

When two (or five) become one: devising a reclassification project workflow in a multi-site art and design university

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This article describes the workflow that has been designed for use in an in-house reclassification project at a multi-site art and design university. The workflow has been devised to be flexible enough to cope with changes in the availability of staff resource while limiting the disruption to users during the process of reclassifying and re-labelling the stock.

Background

Like many arts institutions, the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) has undergone a changing administrative landscape on its journey from art school to university. Through the gradual merging of its constituent institutions, UCA has had to negotiate the coming together of disparate practices in many areas of its service in order to offer a unified experience to students and to realise the potential for efficiencies that this has created. For the library, one of the major areas of negotiation was the merging of the library catalogues so that students across the University could search and request stock from any of the available campus libraries. The next step for the Bibliographic Services team was to tidy up some of the differences in legacy cataloguing practices that were evident in the catalogue records, and agree the cataloguing standards that would be applied from then on. After this, the focus moved to a review of classification practices. Although all campuses used the Dewey Decimal Classification scheme, there had been differences in its application between sites, partly due to differences in which edition of Dewey was in use, but also in how the scheme had been adapted to suit local needs. This had resulted in a fair proportion of stock having different call numbers at each site for the same book. In order to take advantage of full shelf ready supply of new stock and the efficiencies this would bring, it was decided that a standard usage of Dewey would be agreed for all new stock acquisitions, and that a project would be set up to reclassify and re-label all existing stock that didn't reflect this standard usage.

Planning the workflow

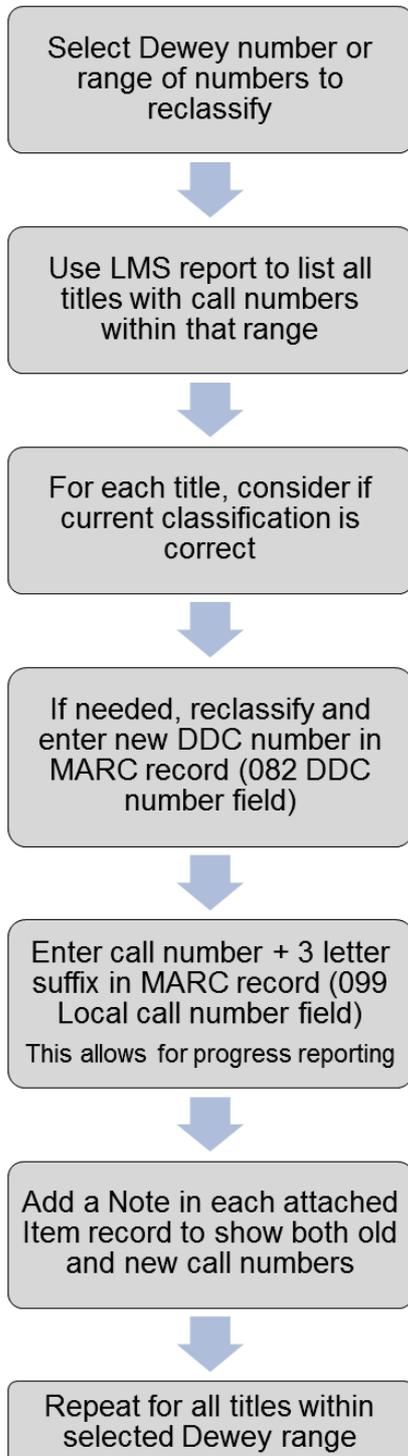
Agreeing a standard usage of Dewey and sharing this with our shelf ready supplier was the easy part, in spite of the minor localisations that we still apply to adapt Dewey to the needs of our subject-specialist institution. The harder part has been working out how to review and reclassify our existing stock. We considered several strategies to complete the work, including outsourcing, but in the end, budget constraints meant that it was decided that the work would be carried out in-house and within existing staff resource.

The next step was to devise a workflow that was flexible enough to allow progress to be made on the project as time allowed, but that would also minimise any disruption to our users, one of the most important considerations for us when planning the project. We tested and tweaked the workflow to make sure that we had thought of every eventuality, and we presented it to the teams who would be doing the re-labelling so that they could find out about the project and understand their vital role in making it a success. It also gave them a chance to think through the workflow from their perspective, ask questions, and make suggestions. After this, the workflow was finalised and put into practice.

The resulting workflow is split into two parts which can proceed fairly independently of each other. The first part is the process of deciding on the correct classification for each title in the collection, and the second is the physical re-labelling of stock with the new call number. Figure 1 gives an overview of the process.

