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## **Describing records, people, organizations and functions: The Empowering the User**

### **Project's flexible archival catalogue**

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As archivists, we look to represent an archive's provenance and preserve its original order when using fonds-based arrangement and description. However, this can only represent one understanding of the creation and use of the archive. In applying a fonds-based approach we always make compromises: records are arranged to fit an administrative structure in place for some, but not all, of an organization's history, or a functional analysis provides an adequate structure, but one which, nevertheless, fails to reflect all the uses of a record across its lifecycle. For complex organizations the traditional, mono-hierarchical structure in which records are arranged and described simply cannot represent the multiple contexts and complex relationships in which records are created and used.

University of Glasgow Archive Services manages two significant collections: the University Archive and the Scottish Business Archive. Both collections include large archives which were created and maintained by complex organizations. In managing these archives we have faced challenges in implementing traditional fonds-based arrangement and description. As archival theory developed to recognize the multiple contexts of the records continuum, we became aware of the failure of fonds-based descriptive practice to represent these multiple contexts.

To address this problem, we have investigated developing an approach to cataloguing that provides what we think is a sounder and more objective basis for archival description than conventional hierarchical, fonds-based arrangement. We wanted to find a way of describing

records in which there is no single structure into which the records must be forced. Our investigation has resulted in a methodology in which there are separate descriptions of the records and of the people, organizations, functions and activities associated with their creation and use. Identifying and describing the relationships between these records, people, organizations, functions and activities prompts consideration of the ways in which the records interacted, why they were created and how they were used. Arguably this requires a closer analysis of the records and a deeper understanding of their creation and use than is required for traditional arrangement and description. This analysis and the resulting description of these components results in a more flexible approach to presenting the records and their context, which allows users the freedom to define for themselves how they want to approach understanding them.

This case study examines efforts at the University of Glasgow to explore new ways of representing these multiple contexts in our *Empowering the User (EtU)* project.<sup>1</sup> It looks at the development of the cataloguing methodology, the identification of relevant international standards, the selection and modification of standards compliant document type definitions (DTDs) for the separate descriptive components (records, organizations and people, and functions and activities), and the development of an online interface which takes advantage of this new approach to describing both records and their context. The *EtU* project offers evidence there is considerable value in the exploration of different approaches to description, both in terms of the determining the primary level of description and in considering how and what we describe.

## **Planning**

In Archive Services, we first looked to explore a new approach to archival description through *Developing Archival Context Standards for Functions in the Higher Education Sector*

(DAC). DAC described the functions and activities of Scotland's Higher Education sector and incorporated these descriptions into the online catalogue for the collections, Gateway to the Archives of Scottish Higher Education (GASHE). Descriptions of functions and activities include listings of the records created and used in their performance and of the administrative units involved in carrying out these functions.<sup>2</sup>

DAC established that these additional descriptive components enhanced the traditional catalogue. However, the records themselves were still described within a static fonds-based arrangement which offered only one interpretation of each institution. A key recommendation of the project was further work to develop an approach to cataloguing which separates descriptions of the context in which the records were created and used from the descriptions of the records themselves in order to represent all the appropriate contexts in which the records were maintained. Having worked with higher education archives, we looked to the Scottish Business Archive for a suitable test-bed for our further development work. The House of Fraser Archive offered exceptional potential.

