

Catalogue & Index

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the March 2026 (214) issue of *Catalogue & Index*, which focuses on subject indexing and classification. Three of our articles discuss in-house schemes and highlight the benefits and flexibility in being able to react to inclusivity issues directly. As the British cataloguing community is currently mulling over the problems involved with a reliance on schemes based in the US over which we have no control and limited input it is really positive to read about the possibilities of local schemes, and independent community driven thesauri (such as Homosaurus). With a summary of last year's World Café on subject analysis, in advance of our two upcoming follow up events in Cardiff and Liverpool, it is time to be thinking about solutions.

Our issue begins with an overview of a project undertaken by the Royal College of Nursing Library & Museum Service to review and update their in-house classification scheme and subject headings. Dawn Williams gives a background to the project and walks us through the methodology used in identifying and evaluating offensive terminology, and highlights the importance of working collaboratively.

Maria Nagle talks us through the complexities involved in cataloguing the Welsh Government Publications Archive. In-house practices, standards, classification and thesauri have all evolved over time creating their own challenges. The team also need to ensure they are capturing all Welsh Government resources being published to ensure they are preserved for the public record.

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Katie Birkwood discusses the potential of using the 'prejudicial works' genre terms designed by the RBMS Controlled Vocabularies Editorial Group, within the context of surfacing and contextualising items with discriminatory content. Although these terms have an obvious beneficial use, this is offset against the apparent meaningless of applying them to most of a particular collection. In Birkwood's example, a historical medical collection, where most of 19th and 20th century medical science was based on discriminatory theories. A wider discussion on this topic is needed and should form the basis of an event later this year.

D St. Amour and colleagues provide the background and overview to Homosaurus, the LGBTQ+ subject heading thesaurus. Originating back in 1982 as Dutch language Homodok it has grown and developed over the years into a community driven linked data vocabulary that continues to evolve.

Will Peaden, Chair of MDG, reflects on the subject analysis World Café held in London in November 2025, as a response to changes made by Library of Congress around the renaming of the Gulf of Mexico and Mount Denali headings based on a Presidential Executive Order. These changes highlighted many ethical issues the Cataloguing sector faces with regards to subject analysis and how reliant we are on this particular US body. The World Café provided the opportunity for individuals to meet and discuss these issues with an eye to finding practical solutions.

Helen Griffiths provides a delightfully whimsical look at the in-house classification scheme used by the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, demonstrating that bespoke schemes are sometimes the most suitable. She discusses some of the challenges in maintaining the scheme and how she is working to update it.

Our next issue is being curated by the RDA Steering Committee and will be published in May to coincide with the one-year countdown to the removal of the Original RDA Toolkit and transfer to Official RDA in 2027.

Finally, the usual reminder that the editors are always happy to receive article proposals, feedback, and letters. Please contact us at catalogueandindex@gmail.com.

Karen F. Pierce & Fran Frenzel, March 2026

Addressing offensive classification practices

embedding equity, diversity, and inclusion in the Royal College of Nursing in-house library classification scheme

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Received: 25 February 2026 | Published: 23 March 2026

ABSTRACT

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Library and Museum Service undertook a review of its in house classification scheme to address offensive and outdated classification practices and subject headings. Guided by the organisation's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, the project drew on inclusive terminology resources and cross country collaboration to update over 200 subject headings and introduce more than 30 new class numbers. The review also prompted changes to working processes to improve representation of contemporary UK nursing practice. The work highlights the need for ongoing review, broader user engagement, and reflective, collaborative decision-making to maintain an inclusive and responsive classification system.

KEYWORDS nursing; classification; subject headings; diversity; inclusion

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The Royal College of Nursing Library and Museum Service

First founded in 1916, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has provided a library service to its members for over 100 years. Today the library has the largest nursing-specific collection in Europe. The library teams at the London, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast sites provide online and in-person research support and access to resources to members across the nursing and midwifery workforce.

The RCN Library and Museum EDI Mission

The RCN launched its Equity Diversity and Inclusion Strategy in 2024 to build an organisation where inequality, discrimination and racism are eliminated and to give support to a diverse workforce ([Royal College of Nursing, 2024](#)). While the libraries' existing practices reflected many of the strategy's principles, a dedicated Library and Museum EDI group was established to strengthen this work. The group - consisting of members from the Museum, Collections, Customer Services, Information, and E-Systems teams - identified additional projects to support the wider RCN strategy and developed a library and museum mission:

“The RCN Library and Museum EDI mission is to create a welcoming and supportive community for all our users, within nursing staff and beyond. This underpins the Library and Museum mission to support the nursing profession and inspire everyone to explore nursing and its history.” ([Royal College of Nursing, 2024](#))

The service and its collections have expanded significantly over recent decades and with the growth of the museum service, members of the public are now also welcomed, further diversifying the communities represented and supported.

Addressing offensive classification practices

One of the first projects identified by the EDI group was the need to address offensive classification practices and terminology in the in-house scheme. Library staff and users highlighted offensive classification in the print lending collections, particularly around the subjects of learning disabilities, neurodiversity, sex, gender, and identity. This feedback illustrated that outdated cataloguing practices not only affect user experience but also risk reinforcing historic biases.

Although existing in-house cataloguing guidelines reflected elements of the Cataloguing Code of Ethics ([Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee, 2021](#)), it became clear that a closer review of practice was required.

RCN in-house classification scheme background

The RCN's in-house scheme is thought to be based on the Boston Medical Library scheme and consists of approximately 380 unique numbers with accompanying subject headings. For many years, the scheme was regularly updated in collaboration with members of the wider organisation, including nursing subject specialists, and an in-house subject thesaurus was published and sold to other libraries. This thesaurus supported the cataloguing of unique UK nursing resources.

However, over time, the thesaurus fell out of use, and both it and the classification scheme went several years without review. This lapse, largely due to limits on staff time and availability, made it increasingly difficult to describe and accurately reflect evolving UK nursing practices.

The nursing profession responds to public health priorities, workforce needs, technological developments, and the needs of diverse patient communities. As a result, the classification scheme must adapt accordingly. In 2018, the service adopted the RDA cataloguing standard and began using MeSH subject headings alongside a concise group of in-house UK nursing specific terms. These in-house headings remained necessary because UK nursing practice is not always adequately represented in the MeSH thesaurus which is maintained by the United States National Library of Medicine ([National Library of Medicine, 2026](#)). Although the team suggested new headings to MeSH, few were adopted.

Maintaining a classification scheme that accurately reflects contemporary nursing presents an ongoing challenge. While the option of replacing the in-house scheme with a more widely used system was considered, the team ultimately concluded that updating the existing scheme would better support accurate representation of UK nursing practice and maintain its unique value as a special collection.

Methodology and rationale

Transparency and consistency were essential to the review. The methodology focused on identifying offensive and outdated terminology, addressing subject gaps, and ensuring the changes reflected modern nursing. To establish a methodology, the team drew on the experience of the SWIMS Network¹, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine classification scheme project², and the Research Libraries UK series on Inclusive Collections, Inclusive Libraries³.

Identifying and evaluating offensive terminology

To help mitigate bias, lists of preferred terminology were used to identify offensive subject headings in the scheme. These lists were drawn from various resources including Carissa Chew's *Inclusive Terminology Glossary* ([Cultural Heritage Terminology Network, 2023](#)), *Homosaurus* ([Homosaurus, 2025](#)), *Inclusive language: words to use and avoid when writing about disability* ([Cabinet Office Disability Unit, 2021](#)) and the RCN style guide. The *Inclusive Terminology Glossary's* inclusion of offensive terminology was a particularly helpful starting point for the project. The classification scheme, along with its accompanying subject headings, was exported to Excel and searched using the offensive terms, allowing the team to systematically highlight areas in the scheme in need of review.

The initial review took two members of staff around four months to complete. Excel was used to track proposed changes and share decisions with the wider teams. As the review progressed, significant subject gaps were revealed particularly in the areas of neurodiversity, sex, gender identity, and prejudice. These omissions were themselves recognised as offensive and required substantial time to address through introducing new, or expanded, class numbers, and relocating topics to entirely new areas.

¹ <https://swimsnetworknhs.uk/>

² See e.g.

Carpenter, E. (2025) *Language as control: Decolonising classification for C21st library collection and data management*. *Aliss Quarterly* 21 (1). pp. 28-32. Available at: <https://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/id/eprint/4678060/>

Barnard, C. C. (2024) *A Classification for Medical and Veterinary Libraries*. 3rd rev. edn. LSHTM Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.56920/lshtmp-1>

³ <https://www.rluk.ac.uk/icil/>

Finding consensus through collaborative decision-making

To find consensus on preferred terminology, various specialist websites were cross-checked, including NHS Trust websites, the RCN website, Refuge⁴, Mind⁵, and Scope⁶. Although MeSH and other classification schemes were reviewed when proposing new class numbers, this proved challenging and decisions were largely informed by the existing scheme and thoughtful placement of new or updated subjects.

