Classification in the U.K.: introducing the 2017 CILIP CIG classification survey

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Introduction

Classification is a critical part of cataloguing and indexing activities; yet, amid the major changes in the bibliographic world in the 2010s, it could be argued that discussing classification has not been the first priority of practitioners in recent years. An event in June 2017 organised by CILIP CIG, entitled "*Thinking about classification*" and devised by the authors of this article, hoped to counteract this. A survey was designed by the authors of this article in conjunction with this event, which explored the classification practices within U.K. libraries. This article offers some preliminary results from this survey, illuminating the real world of U.K. classification practices in 2017. The survey served a number of purposes. First, it was felt that recent information about what was being classified and usage of classification schemes was lacking, and it would be useful to get broad data which would partially answer these fundamental questions. Second, one session in the classification event focussed on reclassification, and so results from the survey could be used as a starting point for exploring reclassification practices. Third, certain concepts such as reclassification and adaptation are not widely written about on a conceptual level, so the survey could help provide some raw data which would inform future theoretical research into these areas.

This article starts by describing the methodology of the survey, including its dissemination. This is followed by a description of the demographic results. The main part of the article explores two areas: whether specific types of materials are usually classified, and, how schemes are used (or "consumed") within the U.K. So, a picture is built up of contemporary U.K. classification practices.

Methodology of survey

Using the free version of SurveyMonkey imposed certain limits, such as a maximum of ten questions and a limit of one hundred respondents, and these limitations were built into the design and dissemination of the survey. The survey questions fell into four main areas:

- demographics of the respondents;
- basic information about classification schemes and materials classified;
- detailed information about localisation and adaptation; and
- reclassification practices.

The first two areas will be discussed in this article, with the other two explored in future research. The first four questions are given in the appendix to this article. All results given are to two decimal places, as this matches the results given in SurveyMonkey. A survey was selected over other methods in order to gain as wide a variety of responses as possible and to elicit information that could only be provided by the institutions themselves. (For an alternative methodology, see for example, Broughton's (2017) survey of 50 U.K. higher education institutions, where the researcher determined each university's classification scheme by looking at catalogue records.)

The survey ran for a month, from May to June 2017. The geographic target was the U.K. as, not only is this area relatively unexplored in terms of international classification research, but also this limitation ensured the complications of a comparative study were avoided. The survey's distribution was specifically designed to engender U.K. responses from as wide a group of institutions as possible.

First, the survey was publicised through CIG directly, including its monthly e-bulletin which is sent to all CIG members, and CIG's social mobile channels such as Twitter. Second, mailing lists were used such as Jiscmail's UK-BIBS (for UK bibliographic services), ARLIS-UK (to target UK art libraries) and IAML-UK-IRL (to target UK music libraries). International cataloguing mailing lists were deliberately not used to disseminate the survey as only U.K. responses were desired.

Demographic results

The survey received 81 responses. The first two questions of the survey – sector and institution respectively – were used to determine the demographics of the respondents, without hindering their anonymity, and also to attempt to eliminate those responses outside of the scope of the study.   Question 2 asked the respondent to name their institution/library, and 78 out of 81 responses were received. One respondent was eliminated as they were positively identified as being from outside the U.K., the others were retained as their reason for not answering this question was unclear.

The responses about sector show that some sectors are represented more than others; in fact just under half of the respondents (48.75%) worked in higher education/adult education institutions. The remaining respondents covered a wide variety of sectors, including four or more respondents from School/further education, National library/research library, Health, Industrial/Commercial/Legal, and Not for profit/Charity. This not only affects how we interpret the results but also raises questions about our methodology. Would we have solicited a wider response from other sectors by advertising the survey via other forums?

What types of resources do we classify?

The survey gives a fascinating insight into which types of library materials are usually classified and which are left unclassified. As well as ascertaining the specific classification scheme used for different types of materials, question 4 also established whether a particular type of material was classified at all. Table 1 summarises the parts of the results of question 4 pertaining to classified versus unclassified materials. Multiple answers were allowed for this question; for instance, if a library has its law books classified using DDC but its music books are not classified, then they would give two responses, "not classified" and "DDC". This means that the total responses for classification schemes used for one type of material will usually be bigger than the overall number of survey respondents. In addition, the figures have been adjusted to take into account the number of libraries which do not hold that type of material at all. To aid analysis the figure of libraries holding material but not classifying it is also given as a percentage.

[See table 1 on following page]

Comparing the figures for different types of materials can infer attitudes towards classification in U.K. libraries and illuminate the perceived worth and value of classification by practitioners. Unsurprisingly, printed books are the most commonly classified material with over 99% of book collections being classified. However, while less than 1% of printed book collections are unclassified, 63.38% of e-book collections are unclassified. As the content type of a book and e-book is the same, this suggests that decisions about classification are taken based on the printed/digital nature of their medium.

