Author Searching on Inspec

In the field of searching, functionality is everything. Search tools such as Indexers can seriously affect the quality of your results.

Author details can be a useful source of information. The author, more often than not, is the person who is carrying out the research in the field being described, and therefore searching for this information can yield the answers to questions such as:

- Who is working in a particular research field?
- Who is working with whom on a particular research field?
- Who is working for which organisations?
- What is the publishing output of an individual researcher or university department?

Inspec is a highly structured database and its comprehensive nature makes it an excellent place to look for the answers to the above questions. Much of the information contained in a record can be searched in an individual field, focusing the search, and reducing the number of non-relevant records (i.e. noise) in the answer-set. The author information is presented in a standardised way and is included in its own search field.

Representation of Author Information in Inspec

There has always been a consistent approach to the way that author information has been treated in Inspec. All individuals credited with the authorship of a particular paper are included in the record. Author details are represented in the following format. The family or surname followed by the initial or initials of the given name.

Its benefit is that when the exact spelling of an author’s name is not known the index can be used to browse for variations of the name in the database. If there is variation in the initials used by the author (e.g. are Green, C.E. and Green, C.E.B. the same person), this can also be picked up. As a result the searcher can be confident that they will be able to find more records which are attributable to the author they are interested in.

Care needs to be taken with Chinese names. Given name and family names are often interchangeable and this needs to be considered for full retrieval while maintaining the accuracy of the search. E.g. To find all records in the database which have been authored by Yet Ming Chiang, the following query must be made

(Yet Ming Chiang) OR (Chiang, Yet Ming) OR (Chiang, Y.M.)
Accents are often displayed but can in general be ignored in the search. For full retrieval of names containing umlauts (e.g., ü), searches should be carried out using both forms of the name:

E.g. to search for records authored by G Müller requires the family name to be searched with and without the extra E. (i.e. Mueller or Muller).

New Features and upcoming Database Enhancements

Author Affiliation – (alternatively known as the Corporate Source). This is of relevance to the Author information but contained in a separate field the Author Affiliation indicates the organisation that the author either works for at the time the research was carried out, alternatively it may be the organisation that is funding the research. This information enables the searcher to link an author to a particular organisation. Up to 2008 the affiliation of the first named author on the Inspec Record was included. Since 2008 the affiliations of all the named authors has been included.

This makes it possible to identify collaborations between researchers working for different organisations, and to monitor author publishing output for a particular organisation. See fig 5.

There are also some newly added features to Inspec that enhance the usefulness of the database still further.

Full Author Names – Many authors now provide their full name on the document and since 2008 this information, when provided, has been included on Inspec records. This helps differentiate between authors with similar names e.g. does the J in Smith, J. stand for John, Joseph, James Jacob... See fig 6.

Author Emails Addresses – These add an extra dimension with respect to contacting the author of a document. These are the people who are working on the research described in the document and they are often happy to discuss their work with others working in a similar field. Author emails can be found on Inspec records from the beginning of 2010. Editor emails are also included, when supplied, on conference records. See fig 7.

ORCID

Author name ambiguity has always been a bit of a problem when it comes to finding published information that is attributable to individual authors. The ORCID Initiative hopes to establish an open, independent registry that is adopted as the industry’s de facto standard. The goal is to resolve systemic name ambiguity by:

1) means of assigning unique identifiers which are linkable to an individual’s research output;
2) to enhance the scientific discovery process and improve the efficiency of funding and collaboration.

When the ORCID system is up and running the data will be made available on Inspec. N.B. Please note that not all of the features described above are available on all of the vendor platforms through which Inspec is available.

If you have any comments on the subject matter covered in this article, or if you seek more information please contact us at inspec@theiet.org.