

Examining the Coverage of a National Deposit Library: A Case Study in the Netherlands

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Generally, the purpose of deposit libraries is to gather all publications as part of the national cultural heritage and preserve them for future generations. A study was undertaken to determine the coverage of the deposit collection of the National Library of the Netherlands. Coverage amounted to circa 95% for books with an ISBN and circa 70% for books without an ISBN. In both cases, the method of list checking was applied. However, definitive statements cannot be made for three reasons: uncertainties about the appropriateness of the checklists, difficulties in assessing the relevance of missing titles and the possibility that coverage increases over time due to late arrival of publications. Failure analysis

showed that lacunae were caused by occasional failures from publishers rather than a structural lack of cooperation. Increasing coverage therefore would require list checking at a large scale on a yearly basis. Procedures are described to reduce the workload on undertaking such a regular review. At present, no comparable studies were identified in the published literature. The authors hope that this paper will stimulate other countries to examine coverage of the collection of their Deposit Libraries and to publish the results of any studies that have been done. The methodology followed in this study may be helpful to other countries wishing to perform similar studies.

Introduction

In 1974, the Deposit of Dutch Publications was established as a department of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB), the National Library of the Netherlands. Generally, the purpose of deposit libraries is to gather all publications as part of the national cultural heritage and preserve them for future generations. In many cases, the deposit collection serves as a last resort. Where else can one find a complete collection of popular fiction, school-books, comic books, popular magazines, daily newspapers and research reports, published in a specific country? In addition, the National Bibliography is compiled on the basis of the deposit collection. Larivière (2000) describes the guidelines for legal deposit legislation; Muir and Op-

penheim (2001) present the current legal deposit arrangements in different countries.

Unlike most other countries, there is no Legal Deposit Law in the Netherlands. However, the tasks of the National Library, including the deposit function and national bibliography, are embedded in the Dutch law. The National Library requests all publishers to supply one copy of each of their publications to the Deposit of Dutch Publications on a voluntary basis. Based on a formal agreement with the National Library, the Dutch Publishers Association urges its members to deliver all publications free-of-charge. The Dutch Deposit also gathers publications from non-commercial publishers, such as companies, associations, governmental and other institutions or even private persons. Publishers will automatically be

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notified if they do not supply any new publication within six months. New publishers are traced by various methods, such as reading the professional literature, browsing databases and surfing the Web. However, resources to perform these labour-intensive tasks systematically are scarce.

Some categories of publication are excluded from collecting. Deposit libraries often refer to these categories as ephemeral publications. Examples are: periodicals addressed to local communities, internal reports, in-company information, door-to-door magazines, publicity material, brochures, study guides, student's theses and reports from regional and local authorities. In 2004, the Deposit Library received more than 40,000 books and approximately 100,000 issues of more than 10,000 current periodicals. These are catalogued in the Pica shared cataloguing system, which is used by many academic, special and large public libraries in the Netherlands. The National Library uses Pica not only for cataloguing the Deposit collection, but also for cataloguing its humanities collection. Records in the Deposit collection can be distinguished from records in the humanities collection by a code in the Pica format.

In 2005, a study has been performed to examine the coverage of the deposit collection. Separate studies were performed for books with an ISBN, books without an ISBN and current periodicals. This paper focuses on the first two parts. It describes the methodology, results, limitations and conclusions of the research.

Methodology

Various methods are available for the evaluation of collections. These can be divided in collection-centred methods, such as obtaining opinions from experts, list checking and citation analysis, and client-centred methods, such as use and user studies. As the Deposit collection aims to achieve 100% coverage of publications within its selection criteria, list checking may be viewed as the only appropriate method. List checking is a well-known method for collection evaluation, which has been applied by various researchers. Larson (1984) elaborates on compiling a checklist for evaluating French literature collections. Walden *et al.* (1994) used national bibliographies as checklists to determine the coverage of political science books, published in Europe, in American libraries. Died-

richs (1999) advocates using vendor reports and databases to assess coverage of library collections. Dobson, Kushkowski and Gerhard (1996) and Delaney-Lehman (1996) describe how they developed a checklist for interdisciplinary fields. The introduction of the OCLC/AMIGOS Collection Analysis CD (CACD) stimulated performing list-checking studies, as demonstrated by Dole (1994), Ciliberti (1994), Webster (1995), Carpenter and Getz (1995), and Perrault (1994, 1999).

