

Questionnaire from the 'Partnerships in Knowledge' Conference, Canberra, 20-23 April 2001 hosted by AusSI ACT Branch and the Canberra Society of Editors. Published in *Australian Society of Indexers Newsletter* 2001, vol. 25, no. 9/10, p. 85, 95.

## **Analysis of Conference Questionnaire (Indexers)**

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There were 33 responses from indexers and 49 from editors. This report only deals with the responses from indexers. Analysis of the part of the survey that covered editors is available from the CSE web site. Most survey forms were filled in at the conference, but since then, members of both professions who didn't attend the conference have sent in responses. This is not a large sample, it wasn't a scientifically controlled survey, and there were the usual problems of inconsistent form completion. All the same, the questionnaire results provide a benchmark that can be used as the basis for future investigation. They also give us some clear messages from an active proportion of national membership. All regions except South Australia and the Northern Territory are represented in the survey and there was one international response (New Zealand).

Here are some of the other descriptive findings.

- Indexers are an aging group: no respondents were under 25, and only 1 was in the 26–35 group; 27% were 36–45, 33% 46–55, and 51% over 55. Interestingly, this is not true to nearly the same extent for editors. While both indexers and editors are feminised occupations, the gender imbalance is less pronounced for the indexers who responded to this question, of whom 27% were male and 73% female.
- Indexers are highly qualified: All respondents had an undergraduate degree, and 21% had a masters degree. Over half (54%) of respondents also had another postgraduate qualification, mostly graduate diplomas and also graduate certificates.
- 79% of respondents had also undertaken specialist professional development courses.
- Of the respondents who answered the question on experience, the largest group (42%) had more than 10 years' experience as an indexer (39% had between 1 and 5 years, and 15% had between 6 and 10 years).
- Many reported other relevant professional experience. The most commonly cited prior occupation was librarian (19), followed by editor (6), researcher (4) and writer (3). Other experience included proofreading, project officer, bibliographer, public relations, trainer/manager, research assistant, architect, lexicographer and historian.
- 45% of respondents were part-time indexers; 27% were full time and 7 of the 33 did indexing in addition to other employment.
- 67% of respondents (22) were primarily back-of-the-book indexers; most of the others were database indexers. Also mentioned were periodical indexing, bibliographic work and electronic indexing.
- Most respondents were freelance (67%). Only 15% were employees. Others nominated combinations of employee, freelance, volunteer, database manager and researcher.
- Average hourly rates were just under \$40 (\$39.86), with a high of \$50 and a low of \$30. Costs for some specific services were higher (project management at \$50.00) while others were lower (proofreading \$27.50 and editing \$34). (All reported dollar amounts have been averaged for those responding to this question (22 of 33 respondents).) It is interesting to note the difference between the editors' responses to a similar question. While the rates indexers report that they charge are lower by around \$10 per hour, the variation is much narrower. (The range editors report varies

from \$15 an hour to \$130.) And while the editor respondents charge virtually the same average amount as indexers for indexing (\$41), indexer respondents charge an average of \$16 less per hour than editors when they undertake editing work. Given the significant overlap of services offered by editors and indexers, perhaps there is some scope for the professional societies to discuss together rates for editors who undertake indexing and vice versa.

Other rates were mentioned for consulting (\$65), lecturing (\$92.50), research (\$30), library consultancy for a project fee or by barter, and web indexing was described by one respondent as being at the top of the price range.

Maintaining and extending networks and increasing skills were seen as the greatest challenges (70% and 55%, respectively). Increasing income and finding interesting work were rated in the top three by 82% of respondents. One respondent's work was voluntary, because of the difficulties in establishing oneself as an indexer, others expressed a desire to expand into other fields such as writing and editing, the desire not to be replaced by a computer, and the need for passing on skills and fitting indexing in with other work.

By far the most commonly listed future development on people's minds was increased professional development programs through professional societies. This attracted the greatest number of responses and the greatest number of responses rated 1 (13). It was followed by increased education and training provision in educational institutions and closer coordination with relevant professional societies. One comment was that there are enough courses but they need to be more widely available (meaning on-line). (It is interesting to note that editors, too, overwhelmingly nominated professional development programs through professional societies as their highest priority.)

A wide range of subject areas was indicated, including all those listed on the questionnaire and others written in. The humanities received the largest number of checks (20), followed by environment (13), health (12), science (11) and politics (10). Some commented that indexers can be generalists, and that any and all subjects were welcome. Biography was mentioned by 3 respondents and there were single listings of annual reports, architecture, public administration, the arts, current affairs, history, medicine and maritime affairs, not to mention the very broad 'anything I can get!'

Other comments included:

- the difficulty in obtaining paid work in history and genealogy;
- the need for AusSI to do more to support new indexers, perhaps a mentoring scheme or certification as step towards registration;
- indexers and editors should join forces as advocates;
- APA and ASA and Media and Arts Alliance should be involved in indexing issues;
- the need for new indexers;
- difficulties in deciphering the conference workshop program.

One respondent took the trouble to attach a separate sheet of comments to the survey form. These comments are summarised below.

Education I believe that indexers need a good general knowledge, a little bit of education specifically about indexing, and a lot of ongoing education about specific aspects of indexing... the courses offered in NSW and Victoria are fine, and adequate to cover the needs of beginning indexers. Unfortunately they are not offered often enough, and are not often available in other states. Online education seems to be a solution to a very small potential student base spread over a large area...

Accreditation I am not in favour of increasing the steps or hurdles to becoming an indexer. We already know that editors pay little attention to registration when selecting an indexer...

communication with editors (as at the conference) about what we currently do is of far greater importance than setting up another level of testing...

I have always liked the fact that indexing is relatively ...accessible... for those who already have skills and experience in other fields... Sometimes it seems that we want things like accreditation because they make us look professional, rather than for the benefits they bring.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in the survey, whether at the conference, by mail or email. I thank Jean Norman, who helped analyse the indexers' section and the committee members who trialled the draft survey. I am keenly aware of the shortcomings of this survey, and not merely the formatting. Just the same, it's a start. If there is interest in running an improved survey again, perhaps in two years, I'd be happy to help or to hand on the lessons and data from this one. If anyone would like specific information not covered here, feel free to contact me on [emend@cyberone.com.au](mailto:emend@cyberone.com.au).