# The workflow is dead – long live the workflow! Cataloguing at Aberystwyth University in 2016

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There is a reason for my silly title. I was surprised by my reluctance to write about our workflows and when I tried to work out why, I realised that I feel like a rabbit frozen in headlights. Between the implementation of our new Library Management System (LMS), Alma in July 2015 and a concerted effort by the library to have academic staff use our reading list system Aspire, we have had an intense and somewhat chaotic few months.

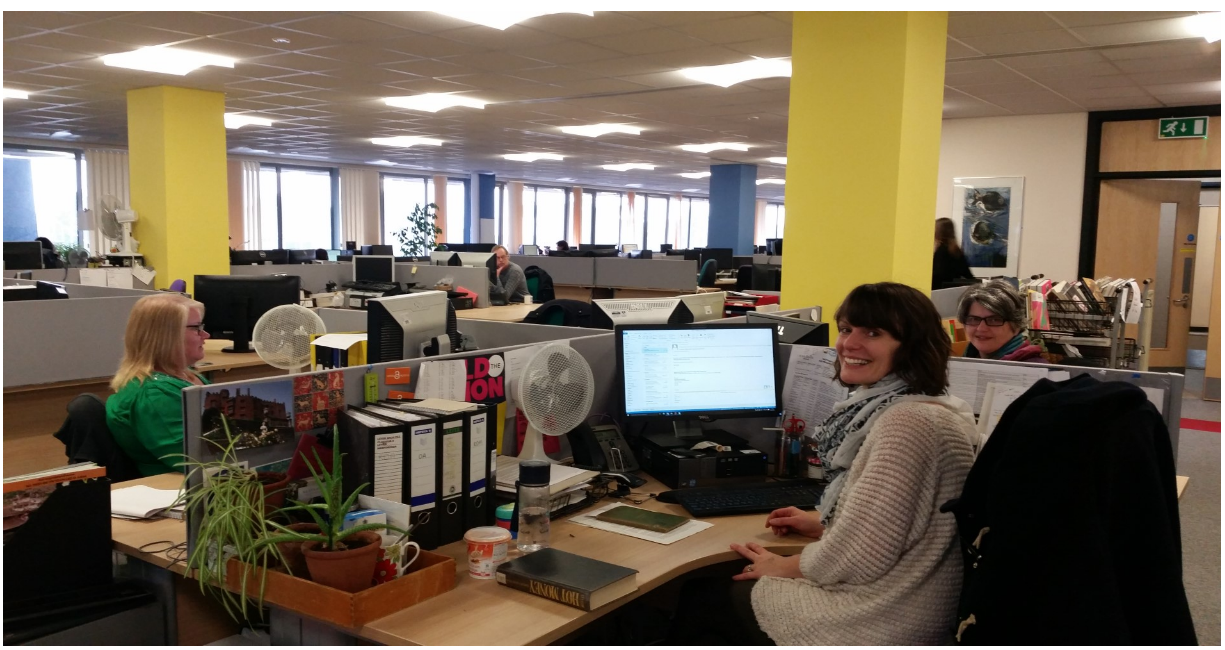
Recently gathered statistics(see table below) for the period between August and December 2015 suggest that we hadn't just been struggling with a new system but with an increase in new items needing cataloguing

| Month | Downloaded records 2014 | Locally created records 2014 | Downloaded records 2015 | Locally created records 2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| August | 205 | 16 | 712 | 84 |
| September | 149 | 13 | 484 | 65 |
| October | 393 | 14 | 667 | 45 |
| November | 212 | 19 | 621 | 23 |
| December | 162 | 38 | 414 | 46 |

But my Staff Development and Performance Review and its strategic objective "to rewrite workflows post-LMS implementation" looms, so this seemed like a good moment to ask myself honestly, what our workflows were, what they are now, and where are we trying to take them.

Who we are

I started my role as Institutional Repository and Metadata (IRM) team leader in April 2013 when the role and team were new and Open Access and bibliographic cataloguing were brought together around the idea of metadata. There are three of us working as 2 full time equivalents: I am full time, Lorna Clark is .5 and improves and validates staff publication records in our current research information system PURE, and Artemis Gratsea, also .5 is a bibliographic cataloguer who also provides our theses cataloguing and queries service.



