

Teamwork indexing of *The Scotsman*

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The idea of an index to *The Scotsman*, Scotland's chief daily newspaper, is not new. For years academics and others interested in Scottish affairs had observed that such an index was needed. The financial cost of preparing an index, of salaries and materials, seemed to prevent anyone from taking the matter further. However, it occurred to me that the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) through its Community Programme Scheme, might consider an index as being of community benefit. Accordingly, after discussion with Dr Henry Drucker, Chairman of the Unit for Study of Government in Scotland (USGS), I approached the MSC at the end of 1982. The response was such that we felt encouraged to make further enquiries.

Dr Drucker then approached Eric Mackay, Editor of *The Scotsman*, and also wrote to Colin Kyte, Managing Director of Research Publications which produces *The Times Index*.^{*} Colin Kyte invited us to visit their Newspaper Archive Developments offices in Reading, and we went there in January 1983. We were impressed by the sophistication of his operation, and further encouraged to proceed. After meetings with Mr Mackay and John Long, Managing Director of The Scotsman Publications Ltd, we asked them for financial support for the purchase of microcomputers and ancillary equipment.

Through John Long, who made application to the International Thomson Organization Ltd (ITOL) we received a cheque for £10,250 for the purchase of Sirius microcomputers, a printer, and software. Unfortunately, the Edinburgh Regional Computing Centre (ERCC)'s Advisory Service advised us to delay purchase of this equipment till they had evaluated our needs. This meant we did not get our first Sirius till September 1983 and another not till October. The problems this caused will be mentioned later.

After discussing the matter with the USGS Steering Committee, we were authorized to proceed with an application to the MSC for a Community Programme Project to index *The Scotsman*. The application was made in February, and approved by the MSC in April. At the end of April, I began a four-week period of training with Research Publications.

During the time at *The Times Index* I was assisted by Reg Readings, the editor, and by Judith Schofield, his deputy, with whom I worked. Indeed, all members of staff were interested and helpful.

Upon my return to Edinburgh, where *The Scotsman* is produced, a Users Committee was formed to advise and assist us with regard to the quality of the index. This consists of Librarians from Edinburgh University Library, The National Library of Scotland, and the Central Library, plus John Hepburn, Managing Editor of *The Scotsman*, Henry Drucker, and myself. The committee meets once a month.

We began the process of recruiting from the long-term unemployed, following MSC rules, in May. Vacancies had been advertised in the Job centres, and from the applications we selected twenty-two men and women for interview. We were looking for non-smoking, intelligent introverts, who were doing something with the "spare" time at their disposal. This could mean either education, formal or not, or participation in some voluntary activity of benefit to others. In brief, we wanted people who had not been defeated by their experience of long-term unemployment. A panel of five USGS members conducted the interviews, and all found it an unhappy task because we had fewer places than interviewees. The problems of choosing between equally-qualified and equally-deserving applicants do not need to be mentioned here.

We recruited three full-time indexers, six part-time indexers, with two part-time secretaries and one supervisor. Each full-time indexer was given a room of his/her own, and two of the part-timers were detailed to work with each full-timer. Each full-timer was assigned a subject area from one of the following three divisions: (a) politics, domestic and foreign; (b) general domestic news; (c) business and industrial news.

We had hoped to locate the project in the Politics Department in our own offices, but as the space was not available it proved necessary to accept accommodation further down the road instead: a five-roomed flat in a poor decorative condition. However, we were assured it would be redecorated.

The start-date was 6 June. The first few days were spent teaching the basics of indexing, after which we began the real job of working with the newspaper. *The Scotsman* had provided six copies of each day's late

^{*}See *The Indexer* (11) 4, Oct. 1979, 209-11.

edition from the beginning of the year, and continue to do this daily. Our system follows that used by *The Times Index* before it became computerized.

The slips (see figure 1) are modelled on those in use at *The Times* when the work was all done manually. Each indexer enters information on the slips, marks off his/her own copy of the paper, and then marks off the master copy when a whole paper or day's work has been done.

Progress has been slow since the start. To date, 21 weeks of the year have been indexed after 26 weeks of work. In my opinion, this should have been at least 26/26. However, unforeseen problems have arisen.

As we had estimated that only two secretaries would be needed to enter data on a computer process, the absence of this equipment obliged us to type entries onto A3-sized sheets in three columns. Our idea was to reduce these sheets to A4 photographically, for printing the finished product. This was so slow and cumbersome that it resulted in the rest of the team indexing months ahead of the actual preparation of a printable index. Eventually we abandoned this at the secretaries' request and entered all data on the Sirius, using Wordstar with Xtalk (a software program which makes Wordstar compatible with the ERCC system). The increase in speed was such that we now have all of January 1983 stored in the mainframe computer waiting to be photo-typeset at the printers. (In fact, there are still problems which may result in publication of camera-ready copy on A4 sheets, in two columns.)

Another unanticipated problem was caused by two graduates who felt underemployed by the nature of the work, which did not interest them, and resented the low

level of wages (£2.44 per hour for either a 36-hr or 20-hr week.) This resulted in a decline in their output, and had an adverse effect on morale in the team. In addition, our lack of experience in personnel-handling did not help. Happily, a new understanding has been reached which should benefit future working.

