

STUDENTS' VIEW OF THE UKSG CONFERENCE

23rd Annual UKSG Conference, Keele, April 2000

This year the UKSG sponsored six library school students to attend the Annual Conference. In return for the sponsorship students are required to submit a critical appraisal of the event, in which they can relate their impressions of what is, for most of them, a new experience. We are pleased to publish a joint report by Rachael Lane-Clarke and Samantha Rose who are studying for an MA in Librarianship and Information Studies at University College London.

Introduction

As students studying for MAs in Librarianship and Information Studies at University College London, we were fortunate to be selected as student delegates to attend the UKSG annual conference at Keele University. We both had experience of working with serials (traditional models and electronic) from our working experiences and from a user perspective. The conference proved to be educational, informative and extremely interesting. As virgin conference goers it also proved to be an excellent introduction to conferencing, as according to many delegates who had attended other conferences, the UKSG ones had a reputation for being particularly good. However, we were nervous and unsure of what to expect: Would the other delegates be friendly? Would we understand the topics discussed? Would the quiz be far too difficult? Did delegates really manage to dance until one o'clock in the morning? By Wednesday lunchtime we knew the answers to all of these questions, and learned a lot about serials as well.

Sam arrived at Keele on Sunday night: I was beginning to regret my decision to apply for a

student place, as I was suffering severe pre-conference nerves. However, having settled into my room after arriving, I felt ready to mingle at the informal buffet at the White Lion Inn. On reflection I am very glad that I chose to travel on Sunday as it gave me the chance to meet quite a few people informally before the hectic programme really began.

Rachael arrived early on Monday morning: having spent the weekend visiting my parents in Shropshire, there had been much discussion as to why the UK Cereals Group would have a conference and I would attend!

Monday

The Conference began on Monday with registration, and we were astounded by the number of delegates attending – we never dreamt that the serials world was so large! Following registration and a brief look around the exhibition the conference was opened by outgoing Chair Richard Hodson, who welcomed all delegates. People had travelled to Keele from all over the UK, Europe, North America and some from as far as Australia and New Zealand. The delegates represented a wide range of organisations, and included lawyers, publishers, subscription agents, computer scientists and of course librarians.

Allan Foster, Director of Information Services at Keele University, gave us a few facts and figures about Keele to consider. In particular he revealed that Keele has one of the largest campuses in Europe (650 acres). This fact became apparent when we walked from our halls to breakfast in Keele Hall! He concluded

his introduction by giving us a weather forecast. His predictions were accurate, especially on Tuesday evening, when we walked to the annual dinner at Keele Hall with only a carrier bag to protect us from the elements. It was also pleasing to hear that Keele had been chosen as the conference venue of the year for both 1999 and 2000: the surroundings, if not the weather, were very welcoming.

We were suitably cheered by the first speaker, Richard Charkin, whose talk was both interesting and instructional. He set the tone for the conference by discussing electronic publishing, which was the theme of most of the papers. His main point was that electronic publishing is about deduction rather than induction, and using the Grove Dictionary of Art Online as an example, he outlined the challenges faced by content providers in the e-world, and the changing nature of the business. Perhaps the most interesting point he made is that understanding the user of the resource is more important than the technology used to deliver it, an idea which was reinforced by the following speakers.

Ken Eason's paper on the psychological processes of users concentrated on the findings of the SuperJournal project, which showed some thought-provoking results. He described how users are excited by the potential of electronic journals, but that in reality there are real barriers to use which meant that only one third of users return to the service repeatedly, even if they thought it was useful. His statistics about frequency and depth of use, and what users wanted from the service give another extremely important angle when considering the function of electronic journals. Although they are now taken for granted as part of the scholarly communication process, there are still obstacles that have to be overcome, if they are to be used effectively.

Dr Fytton Rowland's paper, on what information professionals are doing to help users, built on this theme, outlining the parallel publishing models of commercial journals and free scholarly articles. He gave an interesting analysis of the scholarly journal market, which is unlike most markets in that the success of a journal is determined by its authors rather than its buyers. The free online articles, however,

serve a different purpose in that they provide intellectual content only, without the added value – 'bells and whistles' – of electronic journals. There then followed a panel discussion, which included topics such as the philosophical approach of different journals, the cost of publishing, and the possible demise of the journal in favour of the single article: publishers breathed a sigh of relief as the panel concluded that the journal as we know it will remain because of its ease of use and established conventions.

