

QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

Methodology

Contact was made with 25 local authorities, in order to assess the potential impact of merging the GCL, LGCL and seamlessUK taxonomy. This is by no means a statistically valid sample. The authorities were selected on the basis of a member of the Project team having good contact details for them. A bias is likely in favour of people who are well ahead with implementation, relatively well informed, vocal in public meetings and frequent attendees. Also, most of the respondents were more familiar with the LGCL than with the other two vocabularies.

Of the 25 questionnaires sent (see Appendix), 20 were returned, with the following distribution:

12	South or South East of England
7	Midlands or North of England
1	Scotland

Where the responses needed clarification, a follow-up phone call or email query was made. The replies were helpful in interpreting the questionnaires. In two cases, a visit was made to the authority.

Summary of results

The vast majority of respondents were in favour of the proposal. The most frequently cited reason was to remove widespread confusion about which list to use and how. Any problems anticipated were for the short term.

A good number of suggestions for the merged vocabulary were submitted, each of which needs to be borne in mind as the project proceeds. (NB Some of them contradict others.) Two main concerns stand out:

- More guidance is needed on how to use the lists in metadata and navigation, and particularly how to reconcile local needs with national standardisation
- The opportunity should be taken to correct shortcomings in the current lists.

Full conclusions are shown overleaf, followed by a detailed analysis of the returns, and a list of suggestions contributed. The original questionnaire is shown in the Appendix.

A word of caution

The respondents did not have a great deal of information about the merger. Their optimism could evaporate if the products contain unhappy surprises. It will be vital to keep all users informed, and particularly those who were kind enough to submit questionnaires. It will also be essential to use previews of the products to solicit feedback, without sowing panic.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based mostly on the returned questionnaires, but partly also on impressions gained during phone calls and email correspondence with the local authorities who participated. Although the numbers sampled are quite small, certain themes emerged quite strongly. However, it must be remembered that the respondents had very little information about the nature of the merged product(s). Very important also, we must remember that many users of the GCL – probably the majority – are not local authorities. The conclusions below may not necessarily be helpful in other parts of the public sector.

1. The proposed merger will be widely welcomed among local authorities, if it eliminates current confusion about which of the three existing lists to use.
2. Local authorities should be required to use just one standard controlled vocabulary for subject metadata in applications such as internet websites, intranet websites, EDRM systems and any other system mandated by national or regional authorities.
3. Clarity and simplicity are essential. A solution must be found to end current confusion about the use of Categories and Keywords.
4. There must be the option of using other lists as well. Authorities may wish to use their own customised lists, or subscribe to a variety of vocabularies in common use.
5. As part of the merging process, any known shortcomings in the lists should be corrected.
6. It will be essential to retain mappings between preferred terms in the merged vocabulary and the LGSL (ex-PID list).
7. Authorities should be actively encouraged if they wish to provide user navigation structures, directories and fileplans which differ from the controlled vocabulary for Subject metadata. Guidance and discussion forums, etc., should be provided.
8. The merged product is urgently required. Authorities need to be able to implement the new list in good time before deadlines imposed by the ODPM and other authorities.
9. The merged product should be expanded to cover subjects needed in intranets and EDRM systems, as soon as resources permit. Even after expansion, the list would then complement the LGCS, not replace it.
10. There is no doubt that migrating to the new list will cause considerable inconvenience to a great many authorities. However, this is a short-term problem. It can be mitigated by providing clear information about when the new list will be available, what it will look like, and how it needs to be applied.
11. Subsequent updates will continue to be problematic for many authorities. But updating is seen by most people as important and unavoidable. The burden may be lessened in several ways, e.g. providing information about the changes; encouraging vendors to design their products so that updates can easily be assimilated; and providing guidance, workshops, discussion forums etc on best practice for implementers.

Detailed analysis

1. Which list(s) are/will be used by respondents?

Total number using or planning to use the GCL	8
Total number using or planning to use the LGCL	16
Total number using or planning to use Seamless	4
Total number using or planning to use their Own list	5

One respondent is using none of the lists, pending clarification of Priority Outcomes

Several of the above are using or planning combinations, as follows:

GCL + LGCL	5
GCL + Seamless	1
GCL + Own list	1
GCL + LGCL + Seamless	1
GCL + LGCL + Own list	1
LGCL + Own list	1

12 Respondents have already implemented at least one of the lists; the remaining 8 are still planning.

Additional points observed from comments or follow-up:

- Even among well informed respondents, a lot of people are unaware that use of the GCL is mandatory. There is much more concern about complying with ODPM requirements.
- Some of the "Own lists" in use have drawn upon or adapted from the LGCL. Some of the owners explained they were needed because of shortcomings in the national lists, particularly the LGCL.
- At least two respondents suppose that use of their own list prevents them from using any other list, for their website at least. One of them seems unaware that if they use a customised list in metadata, they may fail to comply with the standards.

