

# ONIX International Steering Committee Minutes

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*Meeting held Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2014, 1:30–3:00 BST (UTC+1),  
Marlborough Room, Earls Court*

## Attendees:

Luc Audrain (Hachette Livre)	Karina Luke (BIC)
Graham Bell (EDItEUR)	Giulia Marangoni (AIE)
Maria Börman (Bokrondellen)	Diane Ouellet (BTLF)
Erik Jan Bulthuis (CB)	Jesús Peraita (DILVE)
Francis Cave (EDItEUR)	Christer Perslöv (Bokrondellen)
Piera Costantini (Informazione Editoriali)	Tine Philips (Meta4Books)
Laurent Dervieu (Electre) [Chair]	Simonetta Pillon (Informazione Editoriali)
Simon Edwards (BIC)	Frank Salliau (Meta4Books)
Fride Fosseng (Bokbasen)	Maiken Thorsen (maiken@bokbasen.no)
Bente Franck-Sætervoll (Bokbasen)	Aija Vahtola (National Library of Finland)
Noah Genner (BNC)	Len Vlahos (BISG)
Uwe Janssen (KNV)	Michael Vogelbacher (MVB)
Hetty Liewerink (CB)	Howard Willows (Nielsen)
Pierre Liboiron (BTLF)	Jon Windus (Nielsen)
Anna Lionetti (AIE)	Nick Woods (EDItEUR)

1. GB welcomed the attendees and handed conduct of the meeting to Laurent Dervieu, who was elected as Chair at the previous meeting of the Steering Committee.

LD greeted the attendees, and explained that he accepted the post of Chair since he greatly values the ONIX standard and the job that EDItEUR and the ISC do in continuing the development of the standard. He asked participants in the meeting to introduce themselves.

LD then asked whether there were any questions arising from the minutes of the last meeting, and there were none. The minutes were approved.

NB as is usual, the minutes of the last meeting have been available on the web for several months in draft form. Minutes are circulated to meeting attendees, and if no particular comments are received, they are posted in draft form. They can if necessary still be modified before approval at the following ISC meeting.

2. LD asked GB to explain the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference of the Committee.

GB explained that the ToRs guide the operation of the ISC, and in their current form are around five years old. During 2013, they were used as a basis for the Terms of Reference of the *Thema* International Steering Committee – but as the *Thema* committee developed, a few additions and clarifications were incorporated. The proposal is that these now be rolled back into the ONIX ISC ToRs (with one significant difference – *Thema* has a guaranteed seat for Nielsen, as a result of the IP transfer arrangement, and this is not appropriate for ONIX).

The changes provide for the attendance of at least one EDItEUR representative, and of observers, neither of which were specifically mentioned in the original document but which are

of course normal practice for the ONIX ISC. They cover the procedure in the unlikely event that the elected Chair cannot complete a term of office. And following suggestions to the *Thema* group about requirements for a quorum from JP, this term from the *Thema* ToRs is also proposed.

FC queried how many national groups there were. GB said there were about 20, but agreed that the requirement for a quorum made it important to be more rigorous. A list does exist, but is somewhat dependent on provision of contact details for each national group. FC agreed, and noted that a 50% requirement might become a problem as the number of national groups grows – particularly those groups that cannot regularly attend both Book Fairs. BFS noted that if the requirement for a quorum aims to avoid a small group making decisions without achieving consensus, then the absence of a minimum notice period becomes an issue. GB agreed that a minimum notice period and a lower percentage may be better in the future, while stressing the aim of the committee is always to achieve consensus rather than resorting to voting. FC added that all previous ONIX ISC meetings have easily exceeded the proposed 50% threshold, so it is not a particular problem at present, and LV noted that the ToRs can be modified again in future if this does become an issue. JP said that additional groups in Latin America or the Asia Pacific region may not be able to attend regularly, but that remote access might be useful. GB agreed, and said that the Japanese group had already asked about remote participation. GB suggested that we adopt the 50% requirement for now, while investigating remote participation options. This was agreed, and all changes in the new ToRs were accepted.

**ACTION:** GB to finalise and distribute revised ToRs

3. The Chair asked GB to present his activity report (the report was circulated prior to the meeting).

GB highlighted first the release of ONIX 3.0.2. The small number of enhancements in this update were agreed in principle by the ISC at its Frankfurt meeting, and were released at the end of January. Two or three of the additions have already been implemented by organisations keen to use the new functionality, and the *Implementation and Best Practice Guide* has been updated with guidance on some of the new features.

