

## #UKSG2023 - highlights from a first timer

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### Day One:

UKSG's 2023 conference was their first wholly in-person conference since 2019. I'd attended the online conference in 2021 but the experience was completely different attending the physical conference! The first thing that struck me was the sheer size of the conference – all the attendees, speakers, and the exhibitors – as an in-person conference newbie, it did feel a bit overwhelming at times. I decided to use the time during registration to scope out the exhibitors on display and keep an eye out for any familiar faces I might recognise.

One of the first attendees I spoke to had come all the way from Kazakhstan to attend the conference and we were both interested in the sessions related to Open Access – although our discussion did make me realise that some countries are not at the same level of OA engagement as the UK is.

### **Plenary Session 1:**

The opening session of the conference really highlighted the inequalities and challenges within the drive to make research openly accessible. **Colleen Campbell**'s presentation provided some very interesting statistics on how Transformative/Transitional Agreements have driven an increase in Gold Open Access publishing over the last five years (although as a repository administrator, I was slightly deflated to see Green OA levels remain at a stable level over the same time frame). Despite this increase, Colleen reminded us that small and middle-income countries still face an uphill struggle when it comes to paying to make their research available openly, either through TAs or APC payments. While a lot of good work has been done, there is

still some way to go before there can Open Access equity for all! The second speaker, **Mac-Anthony Cobblah**, really highlighted that point by providing the conference with an overview of the exciting research being done across Africa (such as the KAWA project which turns air into water or the environmentally friendly and sustainable toilet, the iThrone) which is not being shared with the world. There were various factors at play here, and not just financial considerations – the challenges are multi-faceted! Mac-Anthony’s enthusiasm for the possibilities of Open Science (or Open Research) for African researchers was infectious and really painted a positive picture of what a true Open Research landscape could do for researchers across Africa as well as the rest of the world. It was a very inspiring presentation to watch! The final speaker was **Adetoun Oyelude** who is researching the preservation of Indigenous Knowledge – and this was a fascinating insight into the issues around preserving culturally specific knowledge and did raise the big question of whether *all* knowledge needs to be publicly available. After watching her presentation, I was beginning to wonder if some culturally specific knowledge is best off being closed to preserve the traditions and rituals specific to that community.

### **Breakout session 1:**

Ah, the breakout session dilemma! That was one issue you didn’t need to worry about with an online conference as the presentations were all pre-recorded to watch later. But at an in-person conference, you just have to choose. With Open Access Monographs looming, my brain was pretty much hard wired to focus in on the words ‘open,’ ‘access,’ ‘monographs,’ and ‘books’ so I decided to attend a joint session on the discoverability (or otherwise) of Open Access books with talks from **Tom Mosterd** of the **DOAB** (Directory of Open Access Books), **Rupert Gattu** of **Thoth** metadata, and **Heather Sherman** of the **Bibliographic Data Service**. In a previous role, I did do a fair bit of work with metadata and cataloguing so I had a bit of a handle on what was being discussed but this session did fall a little short of me. Perhaps my expectations were too high? It was interesting to find out how the Thoth schema works for Open Access books and aiding discoverability, but the rest of the session revolved around what services were available for libraries to buy into rather than diving into any issues around if the discoverability of OA books is hindered by the current cataloguing systems. While it may not have been quite what I was hoping for, I’m sure other attendees who are more plugged in to metadata would have got more out of the session.

### **Breakout session 2:**

My second breakout session was much more my thing – an exploration of issues around OA monographs from **Jen Bayjoo** and **Dominic Broadhurst** of the **University of Salford** (‘Open Access Monographs, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic’). This was very much more of an interactive, collaborative session with good use of Metimeter to allow attendees to provide input on the issues they are facing as librarians, publishers, and suppliers. It was reassuring to discover that publishers who are committed to making monographs Open Access are facing similar challenges to librarians – with issues around cost and staffing constraints being high up the list.

### **Breakout session 3:**

The third breakout session of the day for me was “Mandates, policies, and collaboration for the success of Open Access monographs”. This session did place the drive for more long-form work

to be openly accessible in the wider funder policy context and explored the challenges that lay ahead (such as moving towards a publishing model which is sustainable for all parties). This session ended on a sweet note as the presenter (**Frances Pinter**) related a story to highlight the power of collaboration between libraries and publisher and how similar collaboration is possible for the delivery of open access monographs. I really hope this comes about as it seems both librarians and publishers are feeling the strain of recent negotiations around Transformative Agreements for journals (of which, more later!)

