

## RDA AT OXFORD UNIVERSITY

### **The OLIS scene**

Oxford University's OLIS community (Oxford Libraries Information System) implemented RDA at the same time as the Library of Congress and the British Library, but we had to do it in a very different way.

OLIS is a shared Aleph database, administered and supported from the Bodleian Library, but with about 200 contributing cataloguers in about 100 libraries. Half of these libraries, mainly in colleges and departments, are not part of the Bodleian group. Some have only one or two staff, who spend a small fraction of their time on cataloguing and cannot easily take time out for training. To support all OLIS cataloguers on standards and policy issues, the Bodleian has just one trainer/adviser; and the Bodleian's two training rooms are a couple of miles away from most of the libraries and in great demand. We therefore had to design transfer training to make the best possible use of the shortest possible contact time and to enable cataloguers to help themselves and each other thereafter with minimal specialised support. Although the Bodleian is entitled to a reasonable level of cooperation from all OLIS libraries, the success of any large and demanding OLIS-wide undertaking depends on the goodwill of all our OLIS colleagues and their readiness to meet us at least half way.

So why did we, with our numerous, scattered cataloguers and limited resources, decide to implement RDA so early? Basically because the Bodleian, being a Legal Deposit Library, receives about 170,000 items to be catalogued every year and cannot afford to do a great deal of original cataloguing. We depend heavily on copying records from the Library of Congress and the British Library, many of which are cataloguing-in-publication records, excellent as far as they go but in need of updates and further detail. Once LC and BL started to create their CIP records in RDA, we had to have RDA-trained cataloguers to upgrade them. We do not have the resources to support two cataloguing standards for long, so (almost) everyone had to move to RDA at the same time

The fixed point for our planning was Sunday 31 March 2013, or perhaps really the following day, April Fools' Day. 31 March happened to be the Day One chosen by LC and BL, but for us it was determined mainly by the need to make best use of the Easter vacation, when both people and training rooms would be more easily available. Because it was essential to be ready by this date, it (somehow) had to be possible.

### **Training and documentation: finding our level**

Proponents of RDA tend to emphasise the importance to cataloguers of a really good grasp of FRBR and familiarity with the RDA Toolkit. But that is a lot to ask of people who catalogue only occasionally, and we decided that in the short term it was not really essential. We expect to be cataloguing in MARC for many years to come, so we adopted a task-oriented approach, based on MARC record structure rather than FRBR entities. We designed our new documentation to be almost free-standing, so that cataloguers would need to use the Toolkit only for points of detail such as definitions of relators or capitalisation of Finnish state-run economic institutions, and we decided not to mount it within the Toolkit so that it would be easily accessible and could be updated quickly. (We could not anyway have afforded to pay for 200 people to spend serious time in the Toolkit.) We included just enough about FRBR and RDA structure to

enable cataloguers to understand RDA terminology, navigate the Toolkit when really necessary, and have some appreciation of what FRBR is designed to achieve.<sup>1</sup>

This was a good opportunity to rethink our training and documentation overall. We wanted to integrate theory and practice more closely, so that participants would be able to perform simple cataloguing tasks fairly early in their training, and we wanted a single set of documentation to serve both for training new cataloguers and for general reference, so that it could be kept up to date more easily - a key consideration, given the constant developments in RDA.

Transfer training for existing cataloguers took the form of a one-day classroom course (presented 14 times in all, with up to 18 people at each), a set of brief documents and a practice pack. The presentation served mainly to introduce the key points of each document (RDA & FRBR; RDA Toolkit; changes in transcription etc.; changes of structure; whether and how to convert AACR2 records to RDA) but also included a 'workshop' where participants, in small groups, created parts of bibliographic records, trying to apply RDA principles for themselves and find their way around the documents. Some things proved quite easy to accept, such as always having the first creator as main entry and using simple relators; but others proved harder, such as transcribing all six authors of an academic work and making access points for them. Worst of all were (and are) the complexities of 'Is it a new work or just a new expression?', particularly for new editions which have changes in the creative team.

