

Reflections from Brighton:

CILIP Conference 2018

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Introduction

The UK is at the forefront of continual evolution in the field of information and library studies, and as a Canadian who moved to Scotland in 2016 to complete a Master of Science (I&LS) at the University of Strathclyde, I can attest first-hand to the growing demand for innovation within the profession. Faced with unique challenges and opportunities, my peers and I are embracing non-traditional roles centred on digital advancement and the professional skillsets required to adapt and disseminate new technologies.

As a librarian and analyst for the NIHR Innovation Observatory based at Newcastle University, attending the 2018 CILIP Conference through the generosity of the UKeIG CILIP Conference Bursary allowed me the opportunity to expand my horizons beyond medical research and explore interdisciplinary boundaries with other information professionals from a variety of backgrounds. What follows are my impressions of key conference themes as relevant to knowledge and information management (K&IM), and where appropriate, presentations have been linked from the CILIP 2018 [conference webpage](#). Additional coverage includes [conference photographs](#), related tweets on Twitter (@CILIPConf18, #CILIPConf18) and the podcast episode “[Librarians with Lives](#)” by library manager Jo Wood.

Mobilising knowledge

The conference was off to an inspiring start with the opening keynote address from [House of Commons \(HoC\) librarian Penny Young](#). The HoC Library staff support the work of MPs through confidential enquiries and the [production of public briefings](#) on a variety of topics including health services and medicine, education, social services, international affairs, and economy and finance (among others). The queries gathered often provide insight into emerging trends, creating the opportunity to mobilise knowledge in the best interests of democracy. Knowledge mobilisation aims to not only “bridge the gap” between moving available knowledge into active use, but also to create connections between expertise and practice in order to improve outcomes. A key challenge is in the accessibility and management of data available, with the HoC Library considering methodologies of digital distribution and improving public outreach through user experience design of web portals. The “enduring skills” of librarians were highlighted as a means of equipping citizens and the public at large to engage with information resources.

Hong-Anh Nguyen, Information Centre Manager for the King’s Fund, initiated a novel discussion on the second day of the conference as to how knowledge management can be made accessible at all levels titled: “[Knowing me, knowing you: knowledge management is](#)

[something we all can do](#)". While presented within the context of a healthcare environment, many of the ideas shared could be implemented in a variety of inter- or cross- disciplinary settings. This included collegiate working through the development of knowledge management toolkits, stories, and mobilisation strategies utilising social media. The onus was on encouraging awareness and engagement with knowledge management activities through shared learning experiences, which in turn, create a process with the potential to enable innovation. A key takeaway from the session was that knowledge grows when it is used and loses its value or ability to inform change when it is not. While a simple concept, this reinforced the idea of information professionals as driving agents of change.

The heart of knowledge mobilisation strategies, based on a two-way system of information exchange, is to foster relationships and engagement. One mobilisation strategy touted throughout the conference was the [Knowvember campaign](#), which seeks to inspire, encourage and support information and knowledge professionals working in the health sector to undertake knowledge management activities during the month of November. Originally designed for NHS library and knowledge services in England, Knowvember provides an opportunity to showcase how knowledge management initiatives aid an organisation in becoming more effective and efficient while creating both a sense of ownership and agency for participants. Through active reflection on the audience and desired outcomes, K&IM professionals from all sectors are in a unique position to generate, impart, and inform knowledge-based practices and tools.

Digital curation - past and present

The first day of the conference also brought interdisciplinary seminars including *Preserving the past for the future*, which welcomed speakers such as Dr. Nick Barratt (Senate House Library) and Richard Davies (Head of British Library Qatar Foundation Partnership). Dr. Barrett emphasised the [connections between digital technologies and wellbeing](#), and the impact of heritage collections as a form of digital memory curation. By curating and preserving our own stories in a digital environment, [argues Dr. Barrett](#), "there's an opportunity to reflect on what you wrote five years ago and how you see that now - or gather other people's perspectives". Questions were raised regarding the digital curation lifecycle in this instance, and how best to conceptualise methods for capturing and storing elements of personal heritage. Social media applications, such as Instagram and Twitter, offer a new means of documenting lived or shared experiences. The preservation of such digital media items, as well as questions of ownership and access for re-use or transformation, remain contentious. This highlights an area of need for expertise within the profession, as user rights will continue to evolve given interjurisdictional legalities.

Richard Davies offered a differing perspective of the interplay between past and present and the role of digital transformation, speaking on the challenges of [access to the British Library's collections](#) in the context of [partnership with the Qatar Foundation and the Qatar National Library](#). The collaboration has resulted in the [Qatar Digital Library \(QDL\)](#), a free online portal based around the British Library's collections, with the intent to improve understanding of the Islamic world, Arabic cultural heritage, and the modern history of the Gulf. The project has not been without its challenges, from digitising a wide variety of previously un-digitised British Library materials (maps, visual arts, sound and

video, personal papers, manuscripts etc.) to creating a portal that is bilingual and accessible across all platforms. The QDL has taken a broad approach to audience identification, noting that academic research may be only one of many ways in which users can engage with featured materials. The overarching aim is to provide a freely available resource with the potential to transform the study of the Gulf and Arabic cultural heritage.

