UKSG

UKSG Annual Conference 2013
The diaries of the sponsored students and early career professionals

Springer Science+Business Media and SAGE sponsored three free places for students and three free places for early career professionals to attend the 2013 Annual Conference and Exhibition in Bournemouth. The winners of the free places are pictured above and are, from left to right: Lizzie Caperon (Northumbria University, and working at the University of Leeds), Michelle Bond (University of Sheffield), Antony Groves (working at the University of Sussex); with Bernie Folan of SAGE and Eric Merkel-Sobotta of Springer in the centre; Kathryn Walsh (working at NUI Maynooth), Evelyn Jamieson (working at Goldsmiths, University of London) and Angela Applegate (University College London, and working at King's College London). Your Eds believe there is no such thing as a free conference, and so asked the winners to keep diaries of the event so that we can share their experiences and impressions with you.

Antony's diary starts the day before the conference proper. Having meticulously planned his itinerary, he was somewhat surprised to find his conference experience starting on Sunday night at the pub where he discovered a crowd of friendly delegates. He told us, "I happened to mention to the librarians sat next to me that I was hoping to get inspiration for my MA Information Studies dissertation and promptly received suggestions from each of them. If being invited out for a drink hadn't already shown me how approachable other delegates were, this exchange did. I felt immediately put at ease (perhaps in part due to the local ale) and was looking forward to the next day."

Day One: Monday 8 April

At the opening of the conference, all the winners were struck by its magnitude and by the atmosphere of high expectation. Kathryn Walsh said, "I was elated to be in the presence of over 930 other delegates from all over the world and to share a common goal with each of them, i.e. a hope to benefit greatly from the wide variety of content packed into the exciting conference programme. Even after the first three speakers of the Monday morning, I felt a new found confidence in my own understanding of the theme of open access (OA) along with an awareness of the various issues it may present for librarians and publishers alike."

'A great opening' was how Evelyn described the first plenary session by Phil Sykes, entitled 'Open access gets tough'. "Phil introduced the conference to the open access puppy from two years ago, the puppy that everyone wanted to meet and pet, but then showed the audience the puppy now. Unfortunately, it had grown into a ferocious dog – the picture of which was one of the most retweeted of the conference. Moving on to the serious message, he discussed where OA is now, and how we need to move on from the recommendations of the Finch Report." *[An article by Phil Sykes, based on this presentation, appears in this issue.]*
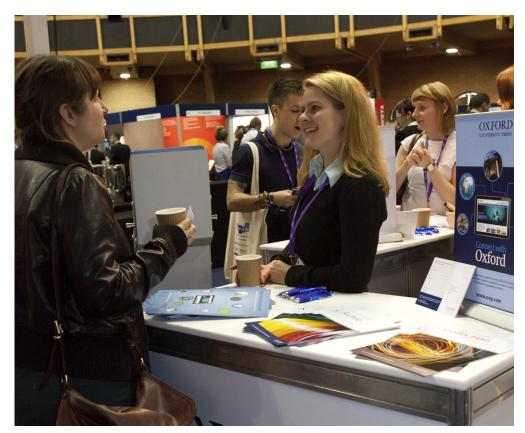
Evelyn found it frustratingly hard to choose which breakout sessions to go to and suffered from what she called 'breakout-session envy' despite thinking the ones she had chosen were excellent. Both she and Lizzie attended a breakout session on altmetrics by Mike Taylor and Paul Groth. "I knew nothing about almetrics (the collection and interpretation of citation of scholarly documents at article level) before the conference", said Evelyn, "and so found the talk particularly interesting. The speakers were both fantastic, and really sold the uses and opportunities presented by the advent of altmetrics and its future development. Coming back from the conference, I tracked down the altmetric.org add-on on Scopus, and I'll be watching with interest as the data grows." What Lizzie found interesting in this session was how formal methods of measuring impact such as journal citations can now be complemented by informal mechanisms. For example, there are now ways to track tweets, hashtags and feeds on a certain research article or topic, and of tracking comments on blog posts. (impactstory.org provides a place where this is starting to be done.) Such forms of data generation are important for creating activity around a certain topic or research area, and the arenas in which these are being discussed now are social media based. This made Lizzie question the exclusion of altmetrics from impact measurements. "In fact", she argues, "why should they not be used as their own form of impact measurement? This fascinating growth area holds vast potential for the future as our arenas for discussion move into more diverse social environments. They shouldn't replace high quality, formal measurements of impact such as JIF and H-index, but they certainly should complement them."