It was a pretty tough day, but participants generally made the best of it. A few would have preferred to have sessions spread out over a longer period, but most were glad to minimise disruption and travel time and get the worst over quickly. They appreciated having a clear programme for the day, with breaks on schedule, and were quick to seize on any light relief which RDA could offer.<sup>2</sup>

After the course participants were asked to read through the transfer documentation carefully, work through the practice pack, raise any queries, and then get on with their ordinary work, in RDA. We encouraged cataloguers who worked together to train together, so that they could support each other, and we asked everyone not to revert to AACR2 after the course, even for the few days before Day One (although it seems that quite a few did, and we did not try to police this). A few weeks later my colleague Elena Estraiikh provided an extra course for serials cataloguers.

## **Infrastructure**

There was far, far more to implementing RDA than re-training bibliographic cataloguers.

### *Systems*

Our library system had to be re-configured for the new MARC elements. This went far beyond just making the new elements valid. Indexes were redefined and new ones created,<sup>3</sup> pick-lists were made for elements with controlled vocabularies, fixes were created to help with conversion by automatically adding or replacing various elements, MARC 21 help files were updated, and, not least, public displays were reconfigured to make use of RDA data, particularly 264 fields. We also compensated for the absence of AACR2 data by generating a quasi-GMD, partly from 33X data, on export to SOLO (our resource discovery platform), so that public users see much the same display whether the underlying record is AACR2 or

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<sup>1</sup> For people who wanted to know a bit more, there were optional presentations on FRBR and the Toolkit a few months before implementation.

<sup>2</sup> More than you might think. Everyone loves RDA sections 4 and 7, the ones which have not been written yet. And for an example to practice using a separate analytical entry for each language-version of a multilingual text, how about the English/Portuguese children's book Flash, bang, wheee! = Flashe bum uuiiii!.

<sup>3</sup> We are very grateful to BL for sharing their Aleph configuration decisions.

RDA. In the longer term we will probably generate 33X fields in our AACR2 records, but there is no point in doing this until we have a public-facing system which can make more granular use of 33X.

We were particularly fortunate to have in Nathalie Schulz an Aleph systems expert who is also a very experienced cataloguer and had been secretary to the JSC for RDA for many years. Nathalie was particularly ingenious in devising Aleph tools to ease some of the more tedious and tiresome tasks associated with RDA, such as fixes for AACR2-RDA conversion and pick-lists for relator terms. They not only save time but also provided a great psychological boost when we implemented, a little bit of magic.

### *NACO*

The demands on our 11 NACO cataloguers were actually much heavier and more urgent than those on our bibliographic cataloguers. Because NACO accreditation is in the hands of the Program for Cooperative Cataloguing, there could be no local policies or 'lite' versions or partial or late implementation. Our NACO cataloguers took the PCC online course (several days' work) and then had a long period of intensive review from an approved agency. In this we again had invaluable support from the British Library, who gave two of our cataloguers an early start by allowing them to share their inhouse training, reviewed our first wave of RDA/NACO cataloguers, and then signed us off so that our second wave could be reviewed largely inhouse. Paul Frank of PCC was also very accommodating about scheduling our slots for online training.

Our series and serials specialists had to take additional external training for series authority work and for serials cataloguing.

Because of the changes in the rules for NACO access points, our Bibliographic Maintenance and Authority Control team (BMAC) and systems staff had to load a vast number of revised authority records; and because not all the changes were 1:1 substitutions, this also meant a huge amount of cleanup in bibliographic records and some difficult decisions about how much could be done. Perhaps the most awkward changes to manage were the replacement of AACR2 access points with 'Polyglot' or two languages in subfield \$l (e.g. \$aHomer.\$tIliad.\$lEnglish & Greek) by separate access points for each language-version.