Issues 23 and 24 of the codelists have also been released during the period. Issue 23 included new codes to denote the aspect ratio of fixed-format e-books, and Issue 24 included new codelists for use with 3.0.2 as well as minor additions for listing the printer and binder alongside the publisher (required in some countries for legal deposit reasons).

Issue 24 also included a clarification of the approach to language. Historically, ONIX has used the ISO 639-2/B language list, which lists around 440 languages and 60 macrolanguages (language groups). This list is more comprehensive than the widely-used ISO 639-1 list, but there are clearly many books in languages not included in the list. This was highlighted by a request from the Norwegian ONIX group to add two rarely-used languages. On the other hand, managing the much larger ISO 639-3 list (~8000 languages) within the ONIX codelist structure is impractical – and even then, it is not comprehensive as there are two languages (distinct dialects of Occitan and Catalan) already in the ONIX lists that are not included. As of Issue 24, there is a clear policy for rare languages: the ONIX list will supplement 639-2 with selected codes from 639-3 upon request, and can also incorporate proprietary codes for other languages omitted from 639-3.

NB GB has checked the ISO lists and although they are different, they are managed to ensure there are no overlaps of codes

KL asked whether there was a minimum number of books for inclusion, and GB replied no, but the guide should be whether the books were actively traded commercially.

GB also highlighted the ongoing ONIX training programme, which continues to be very successful as a way of communicating the benefits of ONIX and encouraging strong interoperability of implementations.

It also provides a minor source of revenue for EDItEUR and for those EDItEUR members who resell the training commercially, and a distinct benefit for other members who arrange in-house or non-commercial courses.

Other ONIX projects – particularly the Acknowledgement message and the advanced schema (Schematron) – have taken a back seat, although LA confirmed the Acknowledgement message is being used in a limited pilot between Hachette Livre and the French National Library. GB aims to have version 1.0 of the Acknowledgement message ready for Frankfurt Book Fair 2014.

GB has been considering ‘what is important about ONIX’. Ultimately it is not the XML schema, but the underlying semantics that allow unambiguous communication between supply chain partners. While all current ONIX is based on XML syntax, the same data *could* be expressed using other syntaxes – for example JSON or RDF. The critical issue is that the semantics of the message remain unchanged, so that the different syntaxes can be interoperable. JSON and RDF remain a possibility for the future, but GB has presented a talk on this topic at BookNet Canada’s Tech Forum.

Finally, GB discussed the issue of the sunset of ONIX 2.1. Open-ended support for both 2.1 and 3.0 is impractical, and undesirable as it adds to everyone’s costs. Much better to encourage orderly migration, trying to minimise the period during which parallel support needs to be provided. Two and a half years ago, this ISC decided that a sunset date at the end of 2014 would mark a reduction in the level of support for ONIX 2.1. This was announced so that implementors had three years notice, so there was adequate time for planning, budgeting and development. Of course it should be noted that the result of sunset is a *reduction in support* – ONIX 2.1 will not ‘stop working’ – but sunset is an important pointer to the future development of the standard.

The sunset date is now only nine months away.

The sunset date has been somewhat successful in a ‘marketing’ sense, providing a clear target date for migrations, and many organisations around the world have already started to use ONIX 3.0. In some countries, the migration is all but complete. But many ONIX users in countries where ONIX is most established – in particular the US, UK and Germany – have not yet migrated, and will not be ready by the end of the year. GB stated that he believes an instantaneous or rapid reduction in support is inappropriate. Support could be tapered off, with some level of post-sunset ‘twilight’ support.

GB suggested that sunset should be marked by:

- removal of documentation to make it clear that all new implementations must be 3.0;
- removal of online validation tools;
- mailing list support, training *etc*, to emphasise only 3.0.

though affected documentation would probably still be available for download from an ‘archive’ location. However, GB suggested that updating of the codelists should continue (there are about 20 codelists unique to 2.1, though only a handful including lists 7, 10 and 78 are critical).

It’s clear that there is a balance between provision of limited twilight support which meets immediate needs for those not yet able to migrate, and the message it sends – a perceived reduction in the need to migrate. Twilight support might prolong any migration delays. But open ended twilight support is not an option, and any level of support has financial implications for every implementer, and for EDItEUR itself.