Finally, broadcaster [Samira Ahmed](#) encouraged attendees to contribute their professional narratives as reflective of austerity. Offering a means of confidential contact to share insight as to how information services are being lost and the impact at both local and national levels, the BBC journalist highlighted the [Windrush scandal](#) to illustrate the importance of archives and the transition to media in perpetuity. Landing cards from the “Windrush Generation” (immigrants invited to the UK from Caribbean nations during the late 1940s to early 1970s) were destroyed in the interest of austerity. The loss of these crucial documents establishing legal status resulted in a host of ramifications, including unjust revocation of personal rights and freedoms. Information professionals and their regulatory bodies were called to action in emphasising the value of their work and the need for ongoing transparent discussion surrounding knowledge management within democratic society.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

The [EU General Data Protection Regulation](#) (GDPR) was at the forefront of much discussion among conference delegates. The new regulation, which was implemented in May of 2018, has fundamentally reshaped the way in which data is handled across every sector from healthcare to banking and beyond. The GDPR broadens definitions of personal data and the obligations of organisations that process it. In addition to records of what personal data exist within organisations, the GDPR requires a documented understanding of why information is held, how it is collected, when it will be deleted or anonymised, and guidelines for access. The successful implementation of GDPR compliance has been challenging for organisations small and large alike, with many nuances of the regulation yet to be seen.

Helen Dodd, Head of Data Governance at Cancer Research UK and [a keynote speaker on the second day of the conference](#), brought a positive message to the implications and potential outcomes of the new regulation. In 2017, the charity was fined by the Information Commissioner’s Office for the misuse of personal data. While transitioning organisations to GDPR compliance is no easy feat, Helen acknowledged the opportunity to create a new relationship with their audience through raising awareness of rights and how personal data is used. For example, by encouraging supporters of their organisation to opt-in, as opposed to opt-out, of communications the onus shifts from one of negative reaction to active, self-directed engagement. Additional strategies include streamlining platforms of digital access where users can update and manage their own details and consent preferences. In doing so, Cancer Research UK hopes to further direct its efforts to an audience that is actively engaged and open to continual dialogue.

This concept of transparency was also echoed by many of the conference exhibitors and sponsors (including Facet Publishing, ProQuest, and LisJobnet.com, among other

representatives from niche industry and research sectors). By way of illustration, the ProQuest company ExLibris opted to create an online portal as part of a newly developed “[Trust Center](#)” which aims to provide customers with in-depth information and to prepare for compliance. The company notes: “With the increased importance of security and privacy regulations, it is imperative to provide customers with full transparency and easy access to in-depth information about the security of their solution, how privacy is being handled, and the standards that these solutions meet, all through a single contact point.” The opportunity to interact one-to-one with representatives from diverse fields reinforced the message that clear communication with engaged stakeholders is at the heart of successful GDPR implementation.

The future of the profession

One of the most impactful experiences over the two-day conference was the opportunity to observe the CILIP Board meeting. CEO Nick Poole presented a strategic plan, entitled “[Securing the Future](#)”, encompassing a workforce strategy for information professionals. The four key priorities of the plan include: advocating for the profession, developing a “future-ready” workforce, driving standards and innovation, and helping members to succeed. It was refreshing to see the CEO of CILIP questioning if the emerging priorities contained in the strategic plan were merely outputs of an “echo chamber” reinforced by a closed system. Information professionals span a wide range of titles including librarians, information managers, knowledge managers and data professionals. Recognising the unique skillset and needs of each broad group, and simultaneously the cohesion of represented values, is no easy task.

As a relatively newly qualified librarian undertaking the CILIP chartership process the emphasis on transferrable skills in K&IM, with the ability to adapt to ongoing innovation, has not only been reflective of my own experience but paramount to the outlook of new graduates. This was echoed by Stephen Phillips, the Vice Chair of the K&IM special interest group, who gave an [overview of key portfolio initiatives](#). Not unlike the Board meeting, professional accreditation for the K&IM workforce and the need for CILIP and its special interest groups to understand and engage with the international K&IM community was emphasised as a key objective. Professional accreditation offers the opportunity to articulate the skills, competencies and shared values of K&IM practitioners while emphasizing and implementing a formalised system of continuing professional development (and the recognition of this status by employers and clients alike). The routes by which accreditation is acquired must be based in credibility and trust, so that the benefits for practitioners and employers will create confidence in the skills and experience needed for successful workplace outcomes.

Finally, retiring librarian Guy Daines (Head of Policy, CILIP) offered a reflective keynote on his experiences within the profession and with CILIP (“[GREXIT](#)”). He spoke of the evolution of the profession and its key texts, including the “Follett Report” of 1993 which fostered the development of one hundred new academic building projects with an emphasis on flexibility and future proofing. Other works of note included the “New Library” report of 1997, which transformed the services offered by public libraries in the UK, and the pivotal “Information Matters” of 2008 which saw the formal recognition of K&IM as a function of government. As Daines noted: “But reports can only go so far. Few

provide the motivation to get us to work on a daily basis. Much more important are the enduring values that underpin our work”. In developing the evidence-base that underpins the profession, the work of both past and present CILIP members can be honoured and recognised for their wider societal contributions.

Final thoughts

Overall, the 2018 CILIP conference offered the opportunity to reflect on the collaborative nature of the profession including the underlying mandate to strive for excellence and lead equitable change through the provision of high-quality information knowledge, skills, and services. While the profession faces many challenges, such as GDPR and a continually evolving workforce, ultimately the message was one of growth and a willingness to innovate in all aspects of K&IM. Attending the conference has given me new perspective on the value of the profession, and the crucial role K&IM plays in all aspects of both public and private life. I can only hope to be as welcoming and generous with my experiences in future as those that were shared with me. Special thanks to John Wickenden (Hon. Secretary UKeiG) for his guidance at the conference, and all those involved with UKeiG for the opportunity to attend.