INDEXERS' REMUNERATION

The problem of the remuneration of indexers has been before the Council of the Society on several occasions and it was eventually decided to appoint a special Committee to consider the matter in detail. The Committee has prepared a preliminary report which the Council received at its meeting held on October 28th, 1958, when it was agreed to publish it in The Indexer and to invite members to submit observations thereon. The Report is, therefore, set out below and members are invited to forward comments to the Honorary Secretary. It is also hoped to discuss the problem at a meeting of members. The Council desires to make it clear that it has not yet considered the report which does not, therefore, represent an “official” view.

In their present form the Committee's recommendations are intended to serve as a guide to indexers but it is hoped that final conclusion will also serve as a guide to publishers in making arrangements with indexers. The report mentions that the scales are based on the number of hours spent but it should be possible to compile a table in which scales based on hours spent are translated into the other systems of charging.

It is anticipated that the indexer working in such highly specialised fields as medicine, law, science, etc., and who has attained such a standard as enables him to work rapidly, would be prejudiced if his fee were to be based only on the number of hours of labour. This aspect is one of great importance and must receive careful consideration. Such specialists are particularly invited to submit comments and to give the Honorary Secretary information as to the methods of assessing fees which they normally adopt.

In due course the Council hopes to issue agreed recommendations based on members suggestions, on the result of the discussion at the meeting of members and on the preliminary report of the Committee.

THE COMMITTEE'S REPORT

In accordance with the wishes of the Council, a small Committee has held several meetings to discuss the question of the remuneration of indexers, with a view to assisting both publishers and indexers in arriving at a mutually acceptable scale of pay applicable to all kinds of indexing work in the field of books. The question of the indexing of periodicals was felt to be one which needed separate consideration, and it was therefore deferred for the time being; decisions concerning book-indexing, when approved, will provide guidance in determining the pay of indexers of periodicals.

INDEXING PROCEDURE

In order to consider the question of book-indexing in all its aspects, it is perhaps as well to outline the various steps normally undertaken when indexing a book. These may be summarised as:

(a) reading through the book to gain a general idea of the subject-matter, and the consequent noting of points to be watched, queries to be cleared up, etc.
(b) the actual process of indexing on cards, slips, etc., with the addition of cross-references, notes for consideration of synonyms, etc.

c) editing of entries—consisting of final survey of the index as a whole, tieing up of references, expansion or contraction of entries, etc.

d) preparation for the press—numbering of slips or cards, typing of index, or other procedure according to the needs of publishers.

e) correction of the proofs of the index and insertion of additional entries where supplementary matter has been inserted, or alteration of entries where pagination has been affected by insertion of additional matter.

Thus, like the work of the schoolteacher—whose five hours of teaching may easily represent an additional five hours of preparation of lessons, correction of written work, etc.—the actual indexing of a book may easily be equalled or exceeded in length by the preliminary and ensuing processes. All these must be taken into account by the indexer, even if it means that there are occasions when (if they were accurately costed) the publisher would consider the provision of an index an uneconomical proposition. It should be added that the longer an index, the greater the proportional addition for ancillary work; e.g., a 64-page index takes more than twice the time needed for a 32-page index.

PRESENT SYSTEMS OF PAYMENT

As part of its enquiry, the Committee circulated to a selection of Members of the Society an invitation to contribute constructive comments on the payment of indexers, based on their actual experience of publishers’ methods. The response was small (probably because most indexers were away on holiday in August) but helpful, and the Committee is grateful to Members for their assistance in this matter. It was found, on examining the replies, that they confirmed the Committee’s own impressions, in that four main methods of payment were in operation at the present time:

(i) payment by 1,000 page entries, an entry such as “pp. 14-17” counting as 4 entries.

(ii) payment by the number of pages of text.

(iii) payment by the total number of columns of index.

(iv) payment by the number of hours spent in indexing, &c.

Method (i) is a cumbersome system, since the publisher must either take the indexer’s word for the number of page entries, or must alternatively set someone to check the number of entries—the latter being rather a waste of manpower.

Method (ii) is a very common method and one that is popular since as soon as an indexer has some experience he can fairly accurately convert pages of text into hours of work. Again, the concise and rapid indexer is not penalised by the economies of his methods and skill.