GB stressed that it’s up to the committee to guide what level of twilight support, if any, should be provided, and that a decision need not be taken today – but the position must be clear before the Frankfurt Book Fair.

The initial request for a level of twilight support had come from the US ONIX group, so GB asked LV to outline the US position.

LV noted that GB provided an excellent summary. US migration is slow, and neither US publishers nor US retailers are ready. The sunset date itself is still appropriate, but because the market has not moved, the US national group feels a continuation of support for new codelist entries for 2.1 is required. There is a risk that if such support is not provided, then publishers and retailers would add their own codes – fracturing the standard. To be clear, BISG itself would not support such a move, but the risk should be avoided if possible. BISG is willing to support EDItEUR’s costs to provide a level of codelist support for a fixed period.

GB asked for views from other national groups. Many countries have put in a lot of effort to migrate their supply chain, with varying degrees of success – but the inertia of very large numbers of implementers in North America and some other markets where 2.1 was deployed earliest is the issue.

UJ said that ongoing German work on best practices for 3.0 showed it was better to stick to the original position on sunsetting. The German trade has mostly not migrated yet but there is a significant concentration of work going on. Any need for codelist updates is likely to come from the e-books sector, where 3.0 has very clear advantages anyway. Any legal requirements should be covered if they arise. The sunset date should not be changed, and UJ would consult the wider German group on the issue of limited twilight support for updated codelists. GB noted that any legal issues that arise would be covered for the foreseeable future.

BFS said the ‘marketing’ of a sunset date had clearly been effective. Any change of date would be counter-productive. GB noted that the sunset date has been effective in some countries, and less effective in others. A change to the sunset date is not in question – the issue is the whether any level of twilight support (specifically updates to 2.1-only codelists) should be provided ‘after sunset’. BFS viewed this as a minor semantic difference – in effect it was changing the date and diluting the migration message. LV noted that the largest three US publishers would definitely not be ready by the end of 2014, and retailers would want the reassurance of some limited twilight support. He disagreed that this was simply a disguised delay to the sunset. GB supported LV’s view here, noting that twilight support could not be open-ended, and it was important to separate out the ‘marketing message’ from real-world needs of some of the standard’s earliest implementers. The marketing message is unshakeable, and no-one is suggesting it should be changed. BFS asked whether GB would suggest making changes to 2.1 to improve it for e-books?

GB: No, not to the structure of 2.1. HW pointed out there had been no changes to the structure since 2006, only additions to codelists, and the proposed change was very subtle. He said we should not dilute the message. KL agreed with HW, that the suggestion [of twilight support] meant a change of message. BFS said that whatever we decide, it should not be announced too early, and GB said that nothing would be announced until the decision was clear (and in any case, not today).

GB pointed out that in countries where ONIX 2.1 remains entrenched – most specifically US, UK and Germany – many IT vendors selling bibliographic or product management applications were ready (or close to ready) with 3.0, but their customers had not yet adopted the latest versions of these applications. This was certainly true in the UK, less so in Germany and the US. In the US in particular, lack of demand from big recipients of ONIX was also a problem.

LA noted that in France, some 3.0 is being used, and good practice guides for 3.0 are being made available. But publishers and distributors are each waiting for the other to commit to 3.0, and there is still a need to ‘push’ 3.0, so the sunset should not be ‘softened’.

LV said that after 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2015, there will be a period of time when every publisher will be required to produce both 2.1 and 3.0 by their recipients, and from the US national group’s point of view, he did not understand why other countries would *not* want updates to 2.1 codelists.

[To be clear, the sunset date was intended to mark the *end* of this period of parallel support, but in practice, in some countries, it will clearly not do so.]

JP agreed with LV that the ending of support should be gradual. LA noted that it *has been* gradual, over a three year period. FC voiced his concern that the marketing message of sunset must not be modified, and we must be clear and careful about describing any twilight support (should it be agreed on). We could look at any codes added after sunset being market-specific, for example – there are precedents for this. KL asked how long twilight support could be, as it would affect the decision. GB: certainly not open ended, perhaps for one year. BFS remained strongly of the opinion that any extension was undesirable. HW noted that whatever the decision on adding new codes in any twilight period, 2.1 would remain in use, in some cases for several years.

