

The UKSG Conference - an early career professional's perspective

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After Baroness **Sue Black** had finished telling us about the successes of **Lancaster University** in engaging with and making a positive impact on their local community, I asked “What advice do you give to smaller universities, that don’t necessarily have the same resources or reputation as Lancaster?” Among other things, such as being open and realistic, figuring out what purpose your university was set up for and using that as a base, she said it is important to build a relationship with your community and ask them what they want. She said, “Relationship is everything.”

This short phrase would become the theme for me while attending my first **UKSG** conference as a sponsored early career professional, and significantly the first in person conference since the pandemic began. I heard people saying, over and over, that it was so nice to see people in person, and it was so nice to be back face to face. Obviously, there are many benefits to having online conferences that shouldn’t be overlooked, but for me, being in person made it incredibly special, and helped me be bolder in networking. I really didn’t want to sit on my own!

I began my UKSG at the new attendee drinks, where I met the other people with sponsored places, as well as many others with widely different and interesting roles. This event gave me chance to meet people I may never have had another opportunity to meet or may have been too nervous to approach. Everyone there was in the same boat, breaking down the barriers between early professional and those established in their career. As one of my new friends said, “You’re talking to someone about your inflatable dinosaur costume, and then you realise who you’re talking to is the head of the **NASIG** conference.”

Having started my role in acquisitions in the middle of the pandemic, which paused publisher campus visits, one of the best parts of the conference for me was going around the exhibition, putting faces to names at the bottom of the emails I receive. We were able to talk more in depth about products and collections that might enhance my students’ learning and I was able to tell

them about our experiences in the library currently to help them understand what we might need and want in the future. Free stuffed toy squirrels, donuts, and **JSTOR** temporary tattoos were also a plus! I don't think I'll ever need to buy a plastic bag again with the amount of tote bags I have ended up with and I can now be found wandering around the local **Aldi** with my bag that says, "Trust me, I'm a Librarian!"

As a young millennial obsessed with social media, one of my favourite talks was *Wait! What? There's lots of vital stuff missing from the scholarly record!* from **Toby Green**, about grey literature, a concept I had never come across before. The ten-minute talk, done entirely through a Twitter thread featuring GIFs and memes, was both engaging, inventive, and thematic. He opened my eyes to the wealth of resources that a student could use but that could not be categorized in scholarly record. This something that I'm definitely going to investigate further myself and use this knowledge as we develop our reading list driven acquisition model in my team. As it was done in a Twitter thread, I was able to send my colleagues a link to the whole talk and discuss it with them, and share it on my own feed, and basically not stop talking about it!

There were many sessions at the conference about Open Access, something that I was interested to learn more about, as I have just started in a role dealing with subscriptions and acquisitions and one of the University's current aims is to increase research output, so this is bound to become even more relevant in my job. Again, I noticed how much of the discourse surrounding this was about relationship and working together, finding shared aims, and collective action.

I attended two sessions about universities that had set up their own open access publications, (*Edinburgh Diamond: launching a library supported open access book hosting service* by **Rebecca Wojturska** and *Open textbook publishing 101: a quick start to your university's open textbook initiative* by **Mira Buist-Zhuk** and **Margareet Nieborg**) both new and finding their feet with it, both detailing the successes they had had but also the mistakes they made, so anyone venturing to do the same thing wouldn't have to make the same ones. What I loved was that both the presenters at these sessions went to each other's, and asked loads of questions "How did you do this?" "How did this work for you?" – each project becoming stronger from shared experience.

In one of the standout plenary sessions, **Joshua Sendall** from **University of Nottingham** in *Compassionate leadership: the role of libraries in promoting social justice* referenced the concept of New Power and Old Power. "Old Power works like a currency, New Power operates differently, like a current. It is made by many, it is open, participatory and peer driven." I loved this concept so much. New Power operates via equality, empathy and relationship. In the discussion and sharing of ideas, like those I was part of and observed at UKSG, changes are made, new ideas are pushed forward, invention and collaboration happens.

In *N8+ and collective collections: what's the little idea?* **Phil Sykes** mentioned that the N8+ would not have happened if a library assistant had not been doing research about Rapid ILLs and brought this idea forward. He said that the big ideas and game changers are in our minds, not in strategic framework. Attending UKSG and forming the relationships I have, and gaining the knowledge I have, has given me more confidence. I know a lot more and I have a lot to give.

I'm an early professional, and sometimes I think that my lack of experience and expertise means that I don't have as much to offer, but I intend for what I've learnt at UKSG to act like new power, like a current. I started this by doing a presentation in my team meeting about what I had learnt and as we move forward into the new academic year I will continue to research and act on

these ideas. Anything I do have to offer I will share, and I will always be trying to learn as much as possible from others and pass this on.

By the end of my time at the conference, it was cemented in my mind that relationship *was* everything and what better way to start creating these relationships than by dancing a six-minute long macarena together at the UKSG disco, or to lose spectacularly together at the evening quiz and win yourself matching wooden spoons.

I'm now part of a WhatsApp group with the wonderful people I met on the first night, and with whom I spent most of the conference. It's so great to have a group of peers from different institutions and roles who can advise each other and share idea as we grow in our careers.

Editor's note: Heather's place was sponsored by UKSG. You can see our other sponsors listed here: <https://www.uksg.org/about/awardsandbursaries/2022winners> and [read about how you can apply for the 2023 places](#), and our Merriman Award which sends the recipient to both UKSG and the NASIG conference in the US.

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