



SEED

Final Report to the Scottish Executive Education Department

Final Report of the RSLP SCONE project
Annexe D

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&
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The SEED project – funded by the Scottish Executive Education Department - aimed to aid researchers by enhancing existing subject descriptions of research collections held in the RCO library collections database, identifying a means of keeping the collections database current, and examining the feasibility of extending the database to include significant collections held in public libraries and elsewhere in Scotland.

	Contents	Page
1.	Introduction	4
2.	Summary of work carried out	4
2.1	Mounting existing RCO data (from the CCR Programme)	4
2.1.1	Preparation of the RCO data	5
2.1.2	Consultation with individual libraries on RCOs before online mounting	5
2.1.3	Conversion of RCO data into electronic form	5
2.1.4	Data input	5
2.1.5	Agreeing a mechanism to permit local updating of information with central co-ordination in order to ensure reliability and currency	5
2.1.6	Incorporation of special and named HE Collections	6
2.2	Investigating the foundation work to be carried out to extend the recording of research collections beyond the libraries in SCURL	6
2.2.1	Discussion of these issues with the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC).	6
2.2.2	Identification of possible methods of extending the existing RCO data to include research collections in public libraries in Scotland.	7
3.	Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations	8

1. Introduction

The SEED¹ Project, funded by the Scottish Executive Education Department as part of an ongoing programme of cooperative initiatives undertaken by the Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries (SCURL)², aimed to:

1. Improve on the existing database of subject descriptions of Scottish learning and research collections held at the Research Collections Online³ web-site.
2. Establish a means to keep the data current.
3. Investigate the feasibility and desirability of extending this data to include collections held in public libraries and elsewhere in Scotland.
4. To work closely with the CAIRNS⁴ Scottish networked catalogue project and the SCONE⁵ Scottish Collections Network project to ensure compatible outcomes for all three.

The project, which was carried out jointly by the National Library of Scotland and the Centre for Digital Library Research at Strathclyde University, successfully met all of these objectives. In doing so, it worked closely, and received significant help from, the SLAINTE⁶ and Scottish Library and Information Resources (SLIR) initiatives of the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC)⁷ and the Scottish Library Association⁸, as well as with SCURL itself. Napier University Learning Information Services⁹ also donated key resources and expertise. This document reports the progress made and indicates further research and development requirements.

2. Summary of work carried out

The work of the project was divided into two main areas:

- Mounting existing RCO data (from the Collaborative Collecting Responsibilities Programme).
- Investigating the foundation work to be carried out to extend the recording of research collections beyond the libraries in SCURL (e.g. Public Libraries, the majority of whom are not in SCURL).

2.1 Mounting existing RCO data (from the CCR Programme)

Background

Prior to the start of the SEED Project, paper-held data concerning research level collections had been extracted from the original Conspectus survey from the 1980s and combined with electronic data from the linked Co-operative Collecting Responsibilities exercise from the mid 1990s. This was used to form a database which listed details of all research level collections in the libraries who originally took part in the Conspectus in Scotland exercise. Those libraries were Aberdeen University, Dundee University, Edinburgh City, Edinburgh University, Glasgow University, Heriot-Watt University, Mitchell Library (Glasgow), National Library of Scotland, St Andrews University, Stirling University and Strathclyde University. This database was then converted by staff at Strathclyde University for web-access as the initial RCO database. However, some elements of the data collected were not in the

¹ <http://seed.cdrl.strath.ac.uk/>

² <http://scurl.ac.uk/>

³ <http://scone.strath.ac.uk/rco/index.cfm>

⁴ <http://cairns.lib.strath.ac.uk/>

⁵ <http://scone.strath.ac.uk/>

⁶ <http://www.slainte.org.uk/>

⁷ <http://www.slainte.org.uk/slic/slichome.htm>

⁸ <http://www.slainte.org.uk/cilips/clpshome.htm> (Now changed name to CILIPS)

⁹ <http://nulis.napier.ac.uk/>

database at this point, and one aim of SEED was to upgrade the database to encompass this data. This work involved the conversion of that part of the existing RCO data still held in hard-copy form to electronic form, to enhance the existing online database; this involved the processes listed in 2.1.1 to 2.1.4 below.

2.1.1 Preparation of the RCO data [NLS]

This entailed surveying printed data from the various sites already covered by the RCO collections database, standardising terminology and syntax, and clarifying descriptions where appropriate.

2.1.2 Consultation with individual libraries before online mounting [NLS]

This was undertaken as and when necessary

2.1.3 Conversion of RCO data into electronic form [NLS]

All of the remaining printed data on research level collections held by the libraries which took part in the original Conspectus exercise to measure collection strengths (see list above) was converted into electronic form for transmission to the Centre for Digital Library Research in a format suitable for conversion to the RCO database.

