

## Editorial

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### UKSG Conference At York

Having suggested in my March editorial that the UKSG Conference could be improved by being condensed, I have to say that the York session, by general acclaim, was particularly successful, both in its quality of papers and its organisation. The hard work and efforts of the organisers were reflected in the smooth running, excellent time-keeping and general liveliness of the conference. Recalled highlights included the excellence of Chris Beckett's visuals, the rich humour of Tony McSeán and Gordon Graham's excellent opening paper. If applause is a true indicator, however, pride of place must be given to the diminutive Dianne Leong Man from Witwatersrand whose paper was not only packed with information but also earned a strong emotional response from a full house for its perceptiveness, tenacity in the face of great difficulties and its irrepressible bubbling humour. The resultant prolonged and genuinely felt applause was the nearest I have heard to a "standing ovation" at UKSG conferences.

The exhibitors at York were pleased to see the attendance rise to the 400 figure and were broadly satisfied with the trade and public relations aspects of the conference. The slightly inconvenient shape of the exhibition area was not to everyone's liking and some who were pushed out down corridors felt they were somewhat disadvantaged. Some delegates found difficulty with parking but this seems to be a routine aspect of life on any university campus. At least the problems were not so acute as at Southampton.

### Could it be that our serious national press has finally got the message?

Michael Ignatieff (Observer, 2nd June) in his article "Gradgrind Rules...." complains that our publicly funded libraries in schools, colleges, polytechnics, universities, along with local authority libraries are being ground down by lack of funding. Opening hours have been reduced, branches closed and bookstocks weakened and, Ignatieff warns, "the cuts ahead may be deeper and more damaging than the ones already made". Over the Thatcher decade public library lending declined by 12.6% and by 15% in London. The situation in schools and polytechnics is "quite appalling" with resultant "tatty bookstocks irrelevant to student needs". In a fiercely-worded final statement Ignatieff points to "the Government's indifference to the universities, its neglect of training, its underfunding of education, its starvation of scientific research and its slow strangulation of the library service" as prime examples of Victorian penny-pinching at its most philistine. I vividly remember the whole process beginning in Autumn 1979, when I was forced to alter drastically my own polytechnic's development plans. Twelve years later my successors tell me little has changed and that the maintenance of services at a level adequate to support research, teaching and learning is barely possible.

*John Cowley*