For this study, two bibliographic sources were selected as checklists: the Dutch ISBN database, owned by the national ISBN centre (which is part of the Centraal Boekhuis, a main national distribution centre of books) and the Pica database, owned by OCLC/Pica. As the Deposit collection aims to be, and probably is, the largest collection in its field, it was not easy to find appropriate sources. The selected sources at least were extensive and compiled independently from the collection of the Deposit library. From each of these sources, a random sample of titles, published in 2003, was taken. In the first half of 2005, each title was searched in the catalog to determine whether or not it was owned. Preceding research had shown that at the end of 2004 only very few titles, published in 2003, were received by the Deposit library. Therefore, it may be expected that the coverage percentages found in this study reflect the eventual coverage percentages.

As a result of searching the catalogue, titles could be classified as:

- Owned
- Ordered, but not (yet) received
- Ordered, but not available / no longer in print
- Not owned, but not within the selection criteria
- Not owned, but difficult to decide whether it fits the selection criteria
- Not owned, but insufficient evidence that it actually has been published
- Not owned, real lacuna

A failure analysis was performed on the titles in the last category. A similar study had been performed in 1996 (Voorbij and Douma 1997), focusing on the coverage of titles published in 1993. Both studies are, for the most part, based on the same sources. Therefore, the results can easily be compared.

*Books with an ISBN**Using the ISBN-database as a checklist*

The Dutch ISBN database stores short records for publications with an ISBN, published in the Netherlands or Flanders (Belgium). Each record lists the ISBN, title and author of the book. Unfortunately, as there is no field for the year of publication, it was not possible to select all records of books published in 2003 by a direct and single query. Instead, a selection was made of records that were entered or changed in 2003. More than 135,000 records fulfilled this criterion. A substantial reduction was accomplished by several means:

- By excluding records with terms such as photograph album, sticker book, display or other terms that refer to non-book material or other publication types that are not relevant for the Deposit collection.
- By excluding records without the term '2003' in the record. As indicated, records do not list the actual year of publication. They should, however, mention the expected year of publication.
- By matching the remaining records with the Pica database in order to determine the year of actual publication. This activity illustrates that the Pica database plays a double role in this study: as a cataloguing system for the Deposit Library and as a source for bibliographic information.

Eventually, the final selection comprised 13,443 titles that were actually published in 2003 and 3,838 titles with unknown year of publication. A random sample of 10% of both categories was taken, resulting in a sample of 1,727 titles. Each title was searched in the Pica database to determine whether or not it was held in the collection of the Deposit library. It was found that 455 titles were not held.

Three methods were used to determine whether these 455 titles should be regarded as real lacunae. First, each title was searched in the Pica database. Circa one hundred titles were found; these were entered by other participating libraries. In most cases, the bibliographic description provided enough information to decide whether or not the title fulfilled the selection criteria of the Deposit library. Next, in order to obtain information about the remaining titles, the Internet was searched by entering ISBN, title or author data as search terms in Google. Finally, publishers were consulted by telephone about the still remaining titles. These

Table 1. Coverage of books with an ISBN, based on the ISBN database

	Number of titles (%)
Original sample	1,727
Not valid	403
Final sample	1,324
– Held	– 1,258 (95.0%)
– Ordered, but not (yet) received	– 10 (0.8%)
– Ordered, but unavailable	– 4 (0.3%)
– Not held	– 52 (3.9%)

publishers could be identified by the second element of the ISBN (publisher prefix) of the publications concerned.