2.1.4 Data input [NLS]

The data was passed to the Centre for Digital Library Research where it was added to the RCO database. Note that the original RCO database has since been incorporated into the more comprehensive SCONE Scottish Collections Network database, part of which is accessible via the SCONE service¹⁰, and part of which is available through the CAIRNS¹¹ service. Combining the two into a single service requires further development.

Additional note

Although not part of the original SEED proposal, it was agreed that it would be sensible to ask libraries to update the data gathered in the 1980s and 1990s. The newly reformatted data was therefore circulated on a subject-by-subject basis to the participating libraries, who were asked to verify that the data was still accurate. This revised information was then forwarded to the Centre for Digital Library Research for inclusion in the RCO database. To date, the following subject areas have been issued for updating: Agriculture, Anthropology, Art and Architecture, Cartographic Materials, Economics and Sociology, Education, Government Documents, History, Law, Library and Information Science, Linguistics, Languages and Literature, Medical and Health Sciences, Military Science, Naval Science, Music, and Natural History. A further six subjects have still to be issued – Philosophy and religion, Physical Geography, Physical Sciences, Political Science, Psychology, and Technology. Adding this data to the database was not a SEED deliverable. An attempt will be made to load it in the near future.

2.1.5 Agreeing a mechanism to permit local updating of information with central co-ordination in order to ensure reliability and currency [CDLR]

During the course of the project, it became clear that the manual updating process described in the additional note above, was unacceptably slow, and it was agreed that a mechanism to allow libraries to update their own records online was a sensible alternative. SCAMP, the embryonic staff portal under development in the HE-funded SCONE project,

¹⁰ <http://scone.strath.ac.uk/Service/Index.cfm>

¹¹ <http://cairns.lib.strath.ac.uk/>

was identified as a suitable basis for allowing these local updates to the RCO subject strengths database¹².

The feasibility of the updating mechanism was tested within SCONE earlier this year (2002) and found to be a workable approach, but the basic mechanism is still embryonic and will require further development if a full working mechanism is to be implemented (e.g. the staff portal requires particular development to ensure the security of data in a distributed maintenance environment). Some of the resources for this development have been funded through the JISC cc-interop Project¹³.

2.1.6 Incorporation of special and named HE collections [CDLR]

A sample of special and named collections belonging to SCURL libraries was used to test whether the SCONE collection descriptions scheme could accommodate special and named collections data from the HE sector.

This was found to be feasible with a suitable augmentation of the scheme, which has now been put in place as part of the general development of the SCONE service.

2.2 Investigating the foundation work to be carried out to extend the recording of research collections beyond the libraries in SCURL

2.2.1 Discussion of these issues with the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) [CDLR]

SLIC pointed out that the Scottish Library Association (SLA) incorporated references to special collections with formal names in its publication *Scottish library and information resources*¹⁴, a directory of libraries and information centres in all sectors including public libraries. Data for the publication was checked annually by asking all organizations represented to notify amendments to their entries. The methodology involved sending a printout of the existing entries, a blank form for recording new entries, and a guide to completing the update. Following discussions, the SLA agreed to add an extra form to the mailings for 2000 and 2001 to gather additional data about special collections.

The form asked for the subject area, size, intended level of user, and details of physical or electronic access for each named collection held by the organization. Details of persons administering the collections were also sought, broken down into the same data areas as for the general contacts for the organization: job title or function, honorific, forenames, surname, postnominals, email address, telephone and fax numbers.

As the table below shows, a comparison of the returns for 2000 (SEED) against previous data-gathering by the SLA (SLIR), when only collection names were requested, highlights two points of significance:

- Public libraries clearly hold significant numbers of special and named collections that should be added to the SCONE national collections database
- There is some confusion in the libraries as to what constitutes a named or special collection and further explanatory outreach work is required to clarify this and to standardise returns

¹² <http://scone.strath.ac.uk/scamp/index.html>

¹³ <http://cdlr.strath.ac.uk/projects/projects-copacclumps.html>

¹⁴ *Scottish library and information resources*. 14th ed. / edited by Gordon Dunsire and Penny Robertson. - Hamilton : Scottish Library Association, 2002.