The winners also found time to take in all of the interesting stalls at the exhibition space. Kathryn told us, "I prioritised the break times to speak with vendors and exhibitors. I currently make use of many of the products and services offered by the vast majority of the exhibitors that were present at UKSG. This I found to be a very valuable use of my time to catch up on the latest developments and it also allowed me to broaden my experience of electronic resources beyond what I already cover in my daily job."

"I prioritised the break times to speak with vendors and exhibitors"

Meanwhile, Michelle attended the 'Breaking boundaries in scholarly publishing' breakout session because she thought it sounded appealingly revolutionary. "The session began with an overview of the scholarly content lifecycle from the publisher's view, and quickly jumped in to thinking territory with the revelation (to me) that scholarly outputs are the way they are because of print, and they needn't be this way any more. Palgrave Macmillan has been surveying since 2011 and found that only 50% of respondents think monographs are the right length for their research – leaving 50% who don't, a significant amount. I've never really considered format an issue before so it was intriguing to consider the many different alternatives that could be offered now that print isn't the only option."

Antony got back to the hotel on the first day, his head full of information, thinking that he had an hour to get ready for the evening dinner and quiz only to find that he actually had 15 minutes! He did make it, however, and said, "I joined what I thought looked like a table of friendly (and, I hoped, knowledgeable) librarians for the quiz. First came the sheets of paper with pictures on to identify. It's one thing not recognizing flags but if I wasn't able to name at least a couple of the libraries how would I be able to hold my head up high the following day? Thankfully we finished a respectable mid-table – I could return to the conference for day two!"

The winning quiz team clutching their Dorset cider – Knobs (Dorset) to the losers!

Day Two: Tuesday 9 April

On the second day of the conference, the plenary session given by medical student Joshua Harding (pictured) was a highlight for all the winners. In fact, Angela found this the most thought-provoking and controversial session of the conference. She told us, "I found it refreshing to hear a first-hand account from a student of his own personal experiences, with few punches pulled over dissatisfaction with e-resource publishing and library access to such material. This perhaps provided quite a wake-up call to many publishers and librarians in the room. I'm sure many librarians were heartened to hear Joshua echo their own frustrations with the multitudes of e-formats, platforms for access and licensing rights across different publishers. However, despite a tangible sympathy emanating from the audience, there was a palpable reaction that Joshua didn't understand the complexity of the publishing and licensing world. I would argue that instead of dismissing his criticisms, both librarians and publishers should investigate such blue-sky thinking in developing their services as they could be missing a trick. Whether this challenge will be taken up remains to be seen."

Lizzie found Joshua Harding's insights particularly interesting in the context of her dissertation on how libraries can improve their mobile services to meet user needs. Lizze said, "Harding drove home the idea that libraries should be investing in smartbooks – interactive e-books which enable the user to annotate them. He advocated the use of greater connectivity allowing syncing to cloud spaces, allowing information to be accessed any time, anywhere, and a need for a textbook that studies him as much as he studies it. This revolutionary concept would involve an e-book to track a student's working patterns, strengths and weaknesses to help improve his learning. Harding's refreshing attitude brought innovation to an auditorium full of interested and intrigued publishers and librarians. One question on all our lips was – who would pay for these great innovations? Currently, Harding is able to download apps and e-books on to his (not inexpensive) device using his own funds. However, not all students are as financially able to do this, and, furthermore, most libraries are not well enough financed in challenging economic contexts to fund large amounts of cutting-edge mobile applications, devices and technologies."

This question of who would or should pay for student resources was a theme in the presentation given by Philip Vaughan and Dawn Derraven. They explained how Coventry

University Library worked with Ingram Content Group to give free core textbooks to students. Angela told us, "To me this project seemed rather radical, and certainly something to consider at my own institution – though perhaps with electronic textbooks. Print appeared to burden the University of Coventry with significant logistical challenges, and seemed to be a step backwards in terms of resource provision. It was also quite new for me to hear a higher education (HE) institution explicitly pledge that no new student should be met with 'hidden costs' on a course. This reflects the direction in which many HE services are now heading."

Antony agreed that the Coventry project is an innovative idea but says it raises many questions. "If these books are given with the library seal of approval, how will students engage with other resources? Will they use other items on their reading lists or rely solely on those that they've been given? Apparently, the number of loans has declined since the distribution of these books but footfall has increased (although this could be due to rising student numbers). I will be watching with interest for the degree results from Coventry University in 2015 to see how effective the programme has been."

