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Stamping it out: Standardisation of book servicing and improvements to processing within Leeds Beckett University Library

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This article describes several improvements which were made to the processing of new book stock received at Leeds Beckett University Libraries. It describes the background which necessitated these changes, how they were implemented, and the measured outcomes.

Background

The Library at Leeds Beckett University runs two Collection Maintenance teams, based at Headingley and City Campus. The main duties of the teams are: liaising with Academic Librarians / Information Services Librarians and academic staff; managing the Orders Inbox; bibliographic checking, sourcing and ordering new stock requests using Selection Lists; coordinating day-to-day workload and on-going projects/service improvements, and maintenance of the book stock at each campus.

Leeds Beckett University is part of the National Acquisitions Group (NAG); NAG is a professional organisation for people responsible for, or interested in, the acquisition, management and development of library resources in libraries of all types. NAG produces impartial good practice guidelines and standards relating to its core purpose. It offers opportunities for education and training, knowledge sharing and networking through its annual conference and a regular series of regional seminars and workshops. NAG is a voice for everyone associated with library and information resources – librarians, information officers, publishers and service suppliers – providing leadership and a source of shared expertise for its membership.

In January 2017 NAG sent out a document for consideration in advance of the book tender agreement planned for that summer. Suppliers

seemed to be the impetus for these proposed changes as they were keen to standardise shelf-ready processing in order to reduce their costs. All public libraries had already standardised their processes and this had been proven to speed up the ordering and delivery from suppliers. Academic libraries were keen to follow suit.

The Collection Maintenance and Acquisitions Team within the Library considered these proposals and formed a working group in order to audit the servicing requirements. Outcomes from a meeting in September 2017 were refined by the cross-campus Collection Maintenance teams and further changes were suggested. Cost savings resulting from these changes were then quantified and reported back to Library managers in September 2017.

Guidelines for Consideration

NAG stated the aim of the guidelines was to “encourage more standardised servicing requirements to enable academic libraries to streamline their supply chain, to provide better customer service through greater efficiency, and to make cost savings.” They published these [guidelines for consideration](#) in January 2017 and the Collection Maintenance teams within the Library were tasked with considering them. This included looking at standardizing sleeves and wallets for books, generic date labels and barcodes, and classmarks and identifying stamps

to be situated in specific position. A meeting was organised and following discussions a list of outcomes were agreed and fed back to NAG and the suppliers.

Servicing Discussion

As a result of a meeting in September 2017 it was decided that the Library would standardise processing as above as much as possible.

The discussion centred on the key areas of Collections Maintenance responsibility with regards to processing new book stock.

In summary these were:

- Book protection cover on paperbacks and jackets on hardbacks
- Spine labels with a class number. Spine labels must also be under book protection cover *or* label protected
- One ownership stamp on the top edge of the book
- A barcode on the inner page
- An RFID TAG inside the back cover

There also used to be a number of other required processes that are now obsolete. For example date labels used to be part of the standard processing workflow for suppliers, but our libraries no longer have a requirement for them. Date labels had largely been phased out during an earlier process of workflow improvement looking at making changes due to the implementation of self-service borrowing. They were originally kept only for AV items as ERA licensing information was added but

this information is now given on a sticker so date labels are no longer necessary. This is another example of continuous improvement undertaken by the Collections and Acquisitions Team. In practice, this made us “non-standard”, and even though we were asking for less it could have had an impact on price and time. Tattle tape was also no longer required due to RFID tags.

Process Stamps

Process stamps had always been used in the Library to record accession information within the book. The stamps which had been used up to this point had contained the item barcode, purchase fund code, order number, date of receipt and classmark (see figure 1).

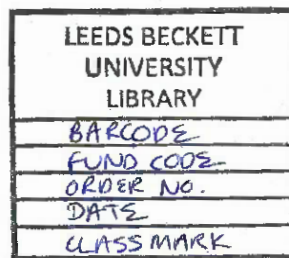


Figure 1: Leeds Beckett University Library process stamp

All this information was entered by hand by the Acquisitions team on every item, as part of the accession

process. It was agreed that it would be a good idea to make changes to the process. We wondered if there was a requirement for all this information on the book or if there was other information we could usefully add instead.

The main use of the process stamp was to identify damaged items where a tag or classmark had been torn off the book, and this remained the only means of tracking the item. It was therefore decided to conduct a number of experiments to see if this was still the case or if we could dispense with it entirely.

Having conducted the experiments it was agreed that although it was helpful to have the classmark and barcode information on the process stamp it was not essential, and savings in cost and time efficiencies would be of greater benefit. It was therefore decided to remove the need for a process stamp as part of the accession process.

Figure 2: A member of the Collection Maintenance team using the RFID pad to check the tag of a book that has no barcode or process stamp in order to ascertain its barcode, and thus ultimately the identity of the book.



Benefits

Year-end statistics recorded that the team was able to reduce their “servicing interventions” with all suppliers, cutting back to a sleek yet functional minimum. The net results included a reduction in servicing costs with one of the leading suppliers from £1.20 to 83p per book. Assuming the same amount is spent on print items in future years, a figure of around £2,000 per annum would be saved. Furthermore, deciding to no longer include the process stamp as part of the accession process, and building on further cross-training between the Acquisitions and Collection Maintenance teams, it was possible to reduce by half the time it takes to receive and load new stock. This was in spite of some staff reductions over the same period.

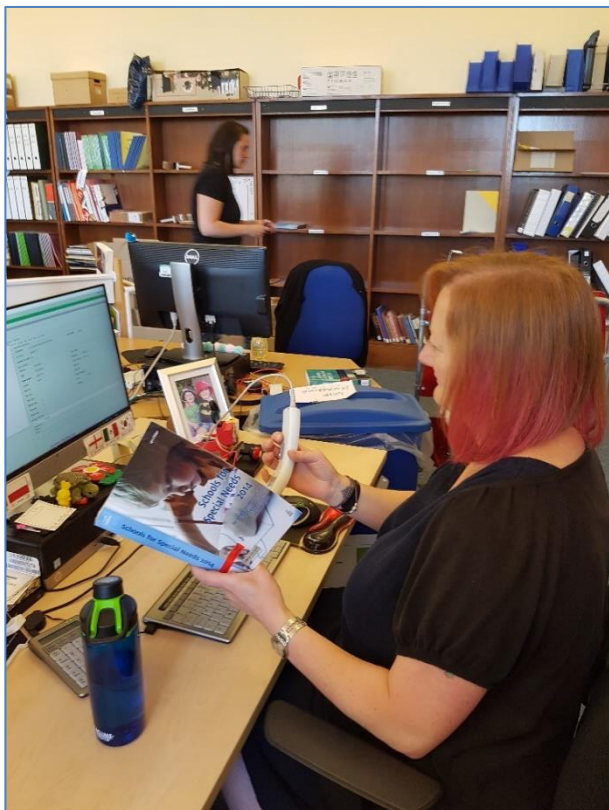


Figure 4: Using a barcode reader to find the item on Workflows, the library management system, as the RFID tag and other identifying features had been removed.

Conclusion

The necessity of considering the new terms and conditions of the NAG agreement allowed the Collection Maintenance teams to revisit some of their established practices. By looking at their



Figure 3: Checking the classmark of a damaged item to identify it via Workflows, the library management system.

workflow and considering in detail what each stage of the process brought in terms of benefits, a number of innovative improvements were instigated. The main benefits have been efficiency savings in both time and money, and a streamlined workflow which has freed up staff to concentrate on other duties within their team.

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