Public library	SLIR	SEED
Aberdeen City	16	10
Aberdeenshire	2	0
Argyll and Bute	1	0
Clackmannanshire	1	1
Comhairle nan Eilean	2	0
Dumfries & Galloway*	15	200
Dundee City	5	6
East Ayrshire	6	6
East Lothian	1	0
Edinburgh City	9	16
Falkirk	0	2
Fife	6	5
Glasgow City	23	22
Highland	6	0
Midlothian	4	0
Moray	2	2
North Ayrshire	2	0
Orkney	3	5
Perth & Kinross	3	0
Renfrewshire	0	2
Scottish Borders	1	0
Shetland	2	2
South Lanarkshire	3	3
Stirling	2	0
West Dunbartonshire	0	2

* All archives; individual collection details referred back to SCAN (N.B. SEED and SCONE have agreed to work with SCAN to co-ordinate the SCONE database of mainly library collections with the SCAN archival collections database).

"... records at collection level for such discrete collections could be included in existing web catalogues, thus alerting researchers to the existence of the collection even if they had subsequently to be referred to handlists, card catalogues or other finding aids for more detailed information." - 4.4.4¹⁵

2.2.2 Identification of possible methods of extending the existing RCO data to include research collections in public libraries in Scotland [CDLR]

A small sample of the returns was used to investigate the feasibility of using the SCONE database to store this information. It was found feasible to do so, and several issues were identified:

- Additional guidance on completing collection descriptions will improve the consistency of entries.
- Use of a standard, controlled vocabulary scheme is essential for coherent subject retrieval.

¹⁵ A national strategy for Scottish material: a report to the Scottish Library & Information Council / Brian D. Osborne & Michael C. Taylor. - Hamilton : SLIC, 1999. Available at URL: <http://www.slainte.org.uk/slicpubs/scotmatestrat.pdf>

- The RCO scheme is sometimes too broad to accurately describe collection subjects.
- SCONE standards are generally suitable for describing public library collections.
- The data-gathering form should be amended and augmented to more closely correspond with the SCONE database structure.
- Once complete, the SCONE staff portal can be used to update public library collection descriptions.

The data returned about the intended level of user raised two issues:

- In many cases this was described as 'general' or 'secondary school and up' for collections which actually included primary source materials of clear importance to higher academic researchers.
- The user level data is not easily accommodated in the current RCO schema, which employs only three categories of user level.

Possible future developments should include:

- Use of a subject scheme which can be used both to describe general research collections and specific, single-topic collections.
- Greater flexibility and range in the definition of the 'research' level of user, to incorporate the requirements of lifelong learning and social inclusion.
- Development of the SCONE staff portal for use by the public library sector.
- Development of the SCONE public portal to support researchers outside of the higher education sector.

3. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

1. *As proposed in the project bid to the Scottish Executive Education Department (then SOEID), the SEED Project has worked closely with the CAIRNS Scottish distributed catalogue project and SCONE Scottish Collections Network Project, and with SCURL, SLIC, and the SLA, to:*

- Improve on the existing SCURL database of subject descriptions of HE based Scottish learning and research collections by gathering and adding new and updated information, and by extending descriptive detail.
- Establish a means to keep the data current.
- Investigate and establish the feasibility and desirability of extending the database to include significant collections held in public libraries and elsewhere in Scotland.

2. The programme of work is now complete:

- Proposed extensions and enhancements to the database have been implemented in conjunction with the SCONE project. These have included a selection of named and special collections in HE libraries.
- It has been agreed that updates and additions to the Scottish Collections Network database can be most effectively and efficiently carried out by allowing libraries to update the database themselves through a central staff portal once the SCONE project confirms the feasibility of the approach.
- It is clear that it is both desirable and feasible to add named and special collections held in public libraries and elsewhere in Scotland to the database and to utilise the same staff portal for adding and updating these.

3. Further work is required if the full potential of the developing Scottish Collections Network and associated distributed catalogue is to be realised. It is recommended that SEED consider funding additional work as follows:
- Building on the work begun in SEED and SCONE, build a fully comprehensive collections service to meet the needs of all Scottish citizens and to integrate this fully with the CAIRNS distributed catalogue. (Note that a pre-requisite of this work is the adoption and implementation of a standard vocabulary suitable for coherent subject retrieval and appropriate collection and user-level description.)
 - Promote further development of the Z39.50 based Scottish distributed catalogue system, CAIRNS, focusing in particular on public and FE libraries. (Note that one public library is now part of CAIRNS and one FE Group, the Glasgow Colleges Group, are about to buy a CAIRNS compatible system.)
 - As the SCONE staff portal develops, identify staff contacts in every library in Scotland, regardless of sector, and train them to:
 - Support the maintenance of an accurate, helpful, and up to date web-based collections and resources landscaping service for users.
 - Facilitate collaborative collection development across Scotland with a view to minimising duplication of effort and expenditure.
 - Carry out work leading to the integration of the libraries database and cross-searchable catalogue with similar enterprises in the archives and museums communities and in other areas such as NGfL and SUfl.

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