The newly established four-country library cataloguing group (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) reviewed the recommendations. Their contributions were vital, particularly in relation to reaching consensus on nursing terminology used across the UK. The wider library teams were also consulted and provided feedback in small group discussions focused on subject gaps and the proposed new class numbers.

Although the project was prompted by user feedback, users were not consulted at this stage due to time constraints, combined with the scale and specialist nature of the work.

Relabelling and moving stock took approximately two months and had to be reflected across the different library sites. To date over 200 subject headings have been removed or replaced and over 30 new class numbers have been introduced.

Challenges and opportunities

Progress on the project was sometimes delayed due to limited staff time and availability. However, collaborating across the teams proved essential, helping to challenge unconscious bias, broaden perspectives, and provided mutual support when working with emotionally challenging subjects.

The review also revealed other issues with the scheme. Some class number areas were under-used, indicating that subjects were either redundant or required further development. The review also showed that large subject themes were represented by smaller number areas, making browsing the shelves difficult and misrepresenting the breadth and nuance of nursing practice. For example, one class number is used to organise books on both palliative and end of life care. The remainder of the classification scheme will be reviewed and updated to ensure the collections continue to be discoverable. A collections analysis at the end of the project will be essential to assess how effectively each classification area is being used, identify under-represented or over-extended subjects, and ensure the scheme accurately reflects current nursing priorities.

⁴ <https://refuge.org.uk/>

⁵ <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

⁶ <https://www.scope.org.uk/>

Towards the end of 2024 the library service moved to the OCLC WorldShare Management Service (WMS). The move, along with a significant weeding project, delayed progress with the scheme review. However, the transition presented new opportunities. As outlined in the Bristol University article *Problematic subject headings : making our catalogue more equitable, diverse and inclusive at the University of Bristol* ([Cooper and McManus, 2025](#)), OCLC provides a locally preferred subject re-mapping tool. The tool helps libraries address offensive and out-dated subject headings in the discovery layer Library Search. Users can search for topics using their own terminology but are pointed to preferred subject headings. Once the scheme review is complete, the library will use the tool to maintain a list of locally preferred headings.

While library users can already suggest new resources for the collections, we also want to provide opportunities to feedback on the subject headings they encounter. We will explore ways to engage users both in the library space and online to help provide an equitable and inclusive experience.

Conclusion

The review of the RCN's in-house classification scheme has reinforced the importance of maintaining cataloguing practices that are inclusive and responsive. As terminology and nursing practice continues to evolve, the classification scheme will be regularly reviewed, not only to identify and replace outdated or offensive terminology, but also to address gaps in representation that may marginalise users or overlook key areas of nursing.

The project also demonstrated the importance of working collaboratively with colleagues, creating space for reflection, challenging unconscious bias, and sharing the emotional labour involved in reviewing sensitive subjects. Although the project was inspired by library user feedback, further user engagement has been postponed until the OCLC re-mapping tool is used. This delay limits the breadth of perspectives considered and risks perpetuating biases.

Finally, the project has demonstrated that the classification system must be continuously updated. Through regular review and active staff and user engagement, the RCN Library and Museum can ensure its collections remain relevant, inclusive and reflective of evolving nursing practice.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to past and present graduate trainees Alice White and Ianto Griffin for their work updating the scheme, and to the four-country libraries for their valuable input. Thank you to Eloise Carpenter and David Archer of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and to the SWIMS network for sharing their classification project experiences and resources.

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Policies and preservation

how we catalogue Welsh Government publications

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ABSTRACT

The Welsh Government Publications Archive is a publicly available catalogue which allows anyone to search and access the historic publications of the Welsh Government and its predecessors. This article outlines the Publications Archive's purpose and background, and how the Knowledge and Library Services team within Welsh Government maintain this resource. It delves into their cataloguing practices and how these have developed over time, describing their approaches to cataloguing standards, classification and thesauri. The article also explores the challenges faced when cataloguing government publications and how these are informed by the evolution of government publishing practices, before concluding by reflecting on potential future developments.

KEYWORDS government publications; Welsh Government Publications Archive

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Introduction

Welsh Government is the devolved government of Wales, with responsibility for devolved policy areas such as health, agriculture, education, culture and the environment. It forms the executive branch of government, making policies and proposing laws for Wales. It is a different body to Senedd Cymru / the Welsh Parliament, which makes laws, agrees taxes and scrutinises the work of the Welsh Government.

Every year, Welsh Government publishes thousands of different publications in the process of carrying out government business; whether in policy making, engaging in government research or setting out proposals for new legislation. These publications are often the vehicle through which government information is disseminated and, as such, are important historical resources. These must be preserved as part of the public record to enable long-term access, enable scrutiny and help support the democratic process. This is why these publications are systematically captured and catalogued by the Knowledge and Library Services team and retained on the Welsh Government Publications Archive¹.

¹ <https://publicationsarchive.service.gov.wales>

What is the Welsh Government Publications Archive?

The Publications Archive is a free, public tool, accessible via www.gov.wales (GOV. WALES) which enables anyone to search and access the historic publications of the Welsh Government and its predecessors (e.g. Welsh Assembly Government / Welsh Office). It provides access to born-digital publications originally published on GOV. WALES, as well as the records of both physical and, in many cases, scanned copies of publications. Our library team of thirteen staff work diligently to make sure publications are consistently captured and catalogued for long-term preservation.

There is also a compliance component to preserving government publications. This is outlined in the *Freedom of Information Act 2000* ([Freedom of Information Act 2000](#)) and the *Re-Use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015* ([The Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015](#)). Government bodies must make as much information as possible available to the public proactively so that this information is accessible but, more critically, re-usable. While much is now published on GOV.WALES, publications can change rapidly. Many are regularly updated and some will eventually disappear from the site altogether, making it difficult to pinpoint what policies or guidance were in place at certain times. The Publications Archive supports this scrutiny, and these practices enable Knowledge and Library Services to answer requests for information resulting from public inquiries, freedom of information requests and general government business.

Cataloguing government publications

To capture Welsh Government publications effectively, we use a cataloguing rota that divides publications by policy area. At present, eight members of library staff are responsible for cataloguing. Each month they'll be assigned a different policy area and be expected to check the sources indicated on the rota for new publications for capture. We rotate areas every month to ensure that our workplan is flexible and can sustain workloads during periods of leave and sickness. Cataloguing is monitored by regular spot checks, and all cataloguers are encouraged to regularly review their records for accuracy.

We use our Library Management System (LMS) supplied by Soutron to catalogue our publications. All staff are trained to internal cataloguing standards, which are bespoke to the needs of Welsh Government as an organisation and updated regularly. While we do not subscribe to internationally recognised standards such as MARC21 or RDA, our cataloguing practices are not wholly dissimilar – a typical catalogue record looks like the below ([Figure 1](#)).

We use different cataloguing templates set up for distinct types of government publications, such as consultation documents, circulars, statutory and non-statutory legislation. Records are linked by several thesauri fields, including author, corporate

[New Search](#)
[Back](#)
[Opened \(1\)](#)
[Current Record Actions](#)

Formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales: survey of senior leaders and practitioners

EDOC Assembly

CID: 1079133

Welsh Title: Gwerthusiad ffurfiannol o'r Cwricwlwm i Gymru: arolwg o uwch arweinwyr ac ymarferwyr

E-ISBN: 9781806337842
9781806337835

Language: Welsh
English

Reference Number: EDOC

Authors: PARKINSON, Gillian
TYLDEN-SMITH, Ben
THOMAS, Hefin
DAVIS, Joanne
SINNEMA, Claire

Corporate Author: WELSH GOVERNMENT

Publisher: Welsh Government

Publication Date: 18 December 2025

Physical Description: Dogfen electronig / Electronic documents: PDF: 488p

Price: Dim pris: Unpriced

Series: Government Social Research (GSR)

Notes: Rhif ymchwil cymdeithasol / Social research number 126/2025

Abstract: Mae'r adroddiad hwn yn cyflwyno canfyddiadau o arolwg o uwch arweinwyr ac ymarferwyr mewn ysgolion a lleoliadau ynghylch eu harferion, eu barn a'u profiadau mewn perthynas â'r Cwricwlwm i Gymru.
This report presents findings from a survey of senior leaders and practitioners in schools and settings about their practices, views and experiences in relation to Curriculum for Wales.

