

SUNCAT: The Serials Union CATalogue for the UK Research Community

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Introduction

SUNCAT is the national Serials Union CATalogue for the UK research community and is available at <http://www.suncat.ac.uk>

SUNCAT is a freely available tool to help both researchers and librarians locate serials held in the UK. It contains serials bibliographic and holdings information from over 60 UK research libraries, including the British Library and the National Libraries of Scotland and Wales. The catalogue also contains high quality bibliographic records from CONSER¹ and the ISSN Register².

SUNCAT is provided by EDINA³, a Joint Information Systems Council (JISC)⁴ funded national data centre based at the University of Edinburgh, with partners Ex Libris⁵, who supply the Library Management System, Aleph 500, underpinning the service.

Background

SUNCAT was developed in response to a 2001 research study which examined the feasibility of creating a UK National Union Catalogue (UKNUC) for all materials, including both monographs and serials. A key message which emerged in the final UKNUC report⁶ was that there was a real need for improved information about serials held in the UK, not only information about the existence and location of serials but also details about serials holdings.

“When users were asked how often they would wish to use a UKNUC for various different purposes, the idea of locating all journals in a particular subject area achieved the highest score among most groups of researchers, with support ranging from 72% to 95%, the highest score reached in response to this question. This is a definite indication of the need and support for a Serials National Union Catalogue.”⁷

Another particular issue that was highlighted in the study was the variable quality of bibliographic and holdings data in library catalogues.

Following the report a decision was taken not to proceed with a National Union Catalogue incorporating monographs, but to fund work to develop a Serials Union Catalogue for the UK over three phases.

During Phase One (2003-04), which was funded by JISC and the Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP)⁸, a union catalogue was created with a critical mass of

over four million records from 22 leading research libraries, the CONSER database and the ISSN Register.

SUNCAT is currently in Phase Two of its development and is now funded solely by JISC. Phase Two began in early 2005 with the launch of a pilot service followed by the launch of the full service in August 2006. Phase Two has so far has seen the coverage of the catalogue increase to include over 60 libraries, including specialist collections and older, rarer materials. Phase Three will run from August 2007 onwards and will incorporate further developments and enhancements to the service to ensure its long-term stability.

Scope and Content

SUNCAT accepts any records from its Contributing Libraries for titles which they deem to be serials and therefore contains a variety of material including journals, periodicals, newspapers, newsletters, magazines, proceedings, annual reports and other publications of a continuing nature. The catalogue contains records for both print and electronic serials, including open access titles. SUNCAT users may be able to access full text content of a journal provided their home institution has an active subscription.

SUNCAT currently holds information from over 60 of the UK's largest research libraries so is a very rich source of social science serials information. In addition to the British Library and the National Libraries of Scotland and Wales, Contributing Libraries include universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Durham and University College, London containing some of the most significant social science collections in the UK. More specialised libraries include those of the London School of Economics and Political Science, the London Business School, the School of Oriental and African Studies, the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Women's Library, with the serials collection of the British Film Institute to be added shortly. A full list of libraries contributing to SUNCAT is available at http://www.suncat.ac.uk/description/contributing_libraries.html

Libraries contributing to SUNCAT are distributed throughout the UK from as far north as the University of Aberdeen to the University of Exeter in the south and from The Queen's University of Belfast in the west right across to the University of East Anglia. SUNCAT has a geographical search function enabling users to limit searches to a particular region, city or even institution which has the obvious benefit of allowing users to tailor searches to locations within easy travel distance but can also be used for collection management purposes, for example, to ascertain the overlap of titles in particular regions.

The Service

SUNCAT has two major aims:

- To be the key online tool for researchers to locate serials throughout the UK
- To provide librarians with a central source of high-quality bibliographic records for upgrading local catalogues.

With data from over 60 UK research libraries, SUNCAT is the most comprehensive source of serials holdings information in the UK. In order to make locating serials as efficient as possible titles are deduplicated to view so that in theory there should only be one bibliographic record displayed for each title, along with a list of holdings from each of the libraries holding that title. Records are deduplicated using a matching algorithm and the best available bibliographic record, or “preferred” record, is chosen for display. In reality, and largely due to the existing poor quality serials data in library catalogues, the deduplication is not complete but this is an area of improvement the SUNCAT team will be concentrating on over the next year.

The screenshot below shows the heart of SUNCAT, the full record display of a journal title with the details for the Contributing Libraries holding that title listed underneath. The links from the holdings display lead users directly to the library homepage of the relevant institutions. This linking allows users to verify local library details such as access arrangements, location, contact details, opening hours and also to check the most up-to-date holdings information on the libraries’ own catalogues. Users can also save records locally, email them or download them to Bibliographic Management tools such as EndNote and Reference Manager.

The screenshot displays the SUNCAT interface for a journal record. At the top, there are navigation tabs: Basic Search, Advanced Search, Browse, Results List, Search History, Marked Items, and Help. Below this is the 'Full View of Record' section for 'British Journal of Industrial Relations'. The record details include the title, author (London School of Economics and Political Science), ISSN (0007-1980), and publication details (Quarterly, Mar. 1991-). A 'Preferred bibliographic record' label points to the main record information. Below the details is a 'Holdings' table with columns for Library, Shelfmark, Availability, and Notes. Annotations point to specific elements: 'Shelfmark' points to the 'Shelfmark' column, 'Online availability' points to the 'Availability' column, 'Links to library websites' points to the 'Library' column, and 'Summary holdings statements' points to the 'Notes' column.

