

Irish libraries and COVID-19: first reflections

On Thursday 14 May 2020 Maynooth University Library hosted a seminar via Zoom, entitled 'Irish Libraries and COVID-19: First Reflections'. The seminar explored the response of the library sector to the global pandemic that has impacted every aspect of life. This article presents the case studies from the seminar.

Keywords

COVID-19; 3D printing; poetry; public libraries; health sciences; medical libraries



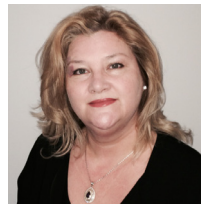
ALAN CARBERY

Head of Academic
Technology &
Communication
University College Cork
Library



HELEN FALLON

Deputy University Librarian
Maynooth University



MARIAN HIGGINS

Kildare County Librarian, and
President
Library Association of Ireland



EILEEN KENNEDY

Library Digital Experience
Developer
National University of Ireland
Galway



AOIFE LAWTON

General Manager and
Health Services Executive
Librarian



CATHAL MCCAULEY

University Librarian
Maynooth University

Introduction

Introduced by Cathal McCauley.

On Thursday 14 May 2020 Maynooth University (MU) Library hosted a booked out, online seminar entitled 'Irish Libraries and COVID-19: First Reflections'.

2 The rationale for the event was to record and acknowledge the magnificent manner in which Irish libraries responded to the terrible challenge and to learn from each other's experiences. There is a wealth of anecdotal evidence that library staff are going above and beyond the call of duty to make sure they play a key national role in responding to the pandemic. Every story about library staff rising to the challenge, whether through ensuring children have an online story time, or a 'cocooning' (also referred to as 'shielding') person receives a book, or a researcher receives an article, or a health worker a 3D printed mask, is inspiring and deserving of recognition. It is also hoped that through sharing our stories, more libraries will be motivated to offer similar services. At the time of the seminar, we were two months into lockdown and it provided a great opportunity for colleagues from across the country to reconnect, network and simply chat with each other.

'The rationale for the event was to record and acknowledge the magnificent manner in which Irish libraries responded to the terrible challenge'

More than 80 delegates attended the event. Speakers included Marian Higgins, the Kildare County Librarian and current President of the Library Association of Ireland (LAI), Dr Sandra Collins, Director of the National Library of Ireland, Helen Fallon, Deputy Librarian at MU Library, Aoife Lawton, Librarian with the Irish Health Service Executive (HSE) and Eileen Kennedy, Library Digital Experience Developer at the National University of Ireland Galway (NUI Galway).

There were a number of logistical factors to consider in organising the seminar. A half-day event was decided on as colleagues were already spending considerable time online. This decision, in turn, influenced the number of speakers and sessions offered. We invited speakers, rather than having a call for papers, due to the time-sensitive nature of the event – the intention being to assist colleagues with their response to the ongoing pandemic – and the general difficulty of co-ordinating processes due to the Covid-19 restrictions. From a technology perspective, we made the decision to use Zoom software for the seminar as, at the time, its functionality was more fit for purpose than other options such as Microsoft Teams or Google Meet. Due to the nature of the library's Zoom licence, the delegate capacity was capped at 89 (to allow for some staff and guest access). If speakers required it, they were given basic training in using Zoom. However, by that time, most library colleagues were familiar with a range of online collaboration tools as the sector had been working from home for almost two months by then. Each delegate was sent an etiquette guide. This addressed issues such as technical preparations, standards of conduct and advice on how to get the most from the seminar. The guide proved very effective and the technology worked well, as can be seen from our conclusion below. A range of other issues were agreed such as the event hashtag (#IrlLibCovid), booking arrangements (Eventbrite) and communications. The seminar proceeded as planned after these issues were addressed (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Group screenshot

The first session, chaired by Dr Mary Delaney, Librarian at the Institute of Technology (IT) Carlow, focussed on the responses of three key sectors – health, academic and public libraries – through papers from Aoife Lawton, HSE Library, Alan Carbery, University

3 College Cork (UCC) Library and Marian Higgins, Kildare Libraries. The innovativeness and commitment of libraries to continuing to deliver on their mission even in extraordinary times, was illustrated by four case studies in the second session, which was chaired by Fiona Morley, Head of Digital Programmes and Information Systems at MU. Eileen Kennedy, NUI Galway), talked about the 3D printing of a range of kit and tools for frontline workers. Helen Fallon described how MU Library organised an online poetry workshop. Dr Sandra Collins covered the Irish National Library's work to collect the Irish experience of COVID-19, while Joan Ward spoke about Libraries Ireland's 'Spring into Storytime' initiative moving online due to COVID-19. The third session saw Laura Connaughton, Head of Academic Services at MU Library, chair a virtual panel question and answer session with all of the speakers and open to all delegates. In the fourth and final session, Hugh Murphy, Head of Collections and Content at MU Library, distilled the key learning points and common themes from the seminar. The following case studies are based on the presentations.

'The innovativeness and commitment of libraries to continuing to deliver on their mission even in extraordinary times'

COVID-19: the Irish academic library response

Presented by Alan Carbery.

Introduction

Academic libraries responded in a variety of ways to the challenges of campus closures and public health guidelines. Following the announcement by the Irish Government that universities, along with most other aspects of society, business and education, would close from 18:00 on the evening of 12 March, the academic library response showed ingenuity, resilience and determination. This section provides an overview of the various responses of Irish academic libraries to the COVID-19 pandemic and campus closures. While I attempt to provide commonalities amongst our approaches, as well as highlight some innovative and individual responses, this is by no means intended to be a comprehensive or thorough insight into the sector's response. Rather, the intent is to give a broad overview of the various approaches taken to continue to provide top-quality and responsive library services at a critical point in the academic calendar during the height of a public health crisis.