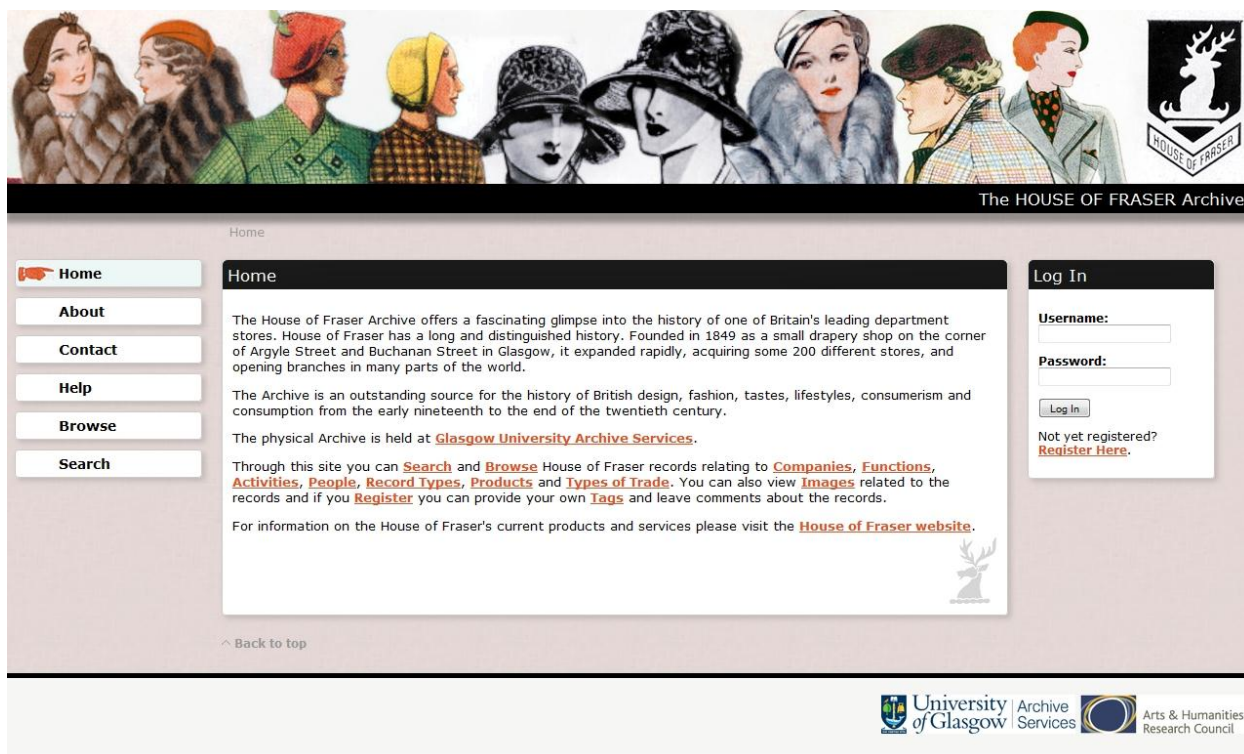
House of Fraser is one of Britain's largest department store retailers. It was founded in 1849 when Arthur & Fraser opened as a retail drapery on Glasgow's up-and-coming Argyle Street. Over the course of the twentieth century a period of expansion saw House of Fraser establish a presence in towns and cities the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. This expansion was powered by a run of acquisitions of other department stores including, in 1959, the prestigious Harrods group. Comprising 130 linear meters of over 10,000 items dating from the early nineteenth century, the Archive is a large collection. With the records of over 200 individual stores, many of which pre-date the foundation of House of Fraser itself, it is also a complex collection. This complexity has brought considerable challenges for the archivists who

have sought to arrange and catalogue it effectively. In the early 2000s, a re-cataloguing project adopted a functional approach to arrangement and description, but it proved difficult to accurately reflect the contexts in which the records were created and used.

As *DAC* progressed and our ideas about a new approach to descriptive practice developed, we also considered the delivery of any resultant catalogue online and the potential of information technology to enhance access. By the mid-2000s, a large number of retro-conversion projects of paper-based finding aids and guides had been completed, delivering online catalogues. However, these projects primarily exploited technology to get existing catalogues available and searchable in the online world. In effect they delivered simply keyword searchable paper catalogues, rather than harnessing technology to develop new ways of delivering descriptions of archives. We were interested in the potential of new technologies for enhancing user access, particularly in offering multiple ways of discovering the information held within them.

To take forward the recommendations of *DAC*, Archive Services submitted a bid to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) through the Resource Enhancement Scheme. *Empowering the User: the development of flexible archival catalogues* was designed to test the concept of catalogues which represent the multiple contexts and complex relationships of records and to deliver an online, flexible archive catalogue for the House of Fraser Archive. The bid was successful and from 2006 until 2009 the project team tested the application of a new approach to description on the Archive resulting in an online catalogue, launched in 2011 (see Figure One).<sup>3</sup>

Figure One: The House of Fraser online catalogue homepage



The foundations of the new cataloguing methodology we implemented in *EtU* were put in place through the recommendations of *DAC*.<sup>4</sup> *DAC*'s main recommendation was to reject the mono-hierarchical representation of the context of an archive as traditionally implemented through fonds-based arrangement and description. In its place would be a method of description which separated descriptions of the contexts of the archive from descriptions of the content of the archive.

Separating records from their context removed the familiar pattern of description from fonds through to item, reflecting administrative structure or functional purpose. We had, therefore, to decide at what level to arrange and describe records. Describing records at the level of the series (as used successfully particularly in Australia) looked to be a useful model.<sup>5</sup> The record series is arguably the most natural aggregation of records. Series are often concrete