As a result of these efforts, only 52 of the 455 titles were identified as real lacunae. The majority (403 titles) were irrelevant for the Deposit collection or for this part of the study:

- Yearbooks and annual reports (n=155). Individual volumes may have an ISBN, but actually they are issues of periodicals. The coverage of periodicals was studied separately.
- Titles that were published in another year than 2003 or not (yet) at all (n=85).
- Titles published in Flanders (n=60).
- Non-book materials, such as CD-ROMs, videos, maps and card games (n=52).
- False hits: titles that were selected only because they carry the number '2003' in their ISBN (n=26).
- Ephemeral publications, such as diaries, colouring books and product catalogues (n=18).
- Other reasons (n=7).

After excluding these 403 titles, the final sample included 1,324 titles. Of these, 1,258 were held by the Deposit Library (95.0%). At a 95% confidence level, the margin of error is $\pm 1.0\%$. Thus, there is a 95% chance that the coverage of the entire population of books with an ISBN falls between 94.0% and 96.0%. Fifty-two titles (3.9%) are not held, ten titles (0.8%) are ordered but not (yet) received, and four titles (0.3%) are ordered but unavailable. Table 1 summarizes the results. The coverage may increase to 95.8% if each of the ten orders still would arrive. The previous study found slightly higher coverage of 96.6% and, including the titles that are on-order, 97.4%. However, there is no statistically significant difference ($p=0,065$). Even if a significant decrease had been found, the con-

clusion that the cooperation of publishers has diminished would be premature. An alternative explanation might be that ISBN's are assigned to an increasing segment of the book production. However, no efforts have been undertaken to examine this issue.

Failure analysis has been performed to characterize the identified lacunae. It would have been useful to determine whether, for example, new editions or combined Dutch – foreign editions are overrepresented. This might have indicated that publishers do not fully understand that the Deposit Library does collect new editions, unless these are unrevised, and works from multinational publishers that are partly based in the Netherlands. However, in most cases the incomplete bibliographic records did not permit such an analysis. Instead, we looked to see whether the identified lacunae originate from publishers which systematically fail to supply their publications to the Deposit Library or from publishers who may have overlooked sending a single item. Both cases call for their own measures. A large extent of structural failures would call for more promotion activities and clearer agreements with publishers. A large extent of occasional failures would call for checking the presence of individual titles on a regular basis and on a greater scale than has been done in this study.

The 52 lacunae originate from 47 different publishers. The Pica database was searched in order to determine whether or not these publishers had supplied other books, published in 2003, to the Deposit Library. It was found that 42 publishers actually had supplied other books published in 2003 to the Deposit Library. The remaining five publishers possibly were not aware of the mission of the Deposit library, were not willing to cooperate or had published only one book in 2003. It may be concluded, then, that lacunae in the collection of the Deposit library are caused by occasional failures rather than a structural lack of cooperation.

Using the Pica-database as a checklist

The selection from the ISBN database included 13,443 titles carrying an ISBN beginning with 90, actually published in 2003 and 3,838 titles possibly published in 2003. However, the Pica database holds 29,137 titles, published in the Netherlands in 2003 and carrying an ISBN. Thus, the Pica da-

tabase includes at least 11,856 more relevant titles than the ISBN database. There are three reasons for this outcome:

- The selection from the ISBN database only included records with an ISBN starting with 90. The selection from the Pica database also included records from multinationals such as Elsevier that are published in the Netherlands and another country (for example Amsterdam and Boston), having an ISBN usually starting with 0 or 1.
- The ISBN database appears to be incomplete. The Pica database includes 3,105 titles, published in the Netherlands in 2003 and carrying an ISBN beginning with 90, which are not listed in the ISBN database. Most likely there will be much more lacunae than 3,105, as the Pica database does not provide a complete overview of Dutch publications as well: it only includes records of documents acquired by the participating libraries. The most probable explanation for the incompleteness of the ISBN database is that publishers receive packages of ISBN's, but refrain from reporting to the ISBN office which specific number has been assigned to which specific book.
- The selection from the ISBN database partly failed. The majority of the 11,856 missing titles is actually held in the ISBN database, but did not appear in the selection. The explanation is that many records do not include an expected year of publication and, therefore, did not meet one of the selection criteria. However, abandoning this criterion would have resulted in a huge amount of titles, many of which not being published in 2003. In hindsight, the ISBN database was less appropriate as a resource for the study than was expected.

It was decided, therefore, to conduct a second study, based on the 29,137 records in the Pica database. Fortunately, the workload could be reduced to a large extent because the Pica database is also being used as the cataloguing system for the Deposit library. A rather simple matching sufficed to determine that 25,971 of these titles were held by the Deposit Library. In order to assess to what extent the remaining 3,346 titles have to be regarded as real lacunae, a random sample of 335 titles (10%) was taken. The bibliographic description in the Pica database gave enough clues to decide whether or not a title was valid for the study. Publishers were consulted only to determine whether titles that did not surpass the ordering stage actually had been published. As a result, 133 invalid titles were identified:

- Multiple records for the same document (n=44). In some cases, the Pica database contains more than one record of the same document: a correct record with

holding data from the Deposit Library, and an inferior record without holding data from the Deposit Library. This refers to the problem of database pollution rather than an acquisition problem.

- Yearbooks, annual reports and special journal issues (n=38). Actually, this is another instance of double record entry: a record for the periodical and records for separate issues. As the Deposit Library does not catalogue separate issues, these documents were erroneously identified as lacunae.
- Titles that do not meet the selection criteria of the Deposit Library (n=32).
- Titles that, as appeared from the place of publishing, are not actually published in the Netherlands (n=18). Data on the country of publication in the record is incorrect.
- Titles that have not yet been published (n=1).

The remaining 202 valid titles can be classified as follows:

- Volumes of multi-volume works (n=17). As the Deposit Library does not catalogue separate volumes, these documents were erroneously identified as lacunae. As appeared from the multi-volume record, all 17 titles were actually held. Whereas yearbooks and journal issues fall in the category of periodicals, multi-volume works fall in the category of books. Therefore, for this part of the study these are valid titles.
- Acquired after the production of the checklist (n=5)
- Ordered, but not (yet) received (n=59)
- Ordered, but not available / no longer in print (n=16)
- Not held (n=105).

Table 2 summarizes the results. Obviously, a sample of 10% of the 25,791 titles that were known to be held by the Deposit library would have shown that all 2,579 titles are held. The sample of 10% of the remaining 3,346 titles revealed that 202 titles were valid for the study. Of these, $17 + 5 = 22$ titles actually are held, although initially they were identified as not held. Together, $2,579 + 22 = 2,601$ titles are held, and $59 + 16 + 105 = 180$ titles are not held. This results in coverage of 93.5%. This may increase to 95.6% if each of the 59 ordered titles still would arrive. At a 95% confidence level, the margin of error is 0.9%. Therefore, there is a 95% chance that the coverage of the entire population of books with an ISBN falls between 92.6 and 94.4%. In the previous study, the Pica database was not used as a checklist for books with an ISBN.

Table 2. Coverage of books with an ISBN, based on the Pica database

Original sample	2,579 + 335 = 2,914
Invalid	133
Final sample	2,781
– Held	2,579 + 22 = 2,601 (93.5%)
– Ordered, but not (yet) received	59 (2.1%)
– Ordered, but unavailable	16 (0.6%)
– Not held	105 (3.8%)

The 105 lacunae originate from 62 different publishers. Again, the Pica database was searched in order to determine whether these publishers had supplied other books, published in 2003, to the Deposit Library. This appeared to be the case for 44 publishers. Six of the remaining 18 publishers published three or more titles in 2003, none of which are held by the Deposit Library. Five of these publishers are multinationals with an office in the Netherlands and another country. They assign an ISBN not starting with 90 to their publications and may consider them as foreign publications, or may prefer to deposit their output in another country. Again, it may be concluded that the majority of lacunae is caused by occasional failures. As far as there is any indication of problems of a more structural nature, this applies to multinational publishers primarily.