Initial responses

By the nature of the services that academic libraries provide in support of the academic mission of our institutions, the sector faced two distinct and significant pressure points in the move towards remote library service provision. Firstly, academic libraries faced the challenge of moving their own operations and processes online. For many of us, the uncertainty experienced by our staff as we transitioned, rather quickly, from a physical library location to entirely remote working was challenging in the initial days. This required a significant amount of operational logistical planning to ensure library staff had the technology and network connections required for remote work, as well as the defined work packages and prioritized tasks for library continuity. For many academic libraries, the weeks preceding the eventual closure of our campuses allowed for the determined planning and operations to be put in place to ensure business continuity in the event of a public health order for closure, which seemed imminent. This preparatory work served libraries well – for many of the Irish academic libraries, the doors closed on the evening of 12 March, but online services continued apace and as scheduled.

The second pressure point followed shortly afterwards. While libraries had the foresight to plan and prepare for a pivot to online service delivery, for many of our academic teaching colleagues across our universities and institutes, the timing came at a particularly critical point in the spring semester. Academic staff often rely on physical library materials to support and supplement their teaching and adapting to an entirely online teaching experience while also facing the difficulties associated with discovering alternative online and digital resources proved to be challenging for many. Academic libraries, of course,

4 supported our academic colleagues in this transition. In addition to pivoting our own operations and services online, the academic library was a critical support system for many others to transition their activities online also.

Pivoting existing services

Library staff immediately dedicated considerable time and energy to supporting and facilitating remote access to digital texts in support of the teaching and learning of our institutions. Acquisition teams and electronic resources staff worked tirelessly to facilitate access to new e-books, databases and other online collections. Many academic libraries bolstered and enhanced the level of access to online materials by putting temporary database and other electronic resource trials in place. In addition to this, publishers responded to the COVID-19 crisis by easing licence restrictions or making research collections available on a temporary basis. These additional resources, while welcome, required further significant efforts to sort and enable within our own library systems. Disseminating news of this temporary access outwards to our various constituents took time, particularly as academic staff and students were inundated with information. The commitment of library staff involved in collections and electronic resources proved effective and sustained and was critical to ensuring successful transition to a fully online library service.

'Many academic libraries bolstered and enhanced the level of access to online materials by putting temporary database and other electronic resource trials in place'

While for many academic institutions, the final weeks of the spring semester prove to place less demand on our instructional services, many academic libraries pivoted information literacy and instructional sessions typically delivered face-to-face, towards the online mode. Library staff quickly became familiar with technologies such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams and adapted to the practices of online pedagogy. This shift is not to be underestimated and, while libraries were successful in delivering online sessions and webinars, the full shift to the complexities of online teaching might not be fully realized until the start of next academic year.

Reaching and engaging with academic library users during the initial weeks of building closure also proved to be a critical component of our individual response. Liaison librarians made use of Zoom and other video technologies to provide copyright advice for academic staff exploring options around digital content, conducted liaison consultations and attended academic department meetings from a distance. The academic library's reference or information services acted as the triage for user queries, fielding basic queries relating to overdue notices and fines during the closure (academic libraries have widely waived any fines during the closure period), to conducting in-depth research consultations online, updating and maintaining the library website knowledge base and ticketing systems, and making FAQs available on our websites to distil the most critical (but rapidly changing) information users needed at this time. Timely, responsive communication with our patrons became critical during the early phases of the COVID-19 campus closure and remains a vital part of our work to date.

Playing our part

Irish academic libraries made inventive use of technologies, spaces and services to support numerous efforts in this public health crisis. This work demonstrates a conscious attempt by academic libraries to demonstrate their contribution towards the greater need. These initiatives directly support the public community health efforts within our regions. UCC Library provided temporary access to library classroom space, typically used for information literacy instructional sessions, as a space for the health service executives to train healthcare professionals in contact tracing for confirmed COVID-19 diagnoses. A small number of Irish university libraries with 3D printing and other makerspace technologies quickly responded to a national concern over the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) for healthcare workers by printing visor shields, mask clips and other 3D objects to support the needs of community healthcare workers. UCC Library's efforts, for example, aligned to Benchspace – a local community group, who co-ordinated national

5 fundraising – to fund a network of PPE printers and the logistics to deliver equipment. Through this initiative, UCC Library was a part of efforts to print 50,000 face shields and raise in excess of €54,000 to sustain this activity.¹ Intentions to bolster healthcare workers in the public health crisis also extended to inventive repurposing of some library services – MU loaned a local hospital its energy pods to allow those on the frontline to rest and recuperate on site.² In many of our universities and institutes, new research clusters are forming, researching various aspects of COVID-19.³ Academic libraries support the research activities of these emerging research groups by gathering resources and organising them in appropriate categories.

'UCC Library was a part of efforts to print 50,000 face shields'

New initiatives

Academic libraries continue to evolve and innovate services, and this time is no exception. Library staff use ingenuity and creativity to provide or modify new services and approaches as a result of closed library buildings. University of Limerick (UL) library unveiled their online study room – a virtual mediated reading room for library users preparing for exams and continuous assessments. UCC Library was already preparing for an on-site, physical exhibition to mark the 70th anniversary of Europe's Schuman Declaration.⁴ By making use of LibGuides and digital surrogates, the library pivoted this exhibition online. MU Library led by example on ways to engage users online through their online poetry workshops.⁵ Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) Library also created digital assets and resources addressing mindfulness during the pandemic.⁶

Conclusion

The initial response by academic libraries demonstrated the sector's continued commitment to supporting the educational mission of our universities and institutions in a time of disruption and crisis. This unwavering commitment required flexibility and creativity in order to bridge many of the gaps in service as a result of restricted access to physical collections and library buildings. The Irish Government released its five-phase (subsequently consolidated to four phases) roadmap for reopening society and business, as well as a Return to Work Safely Protocol that provides indication as to the possible return to physical-based services and building reopening.⁷ This is in line with public health advice.⁸ Given these protocols, many academic libraries began to plan for library reopening in the later phases of this roadmap. Regardless of the specific reopening dates, it is very clear that the spaces, services and operations of the academic library will be considerably altered as part of our new normal. With physical distancing almost certainly a significant part of the Irish society in the near term, and university business likely to be conducted with a reduced footprint on our campuses for the foreseeable future, the capacity of the library is almost certainly reduced and the expectation is that digital library services will be critical to our ongoing role.

