Archives and Records Association
Data Standards Group

A Guide to Archival and Related Standards
Standards applicable to archives; for the digital delivery of repository guides, finding-aids, and images of material from collections.

Title
UKAT (UK Archival Thesaurus)

Name of Standards Developing Organisation
UKAT was developed jointly by the National Archives (TNA) and the University of London Computing Centre (ULCC).

Current version
UKAT: UK Archival Thesaurus¹

Abstract
UKAT is a subject thesaurus for the archive sector in the United Kingdom. It is a controlled vocabulary for archives to use when indexing their collections and catalogues.

Description
UKAT is a subject thesaurus which was created to support indexing and searching of archives in the UK. Its key aim was to promote greater consistency in the subject indexes created by the individual archive repositories and projects which made up the strands of the emerging national archives network, thereby ensuring that users could carry out effective subject searches across the network.

UKAT was created between June 2003 and August 2004. It was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and managed jointly by TNA and ULCC. It used as its backbone the UNESCO Thesaurus, a high-level thesaurus with terminology covering education, science, culture, the social and human sciences, information and communication, politics, law and economics². UNESCO was chosen because it had already been adopted by several archives and archive projects. They had found, however, that UNESCO did not contain sufficiently detailed terminology for their needs, so they had supplemented it with terms either devised by themselves or taken from other schemes, such as Library of Congress Authorities or specialised thesauri such as the British Education Thesaurus. UKAT took all the extra terms that these archives and projects had added, and incorporated them into the UNESCO Thesaurus. It also paid particular attention to incorporating terms reflecting the histories and experiences of groups which were under-represented among archive users, in order to encourage their participation in archival heritage. UKAT is therefore an enhanced and extended version of UNESCO, designed specifically for the archive sector.

¹ Accessed 27 April 2011
² UNESCO Thesaurus <http://www2.ulcc.ac.uk/unesco/> (accessed 27 April 2011)
The thesaurus can be searched or browsed online. There are two options for browsing: alphabetical order or a hierarchy of terms organised under broad fields of knowledge. The UKAT data can also be downloaded from the website in various formats, including formats suitable for import into archival cataloguing software such as the collection management system for archives, libraries and museums, Axiell CALM.

Next month
Next month we will look in more detail at the UNESCO Thesaurus, which forms the backbone of UKAT

Victoria Peters
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