Subjects: Evaluation
Schools
National curriculum

Websites: [Llywodraeth Cymru](#)
[Welsh Government](#)

Attached Documents: [gwerthusiad-ffurfiannol-or-cwricwlwm-i-gymru-arolwg-o-uwch-arweinwyr-ac-ymarferwyr-059371.pdf](#)
[formative-evaluation-of-the-curriculum-for-wales-survey-of-senior-leaders-and-practitioners-668201.pdf](#)

Figure 1: An example record from the Welsh Government Publications Archive

author, series, publisher and subject headings to aid browsing by these fields. These are maintained internally.

We diverge from standard cataloguing practices in how we retain both Welsh and English versions of documents in the same record. This relates to historic Welsh Government publishing practices where, when published in hard copy, many Welsh and English versions of the same document were printed back-to-back and therefore catalogued in the same record. Although the rise of digital publishing has negated the need for English and Welsh versions to share the same record, this practice has continued, even where both versions have different E-ISBNs. We have found that retaining this practice serves our user base, who may often need to carefully review both versions against one another and therefore easily access both at the same time. It has also had the added benefit of helping us save both server space and cataloguing time when dealing with an influx of new publications.

Being a public body, we also need to abide by the Welsh Language Standards in our cataloguing practices so that users can access our records and navigate our catalogue through the medium of Welsh. Our internal standards emphasise the importance of including Welsh within the description in our records and work is ongoing to provide our thesauri terms in Welsh where appropriate.

Since 2021 we've added, on average, around 3,700 items to the Publications Archive per year. For a cataloguing team of eight this is a significant task to keep up to date with. None of our cataloguers work full time on this task; other duties include literature searching, user training and enquiry support. This is also not the only collections task allocated to staff. As well as monitoring, capturing and cataloguing Welsh Government publications, we also maintain a collection of physical and e-resources for the use of Welsh Government staff, routinely transfer digital Welsh Government publications to the National Library of Wales for legal deposit and engage in necessary collection maintenance tasks such as collection audits and weeding.

Classification

Originally, our classification scheme was developed by library staff working in the Welsh Office, pre-devolution. It is based on Library of Congress Classification (LCC)² but uses elements of the Dewey Decimal Classification³ to allocate geographic areas. You can see an example in the below record ([Figure 2](#)).

The original copy of this customised classification system was lost over the years, but we have continued to use a simplified version of LCC to classify our internal library collection, making use of the publicly available LCC listings to guide our classification ([Library of Congress, 2026](#)).

² <https://www.loc.gov/aba/cataloging/classification/>

³ <https://www.oclc.org/en/dewey.html>

Performance evaluation report 2013–14: city and county of Swansea social services

EDOC Assembly

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| CID: | 915146 |
| Welsh Title: | Adroddiad Gwerthuso Perfformiad 2013–14: gwasanaethau cymdeithasol dinas a sir Abertawe |
| E-ISBN: | 9781473423664 9781473423657 |
| Language: | English Welsh |
| Reference Number: | HV 245 (429.51) |
| Corporate Author: | CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES INSPECTORATE WALES (CSSIW) |
| Publisher: | Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales |
| Publication Date: | 31 October 2014 |

Figure 2: A record containing an example of customised LCC

We rarely use LCC to classify digital items held in the Publications Archive. As fewer reports came to be published in hard copy, the requirement to formally classify them became less pressing. Born-digital publications didn't require the extra act of classification to be browsable in an online environment; effective use of subject headings and other linked thesauri metadata fulfil that need. We simply add the term 'EDOC' to the classification field. However, when a government publication comes with its own reference system, we include this in the class mark field. Government circulars and subordinate legislation usually have their own numbering systems; we capture these within their catalogue record in the class mark field, so they are searchable by their reference number.

Our team have also adapted other existing classification systems for cataloguing projects. In 2019 we were tasked with cataloguing the collection of books, journals and reports used by Cadw⁴, the heritage arm of Welsh Government, to support their work in protecting Wales' historic environment. Colleagues working on the project had previously worked in Historic England and so adapted the Historic England library's classification system to meet the needs of their Welsh counterpart. The resulting classification system focuses on subjects such as archaeology, architecture, history, maps and planning. This cataloguing project is still ongoing, and to date the project team have catalogued over 8,000 items, enabling Cadw colleagues to more effectively browse and search their collection.

⁴ <https://cadw.gov.wales/>

Subject headings and taxonomies

We employ a combination of Integrated Public Sector Vocabulary (IPSV) terms and common subject descriptions used in the Welsh Government past and present to maintain our subject thesaurus headings. IPSV was a taxonomy designed specifically for public sector organisations, to help tag information across government resources such as websites, records management systems and library collections ([Local Government Association, 2013](#)). While once widely used across government organisations, it has not been mandated since 2012.

We've adapted and customised our subject thesaurus over the years, adding specific subject headings related to Welsh policy to index publications catalogued and aid their retrieval. Our subject thesaurus is hierarchical, and our catalogue provides the option for users to search related terms in addition to the search terms they've selected. This requires careful management of relationships between terms in our subject thesaurus, to keep them up to date and reflective of any policy / organisational changes.

To ensure consistency in subject allocation, our subject thesaurus is maintained by one person in the team. If a new term is required, this must be requested to avoid duplication. We only use one field to designate subject headings and do not differentiate between various categories of subjects, such as corporate entities or topical terms. For example, a health board inspection report may be indexed using the subject headings 'Local Health Boards (Wales)' and 'Health and Care Inspection', as well as the name of the health board in question and its locale (e.g. 'Swansea Bay University', 'Aneurin Bevan').

Common cataloguing challenges

With the speed and scale of government publishing, it can be challenging to keep up to date and capture everything on the Publications Archive as it is published. As digital publishing has become the default, publishing practices have in turn evolved and, in some cases, become increasingly decentralised.

Sourcing said publications can occasionally be challenging. While the majority are published on GOV.WALES, some departments may maintain a separate web presence and host their publications on there. Some notable examples of this are Hwb⁵, which hosts Welsh educational resources for schools in Wales, Cadw⁴, and the Welsh tribunals who, although they work independently from government, receive administrative support (including report publication) from Welsh Government. We use our rota to log all websites which require checking for publications; this is regularly updated.

Machinery of government changes can also impact our cataloguing practices; public bodies often move in and out of the remit of central government. Two recent examples

⁵ <https://hwb.gov.wales/>

include Planning Inspectorate Wales, which transferred into Welsh Government in 2021 (becoming Planning and Environment Decisions Wales) ([Planning Inspectorate, 2021](#)) and Medr⁶, Wales' Commission for Tertiary Education and Research which became an arm's length body in 2024 ([Howells, 2024](#)). In both cases, we needed to adjust our cataloguing practices to incorporate the material of Planning and Environment Decisions Wales and to exclude Medr. We focus our cataloguing solely on Welsh Government departments, as this is the extent of our remit under our Publication Scheme ([Welsh Government, 2024](#)).

As we host digital copies of publications on our Publications Archive, we take a vigilant approach to copyright to make sure we are only uploading items with the necessary permissions. Most Welsh Government publications are licensed under the Open Government Licence (OGL), a permissive licence which allows most forms of re-use ([National Archives, 2014](#)). However, some publications may not be covered by OGL. For example, Welsh Government commissioned reports sometimes retain the copyright of the originating body and jointly authored reports may have two or more copyright holders. In these cases, we need to carefully consider copyright and whether permissions are in place to add these items to the Publications Archive for long-term preservation.

Finally, version control of publications can be rife with complexity. While some publications follow best practice by using different ISBNs for each edition or including a clear version history, this isn't always standard practice. In many cases, previous versions of guidance will be overwritten with new versions with little to indicate the extent of changes made, necessitating careful review. Digital government publishing used to be predominantly carried out in PDF format, aiding version control and document preservation; this has since increasingly migrated to HTML as a more accessible format ([Williams, 2018](#)). It can be challenging to balance these important accessibility requirements with the act of preservation. We currently convert publications to PDF for preservation, but this is an area of our work which we hope to dedicate more thought to in the future.

Future developments

This article has outlined just some of the aspects of maintaining a government publications archive. Our cataloguing practices are constantly developing to adapt to the wider government and regulatory environment, as well as the ongoing evolution of digital publishing. In future we hope to continue to improve our practices to support discovery, accessibility and the Welsh language. We are also in conversation with our LMS providers to better understand how we can safely and responsibly integrate AI capabilities to enhance our cataloguing practices, while still maintaining a human in the loop. These combined efforts will help us maintain a comprehensive Publications Archive which effectively supports the work of government and ensures the public can easily access and benefit from vital public information.

⁶ <https://www.medr.cymru/en/>

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Considering the adoption of RBMS prejudicial works genre terms to facilitate the identification of historically prejudiced materials

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ABSTRACT

The article considers the limitations of conventional library cataloguing rules for surfacing and contextualising works with harmful and discriminatory content, using the Heritage Library of the Royal College of Physicians as a case study. It introduces the possibility of using a controlled vocabulary in 655 genre headings as a mean to identify this material, though notes that this is not without difficulties. It introduces a future event to enable cataloguers to discuss these difficulties and find solutions to them.