If only I had a crystal ball!! – the Irish public library response to COVID-19

Presented by Marian Higgins.

Introduction

Irish public libraries, through the years, have adapted their service delivery models in line with challenges and developments, be that in the area of social, economic, environmental or technological change. However, no crystal ball, disaster prevention plan or risk management plan prepared us for the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications. My initial concerns, as County Librarian, were staff well-being, communicating with our community, identifying innovative approaches to service delivery and the strategic positioning of our libraries in what is, and will continue to be, a different world.

Staffing

We have over 100 dedicated library staff in Kildare. I felt it was important, during the COVID-19 crisis, to give staff a purpose and a clear role. Whether working through online events, social media, creating content, promoting online membership and services, the community response helpline or the cocooning book delivery service, I hoped this purpose would give structure, routine and a sense of normality.

Like other Irish library authorities, Kildare has taken the opportunity to engage in significant training and development for working in the online environment, and this has enabled staff to develop and improve skills for future service delivery.

The online environment in a public library context

Public libraries, since 2018, have invested in a national suite of online services: e-books, audiobooks, accredited learning courses, language learning, magazine, comic, and newspaper downloading platforms. From the beginning of the pandemic it was obvious that the public were moving in very high numbers to online library engagement with unprecedented increases in engagement.

According to the Irish Department of Rural and Community Development⁹ almost double the amount of new library memberships were created nationally during the COVID-19 crisis, compared to the same period last year. New online membership led to the streamlining of these processes to support this demand. Nationally, over 30,000 new members joined the library in March 2020 compared to just over 17,000 in March 2019. There was a huge rise in usage of specific online library services in the week commencing 29 March compared to the week commencing 1 March:

- 467% increase in e-learning courses being taken
- 313% increase in new users of e-books and audiobooks service
- 246% increase in usage of the online newspapers/e-magazines
- 227% increase in language courses being taken.

In response to the increasing demand for online services, the Irish Department of Rural and Community Development allocated an additional €200,000 to purchase new e-books and e-audiobooks.

Our e-services have allowed our communities to access a large amount of digital content for education, work and entertainment.

Communicating with our community

Working in the new environment, with our physical buildings closed to the public, the library service needed to maintain well-established conversations with our community. Social media played a key role throughout, posting clear and reliable messages, delivered with a fun and light-hearted tone. The period saw a notable increase in our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram activity. These platforms were consistently used to promote reliable national sources of information about COVID-19, local supports for business, social welfare entitlements, community and well-being supports.

'Social media played a key role throughout'

In April we stepped into the world of blogging, with library staff creating a Kildare Library Services blog to meet the needs of the public. It is very popular, with over 670 visitors in April, from 19 different countries and 2,500 page views. Over 50 posts have been published so far including book reviews, reviews of online resources and craft tutorials.

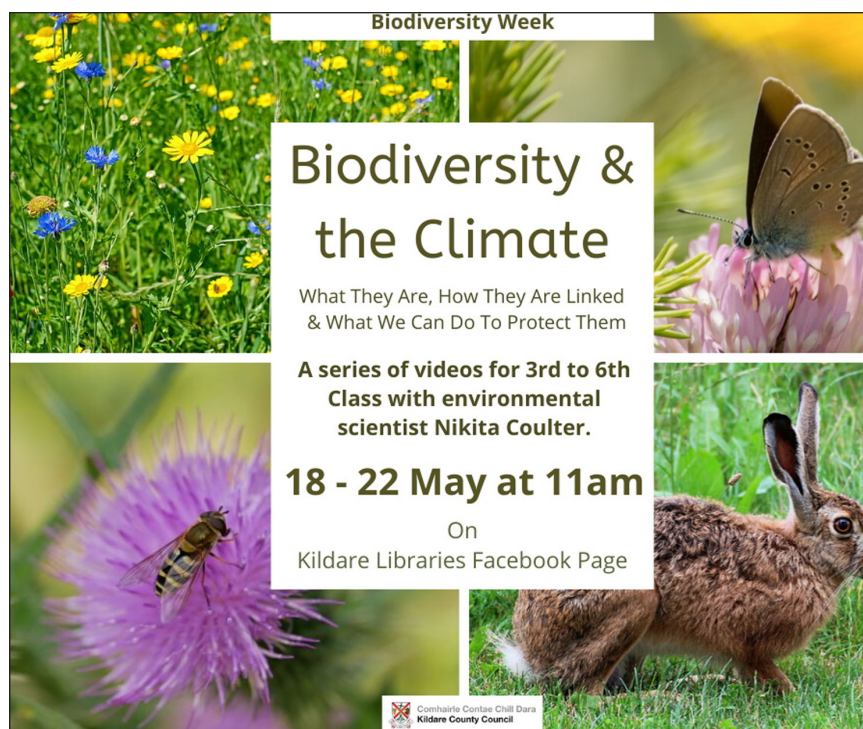


Figure 2. Biodiversity programme on Facebook

Events

In recent years Irish public libraries have put in place comprehensive educational and cultural events for all age demographics. The variety of lectures and workshops on offer promote communication and collaboration, whilst also providing an opportunity for the public to learn, take care of their physical and mental health and most importantly make the most of their time, while enjoying the free content available to them.