In July we applied to the MSC for a second project on the advice of the ERCC's advisory service, which recommended that we hire a computer programmer to write the software needed to produce a sophisticated indexing system. We also asked for another eight part-time indexers. This request was approved in October, and we are now interviewing for a start in December.

Because there has been a demand, from library professionals, for an index of births, marriages and deaths in *The Scotsman*, we are going to begin this in the New Year. The data will cover the period from 1817 onwards. We hope it will be produced much faster than the current index.

As a result of initiative by Mrs Norma Armstrong of the Central Library, we were visited by Stephen Green of the British Library's Newspaper Library at Colindale in London. He invited us to present a paper to the British Library in March 1984, on the work of the index.

In my opinion, the Index Project is a venture which could go on indefinitely. Although MSC finance is available, this is short-term support which may be renewable after 52 weeks. The economic climate is such that funding for Community Programmes is effectively 'guaranteed' till 1987-8. Whether our Index Project would be considered as worthy of continued support is not clear. As things stand at present, everyone on the project will be paid off at the end of the contract year.

SCOTSMAN INDEXING SHEET

PRIME HEADING	+								
SUB-1	+								
SUB-2	+								
SUB-3	+								
SUB-4	+								
SUB-5	+								
CROSS-REF.	+								
ABSTRACT									
.									
.									
.									
.									
DATE	+	PAGE	+	COLUMN	+	PUBLICATION	+	INDEXER	+

Figure 1. Index slip for *The Scotsman* index project.

Although it may be possible to argue for skilled employees to be continued—and I consider them all to have acquired expertise as indexers—the MSC do not agree that all are skilled. This would mean, in the event of continuation, that another group would have to be trained to index, who, by the time they had gained a level of skill appropriate to our needs, would be paid off.

Obviously, though it might be possible to continue MSC funding, it would be better to have some other form of sponsorship, or to have a self-financing unit sup-

ported by revenue from sales or advertising. The demand for our index will not be tested until it comes out in print. In other words, we know there may be a future for the project, but are unable to guarantee it will exist beyond MSC support.

I should be happy to reply to any questions about the project sent to me. When the finished product is published I hope users will send me their suggestions, or criticisms, or both.

Manpower Services Commission indexing

Faced with unprecedented numbers of unemployed, the British Government has set up, and subsidizes, the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) to create jobs and training opportunities. Among others, this offers funding for Special Community Programmes, initiated and sponsored by independent bodies, for limited periods, the criteria for which are specific and stringent. The projects undertaken must be of public benefit; must bring about the acquisition of useful skills by those employed; must not be likely to be performed by any other body within two years; nor be the responsibility of a local council. Not an easy slot to fill; but the indexing of local archives or newspapers does meet all these requirements, and is increasingly being given to teams of novices from the pool of the long-term unemployed.

These projects last for a year, at the end of which it is hoped the workers may be equipped with skills to help them obtain further employment; the training is a salient feature of the whole operation.

The vacancies are advertised in Job Centres and in *Executive post*, the weekly newspaper of job opportunities issued by the Professional and Executive Recruitment Office of the MSC. Priorities in selecting applicants are that they must have been unemployed for six of the previous nine months if aged 18–24, twelve of the previous fifteen months if over 24, and preference is given to local rather than travelling candidates. To enable the best use to be made of the training opportunities for which the funding is intended, it is not necessarily a full team of those already suitably qualified to undertake the work, that is sought.

An English example of such a scheme is based at the Passmore Edwards Museum, East London, where ten part-time workers will be trained in indexing by producing cross-referenced indexes of local photographic, newspaper and other archival material, and completing indexes of Parish Registers including information collected from graveyards.

Pay is low. An advertisement in *Executive post*, 10 November 1983, seeks 'an Indexer to index source material for the local history of Farnworth from news-

papers and publications and photographs', with 'a qualification in librarianship or archival work or a history graduate with a knowledge of indexing materials', offering £2.13 per hour—that is, less than half the £4.75 per hour currently recommended as basic rate of pay for indexing by the Society of Indexers (and shortly to be increased to £5).

We note with interest how similar is the Provincial Employment Program (PEP) in Canada, described in the *IASC/SCAD Bulletin* Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 11–12. Lynn Murphy, having herself prepared an annotated bibliography under this scheme, comments:

'Indexers and abstractors, like many other union and non-union workers, have cause to worry about the undermining of regular paid work by the government-sponsored influx of minimum wage workers. You must also be concerned lest the quality of the work performed by these "harmless drudges" be less than satisfactory by your standards, and perhaps bring the profession of indexing and abstracting into both penury and disrepute.'

Privatizing the public library?

In his annual report for 1983 (Cmnd 9109), the British Minister for the Arts refers to the concern felt by the Library and Information Services Council for the effect on library and information services of restraint in government expenditure. He adds, 'No area of public provision can be immune from economic realities, and I hope that a positive attitude to current limitations will emerge. Libraries should look beyond their traditional sources of funds and consider whether some costs may be recovered from users, or whether private sponsorship, or even private investment in new services, is possible'.

