The Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers held a seminar in London in May 1984, 'We're all in it together', for scholarly publishers, librarians and indexers to attempt to identify and understand each other's problems in the publishing chain.

Denis Forbes of Cambridge University Press spoke on behalf of the publisher, referring to the impact of computers as increasing efficiency and avoiding postal delay for authors, editors and referees. He foresaw electronic transmission of copy, cataloguing and stock control, document delivery and publishing, as the future norm. Cost trends favour electronics; we must enlarge and develop our accustomed skills to electronic opportunities. Nearly 1000 data bases are now publicly available, mostly of bibliographies, abstracts and indexes; rarely, as yet, full-text systems. He spoke of the experimental use of these by the Library of Congress, and the copyright problems arising from them and from the increasing use of photocopying; 2,000,000 photocopies a year now come from the British Library Lending Division at Boston Spa. Page charges, as imposed in the US, may affect photocopying. One answer to it could be to offer cheaper offprints.

New technological vistas may seem daunting. He asked us, are we going to dive in, or is the water too cold?

For librarians, Fiona Hamilton of Aslib spoke of 'Going round in circles'. She suggested that there are many different kinds of libraries and different kinds of material contained in them. The first difficulty for all librarians is actually getting a user to ask the right question—sometimes what is asked for is not what is needed. The librarian, having discovered what is wanted, guides the users to the right sources, in whatever form, and provides space for them to pursue their research. In some cases, such as online searching, the librarian conducts some research in collaboration with the user.

During the actual publishing process, the librarian may well be completely out of the picture, apart from providing such essential reference books as dictionaries or Fowler's *Modern English usage*, plus the space in which to use them for proofreading. In an academic library, where a member of academic staff is the author, the librarian may well find that emotional support and endless patience is also required.

After publication, the librarian again becomes a major contributor to scholarly publishing by purchasing one or more copies of the book, journal or article, or whatever was produced. This item will then go through the process of being made available for use by being accessioned, catalogued, classified, and placed in the appropriate part of the library. It is now ready for the next would-be author to come in and use—and so the process starts all over again.

Indexers were represented by Alan Seal, Research Fellow, Centre for Catalogue Research, University of Bath. We append an abridged version of his address.

**Indexes from a user's viewpoint**

**Alan Seal**

The Centre for Catalogue Research is funded by the British Library and we carry out research (mainly of an experimental nature) into the provision and effectiveness of library systems and procedures relating to bibliographic records. Most of our work to date has been concerned with the construction and use of catalogues using computers. In the course of this work we have dealt with questions of subject access, online catalogues and user satisfaction.

I am going to concentrate on the provision of book indexes, but I am aware that this forms only one part of indexing work. Periodical indexing is generally done on a continuing basis by the publishers of indexing journals, using permanent rather than freelance staff. The work that our Centre does tends to concentrate on the user, considering what are the problems from the consumer's point of view. I would like now to do the same, first considering whether users are adequately served by traditional book indexes and the way that they are provided, and then discussing what authors, publishers and indexers can do about them. I will concentrate chiefly on publishers since they have most say in what is published and how.

**The user**

Little is really known about the actual need for and use of indexes. We have to rely on the opinions of book reviewers and indexers themselves, all of whom could be
said to be biased. A good deal of work has been done on *periodical indexes*, for three reasons. (1) These indexes usually are published separately, often in abstracting and indexing periodicals and now increasingly online so that the user has to make a specific effort to consult them. This makes it a clearly identifiable task and thus a fruitful activity for study. (2) A single index will cover many sources and of course many authors, resulting in major problems of terminology and consistency, which are important areas of investigation. (3) Periodical indexes are more likely to be used for a serious literature search, research project, bibliography, talk, etc., where there is greater need for high precision and recall. Failure to locate relevant references leads to extra effort and duplication of work; there have been attempts to quantify this as a cost.

In contrast, the *book index* is self-contained, and it is difficult to distinguish in research the act of consulting the index from time spent reading the text. It is normally an index to only one work, so problems of terminology are not as great. Finally, it is not so likely to be used in a 'serious' fashion by most users (an exception being librarians). It is thus difficult to point to the value of indexes in any quantifiable sense. There is much evidence, however, of specific instances where provision of an index has been a vital means of access to information.

**Number of indexes**

I did a little groundwork to find out just what proportion of books contained an index. There are about 40,000 titles published each year in the UK and listed in the National Bibliography; I checked the online version of the file. Out of a total of 2238 I sampled, only 31% had an index. Of course this proportion will vary from subject to subject, so I sampled further and looked at different areas of the Dewey classification, with the following results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>1888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Sciences</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Sciences</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>1770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>Total 4695</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also printed out some of the records for the items without indexes, and even with a very small sample, the results confirmed my suspicions. *Categories without indexes* tended to be: conferences; collections of papers; report literature; and, generally, the output of small publishers. In some categories, of course, a low index rate is due to subject matter. Languages, for example, included many reading books, and fiction significantly affects the overall rate of 31%. Most of these categories were just as important as that material which was indexed; much primary source material is published in conference and report literature. In addition I would include the following as indexable, but often unindexed:

- Fiction (primarily classic); Bible; HMSO; Open University; reference books; children's books.

**Quality of indexes**

The second area where indexes impinge upon the unlucky user is their quality. The Society of Indexers has done an enormous amount in raising standards, and may sometimes even appear too demanding. Raising standards should be encouraged. Equally we should recognize that costs must act as a restraint. The precarious balance between the two forces will benefit the user if each side accepts the motives of the other.