KEYWORDS critical cataloguing; cataloguing ethics

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Content advisory: this article uses offensive terms for disabled people as part of its discussion of historical medical works.

Starting in summer 2020, Justice, Equity and Anti-Racism group (JEAN) of the Archive, Heritage Library and Museum Services (AMS) team at the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) began reviewing the provenance, content and description of the RCP's heritage collections for evidence of enslavement, colonialism, racism and other forms of discrimination. This review resulted in a detailed internal action plan, summarised for public information and published on the RCP history website ([Royal College of Physicians, 2024](#)).

From a library cataloguing point of view, this has led to an ongoing project of work, which has so far included

- assessing whether any major library donors were involved in the transatlantic slave trade,
- the adoption of the Cataloguing Code of Ethics ([Cataloging Ethics Steering Committee, 2021](#)),
- the review and updating of geographic subject headings to remove out-of-date and colonialist names,

- the addition of a harmful content statement to the library catalogue ([Royal College of Physicians, 2026](#)),
- and the (very much ongoing) review and updating of subject terms taken from LCSH¹ and MeSH².

Working alongside archives and museum professional colleagues throughout this process threw some of the differences between the metadata standards and norms across the three sectors into clear relief. My colleagues have the ready facility to incorporate broad subject tagging across their items and collections into their archive and museum catalogues, using a list of locally-agreed terms and definitions deemed to be of particular relevance and importance to the RCP context. (At present they are using: black history; colonialism and empire; disability; eugenics and scientific racism; mental health; sexuality and gender identity; slavery; war crimes; women's health; and women in medicine.) They are also able to add textual descriptions of topics, people, and events into narrative descriptive fields in their catalogues as part of standard practice. For example we agreed a standard text to append to materials relating to: Dutch East India Company; East India Company; eugenics; museums and collections as tools of colonialism; physiognomy; scientific polygenism; trade and early modern apothecaries.

The tags were added both to alert users to the potentially sensitive content of records or objects, and also to facilitate the retrieval of material relating to topics that have traditionally been harder to uncover. The narrative descriptions provide the opportunity to provide necessary context for the content of materials that are potentially offensive and prejudiced owing to the time and place of their creation.

Library cataloguing rules do not allow for this style of tagging, nor - traditionally - for the addition of narrative contextualising information. An exception to this is the recent introduction of subfield \$z, 'Title statement context note', to MARC field 245 ([Library of Congress, 2025a](#); [Library of Congress, 2025b](#)). Cataloguing rules require the cataloguer simply to transcribe an item's title as it appears in print, which may (especially in historical medical collections) include offensive language that goes otherwise completely unremarked upon in the record. Conversely, the transcription of a title and the addition of standard subject headings can leave the true nature of offensive or prejudicial contents obscure to any potential reader. For example, a work such as *Some observations on the mental state of the blind, and deaf, and dumb* by Richard Fowler (1843) appears in the catalogue unremarked on despite this being a now offensive phrase for nonspeaking deaf people, and *A treatise on tropical diseases, on military operations, and on the climate of the West Indies* by Benjamin Moseley (1789) will not reveal that it contains extensive descriptions of the supposed disease-resistance of enslaved Black people, an important pillar of developing theories of scientific racism.

¹ <https://www.loc.gov/aba/cataloging/subject/>

² <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/mesh/meshhome.html>

I have therefore been considering what might be possible within the framework of library cataloguing standards to provide more equitable, informative and accurate subject description of texts in the RCP Heritage Library. In particular I have been considering a specific sub-section of genre headings maintained by the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries of the America Library Association (RBMS).

The MARC 21 655 field, 'Index Term-Genre/Form' (commonly referred to as a genre heading) can be used to add terms "indicating the genre, form, and/or physical characteristics of the materials being described" to a bibliographic record ([Library of Congress, 2022](#)). Terms are to be taken from standard published lists as identified by the second indicator (for six of the most common sources) or from other sources identified in subfield \$2 using the relevant code from the appropriate Library of Congress source codes list ([Library of Congress, 2026](#)).

In rare books cataloguing the 655 is used by some (though not all) institutions as a means to apply a controlled vocabulary to the description of copy specific information (provenance, bindings, quirks of production, etc.) by applying terms from the controlled vocabulary maintained by the RBMS. This scheme - the RBMS Controlled Vocabulary for Rare Materials Cataloguing (RBMS CVRMC) - was previously a collection of six vocabularies known as the RBMS Controlled Vocabularies, which were merged together and relaunched as the RBMS CVRMC in March 2023 ([RBMS Controlled Vocabularies Editorial Group, 2025](#); [Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, 2024](#)).

As well as containing terms relating to the physical features of rare books, the RBMS CVRMC also contains hierarchically-organised genre terms, nested within its 'Works' subsection. These include commonly understood genres such as 'Bibliographies' or 'Cookbooks' as well as more specialised terms used for historical works of various periods such as 'Mazarinades' or 'Samizdat'.

Under the 'Content of work' subheading are 32 terms designed specifically for describing prejudicial works, defined as material that "exhibits hostility toward or bias against people because of their disability, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality, gender identity" ([RBMS Controlled Vocabularies Editorial Group, 2025](#)). These terms are the product of a four-year project convened in 2020 to review and revise existing terms and to generate new terminology ([RBMS Controlled Vocabularies Editorial Group, 2024](#)). They are different in their nature as they explicitly confront the supposed 'neutrality' of the catalogue by providing the means explicitly to highlight the directly harmful nature of works. The terms include some that relate to general species of oppression, schools of thought, and societal movements - 'Ableist works', 'Misogynistic works', 'Anti-LGBTQ+ works' and others - and those that relate to specific expressions of prejudice such as 'Blackface minstrel songs'.

In the report that accompanied the publication of the revised terms, the RBMS working group hoped that the use of these terms would both facilitate the study of

systems and structures of oppression, and that they would help libraries and collections not to contribute to or mask harm by "by failing to surface the essential nature of library resources" ([RBMS Controlled Vocabularies Editorial Group, 2024](#), p. 1). These two concerns map closely onto the drivers of the ongoing work at the RCP.

Since the publication of the RBMS working group report, I have been considering how these genre headings for prejudicial works can be applied to the library collections for which I am responsible. The Heritage Library collection contains approximately 50,000 titles, dating from the advent of printing in the 15th century to the present day. Though the subject coverage of the collection is wide and encompasses far more than the medical sciences, the history of medicine is necessarily a core part of its identity. In considering how potentially to apply the RBMS prejudicial works terms to this collection I have faced indecision based on the very nature of history of medicine collections. Given that so much of medical science (especially of the 19th and 20th century) has been predicated on discriminatory theories and perceptions including misogyny, ableism, racist beliefs and eugenics, how can such terms be *usefully* applied to our collections? In wanting to exercise a duty of care by adding a term alerting readers to the fact that a given work 'exhibit[s] hostility toward or bias against peoples or cultures racialized as other by the dominant group or culture of a specific place or time' ([Racist works, 2024](#)), does that labelling become meaningless if every similar work from a broad swathe of time is similarly labelled?

In order to explore this issue further, and hopefully to seek a practical and helpful way forward, I am working with CILIP's Metadata & Discovery Group and Rare Books and Special Collections Group to hold a discussion event later in the year. Watch the usual channels for more information in due course.

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Building and sustaining the Homosaurus, an inclusive LGBTQ+ linked data vocabulary

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the Homosaurus, a LGBTQ+ community-driven linked data vocabulary. Authored by members of the Homosaurus Collective, it details the project's origins, governance history, and transformation from an institutional thesaurus into an international linked data vocabulary.

KEYWORDS subject analysis; LGBTQ+; linked data; Homosaurus

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Introduction

The Homosaurus is an international and community-driven linked data vocabulary of LGBTQ+ terminology. It functions as a critical supplement and alternative to Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), and emerged within a broader effort across galleries, libraries, archives, museums and special collections (GLAMS) to identify and address harmful or exclusionary descriptive language. Within GLAMS, the Homosaurus supports researchers and knowledge workers by providing community-

defined terms that can be integrated into cataloging, metadata creation, and discovery systems. Its structure is designed to be interoperable with widely used metadata frameworks.

By foregrounding community-authored and defined terminology, the Homosaurus reduces risks of erasure, misclassification, and descriptive bias that have historically shaped knowledge organization systems. The project reflects participatory ontology-building practices in which community expertise is treated as authoritative in determining terminology. This approach aligns with broader ethical frameworks that prioritize self-identification, transparency, and accountability in term development and descriptive practice. As a result, the Homosaurus operates not only as a technical metadata tool, but also as an intervention on the historical inequities embedded in subject analysis and other resource description systems.

