

# The students' view

This year UKSG awarded six sponsored delegate places to students who had answered the call for applications. The following is an amalgam of excerpts from their reports on impressions and experiences of the 27th UKSG Annual Conference and Exhibition.



Ross MacIntyre, UKSG Education Officer (pictured left) with the six sponsored students, from L to R: Michelle Peel and Laura Hine (Manchester Metropolitan University), Pamela Stuart (Leeds Metropolitan University), Rosa Sofia Valpereiro (Manchester Metropolitan University), Rocio Serrano-Vicente (University of Sheffield) and Xu Zhang (Loughborough University)

Photo by Paul Harwood, camera courtesy of Xu Zhang. All other photos by Jess Eustace, Sue Hill and Terry Morrow.

## First impressions

When I was told that I had a sponsored place to attend the UKSG Conference 2004, I was thrilled. This would be an opportunity to learn more about the serials universe and attend my first conference in England. Therefore, I had high expectations. Were they met? Well, yes indeed!

I set off for Manchester with some trepidation. Would I manage the networking I was so confident of before leaving for the conference? Would I be out of my depth? On arrival on 29 March we were warmly welcomed by Ross MacIntyre and Paul Harwood, representing UKSG, and were also able to meet our fellow colleagues – sponsored students from other universities – and ask any questions. The overall atmosphere was friendly and welcoming, with clearly (and to my relief) a few other conference first-timers around, a fact confirmed in the conference opening speech when,

of over 500 delegates, at least 150 were welcomed to their first UKSG conference.

It was also surprising to discover that 50% of the delegates came from fields other than libraries. Indeed, the workshops and briefing sessions, as well as the plenary sessions, reflected this fact, because we were able to hear from information professionals and also from people working in the commercial field. I found this very enlightening because they gave us another perspective on the journals and electronic products business.

## Conference – day one

With British punctuality, the conference officially opened at 11.00 on the dot, with a welcome from UKSG Chair, Keith Courtney. There was also clearly

a strong international element to the delegates, with opening greetings from Anne McKee, the current NASIG President. The presentations that followed were very informative and covered a much wider range of topics than I had imagined they would, as did the briefing sessions and workshops.



The first day's plenary sessions covered a variety of areas with the common subject of changing roles, whether in libraries or publishing. *Helen Hayes* made an excellent start in the first of the plenary sessions by highlighting the important role of the libraries in the development of the university. Librarians are managers of knowledge and information, competent to make use of information, to identify, access, evaluate, organize and to communicate knowledge. Therefore, as knowledge managers, our role is going to be different from professionals in other areas and includes fostering collaboration and reminding the academic and research community of the need for innovation in order to provide the best access to resources. Our role is, in fact, to become collaborators and supporters. The future should not be geared to technology alone. People must also be considered valuable, having the unique combination of memory, experience and human instinct. Information professionals are recognizing this, and with it, benefiting the 'information society.'

*René Olivieri* then gave an overview of STM publishing, bringing attention to the large number of smaller and society publishers struggling to adapt to the challenges facing the industry today. This was certainly a useful reminder, as much of what I had learned on my course about changes in the publishing industry had focused on the larger commercial organizations. His presentation also gave us valuable insights into the acquisition and merging aspects of the publishing industry and how they related to the rising journal price.

The afternoon plenary session brought an interesting view of university partnerships. *Gary Lawrence* identified optimistic developments originated by the University of California Libraries partnerships but explained that partnership is not a trend activity: it is a hard and complex relationship between interested bodies that aims, through that, to achieve mission goals. He outlined the advantages of co-operation in libraries, in providing access to a wider collection, improved services, more effective collection management and greater capacity to innovate.

*Bruce Heterick* from JSTOR then gave us the Faculty vision of electronic journals. The results of a survey carried out in the USA indicated that electronic resources were very important to Faculty and electronic archiving worried them, because they depended on the resources for their research. This confirmed much of what I had found in my course: that electronic resources were increasing in importance for academics from all disciplines, and that there remained a certain amount of concern over the availability of archives of these resources.



