

Enhancing access to research materials

Carol Murray, Australian Library Collections Task Force

The Australian Library Collections Task Force recently conducted the first Australia-wide study of the coverage of the National Bibliographic Database (NBD). The Task Force undertook the study to gather information for developing strategies which will encourage libraries to contribute records to the database, thereby enhancing access to scholarly research materials in Australia. The full report of the NBD study is available from: <http://www.nla.gov.au/niac/auscoll/nbdsurvey.html>, and print copies are available from the Task Force Secretariat.

Training data at your fingertips

The Australian research database, VOCED [<http://www.ncver.edu.au/voced.htm>], can revolutionise the way you keep up-to-date or find information on vocational education and training.

VOCED not only includes Australian material but also material from Europe, the United States, Asia and the United Kingdom. The new international VOCED is managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). Its content is ever increasing and currently boasts over 12 000 entries.

Managing director of NCVER, Chris Robinson, said a by-product of the move to an international database is exposure for Australian research. 'Australia has one of the best vocational education and training systems in the world and with greater international access to our research, this will further our reputation in the global market place' he said.

VOCED provides a simple search facility and each entry provides an abstract, key words for further searching and details on how to access the hard copy. The database is updated regularly with research reports, journal articles, conference proceedings, statistics and much more. Access to VOCED is free.

The NBD study collected information about:

- the extent to which materials in Australian libraries are recorded on the NBD, and the types of material most likely, or unlikely, to have NBD records;
- the nature of records for unrecorded materials;
- the existence of special collections not recorded on the NBD that may be of particular research value; and,
- patterns of contribution or non-contribution to the NBD amongst particular types of library.

The study was based on surveys of libraries in the academic and special library sectors, state and territory libraries, and the National Library of Australia. Ray Choate from the University of Adelaide co-ordinated the survey amongst academic libraries, Robyn Collins from the State Library of South Australia co-ordinated the gathering of data from the national, state and territory libraries, and Carol Murray from the CSIRO Black Mountain Library co-ordinated responses from the special libraries sector.

Main findings

- Academic libraries are the major contributors to the NBD and most libraries record a high percentage of their collections on the NBD. There are, however, substantial numbers of older books and non-book material such as maps and music, held by these libraries which are not recorded on the NBD.
- National, state and territory libraries: It is likely that over one million books published before 1980, and held by the national, state and territory libraries are not recorded.

These libraries typically have substantial collections of material such as photographs, maps, music scores, oral history recordings and other special collections that are unrecorded on the NBD.

A number of these libraries have special projects underway to record materials on the NBD but, due to funding constraints, progress in entering records is often slow.

- Special libraries: While some special libraries record a large proportion of their material on the NBD, many record relatively little, and staff in

many special libraries are unaware of the existence of the NBD.

The contribution special libraries make to the NBD is, in many cases, hampered by a lack of suitable expertise and facilities.

A summary table listing the percentages of library collections recorded on the NBD, which was generated from the survey results, is available from the Australian Libraries Gateways site at: <http://www.nla.gov.au/libraries/resource/nbdsurvey.html>.

Implications

It is clear from the study that while the NBD is the major tool underpinning resource sharing in Australian libraries, there are substantial amounts of material that libraries do not record on the database. These omissions weaken significantly the extent to which the NBD can facilitate resource sharing, and reduce the associated economies of scale that libraries can realise through sharing original cataloguing records.

Next steps

The Task Force has distributed the report widely for discussion by the library and academic communities. As the first step to address the omission of significant collections from the NBD, the Task Force has asked libraries to forward information about these collections to the Task Force. With input from the academic community, the Task Force will assess the collections and list them for inclusion in the NBD according to their research importance.

The study is the first Australia-wide overview of the coverage of the NBD and alerts researchers and the library community that significant library collections in Australia are unrecorded on the NBD. Although the NBD survey report does not present any recommendations for further action, the Task Force believes the study will raise awareness of the NBD, and promote a discussion of strategies the library community can develop which will contribute to increasing the completeness of this national resource.

The Task Force welcomes comments on the study and its findings. Please send comments to: Paula Williams, The Australian Library Collections Task Force Secretariat, Co-ordination Support Branch, National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT 2601, e-mail: pwilliams@nla.gov.au, phone: 02 6262 1481. ■