

# Editorial



*Hazel Woodward and Helen Henderson*

Colleagues may recall that in the November 2001 issue of *Serials*, Tony Kidd from Glasgow University (and a member of the UKSG Committee) reported on the serials element of a feasibility study into the setting up of a UK National Union Catalogue. As we all know too well, things move fast in the world of serials and your editors are delighted to report that they (as part of a small consortium) were commissioned in October 2001 by JISC, the British Library and the Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) to take forward that work. They are undertaking a scoping study and implementation plan for a UK Serials National Union Catalogue – now called SUNCAT. No surprise that the timeframe was short. By the time you read this editorial our report will be with the funding bodies. If SUNCAT goes ahead – and all the signs are highly favourable – SUNCAT will form an important building block of the JISC's Distributed National Electronic Resource (DNER) architecture. It will provide a central source of high quality (CONSER/MARC 21) records for matching and linking to other DNER and commercially-based serials projects and services.

However, what has struck the SUNCAT scoping team most forcibly is the rather sorry state of the serials bibliographic infrastructure, particularly in the UK, but also in some cases

internationally (although the Library of Congress and other CONSER participants are making great efforts to produce better quality serials catalogues). Serials catalogue records in UK academic library OPACs are generally of poor quality; they lack both standardised bibliographic descriptors and standardised holdings statements. Many records lack an ISSN – sometimes because it has not been entered at the local level, sometimes because an ISSN has not been allocated to the title. The UK national ISSN centre has a significant backlog, as does the International ISSN Centre in Paris – although the Paris centre has indicated enthusiasm for working with SUNCAT to improve the situation. This is not going to be helped by AACR expanding the scope of what is considered a serial, taking place this year. At the ALA meetings in New Orleans everybody wanted to get on the ONIX bandwagon (libraries, publishers and agents). This product metadata standard is close to being implemented and gives a glimmer of hope for the supply of good quality metadata from the publishers to input to the cataloguing process for both new serials and changes titles. (For more information, go to [www.editeur.org](http://www.editeur.org))

In many ways the poor quality of serials bibliographic data didn't matter so much until we started linking (especially between electronic and

print), setting up distributed union catalogues, and of course tackling the 'appropriate copy' problem that we have highlighted in previous issues of *Serials*. There is no doubt that even if we in the UK wish to join the proliferation of worldwide linking initiatives we are going to have to devote considerable resources to improving the quality of our serials metadata.

On a more positive note, there is considerable support and enthusiasm for SUNCAT from both academics and librarians. In essence, SUNCAT aims to achieve a high quality resource for the identification and location of serials for UK academic researchers. Its scope will be both wide and deep. Clearly the development of the union catalogue will need to be phased. In Phase 1 it is envisaged that the holdings of major academic libraries (those with the greatest spend on serials) will be included, but it is anticipated that this will be followed in Phase 2 by the addition of other academic libraries and the holdings of learned societies and other specialised collections to provide the depth of coverage in a wide variety of subject disciplines. Further developments

might include links to abstracting and indexing services and document delivery services.

SUNCAT is only one of a series of exciting initiatives happening in the serials world at the moment. Bringing the focus back to this particular issue of *Serials*, we are pleased to publish a group of articles on the topic of e-journal usage statistics. Based on the recent UKSG seminar in London, we have a range of papers covering the ARL E-Metrics project, the work of ISO and the view of the librarian on the importance of usage statistics for collection management. To provide a context for this theme the Key Issue is serials metrics. These and many other important issues will be discussed at the forthcoming UKSG Conference in Warwick in April – our 25th Anniversary celebration. There is a great programme of internationally renowned speakers and many of the presentations will be published in the July 2002 issue of *Serials*. One of the high spots of the conference will be the conference dinner to be held at Stoneleigh Abbey.

We look forward to seeing you there.