

1. Introduction

I work in the Enquiry Service team at King’s College London Libraries & Collections. My current duties do not involve cataloguing, but I want to learn the basics as part of my continuing professional development (CPD). I saw an advertisement for a free training place for the Library Juice Academy (LJA) course on MarcEdit in the Cataloguing and Indexing Group (CIG) newsletter in December 2018. I had been looking for training opportunities for cataloguing and heard about LJA courses from a colleague in the Special Collections team at my workplace. I considered the CIG’s timely offer of a free place as their endorsement of LJA courses and enrolled without hesitation in two courses, “Using MarcEdit” (March 2019) and “Introduction to Cataloging” (May 2019). I did not apply for support, however, because I am employed full-time and thought I would not qualify. I then saw in the February 2019 newsletter that there is a 20% discount for CIG members on LJA courses. I immediately contacted the CIG and asked whether I could apply for the discount retrospectively. The CIG kindly contacted LJA on my behalf and I successfully secured a refund as the courses had not started yet. This was an enormous help since the pound to dollar exchange rate has been so unfavourable in the current economic climate.

In the following, I would like to report on my experience of attending these courses. I found “Using MarcEdit” challenging, but I feel I have acquired the skill to utilise this piece of software on the completion of the course. I have mixed feelings about “Introduction to Cataloging”, however. As I explain below, although the course is a sound introduction, it is not for an absolute beginner. It requires prior knowledge on the part of the learner to make the most of the content, mainly because of the multi-faceted nature of the subject.

2. “Using MarcEdit”

“Using MarcEdit” was the first LJA course I had undertaken. The four-week course was fully booked by the time it started. Every week there was reading material on a Moodle book and an exercise. Participants were required to earn points not only by submitting the exercise by the deadline, but also by participating in the discussion forum. Reading through the Moodle book was the hardest part for me as I needed to understand unfamiliar content. Having completed the reading, the exercise was less daunting and enjoyable. I found the tutorial video helpful, which provided the keys to the exercise questions. The course operates on a pass/fail grading scale with 75% as the pass score. When I reached the fourth week and discovered that the exercise involved coding in a specialist language (“regular expression language”), I thought I would struggle to complete the course. I achieved “pass” with full scores, however, with the aid of the course material. The discussion forum helped me to share learning with the other participants and successfully complete the course. Not surprisingly many of them were librarians from North America who were already engaged in advanced cataloguing in their workplace. It was stimulating to read their experience and interact with them online.

MarcEdit is a metadata editing software suite widely used in the library and information science (LIS) sector to create and manipulate MARC records. Many members may recall that the CIG organised a talk by its developer Terry Reese in June 2019. I had only heard about MarcEdit and had not had a chance to use or practice it in my career to date. By completing the course, I feel confident that I would be able to utilise it in any future role where I had to deal with cataloguing records, which is one of my career goals.

3. “Introduction to Cataloguing”

Since I have no cataloguing experience to date, I thought I would find “Introduction to Cataloguing” the more relevant of the two courses. I completed a cataloguing and classification module in the MA Library and Information Studies programme at UCL in 1996-1997, but that was before the advent of Resource Description and Access (RDA). I also attended a one-day course on Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR) in July 2012, organised by the CIG and CILIP in London, but thereafter I have had no opportunity to update myself on RDA. I therefore wanted to fill this gap in my knowledge.

The course format is the same as that of “Using MarcEdit”. It lasts for four weeks and has reading material and an exercise each week. It offers links to relevant websites such as those of the Library of Congress, Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) and RDA Toolkit. Each week participants cover a basic theme of cataloguing (Week 1: MARC 21; Week 2: Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR) 2 and RDA; Week 3: authority records and FRBR; Week 4: subject headings and classification). Although the course is an introduction to cataloguing, as was the case with “Using MarcEdit”, most of the participants were North American practitioners already engaged in advanced cataloguing. As I mentioned above, I had completed a cataloguing and classification module at UCL, which consisted of in-depth tutorials and hands-on practice over several weeks. In addition, the above-mentioned CIG course on FRBR had provided me a good foundation of understanding RDA. Without this prior knowledge and training, I doubt I would have been able to follow the course material as the contents from external resources were inevitably detailed and voluminous.