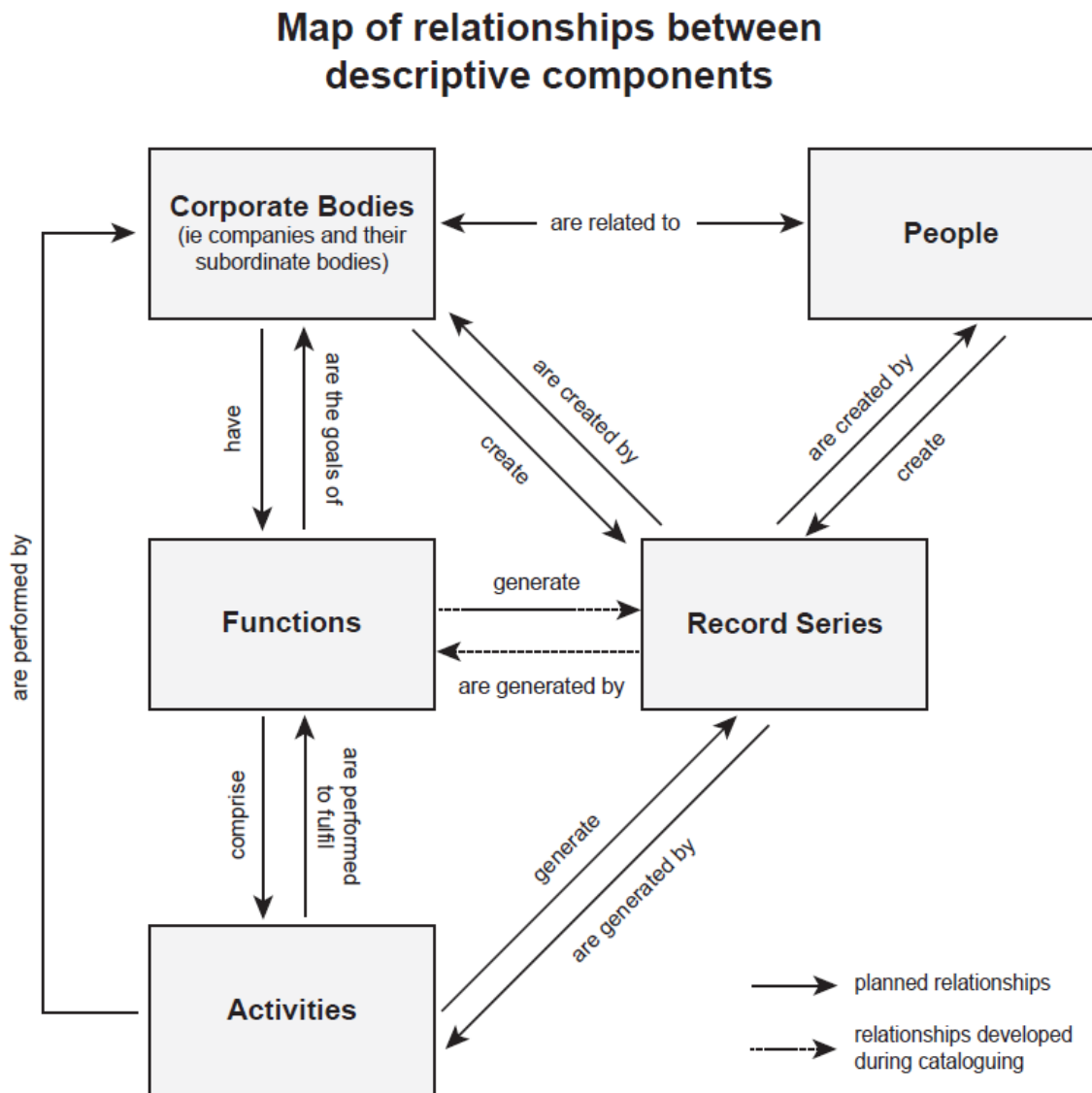
entities; they can be readily identified and pointed to and, most importantly, are what people and organizations actually produce in the course of their work. Record series would, therefore, be our highest level of description.

The contexts of the archive would be represented through authority records. These would act as the main structure of the catalogue and offer access routes to the records for users. Having chosen to place the authority record at the centre of our new cataloguing system, we had to define what these authority records would describe. Again, the foundations for the project came from our previous experience. Based on traditional practice, authority records for organizations creating the records would be included. We saw that this could be extended to include a description of every incarnation of an organization and each significant person involved in the creation and use of the records. In addition, building on the success of *DAC*, we also looked to test the value of including authority records for functions and activities as part of the contexts of the House of Fraser Archive.

At this stage, we had in place a plan with five different descriptive components: record series, people, organizations, functions and activities. The next stage was to map out the ways in which these descriptive components would interact in order to reflect the multiple contexts of the records. Indeed, we realized that the value of our cataloguing approach was found in the relationships between the descriptive components. In our methodology, an individual description by itself—whether of a record series, person or function—would be of limited value to users. However, when linked to related descriptions, the full value of the records and the contexts in which they were maintained could be made explicit. A system of rules governing the interaction between and within the descriptive components was developed. We spent time mapping out the possible relationships between the descriptive components. With its clear outline of descriptive

entities and their relationships, the map of entities for Archives Investigator, the New South Wales Government online catalogue was particularly helpful.<sup>6</sup> We developed a similar map for describing the House of Fraser Archive (see Figure Two).

