

# **SUNCAT MARC Downloading Service**

## **Report of Interviews held November-December 2009**

### **Introduction**

One of SUNCAT's primary aims is to improve the quality of serials' records in the UK. The original UKNUC study, which led to the creation of SUNCAT, recognised the variable quality of serials' records in UK library catalogues and the associated problems researchers faced when searching for and locating serials. To enable Contributing Libraries to add good quality records for any new titles they subscribe to and to improve any poor quality records for existing titles on their local catalogues, SUNCAT provides access to serials' records in MARC format.

SUNCAT introduced the pilot downloading service in early 2008 to enable Contributing Libraries to download serials bibliographic records in MARC21 format. A Z39.50 connection was set up to a subset of the SUNCAT records, the CONSER database. Later in 2008, a second connection was advertised which provided access to both the CONSER and ISSN records on SUNCAT. The intention is to maintain the CONSER only connection as this provides libraries with very quick and easy access to these high quality records. However, the SUNCAT team are keen to extend the coverage of the second connection by adding records from some or all of the SUNCAT Contributing Libraries.

It has not proved possible to extend the service before this point due to concerns about the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) of some of the records contributed by the SUNCAT Contributing Libraries. Many of these records have been downloaded from other sources, including OCLC, Serials Solutions, the British Library and Aleph's MARCIt! service. The SUNCAT team have recently made some progress on negotiating agreements with a number of these services and are hopeful that it will be possible to make more of the Contributing Libraries records available for downloading in 2010.

However, before expanding the service, it is desirable to discover how the current service is being used and if any improvements can be introduced alongside any such expansion. This analysis will be conducted in two stages. The findings of these interviews, conducted with representatives from six SUNCAT Contributing Libraries, form the first stage and will help to inform the structure and content of an online survey to be distributed to all the SUNCAT Contributing Libraries in early 2010.

### **Creation and Editing of Serials' Records for Library Catalogues**

The majority of new serials' records added to the respondents' library catalogues are e-serials purchased as part of large packages. However, of the libraries questioned, two thirds buy MARC records supplied by their e-serial management solutions, such as Ex Libris MARCIt! or Serials Solutions. These records are then directly loaded into the library catalogues with little or no intervention from the cataloguing departments. Only one Higher Education representative, from the University of Aberdeen, stated that they manually create or download records for their e-serials on a regular basis. Another library, the University of Nottingham also mentions downloading serials' records to supplement e-serials records that their e-serial management package is not able to supply or where they are only able to supply very basic records. In this case a number of problem records are prioritised for cataloguing work in each monthly upload to the library catalogue.

All the libraries are required to create or download MARC records on a monthly basis for the small number of new print serials purchased. However, as e-serials proliferate the number of records required for new print serials is ever diminishing.

On a larger scale many of the libraries need access to serials' records to upgrade existing records on their catalogues. The scale of serials' record retroconversion varies from library to library. The University of Aberdeen has a part-time cataloguer devoted to this work in the long term; the University of Glasgow also has a long term project in progress, the National Library of Scotland have several planned and the University of Nottingham has recently completed such a project.

*“We found a lot in summer 2008 when we were looking at improving records on our system for a project. In that case we found 80-90% of what we were looking for on SUNCAT which was great.”*  
[Janet Wharton, University of Nottingham]

The final reason mentioned in relation to editing or creating serials’ records is connected to the general maintenance of records, such as changes of title, title mergers etc. Access to the ISSN data is reported as being useful to allow cataloguers to verify ISSNs or changes of titles. Most of the libraries interviewed spend some time either checking details of these changes on external sources or downloading records to reflect these changes on their local catalogues.

## **Scale of Serials’ Record Creation or Download**

This varies hugely from one library to another. At the bottom end of the scale the University of Edinburgh only create 3-4 new records or title changes per month. The University of Glasgow, due to their retroconversion project, create 50-60 records per month. Next, with its status as a legal deposit library, the University of Cambridge creates around 150 records and the National Library of Scotland similarly creates approximately 200 titles per month, again partly due to retroconversion work and their legal deposit status. However, the University of Aberdeen creates the largest number of records with around 400 new records and 700 older records upgraded per month.

## **Sources of Serials’ Records**

The three primary sources of serials’ records highlighted are

- OCLC
- RLUK
- SUNCAT

Secondary sources also mentioned are the British Library and other legal deposit libraries, such as the University of Oxford and the National Library of Scotland. These sources are more likely to have records for obscure UK titles.

## **Serials Cataloguing Workflows**

All the respondents reported searching for and downloading records via Z39.50 connections to the sources listed above. A few of the libraries, including the University of Cambridge and the University of Aberdeen search several sources simultaneously, whereas others start with a particular source then move to others if and when necessary. Respondents report occasionally searching the web interfaces of services to locate the system numbers of suitable records if searches via Z39.50 are unsuccessful. However, they all confirm that a Z39.50 connection is currently the most efficient system for acquiring serials’ bibliographic records.

One library, the University of Glasgow reported that SUNCAT is their first destination when searching for serials’ records, and another, the University of Aberdeen also indicated that they target SUNCAT records as their first choice.

*“We search a number of sources simultaneously but would tend to look at the SUNCAT results first”*  
[Robin Armstrong Viner, University of Aberdeen]

Some libraries use SUNCAT under particular circumstances when they believe it is likely to contain the records they are looking for.

