

Report on online subject classifications systems similar to InforM25

Introduction

This report is intended to provide an overview of how other online subject classification systems approach subject categorisation. It is being produced for the use of the M25 Resource Discovery Working Group as part of the Find a Library Subject List update project (October 2006 – January 2007).

United Kingdom Archival Thesaurus (UKAT)

What is it?

UKAT is a subject thesaurus which has been created for the archive sector in the United Kingdom. It is a controlled vocabulary which archives can use when indexing their collections and catalogues.

How does it work?

UKAT contains over 20,500 subject terms and can be searched alphabetically or hierarchically. Although the hierarchy is not numbered, it can be said that subject terms flow down in tiers from the initial eight 'Fields of Knowledge'. For my own convenience I have labelled the 8 Fields of Knowledge 'A' and continued alphabetically through the lower levels to 'H', which is the lowest tier.

The UKAT website is very user-friendly and almost always offers a preferred term when users type in a non-UKAT subject term.

Observations

The M25 Resource Discovery Group resolved in the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2006 that UKAT be adopted as the thesaurus from which M25 subject terms should be chosen. This would aid any future transfer of London library data held on InforM25 to FindIt! and Cornucopia.

Find it! and Cornucopia are based on UKAT and it is thought that UKAT could also be mapped to Library of Congress Subject Headings. It is hoped that basing InforM25 subject terms on UKAT could increase interoperability with WiLL, FindIt! AIM25 and other services.

Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this short report to analyse UKAT's compatibility with Library of Congress Subject Headings

Inspire, Cornucopia and FindIt!

What are they?

Inspire is a programme that seeks to create access to public, academic and national library collections for members of the public across the regions of England and Northern Ireland. The service has links with organizations in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Cornucopia is an online database of information about more than 6,000 collections in the UK's museums, galleries, archives and libraries. It can be searched directly using the categories of:

- Time (historical era)
- People
- Place (geographical location of the collection)
- Subject

Inspire created the Find it! service to enable searching of library collection descriptions, including subject searches.

How do they work?

Cornucopia uses the Research Support Library Programme's Collection Description schema. This allows collections to be described in a consistent and machine readable way and is fast becoming a national standard.

Inspire uses the Cornucopia database to hold descriptions of library collections for the Find it! service.

Find it!

Find it! allows the public to search all the public, university and specialist libraries that have signed up to Inspire. It allows users to search for collections on specific subjects, then provides details of where those libraries are and how to access their resources.

Find it! allows users to run:

- a simple search whereby users simply type in the subject they are looking for and receive a list of all the libraries in England and Northern Ireland that have collections on that subject;
- an advanced search allows users to limit the search by geographical regions (England and Northern Ireland) and to search by subject as well as keywords.

Observations

Find it!, through the Cornucopia database, uses UKAT but it does not present users with a controlled vocabulary with which to search the service. Many searches therefore produce no results and users are not provided with a preferred search term if they have entered a term that is not included in UKAT.

Searching under a UKAT term such as "Design (arts)" produces many results but this is not very intuitive.

What's in London's Libraries (WiLL)

What is it?

WiLL allows members of the public to search the collections and community information resources of a range of libraries, museums and archives across London. The London Libraries Development Agency manages WiLL on behalf of the 33 London Boroughs.

How does it work?

The service allows members of the public to perform the following searches:

- *Search the collections* – a simultaneous item-level search of library catalogues and community information databases as well as museum and archive collections. This can be done by: Title/Organization, Author name, Subject, Keyword and ISBN;
- *Search the facilities* – a collection-level search for collections held by some or all of the WiLL members and additional practical information such as location, opening times and services available.

Observations

WiLL's 'Search the facilities' search is analogous to InforM25's Find a Library. It does not seem to return results for non-UKAT terms although it is quite possible that it would if tested thoroughly. It returns a handful of results for various UKAT terms when set for 'All' facilities across the 'Whole of London'.

