

## An Interview with Alan Danskin

Eagerly anticipated by the whole community, the new cataloguing standard Resource Description and Access (RDA) was released as part of the RDA Toolkit. The German National Library published an interview with the then-chair of Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA (JSC) last year, and now continues by interviewing the current chair Alan Danskin.



Alan Danskin is Metadata and Bibliographic Standards Coordinator at the British Library, where he has worked since 1987. In that time Alan has worked in a variety of roles, ranging from collection development and acquisitions to cataloguing and data quality. During his career Alan has been responsible for the implementation of NACO at the British Library; the transition from UKMARC to MARC 21; the migration of legacy data to the British Library Integrated Catalogue. He previously served as Editor of UKMARC and of UNIMARC and has worked on a number of international projects. He was appointed to the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA in 2006 and became Chair of the committee last year.

1. Mr. Danskin, since the first considerations of a completely new, modern cataloguing code until the RDA Toolkit was released much time has passed. Now, it has happened. Are you proud of RDA being released during your term?

*Danskin:* Absolutely, although I feel rather like the substitute who comes off the bench and scores with his first kick. The credit belongs to the team, not only to JSC, but to all those who have contributed their time, energy and ideas over many years.

2. RDA has been designed as an international code. As the development started in the Anglo-American community, there are quite a number of passages in the rules where your cataloguing tradition is showing through. Do you think that RDA will be implemented on a global scale, though?

*Danskin:* I certainly hope so. RDA's development has benefited from the generous input JSC received from European rule makers. European engagement with RDA is further exemplified by the growth of the European RDA Interest Group (EURIG), which is hosting an RDA seminar in Copenhagen this summer, advance of IFLA. There is already worldwide interest in translation of RDA.

3. Where do you think, lays the strength, or the advantage of RDA, its unique selling point? In other words, what has RDA that other rules have not?

*Danskin:* RDA is fundamentally based on providing the metadata necessary to satisfy basic user tasks, as defined by FRBR and FRAD. The correlation of metadata with user tasks is a core strength of RDA. In addition, the underlying models and RDA's independence from any display or transmission standards provide the flexibility and extensibility to respond to future challenges.

4. Before the RDA Toolkit was released the complete draft was published for review. We heard that JSC received a lot of comments. The German-speaking community also participated in the process with detailed comments. Was the text of RDA in the form published within the 1<sup>st</sup> release changed substantially compared to the full draft?

*Danskin:* JSC was only able to discuss the most significant issues raised by the review of the first draft, but even so, we reviewed over 400 comments at the March 2009 meeting. This did result in some significant changes from the full draft.

5. And what are the main changes? Does an overview of these changes exist?

*Danskin:* The main changes were summarized in the outcomes from the March 2009 JSC meeting in Chicago. A comprehensive report on decisions is given in the minutes of that meeting.

Issues affecting the element set and vocabularies were prioritized and therefore feature prominently among the changes agreed in Chicago. The most extensive changes probably affect instructions for describing musical works and expressions, as proposals were not agreed in time for inclusion in the full draft.

6. JSC postponed a couple of issues until after the 1<sup>st</sup> release of the toolkit. After what period of time will the JSC discuss and decide on these issues?

*Danskin:* JSC deferred several issues until after publication of the first release. The constituencies are currently reviewing the deferred issues and assigning priorities and responsibilities. The outcome of these discussions will be published on the JSC website. Some issues will need more discussion by JSC before a change proposal can be prepared. The constituencies are starting work on the issues they designated as high priority as soon as possible with a view to incorporating them in RDA in advance of implementation.

7. So far, rules for subject cataloguing are not yet included in RDA because the FRSAD model has not been finished. For a short time, there is a draft of these recommendations that is currently under consideration by IFLA. Could you tell us when we may expect first drafts for RDA subject cataloguing rules?

*Danskin:* JSC commented on the draft FRSAD recommendations but we have yet to agree the approach for developing the subject component for RDA.

8. How will the process for changes of the cataloguing code be organized?

*Danskin:* There are still some practical issues to be resolved in conjunction with the co-publisher, but the principles will remain consistent. The development process is an open process in which anyone can propose changes. Constituencies which are already represented on JSC have their own national committees which prioritise and prepare proposals; individuals or agencies in countries which are not currently represented on JSC can send proposals to the JSC Secretary.

9. Before deciding for an implementation of RDA the US-American national libraries will conduct a test. Could you, please, tell us what the plans are for the other countries represented by the JSC?

*Danskin:* In the UK, the British Library will be conducting its own internal testing and evaluation in conjunction with partners in other agencies. The British Library and CILIP

(Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals) have been working together to raise awareness and to disseminate information. CILIP Cataloguing & Indexing Group is assessing training needs, with a view to developing training materials. Whether and when to implement RDA will be an issue for individual institutions, but the outcome of US National testing will obviously be a significant factor for UK cataloguing agencies.

In Canada and Australia the respective national libraries and library associations are also providing a lead. Links are provided below.

10. The editor of RDA, Tom Delsey, published 3 different implementation scenarios in 2007. Will the JSC recommend one of these scenarios?

*Danskin:* The specification of three different scenarios is recognition that one size cannot fit all; therefore it would not be appropriate for JSC to recommend one scenario. The choice of scenario will be dictated by your system architecture at the time of implementation. For example, if your institution has a "standard" ILS, in which separate files of bibliographic and authority records are linked, you will be implementing in scenario 2; alternatively if you have just a flat file in which all the data is recorded in the bibliographic record, you will be implementing in scenario 3. A few institutions may be lucky enough to have fully relational databases in which the FRBR and FRAD entities are represented by separate records and these will be implementing in scenario one. For most of us scenario 1 will remain an aspiration until we can migrate to the next generation of information management systems.

11. More and more libraries face the need to catalog their resources (also) machine-processed. Is RDA suited for automated cataloguing processes?

*Danskin:* Yes. RDA instructions encourage a "take-what-you-see" approach. This approach is faithful to the principle of representation of the resource and is hospitable to automated data capture. RDA does not require human intervention to insert ISBD punctuation, or to enforce conventions governing capitalization, or to annotate transcribed information.

We are also excited about the possibilities that may emerge from our collaboration with [The Registry!](#) to register RDA elements, vocabularies and relationship designators in the RDA namespace.

12. Do you have a personal motto that helps you to face the permanent changes that will occur during the next years?

*Danskin:* I always liked Panizzi's ironic explanation of the cataloguer's dilemma, to the Earl of Ellesmere, in 1848, "...deeply impressed as I am myself with the difficulties often alluded to, I am even still more impressed with the difficulty of communicating to others an equal sense of these difficulties."

Mr. Danskin, thank you for answering our questions.

## Links

National Library of Australia RDA page  
<http://www.nla.gov.au/lis/stdnrds/grps/acoc/rda.html>

Library and Archives Canada RDA page  
<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/cataloguing-standards/040006-1107-e.html#m>

Outcomes of the Meeting of the Joint Steering Committee Held in Chicago, USA, 12-20 March 2009  
<http://www.rda-jsc.org/0903out.html>

MINUTES OF MARCH 2009 MEETING, ALA Headquarters, Chicago, USA, 12-20 March 2009  
<http://www.rda-jsc.org/working2.html#min>