
Conferences as Serials

by Garth Frankland, *Conference Acquisitions, British Library Document Supply Centre*

The British Library Document Supply Centre (BLDSC) has the largest collection of conference proceedings in the world, due to a collecting policy stretching back to the early 1960s. The Document Supply Centre also has a very large collection of current periodicals, and every incoming issue of the 53,000 currently received serial titles is scanned for conference proceedings, which are entered on a Conference Index file containing over a quarter of a million entries. Wherever possible, conference series which can be obtained as a serial are ordered as such, and standing orders are set up to ensure regular receipt.

One of the main suppliers of conference proceedings used by BLDSC is Interdok, of Harrison, New York, a firm specialising in the acquisition of such material. Interdok publishes guides to both published conferences and to conferences which are taking place, and the staff in the Conference Acquisitions section find these guides, which cover the social sciences and science and technology, very useful. In addition to standing orders for the major societies' conferences, standing orders are also placed for conferences which experience shows will be extremely difficult to obtain unless pursued pre-publication.

A variety of selection tools is used to ensure the completeness of BLDSC's collection. Interdok publishes *Mind* which contains announcements of conferences, but more useful for BLDSC is *World Meetings*, together with the hundreds of announcements that are received every year for forthcoming conferences. Over 500 periodical titles are scanned routinely for announcements and any lists of conferences they might contain. Each month, from these sources, over 250 conferences are ordered, in addition to the existing standing order arrangements.

Announcements for conferences which have taken place more than once are checked against the BLDSC online serials system to establish whether or not they are already coming in as periodicals. If the items in question can be ordered as a serial, the orders are transferred to the Serial Acquisitions section. Much of what is ordered, however, is very speculative and it is quite common for the publisher and venue to change from conference to conference. The firm Interdok has a common interest in the acquisition of conference material for its own indexing purposes, and as a result it does not mind that many of the attempts that are made to buy conference proceedings from announcements are speculative, since many conferences that are announced take place but do not publish any account of the proceedings. In specialist areas staff write directly to the organisers of the conference in order to try to obtain either copies of the papers themselves or the complete printed proceedings. The regular acquisition of conference proceedings is made even more difficult by the length of time that frequently elapses between the date of the conference itself and the publication of the proceedings. Years can pass before the proceedings appear, and a great deal of patience is required! Print runs of conference proceedings are normally quite small, and as a result, staff at BLDSC usually make no attempt to purchase pre-1980 items.

The main tools used as aids to the selection and purchasing decisions are: the Interdok lists of published conference proceedings; *World Meetings*; the ASLIB list of international conferences, and more specialist lists of conference proceedings such as the *Coal Index* and the *Metal Index*.

The whole field of conference acquisition is fraught with difficulties. BLDSC staff are always looking for ways in which to cut down the number of "one-off" conferences that are purchased, and try whenever possible to acquire proceedings on a standing order basis. Some international

standing order basis. Some international conferences are very problematical with examples of conferences with similar titles and similar origins being split and held in different countries, sometimes on the same date, to increase international rivalry, a practice which is particularly common in the field of high technology.

In spite of all these problems, however, the staff involved in the acquisition of conferences at BLDSC enjoy the challenges posed by such material, knowing that conferences make an important contribution to the world of scientific information and the dissemination of ideas.

NB. The BLDSC publication *Index to Conference Proceedings Received* can be obtained from:

Publications Sales Unit, The British Library, Boston Spa, Wetherby, LS23 7BQ. ISSN 0305-5183. Monthly issues - annual subscription for 1988 is £62. The 1987 Annual Cumulation costs £45.

The on-line version, *Conference Proceedings Index*, is available via the British Library Service, BLAISE-LINE.