

New Zealand branch report to 2009 conference;
read on behalf of branch president Robin Briggs

The New Zealand branch was formed four years ago and has members scattered throughout the country, which presents some difficulties. In 2007-8, branch activities were at a low ebb.

However, in the past 12 months we have increased our membership from 19 to 24.

We have also held an advanced training course, have virtually completed a register of available indexers to send to New Zealand publishers, have reinstated a mentoring programme in the absence of the overall society one, and have contributed to debate on various issues at council level and with other branches of ANZSI.

From our AGM last week, we again have a fully functioning committee, even if its membership too is geographically scattered.

Our mentoring scheme is a relatively low-key one. There is no attempt to provide a qualification. From a distance, we have the feeling that the centralised scheme has become something of a monster, not least for its administrators.

One of our committee members set up an on-line Index Club – a means of critiquing indexes and learning from others' experience.

We had good publicity when one of the two largest newspapers in New Zealand, the *Dominion-Post*, ran a feature article on our leading member, Tordis Flath, and on indexing, in a jobs supplement. This led to several new indexers joining the branch, and three of them crossed the Tasman to attend an ANZSI training course in Melbourne last month.

We appreciate the way the ANZSI website has become ever more comprehensive during the year, and we thank Mary Russell for her work on that. The branch contributed to both the website and the newsletter, so news of our activities had all the coverage it deserved.

We also thank John Simkin and the many others who keep the society running – and progressing.

We appreciate the efforts being put into improving communication between the council and branches. The website's new section for council members, including branch presidents who are unable to attend monthly meetings, has good potential.

Last month we considered a council invitation to host the society's 2011 conference. With regret, our committee decided it could not make such a commitment at this time. However, if the branch's revival continues, we would be delighted to be in the running to host the 2013 conference.

As for the state of indexing in New Zealand, the situation is mixed. By one reckoning, book sales are down by 10 percent. The large chains are demanding discounts from publishers and are not placing big orders. They are reducing their stocks, and increasingly ordering small quantities as there is a demand for individual books.

Printers are adopting the new print-on-demand technology, which allows a single soft-cover book to be printed for about the same cost as on a long run, and that suits the large booksellers' current requirements.

It does not help publishers, however. They still have their fixed costs. Increasingly they are paring those, in part by doing indexes in-house, telling authors to do indexes themselves, or even omitting indexes.

In terms of the recession, some indexers believe the worst is over, but general economic conditions are just one of the issues.

Elsewhere, however, digital indexing of a multitude of new and old records is blossoming, in both officialdom and the world of the community. Indexers who know or can learn the skills required there have many opportunities.