
Planning for the future: the SCONUL annual conference 2011

Hilton Hotel, Cardiff, 8–10 June

[http://www.sconul.ac.uk/events/
agm2011/](http://www.sconul.ac.uk/events/agm2011/)

Conference report:

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This year's SCONUL conference took place shortly after most of the English and Welsh universities had announced their tuition fees for 2012/13. Some aspects of the future higher education landscape were becoming clearer but the main topic of discussion throughout the conference was the likely impact of the changes. The topics addressed by the speakers ranged from the major political and economic developments to the very practical ways in which institutions and individuals are responding. A selection of the presentations is available on the SCONUL website at <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/events/agm2011/presentations/>

OPENING SESSION: BUDGETING FOR THE FUTURE

Julie Lydon, Vice-Chancellor, University of Glamorgan, welcomed the conference to Cardiff. Both Wales and the city of Cardiff are currently in a period of transition, and recent developments, including a large media presence, have helped turn Wales into a top destination. Higher education is also in transition, with the changes to fees, public sector cuts, emerging technologies and a new focus on the student voice. The impact of unprecedented cuts and the continued push for improvements will force us to do things differently. Leadership will be crucial in facing the difficult decisions ahead. Julie stated that she has a great deal of confidence in librarians to make good decisions particularly relating to user needs. She believes the library plays a fundamental role in university life and must continue to be a hub. A key challenge will be to persuade users that the library is the best place to access resources, and we must engage with all the business communication opportunities.



Fiona Parsons, SCONUL Chair, then introduced two speakers looking at different aspects of efficiency and value for money in university libraries. Rebecca Davies, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Student and Staff Services at Aberystwyth University, provided an interesting perspective on the topic of shared services in her presentation ‘Sharing to be selfish’, arguing that to be successful shared services must provide very clear benefits to the individual partners and that issues of trust, cultural and policy differences must be addressed at the outset. Rebecca’s analogy for the difference between ‘sharing’ and ‘shared’ services is the bring-your-own picnic where everyone brings

a separate dish to the party, compared with the shared buffet, where everyone works together from the outset to create something from scratch. Creating shared services is challenging and Rebecca’s question to delegates was how many of us could say we operated genuinely shared services within our own institutions: a good place to start before embarking on more ambitious projects with other institutions.



Rebecca Davies



Carol Tenopir

Carol Tenopir, Professor of Information Sciences at the University of Tennessee, presented the early findings from two studies on value: the US Lib-Value work aims to develop models for assessing value and return on investment (ROI) for academic libraries, and the UK JISC study on reading and the value of library resources examines the value UK academics place on having access to scholarly materials. Once both analyses

are complete, they will provide an international perspective on the role of libraries and the value their resources contribute to individuals and institutions. The UK survey results were very new but Carol was able to outline the methodology and give the initial figures. Academic staff in six universities were asked to reflect on the critical incident of their last reading of scholarly articles, books/e-books and other materials, including where they found out about, obtained and read them. Many of the findings provide evidence for trends that most of us observe on a day-to-day basis: for example, that use of library electronic resources for journal articles is very high and that recommendations for books are more likely to come from personal sources. The study includes interesting findings on where academics read, the purpose of their reading and how long they spend doing it, all included in the presentation slides. Algorithms have been developed to demonstrate the outcomes of academic reading and consequently the value of it: the full results of this study will be published in December 2011.

During the question and answer session, Carol was able to add that the US study will evaluate the academic library more widely, looking at factors such as instruction, shared space, Special Collections and Archives and reputation. Her work over the years on the value of libraries indicates that different arguments are more effective in different situations when justifying the costs of libraries; for example some stakeholders will be interested in the outcomes of providing the resource, others may find the human arguments such as profiles of successful academics more persuasive. Looking at the way collections tend to be purchased in large bundles now, there may well be more of a role for libraries in recommending and pointing to the 'top' articles and books to help academics find their way through the volume of information now available to them.

After the panel session (reported separately in this issue) and the AGM, debate continued into the evening as delegates headed to the first social event at Techniquest, down at the Cardiff Waterfront. The informal reception provided an

opportunity to mingle, catch up with colleagues and try out some of the science-based interactive exhibits. Delegates were then free to make their own dinner arrangements in Cardiff, assisted by the knowledgeable local volunteers on hand to provide directions and restaurant recommendations.

Techniquest



DAY 2: RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES

Sara Marsh chaired the opening session of the second day of the conference, introducing three speakers who provided insights into library development and student information-seeking behaviour. All three presentations are available on the SCONUL website at <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/events/agm2011/presentations/>.