Classification workflow

work carried out remotely by cataloguers from LMS reports



Relabelling workflow

work carried out by library advisors in each campus library

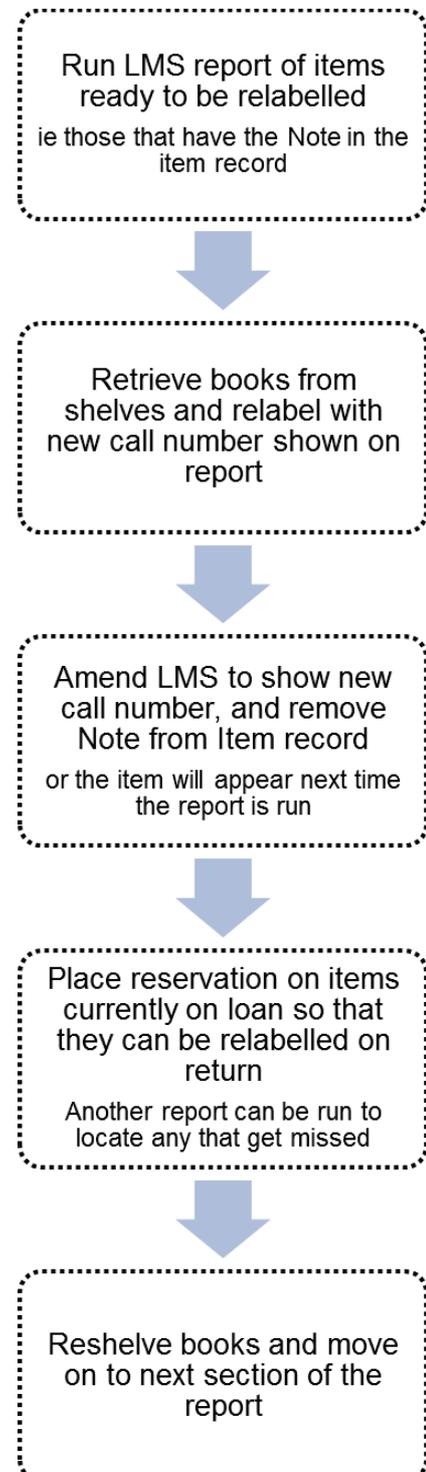


Figure 1. Reclassification workflow

Stage one - classification

The first part, deciding on the correct classification, is carried out by the cataloguing team, who are located at the Farnham campus. Rather than starting at the beginning of Dewey and working logically through the schedules, we have chosen to focus on specific areas of stock in the most urgent need of reclassification, such as areas with localised classification, areas where there have been significant changes to Dewey numbers in recent editions of the scheme (such as the new number for cinematography at 777), or areas of high usage where we are buying a lot of new stock (for example, graphic design and illustration). Once a particular area has been selected, a report is generated from the library management system to list all the books with call numbers that fall within the selected range, detailing the title, current holdings, the Dewey number in the MARC record, and the supplier of the MARC record: if the record bears the code of our shelf-ready supplier, we can ignore that title as it will have already been classified correctly when it was supplied.

Working through the list, we decide on the correct classification and add this information to the record in the library management system. Deciding on the correct classification is mostly done from the reports rather than from looking at the book itself; as we are based centrally and don't have easy access to books at each site, this is the only way that it is feasible to do the work. On occasion, we do request that a book is sent to us to look at in person, but in most cases it is fairly straightforward to get a good enough classification for a book from the MARC record or from looking at, say WorldCat¹ or the OCLC Classify² service.

Apart from working out some of the trickier areas of classification, adding the information into the MARC and item records is probably the most time-consuming part of the workflow. As well as changing the Dewey class number field in the MARC record (MARC 020), the new call number is added into each and every item record for each title, so if a title has 20 or 30 copies, the note has to be added 20 or 30 times. The note is written in a particular way (eg "Reclassify 741.6 GRA to 741.605 GRA") as the word "Reclassify" is used further down the process to run reports to alert campus staff of those items that need to be relabelled. The note includes both the old and new call numbers as this is essential in trapping books out on loan during the re-labelling process.

We also add a local call number to the MARC record (MARC 099) which is used to show whether a particular title has been through the reclassification process. This is also used by our acquisitions staff to instruct our supplier if we order extra copies of an existing title, and it is also used to run reports to keep track of our progress.

At this point in the workflow, the actual call number of the book is not changed in the catalogue so, as far as the user is concerned, nothing has changed and they are not affected by the change in classification. The cataloguing team can carry on with classifying records as quickly as they are able as it doesn't matter if the notes sit in the records for a while until the staff in the campuses are ready to pick up the next stage of the workflow.

Stage two - re-labelling

The second part of the process, re-labelling the books, is fairly straightforward. The library advisors at each site print off reports of the books that have been reclassified (ie those that have the word "Reclassify" in the item note field) and then they work through the lists as and when they are ready, only taking off the shelves as many books as they can manage in a session. Once they have applied the new spine label, they update the item call number in the catalogue and remove the reclassify note in the item record, otherwise the item will be included again next time they run the report. If a book is out on loan at the time of reclassification, a reservation is placed on the item so that it can be trapped and re-labelled when it is returned.

1. <https://www.worldcat.org>

2. classify.oclc.org/classify2/

By working in this way, we avoid having trolleys of books sitting around in the back rooms waiting to be relabelled and therefore unavailable to users, the catalogue is not out of sync with the actual location of the books, and the library advisors can schedule the work around other duties.

Putting it all together

In practice, the workflow has worked really well and we have only had to make one or two minor adjustments to it as we've gone along. We have also found that we've been able to use the same workflow to add reclassification notes when new copies of existing stock have been ordered, using the call number provided by our shelf-ready supplier to reclassify all other items on that title record, as well as any previous editions. This has been a useful way to continue to make some progress on the project when there hasn't been the capacity to devote much resource to the classification side of the project.

Although one of the benefits of the workflow is that these two processes - classifying and re-labelling - can proceed independently of each other, in reality the re-labelling staff can quite easily keep up with the classification work as there are only two people doing the reclassification and, as this is only as a small part of their workload, they find it difficult to devote as much time to the project as was originally intended. However, the workflow does mean that if any extra resource becomes available to reclassify, it wouldn't be necessary for the library advisors to speed up their side of the process in order to pace, which gives the project a lot of flexibility in its resourcing.

We've still a long way to go with the project, but the process is now well embedded into our way of working and we will continue to make progress as and when we can.