COMMISSIONING THE INDEX

James Negus

As a Technical and Scientific Editor with a London publisher, I frequently need to commission indexes to books. I have also made indexes of my own, so that perhaps I may know something of the problems of both publisher and indexer. This note, however, is written from the viewpoint of the publisher in the hope that members of the Society will give their views.

Having found possible indexers for a particular book, I like to approach them in writing rather than by telephone. This gives an opportunity to include a specification of what the book is about and what sort of index is required in some detail. The following is an actual example of one of these specifications:

Indexing Specification

_Handbook of management technology_ (edited by Gordon Wills and Ronald Yearsley).


*Proofs*: to be set directly in page.

*Schedule*: proofs promised to publisher 14.8.67.

*Index*: typescript index copy required by publisher 3.9.67.

*Contents*: a collection of essays each by a different author:

1. Numeracy in business.
2. Human environments.
4. Communication and control.
5. Project planning.
6. Operational research.
7. Design.
8. Financial control.
9. Quality control.
10. Marketing research.
11. Manpower planning and development.

Each chapter includes a glossary of terms.

*Level*: Senior management; HND, undergraduate, and graduate students of business and management.

Would members care to say whether such a specification is adequate and useful? Would they, as indexers, want to know any other details?

I hasten to add that the omission of any mention of fee is deliberate. This rather important question is raised in the covering letter. (The practice of my Company is to name the proposed fee at the outset.) The specification as it stands is typed in several copies in the expectation that the first one or two indexers approached may need to decline the commission for one reason or another. It might be embarrassing to have a stark figure quoted on this sheet which needs modification as the correspondence and enquiries progress.

As a matter of interest I usually also say in the covering letter that I will try to persuade the author of the book to give proper recognition to the indexer, in line with the Society of Indexers’ recommendation. I feel that approval for naming the indexer must rest with the author, although we as publishers can and do exert gentle guidance.