Kildare Libraries moved quickly to work with our facilitators to adapt events to the online environment as much as possible. Events are now offered via interactive platforms such as Zoom and through video (Figure 2). Most popular were our Let's Talk About Parenting events, which we adapted to help support parents suddenly working from home and dealing with their children's anxieties around the pandemic. Participation figures for these events are extremely encouraging, with attendance coming from other parts of Ireland and the UK. Weekly online exercise and yoga classes for families and senior citizens were also popular. We also provided many popular events for children such as coding, biodiversity and art classes online.

Kildare Library staff have also provided virtual story time sessions in Irish and English, arts and crafts workshops, Ciorcal Comhrá (Irish language conversation group) and tutorials on topics such as gardening and crafting.

Community response helplines

The COVID-19 Kildare Community Response Forum, which I was charged, along with a colleague, to set up, includes over a dozen agencies and organizations that support local communities. This is one of the helplines established in each of the 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland, with library staff working in shifts at community call centres, answering queries from those cocooning (shielding) and other vulnerable groups. In addition to helping people with information, the helpline staff connect with groups delivering groceries, medicine, fuel and other necessities to those in need. Library staff adapted to this new role with ease, not least because of their many years of experience supporting the information needs of members.

Cocooning book delivery service

Some public library authorities, including Kildare, developed a free book delivery service for those cocooning (shielding) due to the COVID-19 emergency. This service came into being following timely recommendations for handling library material during the COVID-19 timeframe, prepared by the Libraries Development Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and approved by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer Health Services Executive (HSE).¹⁰ Throughout the county the service is co-ordinated through our County Council's Community Response Helpline. A series of questions about the caller's preferred reading material allows a library staff member to select library items to be delivered to, and collected from, their home by a member of the library team (Figure 3). This service met with a very positive response from both library staff, patrons and the media – it also highlighted the importance the community places on the library service and the impact our services have on patrons' overall well-being.



Figure 3. Packages to be delivered to the housebound

'it highlighted the importance the community places on the library service'

ICT support services

Along with other library services across the country, Kildare Library Service made their 3D printers available to SurfBox, a commercial provider of 3D print solutions, for the production of face masks for nursing homes and hospitals, in a collaboration between Irish public libraries, SurfBox and Engineers Ireland, the professional body of Irish engineers. This initiative garnered significant social media coverage and was featured on Prime Time, a popular Irish current affairs programme, and the RTÉ News (our national television channel). As a small business, SurfBox decided to adapt their existing capacity and expertise to meet the current shortfall in desperately needed personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies for COVID-19.

While the libraries are closed, our laptops are on loan to essential service workers in other sections of Kildare County Council to assist with remote working.

Benefit assistance

Following the closure of libraries, staff began printing COVID-19 benefit assistance forms for members of the public and set up makeshift collection points outside the branches for those who did not have printing facilities at home.

Contact tracing

Library staff from across the county are seconded to support contact tracing, putting their information literacy skills to use to support the Irish health and social services.

'Kildare Library Service made their 3D printers available to SurfBox, a commercial provider of 3D print solutions, for the production of face masks'

'While the libraries are closed, our laptops are on loan to essential service workers in other sections of Kildare County Council to assist with remote working'

Conclusion

Public libraries maintained a strong presence during the COVID-19 period – the role of public libraries was mentioned in widely broadcast speeches given by An Taoiseach (our Prime Minister). We took novel and energetic approaches to the challenges we currently face and provided new, tailored services to our members. The impressive engagement with our online events, growth and engagement with online services and social media channels and the interest shown in the new cocooning delivery service show the value people place on libraries. As a sector, we have adapted to the current situation and remained a steadfast and invaluable resource for our community at this difficult time.

I don't have a crystal ball, but I feel confident in saying that when we are established in the new 'normal', we will be reflecting on what we have gained from this experience and how the lessons learned can change our future service delivery.

'we will be reflecting on what we have gained from this experience and how the lessons learned can change our future service delivery'

Makerspaces contributing in ways we never expected

Presented by Eileen Kennedy.

What is a makerspace?

Makerspaces, also called hacker spaces or fab labs, take on various manifestations depending on the location and clientele. They typically have three features in common – an active community of practice, a physical space in which individuals can collaborate and communicate in person and access to otherwise difficult to obtain tools or technologies. University makerspaces are often located within specific faculties, such as engineering or computer science departments, to serve the design and fabrication needs of those students. Library makerspaces are uniquely positioned in that they welcome students of all disciplines and levels of experience, not unlike the library itself.

The National University of Ireland Galway (NUI Galway) library makerspace is just such a space. NUI Galway is a university on the west coast of Ireland with over 18,000 students and more than 2,500 staff members. Students have an opportunity to collaborate and learn in the makerspace through experimenting with 3D printers, drones, video production equipment, virtual reality headsets and more. Students are also encouraged to take ownership of the space through volunteering to operate and repair 3D printers and check equipment in and out to other students. The makerspace's motto is 'think it, make it, make it better'.

'Students have an opportunity to collaborate and learn in the makerspace through experimenting with 3D printers, drones, video production equipment, virtual reality headsets and more'

University closure

On 12 March 2020 the makerspace was buzzing as usual with small groups of students editing video assignments and chatting, while student volunteers tasked with maintaining the makerspace equipment were working their way through the ever-growing 3D print request queue. When the University Library closed at 18:00 to help stem the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, students and staff alike hoped they would be allowed to return to finish projects two weeks later. Library staff, both in NUI Galway and in other Irish higher education institutions, had already had discussions with regards to 3D printing of personal protective equipment (PPE) in response to potential shortages and supply chain interruptions. By 21 March it became clear that access to campus would be allowed only in special circumstances. So, on that day, one of the three components that make a makerspace, the high-end equipment, moved into my home with me.