Conclusions and recommendations

The coverage of books with an ISBN was examined by using a checklist of titles from the ISBN database and a checklist of titles from the Pica database. The first study showed that 95.0% of the books, published in the Netherlands in 2003 and provided with an ISBN starting with 90, are held by the Deposit Library. Another 0.8% is on-order. The second study revealed coverage of 93.5% of books, published in the Netherlands in 2003 and provided with an ISBN starting with any number. Another 2.1% is on-order. The similarity of the results yielded by both studies increased confidence in the reliability of the results.

Failure analysis demonstrated that the majority of lacunae are not of a structural nature. Apparently, the publisher forgot to supply a copy of one of his publications. Only a few publishers were identified that systematically fail to supply many of their publications to the Deposit Library. Many

of these are multinationals that may not consider their publications as Dutch, although they have an office in the Netherlands. To clarify this situation, the depositing of this category of publications should be discussed with multinational publishers.

In order to identify individual lacunae, the National Library carried out a test in 2004. The ISBN database was searched to identify records that are not listed in the Pica database and do not include terms such as photo album, sticker, poster, card game or display. Relevant titles will be ordered and the reasons why they were not supplied spontaneously will be examined.

The same procedure may be used with the Pica database. An unexpected finding of this study was that the Pica database includes many titles, published in the Netherlands, which are not held in the ISBN database. As both databases are complementary, they should both be used as an instrument to identify lacunae. The workload and benefits, associated with using the Pica database as a checklist, can be extrapolated from this study. The population of books, published in the Netherlands in 2003, carrying an ISBN and not held in the Deposit Library, amounted to 3,346 titles. A random sample of 335 titles elicited 105 real lacunae. Examining the entire population would have elicited circa 1,050 lacunae. As one can only guess to what extent these titles, published about two years ago, are still available, the Deposit Library first should order the 105 identified lacunae. If it turns out that a satisfying amount of these titles does arrive, the procedure may be used at a larger scale.

A small reduction of the workload is possible by excluding titles which are ordered, but not (yet) received and titles which are ordered, but out of print. As a result, the checklist would decrease by $590 + 160 = 750$ titles. The Deposit Library then should examine circa 2,600 titles each year in order to identify circa 1,050 lacunae.

Books without an ISBN

Methodology and results

The category 'books without an ISBN' overlaps to a large extent with the category 'grey literature'. The definition of grey literature reads: "Information produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in electronic and

print formats not controlled by commercial publishing, i.e. where publishing is not the primary activity". [1] Although publishers of grey literature are free to request ISBNs for the documents they produce, the majority of grey literature does not carry such a number.

A complete list of such an elusive category of publications does not exist. The most appropriate source for this purpose is, once more, the Pica database, that holds the records of many academic, special and large public libraries in the Netherlands. The Pica database, however, does not include records of publications that are not ordered or acquired by any of the participants. It may be expected that this applies especially to works that have strictly local relevance, low quality works, and works produced by private persons. However, these publications are relevant for the Deposit library if they fulfil the formal selection criteria.

The Pica database holds 13,941 records of books, published in the Netherlands in 2003, without an ISBN. A search command sufficed to determine that 5,515 of these were held by the Deposit Library. A random sample of 843 titles has been taken from the remaining 8,426 titles. Examination of the bibliographic data showed that 583 sample titles are not relevant for the Deposit Library or this part of the study. The majority of these are ephemeral publications: study guides, students' theses, apprenticeship reports and so on ($n=446$).