Aberystwyth had used Voyager as its LMS since 1999 but there was very little written down about our workflows; bits here and there on Sharepoint; in shared drives; on personal computers; on printed and handwritten sheets (our cutter system is on Sharepoint now because we've scanned the original, for example); but mainly in the heads of very experienced staff who had seen us through SWALCAP, LIBERTAS and Voyager. Like many higher educational libraries we have shrunk – from 3 cataloguing sites and from 4 full time staff in 1999, for example, to 1 site and 1 full time equivalent today, so in 2013 in my new job, it seemed like a good idea to get some of this information written down and shared.

Workflows

I met with as many members of staff as I could - with people who understand serials, people who cope every day with standing orders and people who remember where the microform readers are - and came up with some workflows that have helped us with bibliographic consistency, particularly with materials we deal with sporadically like DVDS, theses and standing orders.

And it seemed our workflows were framed around the following:

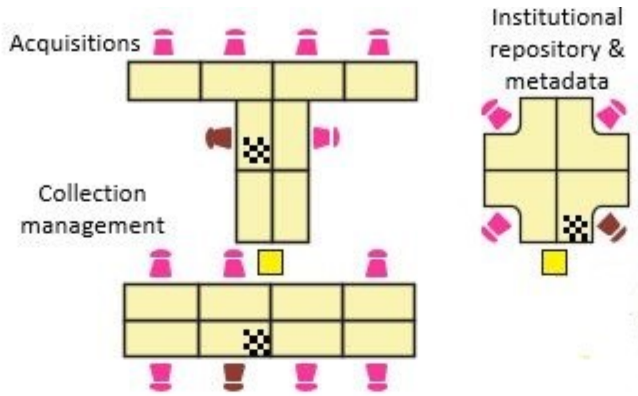
- Shelf ready new books (from our vendor Dawson)
- Non-shelf ready new items (from various vendors)
- Standing order monographs and serials
- Donations
- Authorities

Shelf ready in Voyager meant (and still means) that we get sent full bibliographic records via email that we opened in Voyager, checked and corrected if necessary and added a local field to, before saving individually in advance of the book's arrival. Unless the book or the spine label differed from the title, edition or classmark seen when receiving the item, it wouldn't come to us in cataloguing, unless it was literature, which we assign classmarks to manually.

Non shelf-ready covers everything else with a purchase order. The items were (and still are) placed on our trolley. We opened the basic record assigned at the order stage, in Voyager, amended it ourselves or with some help from copy-cataloguing through the Library of Congress (LC) or OCLC (although not merging records), classified it and put it on a trolley for processing and then shelving.

Standing orders appeared (and still do!) on a different trolley and given that their purchase order remains open we would start the cataloguing process from the beginning and either find and copy catalogue a record or create one from scratch, before adding a holding and an item record and putting for processing. Standing orders remain a potential minefield at Aberystwyth and while in Alma we can see a lot more information in search results we still have to check to see how previous items on the standing order have been treated: do they have the same classmark and location or are they spread out by subject, for example? Perhaps they only share a series record access point? Are they treated as periodicals or monographs? And are they library use only or standard loan?

Then we have donated items which we still catalogue from scratch; creating bibliographic, holding and item records, and adding a 'donation' note to the latter. If the donation was a bequest we may also have added owner information, collection names and bookplate descriptions in the bibliographic record too.




Staff seating plan: new materials come in via Acquisitions, to IRM and then to Collection Management for processing.

Finally, to meet our aim of having at least one LC authorised access point in each bibliographic record, we used to tick a box on the record in Voyager to send it to Marcive for validation. Once a week we would look at unresolved match and multi-match reports and try to resolve each issue manually.

A new Library Management System

In many ways the practicalities of these workflows have not changed. But the context for them does feel quite different. I think our cataloguing practice was quite discrete from other parts of the 'new material' workflows. If something looked odd but the system appeared to let us do what we needed to do then we just did it. I couldn't do anything about purchase orders if one was attached to the wrong bibliographic record. If something didn't open properly we would ask our systems librarian Christiane Kloos to fix it. I didn't see any reports that weren't about authorities, nor did I upload files, or use analytics.

