

Database Indexing Registration Discussion Paper August 2009

1. Database Indexing Registration

This discussion paper has been developed by Max McMaster, Mary Russell and Margaret Findlay, in response to a long standing request for ANZSI to consider registration for database indexers. Initially developed August 2008. Modified April 2009 and August 2009.

2. Background material

The following are notes taken from the survey and articles on database indexing listed on the website.

2007 Survey of ANZSI Members

Question 2 in the survey asked about registration as a database indexer:

About 37% of respondents are interested in registration as a database indexer. Of those expressing interest about 28% are registered indexers, 56% plan to be registered indexers and 30% are not registered indexers.

Question 7 – Type of indexing done

- About 61% of respondent have done back of book indexing in the past year. About 19% have done journal indexing and 19% have done database indexing and 17% have indexed annual reports...
- Of the registered indexers 72% do back of book indexing, 28% index annual reports, 26% index journals, 18% do database indexing, 15% index websites, 13% do embedded MS Word indexing, and 5% index newspapers.
- Of the indexers not registered 43% do back of book indexing, 23% do database indexing...
- Of those planning to apply for registration 81% do back of book indexing, 22% index annual reports, 19% index journals, 16% do database indexing...

The following articles have discussed some of the issues facing database indexers:

1. ANZSI Conference: 'Birds of a feather' session: Database and web indexing, by Prue Deacon and Kathy Simpson, *ANZSI Newsletter*, 2007;3(5):4.
2. From the President – registration for database indexers, *ANZSI Newsletter*, 2007;3(6):1.
'The other side of the database indexing debate is who wants registration for database indexers? Is the registration only wanted by the database indexers themselves to provide some personal satisfaction (not a bad thing in itself) or is it wanted by the database developers?
To answer this question I asked Suzie Davies, from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the manager of the REEF database whether registration of database indexers is an important issue. Her reply was that when hiring database indexers it was important to know that the person had both the desired subject knowledge skills as well as having a recognised accredited standard and knowledge of the processes involved. Without registration (or accreditation) there was an increased risk that someone who was not qualified would do an unsatisfactory job. This particularly being the case, as most database indexing is done freelance with either electronic or hardcopy material away from the database producers' premises.
In many instances the database producer never physically meets the database indexer and relies on an electronic cv, and the results of their first batch of data entry. Having registration would provide a degree of reliability on the person you were employing.'
3. A day in the life of a database indexer, by Edyth Binkowski, *ANZSI Newsletter*, 2005;1(9):6.

Database indexing covers many forms, journal indexing, manuscripts, online websites, ongoing indexing services, often in electronic format. Indexers use a thesaurus, often compile an abstract, a bibliographical description and generate key words. Often more than one person works on a database, so consistency is important. There are parallels with back-of-book indexing, though the latter use the author's words rather than a thesaurus.

Subject specialisation

The panel felt that this was not as important as indexing skills, and comes with practice, though they said it was essential in scientific subjects. Penny commented that she relied on material indexed by others if it was a subject she was not familiar with. She also said the main thing was to know enough to read about the subject and have an interest in it. Also the database can teach you about the subject. Rae said that she had trained subject specialists in indexing skills.

4. Database indexing – sustaining quality. A brainstorming session hosted by the ACT Branches of the ALIA Health Libraries Section and the Australian Society of Indexers, National Library of Australia, 22 November 2000.
 - Some indexes rely on only one or two indexers to provide all the data for a database. This is risky for continuity of quality, especially as people come towards retirement age, or if the indexing is contracted out.
 - Mobility of staff can be a quality problem – people trained to index move on to other things.
 - For specialist databases, indexers with appropriate subject skills can be difficult to find (or to afford!). It can take 2-3 months for a new indexer to feel comfortable/competent in the subject area. Quality control during this "settling in" period can suffer.
 - The Australian Society of Indexers (AusSI) has created a registration subcommittee to investigate what would be the minimum standards for awarding the status of "registered indexer" to database indexers (as is now done with back-of-book indexers and is the main form of accreditation/recognition given by the Society). Sandra Henderson is the ACT representative on the Committee.

5. The indexing companion, by Glenda Browne and Jon Jerney, Melbourne: CUP, 2007.
 - 'Collection indexing is also called open-system indexing, database indexing, bibliographic unit indexing, and continuing indexing. It refers to the indexing of collections to which new items are constantly being added. In these projects the indexer needs to follow rules of the project consistently. The indexer's decisions should reflect past decisions and be useful for future purposes. Most collection indexing projects are done by a team of indexers who refer to a controlled vocabulary such as thesaurus to ensure the consistent use of index terms between indexers and across time. Bibliographical database indexing of periodical articles is a typical example of collection indexing; others are websites and collections in libraries, museums and archives.' (page 30)
 - Hints on planning bibliographic database indexes, periodical indexes and retrospective projects are given on pages 48-50
 - Ways of working – collection indexing and periodical indexing on pages 50-51.