So far, so good – we were managing to keep up with the arguments, and getting into the swing of things. After a tasty lunch, it was time for the first of the workshops, which was then followed by a paper on portals and gateways by David Worlock. He provided an entertaining analysis of how the provision of information electronically has changed publishing. He argued that although content is still important, access and the context of information are now just as significant, and that although the demise of the portal was predicted in 1998, now they seem more valuable than ever. This was followed by a paper on the Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) by Ronald Milne, which was particularly interesting in the context of our studies. The paper stressed the need for collaboration among libraries, and the importance of cataloguing serials to make them accessible, and certainly gave us a better idea of the RSLP's aims and achievements.

Tuesday

Tuesday started with product reviews, and then it was straight into Allan Foster's 'Knowledge Management: What role for LIS professionals?' This clear and engaging paper began by defining the two principal types of knowledge – EXPLICIT and TACIT – and their roles within an organisation. The metaphor that Allan used was most helpful: the difference between explicit and tacit knowledge is like the difference between a map and a taxi, and the key is to know which is appropriate to the situation.

Leah Halliday's 'Economic models of the digital library' was a paper reporting the preliminary results of a research project she is working on with Charles Oppenheim at

Loughborough University. Comparisons were made between the simulated costs of three models of digital only journals: the traditional model, the free access model and the market model. Unfortunately the results so far suggest that costs cannot be reduced significantly, although they did suggest that journal production is not as expensive as is currently thought. Over the next two years two new models, the Cottage Industry Model and Large Organisations Model, are going to be developed and the results from these should prove just as interesting.

Derek Law's paper on the financing of cross-sector library provision was an interesting account of how the library sector can move forward in providing what users want. He affirmed that library users are normally cross-sectoral and use a number of sources, whereas librarians act sectorally, with a different approach for different types of library. To ensure that users are provided with the best possible service co-operation between the sectors is needed, and this requires management at all levels. He concluded that a move to regional agreements would be most appropriate, and that digitisation can only improve access to resources.

The theme for Tuesday afternoon was site licensing, and began with Emanuella Giavarra giving a lawyer's perspective in 'What we want from a site licence and why'. The presentation described how site licences are regulated by contract law and because of this it is vital that they are negotiated to fulfil user needs at the initial stages to avoid problems in the future. She gave a series of guidelines that a good site licence needs, citing NESLI as a model licence.

Henning Nielsen's paper on 'Licensing requirements for e-journals in the corporate sector' discussed the need for site licences in the corporate sector, where user needs will often differ from academic or public sector use. Henning is Manager of Library and Information Centre at Novo Nordisk, a pharmaceutical company which epitomises a typical researched business, where information is time critical. He outlined the main requirements of such a business, and how these can be met in terms of the provision of electronic information. He argued that the next generation of licences will

be priced on the basis of usage rather than subscriptions.

Caroline Vogelzang's paper on 'The exponential value of electronic publishing' was a lengthy promotion of Kluwer online! She discussed the capabilities of electronic publishing, challenges and developments. One of the recent developments was reference linking, allowing researchers greater ease of access to sources, all available from the desk top. She also asked the important question, "When does communication on the world wide web become publishing?".

These three 20-minute sessions overran, so when Caroline Vogelzang finished just before 5pm many delegates left the lecture theatre to attend informal group meetings.

For those that remained John Cox gave a digested paper on 'Standard site licences: Simplifying the acquisitions process'. The benefits of standard licences would be that they would reduce the administrative burden for publishers and librarians.

Wednesday

Wednesday morning began with lots of confusion. Unsure how our luggage would be moved from our accommodation, Sam and I packed our belongings and headed off for breakfast. When we returned from breakfast we discovered that we had either missed the bus or there had not been one. The housekeeper kindly arranged for a steward to collect us and our bags to transport us to the main building. Unfortunately, we were a little late in arriving, and missed the start of Pieter Bolman's discussion of CrossRef, an initiative which was very much on everyone's lips at the Conference.

David Brown then presented a paper on the commercial future for the intermediary, which concentrated on how the value-added services offered by these are important in the provision of information.

He stated that the main driver for change is the split between the product itself and its metadata, forming two new businesses. By developing 'navigators' which concentrate on the most crucial elements for users – reach (number of users), richness (detailed information) and affiliation (addressing users'

needs) – publishers can increase the ‘stickiness’ of their websites.