That was why I was looking forward to implementing our new LMS – because being here at the start would mean that it was up to me to learn what it could do, to rethink our workflows and not be inhibited by historical habit. While it did result in a truly awful six months, I will admit that I now have a much better understanding of how what we do fits into the library's wider workflows.

From day one it was clear that we were never going to return to files of records magically appearing in an email or to books materialising on trolleys by our desk, or not at least without us working with our colleagues in acquisitions who in turn were having to rethink all their legacy vendor data. In the first few months there was much mutual incomprehension as we tried to work out at what level something had gone wrong. Was it our fault? Alma's fault? The vendor's fault? Or a perfect storm of all of the above? We had a case of the latter in July/August that took months to untangle and months more manual work to recover from. And now, we find that to work out where something has gone wrong we have to do it together – is the problem happening at the order stage or the order confirmation stage (I hadn't known about the latter), or when attaching a brief bibliographic record, or when merging (or not merging) with the full bibliographic record?

These questions are probably all part of the painful embedding of a new system, but I do wonder whether, in our more silo'd Voyager days I was burying some issues and nurturing potential problems for the future.

Today's workflows

Shelf ready records are still sent to us in an email (although this may change soon as we try to fully implement the shelf ready process), but now we upload records using a tailored import profile. Creating import profiles has mean that we get better access to data that we haven't been involved with before, in e-book bibliographic records, for example. We're now creating specific profiles for each new provider including open access e-book providers like Open Book Publishing and Knowledge Unlatched.

At times, this does seem like additional work but it is interesting work, and it has meant that we can think a bit more widely about how our cataloguing workflows can contribute to other library objectives – creating records and portfolios for the open access Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol Welsh e-book collection and sharing them with the Community Zone, for example. We have only just started the latter and have a lot of workflow refining to do, but this is the first time we have been able to offer bibliographic records and their portfolios (for access to the e-book itself) to other libraries and we aim to share the records beyond Alma if we can, in order to reduce duplication of effort. And we know we couldn't have attempted such a project in our Voyager days or without our e-resources colleagues.

Having a sense of importing records and the accompanying opportunities to add and change fields upon import – although far from working smoothly yet– means that we can also think more proactively about the records we import for copy cataloguing and those we create from scratch. Alma's clear distinction between print and electronic means that it is easier to spot and prevent the wrong sort of record being imported and saved. We can add, delete or refine fields using rules upon import or to sets of records and it is much easier for us to ensure that a bibliographic record is associated with the right purchase order. All of which means that we have more control and responsibility for the quality of our new records.

Tomorrow's workflows?

A new LMS brings different actions into relief and the above have made me more aware of what our records look like and should look like, of what I want to appear in our user interface, Primo, and what problems we might be able to fix if we ever get the time.

We haven't re-written our workflows, yet. There hasn't been time but when we do, there will definitely be more emphasis on the broad principles of the actions we take and the tools we use rather than step-by-step guides and an over-reliance on past examples. Alma users will know that the monthly updates which change functionality, screens and actions, can be a mixed blessing. On the one hand they mean improvements and fixes can come quickly and on the other they can make finalised detailed instructions redundant.

So, we need to find a new way of writing workflows, a way that allows for flexibility, concepts and cataloguer's judgement and curiosity, and I don't yet know what that will look like. But part of my prevarication also stems from our ongoing effort to get our shelf ready process fully automated. Ideally we should be importing the records through an automated job and with classmarks and barcodes mapped to holdings and item records. And we're close to achieving this, but a lot relies on the relationship and communication we have with our vendor and on advice from other institutions using Alma in this way. If it ever works we will then create reports to check for issues and with some luck we'll free up time for improvements elsewhere…

…like authorities! I won't go into these except to say that we still aim for LC authorised access points in every new and upgraded record and are now using Ex Libris' centrally managed authorities. It has saved us time and money but we haven't begun to utilise and understand the reports which flag up problems – so that is a whole new workflow we have to contemplate.

I have just read Alma's April update and apparently there is a new 'Authority Control Task List', so I had better get writing!