NG noted that Canada was in a similar position to the US. Version 2.1 would remain in use no matter what we do. NG himself was an advocate for a ‘hard’ sunset. The Canadian market unanimously supported some continuation of codelist support – but ‘if we keep giving them outs, they will continue forever’. GB stressed there was no question of any open-ended support. NG stated his willingness to help financially for a limited period.

TP said that for Belgium, a ‘soft’ sunset with limited twilight codelist support is a good idea.

PC supported some level of continuing support.

PL agreed that for French Canada a soft transition would be okay.

GB tried to summarise the view of the committee. The marketing message of a sunset for support at the end of 2014 remains firm and unchanged – and this message needs to be made even more clear over the next few months. But there is no overall consensus yet across the steering committee on whether to provide limited codelist updates beyond sunset for those ONIX users continuing to use 2.1.

LV agreed that the sunset message can be made more firmly – it should *not* simply be “if you can’t make the change, then that’s okay”. FC asked what support might national groups need to distribute this firm message and make the sunset date stick?

HW suggested that a handful of specific questions be put to national groups. GB agreed to draft by end of April, with national groups to respond by mid-May. We need a definitive decision on the provision of limited codelists support after sunset by the end of June at the latest.

**ACTION:** GB to draft questionnaire, committee to come to agreement by end of June

4. LD introduced the proposals for Codelists Issue 25, which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

GB noted that this Issue included updates for 2.1-only codelists 7 and 78, the type of update just discussed, and that these additions come from the Norwegian and Finnish groups. The additions for <ProductForm> cover promotional items such as aprons (cookbooks) and scarves (Hogwarts). The other slightly tricky addition is an audience code for the ‘intended audience language’ – this suggestion came from the Spanish group. This could be used with a schoolbook which is a book wholly in English, but tailored for Spanish rather than French or German learners of English.

GB also noted the addition of the ATOS complexity scheme, widely used with Renaissance Learning courses, and a code to denote syl-lab-i-fi-cation which is used occasionally in Finnish children’s books. He asked for any comments or objections from the national groups.

There were none, and Issue 25 was approved.

LA reported that publishers also have to deal with schemas other than ONIX, particularly in educational publishing, and asked whether there are plans for ONIX to encompass other tags, codelists and schemas, or to link to them? GB replied that there are advantages to either approach. In some cases, it may be best to import a vocabulary wholesale, and in others, it may be best to use ONIX supporting resources. He described a conversation about LRMI (an education-focussed scheme) the previous day, where it might well be useful to incorporate some of LRMI’s controlled vocabularies into ONIX, though most such schemes lack the ‘internationalised’ approach of ONIX. But the technical approach to take must be weighed on a case-by-case basis.

5. LD asked national groups whether they had any updates on their own progress.

UJ: the first parts of a German ‘best practice’ guide for ONIX 3.0 are now published, and there is good progress working with catalogue providers and good progress on updating the German VLB Books in Print service to provide richer trade-focussed metadata.

FF: in Norway, implementation of 3.0 progresses in line with the sunset plans. BFS noted this was a very firm timetable, and ONIX 3.0 would be provided to downstream retailers from May, and that publishers and distributors would be required to use 3.0 from October.

NG: BookNet Canada was now beginning to see ONIX 3.0 files from publishers, and various system vendors were in active testing of 3.0 data feeds.

JP: migration to 3.0 started within DILVE a long time ago, but it is slow to spread to the remainder of the Spanish trade – many have not yet begun the migration.

EJB: in Netherlands, sunset is something of a wake-up call to publishers, and publishers that deal with CB will meet the deadline.

AV: best practices for ONIX 3.0 are ready for the website, and migration to 3.0 continues as expected.

PL: in French Canada, the migration to 3.0 is moving slowly.

TP: in Belgium, ONIX 3.0 is implemented at boek.be and many publishers. New publishers are implementing 3.0 from the outset.

LV: the ONIX Best Practices that were updated during 2013 contain both 2.1 and 3.0 guidance. A new guide for the use of keywords is now available, and will be on the BISG website by the end of April.

LA: the French trade is preparing a best practice guide for ONIX 3.0.

6. LD asked whether there was any other business. There being none, he asked NW to confirm the date of the next meeting. It will be on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2014 at 1.30pm in Frankfurt, dependent on room availability. LD then concluded the meeting.

Graham Bell  
EDItEUR  
9<sup>th</sup> April 2014