Figure 2: Map of relationships between descriptive components for the House of Fraser Archive.





Our planning also considered the way in which our catalogue would be made available online. Our existing online catalogue was not capable of managing the multiple descriptive components and the links between them. Similarly, it could not offer the user the flexibility in discovery we wanted to promote. We looked to our colleagues in the University's Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (HATII) to develop a system which would deliver a flexible presentation of the catalogue.

### **Implementation**

An AHRC grant of £200,000 funded the three year *EtU* applied research project. The majority of the funding was allocated to staff costs: a full time research archivist for three years, with additional part-time staffing for the development of a retail sector business function model and project management. £10,000 was allocated to the development of the online catalogue. The appropriate expertise for the project was found within Archive Services' staff, minimizing training requirements. Victoria Peters, research archivist on *DAC* held the same position on *EtU*. Lesley Richmond, University Archivist, was Principal Investigator. Rachel Hosker, Assistant Archivist (Business Collections) was responsible for the development of the retail sector function model. Victoria was responsible for the development of the cataloguing methodology, the creation of standards compliant templates for the descriptive components, and for the cataloguing of the House of Fraser Archive to test the methodology and its implementation. She also worked closely with HATII's consultant on the delivery of the online catalogue.

Whilst moving away from fonds-based description, we did not wish to move away from international standards for description. So, record series descriptions were created in line with ISAD (G), descriptions of people and organizations complied with ISAAR (CPF) and ISDF was used for function and activity descriptions.<sup>7</sup>

With the appropriate content standards identified, we needed to determine how to structure our descriptions. Knowing that we would be delivering our descriptions as xml data, standards compliant document type definitions (DTDs) were used for each descriptive component. Our choice for the record series descriptions was easy: EAD provides a widely-adopted, stable, and ISAD (G) compliant DTD. Similarly, although EAC was still only in a beta version, since it was ISAAR (CPF) compliant and developed by well-recognized archivists, it was quickly adopted as our DTD for the organization and people descriptive components.

For our remaining two types of authority records, functions and activities, there was not yet an associated xml encoding standard we could adopt. Using EAC as a model, an Encoded Archival Function (EAF) DTD was developed. EAC was suitable due to the close links between ISAAR (CPF) and ISDF. EAF simply borrows relevant elements of EAC and includes the four ISDF elements not found in ISAAR (CPF). These elements are: classification (ISDF : 5.1.5), description (ISDF : 5.2.2), legislation (ISDF : 5.2.4) and type (ISDF : 5.3.2).

With these decisions, the structure for the descriptions of records, companies, people, functions, and activities were achieved through the use of the standard xml DTDs (and the prototype EAF). However, because we were planning to describe archival materials in a new way, these DTDs did not include all the elements of description we required to represent the relationships between the records and their contexts. To overcome this, we developed project rules for the use of the elements available in each DTD to allow the relationships outlined in our map of descriptive components to be represented.

Specifically, for linking record series to the companies which created and used them the “Name of Creator” (ISAD (G) : 3.2.1) and <origination> (EAD) element looked to be perfectly suited. However, to comply with ISAD (G), this element should only be used to describe the

creator of the series; the standard does not permit this element to be used for companies which contribute to or use records, but which do not create them. This type of relationship is not recognized within ISAD (G) or EAD. Therefore, we had to adopt a project rule which expanded the definition of this descriptive element to encompass all companies with an involvement in creating and using a particular record series. This was most commonly seen where one company succeeded another, and retained the same series of records.

We also needed to link descriptions of record series to descriptions of the functions or activities which created the records. However, there is no element representing this type of relationship within ISAD (G) or EAD. Rather than creating a new element of description, we adapted the EAD element <controlaccess>. This, however, is intended for access points or index terms for a record, not as a link to a related descriptive component. This raised a particular problem as we were also using <controlaccess> in line with the rules of EAD in the descriptions of series of product catalogues held for one department store. An index of the products in these catalogues (e.g. gloves, hats, shoes) was prepared, with these index terms appearing as the <controlaccess> element. Users would, therefore, see different kinds of data in the same element of description. Whilst recognizing that this was not a particularly satisfactory compromise, it was the only element which could be adapted to encompass this relationship, so we chose to craft our local rules to use it for both purposes. It would have been possible for us to create a new element to link record series descriptions to the descriptions of functions and activities, however, we wanted to ensure our descriptions were as compatible as possible with the accepted international standards.

