

Report on [Cataloguing with Confidence](#) cpd25 Training Event, 12 May 2026

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Attended as the recipient of a [M25 Consortium Staff Development Award](#).

As a Level 3 Library, Information and Archives Services apprentice, I'm still very much finding my feet when it comes to cataloguing. It's something I've been exposed to in bits (helping with records, hearing colleagues talk about MARC fields) but I've never had the chance to properly step back and understand how it all fits together. So, when I attended this training day at the British Library, it felt like a great opportunity to connect the dots.

The day began with a session on cataloguing theory and history, which helped ground everything that came after. Before this, standards like AACR2 or RDA felt a bit abstract, like something "behind the scenes" that I didn't fully need to understand. But hearing cataloguing described as the process of creating metadata - and, more importantly, making resources findable and usable - shifted my perspective.

One idea that really stayed with me was the simple question - what happens if we buy a book and no one can find it? It sounds obvious, but it made me realise just how central good cataloguing is to making sure the work we do reaches people.

The morning then moved into an overview of MARC fields, which I'd always found quite intimidating. Seeing a full MARC record for the first time can feel overwhelming but the way it was broken down made it much more approachable. Understanding that each field (like 100 for author or 245 for title) has a specific purpose - and that things like indicators and subfields follow clear patterns - made it start to feel more logical (rather than overly complex).

I also hadn't realised how much of cataloguing is guided by other standards rather than just MARC itself. Things like punctuation coming from ISBD, or authorised names being checked against authority records, showed me that cataloguing isn't done in isolation. It's part of a much bigger system that relies on consistency and shared (local, national and international) practice.

After lunch, we moved into the practical cataloguing sessions, which were probably my favourite part of the day. There's something very different about actually working with a physical book and trying to create a record from scratch. It forced me to slow down and really think about where information comes from - the title page, the copyright page, even the physical description of the item.

At first it felt a bit daunting having to apply everything we'd just learned, but it did become clearer with practice. I also appreciated that we were encouraged to work through it collaboratively and ask questions. It made the whole experience feel much more supportive, especially as someone still quite new to this area.

One part of the day that I found particularly interesting was the discussion around subject headings and critical cataloguing. I hadn't really considered before how much impact these decisions can have. Subject headings aren't just neutral labels but they shape how users find and understand resources and reflect the "voice" of the library. It made me think more carefully about the responsibility that comes with cataloguing. It's not just about following rules correctly, but also about recognising where those rules come from and how they might evolve. As someone early in my career, it felt encouraging to hear that cataloguing is still changing, especially with ongoing conversations around inclusive and representative metadata.

Another thing I really valued was being in a room with people from different roles and institutions. Looking at the delegate list beforehand, I realised how varied everyone's experience was - from assistants and trainees to librarians and specialists. It made the discussions richer, as people brought different perspectives and challenges from their own organisations.

Throughout the day, I found myself thinking about how this links back to my own work at the University of West London's Paul Hamlyn Library. While I'm not doing full cataloguing independently yet, understanding the principles behind it gives me much more confidence in the tasks I do support. Even something as simple as checking a record or helping a student find a resource feels different when I have a better sense of how that data has been created.

It's also made me more interested in the cataloguing side of librarianship as a whole. Before it felt quite technical and slightly out of reach, but now it feels like something I could genuinely develop further. As someone at the start of their career, that feels like a really important takeaway.

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