History

Like many LGBTQ+ entities, the Homosaurus emerges from the dedication and stewardship of its earlier generations. The project originated in 1982, when staff at Homodok - the University of Amsterdam Documentation Center for Gay and Lesbian Studies - began developing a list of Dutch-language keywords used to describe resources in their bibliographic database. In 1993, Homodok merged with Anna Blaman Huis (formerly Lesbian Archives Leeuwarden), forming the IHLIA (now IHLIA-LGBT Heritage¹), which faced an urgent need to describe its newly combined and growing collections. Staff identified structural limitations within conventional subject heading thesauri, particularly in their ability to represent diverse queer identities and associated lived experiences. These limitations had direct implications for information retrieval, as researchers, students, and other users encountered difficulties locating materials on topics. In many cases, queer concepts were either absent from legacy vocabularies or described in ways that reduced (and even prevented) discoverability. Thus, in 1993, IHLIA developed the Dutch language *Queer Thesaurus* based largely on the combined subject lists used by Homodok and Anna Blaman Huis. In 1997, *Queer Thesaurus* was translated into English ([Cifor and Rawson, 2023](#)).

Queer Thesaurus reflected the content held in IHLIA, and was thus focused on gay and lesbian terms, with deeper coverage on white gay cisgender men. Between 2013 and 2015, Jack van der Wel and Ellen Greenblatt revised and substantially expanded the *Queer Thesaurus*, adding and linking hundreds of new terms in an effort towards both a more structured hierarchy and broader LGBTQ+ inclusion, forming the first iteration to use the name Homosaurus. This transformation reflected both shifts in community language and evolving expectations around digital metadata environments, while moving the vocabulary deliberately beyond its primarily gay and lesbian focus. During this period, the Homosaurus also began to expand beyond its role as a standalone, in-house reference tool. K.J. Rawson recognized its unique potential for describing materials in the then-nascent Digital Transgender Archive

¹ <https://ihlia.nl/en/>

(DTA)², an online repository for trans-related historical materials. Rawson's application of the Homosaurus within the DTA played a significant role in driving its transformation into a linked data vocabulary, enabling the Homosaurus to function within semantic web environments and supporting broader integration into digital collections and discovery systems ([Cifor and Rawson, 2023](#)).

In 2016, van der Wel and Rawson established the Homosaurus Editorial Board, creating a formal governance structure for the vocabulary. The board was comprised of eight to ten queer- and trans-identified information professionals and academics who met monthly to review term suggestions, make revisions, and discuss emerging language. This period also prompted an important reconceptualization of the vocabulary's scope: rather than attempting to comprehensively describe all resources that might be held in relevant collections, the board determined that the Homosaurus should function as an LGBTQ+-specific vocabulary designed to be used in conjunction with broader thesauri. This approach allowed for greater depth in representing LGBTQ+ terminology and made the Homosaurus usable by any GLAMS - including those operating within LCSH-dominated library catalogs - seeking to describe LGBTQ+ resources ([Cifor and Rawson, 2023](#)).

Present

Between 2015 and 2025, expansion and development continued as the Homosaurus saw a remarkable uptick in adoption and use. In 2016, the Homosaurus became an approved thesaurus source for MARC records (code: homoit) ([Library of Congress, Network Development and MARC Standards Office, 2016](#)), which vastly expanded the use of the vocabulary across the world. To further develop and diversify the vocabulary, Homosaurus used supplemental funding from Northeastern University, Rawson's home institution. This made it possible to support collaborations with community-based organizations such as AVEN³, the Black Lesbian Archive⁴, COLAGE⁵, InterACT⁶, the Leather Archives and Museum⁷, and the Sex Worker Activist Histories Project⁸.

Throughout this period of growth, the Editorial Board also received a number of requests for potential translation projects. As a result, in 2023, Marika Cifor and K.J. Rawson (in partnership with the San Francisco Public Library, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center and Library, and Arizona Queer Archives) were awarded the Homosaurus' first external funding; a three-year research and development grant from U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities to create a Latin American Spanish-language version of the Homosaurus and to build a multi-language backend

² <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/>

³ <https://www.asexuality.org/>

⁴ <https://blacklesbianarchives.wixsite.com/info>

⁵ <https://colage.org/>

⁶ <https://interactadvocates.org/>

⁷ <https://leatherarchives.org/>

⁸ <https://swahp.ca/>

infrastructure for the Homosaurus. Despite the grant being rescinded by the Trump administration in April 2025, Rawson and Cifor along with postdoctoral fellow, Ernesto Cuba, student collaborators, Sofia Zamora, Sandy Alcantara, and Mar Munné, and translator Ana Portnoy Brimmer, were able to complete the project's primary goal of developing a Spanish language Homosaurus. Version 4 was released in early 2025 and reflected both direct translation of terms from the English language Homosaurus and concepts unique to Spanish-speaking LGBTQ+ communities. There are now versions available on the Homosaurus website in English and Latin American Spanish, with Bengali, Castilian Spanish, Dutch, German, Hindi, Japanese, and Swedish versions planned or in process.

As growth continued and collaboration expanded, it became clear that the Editorial Board model was not a sustainable solution for continued governance. Furthermore, members observed that the Editorial Board model did not adequately reflect the Homosaurus' values of equity, justice and self-determination. Starting in 2024, the Editorial Board developed a new leadership structure, which was formalized as the Homosaurus Collective in late 2025.

Governance & Decision Making

The Homosaurus Collective, which presently includes 40+ members based in 9 countries, is subdivided into three interdependent boards: Organizing, Term Development, and Implementation (see [Figure 1](#) below). The Organizing Board provides coordination, visioning, and guidance across the project, and helps to develop and grow the Collective, seeking funding, hosting summits, and identifying partnerships. This board contains the Systems Committee, which focuses on software functionality and coordinates with developers. The Term Development Board supports cross-language work and provides coordination among Term Development Committees. This board oversees the Dutch, English, French, German, Hindi and Bengali, Japanese, Spanish, and Swedish Language-Specific Committees, which are sustained long-term, as well as Ad-Hoc Thematic Committees, such as the Pasifika/Oceania committee, which are temporary in nature. The Implementation Board works with outside organizations on the implementation of the Homosaurus, developing both internal and external training practices, creating implementation resources, and tracking use and scholarly application of and writing on the Homosaurus.

Because Homosaurus usage is primarily gathered through user self-identification via our community platforms, the precise number of institutions using the Homosaurus today is difficult to ascertain. According to the data we have, our user community includes over 150 institutions, ranging from large, public library systems and national libraries, to small, grassroots community-based queer archives in seven or more countries. To date, we have been able to track at least 255 mentions of the vocabulary's use across scholarly platforms representing at least seven different countries, and both discussion and usage of the Homosaurus continues to increase across a range of LIS and GLAMS settings. For example, in their recent study of

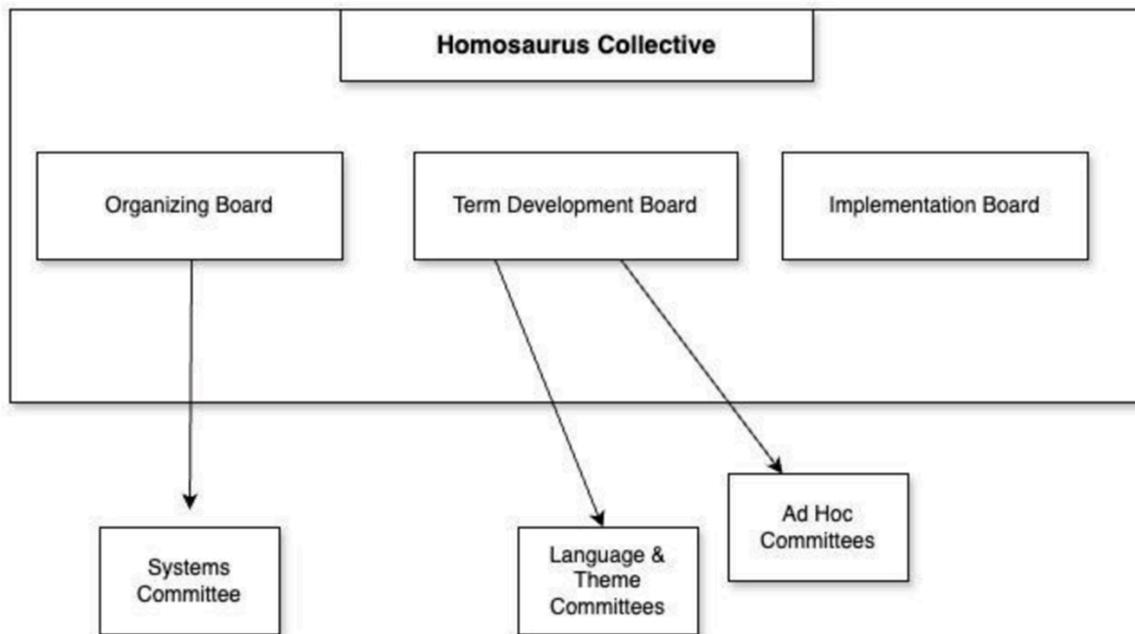


Figure 1: Homosaurus Collective structure. Diagram created by Chloe Noland, Homosaurus Term Development Board.

archivists working with LGBTQ+ collections and materials, [Wagner et al. \(2025\)](#) note that more than two thirds of the 29 archivists they interviewed utilized the Homosaurus as part of their archival description work. We also know that the Homosaurus has been incorporated into a number of grant funded projects, including a recent National Leadership Grant funded by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services led by co-principal investigators Brian Dobreski, Karen Snow, and Heather Moulaison-Sandy. While findings are still forthcoming, this research will help expand the quantitative and qualitative uses of the Homosaurus ([Gallant, 2024](#)).

