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## National Bibliographies in the Digital Age: Guidance and New Directions

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### Abstract:

*After several years of discussion and writing, the Working group on National Bibliographies in the Digital Age has prepared the new guidelines which have just been published. The document addresses the challenges faced by national bibliographic agencies, such as selection, cataloguing and organisational issues. Taking into account that bibliographic control varies greatly from country to country, the document is not prescriptive and lists possible options, illustrated by examples. The Working group would like to encourage national bibliographic agencies to test the guidelines and send their feedback to the Bibliography Section.*

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After the turn of the century the Bibliography Section started the discussion on two important topics: how to encourage and support the countries without a national bibliography to start producing one and how to help national bibliographic agencies respond to the challenges of the digital age. The first plan was to develop two sets of guidelines: one on setting up a bibliography and the other to offer guidance in treating the electronic documents and design an electronic version of a national bibliography. Quite soon it became obvious that although the audiences for the two guidelines seem very different, there is a lot of overlap in the topics discussed. Therefore the Section decided to merge both efforts under the same Working Group on National Bibliographies in the Digital Age.

The Working Group was tasked to:

- develop guidelines to help national bibliographic agencies start or improve bibliographic services;
- develop guidelines for publishing bibliographies in electronic form;
- develop guidelines on the inclusion and presentation of electronic resources in national bibliographies.

These seemingly separate strands have intertwined as the work of the group has progressed. The change brought by World Wide Web, new modes of publishing and the explosion of electronic media have called into question many of the assumptions on which national bibliography has been founded.

The Working Group started with the analysis of users and contexts of use of national bibliographies. The analysis was extended beyond the obvious: librarians and library users. Other uses and users were identified such as publishers, booksellers, funding bodies, rights management. In addition we have to be aware that electronic national bibliographies are also accessed by harvesters or serve as targets in distributed searching.

The document consists of relatively independent chapters, each of them addressing a separate issue. At the same time the publication was planned as a whole. Therefore the readers can use this publication in both ways: reading all the chapters in sequence or only individual chapters:

#### *History and Background*

The development of national bibliographies is analysed, particularly all international recommendations on all aspects of national bibliographies.

#### *Value of national bibliographies: Use and Users*

Mission of modern national bibliographies is discussed, followed by detailed analysis of users of NB, the reasons and contexts in which they access NB. As the foundation for next chapters, the requirements for each user group and context are listed. The emphasis is on search formulation requirements (such as typical queries), required display of bibliographic/authority information and additional functionality when needed.

#### *Selection Principles*

This chapter presents selection principles to aid national bibliographic agencies in formulating their selection criteria. There is no one set of selection principles that can serve every national bibliographic agency. This chapter provides a discussion of the various criteria to be considered; the rationale to be taken into account; and the constraints that come into play as each national bibliographic agency tackles the challenge of defining its selection criteria.

#### *Cataloguing*

Traditional cataloguing practices, assuming book-in-hand detailed analysis of all resources are not scalable to the whole of the World Wide Web. The proliferation of digital media and formats also raises new challenges for the organisation and presentation of information and provision of access. Users are no longer satisfied with the knowledge that a specific resource exists; they are accustomed to instant access to information sought. Current IFLA Recommendations and previous guidelines have emphasised the need for national bibliographic agencies to treat all resources equally. In the new context this approach is no longer sustainable. In future a graduated approach will be required in which the level of cataloguing appropriate to different types of resource will be determined in relation to the type of resource, the level of metadata associated with the resource, and the significance of the resource for the national bibliography.

#### *Functionality and Interface*

The electronic national bibliography is an important information resource for various user groups in different contexts as discussed in previous chapters. The interface should, as much as possible, enable all the functionality needed by these user groups. The list of user groups is

long and it is clear that their information needs, contexts, and, consequently, requirements differ very much. In order to serve all the users, the requirements regarding interfaces, access points, display formats are analysed. A comprehensive section on interoperability issues is included.

#### *Organisation and Management of National Bibliographies*

This part of the document provides a general organizational overview of preparation of NB and is intended to be used both by well established national bibliographic agencies and by those which are now being planned. The content includes the legal framework, organizational alternatives and possible business models. National bibliographies are produced in very different organizational frameworks and particularly newly established national bibliographic agencies need an overview of alternative approaches.

#### *Cooperation with Publishers*

Some National Bibliographic Agencies have already established successful working relationships with publishers. The benefits of such cooperation include improved timeliness (publishers deposit their publications promptly), sharing and re-use of metadata, and mutual promotion.

#### *Glossary, Bibliography and Useful links*

The publication ends with a comprehensive glossary and bibliography, including a long list of resources, useful for any national bibliographic agency

The document is not intended to be prescriptive: bibliographic control varies widely from country to country; local requirements may be influenced by financial, legal or practical constraints. Therefore, a number of potential options are presented to enable different levels of application or uptake according to circumstances, and examples are given to illustrate the range of approaches taken by different national bibliographic agencies.

The intended audience for this document is wide: in the first place, it addresses those charged with implementing new national bibliographies. Secondly, this document will be of interest to managers and staff of established national bibliographic agencies who are responding to opportunities and challenges posed by new technology and media.

After several years the draft was in world-wide review in 2008 and some comments were received. The final text was prepared and now we are finally at the most important milestone: the publication. The Working Group and the Bibliography Section hope to see the guidelines used by many national bibliographic agencies and others. Bibliography Section will follow the use and collect and analyse all (positive or negative) feedback. After that the Section will perform occasional periodic reviews in order to keep the guidelines current, useful and used.