

The Scottish Science Library — Its Role In National Provision

Background

The Scottish Science Library (SSL) is part of the National Library of Scotland (NLS), which has its roots in the Library of the Faculty of Advocates, founded in 1682 and transferred, except for its legal collections, to the nation in 1925. The NLS has therefore been a legal deposit library, in one form or another, since 1710, and is entitled to claim printed books, periodicals, newspapers, official publications, maps and music published in the United Kingdom and Ireland. The Library also has a purchase grant with which it buys a selection of items not received via legal deposit, either because they are not published within the United Kingdom, or because they are in a format not covered by legal deposit legislation (eg CD-ROM, microform, etc).

In the past, the NLS has considered its main role to be to concentrate particularly on the development of staff expertise and stock acquisition in areas of particular relevance to Scottish history and culture. At the same time, however, the NLS has also continued to receive legal deposit material in other subject areas, and to make this available for consultation by those with a genuine need for access to it. As with many national libraries, however, the NLS has tended to be biased towards the humanities and social sciences, rather than science, technology or business. This has meant that specialist staff have not been available to exploit the scientific collections in the NLS on behalf of the readers. However, almost three years ago the NLS launched a new service intended to exploit its scientific collections more fully and improve access to them. The new service is called the The Scottish Science Library and employs

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specialist staff in the areas of science and business to plan services and stock to meet the needs of the scientific and business communities in Scotland.

The central aim of the National Library of Scotland is now therefore: “to acquire, make available and preserve books, manuscripts, and information in other appropriate forms to meet the needs at a national level of scholarship, research and reference in the humanities and *science*, and of *information provision for industry and commerce*”. (*authors italics*)

The idea of a national science library for Scotland was first seriously considered after the publications of the Dainton Report(1) in 1969. This report suggested that the information needs of industry and commerce would be best served by a system of regional scientific and technical reference facilities based principally in existing public and university libraries. This was dismissed, in a subsequent White Paper(2) on the British Library, as being too expensive. However, in Scotland the idea of a national science library was considered more feasible, both because of the existing Scottish library structure and also Scotland's geographical position in relation to other major United Kingdom library facilities.

In the early 1970s several factors combined to take the idea beyond discussion and towards reality. The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) was looking for a location for its extensive collection of scientific journals. At the same time, the National Library of Scotland was considering ways in which to exploit more fully its scientific collections and was also seeking additional

accommodation to store its growing legal deposit stock. This led to the proposal that the merger of the Royal Society of Edinburgh's collections of foreign scientific periodicals with the NLS scientific collections would form the basis for a national science reference library for Scotland. A meeting took place between Principals of Scottish Universities, Directors of Government Research Institutes in Scotland, and representatives from the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the National Library of Scotland which endorsed a proposal that a national science reference library would greatly enhance access to scientific literature in Scotland. In 1981 approval was finally received from the Government to go ahead with the creation of a new science information service within the NLS, served by a separate reading room with specialist staff, and housed in part of a new building to be provided to house the growing NLS collection. In 1983 a survey of potential users of the intended new service was undertaken by the NLS.

Questionnaires (1,052 in total) were sent to various sectors of the scientific community in Scotland, e.g. universities, colleges, research institutions, hospital laboratories and large industrial concerns. The 85% response rate reflected the demand for, and interest in, the planned new service. As predicted, potential users sought a wide range of facilities including speedy access to scientific material, online search services, remote access to the Library's catalogue, information services and a rapid photocopy facility. The new library, to be known as the Scottish Science Library, opened in June 1989, and a business information service (SCOTBIS) was launched in November of the same year.

The Scottish Science Library

Because of the small scale of the Scottish Science Library (there are only 14 members of staff, from the Director to the bookfetcher), the Library cannot even

attempt to provide all the services and range of stock asked for. Where services are adequately covered by other organisations such as the British Library Document Supply Centre, the SSL sees its role as to act as a referral service, rather than try to compete with, or duplicate, existing services. Therefore the SSL has developed policies in the areas of purchasing and services intended to fill gaps in existing provision, especially where these might build on strengths within the NLS collection. Some examples are:

(i) *Information Services for Small Businesses*

As with most national libraries, our stock is one of our greatest strengths, and the business information section does include the best collection of market research reports and trade journals in Scotland. Our Business Information team also offer a range of services including online searching and desk research. There are two types of service currently offered — one basically free, with charges for value-added services, and one fee-based where staff time is charged for.