### *Maintaining throughput*

Inevitably, a mixed AACR2/RDA environment makes more work than a predominantly single-standard environment. Before implementation most<sup>4</sup> OLIS cataloguers were allowed to download only those RDA records which could be trusted to require virtually no editing (BNB or LC full-level records), and that meant more original cataloguing. After implementation they were allowed to download only trusted AACR2 records (BNB or LC, full-level, post-2005) without conversion. All others had to be converted to RDA before checking and editing, which again made extra work. We later eased this restriction for some groups of cataloguers who were working in areas where RDA records were seldom available for download (e.g. the Bodleian's backlog of non-academic materials) and who were doing enough cataloguing to keep in practice for AACR2. We cannot expect our cataloguers to maintain skills in two standards for very long, but the need for AACR2 should decrease once most pre-2013 materials have gone through.

Another problem has been that every agency's output drops while it is implementing RDA, which meant a net drop this year in records available for download from major agencies, whether RDA or AACR2. Specialists in art and some foreign languages suggest a drop of about 50% in their areas, but this probably is not all due to RDA.

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<sup>4</sup> One cataloguer had early RDA training so that she could deal with the small number of RDA CIPs we encountered.

The demands of NACO cataloguing have increased sharply, both because RDA records typically have more access points and because NACO records can now include much more detail about each entity than is required just for identification. This is more satisfying, because it was frustrating for NACO cataloguers to be forbidden to record useful and interesting research except as notes, but the amount of work can be alarming and sometimes competes for time with bibliographic cataloguing and with other BMAC work.

Most OLIS cataloguers did get up to speed with RDA fairly quickly. The worst snarl-ups in bibliographic cataloguing arose from RDA's flexibility about how many statements of responsibility and access points to include, aggravated by the need to assign appropriate relators where possible. Initially we encouraged generosity but avoided issuing detailed guidelines, partly because we wanted to keep transfer documentation free from finicky detail and partly because only experience could tell us what kinds of situation (if any) would need something more than 'cataloguer's judgment'. After a couple of months we did have to create guidelines. These were welcomed and seem to have made things appreciably better. Again, specialists in art and foreign materials were disproportionately affected: art because so many art-related works include numerous valuable essays, interviews, insights and responses by different people; foreign-language material because it is so much harder to identify and evaluate statements of responsibility when they are in Albanian.

Overall, throughput issues have often been worrying but never disastrous. However, we were perhaps unprepared for the extent to which this issue affected people as well as statistics. Cataloguers inevitably feel rather fragile when adjusting to a new standard. Having so much left to their judgment, seeing a great variety of practice in downloaded records, and lacking a framework of experience and approved models, many people tended to agonise, afraid to omit anything but horrified by how much extra time they were spending per resource. It was essential to reassure them that their sense of which entities and roles are important and interesting for readers, although acquired in AACR2, reflected the FRBR user tasks and was still applicable to RDA records.

#### *Workflows for non-cataloguers*

Most of our materials have had quite a lot of processing from acquisitions staff or paraprofessionals before they meet their first fully-trained cataloguer. When downloading, these staff needed guidelines for selection, taking into account whether AACR2 or RDA was currently preferred; when creating brief records, they had to know about changes to transcription rules (e.g. abbreviations) and get used to 264 and 33X fields. These needs were covered by documentation, because there was no time to run separate courses for non-cataloguers. But the documentation about downloading had to change at least three times in the year before Day One, as relative availability of AACR2 and RDA records shifted (and also because we had to develop a policy on use and conversion of foreign-language records - other things do not stop happening just because we want to focus on RDA), and this was probably an uncomfortable period for the people involved.

Our AACR2-RDA conversion fix is fine for use by non-cataloguers, because it adds a local field with a strident warning that the record needs to be checked further for RDA compliance. Only when a cataloguer has made the checks and removed the local field will the record be exported to RLUK and WorldCat.