2. What the lists will be used for:

Internet website(s) directory	14 + 2 maybe
Internet website(s) metadata	20
Intranet website(s) directory	7 + 1 maybe
Intranet website(s) metadata	9 + 2 maybe
EDRM system fileplan	6
EDRM system Subject metadata	9 + 1 maybe
Knowledge management system	5
FOI publications scheme	10 + 1 maybe
Other application (please describe)	3

Other application(s):

Categorising databases; CRM (2 authorities); Contacts centre; Case management system.

3. Number of levels used

Impressively, 17 respondents plan to use three or more levels of the hierarchical lists. Three of the 17 clarified that they might limit the user's view to just one or two levels.

Two respondents will use just the top two levels.

One respondent is waiting for clarification on how many levels you have got to use.

4. Do regular updates of the list(s) give you any problems?

No 6 Yes 5 Don't know 5

One more respondent said a major revision would cause problems (but was still in favour of the merger, provided enough notice given).

The above results must be interpreted with caution. We are still at the early stages of system development and user experience.

- Of those who said No, one said “because we use Wordmap”, i.e. there may be problems, but at least the solutions are made available to multiple customers. One clarified that each update would typically cost them about two hours work. One has not yet implemented the lists, so may be unaware of what lies ahead. One said no problem so long as XML or CSV format used. One uses just the GCL and Seamless, which may present fewer complications than the LGCL.
- The most common problem mentioned by those who said Yes or Don't know, is the inflexibility of their CMS for implementing the changes. Two reported difficulties uploading the XML file.
- One respondent said that in the event of changes, it would be helpful to follow the current LGCL policies re deleting and renaming. Another suggested improvements to the synchronicity of changes in the LGCL and LGSL – it would be helpful to retain a “frozen view” of which versions were simultaneously in force, for some time after the new versions are launched.

5. Potential benefits and/or problems caused by the proposed merger.

12 respondents expect benefits
1 anticipates a potential problem
5 expect both benefits and problems
2 are not sure.

The overall, overwhelming perception is that this project will be beneficial. Despite the problem anticipated by one person, a visit subsequently established that he is greatly in favour of the project (and the problem he was concerned about will not arise if the project is well done). The first three benefits below were cited by many respondents.

Expected benefits:

- One list will be so much simpler than three
- Confusion will be eliminated
- No need for mappings
- Seamless terminology will be a big asset – at the moment the cost puts us off
- Interoperability enhanced
- Improved standardisation
- More granularity

Anticipated problems

- There would be a problem if mappings to/from the LGSL cease to be available
- Top level changes may conflict with our own chosen navigation?
- Migration could be a problem
- Some reworking of our website may be needed
- Lag before CMS and EDRMS vendors catch up
- Need to synchronise all authorities on using the same versions

6. Additional comments, including suggestions for features needed and problems to be fixed.

Most of the comments reported are direct quotes from the returns submitted. In some cases they reflect misunderstandings, but even so they may indicate issues that need to be addressed.

a) General

- I do wonder if the one-size-fits-all approach is workable.

b) The context: websites, metadata etc.

- More guidance should be available on best practice for website navigation. It is important for authorities to grasp the Lists are for behind-the-scenes use and metadata, not for user navigation.
- We should issue an exemplar metadata map for a generic Council to show how controlled lists fit into existing Council owned information.
- For our website navigation, it is important to be able to use the top-level categories we have established by user testing, not those in the LGCL.
- There needs to be provision for LAs to add terms needed locally, even if they are not deemed suitable for the central List.
- Although as a web manager I found the LGCL a useful starting point for the site's navigation, however, users across the organization do not like it and find it illogical.
- If the LGCL is used as a Navigation structure (as it is also intended), not being departmentally based makes it difficult to administer the CMS. For a combination of reasons, we are considering restructuring the Site by consulting our departments, the new structure will be based only very loosely on the LGCL.
- We would be keen to attend workshops etc on best practice in applying metadata.
- We need clarity over the future of the subject.category refinement and whether it is to remain mandatory as it isn't mandatory in the Dublin Core: we can see the point of some categories like "education" but not of the less obvious ones like "community and living" or "legal services". Also need clarity about the relationship of the future list and the subject.keyword refinement.
- In terms of database applications - it would be nice if applying the GCL term only meant to the application as a whole and we could use a different taxonomy to categorise the individual records e.g. UNESCO.

c) Scope and content

- Scope needs to expand for intranets, with coverage of e.g. Human resources, communications, IT and Finance. [Several respondents said this. But it was generally accepted that expansion could come at a second stage – the main merger should be completed asap.]
- I've found that each list has something missing. They are not necessarily public facing or use terms that the public would understand. A public service listing would be better than central govt. and local govt. A wider thesaurus would be useful (with broader and narrower terms and use for etc.) that could be used by web site search engines etc.
- One problem has been that the lists have not suited the information we have been trying to index. The original GCL was for central government and we obviously have different functions. Seamlessuk was for community information and we were not trying to index that exactly and the LGCL was getting closer but still contained large numbers of irrelevant terms for us.
- Make sure you consult with local authorities outside the south east before finalising the new category list, as it's an opportunity to sort out the considerable shortcomings of LGCL once and for all.
- LGCL includes some really odd ideas which could do with ironing out. For example, from the Education category, "primary schools" (age 5-11) aren't "infant schools" (age 5-7) but they appear as synonyms. Independent schools are the same as private schools or

public schools but they all appear separately. "Children in entertainment" is completely different from its synonym, "Extra-curricular activities". Scope notes would help: under "Leisure and culture" we have "bellringing" (I assume hand-bells) and "church bells" but no warning against either to make sure the indexing is done correctly. Different types of concepts are muddled up: in the same section, "orchestras" and "composers" and "choirs" aren't comparable with "jazz music" or "chamber music"; "orchestral music" and "choral music" *would* be comparable. Under Learning disabilities, "Asperger's syndrome" should be a subcategory of "Autism", not a separate entry.