**Value of indexes**

On the importance of book indexes to the user, indexes are invaluable for much so-called serious literature and the debate is about which categories do not require an index. The categories cited as lacking indexes are different from others in that they are often not the work of one author, but report collections etc. Is this a simple case of publishers (small ones) just forgetting rather than omitting deliberately?

Two developments may make indexes even more important. First, the development of electronic storage and delivery of material. Certain types of material will become available in this way, and the presence of an index could help the user to select items of relevance and pages within them for printing or despatch. For example, the ordering of computer software, recipes, consumer information, statistical data etc., would all be suitable, as well as conferences and small-run publications that at present are so often unindexed. The availability of full text online may merit the placement of the index at the front of the document so that it is one of the first sections seen by the user. Scanning of documents online is tedious, and an index will be vital to enable the user to move directly to relevant pages. The second area is that in libraries book indexes could become part of the public catalogue and included in the libraries' online files, which would significantly improve subject access to library stock. A research project has confirmed this, despite the varying terminology. Increased use of books in libraries may not please publishers, but I am sure that there is a correlation between high library circulation and sales.

**Publishers**

Most publishers now accept that it is their decision whether or not to include an index. They should, then, take some responsibility for providing an adequate one. This means not just leaving it to the author, but checking whether the author is capable of producing an index, and if not, arranging for it to be done by an indexer. The number of poor indexes being produced shows that more attention needs to be paid to this. There has been much discussion about the inclusion in the author's contract of the requirement for him to produce the index, it really should not be his responsibility.
The biggest step forward in improving the quality of indexes would be to cite consistently and as a matter of course the name of the indexer at the head or bottom of the index. I would have thought this a relatively innocuous move but of tremendous importance. I suspect that anyone who produces a bad index has a good idea as he works on it that it is not going to be adequate, and may only continue as he knows that it can be produced anonymously. Why are Prefaces and Introductions generally attributed to their writers, but not indexes? My own indexes did appear under my name, for which I am grateful. What I am not thankful for are the changes made by the editor to the index without my knowledge or consent. On one occasion a change made by the editor resulted in a serious inconsistency in the index which bears my name. Another problem is a change in the space allocated for the index. This is unfair to the author and the indexer and contravenes a fairly basic management principle of the relationship between authority and responsibility. It is not sensible to assign responsibility for a task to another person without also assigning the authority to carry it out. If space does shrink, why not reduce to triple columns? I have rarely seen this used, although it has been shown that a reduced type size does not seriously affect legibility.

Authors

Indexer/author problems are often caused because the author is responsible for an index but it is actually commissioned by the publisher. Liaison between indexer and author is valuable in many ways, to discuss terminology, special emphasis etc., but is bound to become difficult if questions of space and depth of indexing are involved. Indexing a poorly written text is difficult, though not impossible. The most arduous aspect is trying to find something to index in paragraphs which seem to say nothing.

As about 60% of writers produce only one book it makes sense for them not to spend the time learning the techniques to compile the index themselves; a skill which they will have no occasion to reuse. Index compilation by the professional rather than by the author is also much quicker, and time spent on it more easily specified. Equally, there is no reason why prolific authors should not learn to index their own books. Could not publishers liaise with the Society of Indexers to ensure that such indexes are adequate and to direct authors towards training courses, or even produce the index in conjunction with an indexer? Authors might then be more likely to realize the skills involved and pass the work over.

Indexers

Most indexers are paid by the hour and it is a gentleman's agreement that it is done in a reasonable time. Am I too suspicious in wondering whether this is why indexes are requested in such a short time? I often hear the complaint that publishers ring up requiring an index to be produced in three days. Are publishers so badly organized? There should be some advantages in fixed price contracts, which would enable both parties to be more precise over terms than at present. It might also reduce costs. It might reduce indexers' income if publishers asked for several quotes and took the lower ones. The indexer would then have to work to a price, but would equally get more commissions (if he is any good). Combined with the attribution of indexes to the indexers, this would result in indexers obtaining more work as there would be fewer author-indexes, and the rise in standards should continue.

It is unlikely that publishers could employ indexers on the payroll but with the development of computer technology we could have more co-operation than at present. It seems silly to produce a machine-readable index and post it off to the publisher in hard copy for him then to re-key it to his photocompositor. The first step would be to develop a standard interface for tape or floppies between the typesetters and indexers. The second stage would be for the entire text to be sent to the indexer in machine-readable form for the indexer to work on. There are several semi-automatic and fully automatic indexing systems, certainly at title level (e.g. KWIC and KWOC), and some are becoming available for full text indexing. However, human intervention will be needed for some time to come; but we must do all we can to automate the clerical tasks and eliminate duplicated effort, and this is a potentially very fruitful area for cooperation.

Indexers should concentrate more on training authors and publishers in the skills involved, possibly even working with authors to correct and amend indexes. The development of automatic indexing has some way to go before it threatens the existence of indexers. Research to date is not very promising for back-of-book indexes, although keyword indexes for periodical articles and book titles can be very effective.

Index not all-compassionate

She took the Bible from the window and placed it on the bedside table. . . . It had a special index—for those in hospital wards, prison cells and hotel bedrooms—to guide one to helpful passages, when Backsliding, Leaving Home, Needing Peace or in the Failure of Friends. Nothing for her. Nothing for those needing a new home, in love with the wrong person, or sick of responsibility. Nothing in the index, rather. In the Bible itself everything can be found, she remembered having been told.

—from The soul of kindness by Elizabeth Taylor (1964), quoted by permission of the estate of Elizabeth Taylor and Chatto & Windus Ltd.