

UKSG Blog post - experience as a first-time UKSG Conference attendee

The world of academic libraries is fairly new to me. I graduated from Lancaster University in 2018 and like many early career staff in the HE sector, returned to the University as a staff member. I was initially employed as part of the Ambitious Futures Graduate Scheme, during which I worked within a number of professional service departments across three six-month placements both at Lancaster University and the University of Manchester. Following the completion of the scheme I moved into the Research and Enterprise Services division at Lancaster University, first as a REF support Officer, and then as a Faculty Research Ethics Officer. I then joined the Library as an Open Research Officer in December of last year. My current role involves supporting the Library Open Research team in the areas of Open Access, Research Data Management and Research Intelligence to coordinate and deliver a range of services, projects and initiatives.

Like many people who start new roles, I was aware that there were gaps in my knowledge of the Library sector, but often we don't even know what the gaps in our knowledge are. To put it another way, "I didn't know what I didn't know". The UKSG conference represented a great opportunity to further develop my understanding of the sector and I was grateful to be given the chance to attend by my team.

Prior to attending the conference, I admit experiencing some feelings of imposter syndrome. Would I be able to network with experienced library professionals as someone fairly new to the sector? Would I be able to understand the topics being discussed at the conference? I soon realised these fears were misplaced when I arrived at the conference centre in Telford. The buzz in the room made it easy to approach people and through talking with fellow attendees it became obvious that although some attendees were more experienced, everyone was there to learn more about the sector.

The conference was structured to provide a range of plenary presentations, lightning talks and breakout sessions along with social events and a trade exhibition. Josh Sendall's plenary talk "Compassionate leadership: the role of libraries in promoting social justice" explored the positive role that libraries can play in responding to the challenges as compassionate leaders striving towards social justice. Reflecting on this talk reminded me of my motivations to work in the Library and wider HE sector. I consider myself to be a 'values-driven' individual and the role of Libraries and universities as socially responsible organisations strongly aligns with my own values.

A highlight of the conference was being able to connect the topics being discussed with my own experiences and consider how I could apply this within my role. The session 'Bridging universities with society: policy, strategy, and practice' presented by Thomas Kaarsted, Kirsty Wallis and Anne Kathrine Overgaard was a particularly good example of this. The session explored how the role and place of universities in society are changing through various citizen science initiatives. However, the framework, knowledge and possible implementation of these new standards seem diverse and somehow not consistent enough to produce sustainable

change. The session set out some strategic options to address this and provided a number of case studies. I particularly enjoyed how the session asked the audience to break into groups and discuss a series of questions. These included:

- Are there any citizen science policies at your institution?
- Do you know of any examples of Citizen Science within your institution?
- How could your library support researchers engaging in Citizen Science initiatives?

Discussing these questions, I realised that I was unaware of any citizen science policies within Lancaster University or the range of citizen science activities. I left the session pondering how Lancaster University Library may support researchers engaging in citizen science initiatives and an action to explore what Citizen Science activity is already taking place within the institution.

Another conference highlight was the session 'The 'personal manifesto': what does it mean to explore your style, preferences and needs?' by Tom Shaw of Lancaster University. In 2021 Tom's article ['How to strive for success, happiness, fulfilment and impact: a personal manifesto'](#) was published in UKSG Insights. During the session, Tom was interviewed by Andrew Barker, also of Lancaster University, to explore some of the key themes from the article. Their conversation explored how the framework acts as a set of guiding principles to deal with the challenges and opportunities Tom has experienced professionally. The session touched on a number of themes, including Tom's experience with imposter syndrome when starting a new role, and it was interesting to hear that this was experienced by senior members of my team at Lancaster along with some of the strategies they adopt to deal with this. A key takeaway from the session was the message 'don't be too hard on yourself'. Most of us are doing better work than we think we are and when we realise this, it's motivating and liberating. Reflecting on the session, I have begun to consider what would make up my personal manifesto and how I may apply this within my own career.

Writing this reflection on the conference has been challenging. There are many sessions I could highlight and I intend to watch several recordings of sessions I missed over the next few weeks. The broad range of topics covered at the UKSG conference has framed the key issues within the library sector and allowed me to gain a greater understanding of the context within which the sector is operating. I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to network with colleagues from other institutions at the conference. However perhaps the most valuable takeaway from the conference is being able to apply what I have learnt within my own role.