The Evolution of UKeiG:

1948, 1958 and 1978 – three important anniversaries

Martin White Managing Director, Intranet Focus Ltd

martin.white@intranetfocus.com

If you have joined the profession since the mid-1990s you might occasionally wonder how UKeiG came into existence. To answer this question, I need to go back to 1921 when Professor Robert Hutton, at that time Goldsmiths' Professor of Metallurgy at Cambridge University, became the first Director of the British Non-Ferrous Metals Research Association (BNFMRA, referred to in its day as the BNF). Ben Fullman was appointed as the Librarian of the BNF and both he and Robert Hutton were aware of the growth in scientific research and publications since the end of World War One. A meeting was organised at the BNF in 1923 to consider the skills that would be needed by librarians in managing this wealth of information. The Library Association (LA) wanted nothing to do with this initiative, and so in 1924 the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux (Aslib) was established to act as a clearing house for information resources. After World War Two there was an even greater volume of information to manage. These issues were discussed, but certainly not solved, at the Royal Society Scientific Information conference, which ran from the 21st June to July 2nd,1948. This Conference was the direct result of a recommendation made by the Royal Society Empire Scientific Conference of 1946 that the Royal Society convene a meeting of libraries, societies and institutions responsible for publishing, abstracting and information services to examine the possibility of improvement in existing methods of collection, indexing, and distribution of scientific literature and for the extension of existing abstracting services.

The Conference was "dedicated to considering information services from the point of view of the scientific user and was organised in four sections with members of the organising committee (including Professor J.D Bernal) acting as editors-in-chief of the sections." The four sections were: the publication and distribution of papers reporting original work, abstracting services, indexing and other library services and reviews and annual reports. It embraced all scientific subjects including agricultural sciences, engineering sciences, medical sciences, but not social sciences. It was an ambitious undertaking.

Following the Conference, Ben Fullman gave a presentation to the Aslib Annual Conference about the importance of establishing a syllabus of education to meet the needs of people working in special libraries who often had not been trained as librarians but were using their technical knowledge to manage information resources. The story from 1948 to 1957 is one of battles with and between both Aslib and the Library Association about who owned this new group of information professionals.

The immediate outcome was that B. Agard Evans, Chris Hanson, Felix Liebesny, Alexander Gordon Foster and Jason Farradane, all working in this sector, decided to call a meeting in

early 1958 to see if there was an interest in setting up a new professional organisation. The meeting was chaired by George Malcolm Dyson, a distinguished chemist who at that time had a reputation equal to David Attenborough today. It was therefore not surprising that one hundred and twenty-five people turned up! From this meeting the Institute of Information Scientists (IIS) was established in May 1958. The term "information scientist" was created by Chris Hanson in 1956 when (ironically) he was on the staff of Aslib.

The growth of the IIS was remarkable, expanding from one hundred and fifty members in 1959 to seven hundred and fifty by 1965. In parallel, Jason Farradane and his colleagues established a course at what was then the Northampton College of Technology in London (later becoming City University), which initially was a two-year part-time course, with a post-graduate course and a one-year full time course being established in 1963. The IIS started up a Bulletin, later to become *The Information Scientist* and is now the *Journal of Information Science*, published by Sage. The first IIS Conference took place in 1964, with sixty attendees, a number increasing to two hundred at the 1970 Conference in Reading.

For the purposes of this article I will bring the history of the IIS to a halt, other than to note that after attempts to bring together Aslib, the LA and the IIS into one super-organisation failed, the IIS and the LA merged in 2002 to form CILIP. Aslib closed its doors in 2010.

It was as a result of the merger that UKeiG was established, though not directly from an IIS origin. The antecedent of UKeiG was the UK Online User Group, known by the rather ugly acronym of UKOLUG. In the mid-1970s the information profession was able to take advantage of online remote access to computer databases of abstracts of Chemical Abstracts, Derwent Patent Abstracts and in time hundreds more databases. Access to the network was gained by using an acoustic coupler, the precursor of the modem, initially working at three hundred baud (roughly equivalent to thirty characters per second output on a teletype printer). Although the computer service companies offering these database services (Dialog, System Development Corp and ESA-IRS as examples) were quick to establish user groups, there was a view among the search community that an independent voice was needed. The first Online Conference was held in December 1977 and during this event (with around four hundred delegates) a side meeting agreed that there was a need to create a UK organisation to represent users, noting that similar initiatives were taking place in Scandinavia. On the 8th February 1978, the initial meeting to establish such an organisation took place and by the end of the year UKOLUG was up and running. Although the IIS played a role in this, UKOLUG was independent of the Institute and focused on providing training courses and "how to" guides for people using these services, who were often not trained as librarians or information scientists but might well be research chemists. Indeed, in respect of the UKOLUG Conferences, the organisation was a competitor to the Institute, with over two hundred delegates at the 1996 State of the Art Conference in Warwick and even more (from memory) at the 20th Birthday Conference in 1998. The IIS continued to act as a secretariat for UKOLUG, but the success of the organisation was down to the total commitment of members and the amazing ability of Christine Baker (as Administrator) to do the work of five people.

Although the merger to create CILIP took place in 2002, the name change to UKeiG did not take place until 2004, when Gary Horrocks (then Chair of UKeiG) was quoted as saying "We felt the term 'online' was rather nebulous. It was a question of rebranding and thinking about our future direction. We wanted to take that very successful brand and recreate it with a 21st century angle. The main message is that we exist as a collective resource for information professionals."

On a personal note
My career started at the BNF where Ben Fullman (by then retired) turned up most days to work on his translation from the German of the 2nd edition of *Lead and Its Alloys* by Wilhelm Hofmann. He had so many stories to share with me about the early days of the information profession in the UK and had an encyclopaedic knowledge of seemingly every item in the Library, memorised by its colour and shelf position. I was also very fortunate to work with Clive Mitchell and Brian Perry in the information department of the BNF. Both had attended the City University course and ensured that I always followed good practice in a crucial early stage of my career. They also encouraged me to join the Institute, of which subsequently I was one of very few people to be both the Chairman of Council and President. I still claim to be a chemist by training and an information scientist by profession.

A history of the IIS – can you help?
To me, and others, it is a concern that the IIS has vanished other than in the memory of those whose careers were immeasurably supported by it. There is no board in CILIP HQ that lists the Presidents, all of whom were immensely supportive of the work of the Institute. Most distinguished themselves outside of the information profession, seeing information as a corporate asset in the widest sense. They included Sir Harold Thomson, Sir James Tait, Sir Raymond Appleyard and Professor Lewis Wolpert.

Dr. Sandra Ward, (like me a former President) and I are going to set about writing a history of the IIS in 2019. If any readers of eLucidate have memories or artefacts from their time as members and would like to contribute to this history, which will be (we hope) more of an oral than documentary history, do please contact me at *martin.white@intranetfocus.com*. I am fortunate to have most of the back copies of both the *The Information Scientist* and *Inform* newsletters.

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