Sandra Ward’s ‘Serials and enterprise-wide information strategies’ argued that we have moved from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy. Organisations are moving towards incorporating more information and knowledge products. This has led to a change in the shape of organisations, with more attention paid to the value of individuals. She emphasised the value of knowledge assets mapping, and building partnerships. Chris Rusbridge closed the Conference on an optimistic note with a paper detailing some of the projects run by JISC, including the Distributed National Electronic Resource (DNER) and the prospect of integrated sources, all of which contribute towards a potentially seamless web of knowledge – an exciting thought for the future.

Workshops

The preservation management of digital materials

Maggie Jones’s workshop introduced us to the Digital Preservation Management Project. The aim of the project is to produce a workbook and decision tree, which will provide advice and guidance to organisations contemplating the preservation needs of digital material. The workshop was informative and interesting, and it is a shame we were limited to only half an hour in this case.

Metadata: What’s all the fuss about?

Mark Bide introduced his large audience to all aspects of metadata from an <index> perspective. I’m afraid I didn’t really understand what all the fuss was about! As a large group, the workshop was more of a lecture and the time constraints meant there was little time to discuss issues that arose. My previous knowledge of metadata was minimal, and I was looking to expand it during this session. Unfortunately I didn’t really learn anything, however, the rest of the group seemed to find it rewarding.

Emerging standards and conventions in e-journals

Having managed to eventually locate the appropriate room (confusion all round with the numbering system at Keele), I settled down for

an hour learning about standards and conventions in electronic journals with Simon Inger of Catchword. This was a well attended session, and much of what he said proved very useful for what was to come: DOIs are obviously very important in the electronic world!

Recent developments in electronic library formats

This proved to be the highlight of the Conference for me. I attended Dr Judith Wusteman’s session on developments in electronic library formats, which was mainly concerned with the attributes and implications of SGML, HTML and XML. Although I have encountered these formats before, I found this workshop extremely useful as the terms were explained simply and carefully in a relaxed atmosphere.

Social events

Monday

The Reception in the Exhibition at 6pm gave us a chance to have a proper look round. However, it was soon time to make our way to Keele Hall for dinner, which was surprisingly good – vegetarians were well catered for! The quiz that followed was certainly entertaining to say the least. We found ourselves on a team made up of UKSG Conference regulars, who quickly got into the spirit of things. The questions were really difficult, and between the two of us we only managed to answer two of the 60 questions correctly! Luckily our team members did not seem to notice the lack of contributions coming from our side of the table. Following the quiz we moved to a room upstairs for the disco. The dance floor was soon packed out, many people stayed on the dance floor all night, particularly the UKSG Committee members!

After dancing the night away we trekked back to our accommodation (on the other side of the largest campus in Europe...) We were up bright and early the following morning for the walk back to Keele Hall for a full veggie English breakfast.

Tuesday

Everyone got all dressed up for the annual dinner and reception beforehand at Keele Hall. Just as we were ready to go the constant drizzle

of the day turned into freezing hail and snow. Armed only with a carrier bag (I didn't have room in my suitcase for an umbrella), we set off for the reception, sheltering at bus stops along the way. By the time we got there, we were drenched, along with lots of other delegates. Our spirits were soon revived with a couple of glasses of champagne in the stately splendour of Keele Hall. At every social event we were amazed at just how many people had attended the conference.

For the annual dinner we sat at a table full of Swedes. We enjoyed an interesting conversation with Karin Grnvall from the National Library of Sweden comparing the differences between British and Swedish librarianship.

After another delicious meal, the barn dancing began. I am ashamed to say that my colleague and I felt too tired to dance, and preferring instead to save our energy for the disco we watched the barn dancers from the balcony. Once again all the regulars were on the dance floor, and when the barn dance finished they joined us in the traditional disco, with a surprising number of people surviving (almost) upright until the bitter end!

Summary

The Conference and Exhibition was aimed at those working in the information sector, and at times was rather hard to follow. Nevertheless we completely immersed ourselves in the serials world: we were both surprised to find ourselves discussing issues relating to electronic publishing in our free time.

The two and a half days were well balanced, comprising of lectures, workshops and exhibition viewing time. There were plenty of breaks for refreshments, and at times it felt like we were constantly eating. We thoroughly enjoyed attending the Conference, and learnt a great deal about the current issues in serials management. It gave us the opportunity to meet people from all over the world, and put the theory studied at library school into context.

We would like to thank UKSG, particularly Alison Whitehorn, for enabling us to take part in the Conference: it was a very valuable experience, and we shall certainly take some of what we learnt into our future careers. And as for our initial questions – the answer is definitely 'yes' to all of them!