

UKSG 20th Anniversary Conference

Heriot-Watt University, 7 - 9 April 1997

The 20th Anniversary Conference through student eyes

Each year we offer a number of free places to students. The catch is that they are asked to submit a report on the conference. We are pleased to publish the following report by Ellen Reed, University College, London, together with extracts of reports submitted by Hannah Mateer, University College London, Sarah Gooding, University of Westminster, and Basil Nankivell, Manchester Metropolitan University.

As the venue chosen for the UKSG 20th anniversary conference and exhibition, the Edinburgh Conference Centre at the Heriot Watt University, with its excellent facilities ensured a comfortable and enjoyable stay. The record attendance of over 400 delegates, including over 200 first time delegates, from 18 countries and representative of all major sectors of the information community, reflected the status and international recognition that the UKSG has achieved in its first 20 years.

The conference provided an informative and relaxed programme of presentations and social events. Whilst the pertinent issues of pricing, access and the future role of the electronic journal were recurrent themes in the conference papers, the programme provided the opportunity to explore special interest topics in a wide choice of workshop sessions.

Pieter Bolman, President of Academic Press, USA, presented the keynote paper which examined the potential of consortia licensing to realise a 'win win' situation for publisher, library and end users. The paper concluded that the Academic Press consortia licensing model benefits the publisher by reducing the economy of single article purchase and the consequent revenue loss through document delivery via a third party. Libraries benefit as

licensing promotes access to journal literature, journal price inflation is inhibited and document delivery/interlibrary loan costs are reduced. However, to enable the consortia model to succeed to the benefit of all, the prerequisites of the existence of central purchasing authorities like the HEFCE, a variety of pricing mechanisms and the emergence of consortia of small publishers, were identified.

An entertaining and apt paper was presented by Ian Mowat, University Librarian at the University of Edinburgh, which postulated the role and format of the journal, 20 years hence. A future in which the rapid growth of electronic journals is restrained by inadequate technological access in the academic community is envisaged, a trend influenced by such social, technological and economic factors as the growth of IT in schools, improved screen quality, technological controls to electronic access, reduced communication costs and the realisation of a mass market as cheaper electronic publishing reduces the cost of access. The paper envisaged that charges will increasingly reflect information *location* rather than access costs, as the value of search tools relative to the information itself increases.

Following the theme of the keynote address, Martin White's paper evaluated the PSLI (Pilot Site License Initiative) at the close of its first year of implementation, from the perspectives of library, publisher and subscription agent, and reinforced Pieter Bolman's perception of consortia licensing as a potential 'win win' scenario for all.

Following the PSLI, higher education institutions reported average savings of £11,000, but concerns over archiving, VAT charges on electronic products and variable publisher contracts were expressed. The large UK

publishers recognised the need for close direct contact with users to enable the development of suitable price structures, access arrangements and formats for their electronic products, whilst subscription agents, confronted with a direct threat to revenues, as commissions are calculated on a discounted price, have responded positively, developing a role as an electronic intermediary.

The PSLI has established the national site licence as an important subscription option. Following withdrawal of the PSLI in 1998, the evaluation team envisage the development of similar licensing schemes, but which differ in not being funded by the top slicing of HEI's budgets and which offer national and sectoral site licences to include non UK publishers.

The following two papers examined the themes of preservation and archiving in the electronic journal environment. Michael Break's paper examined the issues involved in the conversion of print to digital format. The paper concluded that the 'sustainable' library of the future will integrate print and digital resources, but with the critical mass of material for digitisation, the development of subject led digitisation projects and the emergence of economic models in which access is equated with ownership, to ensure that the rights of ownership are applicable in accessing digitised material.

Concluding the formal programme for Monday, Michael Alexander's paper identified the different means of creating and storing electronic journals and exemplified the issues involved with reference to activities at the British Library. Whilst Adobe Acrobat has become the 'de facto' standard for the storage of e-journals, other technical issues with implications for the long-term storage and access of digitised material are the need for consistency in the naming and location of digital objects and the need for technical solutions to protect the integrity of digitised material.

Tuesday's programme opened with two papers in which opposing scenarios were envisaged for the future of the print journal. Matt Hemus presented an interesting paper in which the emergence of 'scholarly skywriting' is seen to erode the *Faustian bargain* on which

paper publishing is based; the internet has released non trade authors from the restrictive conditions of access necessarily imposed by paper publishers to recoup publication costs and realise profit. The paper suggests that the page costs of peer review, editing and formatting in the electronic environment are low enough to recover at the author end, thus enabling universal free access to periodical literature in the internet, which is the esoteric author's preference. The paper concluded that electronic only publication rather than hybrid print and electronic publishing is required to realise the benefit of free access to learned periodical literature.

