

# The ANLTC Library Assistant Award

A competitive opportunity for personal development



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This article provides an overview of the history of the Academic and National Library Training Cooperative (ANLTC) Library Assistant Award and explores the practical elements of co-ordinating the 2016 competition. Personal reflections from award prize-winners and authors of highly commended entries provide some insight into the perceived benefits of the award. Reflections focus on the impact of the award in creating staff development opportunities in the authors' home institution, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI).

## The Academic and National Library Training Cooperative (ANLTC)

The Academic and National Library Training Cooperative (ANLTC) was established in 1995 to provide cooperative staff training programmes for library staff in the seven Irish university libraries and the National Library of Ireland. In the intervening years membership has grown and there are currently 13 members.<sup>1</sup> The activities of the group are managed by the ANLTC Committee, to which all member institutions nominate a representative.<sup>2</sup> The committee reports to the Consortium of National and University Libraries (CONUL).<sup>3</sup>

The ANLTC Committee organises an annual training programme of events for members and co-ordinates two biennial awards to encourage staff development and research activity – the ANLTC Research Award and the ANLTC Library Assistant Award.

## Background to the ANLTC Library Assistant Award

Open to all library assistants and senior library assistants in ANLTC member libraries, the original incarnation of the award was a competitive bursary to support professional development. It could be put towards the cost of postgraduate programmes in librarianship, conference attendance, visiting libraries overseas or to offset the costs of undertaking a research project in their home institution. Applicants were required to write a 1,500 word essay, later revised to 1,000 words, outlining how they would use the award to advance their professional development.

In 2011 the bursary was reviewed. Library assistants and senior library assistants in the ANLTC member libraries were surveyed and feedback on the scheme was sought from senior managers in member libraries. A decision was then taken to discontinue the bursary and replace it with a biennial award with a first prize of €200; second prize of €150 and a third prize of €100. The prize money awarded would be for personal purposes.

Moving from a bursary to an award required a change in the application format. In 2012 entrants were asked to submit a poster<sup>4</sup> on a library topic of interest. Entrants in 2014 were asked to design a blog on a library topic of interest.

## The 2016 award – the practical stuff!

In 2014 a low number of applications were received. Entrants had been expected to design, create and contribute content to their blog over a period of time. The technical and editorial skills required, along with the time commitment, were perceived to be off-putting and for 2016 the award submission format was revised.

The application process needed to reflect the aim of the award, which is to provide an opportunity for library assistants to voice their thoughts and views on library themes. In creating a blog post applicants would: share their thoughts on a library theme of interest to them; develop an understanding of blogs as a communication channel; source, manipulate and create images; cite and reference resources appropriately; demonstrate a blogging style that engaged their audience and have an opportunity to explore blogging as a way to share their professional practice with a wider audience.

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For the 2016 ANLTC Library Assistant Award entrants were invited to submit a blog post of 500–800 words in length on any aspect of their work, for example: training they attended; a new development in their library; a collection item in their library; research they had undertaken. Applications were invited from library assistants, senior library assistants and equivalent grades in member institutions.