This was certainly an interesting start to the conference. After having attended a UKSG Roadshow in December of last year, I was aware that the group comprised not only librarians, but people from all backgrounds, with a wide range of interests and aims. The sheer variety of presentations in plenary sessions and topics covered in workshops and briefing sessions only confirmed this – from tips for those new to serials to metadata standards, from copyright legislation to the future developments of Google – there was something for everyone, and a great deal to learn for student members. The first day ended with product reviews and the chance for more exhibition viewing.

### Product reviews and exhibition

I found the product reviews of particular interest, especially as I was a little reluctant to approach the company stands. I had seen product presentations before, but none of them were as good as these!



*Just a few of the  
59 exhibition stands*



The sessions were organized so well that each presenter finished their job exactly according to the schedule (not an easy feat). Product introduction is often boring, but this one was fun, especially when every presenter started to compete for delegates with the gifts they had! It was interesting to hear about the kinds of innovations being made in the serials industry.

There was also plenty of time on the first day to see the vast array of exhibition stands – with more time over the next couple of days to understand a little more about the huge range of products and services on display. The exhibition gave us the opportunity to contact some vendors and see a selection of the new electronic products on the market. Some of them were very useful in the management of serials.

### Social events – including the famous quiz!

By night, we all enjoyed a relaxing atmosphere accompanied by good food, drink, music and entertainment. The social events allowed us to meet many delegates in an informal context, and were a great way to network with one another. All

the delegates I met were very pleasant and one could see that regular conference-goers have a good, friendly relationship with each other. On the first night, a reception and dinner were followed by entertainment in the form of a quiz, although I've heard easier questions on Mastermind! Our team narrowly scraped into a position just above last, thanks to knowing one more football team ending in 'Rovers' than the losers, giving us a 1/4 point ahead of them. Had I been the decision-maker for our team, we would definitely have got the 'I lost it in Manchester' T-shirts!

This challenging but interesting quiz was followed by a disco and late bar, meaning that



many of us had a more than slightly tough time getting up the following morning. But we did get up, and began the second day of presentations and some more excellent workshops and briefing sessions.



*The winning team  
drinking their prize*

*Dancing the night  
away ... and  
part of the  
morning*

### Conference – day two

I was particularly interested in plenary session 3 on aspects of open access. I have already written an assignment on the topic and have been following with interest the debate on mailing lists and in the newspapers. Therefore I was interested to hear what the three speakers would have to say and to hear any discussion that might ensue. All of the speakers had real experience in the industry and were very well prepared. The speeches on open access were deliberately arranged to show the 'three' sides of a coin (three speakers, three opinions), quite like a parliamentary hearing.

*Hugh Look* gave a balanced account of the conflict taking place between for-profit publishers, society publishers and open access. This is not an easy task considering the ferocity of the arguments on all sides. However, I did feel the fate of my pension should not be a factor in accepting the high prices of for-profit publishers. Not surprisingly, *Nick Twyman* of PLoS thinks open access is the way forward and that PLoS have a sustainable

business model. The third speaker, *Michael Held*, represented a society publisher and felt that neither the subscriber-pays model nor the open access model was a solution to journal publishing but recommends the non-profit model. I think we can look forward to many more heated discussions on this topic.

The workshops and briefing sessions were also very useful, and it was difficult to choose which ones to attend. They gave us a very practical vision of some of the problems in serials and electronic product management in libraries.

The workshop on 'Resource discovery and e-journal linking' gave me plenty of information on library portal and journal linking, which is very important to my dissertation. I had chosen the workshop 'A copyright law for the digital age' which was very informative, and it was interesting to hear other delegates' views, particularly those from other EU nation states. As a student, the world of serials was completely new to me, my

experience being limited to journals check-in and occasional claiming of issues, so I chose the workshop run by Jayne Everard and Paul Harwood on 'Tips and practical solutions for those new to serials'. I found this very useful, and once again it was interesting to hear what others in the profession had to say about different aspects of serials management and publishing.

The briefing session entitled 'Open for business' given by Andy Powell was fairly technical and covered some things such as RSS which I knew nothing about. The information on metadata, such as the Dublin Core, and Andy's work at UKOLN was of great interest. The session has given me food for thought.