The opposite perspective was adopted in Gordon Graham's paper in which the continued primacy of the print journal as the repository of human knowledge was envisaged. Barriers to electronic access were identified and it was argued that what is technically feasible should not be assumed to be socially desirable. The paper concluded that the electronic medium has a role in providing additional functionality to that offered by paper, but is not a substitute to the print journal. In the access versus holdings debate, holdings will continue to dominate.

The paper presented by Steve Hitchcock examined the state of e-journal publishing in the UK following the introduction of the PSLI and the electronic libraries research programme. The proliferation of electronic versions of established print journals in 1997 was identified and the emerging 'de facto' PDF standard. Three pricing models of site licensing, cost plus and per article were identified. Typically, e-journals were found to cost an additional 20% to the hardcopy subscription. Currently 900 e-journals exist, with over 1600 announced for 1997.

The following paper reinforced these findings in examining if publishers have a commercially viable future in online publication. Mark Bide predicted that in the next 18 months, every major publisher will have made available electronic versions of their journals. The paper concluded that there is a commercial future for online journal publication, but that it will be less profitable, requiring continued investment in establishing and maintaining e-journal programs, developing interfaces and promoting

e-journals. Reiterating Ian Mowat's view that the major publishing world should be regarded not as 'value added' but 'garbage subtracted'. Whilst advanced functionality adds value to the product, increased revenue for publishers is not envisaged, as more revenues are directed to editors and intermediaries such as host database providers.

On Wednesday morning, the issues of pricing and access in the digital context were addressed in two papers, from the publisher, agent and customer stance respectively.

Suzanne Wilson Higgins examined the differing perspectives of publisher/agent and researchers on pricing and access to e-journals, using the analogy of the 'pieman' and 'simple Simon' in the popular nursery rhyme; publishers are moving away from free pilot access to charged access while the agent's role is in arbitrating these pricing and access controls. Pricing will reflect the cost/value of advanced functionality, the cost of infrastructural investment, software development and the potential revenue loss through commercial piracy. Whilst the growth of campus networks facilitates increased access, lack of standards, cost of hardware/software and copyright and archiving issues remain barriers to access. The objective of the publisher was stated as to seek effective pricing and access controls to enable researchers to access e-journals simply; agents and libraries were identified as having a vital role in facilitating this access.

Colin Harris's paper looked at the incompatibility of just in time pricing models and the traditional role of the library. Pre-payment models such as site licensing or e-journals subscriptions are necessary to promote maximum use of the library's resources and facilitate free access to information at the point of use. Just in time models of document ordering, payment and delivery on demand necessarily requires controls to be placed on usage, thus inhibiting use.

In the paper by Cliff McKnight the acceptability of different interfaces used to access e-journals was evaluated, based on the user requirements for browsing, skimming and reading. The paper concluded that if the digital environment is to be more than a print on

demand service, interface design must focus on the human acceptability rather than the technical feasibility of the interface. Human acceptability will be the major factor determining the success or failure of e-journals.

Hannah Mateer, University College, London, comments:

The last paper of the conference was somewhat of a departure from the concerns of the past few days. Hazel Hall and Neil Smith entertained us all with their paper on the bibliographic control of football fanzines. In the football strips of Newcastle and Manchester United they raised the problems of locating fanzine material and the race to track titles down before they change name or disappear altogether. Hazel gave an example of a librarian who wrote to a fanzine editor to request a copy for his archives: the editor printed the librarian's letter in the fanzine's next issue with the reply, "You'll have to buy one like everyone else."! This exemplified the problems faced in collecting such items and also provided a very entertaining end to the conference.

In addition to the main papers delivered, I also attended workshops on Electronic Copyright and Electronic Current Awareness. The discussion in these smaller groups was very informative as it gave me the opportunity to hear opinions on the issues of a varied group of people. Sandy Norman led a lively Electronic Copyright discussion where the consensus of opinion seems to be that cooperation and legislation are the two main areas in which development is required to help settle this problematic area.

At the conference there was also an ongoing exhibition of agents and publishers offering information on the services they offer. I was continually laden with leaflets (not to mention mugs, notebooks and glasses of wine!) and found this a very good opportunity to get to know more about the products and services that constitute the present and near-future provision of serials in libraries. Various brief product reviews were also given throughout the three days of the conference which provided valuable in-depth information on a wide range of the commercially available products.

The social side of the conference was explicitly adhered to in the evenings' entertainment but was also omnipresent in the friendly atmosphere of all the conference proceedings. After feeling a moment's apprehension on Monday morning when all the other delegates appeared to be old friends, I was quickly involved by everyone. On Monday night I was delighted to be on the winning team in the quiz. Our win was equally appreciated by fellow 'After Eights' team member, the outgoing chairman Will Wakeling, who was heard to proclaim, "I've never won anything before!" The quiz was followed by an expert display of Scottish dancing by a local group, with the rather less expert participation of UKSG members!