#### **Upsides, downsides**

Our rush to RDA probably worked to our advantage in most ways. Rather than living with the fear of the unknown and with a succession of tiresome bodes for the mixed and shifting AACR2/RDA environment, our cataloguers could get to grips quickly with the realities of RDA and adjust to settled workflows for

which they were properly skilled. And the people closely involved in implementation could at least see a prospect of life after implementation, when it would become possible to take leave again.

One downside was that we could only implement for modern books, serials and printed music<sup>5</sup> in the short term. Books and serials were the priorities because they are still the vast bulk of our intake and are the materials for which we can most often find good external records. But cataloguers dealing with books with substantial non-book accompanying material are still having to make do with rather sketchy documentation for the non-book 33X and 34X fields, although we are gradually developing detailed documentation for each type of material (DVDs and Atlases so far, with Sound Recordings in preparation).

Another downside was that it was a high-risk strategy. We had no additional staff for RDA and, apart from cancelling the autumn 2012 set of cataloguing courses (too late for AACR2, too early for RDA), we were doing all our normal work. Plenty of non-RDA stuff happened and had to be attended to. We were working at our limits, with little overlap of roles, and there was no Plan B in case a key person was unavoidably absent.

A further downside was that our preparations were made while RDA and its interpretations were still very much under development. There were plenty of shocks and confusions on the way. What was written had to be rewritten over and over, even after training had started, and could not be adequately checked before use.<sup>6</sup>

Because policies and documentation were never quite finalised, they were not shared and discussed as widely as we had hoped. Our implementation was managed by a small group: Alison Felstead, Head of Resource Description; Nathalie Schulz for systems; Alasdair Macdonald and Stephen Arnold for NACO training and other BMAC work; Rebecca Alexander, one of our first two RDA cataloguers, who gave feedback on the draft training material, dealt with RDA CIPs before implementation and acted as a mentor during the training period; and myself as trainer/advisor for cataloguing standards. We met frequently and worked closely together, but no one other than myself had serious time to spend reading RDA itself and related documents, so our grip of RDA was less balanced and comprehensive than it might have been. Alison also set up a broader implementation group, representing a range of OLIS libraries and specialities, but we did not have time to use their expertise very much before implementation or to get their opinions on the training plans and documents. In the wider context, OLIS and various other agencies had planned to make their draft training materials available to each other in good time but did not actually have usable drafts until shortly before implementation. Nevertheless, seeing other agencies' materials was of immense value, often exposing gaps in our own thinking.

Which brings me on to the really big upside of the whole experience, the cooperation and support between different cataloguing agencies, often under the aegis of CILIP CIG. Memorable events included an informal discussion at LSE in July 2012 and the CIG e-forum in October 2012, both of which fostered a sense of community and opened conversations, particularly with Cambridge University Library, whose willingness to discuss and advise has been invaluable to us. More recently, we have welcomed at Oxford visitors from a number of agencies who are planning their own implementation, and I met others at the CIG pop-up workshop at Warwick University last July. The ethos of sharing is at the core of FRBR and

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<sup>5</sup> The British Library very kindly shared their music training course with our music specialists, enabling us to implement early for this speciality.

<sup>6</sup> And it goes on. At the time of writing, nearly 20 documents have just had to be updated because every ISBN example now needs subfield \$q for its qualifiers rather than parentheses.

RDA, and is reflected in LC's sharing of its own training materials and in the user-contributed workflows within the RDA Toolkit.

If anyone is interested in seeing our transfer training documentation (a little out of date since the July round of RDA changes) or our ordinary RDA/MARC21 training/reference documentation, it should be available from mid-December 2013 at <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/our-work/cataloguing>. Comments and corrections are always welcome; please feel free to contact Bodleian Catalogue Support Services, [css@bodleian.ox.ac.uk](mailto:css@bodleian.ox.ac.uk).

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