Registration for back of book index criteria covers analysis, description, comprehensiveness, arrangement, style, and processing.

3. Reasons for database indexing registration

1. Why do we want database registration?
 - Members have consistently expressed interest in having it developed.
 - Many experienced members are not registered because they work in this area.
2. What would be the benefits of having database indexing registration?

- Knowing that an indexer with database registration has particular experience when looking for new staff.
- Broadens the scope of ANZSI and hopefully attract new members.

4. Reasons for not having database indexing registration

- Too difficult to define.
- How will database registration be differentiated from back of book registration?
- It is an area that hasn't had registration/accreditation in the past and managed, so why change.

5. Defining 'database indexing'

1. What is database indexing?

The indexing of a range of materials into a relational database structure using a controlled vocabulary. Materials may be bibliographic covering chapters from books, journal articles, websites, web documents report items, archive items, etc., extracts from audio-visual materials, or objects, eg. museum items.
2. Book and database indexing have much in common. In both cases the indexer is creating a finding aid for the reader. With back-of-book indexing, the indexer can be creative as to how they do that and use the language in the text; with database indexing the indexers have to follow rules and use a thesaurus. The basic 'indexing' skill is the same, and the specialist 'database' skill comes down to being able to follow rules, understand the thesaurus, and keep the big picture in mind when working on a large volume of material. Creating the thesaurus or designing the database are different skills.
3. Does it include A-Z website indexing?

No. A-Z website indexing is similar to book indexing in that it only uses one type of material which is held in electronic form. Web indexing however does use a thesaurus.
4. Does it include indexing of individual journal titles?

No. Journal indexing only covers a specific title, whereas database indexing will cover a range.
5. Does it include library catalogues?

No. Library catalogues although databases by definition are not included as they are not at the level of specificity required, ie. they index at the whole book or journal level
6. Does this level of database indexing experience have to include substantial thesaurus work?

Yes. It is essential that the indexer has had extensive experience developing, updating or contributing to a thesaurus.
7. What about database construction work?

Understanding of database design/construction would be essential but actually constructing or designing a database is not a requirement for assessment of indexing competence.

6. Establishing what skills are required for registration

The skills required for registration would include:

- Minimum of three years full time experience or equivalent with either a single database or across a range of databases.
- Understand the needs of the database users and audience.
- Competency in using a thesaurus and applying the terms consistently to the records in the database.
- Maintenance of the quality of the database through the creation and editing of database records according to a 'house style', including consistent use of subject terms.
- Knowledge of day-to-day database administration, including selection of materials for inclusion in the database, or uploading records.
- Subject terminology and thesaurus work covering developing, updating or contributing terms to the thesaurus.
- Knowledge of database design and construction.
- Working knowledge of database software.

- Knowledge of abstracting.

7. Assessing skills

The applicant for database indexing registration will need to provide supportive evidence addressing each of the skills referred to above in section 6 with names of supervisors/employers. Assessment of these skills may be made in discussion with supervisors/employers.

In addition to the process described above, the assessment panel will be able to recommend indexers to ANZSI Council for registration members who have extensive experience in database indexing.

8. Cost of registration

The cost of registration will be the same as for back-of-book registration.

9. Reassessment

Registration will be periodically reassessed.

10. Different types of registration

This means there will be more than one type of registration and members will be able to receive Registration in one or both types, that is in either regular Registration or Database Registration.

As a result members will be able to call themselves either a Registered Indexer or Registered Database Indexer, or possibly both.

An explanatory note on the website under Registration, and on the opening screen for Indexers Available is all that is required to differentiate the two types of Registration. Registered Indexers have had their skills assessed in book, annual report, journal or A-Z website indexing; Registered Database Indexers have been assessed in Database Indexing only.

11. Recommendations

1. An amendment* should be made to the ANZSI Constitution to allow database indexing registration by the Society. The 2010 AGM may be the appropriate time to move such an amendment.
2. When the constitutional amendment is approved by the membership, registration should be implemented as soon as practicable.
3. Council should publicise to the library/information management and indexing communities that ANZSI has implemented a peer reviewed database indexing registration scheme.
4. Council should appoint a Database Registration Committee.
Note: this body would be separate from the current Registration Panel which has a predominantly book indexing focus.

*Suggested Constitutional amendment change

4. Register of Indexers and Register of Database Indexers

The Society will establish a Register of Indexers and a Register of Database Indexers recording those who have been assessed by peer review as meeting the Society's registration criteria. The inclusion of a member's name in either/both Register(s) will entitle that member to be known as a Registered Indexer or Registered Database Indexer of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers so long as he/she remains a financial member of the Society. To ensure standards are maintained procedures for renewal of registration will follow the guidelines as set out in the Council's document on Policy and Procedures for Registration