On Tuesday night we were whisked away by coach to the centre of Edinburgh for the Anniversary Conference Dinner at the Royal Museum of Scotland. We were welcomed by bagpipes on the steps and champagne was served while we wandered around the glass and ceramics exhibits. The building, in the style of the Crystal Palace, is beautiful, three stories high with a glass roof. Eating a three course meal in such surroundings with the darkening sky high above is not an experience I will quickly forget. The dinner was rounded off with a speech by the broadcaster, sociologist and writer Laurie Taylor. He had obviously been well briefed about the activities at the conference thus far and mingled observations on these with his own reflections on being a 'child librarian' to entertaining effect. An inspiring rendition of the UKSG song brought the evening at the museum to a close. A scenic drive back to Heriot-Watt with commentary from our coach drive then gave us a chance to view the city where we were staying. Quite a number of delegates still had the energy to dance the rest of the night away at the disco, persuading the DJ to continue the music until it became too late to look at my watch in view of the early start on Wednesday morning!

I enjoyed every aspect of the conference which felt like a holiday but was also hugely informative. I feel I have benefited greatly from the experience, not only from the papers given but also from gaining an understanding of the serials industry through mixing with the

different players in the 'information chain'. For three days of professional education and social enjoyment I would highly recommend the UKSG conference.

Sarah Gooding, University of Westminster included the following in her contribution:

This was my first visit to a professional conference and though slightly daunted by some of the topics outlined in the programme, I was determined to survive and hopefully enjoy the learning experience. Delays at Luton Airport and descent through thick cloud did little to inspire, but my spirit revived when I awoke on Monday to bright sunshine.

First on the agenda was registration where I was presented with a complimentary clipboard, complete with a comprehensive list of all the delegates and organisations represented. These lists gave me my first insight into how many people are involved in the business of serials. Yes there were librarians, but there were also subscription agents, publishers, book binders, from this country as well as visitors from Norway, Finland, Sweden and the USA to name but four. The opportunity to meet people from outside librarianship, yet still involved in serials was one of the highlights of the conference for me. It widened the business of serials far beyond the level at which I am currently involved, namely checking serials in. The workshops held on Tuesday and Wednesday morning gave me the opportunity to look at current awareness schemes, which I knew very little about from the viewpoint of publishers, subscription agents and those businesses and libraries that offered such schemes to users. Current schemes were discussed as were the different needs of academic as opposed to business users.

Personally, it was the topic of electronic journals that caught my attention over the three days. For many reasons, mass availability, library space and improved technology to name but three, it appears that the journals of the future will be in the main, electronic. This was certainly apparent in the exhibition area where some thirty publishers, subscription agents and binders were present. The key players in the electronic journals market drew vast crowds to

the demonstrations of their latest products, two examples being Blackwell's Electronic Journal Navigator, and SwetsNet from Swets Subscription Service. The product review also gave 18 companies the chance to demonstrate their latest e-journal related products.

Yet for a development that seems so certain there are still many unanswered questions. It was these questions raised by various speakers, that highlighted decisions that still have to be made, decisions that I might well be involved in as a librarian starting work in the late 1990s.

It has to be said that as a graduate trainee and a first time delegate I did at times find the technical details too much and the internet addresses too long! For that reason I appreciated the paper given by Gordon Graham who stepped in after the sudden death of the scheduled speaker Prof Bryan Coles. In the middle of all the talk about e-journals and the PSLI Gordon Graham slowed us all down and spoke of the need to learn less and understand more. He stressed that although there was no lack of vision and experience as could clearly be seen from the exhibition, the road ahead was not clear - there were many questions to be answered and caution recommended. For example control over the World Wide Web is shaky at the least and how can you control something that is open to all, worldwide, available 24 hours a day and anonymous? This for me brought together all the issues that have to be addressed as we move forward to an electronically dominated information service.

Basil Nankivell, Manchester Metropolitan University perhaps sums up the impact of the conference on a student when he writes:

For me, as a student living in the theoretical world of academia, the highlights of the conference were the workshops. I discovered what professionals working in serials feel about the issues of the day, and to hear how different methods are used. I attended a session on internet searching, which emphasised how different techniques and search engines are useful for different types of search. I was introduced to several subject specific sites which are being set up by information professionals. The other workshop concerned training where I

observed a fascinating debate on various aspects of change, and how to prepare for it, given from different professional perspectives.

The conference was a fantastic opportunity for the student delegate to meet many professionals in the information world. There were plenty of chances to talk to people at workshops, during the social events and just around. The wealth and variety of professions involved with serials was an inspiration for me. The future of serials management is exciting, with the development of so much technology enabling greater access and usage than ever before. I would enjoy to stay in such a field.

I want to thank the UKSG for giving me the opportunity to attend such a conference and would certainly recommend it to all future students. It was a friendly event and the best way to sum up the experience is through the refrain of John Urquhart's song:

"Wherever you are and wherever you be
The UKSG is the conference for me."