Items produced

Over the following weeks, I produced three main items using the makerspace printers. The first was a simple face shield made up of a 3D printed headband, an A4 acetate sheet – the same type that was used in the overhead projectors of a bygone era – and an elastic cord (Figure 4). The sheet is secured to the headband and hangs in front of an individual's face to offer an additional layer of protection. It is designed to be worn over an N95 mask to prolong the mask's use if necessary. Of course, in an ideal situation N95 masks should be changed between each patient or as frequently as possible. The printing activities I carried out were intended as a stop-gap for situations that were not ideal. The design was a modification of a model created by PrusaPrinters in collaboration with the Czech Ministry of Health. It was then made available online to be remixed and remodelled in response to real world needs and feedback. In true maker fashion, an online community organically came together to discuss printer settings, assembly and sterilization tips and connecting with frontline workers in need. The community was diverse. Some members were colleagues from other libraries, both public and academic, who wanted to put their own makerspaces to use. Others were trained engineers and materials experts. Still others were individuals with access to just a sewing machine who wanted to know how they could contribute. The communities formed in designated forums such as the Prusa 3D Printing forum, on Facebook pages like the 'Galway Homemade Mask Sewing and/or Faceshield Printing Coordination' and on Reddit in the 'Coronavirus 3D Printing Megathread'.

'Prusa face shield files for printing have been downloaded over 350,000 times'

At the time of writing, the various Prusa face shield files for printing have been downloaded over 350,000 times and over 1,700 posts have been submitted to the discussion forum, with tens of thousands of views.



Figure 4. Face shield

The second item to be printed was requested by a doctor in University Hospital Galway who was investigating the use of modified Subea snorkels as PPE (Figure 5). These full-face snorkel masks have been the subject of research¹¹ that found they not only formed suitable PPE in the absence of other resources, but were also most effective when modified with 3D printed adaptors, which are 'safer, have more flexibility and reliability than makeshift adaptations'.¹² The part I printed was a simple adaptor which allowed a filter to be fitted to the snorkel. As with the face masks, the files for print were open source. Advice to healthcare workers using the adaptors was to dispose of them after each use and use them only in cases when no other PPE was available.

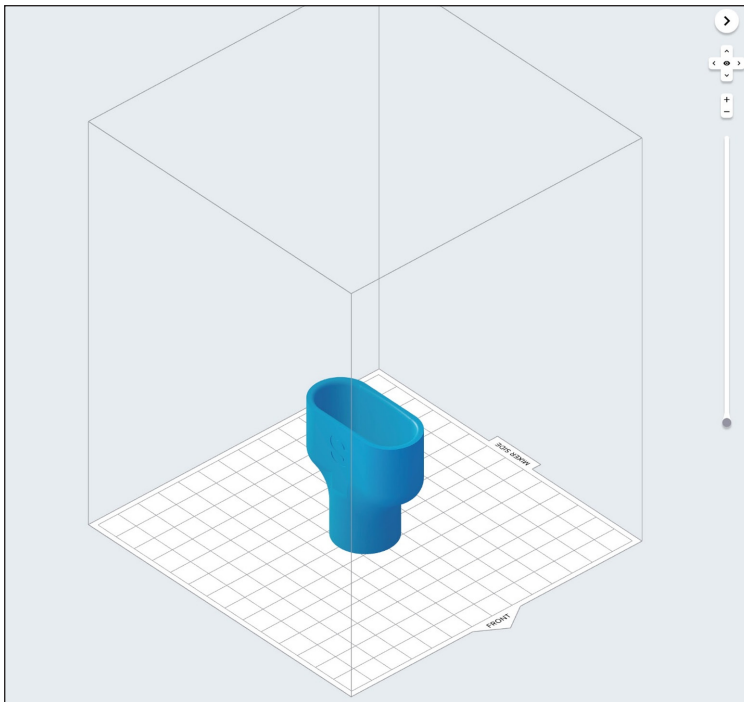


Figure 5. Subea snorkel

The final printed item was quite possibly the simplest – an ‘ear saver’ to be worn with masks (Figure 6). It was a piece of plastic with catches on it designed to go behind the head and hold the loops of a face mask to take pressure off healthcare workers’ ears. Sometimes the most basic items can be the most useful. I printed over 300 of these small devices which were then distributed to healthcare and frontline workers across Ireland. Whereas the other items were designed to be used in dire conditions when PPE was unavailable, the ear savers could be used under any circumstances to render masks a little more comfortable and make a small, immediate contribution to workers.



Figure 6. Mask extenders

Reflection

While producing PPE with the makerspace printers, I did in one sense work alone. I was socially distanced from colleagues and students as I prepared files, unclogged printer nozzles, replaced heater cables and cleaned and packaged prints. Though I missed the camaraderie of working in a collaborative environment, the tasks were not new to me. As library makerspace manager, I typically maintain and repair 3D printers, train volunteers and organise and teach workshops. I am, however, by no means an engineer or knowledgeable about the specifications to which PPE should be produced. The enormous online community of practice and the incredible willingness of the NUI Galway Library to devote resources to assist in the PPE effort is what made everything possible.

Perhaps more significant is the position of a makerspace in a crisis. The makerspace at NUI Galway Library is characterised by a willingness to contribute, collaborate, hack, make and make again. That ebullient desire to work together towards unprecedented solutions is precisely the mindset which universities must instil in their students as we prepare them for an uncertain world. A makerspace is just one area in a university where that type of learning can happen and a library, which welcomes all disciplines, is its ideal home.

'It's a pandemic, Jim, but not as we know it': the Irish Health Service Executive National Library response to COVID-19

Presented by Aoife Lawton.