Janet Peters gave an overview of the SCONUL collaborative visit to Germany in April 2011 when participants were able to visit some fascinating new and refurbished library buildings. There were some notable differences in what might be called library 'culture' between Germany and the UK, for example the right of any German resident to join a university library for a small fee, the banning of CCTV in public places and still quite

Janet Peters



a high retention of print collections. The buildings visited were of exceptionally high quality, with many environmentally friendly features incorporated into the designs. As well as visiting library buildings, participants attended seminars on German e-science projects and the UK teaching and learning experience, discussing the role of librarians in these activities. These presentations can be viewed via the study visit blog at <http://sconulberlin2011.blogspot.com/>

In a presentation themed around *Through the looking glass*, Gill Needham from the Open University examined recent research on how students find and use information and the implications for future planning. The Open University has been using 'personas' developed from typical characteristics to help envisage users' preferences,

Gill Needham



how they are going to access all our services and whether the services we currently offer will meet their needs. Some of the themes emerging from this work include the importance of virtual spaces to build relationships, the expectation that the users, not the providers, will be in control and the assumption that everything is available to share. At the Open University this has translated into a steady growth in mobile delivery, liaising with publishers to make content more accessible and thinking about the changing learning styles that will determine future technologies.

Graham Stone



There was a great deal of interest in the data presented by Graham Stone, University of Huddersfield, from the Library Impact Data Project. This work looked at the correlation between library usage and student attainment in their final degree results at eight different universities. Graham took great care in his presentation to make clear that the relationship is not cause and effect, but that the initial findings do show a statistically significant correlation between library activity data and student attainment. The project team plan to release the data on an Open Data Commons licence and provide a toolkit to allow other universities to benchmark their own data. Further information from the project is available on the project blog at <http://library.hud.ac.uk/blogs/projects/lidp/>.

VIEW FROM A VICE-CHANCELLOR

Professor Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor, University of Exeter and President of Universities UK, gave

Steve Smith



a thorough and very personal overview of the current national position in higher education. At the time of the conference, the UK White Paper *Students at the heart of the system* had not yet been published, but he was in an excellent position to look forward and examine the implications for universities, students and the UK economy.

Many of the changes to UK higher education have been forced by the current fiscal environment, but government has also recognised that we need to pay greater attention to the student voice and make efficiency gains. The effect of the changes will not simply be to shift resource to attain the same level of expenditure, but to move into a very different environment which will be much more student-centred. Students are saying: 'We are paying, but they are not delivering.' The language, for example in letters from parents, is changing too. Students and parents believe they are paying triple fees and will therefore expect triple benefits – a major issue to address. Both government and universities will have difficulty explaining what the changes are really about. The language of 'fees' and 'debt' could be very damaging and problematic and it would be better to think of the fees contribution more in terms of a mortgage with very good terms.

We need to explain to the general public what universities are for, as they are not loved in same way as the health service is. Many people will not be aware that universities make a major contribution to the UK economy and provide a valuable ladder of social mobility. Referring to Leon Feinstein's work on cognitive abilities and social class, Steve Smith argued that universities offer a means of addressing the achievement gap between income groups. The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) has noted that graduation numbers are a good predictor of economic success. The message that universities matter to society as a whole needs to be promoted.

The UK Treasury has stated that in the recent budget rounds higher education has come out extremely well. Although HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council) funding will drop by £3 billion, the capital budget has been cut and science budgets frozen, overall funding will actually increase by £3.7 billion by 2015. There are, however, probable consequences resulting from the funding restructure: the risk of market failure, the new role of the student as collaborating partner, questions around the need for a funding body such as HEFCE and the future of regulation itself in a market-driven sector. It is not likely that the system will face meltdown but government would certainly like university reserves to be stronger and universities will need to be clear about their mission and what their students want. Some unexpected shocks may be in store when the market frees up.

Libraries will also need to consider what students perceive that they are paying for and what they are getting. Key priorities are likely to be core texts, opening hours and e-resources. There will be a need for a strong, professionally expressed, voice on library and IT in competition for resources. Going into a market-driven environment, the UK as a whole must reflect on what would happen to towns where universities make a big contribution to the local economy. Universities are essential to the future of our country and we must face up to change, read the white paper and take part in the consultations to ensure the system evolves in a way that will deliver an excellent student experience.

PARALLEL SESSIONS AND SOCIAL PROGRAMME

The afternoon session on day 2 started with a group of parallel sessions. Delegates could choose to join the discussions on the JISC/SCONUL shared services programme, the information literacy framework for Wales, LEAN techniques, joint procurement initiatives (SHEDL [Scottish Higher Education Digital Library] and WHEEL) or the research data management toolkit. The presentations from all five sessions are available on the SCONUL conference website. Following the parallel sessions, visits were organised to the Atrium, University of Glamorgan, Cardiff University's Trevithick Library, Llandaff Learning Centre at University of Wales Institute Cardiff (UWIC) or Cardiff Central Library. In the evening the conference dinner was held at Cardiff City Hall, a very impressive civic building, beautifully decorated for the dinner accompanied by a harpist (who was more than willing to play requests – probably the



first time I have heard an Abba song played on the harp).



