

UKSG 2019: a report from the sponsored early career professionals

UKSG eNews 445

17 May 2019

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Cambridge University Press, Gale, and SAGE Publishing made it possible for six early career professionals (ECPs) to attend the 2019 Annual Conference and Exhibition at Telford in April. The winners were Michael Hart, (University of Birmingham), Samantha Heeson, (Leeds Beckett), Kalle Karlsson, (University of Borås), Jo Lovelock, (University of the Creative Arts), Christine Tate, (University of Manchester) and Lucy Sinclair, (Royal College of Surgeons).



Their conference experience began with the first timer drinks reception on Sunday. They were a little nervous as they walked up to the venue but all felt welcome. The conversation flowed easily, probably helped by the wine and delicious canapes. The night was an ideal opportunity to meet like-minded people and hopefully the beginning of a few friendships.

The conference programme was packed full and the six found it hard to choose which sessions to attend.

“We weighed up the pros and cons of attending sessions that were directly related to our roles compared to attending sessions that outside of our current role to expand our knowledge and expose us to new areas of the sector.” (Christine)

Christine found the session on ‘What publishers want librarians to know’ by Bernie Folan eye-opening. Bernie revealed the results of an anonymous survey where publishers’ messages to libraries were collected. The attendees in the room were a mix of librarians and publishers so the discussion of the results was illuminating. The conclusions was that both libraries and publishers need to be more open and honest in their communications with each other.

Samantha and Jo went to the session led by Irene Barbers on ‘Using COUNTER Release 5 Usage Reports’. Irene’s session was packed, with standing room only at the back. The session explained how the new stats will work, and Jo said that she now feels more confident to go back and to start looking at these in detail.

The highlight for Lucy was the ‘Writing for publication’ workshop delivered by Helen Fallon, from Maynooth University. In the usually difficult position of post-lunch, this workshop was a breath of fresh air and felt a bit like a retreat from the more intense sessions. Focusing purely on how and why librarians should publish, the session felt like returning to university, where you focus on

writing on an almost daily basis. It was a good reminder that librarianship can be academic and research focused, hard to remember when you are working away on projects. Lucy went away with tools to help with getting her dissertation ready for publication in the future.

“Helen’s paper was incredibly empowering, laying out clearly and with good humour her top tips for writing and convincing me that I am as capable of writing for publication in journals on librarianship as an academic.” (Michael)

The supper and quiz on the Monday evening made for an entertaining end to the day. The ECPs feared they were going to have to make up a team on their own, but they were asked to join a large group of people from universities and publishers. Everyone was very welcoming and friendly, and they had a good laugh attempting to answer the rather challenging questions. Lucy found the quiz gave her an excellent opportunity to sit down and talk to those who work in the publishing sector.

“I’ve rarely engaged with publishing before and talking in an informal setting was the perfect way to gain insight into another profession. Listening to them nearly made me want to change profession.” (Lucy)

In the second plenary session ‘Positioning ourselves for the future’ on the Tuesday, the lack of diversity in the field of scholarly communications (and elsewhere) was expertly exposed. Femi Otitoju’s spirited and illuminating paper on unconscious bias demonstrated just how far we still need to go in altering our mind-sets and fighting for a representative profession (and world). Michael’s takeaway is that in defining what libraries and librarians are, we must create an identity that is inclusive and reflective of the diversity we see in society. It is only by being accessible to all that we can start to unpick our ideologies and decolonise our knowledge base.

Lived experience of BAME groups and practical action was echoed by Samantha’s colleague, Jen Bayjoo from Diversity in Libraries of the North (DILON), in her session on ‘Diversity in HE libraries: working towards best practice’. Michael attended the session in which Miriam Conteh-Morgan shared experiences of working in the Main Library at Ohio State University and in the University of Sierra Leone Library. Miriam reassured delegates that all libraries, regardless of size or location, must address the same challenges, and bestowed sage advice on how to approach these challenges.

Kalle found the spontaneous and more informal meetings that take place when professionals and different stakeholders meet in a common forum the most rewarding part of the conference. Strolling around the conference and exhibition she talked about how to better promote electronic resources, tried out interactive databases, discussed media literacy, fake news, bibliometric approaches and tools.

Lucy is developing an interest in AI, so “saving the best till last”, she attended David Leeming’s ‘Improving content discovery using AI and machine learning’ session.

“It was brilliant to see a demonstration on how machine learning works. This session has given me hope that somewhere down the line, I will be able to incorporate machine learning alongside my career.” (Lucy)

The conference dinner and disco in the evening was thoroughly enjoyable, and after two days of presentations the ECPs found it was good to have a relaxing social event and the opportunity to have a bit of a laugh.

“My table, but I won’t say who, embraced the zero waste policy and made sure no leftover wine from the surrounding tables went to waste.” (Jo)

Samantha was also pleased to see that UKSG had embraced social responsibility through a no landfill and water sustainability policy, asking delegates to donate unneeded food and toiletries to

Stay, a local homeless charity, and donating unused writing pads and pens to a local school.

“It obviously mattered to people, seeing how much they donated each day, refilling their water bottles, and tweeting about conference waste. The conference app was great and will hopefully lead to less printed material in future.” (Samantha)

The final plenary session on ‘Plan S and the ultimate measure: is it good for research?’ was considered to be an excellent way to close the conference. The panel represented the knowledge community, with a representative from the library sector, an academic and a society publisher. Christine noted that the respectful way that the panel were able to articulate their (sometimes opposing) views was an example of how to address a contentious issue in a courteous manner.

“The panel were an embodiment of the approach they were advocating to Plan S – that our community needs to collaborate to address issues so we can find practical solutions to move open access forward.” (Christine)

“I will be taking all of this back to my team and workplace. As a new professional and new to the higher education setting, this conference has been a vital learning curve and probably one of the most important things I’ve attended since leaving my MA course. Attending a three-day conference can feel a bit like being in a parallel universe for a couple of days, this was an enjoyable one and I was both sad and ready to leave.” (Lucy)

These views are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of UKSG.



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