Community Driven Term Curation

Community input has defined the Homosaurus vocabulary development process since its inception, with the vocabulary's ongoing growth and refinement shaped by the lived expertise and feedback of the communities it represents and serves. New terms, as well as revisions to existing terms, may be suggested by community users, community members, or by Homosaurus Collective members. Currently, the bulk of these requests come through the contact form on the Homosaurus site, via email, and on Homosaurus community social spaces. Once a new term or revision is proposed, if it is not duplicative, it is added to the language committee's term development spreadsheet for consideration.

Members of the English Term Development Committee discuss whether a term should be developed based on:

- prevalence (*Is the term currently or has it been previously widely used by LGBTQ+ communities it is relevant to?*),

- significance and relevance (*Is the term relevant in some way to LGBTQ+ concepts, issues, communities, and resources?*),
- coverage in other vocabularies (*Is the term present in mainstream vocabularies, and if so, is this coverage adequate? Does the coverage or preferred term differ from community usage?*).

Once a term is deemed to be in scope and/or appropriate for inclusion, a member of the English Term Development Committee drafts a term (either individually or in collaboration with others) including its preferred and alternative labels, scope note, relationships to other terms in the vocabulary, language of use, and any exact or close matches for the term in LCSH. Once the term is drafted, it is moved to the asynchronous approval queue if it is ready for voting or the terms for board discussion queue if the term may be controversial or need special attention. Presently, all terms need full-committee approval to be considered ready for publication. Some terms are approved as drafted, whereas others are collaboratively revised by the rest of the committee. Since the transition to the Homosaurus Collective structure, all new or revised terms drafted by the English Term Development Committee are shared with the rest of the language-specific term development committees for a final round of review before being added to the next semi-annual Homosaurus release. Currently, most other language-specific term development committees are focused on translating existing English Homosaurus terms rather than drafting original terms, though we expect more original terms from non-English committees moving forward and are prioritizing creating the infrastructure for supporting this work.

Linked Data & Technical Architecture

Early multi-language efforts of Homosaurus were largely focused on front-end language translations that identified one-to-one comparable terms. These direct translation efforts were successful at expediting greater front-end language accessibility. However, these efforts still used English as foundational ground truth, which was incompatible with the cross-cultural and translinguistic goals of Homosaurus.

Under the Editorial Board structure, Homosaurus was primarily treated as an English-language vocabulary with translations in other languages. Under the new structure, the Term Development Board has been working towards a more international framework. Each language committee brings not only translation but genuine cultural and linguistic expertise, with the goal of building a diffused and collaborative model that resists mapping onto an English-language centre. In practice, this means that terms no longer must be included or first developed in the English vocabulary to exist in another language. Additionally, the Term Development Board is working towards developing translation guidelines in acknowledgement that there are concepts and terminology that may only be relevant in certain language versions or cultural and/or geographic contexts.

Homosaurus' pivot away from English as the basis for multi-language translation is supported by linked data's paralinguistic structure. Linked data enables Homosaurus to assign each concept in the vocabulary a unique alphanumeric uniform resource identifier (URI), which allows concepts to exist in a stable form detached from any particular linguistic tradition. If the concept resonates in a specific cultural or linguistic environment, it can then be expressed by attaching a label appropriate for the sociocultural context. This linked data structure thus shifts Homosaurus' efforts away from front-end language translation to back-end vocabulary building.

The Metadata Application Profile details the technical architecture and supporting data model that supports the vocabulary (Roles, et al., 2022). Concepts are modeled as SKOS Concepts, with alphanumeric URIs distinct from individual language labels and their corresponding HTTP URLs. Relationships between Homosaurus concepts (and mapping from Homosaurus to LCSH concepts) are expressed hierarchically in SKOS and available as structured data in N-Triples, JSON-LD, TTL, and CSV formats. Controlled language tags facilitate the vocabulary's multilingual back-end in compliance with IETF BCP 47⁹ (Roles et al., 2022).

The Homosaurus website is a Ruby on Rails application available on GitHub (Anderson, 2024). The code is maintained by its author, Steven Carl Anderson. The website uses Blazegraph for querying, Solr for record display, and Postgres for data storage and preservation metadata (Watson, Noland, and Billey, 2021). The Homosaurus publishes new versions for major changes and releases for vocabulary changes, both of which are documented on the Releases page¹⁰.

Future Directions

The Homosaurus is a living vocabulary, designed to evolve with the people and communities it represents and serves. As LGBTQ+ language, identities, and cultures shift over time, so too does the vocabulary - with new terms added and existing terms revised on an ongoing basis. This commitment to responsiveness is not incidental but foundational: the Homosaurus exists to reflect community knowledges.

A central dimension of this growth has been the expansion of the Homosaurus into new languages, an undertaking which, under the previous structure, volunteers typically completed in isolation from other members. Working more closely on the Term Development Board has surfaced needs in translation workflows and implementation support that is both multilingual and not limited to MARC cataloging environments. Effectively collaborating across time zones (we currently have collaborators in Hawai'i, UTC-10:00, and Japan, UTC+9) and creating the framework to support and grow this cross-language work is an ongoing project for the Term Development Board.

⁹ <https://www.rfc-editor.org/info/bcp47>

¹⁰ <https://homosaurus.org/releases>

Alongside this linguistic expansion, the Homosaurus has worked to broaden participation in its governance and long-term sustainability. The transition to a Collective and distributed model of leadership has allowed stewardship of the vocabulary to be shared across a wider and more geographically diverse group of contributors. While ongoing technical infrastructure development has kept pace with the vocabulary's growing scope, new institutional homes and collaborations - particularly in Canada, the European Union, and beyond - will help to both safely anchor the project and to extend its reach.

Looking ahead, the Homosaurus Collective has an ambitious wish list for the future:

- dedicated staff and infrastructure to support day-to-day operations,
- expanded resources for community collaborations,
- continued growth of language boards,
- support for implementation in non-English and non-MARC cataloging environments, and
- contributions from software developers to strengthen the technical foundation of the project.

Realizing this vision will require sustained investment and partnership; however, the Homosaurus is driven by a clear purpose: to continue building a vocabulary that does not merely correct existing information systems, but actively works to make them more permeable, more equitable, and more genuinely reflective of the diverse LGBTQ+ communities it exists to serve.

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Drinking coffee and saving the world

reflections on MDG subject analysis World Cafe in London

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ABSTRACT

This article summarises the outcomes of MDG's first subject analysis World Cafe event in London, organised in response to the controversial changes to the Library of Congress Subject Headings for Mount Denali and the Gulf of Mexico in February 2025 and the ethical challenges these changes pose for users of LCSH.

KEYWORDS subject analysis; cataloguing ethics; Library of Congress Subject Headings

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On the 18th of February 2025 the Library of Congress circulated *Tentative monthly list 12 LCSH 2 (February 13, 2025)*¹ of changes to Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) ([Library of Congress, 2025](#)). This came with a “consultation” on these tentative changes closing the same day ([Library of Congress, 2025](#)). They allowed half a day or about 12 hours to gather feedback about these changes. Depending on one’s time zone this timeframe may not even have been within regular working hours but overnight. The next day it was announced that the changes would take place ([Cannan, 2025](#) and [Fox, 2025](#)). The changes proposed in this tentative document were around the naming of the Gulf of Mexico and Mount Denali. LoC changed every heading referring to the Gulf of Mexico and Mount Denali to reflect the Presidential Executive Order “Restoring names that honor American greatness”. A change in the authority file that is now reflected in every catalogue across the world that relies on the LCSH authority file.