Type of library material	Total responses from those who hold this material type	No. of libraries who don't classify this type of material	Percentage of those holding the material who don't classify it
Books	110	1	0.09%
E-books	71	45	63.38%
Print journals	80	40	50.00%
E-journals	70	57	81.43%
Maps	50	8	16.00%
Music scores/ notated music	43	1	2.33%
Sound recordings/ audio materials	58	7	12.07%
DVDs/audio-visual materials	74	9	12.16%
Digital resources not covered elsewhere	58	34	58.62%
Microfilm/microfiche	49	14	28.57%
Store/stack materials	79	4	5.06%
Special collections materials	81	5	6.17%
Objects/Realia	41	14	34.15%

Table 1. Is this type of material usually classified?

This is confirmed by the difference between print journals and e-journals, which sees 50.00% and 81.43% respectively left unclassified; furthermore, "digital resources not covered elsewhere" are unclassified in nearly 60% of libraries. However, this pattern of being unclassified does not apply to all non-print media, as audio-visual materials, sound recordings and microfiche/microfilms are only unclassified in a third of collections or less. It would be interesting to explore further the reasons behind this. Are digital collections less likely to be classified largely because of their format or do other reasons, such as their acquisition through large packages and subscriptions, rule out hand-classification? Where classification is part of a downloaded record's standard metadata what effect would it have on discoverability? At present however, the results of this survey do suggest that being digital is a likely way for a resource to end up unclassified in a U.K. library.

As browsing is a central tenet for classification, another perspective in which to consider these results is the connection between classification and physical browsing. So, it is interesting that around 95% of stack and storage materials are classified; these materials will not be browsed by library users, yet the materials are still classified. While it is likely that the reason this figure is so high is that many of the materials currently in storage were formerly on the shelves and therefore came to the stacks with their classification already determined, the classification of stack/storage materials is still part of the classification fabric of current U.K. libraries. It can also be inferred that other closed access materials, such as audio-visual, sound recordings and microfiche, were always kept in closed access; again, if there was an unbreakable link between physical browsing and classification, we would expect much higher numbers for not classifying these types of materials. So, it seems in the 2017 U.K. library, the physical/digital divide will impact upon whether a resource is classified; however, the results of the survey suggest that being closed or open access makes much less of a difference.

Classification scheme consumption in the U.K.: a snapshot in 2017

The third question, asking simply which classification scheme libraries use, reveals current U.K. classification practices. The results also reflect on the nature of those individual schemes, illuminating the "consumption" (Lee 2015) of each classification scheme, which is part of their reception. Table 2 gives the number of libraries which use each scheme, and the equivalent percentage of the 80 libraries surveyed. For example, 5 libraries responded that they use "Universal Decimal Classification", so the number of responses is "5" and the percentage is "6.25%". This means that 6.25% of the U.K. libraries which responded use UDC in at least part of their library; furthermore, as each library is giving a separate binary response about whether they use each particular scheme, we also can surmise that 93.75% do not use UDC at all.

Classification scheme	Number of responses	Percentage of 80 libraries using that scheme
Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)	43	53.75%
Library of Congress Classification (LCC)	14	17.50%
Universal Decimal Classification (UDC)	5	6.25%
Bliss Classification	2	2.50%
National Library of Medicine Classification (NLM)	7	8.75%
Moys Classification	7	8.75%
BISAC	0	0.00%
ANSCR	0	0.00%
Adapted scheme from any of the above	11	13.75%
Library's own classification scheme	30	37.50%
Other	8	10.00%

Table 2. Usage of classification schemes in U.K. libraries

The first interesting finding is that over half the libraries used Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) in their library, and this is the biggest use of any single scheme. This represents the largest single answer. (Note, that the "adapted" answer could also include those who adapted from DDC, and the "other" includes at least one response of an adaptation from DDC, so actually DDC influence is possibly even higher.) The number of libraries using DDC was about three times the number of responses for Library of Congress Classification (LCC), which was the next most popular answer. Of course the sample size is small and cannot be taken as numerically representative. However, as a snapshot it offers an interesting alternative to the common narrative in the U.K. that academic libraries are moving towards LCC and that public libraries are moving away from DDC. This survey suggests that DDC is alive and well in the 2010s in the U.K. A future line of enquiry would be to mine the survey results in order to compare the scheme usage with the sector.

Another fascinating insight offered by these results is the high numbers of respondents for "*adapted scheme from any of the above*" and "*Library's own classification scheme*". Note that the difference between the two categories was self-determined by the respondents, so it is not reliable to compare across the (fuzzy) adapted/ own scheme boundary.   Further questions in the survey, not discussed in this article, attempt to delineate the levels of adaptations, and future research will consider adaptations and localisations in detail. Nevertheless, the two figures show something noteworthy: that over a third of libraries use a localised scheme of some description for at least part of their collections, and nearly a sixth use an adapted scheme. These figures are vitally important for discussions about universality and localisation. If localisation happens in at least a third of libraries, then conversely, using purely universal schemes *only* happens in two thirds of libraries. In a cataloguing world which is supposedly moving towards universal practices necessitated by global record sharing and shelf-ready, the results from this survey paints a different sort of picture.