Introduction

The Health Service Executive (HSE) is responsible for national public health and social care in the Republic of Ireland (RoI). The National Health Library & Knowledge Service (NHLKS) is part of Research and Development in the organisational structure of the HSE. I am the National Health Service Librarian with responsibility for NHLKS.

Staffing

NHLKS employs some 57 library staff who are based in 31 locations across Ireland. During the second week of March it was apparent that the majority of library staff would be redeployed to assist with the response to COVID-19 with a continuity business plan for library services required. The NHLKS has a five-year strategic plan with six national virtual teams in place.¹³ The teams are:

- the Evidence team providing literature search and summary service
- the Digital team managing all the digital infrastructure, national library management system, institutional repository, website, social media, Libguides, etc.
- the Procurement team procuring print and e-resources in conjunction with user panels and staff
- the Knowledge Broker team facilitating multidisciplinary teams to put evidence into practice
- the Estates team maintaining standards of library facilities in all locations
- the Information Skills team providing training and education for all library users.

Of the six teams, two were essential – the Evidence team who produce literature searches and summaries of evidence and the Digital team who ensure access to core e-resources and platforms. As national HSE librarian I kept the leads of both teams in place and worked with managers to determine who was available, with the requisite skill set, to work on both teams. On Friday 13 March 2020, a communication was issued to all NHLKS staff regarding redeployment and the journey ahead. The following weeks were all-consuming with regards to work.

The Evidence team

New operational workflows were quickly put in place to respond to the organization's requirement for COVID-19 guidance and evidence at the frontline (Figure 7). The NHLKS had an important role to play and worked in an integrated way with Research and Evidence to jointly put together a Libguide¹⁴ to house the HSE COVID-19 Guidance and Evidence Repository, which was set up in a matter of weeks in March and launched on 2 March, 2020. It is still in use today. The Repository received 73,656 visits in the first 20 days and was mentioned in an Irish Government COVID-19 briefing broadcast on national television on Easter Monday. The Repository combines guidance produced and approved by clinicians through a rigorous governance framework. The Summaries of Evidence are produced by the NHLKS Evidence team. Both are combined in the repository and are signposted to frontline staff. The intention is that evidence informs guidance and both are updated on a timely basis. The Evidence team produced a search protocol for COVID-19 and operational workflows to match. The Evidence team has a designated team lead who is a senior library manager. The rest of the team consists of 15 HSE librarians and volunteer librarians from across the public sector. All librarians on the team are expert searchers with a minimum of five years of experience of carrying out complex searching in medical databases. The composition of the team changes in line with redeployment demands from across the public health sector. Some librarians were released from the sector and redeployed between April and June 2020.

'put together a Libguide to house the HSE COVID-19 Guidance and Evidence Repository'

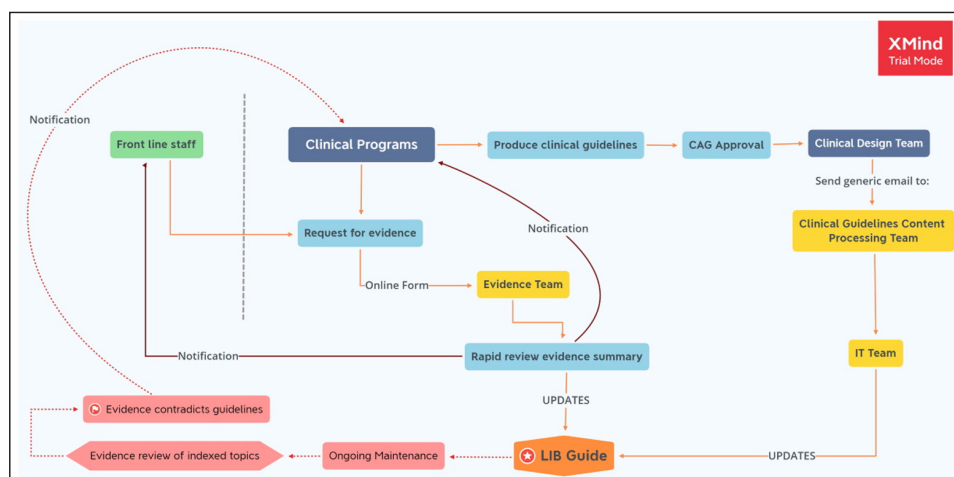


Figure 7. Suggested workflows

Complex operational triage is set up for research requests on COVID-19 and put in place by key team leads, with input from multidisciplinary HSE staff. Daily 'Evidence Triage' calls are held with multidisciplinary teams including IT staff, the Evidence team lead, the National Clinical Programme lead, the Public Health Guidance lead and the Research Manager. Daily research questions are discussed and triaged, they advance to the Evidence team if a summary of evidence is required, they are responded to by the Public Health section if there is existing guidance or they are sent for consultation with subject specialists for further review if that is warranted.

The Digital team

In parallel to the work of the Evidence team, the Digital team ensured that the many open access collections and resources being provided by multiple suppliers were accessible and visible to our end-users. Publishers keen to supply open access content provided links to resources including e-books, e-journals and databases such as GIDEON (Global Infectious Diseases and Epidemiology Network) and Covidence (a package for managing literature searching and filtering). After much negotiation, Elsevier provided an open access suite of Clinical Skills. This was particularly welcomed during the time when community assessment

14 hubs were set up to triage COVID-19 patients. The resource was particularly useful as student nurses and nurses from a variety of speciality areas were drafted in to triage patients and needed to learn on the job.