(ii) *Environmental Information*

Existing library coverage of environmental information is not totally satisfactory, mainly because of the multidisciplinary and multilevel nature of the subject. Public libraries may stock popular environmental publications and academic libraries will have material to support teaching courses such as environmental engineering or ecology, but only a legal deposit library, with its unique range of material, can hope to provide for more than a narrow field or small target audience in such a complex area. The legal deposit collections of the NLS include environmental publications from many sources and all levels. The SSL has a core collection of recently published scientific and technical

material on its open shelves, backed up by other relevant collections from elsewhere in the NLS.

The SSL is also purchasing widely in environmental science and related subjects, especially periodicals and abstracting and indexing publications, to fill gaps in local provision and to supplement the NLS collection in this subject area.

(iii) *Standards*

The SSL holds a full current set of British Standards, and also purchases a range of international standards, with the intention of further building up the collection as a major priority for the future. The Library has just purchased ISO standards on CD-ROM and will be publishing a guide to standards in Scottish libraries in the near future. One of the major uses our collections are put to is for examination of particular standards for relevance and suitability before purchase.

(iv) *FOSSIL (Forum of Scottish Science Information Librarians)*

In April 1990, the Scottish Science Library brought together a cross-section of Scottish science librarians to discuss topical subjects in the area of scientific information. Topics such as patent provision in Scotland, SLIC (Scottish Library and Information Council), library co-operation, collection development policies, union lists of periodicals, and standards were discussed. What came out of that meeting was the realisation that, while many of the areas discussed by the meeting were adequately covered elsewhere, for certain topics there was no existing forum. It was decided that the group would be known as the Forum of Scottish Science Information Librarians (FOSSIL) and would continue to meet on an informal basis, with irregular meetings being called when there was sufficient need. It is as

a direct result of the first meeting of FOSSIL that the Scottish Science Library is producing a guide to standards collections held in Scotland.

As can be seen from these examples, the SSL sees its role as to build on existing strengths within the NLS stock by purchasing more widely in those areas and by making the stock more accessible to users, as well as to fill gaps in existing information provision in Scotland where these gaps can be identified. The Library also has a general interest in the promotion of science and hosts an annual science lecture, sponsored by IBM (UK). This series of lectures began informally with Dr Benoit Mandelbrot on fractals, and was formally launched in 1991 with a talk from Professor Heinz Wolff on encouraging an early interest in science.

Serials in the Scottish Science Library

The NLS currently receives about 20,000 serials titles via legal deposit, of which approximately 5,000 can be described as science. The SSL has made serials a priority as they play such an important role in the communication of scientific information. A selection of legal deposit periodicals are housed on open access in the SSL, and these are supplemented by the purchase of non-UK titles in core areas. Most of the SSL purchase grant is spent on serial publications, for instance several abstracting and indexing publications are purchased in hard copy and/or in CD-ROM format, including Biological Abstracts, Science Citation Index and Chemical Abstracts.

As previously mentioned, the SSL also holds a collection of foreign scientific periodicals formerly held by the Royal Society of Edinburgh. The collection is still growing (approximately 900 titles are still current), and is added to by an ongoing exchange programme maintained by the Royal Society of Edinburgh. A project is

currently underway, within the SSL, to catalogue these periodicals and incorporate the records into those of the NLS as a whole. A few of these titles have unbroken runs going back to the 18th century, and for some of the titles the SSL is the only location in Scotland.

Future Developments

Future developments in the Scottish Science Library will include the general expansion of existing services and the development of a range of new services. Specific objectives are the launch of an environmental information service, a series of publications on information sources, training courses in information-related areas, and exhibitions.

Conclusion

The SSL was never intended, or designed, to

compete with services such as those offered by the British Library Document Supply Centre. Rather, as part of the only legal deposit library north of Cambridge, the SSL aims to improve Scottish access to a valuable legal deposit collection, and to provide an information service to those whose needs are not easily served by other libraries. The SSL acts both as a library of last resort (ie as a back-up to other Scottish libraries), and a library of first resort for publications and services not available elsewhere.

References

- (1) *Report of the National Libraries Committee* (Chairman: F.S. Dainton). London, HMSO, 1969 (Cmnd. 4028)
- (2) *The British Library*, London, HMSO, 1971 (Cmnd. 4572)

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