The final relationship that a record series can have is with other record series. The “Related Units of Description” (ISAD (G) : 3.5.3) and <related material> (EAD) element was

suitable for linking between descriptions. We also used the “Administrative History” (ISAD (G) : 3.2.2) and <bioghist> (EAD) element as necessary to provide an expanded narrative description of the relationship between two or more series of records. Whilst generally used at fonds or sub-fonds level to describe the history of the records creator, we found this element of value at series level to record information concerning the administration of the record series being described. This was particularly the case where a records series was used in conjunction with another. For example, the description of a series of funeral journals and general ledgers maintained by the staff of Wylie & Lochhead Ltd uses the administrative history element to describe the way in which staff used the records, in this case for the management of accounts which had not been paid.<sup>8</sup> It also includes details of the way in which the funeral journal was used in conjunction with other records held in the Archive, such as funeral order books and funeral insolvent ledgers.

However, describing the relationships between record series in these two ways (through two different elements) brought a duplication of information. In order to minimize this, we recorded a full account of the relationship within the “Administrative History” (ISAD (G) : 3.5.3) and <bioghist> (EAD) element and a briefer explanation within the “Related Units of Description” (ISAD (G) : 3.2.3) and <related material> (EAD) element.

ISAAR (CPF) and EAC do include elements allowing links to other descriptive components. So we were able to link company descriptions to the relevant record series through the “Relating Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families to Archival Materials and Other Resources” (ISAAR (CPF) : chapter 6) and <resourcerel> (EAC) element. Similarly, the relationships between companies and people were easily made through the “Relationships” (ISAAR (CPF) : 5.3) and <eacrel> (EAC) element. However, as discussed above, there is no element which allowed a link to descriptions of functions or activities. Rather ISAAR (CPF)

includes its own elements to describe these functions. At the start of the project, we made the decision to describe the relationships between companies and their functions through a link to the authority record for these functions. We used the “Relating Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families to Archival Materials and Other Resources” (ISAAR (CPF) : chapter 6) and <funactrel> (EAC) element to describe and make these links.

However, as the cataloguing of the Archive progressed, we made a slight change to our practice. This change was prompted when we started describing individual administrative units within a company. The description of the Army & Navy Stores Ltd (a company within the House of Fraser group) is linked to authority records for its Group Management Committee and its Board of Directors. In line with our plans for organization authority descriptions, details of these units’ functions should only have been represented as links to the relevant function authority descriptions. However, at the level of the administrative unit within a company, the potential value of an overview of the functions of the unit was recognized. We felt that we could use the “Functions, Occupations and Activities” (ISAAR (CPF) : 5.2.5) and <funactdesc> (EAC) element to provide information on the particular role of the unit in carrying out the relevant function(s) in a way that would be of benefit to users. So, descriptions of administrative units within a company have both links to the relevant function descriptions and an overview of the role of the unit in carrying out these functions.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, descriptions of the functions and activities were created in accordance with ISDF using the EAF prototype. ISDF and EAF provided suitable elements of description for linking functions and activities to the relevant descriptions. Links to companies were recorded through the “Relating Functions to Corporate Bodies, Archival Materials and Resources” (ISDF : Chapter 6) and <eacrel> (EAF) element. Links to other functions and activities used the

“Relationships” (ISDF : 5.3) and <funactrel> (EAF) element. Lastly, activities were linked to record series through the “Relating Functions to Corporate Bodies, Archival Materials and Resources” (ISDF : Chapter 6) and <resourcerel> (EAF) element.

Thus, through thinking creatively we were able to adapt existing content and encoding standards to meet the way we wanted to catalogue the House of Fraser Archive. We used the xml editor oXygen for both the development of the DTDs and the encoding of each descriptive component (descriptions of series, people, organizations, functions, and activities). As the cataloguing itself progressed, some changes were made to the rules set out at the start of the project, but the DTDs for the descriptions themselves proved robust.

Our first step in developing authority records for the relevant functions for the House of Fraser Archive was to identify the functions and activities of the retail sector as a whole. In *DAC*, the function and activity descriptions for Scottish Higher Education had been based on the JISC Higher Education Business Classification Scheme.<sup>10</sup> As no such generic model of the retail sector was available, we undertook work to develop our own.

The high level classification set out in various business and industrial classification schemes allowed us to define the industry and identify the broad terms (such as governance, merchandising, purchasing and procurement, and supply chain management) which sat at the top of our model.<sup>11</sup> A literature review of business administration also helped to define broad terms, but lacked the necessary detail which we felt was required to offer the added value to our users. On reassessing the JISC business classification we found that many of the functions included are not unique to the higher education sector and applied equally well to the business world. This, alongside a review of the House of Fraser’s website, literature and the Archive itself, helped us to add the detail required for a workable model for the cataloguing project. To ensure wider

application across the retail and business sector, the draft model was reviewed by a business expert at the University before being finalized.<sup>12</sup>

