

## My experience as a UKSG First-Timer

*UKSG eNews 525*

14 October 2022



**Luca Filippi**, Liaison Support Librarian (Medicine and Biomedical Sciences), **St George's, University of London**

I will lay my cards out on the table straight away: when I took up my first role in academic libraries in January I had never heard of **UKSG**. Now, in July, I find myself writing a report on its 45th annual conference! You really never know where a career in our sector will take you. In this article I will share a little about my experience at the UKSG conference as a first-timer and recipient of a sponsored place for early career professionals.

My motivation in applying for one of the UKSG sponsored places was twofold. Firstly, I realised that while I understood the responsibilities of a liaison librarian fairly well, I actually knew very little about the context in which my library colleagues operated in. Secondly, I relished the opportunity to finally network in a physical space with information professionals from across the globe. To me, the UKSG conference offered the opportunity to not only understand the sector through seminars and lectures, but to also understand it through the experiences and opinions of those individuals of whom it comprises.

What I have always loved about our sector is that we are always learning and I am lucky to be so early on in my career that there is so much to learn. My first library role was a part-time gig as a library assistant manning the helpdesk in the evenings at my university library. I enjoyed being a point-of-contact and answering enquiries from the simple to the complex. I think what really warmed me to the role was that as a student myself I was able to relate to our patrons when they opened up about their academic experience. The library and its staff were there to help them succeed. After I completed my degree I travelled further north to complete my MSc in Information and Library Studies at the University of Strathclyde. Soon after I was fortunate enough to land an assistant librarian role at a busy NHS Trust in the south of England where I worked for over a year completing evidence searches for clinical colleagues at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Working in such a competitive sector full of so many talented individuals, and being so early on in my career, I take no shame in saying that I have suffered from imposter syndrome at many points in my career. While excited for the conference, the journey up to Telford was also one where I wondered whether I was completely out of my depth. Yet, this was not the case whatsoever. On the first day I was fortunate to have been quickly introduced to many like-minded early career professionals. Indeed, rather than being completely overwhelmed by the high-level discussions and complex debate, I felt that there was a comfort in collectively 'not knowing' that allowed me to engage with the conference and get the most out of it.

Looking at the programme, I was immediately struck by how global the conference was. I had initially assumed - naively - that the UKSG Conference was going to be just that: a UK conference. Yet, by the end of the first day I had interacted with delegates from the USA, Belgium, Finland, Austria, Denmark and beyond. The programme was not one that was limited to the day job either and there were sessions that allowed me to consider my own professional development. Perhaps the session that resonated with me the most was **Andrew Barker's** interview with **Tom Shaw**. Shaw had published an article in *Insights* in 2021 in which he outlined his 'personal manifesto.' I think the reason this session resonated with me so much was that Shaw was writing from the same position as me - that is someone in a new role (and new sector in my case) and having the opportunity for introspection, and, as Shaw puts it, 'psychologically rebooting.' Following Shaw's advice to be inspired by others, know the importance of emotional intelligence, and to not be too hard on yourself, I left considering what my own personal manifesto would look like.

I was also fascinated by how some institutions were tackling traditional problems with such ingenuity. Embracing the latest in computer-based methods, **Robyn Price** showcased work at **Imperial College London** to combine reading list management systems, journal databases, and data from the **World Bank** to evaluate the distribution of authors cited on reading lists by the income status of the affiliated country. Price addressed some valid limitations very well, and I believe the tool at Imperial has a lot of potential for accelerating discussions on decolonising the curriculum.

Ingenuity was clearly on display throughout the conference and I was happy to see that each speaker delivered their presentations in unique and interesting ways. Perhaps the best example of this was **Toby Green's** lightning talk which he delivered alongside a 56-long Twitter thread that was displayed to the auditorium. Grey literature - which is what Green's talk was on - was made a lot less grey when explained through Simpsons GIFs!

The plenary sessions also allowed me to consider how my role 'on the ground' fits into the wider higher education context. I particularly enjoyed Baroness **Sue Black's** examination on UK universities in the context of current government priorities such as the levelling up agenda. It was a talk that was well complimented by the ones that immediately preceded and succeeded it - namely **Hamish McAlpine's** look at the role of universities in delivering inclusive regional growth, and **Joshua Sendall's** powerful exploration into the positive roles that libraries play in striving towards social justice. I ended up leaving the plenary with a renewed sense of purpose, one where I did not just look at my role through the students I supported day-to-day, but through the role of the university library at the heart of the academic experience and academic community.

When I first started writing this article I thought about what information would be most useful to first-timers at the next UKSG Conference. Well, for one, your suitcase will never be big enough for the free goodies that you want to take back with you. Pack big! On a more serious note though, I will simply say to trust yourself and make the most out of it. The conference hall is large and daunting, but the people that occupy it are all wonderful, funny, and talented individuals from all walks of life. Everyone has their own perspective to share, and your contributions are just as valid whether your experience in the sector is one of many decades or many months. I would strongly encourage anyone who is considering applying for one of the sponsored places. It is a fantastic opportunity to gain new insights

My phone will still occasionally ping with a message from the UKSG WhatsApp group that myself and my fellow early career professionals created before leaving Telford, and that is something only a fantastic conference can give you.

**Editor's note:** watch out for our announcements in the new year about the 2023 Early Career Professional free places for Glasgow

These views are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of UKSG.



This UKSG Editorial is taken from the industry newsletter UKSG eNews, published every two weeks exclusively for UKSG members. The newsletter provides up-to-the-minute news of current issues and developments within the global knowledge community.

To enjoy *UKSG eNews* and other member benefits [become a UKSG member.](#)