- Personally, I'd like to be able to separate out words like "elderly", "children" "disabled" and other such descriptors and add them to any term rather than have them prescribed in the subjects - "children's activities", "elderly mentally infirm". We shall inevitably have to have this approach for places so it makes sense to have it for types of user too. More attention needed to the use of such terms too – things which are definitely "children's activities" such as Beavers and Brownies are under "young people's activities".
- Should avoid having long lists of e.g. illnesses (which local authorities don't deal with anyway) and 'brand names' specific to a few authorities (e.g. Bertie box)
- Not all of our existing information can easily be categorised using the LGCL as it either doesn't relate to the services that are offered by the LA but by other organisations or are different information types entirely, i.e. museum archives.
- The project should take account of other lists, such as the LGCS and the taxonomy of PITO (a consortium of police authorities).

d) Size and specificity

- A simple list would be better than an elaborate, complex list.
- Our need is for as much specificity as possible to ensure excellent search returns; in this respect we prefer Seamless. Also prefer its coverage outside the strict bounds of local government responsibility, and the strict updating mechanisms which are a function of having to sign up to use it.
- Although there are many terms not specific to council services in an attempt to engage the community, this has overcomplicated the LGCL and made it difficult to locate key services. Even the LAWS A-Z seems to be exhaustive. Improving APLAWS may have been sufficient.

e) Form of outputs

- We REALLY need an alphabetical index (like the GCL or Seamless) of all the terms and synonyms, showing their context in the hierarchy quickly and easily – especially important where terms appear in more than one place.

f) Structure

- Polyhierarchy is a problem for our CMS. We need a monohierarchical option.

g) Management

- A main concern would be that such a joined up list is maintained for the foreseeable future - perhaps with a website where users of the list can suggest new terms or search through the ones already available - download an XML or .csv version to keep updated with the list.
- We hope there will be a timely procedure for making decisions on proposals submitted by LAs. The decisions should preferably be made by a panel, and documented. There should be a mechanism for informing people about the decisions made.
- As far as interoperability is concerned the LAWS "gentleman's agreement" not to change or add to the list seems far less sustainable than Seamless's absolute control of their list.

h) Other

- We may have to do our own mappings from the LGCL to the PIDs (LGSL) as the auto mappings from the esd-toolkit do not seem very logical at present.

APPENDIX

Vocabulary Merger Project

Three controlled vocabularies for Subject metadata are available to local authorities: the GCL (Government Category List), LGCL (Local Government Category List) and SeamlessUK taxonomy. To eliminate widespread confusion about which of these lists to use, the list owners have resolved to create one merged vocabulary. This project is funded by the new Local e-Government Standards Body, working in cooperation with the e-Government Unit of the Cabinet Office and Essex County Council. The questionnaire below aims to assess the impact of the merger on local authorities, and invites views on requirements for the merged product.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Which of the following do you use or plan to use? (Please tick all that apply)

	GCL	LGCL	SeamlessUK taxonomy	Other*
Already implemented	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We plan to use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*"Other" includes your own specialised taxonomy, or any other standard list for Subject metadata. If you tick these boxes, please say which "Other" you use:

2. What do/will you use it/them for? (Please tick all that apply)

Internet website(s) directory	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internet website(s) metadata	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intranet website(s) directory	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intranet website(s) metadata	<input type="checkbox"/>
EDRM system fileplan	<input type="checkbox"/>
EDRM system Subject metadata	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knowledge management system	<input type="checkbox"/>
FOI publications scheme	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other application (please describe)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Description of other application(s):

3. Each of the three lists has a hierarchical structure, with 10-20 terms at the top level, and three or more levels below. How many levels do you use or plan to use:

Just the top level Top two levels Three or more levels

4. Do regular updates of the list(s) give you any problems?

5. If the three vocabularies are merged, will this

(a) bring benefits

(b) cause problems

Please explain what are the problems and/or benefits you envisage:

6. What other comments do you have about the proposal? Are there any features of the existing lists that you would particularly like to see retained or removed? Please use the space below for any views about what is needed. If you have found one of the lists unsatisfactory, please tell us what is wrong, plus any suggestions for fixing the problem.

Contact details

Your Name

Telephone

Email address

Name of organisation

.....

Questionnaire to be returned to (or discussed with) Stella Dextre Clarke, as soon as convenient but not later than 26 August 2004.

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