THE SOCIETY'S PANEL OF INDEXERS

—How it works

It is thought that members generally, as well as publishers and authors who wish to make use of its services, may be interested to learn how the Society's Panel of Indexers is operated.

It may not be realised that members of the Society are not automatically admitted to the Panel, also that persons may not be placed on the Panel unless they are members of the Society. Any person who is desirous of being admitted to the Panel should indicate this when completing the form of application for membership; but if this is not done the member can do this later by writing to the Hon. Secretary. In either case the applicant must submit a complete list of books, periodicals or documents, etc. indexed, stating their titles, names of publishers and dates of publication. To avoid any sort of unfairness in admitting members to the Panel it is a standard requirement for every applicant to provide evidence in the form of books or other work for examination by one (or in doubtful cases more) of the members of the Council who form the Panel Committee. If however an applicant has compiled indexes to business records or archives which cannot be made available to the public, then full details of experience of the applicant must be submitted together with names of previous employers. In this second situation the first of any published indexes has to be submitted for examination, although the member has been admitted to the Panel.

The Hon. Secretary maintains a record of the Panel in the form of edge-punched cards, one for each member. Each card contains as many as twenty particulars including such items as subject preference, qualifications, occupation, type of indexing done, proficiency in languages and details of each recommendation made as a result of the Panel service. When the Secretary receives an inquiry from a publisher or author, the special qualifications connected with it are matched with the profiles on the punched cards so that the most suitable members are selected.

It is customary to submit three names (with addresses and telephone numbers) for each inquiry, although for big projects more names may be given. At the same time the members so recommended are advised that their names have been put forward. The ultimate choice is left to the inquirer, but submission of more than one name also allows for the situation that sometimes arises when one or two of the members concerned are already fully occupied.

The Secretary makes every effort to submit the best choice of names for each commission. But neither he, nor the Society, can accept responsibility should a publisher consider that the resulting index from the member he has chosen is not entirely satisfactory. It may very occasionally happen, however, that the publisher thinks that the indexer has fallen down on his job. The Council would wish to be informed of any such dissatisfaction, in order to consider the desirability of investigating the circumstances fully so as to avoid the possibility of such a situation recurring.

If the Panel is confined to members who are experienced indexers, how then, it may be asked, is the aspirant without experience to obtain a first commission? Indeed, if a member cannot be admitted to the Panel until an index of adequate quality has been submitted and cannot gain a commission until he has been admitted to the Panel, what then? This is an aspect needing some exploration, and on several occasions the matter has engaged the attention of the Council. The solution would seem to be two-fold. In the first place an aspirant, who has made himself as proficient as possible by study, is encouraged to offer his services direct to publishing houses. Secondly, probationary admission to the Panel is granted until such time as a published index can be submitted which will meet approval as being of adequate standard. When submitting names of Panel members to inquirers, probationary indexers are included, but their
lack of much experience is pointed out. This practice is based on the assumption that good publishers recognize that in order to provide a continual supply of proficient indexers, newcomers must be given an opportunity to get started.

It might be useful here to outline in greater detail some of the qualities required in an index to fulfil the needs for admission to the Panel. Indexes are often not long enough; that is they do not provide sufficient detail of the subject matter of the text. This is often due to publishers restricting the scope of an index or the amount of space it may occupy. Mrs. M. D. Anderson’s study on length of book indexes (The Indexer, Vol. 5, Spring 1966, pp. 3-4) is, as far as I know, the only guide on this subject apart from Mr. G. Norman Knight’s observations in his article on indexing the life of Sir Winston Churchill (The Indexer, Vol. 5, Autumn 1966, pp. 58-63). Irrelevant items indexed, and relevant ones omitted, is a common fault which is only remedied by understanding the theory of converting subject matter of the text into index entries and by keeping close liaison with the author or publisher so that there is agreement on the sort of entries used. Another main fault is that the filing order is sometimes incorrectly presented, or is not consistent. This subject is under review by a working party convened by the Library Association Cataloguing and Indexing Group, and the British Standards Institution recommendation BS 3700:1964 Preparation of indexes and BS 1749:1951 Alphabetical arrangement should be accepted for the present. The last fault I want to list is lack of adequate cross-referencing. The average user of an index is not aware of any theory lying behind indexing, and frequently expects to find information in a particular book by looking up the first word that he considers relevant to the subject being sought. Semantics become important here as a key to the choice of indexing descriptor terms to suit either the general reader or the specialist reader where appropriate. When synonyms or related subjects are grouped under one descriptor, it is therefore important that the other relevant entry words should be cross-referenced to the chosen one.

The style of presentation of an index is important. There are a number of methods, and the one chosen should be agreed between the indexer and author or publisher. Finally it cannot be emphasized too strongly that when the index has been completed it should be edited thoroughly for consistency and accuracy.

The Society’s Panel of Indexers undoubtedly offers a very useful liaison between indexers on the one hand and authors and publishers on the other. Some members have obtained, through a single recommendation, an abiding association with a publishing house. Established Panel members for their part can help to make the scheme successful in two ways: first, by notifying the Secretary of each additional index they compile, thus helping to keep his records up to date; and secondly, by informing him whenever they are too busily occupied to be able to accept any further work, but remembering to let him know directly they become free to take further commissions.

C.R.R.

NEWS OF THE SOCIETY

Working Party on Filing Rules

Since the initiative taken by Theodore C. Hines and Jessica L. Harris in compiling a filing code for computer use (see The Indexer, Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 1966, 23-6) a committee was set up in the U.S.A. by the American Standards Association to study the revision of filing rules and examine differences that might occur between manual and computer-sorted filing systems. More or less at the same time the Library Association Cataloguing and Indexing Group convened a working party, with the approval of the British Standards Institution, to study the subject on this side of the Atlantic. Both these committees are working in close liaison with the aim to assist in the compilation of an