### **The quiz night:**

I'm a sucker for a quiz night and the famous (or infamous) UKSG Quiz Night certainly delivered. It was great to be able to talk to other attendees outside of the conference environment (we all bonded on our table with discussions of our pet cats and dogs) and I was able to show off my knowledge of misheard music lyrics, although my South American geography left much to be desired; fortunately, my quiz team mates were able to cover for my lack of knowledge in that area! We didn't win but didn't lose either, so I guess that was something!

### **Day Two:**

#### **Plenary Session 2:**

The second day of the conference kicked off with a hugely thought-provoking presentation by the **University of Birmingham's Kalwant Bhopal** who demonstrated that the perception of universities as liberal progressive institutions was a false one and that there was still a very long way to go with ensuring that BME staff are able to access the same levels of professional positions and respect as their white colleagues. A very important and humbling presentation which really does prove the distinction between words and deeds. The second presentation of this session was delivered by **Masoud Khokar**, University Librarian at the **University of Leeds**. Another highly relevant and timely talk, Masoud explored why there is a feeling of burnout, particularly post-pandemic. I will admit to feeling a little lost in the talk around the types of cognitive load, but the points Masoud was making weren't lost at all – and I loved the metaphor he referred to of being in a house and needing to get out of the 'basement of despair' and work up to the 'balcony of hope'!

#### **Breakout session 4:**

My fourth breakout session was "Certain in our uncertainty: Acknowledging, addressing and achieving in an unequal scholarly communications landscape" delivered by **Katherine Stephan** from **Liverpool John Moores** and **Lucinda May** and **Stephen Carlton** of the **University of Manchester**. This session provided commonalities and differences in approaches to issues around Open Access and research support from a big, Russell Group institution like the **University of Manchester** and a smaller, but no less powerful, institution like LJMU. This session reinforced what seemed to be a recurring theme at the conference - that collaboration between libraries and collaboration between libraries, publishers, and suppliers was key to addressing the challenges and changes in the sector.

### **Plenary session 3:**

This session was a panel discussion, specifically geared towards Transformative Agreements and what comes next. It was an interesting, if somewhat weighty, debate which attempted to peek into the future to see what the agreements are transforming open access publishing to – will there be a move away from paying for itemised material (on a per-article basis) towards libraries being able to buy other, open research based content such as peer-review reports? With publishers having made changes already, can they sustainably continue with more change (particularly the smaller publishers)? There were big questions, and the answers might not be comfortable ones to take in for some, but it was clear that after twenty years, the Open Access movement was driving change in the way research is published and disseminated.

### **Breakout session 5:**

**Joanne Fitzpatrick**'s session "Archiving Brain Fruits: Research Data Management for The Arts" proved to be a thoroughly interesting presentation which navigated the complexities of RDM within arts-based research. Taking quite a creative and suitably 'arts-y' approach, the session dived into potential solutions to handling research data for creative 'practice as research' based research outputs. Does the language around RDM need to be altered to better fit the remit of arts subjects rather than trying to use a 'one size fits all' (or one-word fits all) approach with terminology from STEM areas? It was fascinating, thought-provoking stuff, and the issues are ones which I'm still mulling over even now!

### **Breakout session 6:**

Rights Retention for authors is becoming the new BIG THING in research support, spearheaded by the Plan S principles adopted by the UKRI funding bodies in the UK. **Sheffield Hallam** have been one of the growing number of universities who are implementing a blanket policy on rights retention for their researchers and as this is a topic of discussion within my team at **Manchester Metropolitan University**, this was a key session for me. **Nick Woolley**'s presentation made the process seem easy, although I am sure there were some hurdles amongst the way (Nick did mention the process of drafting and implementing the policy was *relatively* straightforward) but it was interesting to see that even at this early stage in the lifecycle of the policy that authors at Sheffield Hallam were happy to use Rights Retention statements in their submissions to journals and that there had been little pushback from publishers. It certainly made the case for more universities to create and adopt their own policies on Rights Retention!

### **The Gala Evening:**

Situated in the gorgeous **Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum**, the conference had a gala evening featuring drink (luckily teetotallers like me were catered for as well as those who enjoy an alcoholic beverage), nibbles, an organ recital, and a chance to admire the art works and displays in the Kelvingrove. In all honesty, I would have preferred a more formal, sit-down meal type of event but the fact that I got to see Salvador Dali's Christ of Saint John of the Cross up close and personal made the evening worthwhile (and this is despite me having seen it before at the Kelvingrove back in 2019 on a short holiday to Glasgow). It really is an astonishing work of art.