In addition to WILL, there is a page on the London Libraries website entitled *Subject Collections*, which provides a simple list of subject headings on the left with a corresponding list of institutions on the right: <http://www.londonlibraries.org/servlets/libraries/collections>.

Some of these subject headings are UKAT terms (eg. Criminology, Civil engineering) but there are many more which are not UKAT terms (eg. Clocks and clockmakers, Edward Thomas Collection).

AIM25

What is it?

AIM25 was a project funded by the Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) to provide a web-accessible database of descriptions of the archives and manuscript collections of over ninety higher education institutions and learned societies within the Greater London area. It is also intended for AIM25 to provide the corresponding archive component to the M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries in the London Region.

How does it work?

AIM25 offers a Quick Search and an Advanced Search. It also allows users to browse each individual repository.

The search facilities are accompanied by a Subject Thesaurus which can be searched alphabetically or by hierarchy. Both versions of the AIM25 Thesaurus are based on the UNESCO Thesaurus.

The service also offers indexes of Personal and Corporate names as well as alphabetical and hierarchical indexes of place names.

Observations

It is very clear to users as soon as they start to search AIM25 that they need to use the vocabulary provided in the Subject Thesaurus and the Indexes.

UKAT is based on the UNESCO Thesaurus. As the AIM25 Subject Thesaurus is also based on the UNESCO Thesaurus, the revised Inform25 Subject List should be broadly compatible with AIM25.

SCONE

What is it?

The Scottish Collections Network (SCONE) provides descriptions of collections held in Scottish libraries, museums and archives, and collections about Scottish topics held elsewhere. These descriptions can be searched by collection name and location.

It interacts with the Co-operative Information Retrieval Network for Scotland (CAIRNS) in a way that is similar to InforM25's Find a Library and Search catalogues services.

How does it work?

Users can search for collections by:

- Collection title
- Location (physical location of the collection)
- People and organizations
- Education Level
- Subject
- Subject strength
- Language other than English.

The search by Subject offers an alphabetical list of Library of Congress Subject Headings to use for this type of search. There are also alphabetical lists of people and places, a list of Dewey decimal

classification numbers and a service which picks out users' search terms from the beginning, middle or end of a longer word.

The search by Subject Strength firstly presents users with 22 broad subject headings. They can tick one or more boxes to reach subdivisions of their chosen subjects. Users can then tick one or more of the subdivisions to reach the third and final level of subject terms. For example, users might choose 'Law' → 'Scots and UK Law' → 'Scots and UK Law – Arbitration'.

This third and final list of options also asks users which of the following Conspectus levels they wish to search at: 3) Instructional Support; 4) Research; 5) Comprehensive.

Observations

The search by Subject uses a controlled vocabulary but not one that stems from the UNESCO Thesaurus. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this short report to analyse UKAT's compatibility with Library of Congress Subject Headings.

The search by Subject Strength is a hierarchical method of searching at collection level. Many of the subject terms, including 'Scots and UK Law', are not UKAT terms.

Mapping Access to Special Collections in the London Region (MASC25)

What is it?

MASC25 is an online resource guide to printed special collections in libraries within the M25 Consortium. MASC25 aims to describe 'any collection of printed works that is considered to contain material of a rare or unique nature, or has been developed as a special resource in terms of depth or subject coverage', located in the defined geographical area.

How does it work?

Users have the following search options:

- Basic Keyword Search
- Browse by Subject
- Browse by Institution

The Basic Keyword Search picks out keywords from any part of the expanded information provided on a collection. A search for 'Byzantine' produced the record for the King's College London Rare Books Collection, which has notable coverage of Byzantine Studies.

Browse by Subject invites users to select a letter of the alphabet from the drop down menu and then returns a list of all subject headings beginning with that letter. A search on 'H' produced a list of subject terms including 'Hasidism' and 'Handicraft - Sweden' which are not UKAT terms. Additionally, this list included the names of people eg. 'Halsted, William 1852-1922'.

Observations

The Browse by Subject service does not seem to use a controlled vocabulary and many of its terms are not UKAT compatible.