In applying the retail sector function model, we planned to develop a single set of descriptions for the functions and activities of the House of Fraser and apply these across the Archive. Links would be made, as appropriate, to the relevant organizations, people and record series descriptions. We started by looking at the core parent company, the House of Fraser, to develop function descriptions. Our initial attempts were successful. The description of a function was applicable to each of the relevant House of Fraser organizations, dating from 1849 to the present day. However, when we looked to link this description to the other companies within the Archive (those not a part of the core parent company) it was not a true representation of the way in which this function was performed. This is primarily due to the nature of the House of Fraser group. Whilst founded in 1849, the majority of the 200 individual department stores represented in the Archive were acquired as active businesses in the twentieth century. Whilst all the department stores carried out the same functions, they did not all perform them in the same way. We were, then, unable to use a description of a function based on the way in which the core House of Fraser parent company performed a function to accurately describe the performance of the same function by one of its subsidiaries. We realized that we would have to develop function descriptions for each individual department store.

This realization brought challenges for the project. Primarily, this was one of resources. Creating descriptions of the functions and activities of a business is time consuming. There was not scope within the project timescale to produce these descriptions for every individual company represented in the House of Fraser Archive. Our compromise was to concentrate on areas where description of functions and activities would be of most value to users. The Archive

includes, for example, a large number of accounting records which can be difficult for users (and archivists) to understand. We prioritized, therefore, developing function and activity descriptions explaining financial management and financial accounting to assist users in understanding the records. These descriptions were developed for ten organizations across the Archive.

The final part of the project was to develop the online catalogue. For the technical development, the University of Glasgow's Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute provided consultancy services to build a custom-designed system. In addition to the technical development of the site, the project team also considered issues surrounding the presentation of the descriptive components and the discovery options for users.

The online catalogue was planned as a series of linked descriptions. Each authority or record series description would be displayed as its own webpage, linking out to the related descriptions. We started to consider their presentation as our cataloguing work produced descriptions with significant numbers of links. This was particularly evident as descriptions of the larger companies represented in the Houser of Fraser Archive were developed. These companies have lots of related record series, companies, and people. Having all of these links displayed creates very long webpages. This drove us to consider the presentation of the record series information as a priority.

For example, our initial plan was that there would be no particular order to the listing of related record series. They would be added simply in the order they were catalogued. However, as cataloguing progressed we became concerned that the lack of any order would be unhelpful to users. Our first attempt at imposing an order was to list the records series chronologically. This worked well for companies with a small number of related record series, as the display could be quickly scanned. However, it proved less useful for those companies with larger numbers of



related record series. We felt further organization in the display of the records was necessary to assist the user. We were, however, aware of the risk that we would be replacing the rigid, mono-hierarchical structure of a fonds-based description with another rigid structure. Our compromise was to establish a set of nine, very broad, function based groups into which we arranged the record series for display within the company description. The groupings are: corporate records, legal records, financial records, operational records, merchandising records, marketing records, public relations records, staff records and property records.

As noted, an aim of *EtU* was to develop a flexible catalogue, one which would be capable of being explored in ways which suit each user's own preferences. We had, therefore, to ensure multiple discovery options within the online catalogue. This meant having more than a simple free text search. We saw the key to our flexible catalogue in building on opportunities created by the Archive's different descriptive components. We wanted to develop browsable lists both to provide an overview of the collection and offer multiple access points. To ensure that these lists were of most value to users, we based the topics on enquiries received by the Service. Many of the lists suggested (company names, person names, places) could be generated from the five descriptive components. However, users also requested access to records by product, business type and record type and automatically generating these lists relied on adding new index terms to descriptions.

These additional topics for browsable lists, based on patterns of user requests, were in contrast to our plans for the interface. Drawing on the findings of *DAC*, we had planned to avoid the use of subject indexes. *DAC* had discovered that users do not understand the principles that sit behind the development of subject indexes and are confused by them. However, we also recognized the need for the use of standard terms to guide users to records of potential interest.

Therefore, we decided to add these three specific subject indexes for business, record, and product types. Each index is concerned with a narrow, well defined subject area, and deals with a fairly concrete concept. This made us more confident that these specific indexes would offer less room for confusion over their scope and coverage than a single, general subject index.

Whilst limiting our own indexing to these narrow areas, we made the decision to embrace the opportunities offered by Web 2.0 technologies to allow users to develop indexes of their own design. On many social networks user defined indexes, created by user-created tags, work well. Therefore, our online catalogue for the House of Fraser Archive offers users the option to log-in and add tags to the descriptions to sit alongside the index terms we have provided. The catalogue is also designed to allow users to add information to the descriptions by commenting. We hope that users will add further detail on the information held in particular records, highlight related resources, comment on the value or interpretation of particular record series, and add further detail about the companies and individuals described.