This change and the manner in which it was enacted caused consternation across the library sector both here in the UK and abroad. The email listservs lit up with responses ranging from anger and outrage to indifference. As chair of MDG I had many emails from around the UK and from Canada, Australia and New Zealand expressing real concern about the ability of the US executive to make changes to library catalogues across the world at a whim. This change to LCSH is only the latest

¹ The list was backdated to the 13th of February. Perusal of the pertinent mailing lists (e.g. PCC Discussion list (<https://listserv.loc.gov/archives/pcclist.html>), AUTOCAT ([Tomaras, 2025](#))) shows that it was not shared with the community before the 18th February.

example of the Library of Congress making decisions on the basis of the US executive. In 2019, the excellent documentary “Change the subject” by Jill Baron and Sawyer Broadley exposed a similar contention around language used to describe undocumented persons in the United States ([Change the subject, 2019](#)).

MDG responds

Over the following months MDG needed to formulate a response to this change by the Library of Congress. I consulted with colleagues across the globe and within the sector in the UK about what could be done. It was agreed by many that short term technical fixes could be applied within discovery layers where technical expertise and will exist. However, there was no larger sector discussion about the overall ethics or responsibility of the library communities towards subject analysis nor any obvious, viable, scalable solutions that could be implemented quickly and effectively. In light of this, MDG proposed to host a series of WorldCafé workshops to discuss all the issues raised and to propose a solution moving forward.

The World Café method

The world café method is a simple style of event that is designed to bring together sector experts and solve difficult problems. The methodology ([The World Café Community Foundation, no date](#)) boils down to 5 basic parts:

1. a space that is comfortable and full of coffee
2. an introduction to the topic
3. small group rounds at each table tackling one topic area
4. questions designed to promote discussion and seek answers
5. harvesting the data generated at each table afterwards

Afterwards, a plenary may be conducted where the issues are discussed and the main points drawn out by the various tables and participants.

On subject analysis

With the method in place, we decided to run the first of a series of these in London at the Wellcome Collection on the 26th November 2025. Since there were so many topics to consider and areas to cover, we consolidated the World Café programme to 6 overarching themes. These were:

1. sector-wide implications of LCSH as a subject index
2. principles of an alternative system
3. the technical and financial issues around temporary or long-term solutions
4. scalable alternatives to LCSH
5. partnerships with sector bodies
6. what next?

Each of these topic areas had a number of seed questions (see [Appendix 1](#)) to begin the conversations and stimulate discussions around the table. Each participant at the event then had 25 minutes per table to discuss each topic area with other participants and draw up some ideas on flip-charts. At the end of the sixth session, we held a brief plenary session before wrapping up.

Overview of the day

Overall, the energy in the room was vibrant and engaging with all the tables being active and energised throughout. We generated 6 flipcharts per topic and each of these captured a whole range of ideas to carry forward. In general, there was widespread agreement that something needed to be done and that achievable goals should be set around enhancements and supplements rather than wholesale replacement. The main theme to arise was the feeling that we needed to create a community-led, ethical framework that could be used in a linked data environment.

The main findings of each of the topic areas were summarised in a report following the meeting. I will replicate these here for wider sector discussion.

Question 1: Sector-wide implications of LCSH as a subject index

The pros of using LCSH:

- efficiency
- consistency
- widespread adoption
- supplier availability
- open
- large percentage of terms are ok
- VIAF/LC classification links

The cons of using LCSH:

- US/Anglo-centrism
- slow to change
- inflexibility
- language not inclusive
- limited local control
- single point of failure

Context fit: Adequate for broad Anglophone academic content but weaker for specialist, public, juvenile, and local history.

Ethics: There was some discussion about the onus of responsibility for discoverability. How much falls to the user and how much falls to librarians? There was

agreement that some responsibility lies with the user, but how we describe the bibliographic world is still vital. There are ubiquitous concerns about political interference in library indexes, but also acknowledgement that the act of cataloguing is not neutral.

Some ideas:

- create an inventory of problematic terms to feed into front-end display substitutions
- create mappings from current LCSH to preferred UK labels and domain thesauri
- create workflows based on linked data

Question 2: Principles of alternative system

Principles:

- fit for purpose (discoverability)
- equitable/EDI
- consistent
- community-driven
- open
- non-commercial
- agile
- professional integrity
- fair compensation to those involved

Users:

- librarians
- end-users (public, academic, specialist, corporate etc)
- domain experts

Scope:

- needs to be MARC compatible
- LMS integration with discovery layers
- linked data integration (Wikidata)
- allow optional uncontrolled tagging to compliment controlled headings

Recommendations:

- a published principles manifesto/charter/declaration to give overarching direction
- create an editorial policy to ensure transparency alongside an accountability board

Question 3. The technical and financial issues around temporary or long-term solutionsFinance:

- massive sector constraints on UKHEIs and many sector bodies in CILIP and Jisc
- all community led work has costs (often hidden) such as pro bono labour, time given by institutions for staff etc.
- the project will need long-term sustainable finance beyond project funding
- the project should avoid any involvement of corporate interests seeking to monetise the work
- technical solutions need to be affordable but will take time to create (which costs) and time to develop (more costs) before they can be stabilised (which will need long term funds)

Technical:

- open and interoperable
- API-driven
- linked data for local variation
- Wikidata and Wikimedia infrastructure already exist and could be leveraged
- some limitations imposed by vendor systems and LMS software solutions

Ownership: The ownership of this project should be a partnership agreement with various agencies. It could be CILIP MDG alongside Jisc and BL. We propose that the MDG committee creates a permanent governance board with a liaison to the committee and each of the coalition partners.

Recommendations: Considering the discussions these are some of the things that could be explored by the community:

- create a low-tech barrier, machine-readable list (compatible with MARC if necessary)
- create a low barrier API service to query this list
- map concepts to Wikidata.
- could we get a consortium funded post for editorial and/or technical roles?

Question 4: Scalable alternatives to LCSH

There is no single scalable alternative to LCSH. FAST² is bound up with LC and is controlled by OCLC. There are governance issues to consider if FAST is set to become the standard to build a new scheme. Some subject specific schemes are available such as Homosaurus. There are industry standards such as UKSLC³ and BIC Thema⁴.

We could create a UK supplement to LCSH that translates headings for normalisation in discovery layers. It could be the work of a task and finish group to identify sets of problem areas and propose alternative locally relevant headings. Would we need to consider creating MARC records? How would these port into current ILSs? What linked data options are available that are low tech, scalable and reliable?

Recommendations:

- create priority list areas for targeted approach and look to current practice in this area e.g. Carissa Chew's Inclusive Terminology Glossary⁵
- create a central register of local alternative headings
- generate authority records? In MARC?
- do user experience testing with records before and after
- present results to IFLA 2027?

Question 5: Partnerships with sector bodies

Primary partners:

- CILIP
- RLUK
- SCONUL
- Jisc
- national libraries
- Wikidata UK
- consortia, e.g. ALN, WHELF, M25, Mercian
- community groups
- vendors, e.g. OCLC, Ebsco, BDS, Clarivate

² <https://www.oclc.org/research/areas/data-science/fast.html>

³ UK Standard Library Categories Scheme, <https://bic.org.uk/resources/uk-standard-library-categories/>

⁴ <https://bic.org.uk/resources/thema/>

⁵ <https://culturalheritageterminology.co.uk/glossary/>

Boundaries:

- politically agnostic and free from direct or indirect political interference
- independent editorial control must be maintained
- do not allow commercialisation or monopoly interests to dominate the work

Recommendations:

- convene a Subject Index Steering Committee under CILIP MDG
- create working groups to undertake specific tasks (subject domains, technical working group)
- use domain task and finish groups to complete specific work and engage with communities
- create vendor memoranda of understanding
- partner with Wikidata formally

Question 6. What next?

Create working groups.

Purpose:

- build connections with community of practice
- general advocacy with the sector
- build technical capacity
- conduct UX testing
- look at systems and solutions e.g. Alma group, OCLC group etc.
- look at the role of AI
- we need to make sure that these groups are representative of the UK

Immediate steps:

- (1-6 weeks) Publish London report and Charter?
- January: Organise follow up sessions in Cardiff, Liverpool and Scotland. Plan activities to coincide with additional WorldCafe events. Ensure participants get a view of previous work to build on London beginnings
- (Feb-April) Form steering committee and commission technical working parties
- (April-May): Create two pilot projects as alternative headings in focused subject domains e.g. race and sexuality
- (May-Sep): Pilot API/linked solution with subset of new terms created in one or more library systems
- (Sep-Dec): Continue working groups. UX testing

- 2027: Expand project to more areas. Present initial results to IFLA 2027, particularly the intellectual work
- Build resilience in the system by exploring long-term funding options and sector wide buy-in

Concluding remarks

The overall success of the day has initiated the planning of more World Café events to be held this year. Already planned are events in Cardiff on 21st April 2026⁶ and Liverpool on the 29th April 2026⁷. It is anticipated that these events will build on the work already done in London and start to build the coalition of the interested that will carry this work forward. As chair of MDG I encourage anyone interested in this work to attend the events if they can or contact me at chair.mdg@cilip.org.uk to be included. We have created a Teams space to collaborate and will be forming working groups very soon. This work should be front and centre of metadata advocacy across the sector and before the eyes of our directors and library leaders. Now is the time for change, now is the time to save the world.