Method (iii) is generally used in small indexes where the publisher realises that he has only a certain number of pages left which he can allocate for indexing purposes, and must therefore ask the indexer to do the best he can within the artificial limits thus laid down.
Method (iv) is the most usual, and is one which is very much used in connection with substantial indexes to learned books. It is based on the mutual trust of publisher and indexer, both of whom realise the implications of full-scale indexing, and are prepared to make some allowance for economic circumstances, questions of experience and speed, etc.

COSTING

In the light of the considerations and experience described, the Committee then proceeded to examine the question of the differing needs and complexity of books with regard to indexing and indexes. To summarise the results of their careful enquiry on this point, it may be sufficient to say that they felt that books could roughly be divided into three categories, from the point of view of indexing:

(a) straightforward simple books: those, such as guide books, chatty reminiscences, etc., where it is only necessary (at least, in the publishers' estimation) to index names of people and places, and these mainly English and presenting no problems of alphabetical arrangement. This is almost a clerical task and, as such, is often so treated by publishers.

(b) books of moderate scholarship where no specialised knowledge of a subject is required, but the indexer should undoubtedly have a good general knowledge (say, of degree standard) plus a good grounding in the principles of indexing. The majority of books having any claim on the attention of the public fall into this category.

(c) books requiring specialised knowledge of the subject: this applies not only to obvious items such as legal, medical, scientific and technical textbooks and monographs, but also to works of more general character, such as serious historical, literary and fine arts works, where lack of knowledge of the subject may give rise to serious howlers, confusion of subjects and people, and other nonsense familiar to any user of some so-called indexes presented to the public today.

The Committee realises that there are further categories of books, such as encyclopaedias, loose-leaf digests, yearbooks, etc., but feel that the indexing of such works is usually undertaken in most cases by a full-time office or other staff, and that indexers who are asked to undertake such work will nearly always find that the question of remuneration can be settled satisfactorily by other methods, though even here they may find that the general scales outlined below may give them some assistance and guidance of a general nature when asked to estimate for this kind of work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee therefore recommends for the consideration of Council the following scales of remuneration for the three main categories of book indexing. All these scales are based on the number of hours spent in indexing and its ancillary processes, but may be translated into the other systems employed in each particular case.
Scale I Straightforward, simple books, requiring no special knowledge of the subject, and only a general knowledge of indexing and alphabetical arrangement:

\[ a \text{ minimum of } 6s. \text{ per hour.} \]

Scale II Works of moderate scholarship where no specialised knowledge of the subject is needed, but where the indexer should have good experience of general indexing and should have a good background of general knowledge (say, to degree standard):

\[ a \text{ minimum of } 8s. \text{ per hour.} \]

Scale III Works requiring a high grade of indexing technique, and a specialised knowledge of the subject:

\[ a \text{ minimum of } 10s. 6d. \text{ per hour.} \]

As a corollary to these scales, it may be of interest to the Council to know that the Committee also considered the question of payment of the full-time indexer. There are very few such people at the moment, but may well be that their numbers may grow as a result of an increase in better and more adequate indexing. Allowing in all cases a forty-hour week, the remuneration, based on the above scales, works out as; Scale I: £600 per annum. Scale II: £800 per annum. Scale III: £1,050 per annum. Keeping in mind the current rates paid in industry and commerce for work and qualifications of a comparable nature, the Committee believes that the Council will be able to agree that these Scales are realistic and in line with current trends for white-collar workers of this category.

\[ \text{NO INDEX—NO COMMENT—NO MORE} \]

It is felt that this feature has now served its purpose—that of drawing attention to those lax publishers who issue books without indexes—and although there has not, as yet, been any great diminution of such books the point has been made, and, judging from the publicity that this feature did receive, appreciated in responsible circles.

On final word of apology—to Crosby Lockwood. In the last issue of The Indexer one of their publications Motivated research was included in No index—no comment. As though to prove that even the editor of The Indexer can err such inclusion was unjustified—the book did in fact contain an index. And on that slightly crestfallen note this feature draws its short but not undistinguished life to a close.