## **Results**

We believe *EtU* produced results which have significant potential to inform cataloguing practice within the archives sector. For our archivist colleagues, the project developed a robust, scalable approach to cataloguing, capable of describing the multiple contexts of an archive. All the relevant record series, companies, people, functions, and activities for the House of Fraser could be described using this methodology. Furthermore, the approach allows for the equal presentation of each context. One is not favored over another. Rather the user is given information about all the contexts in which the record was created and used.

A significant advantage of the approach is its scalability. The descriptive components themselves are not fixed; additional elements of descriptions can be added in accordance with the

relevant descriptive standards as required. There is no limit to the number of descriptions that can be included. Should accruals be received for the House of Fraser Archive, we will be able to add them to the catalogue without the need for a restructuring or rearrangement of the descriptions. Similarly, should we wish to add further descriptions about the Archive as it currently stands, for example, by adding additional descriptions of a company's functions, we will be able to do so.

We recognize, of course, that there are some issues with the cataloguing methodology. For example, abandoning a fonds-level arrangement raises issues about recording information about the collection as a whole. Details such as the archival history of a collection, the immediate source of acquisition, and its appraisal are often best recorded at fonds level as they apply across the collection. With no fonds level description, the question arises as to where to record these important elements of archival description. One solution would be to include these details in each of the record series descriptions. However, whilst in line with the principles of ISAD (G), this would lead to considerable levels of repetition across the catalogue as a whole. Within the context of *EtU*, the catalogue for the Archive is delivered on its own website. This offers a potential solution, as it is possible to provide such information on the website, separate from the descriptions themselves. However, it remains unclear how this information could be recorded within a discovery system which provided access to the descriptions of many collections. We recognize that further research is required to identify other solutions to this problem. Investigation of a hybrid fonds-series system, where a fonds-level description would be added to the mix of descriptive components, is of particular interest.

The user perspective on the new approach to cataloguing can be found in the results of the user testing carried out as part of *EtU* prior to the formal launch of the site, and in the use of

the House of Fraser catalogue since its official launch in December 2011. Unfortunately, due to delays in the development of the online catalogue, only one round of user testing was completed. This was targeted at academics with a research interest in the Archive. The test was a combination of initial questionnaire, controlled tests, free time to explore and a semi-structured interview. Five academics participated in the tests.

A significant issue relating to the presentation of search options was quickly identified among this group. Users did not understand the difference between the free text search and the browsable lists. Their co-location on a single webpage led some users to try to combine the free text search with a term from one of the lists. In addition, all users concentrated on the free text search option, with the browsable lists little used. Based on these results, the online catalogue launched in 2011 has completely separate search and browse options.

In the both the controlled tests and the free time to explore all five users chose very different routes through the catalogue. Users voiced their thoughts as they worked through these activities, allowing us to understand that each was using their own tried and tested search approaches. For us, this meant success: we had developed a flexible catalogue that allowed people to use their own strategies easily. Presented with links to related descriptions of companies, people and records, the majority of users followed these through. The users were able to access the information they required, working through the multiple contexts to discover the required descriptions. The testing highlighted that further guidance is required to enable users to fully exploit descriptions of functions and activities. Whilst they were noticed by some users, there was some uncertainty as to what they were.

While we made changes to the interface prior to launch as a result of this user testing, the current website has had no formal user testing. We can, however, look at users' interaction with

the site to have some understanding of their experience. Around 200 people have registered on the site since its launch. Follow up enquiries to Archive Services highlight that some users have the expectation that registering with the site will provide access to more content. We have disappointed users who are expecting digitized images of the Archive. Other users have added comments to the site, the majority sharing memories of shopping at some of the stores, or details of their ancestors who worked for the group. Others simply post their enquiries. Very few users, however, add tags to our catalogue or add further detail to the descriptions of records after they have actually used them in our searchroom. We were aware when we included tagging and commenting functionality in the site that they will only have value when a critical mass of users contributes. Gaining such a number of users will require wider promotion of the site and further guidance on what we would like users to contribute.

### **Lessons learned**

In our assessment, *EtU* was a successful project, generating positive results with the development of a new method for cataloguing. However, our experience has taught us some valuable lessons that could benefit others who want to explore new approaches to cataloguing.

In line with our standard cataloguing practice, we used an xml editor to create the catalogue data. Over the course of the project, templates for each type of description were developed, however each cataloguer still had to ensure that the descriptive data was appropriately encoded to ensure its accurate display on the online catalogue. As cataloguing work got underway we realized that this was not only time consuming, but also had a high potential for errors. This was particularly apparent when a large number of links to related descriptions were being encoded. Errors in the encoding for these links results in broken links on the online catalogue. As we were successfully using an xml editor to create catalogue data for

our other collections, we had not anticipated these issues and so had not investigated any other cataloguing systems in our project planning. Future projects implementing a cataloguing methodology of separate, but linked, descriptive components should include the investigation of automated systems to generate and maintain descriptions and the links between them.