*“If looking for a new title or a change of title we would go first to RLUK as more likely to find records there. However if an old record for a title we hold needs upgrading we could go straight to the SUNCAT CONSER database....SUNCAT becomes even more attractive when there are high quality records which are not available on RLUK.”* [Janet Wharton, University of Nottingham]

Other libraries reported that they have long established workflows of looking at other sources such as OCLC or RLUK first, but that the only real reason for not using SUNCAT first is that it contains a

smaller number of records and is not as well known as other sources. Unfortunately, due to its name, SUNCAT also appears at the bottom of the alphabetical lists of sources.

*“Custom and practice is what makes cataloguers go to RLUK a lot of the time, we would need local promotion to highlight the differences.” [Hugh Taylor, Cambridge University]*

## **Key Requirements of a Serials’ Record Source**

The overwhelming response to this question is that the quality of records is the most important feature of a record downloading service. In this respect SUNCAT scores highly with the respondents as it provides access to the high quality CONSER serials’ records. However, OCLC also provides access to these records.

Coverage of serials’ titles is another important factor. In this case SUNCAT is currently stronger in the coverage of current popular titles so useful for new print or electronic titles or coping with title changes to current titles. Where SUNCAT is weaker is the coverage of more obscure titles, where OCLC and RLUK would have a wider coverage. For the legal deposit libraries access to records for UK titles, often very obscure titles, would be a major advantage as OCLC is not particularly strong in this area, with the National Library of Scotland only finding 50-60 % of the material they require on OCLC.

Finally, ease of use is also cited as an important factor and here again SUNCAT proves quite popular. Respondents appreciated that SUNCAT is a serials only service and provides access to a limited pool of high quality records.

*“SUNCAT is a far better database than RLUK, much user friendlier, confined to serials, which is good. I wouldn’t like to see SUNCAT go as it’s good to have a serials only resource. Another major attraction is that it contain CONSER records and with more libraries’ records it would be a richer resource and useful when starting a retroconversion project.” [Caroline Lowrey, National Library of Scotland]*

## **Percentage of Records found on SUNCAT**

There is a wide variation in the percentages reported by the interviewees. This can be explained by the order in which they search record sources and also the different purposes for which their institutions are seeking records. Both the University of Aberdeen and the University of Glasgow use SUNCAT as their first port of call for serials’ records and both report that than on average they find two-thirds of the records they require on SUNCAT. The University of Glasgow also emphasise that the percentage has increased since the same period in 2008 when they found on average around 50% of the records they required on SUNCAT. The University of Nottingham find on average around 50% of the records they require but highlighted that they found 80-90% of the records they required for a record upgrading project conducted in 2008. However, the National Library of Scotland and the University of Cambridge report that they find fewer than 5% of their serials’ records on SUNCAT. The National Library of Scotland estimated that if they did use SUNCAT as their first destination for serials’ records it would fulfil around 30% of their record requirements.

As noted above, increasing the number of records available for download on SUNCAT, by adding records from the SUNCAT Contributing Libraries, would increase these percentages, particularly for the legal deposit libraries, such as the University of Cambridge and the National Library of Scotland.

## **Current Satisfaction with SUNCAT**

All of the interviewees report a good level of satisfaction with the downloading service. The main issues are connected with the coverage of the service compared to other sources of records and the desire to conduct more focussed searches. No difficulties are reported regarding configuring the Z39.50 connection and most of the respondents report that the connection is stable and unproblematic.

## Desirable Improvements for SUNCAT

The major improvement highlighted is, unsurprisingly, increasing the size of the database by making MARC records from the SUNCAT Contributing Libraries available for downloading. However, a number of the respondent did also stress that part of SUNCAT's current attraction was the lack of duplicate records in the database making it possible to quickly and efficiently identify and select records for downloading. This suggests that any expansion of the service should initially be selective or provide some way of enabling cataloguers to identify quality records.

*"Adding new libraries and better quality records. If everyone out there doing retrospective cataloguing could draw on the same pool of records it would save a huge duplication of effort." [Robin Armstrong Viner, University of Aberdeen]*

*"In a way where you are winning is that there isn't much clutter. On RLUK you have all comers, so matching is a problem... SUNCAT is clean with not many records coming back and CONSER records full and pretty nice, gives it a slight edge." [Hugh Taylor, Cambridge University]*

The improvements suggested include:

- Increasing the number of records, particularly for more obscure titles
- Connecting to the deduplicated version of the database when more records are made available to reduce the amount of duplicated records
- Providing information on how libraries can limit their searches to only search selected libraries' records
- Reducing duplication of records as far as possible
- Highlighting preferred records, and hence the best quality records, on the brief display
- Displaying the records' provenance on the brief display as this can also be an indicator of quality.
- Enabling libraries to be able to set the order in which libraries' records are displayed
- Investigating time out issues reported by the University of Glasgow for common keyword searches and combination searches as reported by the National Library of Scotland.
- Increasing the frequency of CONSER updates so that new titles and title changes are included in SUNCAT as soon as possible.

A few of the respondents also commented on issues or improvements which are already available via the Z39.50 connections, including:

- Providing Boolean keyword search capabilities and/or combined field searches
- Introducing a "title starts with" or a "title phrase" search in addition to the title keyword search.

This suggests that in addition to contacting these libraries directly it would be useful to add more information and suggestions to the SUNCAT website. Some libraries appear to have their connection configured as they would want it but in other cases there appears to be some lack of communication between the users of the service and the person conducting the initial set up. As part of the expansion it might be useful to promote how some libraries configure the connection so that its potential can be fully realised in the majority of the SUNCAT Contributing libraries.