Nine of the remaining 260 titles are acquired after producing the checklist, thirty titles are ordered but not (yet) received, six titles are ordered but out of print, 188 titles are not held. The status of 27 titles is uncertain, either because the bibliographic description provides insufficient clues whether the publication fulfils the selection criteria of the Deposit library ($n=20$), or because there is insufficient evidence that the title actually has been published ($n=7$).

Table 3 shows two scenarios, both based on a 10% sample of the 5,515 titles held and the 8,426 titles not held. In the first, least favourable scenario, it is assumed that each of the 27 titles of uncertain status is valid. In the second, most favourable scenario, it is assumed that none of the 27 titles of uncertain status is valid.

The coverage in the least favourable scenario amounts to 69.1%. This increases to 72.8% if each of the thirty orders still arrives. The corresponding results in the 1996 study were 68.7% and

Table 3. Coverage of books without an ISBN

SCENARIO 1: Assuming that each of the 27 titles of uncertain status is valid	
Original sample	552 + 843 = 1,395
Invalid	583
Final sample	812
– Held	552 + 9 = 561 (69.1%)
– Ordered, but not (yet) received	30 (3.7%)
– Ordered, but out of print	6 (0.7%)
– Not held	188 + 27 = 215 (26.5%)
SCENARIO 2: Assuming that each of the 27 titles of uncertain status is invalid	
Original sample	552 + 843 = 1,395
Invalid	583 + 27 = 610
Final sample	785
– Held	552 + 9 = 561 (71.5%)
– Ordered but not (yet) received	30 (3.8%)
– Ordered but out of print	6 (0.8%)
– Not held	188 (23.9%)

71.5%. In the most favourable scenario, the coverage amounts to 71.5% at the moment and 75.3% in case each of the thirty orders still arrives. The corresponding results in the 1996 study were 71.9% and 74.8%. In all cases, both studies produced very similar results. In the present study, the coverage percentages have a margin of error of 2.3%, at a 95% confidence level.

Failure analysis has been performed to characterize the publishers of the 188 titles that were definitely considered as lacunae. In eighteen cases the identity of the publisher is completely unknown. The publisher fields of the records provide no information other than [S.l : s.n.], or just the place of publication, for example, Hilversum : [s.n.]. The remaining 170 titles are published by 161 different publishers. These can be divided into four categories:

- 74 publishers are registered into the acquisition system of the Deposit Library and have been assigned a code that identifies them as loyal suppliers of their publications. Together, they published 81 of the 188 lacunae. Apparently, they occasionally forgot to supply one of their publications to the Deposit Library.
- 23 publishers are registered into the acquisition system of the Deposit Library and have announced that they do not intend to publish any documents in the future.

Table 4. Missing publications without an ISBN, by publisher status

Titles published by registered and loyal publishers	81 (43.1%)
Titles published by registered publishers that announced to refrain from further publishing	23 (12.2%)
Titles published by registered publishers that are known as problematic suppliers	16 (8.5%)
Titles published by unregistered publishers	50 (26.6%)
Titles published by unidentified publishers	18 (9.6%)
Total	188 (100%)

Apparently, they changed their minds and failed to remember their earlier promise to send one copy to the Deposit Library.

- Fourteen publishers are registered but known as problematic suppliers. Together, they published sixteen of the lacunae.
- Fifty publishers are unknown to the Deposit Library and not registered at all.

Table 4 summarizes the results.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on a random sample of records in the Pica database, the Deposit Library owns circa 70% of the non-periodical documents, published in the Netherlands in 2003 without an ISBN. Although the Pica database was seen as the most appropriate resource, it does not provide a complete overview of this category of publications. Most likely, therefore, the actual coverage will be lower than 70%.