From the library perspective, all websites and platforms needed immediate and continuous updating. A new online form was put in place to offer a 'COVID-19 Request for Summary of Evidence'. A range of new COVID-19 related content was made available on the main library website. A platform called 'SLACK' that was in place pre-COVID-19 came into full swing. This social media platform for instant messaging, conference and video calling was used by a handful of NHLKS staff before the COVID-19 emergency. It is now operating at full capacity and proving to be a worthwhile investment. Social media is active and the NHLKS Twitter account regularly sends out tweets to a captive audience. Engagement increases over time.

Redeployment

The majority of NHLKS staff were redeployed to new roles in the public health sector, including contact tracing, answering calls on the national HSE Helpline and occupational health duties. This is a very different experience for qualified librarians and paraprofessionals. It will be important to capture the learning from this in the months ahead. The NHLKS were the 'back office' workers supporting the frontline, putting in long hours and much weekend work.

Lessons learned

What has worked well during this time is strong leadership, having a strategic plan that translates into the environment we found ourselves thrust into, the positive library staff response, having a national point of care tool accessible to everyone in Ireland (BMJ Best Practice) and opportunities to integrate our work with others. Above all, there is now an increased awareness and appreciation of the value of the unique skill set of librarians.

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Moving on

The next steps are to keep going! A Virtual Reference Desk was broadcast to all HSE staff on 28 May 2020 including a LiBot. The desk is staffed by library assistants and senior library assistants who are enjoying working with the new technology and the opportunity to carry out their normal work in a new way. Other plans include to continually monitor redeployments, reinvigorate a Knowledge Broker Team and plan for a phased reopening to return to a 'new normal'. Key to the return is government advice and putting the strategic objectives of the HSE first. Reclaiming library space which was handed over to different sections of the Public Health sector will be a key challenge. NHLKS will continue to work behind the scenes to deliver better outcomes for patient care through supplying frontline staff with evidence summaries, point of care tools and learning resources.

Reflection

Pandemics are not new to the HSE or the NHLKS. In our lifetime, we have experienced SARS (2002–2004), Bird Flu/H5N1 (2007) and Swine Flu/H1N1 (2009–10). For all three pandemics, information is vital to inform decision-making. HSE libraries helped with the distribution and organization of this information. However, Coronavirus/COVID-19 is a pandemic, but not as we know it. The daily death and infection toll reported by media through the Irish Department of Health is like nothing any of us have ever experienced. It is a time of stress for all of us as human beings. It is a time for reflection and deep thinking. We have not, as yet, had enough time to produce grounded, compelling evidence to navigate the road ahead with certainty, even as the virus changes and mutates. Governments do what they can based on the best evidence and guidance available to them.

Virtual poetry at Maynooth University Library

Presented by Helen Fallon.

Introduction

Maynooth University Library hosted two poetry workshops in Zoom in May and early June. The workshops, facilitated by Irish poet and creative writing teacher Jessica Traynor, were open to all.

The context for the poetry workshop is a Special Collection – the Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive – held by the Library (Figure 8 and Figure 9). Saro-Wiwa was a Nigerian writer and social activist. An Irish nun, Sister Majella McCarron (OLA), worked with him to highlight the environmental destruction of his homeland Ogoni, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. While the then Nigerian government received massive revenues for oil from Royal Dutch Shell, in Ogoni there were no schools or hospitals and fishing and farming livelihoods were destroyed. In November 1995, Saro-Wiwa was executed, with eight colleagues (The Ogoni Nine) for organising peaceful protests. His death row correspondence to McCarron, a collection of his poems and photographs and artefacts, were donated to Maynooth University Library in 2011. The death row letters and poems have been subsequently edited and published in 2013, with a second edition in 2018.¹⁵



Figure 8. Panels – Ken Saro-Wiwa Travelling Exhibition 2019

Poetry competition

Maynooth Library has engaged in a number of initiatives to highlight the collection and the human rights issues embodied therein. In 2018 and 2019, the Library ran a poetry competition, in collaboration with a local school, for transition year students. In 2020, this event was broadened to an open poetry competition, with both school and adult categories, to mark the 25th anniversary of the execution of the Ogoni Nine. The competition was for a poem which broadly embodies the ideals of Ken Saro-Wiwa. These include equality, justice, the environment, gender, land rights and climate change. While the competition had its origins in injustice in Nigeria, it sought to inspire people to write about their own life experiences and ideas on these topics.

An on-site workshop for adults – to complement and highlight the competition – was in the planning stages for Saturday 18 April with Irish poet and creative writing teacher Jessica Traynor. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the two-hour workshop was delivered through Zoom. The workshop was advertised via social media, with booking via Eventbrite. There was a very high level of interest, with places filled up within a few days. A waiting list was then established and a second workshop scheduled for three weeks later. It was in no way mandatory to attend the workshop in order to enter the poetry competition.

Poetry workshops

Each workshop involved an intensive two hours of creative writing. The workshops were delivered, via Zoom, from 11:00 to 13:00 on two consecutive Saturdays. Fifteen people attended each workshop. Following brief background information on Ken Saro-Wiwa, people began writing, using a poem as a starting point.

The first two warm-up exercises were based around poems written by Saro-Wiwa. The facilitator read 'Morning Song' written from military detention, explaining how the poem captures the sense of how the human spirit can find beauty in the mundane. She then asked participants to write a poem about a place where they felt comfortable, emphasising that this did not have to be a beautiful place. She advised people to write without editing and to try to use more than one of the five senses in their poem. The next poem was described as a rant. 'Ogoni, Ogoni' captures Saro-Wiwa's anger at the pollution of his homeland. The facilitator asked participants to write a poem about something which made them angry. She emphasised that poetry lives in the specific details and that humour and anger work well together. People were allowed ten minutes writing time, followed by ten minutes of sharing outputs. This helped create dialogue within the group, which was really helpful in the online environment.