Library	Shelfmark	Availability	Notes
Aberdeen Univ. Electronic resource		Available online	Available from Blackwell Synergy, Current and last year available
Aberdeen Univ. Electronic resource		Available online	Available from IngentaConnect, Current and last year available
Aberdeen Univ. Electronic resource		Available online	Available from SwetsWise, Current and last year available
Aberdeen Univ. Electronic resource		Online version available for university members only - This requires ATHENS login off-campus.	
Aberdeen Univ. Queen Mother Library Floor 1 Per	Per 320 Bn	v. 1 (1962-)	
Birmingham Univ. Main Library	Periodicals HD 6961 A1B7	Vol.40-, 2002-	
Birmingham Univ. Store	Add_per1342	Vol.1-39, 1963-2001. Cumulative index, vol.1-19, Library lacks: Vol.30, no. 3-4, 1992; 35, no.2, 1997; 38, no.2, 2000	
Bristol Univ. Arts and Social Sciences		Vol.1 (1962)-Index v.1-19	
British Library Document Supply	2216 000000	VOL. 1, 1963-	

SUNCAT Full Record Display with Holdings

SUNCAT supports title and subject searching, enabling users to both locate particular titles and also to search or browse for serials in their field of interest. Z39.50 connection details have recently been published thereby allowing users to search SUNCAT from their own local catalogue, federated search services or from within Bibliographic Reference Management software. This functionality enables libraries to integrate SUNCAT into a wide range of subject collection searches improving the visibility of more unique serials collections to researchers, particularly in the social science arena.

In addition to being a serials location tool for end-users, SUNCAT can be used by a range of information professionals for a variety of purposes. It can be used as a location and discovery tool by Reference/Enquiry and Liaison staff to help their users locate particular serials and to find out about the existence of serials in a particular subject area. SUNCAT is a particularly useful location tool for Inter-Library-Loan (ILL) Librarians as with one search they can check whether a serial is held in their own library, the British Library or elsewhere in the UK. In addition, both ILL and Serials Librarians can use SUNCAT to verify bibliographic details, and Collection Managers can use SUNCAT to determine information about their serials collections, including the number of unique serials held in their library and any overlap with other contributing libraries which may be of interest on a geographic or subject level basis.

With respect to its second aim, SUNCAT is attempting to address the problem of poor quality serials information in the UK by creating a central source of serial bibliographic records. SUNCAT currently contains high quality records from CONSER but has a long term goal of ensuring that at least one good quality bibliographic record exists for every title on the catalogue. Therefore, Contributing Libraries will be asked to upgrade, over time, any of the serials records they have supplied which are either unique or preferred to meet SUNCAT's bibliographic standard, which is based on the CONSER minimum level standard.

Currently cataloguers from any library can consult MARC records on SUNCAT and use the information contained to verify or improve serials data locally. Contributing Libraries will soon be able to download MARC records in order to upgrade their own local catalogues so that serials data will be improved on both a local and national level.

The Future

SUNCAT contains information about serials at the title level but not at article level and it is therefore important to investigate how SUNCAT can integrate fully into the wider digital information environment. Development for SUNCAT should improve users' experience of the search and discovery process enabling simpler and more seamless transition from discovery of information, to location and ultimately access. SUNCAT's strength currently lies in the location function but does include elements of discovery, enabled by subject searching and browsing and also access with the inclusion of open access titles and further the ability for users to get to the full text of titles subscribed to by their institution. However, improvements in these functions could be achieved with linkages to tables of contents services such as Zetoc⁹ and further, with Open URL linking leading users to either the appropriate copy online or to document delivery options.

SUNCAT will also continue to expand and enhance its core business with improvements in data quality as we look at ways of reducing duplicates on the catalogue and ask our Contributing Libraries to verify and upgrade any unique or preferred records supplied. SUNCAT is in the process of processing updates from Contributing Libraries and in the future the majority of Libraries will supply updates on a monthly basis, keeping the catalogue as current as possible. Finally, SUNCAT is expected to contain serials information from over 75 libraries within the next few

months and to continue to expand during Phrase Three improving its subject and geographic scope and ensuring that SUNCAT will mature into a truly national serials union catalogue.

References

¹ CONSER (Cooperative Online Serials): <http://www.loc.gov/acq/conser/>

² ISSN Register: <http://www.issn.org/en>

³ EDINA: <http://www.edina.ac.uk/>

⁴ JISC: <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/>

⁵ Ex Libris: <http://www.exlibrisgroup.com/aleph.htm>

⁶ Stubbley, P., Bull, R. and Kidd, T. (2001) "Feasibility Study for a National Union Catalogue: Final Report", available at <http://www.suncat.ac.uk/description/SUNCAT-NUCrep.pdf>

⁷ Kidd, T. and Bull, R. (2001) "UKNUC Feasibility Study: A Serials Union Catalogue for the UK: a compilation of relevant sections from other UKNUC Feasibility Study reports."

⁸ RSLP: <http://www.rslp.ac.uk/>

⁹ Zetoc: <http://zetoc.mimas.ac.uk/>