

UKSG Annual Conference 2014

The diaries of the sponsored students and early career professionals



SAGE and Springer Science+Business Media sponsored places for three students: Penny Andrews (University of Sheffield), Gareth [Gaz] J Johnson (Nottingham Trent University) and Anna Theis (Manchester Metropolitan University) and three early career professionals: Benjamin [Ben] Catt (University of York), Katie McNamara (King's College London) and Sarah Roughley (University of Liverpool) to attend the UKSG 2014 Annual Conference and Exhibition at the Harrogate International Centre. They are pictured in a group above with Carolyn Alderson (UKSG Education Officer) on the left, your esteemed *Insights* Eds, Lorraine Estelle and Steve Sharp either side, and sponsors Eric Merkel-Sobotta (Springer) and Dave Phillips (SAGE) on the top step. Between Eric and Dave is Ben, on the next step down, Gaz and Sarah, with (left to right) Penny, Katie and Anna.

Arriving in Harrogate, the sponsored early career professionals and students were surprised and impressed with the scale of the conference, with close to 1,000 delegates packing into the expansive venue. Ben Catt was worried about how he would fit in as a “lowly serials assistant mingling amongst the vendors on the exhibition floor”. Happily, he found his feelings of trepidation were misplaced, and spent the following three days busily dashing between auditoriums and workshops, frantically making notes throughout each of the 25 plenaries, lightning talks and breakout sessions.

118 Leading up to the conference, the six sponsored delegates were each assigned a conference mentor. There is nothing worse than arriving somewhere new and not knowing anyone, so the mentoring scheme ensured that they already had their own mini network. The UKSG representatives really made them all feel welcome and valued, and they quickly felt they belonged in this community.

The conference proper began in a vast auditorium with the highlight from Monday's sessions being two thought-provoking discussions about research assessments. Katie McNamara enjoyed hearing differing, and sometimes clashing, perspectives on the topic and there was a real sense of an open discussion with participants invited to compare the different views to find common ground as well as discussing obstacles to be overcome.

For Ben and Anna Theis, a highlight of the first day was the breakout session they attended, giving an overview of the SAGE Undergraduate Scholars project at the University of Sussex. The three undergraduates who took part in this scheme assisted in delivering the talk and offered valuable insight into how their interactions with the library and its resources had evolved over the course of their university lives. Anna found it refreshing to see publishers so proactive in their approach to customer satisfaction and to see students, publishers and the library working collaboratively in order to better the service. She took away some ideas to use in her own workplace, at the University of Manchester.

Katie and Anna both chose to attend Jagdesh Kaur Georgiou's wonderfully inspirational session on presentation. The session was very practical and they took away some valuable tips, not only from the content but from observing Jagdesh's presentation style. Jagdesh was confident, relaxed and knowledgeable – and gave them so many tips and lots of advice on how to present confidently. They are just beginning to present their own material at work and externally, and so will have good opportunity to implement their newly learned skills.



"Wonderfully inspirational"!
Jagdesh Kaur Georgiou's
breakout session on
presentation was a big hit



“Opportunities to network” ... included the popular mentoring scheme (bottom right) and first-timers’ reception (centre)

All of the sponsored students and early career professionals found refreshment breaks and opportunities to network with publishing and library colleagues were plentiful and an invaluable opportunity to discuss themes from the plenary sessions and hear other delegates’ take on them. Lunches at the conference were informal, being served in the busy main exhibition hall (and eaten wherever a seat or floor space could be found). Katie noticed that the publishers’ stands were constantly busy during breaks and there were some inventive ways to draw people over to the stands (with special mention of Springer’s waffle stand).

Lightning talks offered a speedy overview of a subject area, with particular highlights in Monday’s session around alumni and NHS access. The talks condensed a lot of information to give a concise overview of the subject whilst managing to be informative and detailed. As Katie works as an OpenAthens administrator, she was particularly interested to hear about issues a pilot project faced in extending access to the NHS. The lightning talk that really made an impression on Anna was Peter Burnhill’s ‘It’s about time!: preserving the integrity of the scholarly record’. She had never considered before that libraries have complete control of their print stock but electronic content is in the hands of the publishers. “How can we be sure that it’s safe?”, she asked.

Simone Kortekaas from Utrecht University Library gave a plenary session on discovery, which certainly sparked debate! In Utrecht, the Library no longer uses any form of discovery service because their students use Google Scholar. Sarah Roughley noted this linked to a theme that seemed to run through the whole conference: libraries should stop focusing on discovery and start focusing on delivery. "Why do discovery", she asked, "when there are others such as Google who do it so much better?" Katie also found this a thought-provoking session. She said, "It is the bravest example of customer-focused change that I have come across; it was exciting to hear that libraries in the sector are making radical decisions, which bypass conventional routes and make expensive systems redundant." Katie will shortly be attending a radical-librarians collective, and will bring this to the attention of the participants, as there are many interesting discussions to be had around this concept.