Both “Using MarcEdit” and “Introduction to Cataloguing” are popular, established courses. The complete four-week material was already accessible on the website from the start of these courses. This allowed me to read the material and work on the exercises in advance to ensure that I would be able to meet the deadlines while fulfilling my commitments as a full-time employee. For “Introduction to Cataloguing”, I gained a comfortable “pass”, losing only a few marks. Even after the completion of the course, however, I do not feel I have gained enough training on cataloguing.

Cataloguing is not a skill that can be acquired solely by attending a course; it needs to be learned by practice over many years. A beginner must start somewhere, however, and “Introduction to Cataloguing” offers a good starting point. If your task is to import cataloguing records and amend them according to your institution’s house style, and you do not need to create a record from a scratch, attending this course may suffice. In contrast to “Using MarcEdit”, the course instructor of “Introduction to Cataloguing” did not make participation in the discussion forum compulsory (i.e. by awarding points, for example) and as a result the forum was less lively. This is understandable as most of the participants were full-time workers seeking to juggle work and their own learning. Unfortunately this meant that I could hear less of individuals’ thoughts and experiences.

4. LJA and further CPD

An LJA four-week course earns 1.5 Continuing Education Units (CEUs), but their CEUs are not accredited by the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET). On the LJA website, they cite the financial cost of applying for IACET accreditation as one of the reasons for this. LJA, however, observes the educational requirements for IACET accreditation to provide a degree of assurance to participants of the quality of their curriculum. They also recognise that those who enrol in their courses are interested in gaining knowledge and not purely CEUs. I have already received a librarianship qualification from UCL. When I look for CPD opportunities, LJA is an ideal provider whose courses are robust enough to challenge and improve my knowledge and skills. A four-week course requires 15 hours of work in total (or 3.75 hours per week), which should be manageable for full-time workers. Their offering, which is affordable but not inexpensive, provides good value for money with the quality of training delivered to be taken into consideration. A particular benefit is that even after the completion of courses, you can continue to access the course material and grades online.

The flexibility provided by online learning is ideal for those with many other commitments. LJA is based in Sacramento, California, and, as I have mentioned above, many participants are from the US, but anyone who has internet access can sign up for their courses. Some participants in my classes were from Australia and a few from the UK. It is fascinating to hear that some of the participants work in the “technical services” department, an unfamiliar term in the UK. At the end of April, I received an invitation email to LJA’s garden party that was to take place at their headquarters in Sacramento. I had to decline for obvious reasons, but it would have been a wonderful networking opportunity. Apart from such international aspects, online learning is time-effective and efficient, allowing participants to organise their study schedule around their working life.

LJA offers certificate programmes, which comprise six to eight courses, for example, “Certificate in XML and RDF-Based Systems” (six courses), “Certificate in Digital Curation” (six courses), and “Certificate in Cataloging and Technical Services” (eight courses). The last mentioned is a programme designed to help develop a set of skills in cataloguing and technical services. Learners can choose eight from a range of courses to gain a certificate in the programme. The attractive looking line-up includes “Introduction to Cataloging”, “Using MarcEdit”, “Library of Congress Classification”, “Dewey Decimal Classification”, “Authority Control”, “Controlled Vocabulary and Taxonomy Design”, “Metadata Design”, and “Understanding the BIBFRAME Model and Vocabulary”. As can be seen, the two courses I have completed form part of this programme. The courses in the certificate programmes can be also taken as standalone courses. I am planning to complete another six to acquire the certificate in “Cataloging and Technical Services” and develop my knowledge and skills in cataloguing still further. Beyond that, I may move on to another certificate programme as LJA offers limitless CPD opportunities.