## **Day Three:**

### **Plenary session 4:**

The final day of the conference kicked off with quite a deep panel discussion around how libraries, publishers, and suppliers can mend the ‘fault lines’ within the sector (echoing points raised in earlier breakout sessions, collaboration between all stakeholders seems to be the key). It was a bold session to hold at 9am on a Saturday morning (particularly after the Gala Evening the night before) but was no less thought provoking for it – particularly the chilling comment from **Gwen Evans** of **Elsevier** about the growing anti-science movement in America, at a time where more research is open to all than ever before!

### **Breakout session 7:**

The penultimate breakout session for me was “Challenges of moving to new publishing models” which gave established publishers such as **Wiley** and **Cambridge University Press** to highlight how Transformative Agreements have gone and new OA initiatives are being developed to enable more content to be made available Open Access. The most interesting point of view, however, came from a small publisher – **James Rice** of **White Horse Press**. For smaller publishers such as White Horse, Transformative Agreements don’t work as well as they do for larger publishers, but James seemed to be quite taken with the ‘subscribe to open’ model which is being used by some publishers of book content (in White Horse’s case, they are using it with journals). An interesting debate opened up during the Q&A part of the session with an attendee from the USA urging a level of caution for James’ enthusiasm for the subscribe to open model. This session really did highlight that smaller publishers are keen to play their part in opening up research but the financial costs for the changes to publishing models being driven by the OA movement carry far greater consequences for them than they do for the larger publishers.

### **Breakout session 8:**

For my final session of the conference, I decided to attend “Reducing the Risk of Propagating Retracted Research”. This session again focused more on metadata than I was anticipating – specifically how metadata can be improved to better communicate when a research article is withdrawn or retracted. This session did manage to get me thinking about the role of retracted research in the wider scholarly communications landscape – would an article in our institutional repository which is later withdrawn by the publisher need to be removed or would we be able to acknowledge its removal and retain the AAM in our repository? Does retracted research still play a role in the scholarly communications ecosystem or could it be used as a way of further propagating the mistrust in expertise referred to during the morning’s plenary talk? To my surprise, I left the session feeling particularly engaged with those issues and I’m keen to see how the **NISO** project progresses in communicating when research has been retracted at a faster pace than at present.

### **Plenary session 5:**

By this point in the conference, I was ready for a lie down! Two full days of full-on sessions and the morning had been just as intense! Luckily, UKSG has picked a fantastic speaker to end the conference on – Dr **Andy Cope**’s talk on embracing change was funny, relevant, and featured a reference to the 1984 film *The Terminator* – I don’t know about anyone else, but that last one

was certainly not on my ‘conference bingo card’! In a sector which has undergone and is still undergoing big, dramatic changes, Andy’s message for us to be more positive and accept that change happens and face the world with positivity (when it is all too easy to be negative, more so over the last three or so years) was the perfect note on which to end the conference.

### **Cross-day events:**

#### **Lightning Sessions:**

The lightning sessions provided a whistle stop overview of projects and works being carried out at institutions and organisations in the sector. Of note to me, was **Karen Veitch**’s presentation on embedding Open Research topics into information literacy training for students. This is something which my team has discussed (in as much as setting up our own e-learning) but to see an institution incorporating it with their other student focused e-learning was inspiring, after all students will benefit from Open Research and the undergraduate students of today may very well end up as the researchers of tomorrow, so to embed what Open Research is and what good Open Research practice at that stage of their careers (along with more advanced material for postgraduate researchers) can only be a good thing!

#### **Exhibitions:**

There were a lot of exhibition stands to explore in between the sessions. I suspect for a lot of attendees the main draw was the freebies – and **AIP Publishing** had some fantastic tote bags on offer! I particularly enjoyed finding out more about the **ChronosHub** Open Access management platform and had a nice discussion with a rep from **Rock’s Back Pages** on Radiohead (not a topic of conversation I was expecting to come up at the conference!). Of course, it would be remiss of me to mention the reps from **Content Online** who had everyone talking about them due to their matching powder blue suits! I dread to think what the dry-cleaning bill will be for the suits to be cleaned now the conference has finished...

### **Final Thoughts**

My first in-person conference with UKSG was very full on, very tiring, but also very inspirational. I got to meet people from across the world, reconnect with former colleagues, and meet new contacts in the world of libraries. I would recommend anyone who is at the start of their career in libraries to attend. Who knows, maybe at the next conference, I’ll be presenting a breakout session myself? I’d better get thinking on what that could be on!

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



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