BIC Bites

BIC Bites are a series of short, high level, papers on topics of interest to BIC Members.
If there is a topic you would like to see as a BIC Bite, please contact info@bic.org.uk

Introduction to UK Standard Library Categories (UKSLC)

The UKSLC scheme is designed for the public library sector to provide library-oriented category headings applicable across the full range of stock. It can be used alongside, or in preference to, more complex trade and library classification schemes, according to requirements.

Background

The UKSLC scheme grew out of the BIC E4Libraries initiative – a partnership between BIC, MLA, CILIP, NAG, library suppliers and library management system suppliers designed to streamline workflows and realise the potential for efficiency gains in the library supply chain. Initially, UKSLC was based on the BIC Standard Subject Categories scheme, the now obsolete UK industry standard. However, since the release of v1.2 in September 2019, UKSLC has been based on *Thema*, the subject category scheme for the global book trade, rather than BIC.

In 2025, a significant revision BIC Task & Finish Working Group saw the release of UKSLC v2.0 with particular emphasis on the expansion of 'Interest' values within the scheme – see details below.

Basics of UKSLC

UKSLC provides a concise set of values designed to express the key characteristics of library stock, where the detail and complexity of more extensive schemes, such as DDC, LCSH or indeed *Thema*, are not required. The scheme divides all material into three 'Types': Adult Non-Fiction, Adult Fiction and Children's/Teenage. Each Type has specific sets of values that reflect the particular features of each type of stock.

For Adult Non-Fiction, each title is assigned a Subject and may also have Audience and Interest codes. Adult Fiction has a Genre code, and may also be assigned Audience, Treatment and Interest codes. Children's Early Years items are given a single Book Type value and may also have Interest codes. Other Children's or Teenage materials are classed by Age and Subject (or Genre for fiction), and may also have Audience, Treatment and Interest codes as applicable.

For full details see the UKSLC v2.0 User Guidelines here:
https://bic.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/BIC-UKSLC-User-Guidelines-v2_0.docx

Key features of v2.0

The latest revision was undertaken in response to users' requests for an expansion of Interest values within the scheme, particularly in relation to ethnic groups. This led to the introduction of a new Interest section which allows for the allocation of a single set of Interest values to material across all three 'Types'. This single Interest section replaces the Interest values previously held in within each Type and greatly expands the range and detail of Interest values.

Other changes in v2.0 are:
- The re-instatement of previously deprecated codes for Fantasy Romance in both adult and child/teen fiction
- The removal of all other previously deprecated codes
- The removal of Broad Subject Category Codes in Adult Non-Fiction (a little-used alternative simplified list).

A list of all v2.0 codes and headings (including lists of removed codes for reference) can be found here:
https://bic.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/BIC-UKSLC-v2.0-Final-August-2025.xlsx

The removal of the old Interest values, along with other previously deprecated codes, breaks 'backwards compatibility' (whereby any valid code in a previous version remains valid in the new version); hence the numbering of the new release as v2.0, rather than v1.3. However, the revision maintains and increases compatibility with *Thema* – the new Interest values act very much like *Thema* qualifiers which can be assigned alongside all *Thema* subject categories.

It is not expected that all records classified with now-removed codes under previous versions will be comprehensively re-classified by users or data providers. Rather, v2.0 codes are likely to be introduced alongside values from previous versions; it is thus important to indicate the version number of UKSLC values. Data providers may also like to include the text headings as well as the codes, for clarity and ease of use (although as the meaning of codes is unambiguous, and no previous code is re-used with a different meaning, this is not strictly necessary).

Why use UKSLC ?
Adopting UKSLCs offers many benefits. They can be used to facilitate the evidence-based assessment and benchmarking of stock supply, demand and performance. They support standardised servicing and supply specification, reducing the complexity and cost of processing and selection. On the library shelf, they provide the basis for a logical and user-friendly display of stock, scaleable for different sizes and type of library. Most significantly, they underpin improvements in access to library stock, facilitating on-line browsing by subject and genre using the 'search, discover, refine' methodology familiar from on-line retailers and supporting personalised reader recommendations, regional and national catalogue initiatives, and links to retail sites.

UKSLC values may be applied locally by libraries or consortia or included in data feeds from bibliographic aggregators or library suppliers. They may be assigned manually or generated through a mapping based on *Thema* codes and other pertinent data elements.

Expressing UKSLC in ONIX and in MARC
UKSLC is a recognised subject scheme in ONIX, indicated by Subject scheme identifier code 92 in List 27. No distinction is made between Adult Fiction, Adult Non-Fiction and Child/Teen sections, but this is not an issue, as all UKSLC codes are now unique. The basic expression in ONIX3 for an adult non-fiction title on media studies of LGBTQ+ interest would thus be as follows (note that there is a separate iteration for each value):

```
<Subject>
  <SubjectSchemeIdentifier>92</SubjectSchemeIdentifier>
  <SubjectSchemeVersion>2.0</SubjectSchemeVersion >
  <SubjectCode>MED</SubjectCode>
</Subject>
<Subject>
  <SubjectSchemeIdentifier>92</SubjectSchemeIdentifier>
  <SubjectSchemeVersion>2.0</SubjectSchemeVersion >
  <SubjectCode>4VA</SubjectCode>
</Subject>
```

UKSLC, as might be expected for a library standard, is also recognised in MARC21. The codes are included in the 072 subject category code field, and the associated headings may also be provided in the 650 subject access fields. The entire tag is repeated for multiple iterations. For example:

```
072  7$aF9$2ukslc              650  7$Fiction 9+.$2ukslc
072  7$aYFM$2ukslc             650  7$aFantasy and Magic.$2ukslc
```

Links and documentation
All of the documents referenced above, plus further background reading, can be found in the Resource Centre of the BIC website: UK Standard Library Categories - Book Industry Communication.

For details of *Thema*: https://www.editeur.org/151/*Thema*