to consider before making any decisions. Using these areas and the options each provided they would work out how best to proceed with classification and any retro-conversion:

Option A was to do nothing, maintain the status quo and try and find more staff time to keep the schedules up to date and all info trained in all the different classification schemes in use in the library. That wasn't really a viable option – as student expectations and staff workload had been steadily increasing it was recognised that something had to change.

Option B was which classification scheme to use in place of UDC. They did consider an in-house scheme but, again, in terms of time and maintenance it wasn't really a valid option. Ease of use for both students and staff was the core driver behind the decision and as it was felt that more people are familiar with Dewey then, if the change was made, it would be to Dewey.

C was the question of whether, if they did change to another classification scheme, it would be applied to the whole library or whether they would limit it to a test area or one floor or faculty.

D was whether or not there would actually be any benefit to outsourcing the classification and cataloguing. The report suggests that they were keen to use the Coutts shelf-ready service for book processing and for their quality of records and service.

The next question was whether or not there should be any retro-conversion of existing stock. The feeling was that, in order to avoid things getting even messier over time, all stock should be retro-converted. However, practicalities suggested that small, targeted projects on identified problem areas might be the best option.

Finally, they looked at the management of retro-conversion. Would it be best to bring in an outside company to do all the stock in one concerted effort? It was recognised that with the staffing levels in place it would be very difficult to do a single hit to retro-convert everything.

Task Group: conclusions

Having considered the options the Task Group presented their preferred options. They suggested that the best thing to do would be:

- Adopt Dewey across the whole library (updating to newer editions when available)
- Use the Coutts shelf- ready service for new purchases
- Retro-convert all existing stock in one short concerted effort.

As we don't often get exactly what we want it was the alternative options that were largely adopted through the pilot scheme that was run in 2009.

2009 pilot project

The pilot project was run in 2009 and targeted the 720s (architecture) as this was an area that had received a lot of complaints.

The aims of the projects were:

“To retroconvert architecture books within the 720 range in our UDC sequence to DDC”

“To acquire new architecture books likely to fall within the DDC 720 range in shelf-ready format.”

As the majority of the Dewey numbers were going to be found through downloaded records, and not all records have numbers from the latest edition of Dewey, the schedules were checked for any major changes in the numbers. It was determined that anything from versions 19-22 would be acceptable as the numbers would likely be the same from any of those schedules.

It was calculated that there were 7,108 items in the 720 range but by using ISBNs Coutts were able to find acceptable Dewey numbers for 3,500 of those. BDZ records were also searched and numbers for a further 3,118 were found. Any books where numbers hadn't been found would have to be classified in-house. The retro-conversion would be done by the Academic Services information librarians, no out-sourcing, but there would be new shelf-ready items coming in from Coutts.

Pilot project procedures

At this point there wasn't much for cataloguing to do. The team checked the records coming in as a quality control exercise but had very little else to do with the project.

Academic Services had the bulk of the work to do. They had a spreadsheet of titles and Dewey numbers that had been found with the version from which they'd been created. If the number was from Dewey version 19 or above then it was accepted without being checked. If it was from 18 or below the numbers were checked and then either accepted or changed to a version 22 number.

Those 1,122 items that didn't have a number were removed from the open shelves and placed in a storage area, issued on the LMS to the user ID 'RECLASS' so if anyone came looking it would be obvious where they were. If there were any items on loan, particularly where there was more than one copy of a title then a hold for 'RECLASS' was placed.

Once the numbers were on the spreadsheet Joblink staff (aka students) would update the bibliographic record with the new number and put a spine label on. They would also place a green dot sticker on the spine. This was done so that it would be easy to identify any scatter of stock that resulted from the project and give an indication of whether this might be a potential issue in the future.

Pilot project: results

In total the pilot took 22 weeks, which is nearly half a year! 6,768 items were reclassified and some 340 were identified as missing and were

therefore deleted. 1,068 moved outside the 720 range with some moving to Level 5 to join the more sociology related subjects and some moving to the engineering subject areas. It became clear that these were mostly in anticipated areas and where the library had previously employed a high level of customisation in the classification!

67 were ordered as shelf-ready and it was a pleasant surprise that the library had only been charged the price of 'extra items' rather than the standard price for a new item!

After completion a short questionnaire was used to collect feedback from architecture students making enquiries on Level 3. The comments were all positive and even the Head of Architecture weighed in saying that the new system was much easier to use despite having been used to the placement of books in the old classification scheme.

Expansion of the project

This is really where cataloguing became properly involved in the project. It was decided not use any shelf ready services which meant that the cataloguing team were now responsible for downloading records and finding acceptable Dewey numbers.

The project was initially extended to other Level 3 subjects – the engineerings (but not literature) and all new books coming in bought by those fund codes would be classified to Dewey. At this stage, because Level 3 doesn't buy many books the increase in workload for cataloguing wasn't too bad.

The decision had been taken to continue with the retroconversion as well. The Academic Services infos would start at the beginning of the Level 3 sequence and work through until Level 3 was complete before moving on to the next Level.

It also meant that when a new book came in any other editions or extra copies would also be captured, given the new number and re-labelled. Initially this was done by the cataloguing team and it was certainly

manageable even though we were now dealing with retro-converting any extra copies and other editions – literally going to get them from the shelves, updating the records with the new Dewey number and creating new spine labels.