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⁶ <https://www.cilip.org.uk/events/EventDetails.aspx?id=2046160&group=201298>

⁷ <https://www.cilip.org.uk/events/EventDetails.aspx?id=2048521&group=201298>

Appendix 1: Seed questions for each topic

Each topic came with a series of seed questions to get the conversations running. Here are the questions asked at each topic table.

Question 1: Sector-wide implications of LCSH as a subject index

1. What does LCSH do within our catalogues?
2. How does it affect our view of the bibliographic universe?
3. How flexible, adaptable, inclusive or appropriate are they?
4. Is it good enough for large English language academic collections?
5. How much does the US-centric or lack of localisation really degrade our descriptions?
6. Are workflow efficiencies from ready-made worth the trade-off?
7. Are they useful in a public library context?
8. Or specialist library or scholarly content context?

Question 2: Principles of alternative system

1. What are the top level principles around which a subject index is built?
2. What is it for?
3. Who are the users?
4. How do we get buy in from interested parties?
5. What would be excluded?
6. To what extent should political considerations be factored into these?
7. How do we remain politically neutral without compromising professional integrity?

Question 3: The technical and financial issues around temporary or long-term solutions

1. What are the technical fixes?
2. Can we put a plaster over subject headings we don't want?
3. Can we flex the current system?
4. Are there linked data solutions?
5. What are the base technological needs?
6. Are there other indexes we want to use?
7. What are the long term implications of setting up a new/rival system?
8. Who will maintain it?
9. How will it be costed?
10. Will it be entirely community led?

Question 4: Scalable alternatives to LCSH

1. What are the viable scalable alternatives to LCSH?
2. How will these be implemented?
3. What systems requirements are involved?
4. Does a new index need to be curated?
5. To what extent should the solution be local, national, or international?
6. Should the index be narrowly constrained or expandable?
7. What is the governance of the alternative systems?
8. What governance should be made around adoption?

Question 5: Partnerships with sector bodies

1. What are the primary partnerships we can form?
2. What are the boundaries that need to be formed?
3. What kind of governance structure ought to be created?
4. How many and what types of relationships should be created?

Question 6: What next?

1. Who are our interested parties?
2. Are there any obvious working groups that could be formed?
3. Are there any task and finish groups that might be of use?
4. Is anyone willing to chair or host these?
5. Do we need a steering committee?
6. What are the timeframes that seem reasonable?
7. Which groups should be approached in what way?

Maintaining local classification schemes

a Bridge(rton) too far?

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ABSTRACT

This article is a light-hearted look at some of the challenges and opportunities of maintaining a local classification scheme at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and inspired by the Netflix drama 'Bridgerton'.

KEYWORDS classification maintenance; in-house classifications

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This piece is written as a light-hearted look at some of the challenges and opportunities of maintaining a local classification scheme. Inspired by the Netflix drama 'Bridgerton' I began to draw parallels between historical and modern-day practices living side by side (I love how the music in the series is current but with a 'Regency' twist). There is a perfect harmony of old and new, and this, is how I believe our out-dated classification will survive. Details have been omitted in favour of 'entertainment' and with apologies to any die-hard Bridgerton / Lady Whistledown fans for any literary impropriety or frivolous disregard of continuity. I hope you enjoy reading it. For further information or comment about our classification scheme at RWCMD and the work as it progresses, please feel free to contact me. I would be very happy to discuss issues raised and hear any suggestions for improvement you may have. Thank you for indulging me.

Dearest, Gentle Reader,

I write to you today concerning a most pressing matter. I am presently in a most perplexing situation - a love/hate relationship, if you will, with my classification scheme and hope that by sharing my tale, I will gain clarity on how to navigate the journey ahead and maybe even persuade some of you to join me in my quest to tackle out-dated classification schemes (one delicate step at a time).

Now, please don't turn the page just yet, dear reader. I am well aware, that most of you will no doubt be wondering whether such a relationship can exist at all? Surely, this argument is moot, positively archaic. Most libraries (particularly scholarly libraries) have transcended to the giddy heights of electronic books, leaving classification quandaries to be nothing but a dim and distant memory? Even those with physical tomes will, no doubt, be purchasing metadata, complete with an array of classification schemes, from which to choose. Well, this writer urges you to spare a thought for those walking amongst you who still allocate their classification by hand and more shockingly, for those who maintain unique taxonomies. Let me take you on a journey ... a promenade down Classification Lane if you please? I am sure you will find it most enlightening.

This writer is employed at the library of The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff, which houses a small but perfectly honed collection of items to support the teaching and performance needs of the college. The origin of the classification scheme is a bit of a mystery I must confess. There are several penned versions with increasing amounts of complexity, detailing the alpha/numeric system in operation but little to none explanation of where the system originates. The more discerning examiner may identify echoes of the Dewey Decimal Scheme, albeit with the decimal place after the first digit. But therein, the similarity ends. A bespoke scheme has been devised for the 'Arts' subjects wherein, the general purpose appears to be to aid browsability. There are designated areas for drama texts, design books, play scripts, music texts and most notably music scores. Perhaps inspired by subject zoning in public libraries, the classification moves away from a predominantly numerical system (as with DDC) and instead, applies lettered sections such as D for Drama and M for Music (coincidence or design? I would like to believe the latter). Textbook collections are further subdivided numerically while plays, biographical works and music scores are arranged in an alphabetical sequence by author/composer as applicable. Perhaps the most interesting feature is the designation of lettering to arrange musical works by instrument, effectively placing works together (if you want piano music by Chopin: QA CHO will more than likely have all you need). It is for this part of the classification that I hold great affection. Browsing works by instrument allows our readers to find music they may not have found otherwise (a journey of discovery, if you will) and the library catalogue allows for searching specific titles. A happy marriage indeed.

Where I am less enamoured with the system is within the textbooks. There exist narrow subject divisions with inherent bias (Western-centric imbalance of geographical areas), period divisions that stop at the 20th century (where number designation makes sequential scaling, impossible) and closed sequences that make it increasingly difficult to generate number designations for new topics. The sequence holds more affinity to harpsichords and madrigals than digital playbacks and social media, and where does one shelve a book about Artificial Intelligence in musical pedagogy??

Thus, dear reader, you see my plight (and if you have remained with me up to this point in my musings, I thank you). The opportunities for change within a bespoke scheme are indeed exciting. In theory, I could re-write the entire scheme. In practice however, the challenges outnumber the gains. The re-classification alone would take more time than I have and that does not take account of the work needed for implementation. But we all know that any worthwhile relationship is built on a strong foundation and compromise. For all its alleged faults, I believe that DDC does provide a strong foundation. I am willing to sacrifice the temptation to start afresh and agree a compromise that will allow me to breathe new life into an aging system. Starting with the standard subdivision tables of DDC, I have begun to employ a method of matching these with existing subdivisions and identifying areas that could benefit from re-alignment. The most pressing to tackle being period designation. Although initially daunting, on closer inspection, the number of items in need of re-numbering is manageably low. The challenge is more to identify the affected areas (subsections, within subdivisions). But every journey begins with a single step and the obvious place to start was within active subject areas where we were adding new physical items - each section tackled individually - and by keeping DDC standard subdivision tables at hand, consistency is starting to shine through at last.

Yes, there are still challenges. With every change implemented, there is a ripple effect. You can rarely change one number in isolation so careful planning and timing is crucial. No, I still haven't found the perfect home for my book on AI and music pedagogy, but I have found a temporary home and am looking at how this number strain can be used in parallel sections, for example, AI in drama, composition etc. before writing it into the scheme.

Why has it taken so long? It is 2026 I hear you say. Well, against the grain, this author must confess that, as with many a failing relationship, failure to recognise there is a problem, is oft the biggest problem. Coupled with the naïve notion that everything will work itself out or even a lack of confidence that a solution is possible. There will never be enough time to dedicate to these endeavours but having a wish-list to turn to when there are moments of calm, means progress can be made.

So therein, dearest reader, is my situation. I have identified the problem and embrace the challenges and opportunities for change (albeit one baby step at a time - the exhilarating pitter patter of tiny feet as it were) and am committed to rekindle the flame I once held.

If you are still reading, I thank you for your patience and wish you Godspeed with your own endeavours.

Truly yours,

H x



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