The only problem I had during the conference was that time was too short. As a result I had to give up some of the briefing sessions or workshops which are important to my dissertation and future work. Thankfully, UKSG have put most of the material on their web site.

On Tuesday afternoon we had a choice of concurrent sessions. I attended a remarkable session by *Carolyn Squire*. Her experience in creating, developing and sustaining a virtual library made me think about the implications. Even with technology to support the relationship between the library and their clientele, I still think the existence of face-to-face human interaction is necessary. The social contact established between information professional and user creates additional value

for both parties. It is something difficult to quantify, but adds quality. A student colleague of mine particularly liked *Bill Simpson's* concurrent talk on change in libraries, and found it very inspiring. It tackled many problems academic libraries are facing at the present.

### Conference dinner

Tuesday evening brought the highlight of the conference – the conference dinner at the Imperial War Museum North at The Quays in Trafford Park. What a pleasant surprise! The dinner began, and so the enjoyment of sharing a table full of publishers, librarians and researchers. The food was a delight to the eyes, and delicious. The museum provided a wonderful setting. It was slightly surreal eating dinner beneath a Harrier jump jet, but the dinner was lovely (especially the chocolate tart), and the wine was once again flowing freely. After the dinner, we all got on buses back to UMIST and joined another disco with more alcohol and an even later bar.



*"It was slightly surreal eating dinner beneath a Harrier jump jet"*



"Like a big family reunion"

One of the special features of this conference, I believe, was the intense personal contacts. Since I was a newcomer and speak awkward English, I thought I might feel lonely and uneasy at the conference. But the worry soon disappeared. Everyone was very friendly, and I was easily accepted. I noticed there were plenty of renewed contacts in the conference which made the conference look like a big family reunion. Some people told me they have attended the conference more than ten times (years), and these are not rare!

#### Close of the conference

The following morning was probably the toughest yet, due to the enthusiastic 'networking' the night before, but the end of the conference brought more interesting presentations. The first talk on Wednesday morning began at 9.00. (All there, some more awake than others.) More carefully selected speeches followed, covering many of the hot topics in the industry. Finally, in the last plenary session, *Cathy Gordon* from Google gave us a broad view of the past, present and future of Google, including some projects with libraries which could



Whoops!  
Edinburgh  
was next  
year ...



make this tool still more useful. When she spoke about organizing information, she mentioned something not new to me – a considerable number of information professionals are secret Googlers. I confess that I am also a bit of a Googler. Their information retrieval system works, but many have doubts about it. It seems that for some, scientific work needs to be reached by the long route, and through complex alleyways. However, human instinct tells you to follow short cuts, and get to things using minimum effort. Google acknowledges that, and their people are revolutionizing information science by the way they want to organize and retrieve information.



Keith Courtney closed the conference, not forgetting to give us the dates for the next one: 11 to 13 April 2005 at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh.

**To conclude, let the students sign off individually with their closing remarks:**

*I would like to thank UKSG, especially Ross MacIntyre and Paul Harwood, for giving me the opportunity to attend this conference.*

Pam

*2004 UKSG conference in UMIST was an unforgettable experience to me. I was deeply impressed by the efficient organization, the close personal contacts which set it apart from the other conferences, the high quality speeches made by the eminent speakers, the hot topics broadly discussed. I do wish I can participate in the meeting next year.*

Xu

*It was an invaluable experience, not only in terms of improving my knowledge of issues affecting all those working with serials, but also in terms of meeting new people and learning more about the variety of roles that are available to those starting careers in the library and information field.*

Laura

*I understood that this was an occasion to see stimulating people gathered to excite their minds with challenging thoughts. It serves to remind everybody that information professionals are at the heart of a thrilling modern society.*

*I thank all for having the opportunity to be there.*

Sofia

*I found the conference a very worthwhile event to attend and can honestly say that the world of serials covers many more areas than I had imagined. I have come away feeling as though I have learnt a lot, although I also feel that there is an awful lot more to learn! I would definitely recommend the experience to any other students, and am considering a move into serials librarianship in the future so that I can enjoy the experience (and networking!) provided by the conference again!*

Michelle

*We'll meet up again there!*

Rocio