However, in early 2010 the faculty librarian for Level 5 requested that purchases for the Management fund code be included in the process. This would mean that new books for Management would be given a Dewey number and any extra copies or other editions would have to be captured and updated. At this point the workload on cataloguing increased massively as Management textbooks seem to have a lot of new editions! It quickly became unsustainable as there were days when the library assistants were out looking for books more than they were at their desks.

They were also getting demoralised by the sheer numbers of books still going through as UDC and knowing that at some point they'd have to see them again and Dewey them. At this point the Bibliographic Services Librarian and I started to push for all fund codes to go to Dewey and that the other editions would either have to be left or AS would have to start doing them. To prevent other editions being at different shelf locations the faculty librarians agreed to incorporate the other editions work into the Academic Services reclassification/retro-conversion workflow.

Cataloguing kept the extra copies work but enlisted the help of the book processing assistant who would now be the one to get the books from the shelves and relabel them. This meant that we could work faster and the books would be rounded up much more efficiently so they wouldn't be on the shelves with the wrong number showing for very long.

Current cataloguing procedures

We now have the policy that any books that pass through the Workroom, including new purchases, repairs or loan category changes, will get a Dewey number and have their records updated. We did have a large number of UKMARC records still on the catalogue and although they have now officially been made into MARC21 records due to the implementation

of Primo they are still very poor quality and so seeing the older books gives us a good opportunity to update these records.

We attempt to find a Dewey number in the acceptable range identified for that fund code (for example Management accept 20-22 while the sciences only accept 22 & 23). We can download records from BDZ and Library of Congress but also check the British Library, British National Bibliography and new service OCLC classify for possible numbers. If one is found either from an 'unacceptable' Dewey version or without a version number then the Cataloguing Info will check it in Dewey 23 to see if it's usable. If we can't find a number then we send it to the relevant Academic Services Info to be classified. Once they've done that it's returned to us and we finish the cataloguing process.

If the book we're dealing with is an extra copy then we will make a print out of the record before updating the call number, place a hold on any items on loan and then pass the print out to the book processing assistant who will fetch any copies from the shelves and re-label them, when the holds come in she re-labels them and files the completed sheet.

If there are any other editions in stock then we make sure the Dewey number we've used is added to all the other records in a 082 field and we make print outs of all these records. We then send them to the relevant Academic Services info. This is because the call number on the OPAC hasn't been changed so there isn't such a pressing need to re-label them and the stock is more easily fetchable by subject staff on the levels.

Our Systems Librarian has created a programme which he called 'ReclassificationThing'. When a book's barcode is scanned it pulls the number from the 082 field through into the call number field and it creates a suffix using the hierarchy of 100s, 700s, 245 and then creates a label using this information. This has sped the process up considerably and now Levels 3 and 5 have their own labelling machines. Each floor also has its own Reclash user ID in order to place holds for any items out on loan.

Retro-conversion

The retro-conversion of Level 3 continues all year round with the Academic Services info timetabled to do half a day a week on it. This involves fetching a trolley of books, identifying Dewey numbers for them and re-labelling. The Task Group are hoping to be able to identify funding for extra help with the re-labelling and the other editions work as this has started to reduce the number of books being reclassified.

Each summer since the start of reclassification there has been a targeted summer project on an identified problem area. It started with the 720s and since then Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science have been completed. Due to the implementation of Primo there wasn't one this year but likely contenders for 2013 are Biology & Biochemistry and Management. I would be happy with either of these as they are very textbook intensive and if we could get them all done then the reclassification workload at busy purchasing times would be significantly reduced.

The future

We're unlikely to adopt shelf ready services in the near future – the systems we have in place are working well and the trial with Coutts didn't impress sufficiently to encourage the outlay on it.

The summer retro-conversion projects will continue, as will the work on converting Level 3.

My hope is that as the library gets more Deweyfied there will be more of an impetus to change the stock layout to a single sequence. While there is some merit in having the books grouped by faculty and subject it's probably more confusing than helpful and if the purpose of making the change to Dewey was to make it easier for users to locate stock then we should probably make it as logical as possible! This may be a long term goal, however, as there are some who are very wedded to the faculty system.

There will of course be changes to Dewey. We have adopted Dewey 23 and we were lucky this time in that there were only enhancements to numbers in our main subject areas while some other areas had

considerable changes. We may not be so lucky with future editions and it may be a problem that we have to deal with when Dewey 24 is published.

Over the three years I've been involved with the project I've managed to establish my role and the work of the Cataloguing team as central to the project. It has evolved so that the main spearheads of the day to day workings of reclassification are the Cataloguing Info and the Information Librarian on Level 3 (where it all started!).

However, the original Level 3 Info left last year and so there has been a new member of staff to bring up to speed. The benefit for me was that an internal candidate got the job and I already had a strong working relationship established with her.

We also have a very recently appointed new Head Librarian at the University of Bath and she is very keen on the Dewey project. We also have high hopes for a new collection management policy that will enable easier withdrawal of outdated stock. This would mean that we could clear some of the UDC stock from the statistics and never have to Dewey it!

The main thing is to keep going. It does seem like a Herculean task and one that probably won't be finished during my time at the University. Current calculations predict that, at the current rate, we have another 17 years to go before the library is totally Deweyed. However, I believe that the project is improving things, not least the standard of the catalogue records! The procedures are now embedded and are no longer subject to change on a frequent basis so things may speed up again. The reasons for embarking on the project remain valid and while ever we can keep sight of that we'll keep soldiering on and try to keep in mind the improvements it has already made and how good it'll be when it is finished.