Simone Kortekaas sparked much debate

After a very full first day, they headed over to the 'Curry and Quiz Night' at the stunning Royal Hall. Sarah found herself in a team with the well-travelled Cengage folk, but nonetheless they fell down on the pictures of cities. However, on a brighter note, their knowledge of William Shatner hits was unsurpassed!



The plenary sessions on day two of the conference covered trust, impact and workflows. Initially, Sarah was not sure what to expect – after all, ‘trust’ could refer to anything – but she found that all the sessions proved fascinating. The differences in attitudes of younger academics towards non-traditional methods of disseminating their work were really revealing. Whilst they seem to trust these non-traditional methods, they clearly still feel constrained by the norms of the academic community to disseminate their work using methods that are more traditional.

Everyone in the main auditorium was blown away by the presentation given by Guilhem Chalancon: ‘Channelling information flows: a young researcher’s approach to knowledge management’. His explanation of how he organizes, categorizes and consumes the vast amount of scientific literature that is produced was certainly eye-opening. Sarah said that before seeing this presentation she had thought herself to be an organized person, but realized there are so many more available methods and tools that she could use. Chalancon discussed issues of distraction and mindfulness, reminding Ben of his own experiences (on a much smaller scale) in researching his Librarianship MA dissertation. He feels that library professionals have a core responsibility to understand the expectations and challenges faced by researchers, so it was interesting to delve into Chalancon’s personal workflow and understand his approach to knowledge management. In a blogpost following the conference, Gaz Johnson noted the absence of the library in Chalancon’s information gathering – an interesting oversight which suggests a lost opportunity for valuable collaboration between library professionals and researchers. [An article by Guilhem Chalancon, based on his presentation, appears in this issue.¹]

Penny Andrews has completed ten massive open online courses (MOOCs) since they first became popular several years ago and so, along with Sarah, was keen to attend the enlightening session given by Jo-Anne Murray from the University of Edinburgh. They learned that Jo-Anne launched a new MOOC on equine nutrition, not expecting much interest, only to find that 24,000 people signed up, 30% of whom completed the course! Sarah found the most interesting statistic was that following the MOOC, the University of Edinburgh’s equine postgraduate degree course had a third extra students. Clearly, MOOCs might provide a way for universities across the UK to boost their postgraduate numbers. [An article by Jo-Anne Murray, based on her presentation, appears in this issue.²]

Sarah had heard lots about UKSG conference dinners so was very excited to attend. There were no dodgems this time, but there was UKSG’s very own beer festival. Sarah and her colleagues very quickly discovered that amongst the different beers there was also someone making cocktails and they put their drink-vouchers to good use on some ‘serial killers’. Penny doesn’t drink beer or cocktails but had the bright idea of swapping her drink-vouchers with someone who was prepared to buy her a pomegranate fizz from the bar in return.



“Everyone in the main auditorium was blown away”
by Guilhem Chalancon’s presentation on how
he tackled information overload

"The evening of the conference dinner was a delight!"



123 The evening of the conference dinner was a delight! Excellent food and drink was on offer and it was lovely to taste some local produce; the local cider and the Yorkshire cheese was of an excellent standard. However, the early career professionals and students agreed the best part of the evening was the opportunity to mingle with the other delegates in an informal setting. Anna had the chance to meet with presenters such as Ernesto Priego, who gave such a provocative presentation earlier in the day. Sarah was introduced to some librarians from Lund University in Sweden who, like the librarians at University of Liverpool where she works, are organizing a conference specifically looking at EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS). It was great to chat and exchange experiences, and Sarah is hoping to follow up with a visit to Sweden so she can learn more about EDS and academic libraries in Scandinavia.



Bill Thompson entranced his audience with musings on the vast unregulated worldwide experiment in openness

In the final day's closing plenary, BBC's Bill Thompson provided a fitting conclusion to the conference with his exploration of the nature of 'the open society, open data and the open library'. Ben felt that all members of the UKSG audience (even the lowliest of serials assistants) could relate to Thompson's arguments as he validated the roles of library and information professionals in maintaining a culture where knowledge and data can be shared and used freely. Anna found that Bill Thompson's presentation made her question how 'open' information is at present; it also made her realize that although the internet has been around for quite some time now, we are still relatively unaware of its impact with regard to open data. This session also made her consider the risks with open access as well as its benefits.

Summing up his experience of the three packed days of the 2014 UKSG conference in Harrogate, Gaz said that he had three key take-away words: diversity, collaboration and renewal. The following article by Gaz (Gareth J) Johnson provides an overview of the conference as a whole.

124 Note more articles based on 2014 UKSG conference presentations will be published in the November issue of *Insights*.

Images by Procter Photography, with thanks to Pat Procter

References: articles based on 2014 UKSG conference presentations appearing in this issue

1. Chalancon, G, Channeling information flows: a young researcher's approach to knowledge management, *Insights*, 2014, 27(2); DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1629/2048-7754.151>
2. Murray, J-A, Participants' perceptions of massive open online courses, *Insights*, 2014, 27(2); DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1629/2048-7754.154>

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See you in Glasgow

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Conference & Exhibition**

30 March - 1 April 2015

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