The results about Moys and NLM are also noteworthy, as seven libraries use Moys and seven use NLM. These are both universal schemes (in other words, intended for use by multiple libraries) for the special subjects of law and medicine respectively. This could be regarded in a number of ways; as a sign of the quality of these particular schemes, of the standardised practices of the law and medicine communities, and/or the need for special classifications for these particular areas of knowledge. Note that in contrast, a scheme for sound recordings, ANSCR, received no responses in both question 3 and 4, even though 55 libraries hold sound recordings according to the results of question 4.

Returning to question 4, as well as viewing how many times any individual scheme is used for each type of material, analysis was also carried out by comparing the mean usage for each scheme with the results for individual types of material using that scheme. One of the most striking trends was the popularity of libraries' own schemes and adapted schemes for certain types of material. Print journals and other digital resources were especially likely to use a library's own classification scheme, and other digital resources were especially likely to use an adapted scheme. In addition, e-journals were also very likely to use an adapted scheme; however, the small number of libraries who classified their e-journals at all make these results unreliable from a statistical perspective. This could be read as non-printed-books being more likely to use specially devised schemes; however, a relatively high percentage of libraries classified their maps, sound records and music scores using a standard scheme such as DDC – in each case, more than the mean for overall DDC usage. So, being "non-book" does not in itself prescribe a non-standard classification path. The music results are particularly noteworthy when considering music classification literature reports that librarians have traditionally found DDC problematic for music materials (Lee 2012). Therefore, this survey points to useful future research which might question assumptions about classification scheme usage, against actually auditing how schemes are used in the contemporary, real world.

Conclusion

The results from the first part of the CILIP CIG survey present a snapshot of U.K. classification practices. The U.K. library community seems more likely to use DDC than other universal classification schemes; however, in this small un-systematic sample, LCC, Moys and NLM also received a fair amount of use. Perhaps most interestingly, the results of questions 3 and 4 showed that there is very frequent usage of adapted and localised schemes. So, it could be inferred that universality is not of primary concern in many U.K. libraries. The results also show that different types of materials are classified in very different ways in the U.K. community. While being in a non-browsable collection does not have too much impact on whether a material is classified or not, it seems that in the U.K. community, there is much less classification of electronic resources than physical resources. Furthermore, adapted and localised schemes were more likely to be used for materials such as other digital resources and print journals, while traditionally "difficult" resources such as sound recordings, maps and music, were actually fairly likely to be accommodated in standard universal schemes. This shows the power of the consumption-based approach in challenging "collective wisdom" with analysis of actual usage.

This article lays the groundwork for the next stage of the analysis, which is to consider the question of adaptation and localisation in more detail. In addition, the results from the reclassification questions will also be explored. Furthermore, there are other potential findings from the responses analysed in this article which there was no space to explore, such as a comparison of scheme usage with responses about sector of information work. Therefore, this survey and article acts as a beginning: it provides a snapshot of 2017 U.K. classification practices, but also illustrates the richness of further study of our classification lives.

Appendix: the survey questions 1-4
Introduction

The Cataloguing and Indexing Group (CIG) Committee would like to invite all cataloguers, CIG members and non-members alike, to take part in a short survey about classification and reclassification. We are interesting in hearing from people working in libraries and other information environments in the UK. The survey will take no more than 10 minutes to complete and your contributions will help inform discussions at the 'Thinking about classification' workshop in June and possibly inform future research about classification or reclassification by CIG committee members. Please note, that although we ask for institution names, we will not use individual institution names when disseminating the results from this survey.
Participation in this survey is voluntary, and you are free to leave the survey at any point.
Thank you so much for your time and your contribution.

Question 1.

Which sector best describes your current library/workplace? [Only one answer permitted]

- Higher education/Adult education
- School/Further education
- Government
- National library/Research library
- Museum/Gallery
- Health
- Industrial/Commercial/Legal
- Not for profit/Charity
- Public libraries
- Independent/Learned societies
- Digital
- Not currently working in the library or information sector
- Other (please specify)

Question 2.

Which institution and library are you currently based? (Please note, we will not use the names of institutions for any summaries or research based on this survey.)

[Free text answer]

Question 3.

Which classification scheme(s) do you use? Tick all that apply. [Multiple responses permitted]

- Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)
- Library of Congress Classification (LCC)
- Universal Decimal Classification (UDC)
- Bliss Classification
- National Library of Medicine Classification (NLM Classification)
- Moys Classification
- BISAC
- ANSCR
- Adapted scheme from any of the above
- Library's own classification scheme
- Other (please specify all other schemes used)

Question 4.

For the following library materials, which classification schemes do you use?

[A grid where one classification scheme was permitted for every type of material, plus a free text box]

Classification schemes
- DDC
- LCC
- UDC
- Bliss
- NLM Classification
- Moys
- BISAC
- ANSCR
- Adapted scheme
- Library's own scheme
- Other
- We have this material but do not classify
- We do not have this type of material

Types of material
- Books
- E-books
- Print journals
- E-journals
- Maps
- Music scores/notated music
- Sound recordings/audio materials
- DVDs/audio-visual materials
- Digital resources not covered elsewhere
- Microfilm/microfiche
- Store/stack materials
- Special collections materials
- Objects/Realia

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