Further testing of the value of function and activity authority records is also required. User testing and staff experience from *EtU* has demonstrated that these descriptions can add significant value, at least in our business archives context. However, due to the issues discussed previously, our project ultimately tested only a small number of company-specific function and activity authority records. Our planning for the function and activity descriptions had not anticipated the level at which these descriptions needed to be created, or the resources needed to create them. Future projects should consider if a comprehensive set of these functional descriptions is of more value to the user than the targeted descriptions we delivered.

As this project demonstrates, there is room for more investigation of the implementation of descriptive standards. *EtU* developed project rules for the implementation of these standards, which included local modifications of the standards as well as our modified xml DTDs. To ensure that the standards themselves develop in a way which allows flexible application across multiple methods of cataloguing, more experimentation is required to assess what kinds of changes are needed. The results of this experimentation should feed into standards revision, allowing their development into robust, but flexible, tools for the profession.

Finally, embarking on this kind of project, designed to test innovative cataloguing practices, requires careful consideration of the required resources. The right mix of an appropriate collection, professional expertise and time is needed for development, testing and implementation. Unfortunately, this consideration is not an exact science. From our experience,

the time required to complete such a project cannot be underestimated. Our AHRC funding provided a three year timescale in which we were able to develop and test the delivery of our cataloguing system. However, we have had to continue some cataloguing work and the development of an online interface beyond the project.

## **Conclusion**

*EtU* was an exciting project for Archive Services. It proved that there is room for experimentation and development in something that is core to our professional life: archival description. Simply by widening the focus of our descriptive practice, we have developed an approach to cataloguing which represents the contexts and contents of an archive equally.

The challenge is to build on the outcomes and recommendations of *EtU* and continue the development of the House of Fraser Archive model. Without the dedicated project team to undertake this work, the service continues to use the traditional, fonds-based model of arrangement and description. Unfortunately, securing the resources to undertake such development work is difficult. The AHRC Resource Enhancement Scheme which funded both descriptive practice projects at Archive Services has ended. As a Service, and as a sector as a whole, we need to find ways of financing such important development work.

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<sup>1</sup> This study draws on Lesley Richmond and Victoria Peters' 'Empowering the User: the development of flexible archival catalogues Final Report', submitted to the Arts & Humanities Research Council in 2009. The report is accessible at <http://housefraserarchive.ac.uk/about/>, accessed August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Gateway to Archives of Scottish Higher Education is accessible at <http://www.gashe.ac.uk>, accessed June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Please note that development work is underway (Summer 2013) to ensure links within the catalogue are fully functional.

<sup>3</sup> The online catalogue is accessible at <http://www.housefraserarchive.ac.uk>, accessed June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> 'Developing Archival Context Standards for Functions in the Higher Education Sector Final Report', submitted to the Arts & Humanities Research Council in 2006 is accessible at [http://www.gashe.ac.uk/news/final\\_report.pdf](http://www.gashe.ac.uk/news/final_report.pdf), accessed August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

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<sup>5</sup> For examples of the record series system, see New South Wales State Records Archives Investigator, which is accessible at <http://investigator.records.nsw.gov.au/>, and National Archives of Australia Commonwealth Record Series System, which is accessible at <http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/SearchScreens/AdvSearchMain.aspx>, both accessed October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> The map of entities is accessible at <http://investigator.records.nsw.gov.au/Help.aspx?ID=1>, accessed June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on these ICA standards, see <http://www.ica.org/10206/standards/standards-list.html>.

<sup>8</sup> The catalogue description for the funeral journals and general ledgers is accessible at <http://www.housefraserarchive.ac.uk/series/?id=fras-252>, accessed June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> The catalogue description for the Board of Directors is available at <http://www.housefraserarchive.ac.uk/company/?id=c2605>, and for the Group Management Committee at <http://www.housefraserarchive.ac.uk/company/?id=c2596>, accessed June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> JISC Higher Education Business Classification Scheme, 3<sup>rd</sup> iteration, JISCinfoNet, accessed June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013 <http://www.bcs.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/he/>

<sup>11</sup> The project team consulted: United Nations Statistics Division, *International Standard Industrial Classification of all Economic Activities* (1989); Office for National Statistics, *UK Standard Industrial Classification of Economic Activities* (2003), United States Office of Management and Budget, *North American Industry Classification System* (2002).

<sup>12</sup> The Retail Function and Activity Model is Appendix A of Richmond and Peters' 'Empowering the User: the development of flexible archival catalogues Final Report', accessible at <http://housefraserarchive.ac.uk/about/>, accessed August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013.