A contrasting 'lightning talk' by Claire Gill and Claire Gravely from the University of Surrey gave an account of how they are implementing new mobile services to try to meet the needs of users who arrive at University with smartphones, mobile devices and a demand for mobile services. Michelle found this interesting as it was directly opposite to her own experience of using roving iPads. "A university library I worked at previously introduced the idea of roving but it wasn't really popular with staff, who found that they weren't answering many enquiries and were instead more 'behaviour patrol'. I like the idea of staff being around the library rather than students needing to come to a fixed enquiry desk, but as evidenced by the Surrey experience, it needs staff buy-in and time to make it work."

On the other hand, Lizzie thinks some of Gill and Gravely's ideas, such as mobile friendly web pages, were positive, but argued, "Many of these ideas are merely 'catching up' with what library users now expect, and those such as QR codes and roving may act more as barriers to users accessing instant information than facilitators. QR codes have been seen as too clunky and long-winded as tools to find information, and my research at Leeds has shown that many users prefer to e-mail librarians or find the answer to an enquiry themselves, rather than approach a sporadic roving librarian with a tablet who may or may not be able to help." Lizzie reminded us that Jill Emery in her plenary session the previous day had said librarians should be acting as facilitators in enabling users to access services. *[An article by Jill Emery, based on her presentation, appears in this issue.]* The provision of mobile apps, such as those Taylor & Francis showcased in another lightning talk, are examples of tools which facilitate rather than bar users from accessing information. Lizzie in some frustration pointed out, "The fact remains though, that libraries are running a constant, plodding, snail-paced race of catch-up against young students such as Harding who, rabbit-like, are sprinting ahead, hopping from new technology to new technology, not looking behind them, and expecting the library to be running at their speed."

Our winners may have differing views on the issue of mobile services but all agreed that the conference dinner on Tuesday was a night to remember. The theme was 'All the Fun of the Fair', with dodgems and amusements. There was a great buzz in the air as everyone circulated from stall to stall, hooking ducks, shooting bottles and dodging bumper cars! The laser quest was a definite winner with the sponsored attendees. Michelle won a little trinket box for knocking over three cans and learned that two of the others are pretty sharp shooters! Kathryn told us, "It seemed very surreal to have been talking to vendors and exhibitors earlier that same day, swapping business cards and the like, yet then by evening to be chasing them around a dark inflatable dome shooting them with lasers! It was a fantastic night. One personal highlight was seeing a crowded dance-floor of librarians, publishers, and vendors, etc. dancing gangnam style!" Angela particularly enjoyed throwing some wild shapes to Kate Bush on the dance floor and going up against some high-ranking librarians on the dodgems, but made sure she avoided the bucking bronco. They all agreed that the dinner was delicious; particularly dessert, and afterwards they partied to the very end; eating candyfloss, playing laser quest and dancing away until the DJ stopped.

All the fun of the fair!

Day Three: Wednesday 10 April

The late night meant it was tough getting up the next morning, but the range of talks meant it was well worth it. Michelle told us, "I enjoyed the final plenary session, which started with a rabble rousing talk from Jason Scott of Archive Team. I'm sure I wasn't alone in feeling inspired and motivated by this talk – I didn't take notes or tweet really during this talk as I was caught up in the enthusiasm of it. Jason really hammered home his point that private companies don't care about data – there are many examples of sites being closed down with little or no warning and people losing important files, memories and

Jason Scott (right) with T Scott Plutchak

histories. His work with the Archive Team is based on three virtues: rage, paranoia and kleptomania, and they have downloaded 500TB of data in three years, saving things that would otherwise be gone forever. For me it highlighted an essential problem we have with the proliferation of mobile devices – we use apps because they're easy to use and make our lives easier in the short term, but we don't think about the longevity and what happens if that app disappears."

Kathryn summed up the conference wonderfully: "My attendance at the UKSG conference was far more than what I had expected it to be. It was on all sides a real success. I was pleasantly surprised that the vast majority of sessions I attended were so relevant to my current work. I found it valuable also attending sessions that were outside of my main areas of interest to gain extra insights into issues and services where I only had theoretical knowledge. As such, I cannot thank UKSG enough – along with Springer Science+Business Media and SAGE who partly sponsored my award – for enabling me to attend this conference. I would strongly encourage those who are in a similar position as me to apply for this wonderful opportunity in the future. It was a fantastic experience to attend such a high quality event and I can't wait to attend many more conferences in years to come."

Don't miss the next one!

UKSG 37th Annual Conference and Exhibition

Harrogate, 14–16 April 2014

Photos of the conference by Stuart Lane (www.photographylane.com)