The majority of documents without an ISBN are grey literature. Although it is illusory to reach 100% coverage of these sometimes very obscure documents, some measures can be taken to improve the current situation. The Deposit library already has established a procedure for following up with registered publishers that do not supply any publication during a certain timeframe (of six months or longer) about their recent output. However, as Table 4 shows, still more than half of the identified lacunae originate from publishers that are willing to cooperate but apparently forget to supply a copy to the Deposit Library. More frequent contact with publishers may contribute to higher coverage. On the other hand, this measure may cause irritation to the publishers.

In addition, titles from unregistered publishers would escape attention. These publishers include private persons, associations, corporations, research institutes, private enterprises and subdivisions of ministries. Many will publish only a few or just one title. The content of these sources may vary from fiction and local history to policy and research. It is impossible to get a grip on documents such as these in a systematic manner.

A more effective method for increasing coverage of this category of publications is to follow the same procedure as has been applied for this study, at a larger scale and from year to year. At the beginning of 2005, the Pica database included 8,426 records of non-periodical publications, published in the Netherlands in 2003, without an ISBN and without holding data from the Deposit Library. Eliminating titles that are on-order and titles that are out of print would reduce the selection with 360 titles. A further reduction with 2,430 titles could be accomplished by excluding records that contain terms such as 'study guide', 'student's thesis' or 'apprenticeship report'. Eventually, the selection would comprise circa 5,600 titles. Extrapolating from the current study, it is estimated that circa 1,880 real lacunae and 270 titles of uncertain status will be found. A crucial question is to what extent these identified titles are still available or to what extent the publishers are willing to supply them.

A preliminary examination at a limited scale may answer this question. Therefore, it is recommended to order the 188 lacunae that were identified in this study and to determine how many of these arrive at the Deposit Library within a certain timeframe. If the results are satisfying, it may be decided to carry out these activities at a larger scale.

Discussion

The study found coverage of circa 95% for books with an ISBN, and circa 70% for books without an ISBN (and circa 90% for periodicals). However, definitive statements cannot be made, for three reasons: uncertainties about the appropriateness of the checklists, difficulties in assessing the relevance of missing titles, and the possibility that coverage increases over time due to late arrival of publications.

Both studies are based on list checking. Lists that provide a complete overview of the national imprint do not exist. The National Bibliography approaches this ideal, but this of course is based upon the collection of the Deposit Library itself. By consequence, no definitive statements can be made about coverage percentages. The findings of this study approach actual coverage as far as possible. Neither a bibliographic utility such as the Pica database or, contrary to what was expected, the ISBN database, offers complete coverage of books with an ISBN, let alone the more obscure category of grey literature. In general, coverage percentages always have to be seen in the light of the checklists that were utilized for their calculation.

A second source of uncertainty relates to the sometimes very short or incomplete bibliographic description of titles that are not held by the Deposit Library. These records do not always provide sufficient clues to decide whether or not the title actually has been published and whether or not it fulfils the selection criteria of the Deposit Library. Therefore, for calculating coverage percentages, two scenarios were developed, one assuming that each title of uncertain status is relevant and another one assuming that none of these titles are relevant.

There is a third factor that inhibits definitive statements about coverage percentages. The Deposit Library receives by far the most publications shortly after they have been published. Some titles, however, are hard to trace and may be acquired several years later. Coverage of works published in a certain year may continue increasing for a few more years, however modest it may be. The current study was carried out in 2005 and focused on works published in 2003. The previous study was carried out in 1996 and focused on works published in 1993. Thus, the average time-span between date of publishing and date of checking its presence in the Deposit Library was two years in the current study and three years in the previous study. Therefore, the findings of the current study may be at a small disadvantage compared with those of the previous study. In general, the time-span between year of publication and year of research should not be too short.

These considerations should be taken into account when comparing the results of this study with similar studies abroad. However, no such studies were identified in the published literature.

The authors hope that this paper will stimulate other countries to examine coverage of the collection of their Deposit Library and/or to publish the results of studies that have been done.

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Notes

1. <http://www.greynet.org/pages/2/> [Accessed 1 December, 2005]

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