British and Canadian Government-sponsored employment schemes relating to indexers and indexing have been criticized on two grounds: that the rates of pay offered are not a fair reward for indexing skills; and that this may consequently threaten indexing standards. On examination the British Manpower Services Commission (MSC) Community Programme proves to be primarily an employment programme. The project sponsors are the employers and responsible for all standards and conditions of employment, including rates of pay and training. All the MSC does is pay the project sponsors an average allowance per employee of sixty-three pounds per week, and it is up to the sponsors to decide whether to offer higher pay and, if so, to obtain additional funding from elsewhere. However, employers are not entirely free to act as any other employer would, because, by the very nature of the schemes, they can offer work only to a restricted group of people, namely, the long-term unemployed and those who are receiving either unemployment or supplementary benefit.

Where does this leave the indexer? What possible benefits can the indexer derive from the MSC? There are three MSC schemes which might benefit indexers, whom I have divided into four categories: the self-employed freelance indexer; the unemployed indexer who wants to do voluntary work for the benefit of the community; the in-house employed indexer; and groups of indexers who want to combine to make use of one of the MSC schemes.

The first scheme is the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, which helps unemployed people who want to start their own business but might be deterred from doing so because they would then lose their supplementary benefit or unemployment benefit. To be eligible applicants have to be receiving unemployment or supplementary benefit and must have been unemployed for at least thirteen weeks before the application, and must show that they have available at least a thousand pounds which they are prepared to invest in the business over the first twelve months. The scheme is also restricted to those aged between eighteen and the State pension age, and the business must be approved by the MSC as suitable for public support. The MSC gives examples of unsuitable businesses, for example, nightclubbs and gambling establishments, so it is quite possible that indexing would qualify as a suitable occupation. There is one further snag: you must agree to work full-time in the business. There is no definition of ‘full-time’. Would it include, for example, someone who has advertised their services as an indexer and then sits at home waiting for the commissions to come in? There would, however, be no reason why the new business should not include other services. Your ultimate aim may be to become a full-time indexer but you may be able to do other work in the meantime. Provided that you make it clear that the new business can cover other services then I do not see that MSC could object.

MSC pay an allowance of forty pounds per week for up to fifty-two weeks to supplement the receipts of the business while it is becoming established. This allowance is taxable as a business receipt and is in fact slightly above the minimum rate for paying tax and national insurance. The scheme also provides access to free business counselling, but the MSC make it clear that they do not require applicants to prove that the business is a sound commercial proposition, and acceptance onto the Scheme should not be taken as an indication of the expected success of the business proposal. The allowance is also payable to partnerships and co-operatives, which we shall discuss later.

The second scheme is the Voluntary Projects Programme. The main purpose of this programme is to provide unemployed people with a constructive activity which might develop their existing skills or provide some form of part-time rehabilitation or work preparation without affecting their entitlement to statutory benefits. Some of the criteria for projects are that jobs in normal employment must not be put at risk as a result of any operation carried out under any part of a project, and projects should have the support of appropriate trade unions and employers' organizations and local authorities. There can be few indexers who, in these hard times, would want to donate their services. Such projects might, however, benefit those who are unemployed but do not feel able to take the plunge and become full-time self-employed, thereby entitled them to apply for an enterprise allowance. An unemployed indexer might like to keep in practice and benefit the community by finding a suitable project. There is, however, provision in the Voluntary Projects Programme to enable project sponsors to employ either full-time or part-time tutors. Wherever possible, unemployed people with necessary skills should be encouraged to use them and teach them on a voluntary basis. Where this is not possible, however, paid tutors and instructors can be recruited and paid at the Burnham agreed part-time rate for casual tutors (currently £7.58 per hour plus London allowances), and the current maximum for full-time tutors is £6,135.00 per annum. It is not clear, however, whether indexers who are recruited as tutors/instructors would have to have a teaching qualification. The MSC is looking for potential sponsors to devise interesting and innovative projects in
The community for unemployed people, and there is no reason why a group of indexers should not sponsor a project, which might not only provide employment for part-time indexers to act as tutors but also provide an opportunity to teach good indexing skills, thereby helping to raise standards.

The third programme, the Community Programme, has already been described in The Indexer (14 (1) April 1984, 29). As with the Voluntary Projects Programme, this project must be of general benefit to the community, such as indexing a local paper. The Community Programme does, however, provide some security of employment for up to a year and might attract indexers who would prefer to be employees rather than run the risk of becoming self-employed. As with the Voluntary Projects Programme, anyone can become a sponsor and put up a project to local Area Manpower Boards, which then decide which of the many proposals received best meet the needs of local long-term unemployed people and the local community. It is essential for prospective sponsors to consult local trade unions and employers associations likely to be affected by the project.

The only jobs that I have seen advertised which are suitable for indexers are ones sponsored by local authorities. As I have said, there is no reason why a group of indexers should not sponsor their own scheme and indeed try to overcome the two main objections to these schemes noted above: namely, poor pay, and a possible threat to standards of indexing by work done by unqualified people. Anyone thinking of setting up such a project should not underestimate the amount of time and effort needed. For a start, my discussions with MSC have indicated that they prefer to deal with sponsors who have incorporated themselves into a company, such as one limited by guarantee. Indeed, sponsors, who have to carry the full legal responsibility for paying wages, etc., would probably be best advised to incorporate themselves and obtain limited liability. It is possible, however, for sponsors to avoid this cumbersome machinery by using an established and recognized agent for the Community Programme. For example, a local authority might act as an agent and do all the necessary work administering the scheme.

I have not heard of any group of indexers who themselves have sponsored an MSC project but I was interested to read in Newsletter 68 of the American Society of Indexers that an indexing collective was established in Virginia, USA (see 'Shoebox International', p. 198). This scheme might provide a useful model for other indexing collectives or co-operatives, which would then be in a good position to make the most of the facilities offered by the MSC.

I wish to acknowledge the co-operation I have had by correspondence and discussion with officers of the MSC and members of the Council of the Society of Indexers. The views expressed are my own and do not necessarily coincide with those of the MSC or the Council. I would, however, welcome further discussion on this matter from indexers and readers of The Indexer.

For further information about the MSC schemes contact Janette McNeil, Manpower Services Commission, Moorfoot, Sheffield S1 4PQ Telephone 0742 733275.

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"Your Majesty's loyal and obedient servants": abstracting Loyalist materials at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia

Lynn Murphy

In the summer of 1982, Jean Peterson and I were hired under Canada's Provincial Employment Program (PEP) to prepare an annotated bibliography of all primary and secondary materials on the United Empire Loyalists of Nova Scotia held by Public Archives of Nova Scotia. The project was under the direction of Dr Brian Cuthbertson, then working on his biography of the Loyalist governor, John Wentworth.

Jean was a history graduate who had already worked with Loyalist documents in Shelburne. I am a former history teacher, and a professional librarian with nine years' experience.

The project could not be completed in the twelve weeks allotted, and a new PEP grant was received in midwinter, with Heather MacDonald taking my place, as I was then on contract elsewhere.

We followed no set formula in dividing the work between us, except that Jean covered most of the Shelburne materials. After a time we were drawn to a few favourites among the Loyalists—I developed a special affection for a politically indiscreet Cape Breton cleric, the Reverend Ranna Cossitt.

One of our first problems was finding out just who was a Loyalist. Some had the same names as Planter families.