The work of other poets was used for inspiration. The facilitator noted we are in a strange place at the moment. This may create a resurgence of our awareness of nature, while the hum of traffic is lessened, but set against this people are feeling curtailed. After reading the poem 'The Present' by Simon Armitage, she asked participants to write a poem about a gift of something they would like to pass on to their children or future generations. This was followed by a praise poem exercise and a poem for a time of conflict. After each exercise participants shared some of their writing.

In total 30 people attended the workshops. While the majority were from Ireland, there were also attendees from as far afield as New Delhi, something which a traditional workshop in the Library would not be able to accommodate.

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Figure 9. Travel writer Noo Saro-Wiwa views her father's archive at Maynooth University Library in 2015 with Ciara Joyce, archivist

Feedback

There was no formal evaluation carried out. E-mails from participants were extremely positive. Comments included:

'I found the workshop really helpful to get back to writing poetry again. I wrote poems in my early teens. I liked the prompts for getting started. I'm in first year at UCC, studying government and political science and I'm really interested in

17 social justice issues in Ireland and further afield, like the issues Ken Saro-Wiwa campaigned for. I've just joined the Green Party, and I hope one day to be a politician or maybe work for the United Nations.' (Sinead, Cork)

'I really enjoyed the Poetry Workshop. It was the first time I had ever done anything like that. The presenter, Jessica, was really welcoming and it was clear that everyone's contribution was really valued. What I enjoyed most was sharing ideas and hearing some of the work of those taking part. Everyone was so encouraging and I feel it will help to keep me working at my poetry and to appreciate better that a poem can spring from anywhere.' (Gerry, Maynooth)

'The sample poems as well as writing prompts were a great mix of poems and captured the essence of Saro-Wiwa's work and humanity. I especially liked Simon Armitage's poem and that has made me think about how to connect the small "mundane" activities to the larger picture. I also appreciate as a person living in a so-called developing nation that we discussed issues that are prevalent everywhere, not just in the West. In that sense, it was a unique workshop and I enjoyed it even more.' (Jona, New Delhi)

'I've taken many workshops over the years and this one in particular blew me away because it was online but the interaction between Jessica and participants felt like we were in each other's sitting rooms, never mind sitting face-to-face in real life. It was incredibly intimate and engaging. I was tired afterwards but I can't describe how this energized me. Still buzzing and it's 4:38pm. Can't wait to read up on Ken Saro-Wiwa and the others discussed.' (Mari, Mayo)

Reflection

In addition to the positive feedback on both days, the success of the workshop can also be measured by the number of entries to the competition. Seventy-three entries were received in the adult category, which was the focus of the workshop.

However, outside of the competition, participants enjoyed the event as a time to learn, to interact with colleagues and possibly to address difficult and challenging issues through a creative medium. The fact that people from outside of Ireland could participate fully is a major positive to having a virtual workshop and very much in keeping with the Library's commitment to inclusion.

'participants enjoyed the event as a time to learn, to interact with colleagues and to address difficult and challenging issues through a creative medium'

Conclusion

Overall, the seminar was an enormous success. It was fully booked (80 delegates) and a further seven people attended in staff or guest roles. All delegates were sent a feedback form (using SurveyMonkey). There was a 58% response rate and the results were extremely positive. All questions received positive responses of more than 98%. In addition to satisfaction with the presentations, delegates praised the technology and other logistical aspects of the seminar. Suggestions for improvement were minor, with most proposing further enhancements for future seminars such as wider participation and addressing the challenge of reopening. Delegates also reported that the opportunity to network and for colleagues to 'see' each other was very valuable.

'Nationally, the seminar helped us reflect on the enormous level of activity Irish libraries have engaged in, in response to the COVID-19 crisis'

Nationally, the seminar helped us reflect on the enormous level of activity Irish libraries have engaged in, in response to the COVID-19 crisis. This response was recognised at the highest level when on the 17 March, St Patrick's Day, our national holiday in Ireland, an Taoiseach (the Prime Minister) made an address to the nation.¹⁶ He thanked librarians for joining the national COVID-19 effort. This won hearts and minds and further motivated people.

18 There was significant coverage of the initiatives discussed in this article in Irish national media and this reinforced our visibility and the importance of our role. Both the lending of library energy pods to a local hospital to allow those on the frontline to rest and recuperate on-site,¹⁷ and the public library lending of 3D printers for face shield production,¹⁸ was covered by RTE, the Irish national television channel, while the Ken Saro-Wiwa Poetry competition was featured by the *Irish Times*, Ireland's leading national newspaper.¹⁹ The makerspace 3D printing was also featured on TG4, Ireland's national Irish language television channel.²⁰

The value of public libraries was recognised at governmental level, with the Irish Department of Rural and Community Development allocating an additional €200,000 to public libraries to purchase new e-books and e-audiobooks. The newly appointed Minister for Education is seeking an additional €100 million in funding for higher education, some of which will be targeted at equipment and resources.²¹

New relationships have been built up during the crisis. The Public Library Community Response Helpline involvement resulted in strategic new connections to agencies and organisations, which in turn will be of importance in the future. Initiatives such as academic library spaces being repurposed for training healthcare workers in COVID contact tracing, have hopefully resulted in new perceptions of library space nationally. The key role librarians from different sectors played in contact tracing was a recognition of our high level of transferable skills.

Recordings of these talks are available online on MU Library's YouTube channel.²²

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the 'full list of industry A&As' link: <http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa>

Competing interests

The authors have declared no competing interests.

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Corresponding author:

Helen Fallon
Deputy University Librarian
Maynooth University, IE
E-mail: Helen.B.Fallon@mu.ie
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6249-9797

Co-authors:

Alan Carbery
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-3150-3228

Eileen Kennedy
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2042-9918

Aoife Lawton
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3040-8520

Cahal McCauley
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0849-9059

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