Ann Rossiter

beehive, walled garden and wild west. The key features of each scenario are outlined on the presentation slides available on the SCONUL conference website. They can be used to help develop strategic plans by challenging assumptions, identifying early indicators of change and testing the resilience of current strategies. The final report will be launched at the end of 2011 and rolled out for discussion and debate, including use in the formulation of SCONUL strategy. Following the presentation, delegates commented on possible additions to the work already done and how the scenarios could be used in practice. So far there has not been any work on profiling the students of the future, and this could add an extra dimension to the report. In the United States, the Association of Research Libraries have devised five scenarios for the future of research libraries, available on their website, and it would be interesting to compare these to the UK work. In all the scenarios,

the roles of the lecturer and the researcher move apart, possibly into different institutions, and this would have a big impact on the role of libraries. The idea of library as place may change – in some scenarios content and buildings are separate, in others they are linked, but in all three the boundaries are



Cardiff City Hall

Conference dinner

DAY 3: SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE

Ann Rossiter opened the final group of presentations, summarising the findings of the *Libraries of the future* study, a major piece of work looking forward to the year 2050 and presenting three possible scenarios: the



blurred. The main use of the materials produced during the study will be to enable us to look to the future, challenge our preconceptions and ensure that we are not caught unawares: since the work started, some of the possible changes have, in fact, already happened.



Stefan Gradmann

Professor Stefan Gradmann, Professor for Library and Information Science at Humboldt University, Berlin, talked about the need for a new language in his presentation 'From catalogs to graphs: changing terms for a changing profession'. The term 'catalogue' can no longer be taken for granted as the traditional use describing a finite number of delimited holdings no longer applies to this core area of our business. The presentation slides show representations of the document continuum model where the relationships between concepts using techniques such as linked data and mapping tools will help tackle the complexity of material now used by scholars. If librarians want to become part of the linked open data web, they will need to start changing the terminology they use. Although the old terms are becoming obsolete, we do not yet have all the new names required and some, such as 'library' perhaps, may remain if applied to new concepts. So far, nothing works as well as 'library' but even though libraries may change to adapt to new requirements, it is possible that the term could hold us back from developing new architectures. This is a challenge

to a profession that has developed around the traditional needs of users (books and places) and we will need to reposition ourselves to meet the needs of current and future users. Professor Gradmann's final comment was that information has always been a transition to knowledge, and the future will be about creating the context that will allow the generation of new knowledge



Nick Poole

The final conference presentation was a look at the future of libraries in a digital Britain, by Nick Poole, Chief Executive of the Collections Trust, although his first point was that the concept of 'digital Britain' is already outdated and we should really be moving beyond it to a time when the digital is a normal part of everyday life. The concept of literacy in a digital environment has two elements: 'facility' (how confidently you can define what you are looking for and navigate to it) and 'agency' (your expectation of being able to influence the world around you), which carries a sense of entitlement and the ability to assert your own world view. A key question is where people will get their literacy from, and libraries can play a central role in helping to develop the key skills required in a digital world: critical judgement, selection, analysis, research and comparison. They can also create the circumstances in which literacy can flourish, which could include neutral social spaces and professional staff. We do, however, need to reconnect with the real needs of users or they will drift away elsewhere. In the discussion following the presentation, the question of resources was raised in different ways. Nick Poole's view was that libraries have an excellent 'offer' but it is not well understood by politicians. We should stop using the language of 'cuts' and put forward the very positive ideas we have about the future. A transcript of his talk is available on the conference website.



Workshop leaders

CLOSING SESSION

Fiona Parsons thanked all the speakers for their thought-provoking and challenging presentations. Key themes emerging over the three days included sharing, trust and impact. We heard from some very articulate students who without doubt will be expressing their expectations of us. The future scenarios put forward were stimulating and sometimes uncomfortable – we do have to face the fact that libraries might not exist in the future as we understand them now and that the profession will have to rise to many challenges, including those of language and nomenclature. It is clear that there will not be one ‘student experience’ and that we must think carefully about individual learners when designing our services. If libraries are to play a central role we will need a strong, professionally evidenced voice to speak up for the future of library services, whatever form they may take.

Finally, Fiona expressed thanks to the conference planning team, local organisers and the SCONUL office staff for their contributions to an excellent conference.



Conference planning team