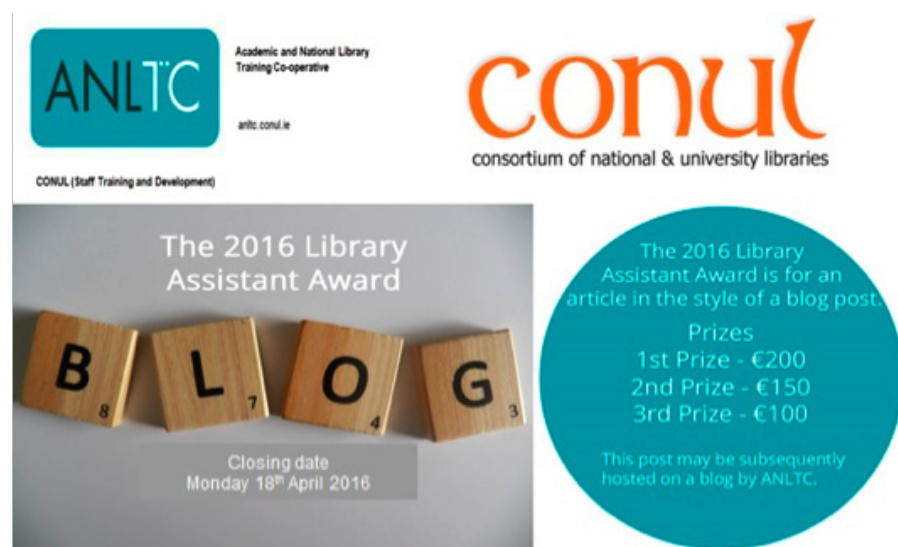


Fig. 1 2016 ANLTC Library Assistant Award poster imagery

The award was promoted on the ANLTC website. A poster was created to promote the award, along with guidelines for applicants and a list of useful resources on blogging. Each ANLTC representative promoted the award internally and centralised receipt of applications in their home institution.

A judging panel of three members was formed from the membership of the ANLTC committee. Each blog post was reviewed by two members of the panel; they did not review entries from their home institution. The panel selected the prize-winners and highly commended entries. All entrants received notification of the outcome of the award in relation to their entry, with feedback from the judging panel.



Fig. 2 Timeline for 2016 ANLTC Library Assistant Award

## Outcome

A high number of entries was received from across the ANLTC member institutions. The themes explored by the award winners focused on new technologies, blogging, open access and collections. First, joint second and joint third prizes were awarded and the judging panel highly commended five entries. Prize-winners were announced at the CONUL Conference on 2 June 2016. The prize-winning and highly commended entries were published on the libfocus blog<sup>5</sup> during June 2016.

- 1st Prize *Tradition and technology and the Glucksman Library, UL* by Seán Cafferkey, University of Limerick
- 2nd Prize *A captive audience* by Bernie Gardiner, Maynooth University  
*The Kelmscott Chaucer* by Helen McGinley, the Library of Trinity College, University of Dublin

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3rd Prize *Facing the open access challenge –the experience of a university open access team* by Megan Corrigan, Queen’s University Belfast  
*Brian O’Higgins / Brian Ó hUiginn (1882–1963)* by Olive Morrin, Maynooth University

## Reflections on the ANLTC LA Award 2016

### Reflections from entrants

In preparation for this article the authors of prize-winning and highly commended blog entries were invited to share their reflections on applying for the 2016 award. Prompting questions for the reflective piece included:

- What motivated you to make a submission?
- Why did you choose your topic?
- What are your learnings / reflections from putting the submission together?
- What tips would you offer future entrants?

With the exception of themes that were reported by more than one respondent, the reflections are unedited and presented as received from the respondents.

### Motivation to apply for the award

- Encouraged to consider applying by either a line manager or another work colleague. (A number commented on the importance of person-to-person follow-ups.)
- Appealed to the competitive nature of some entrants
- Seen as an opportunity to showcase writing talents to a broader audience
- Wanted to share information and knowledge with a wider audience
- Identified this as an opportunity to develop their blogging skills

### Benefits of participating

- A welcome opportunity to reflect on practice
- Sharing information about the collections in their institution with a wider audience
- Publishing outside their home institution
- Developing / enhancing their writing skills e.g. editing, citing, researching etc.

I think the ANLTC LA Award is a great chance for library assistants to work on skills relevant to our jobs. It is a good experience just participating but there is a great sense of achievement even if you don't win.

As a library assistant you don't get many opportunities to write something that will be published and seen by a wider audience, because of this I think the award is a valuable opportunity for people working at this grade.

### Supports identified

- Direct encouragement from line managers to consider applying
- Enthusiasm from line managers was infectious
- Support of colleagues at all levels sharing skills and knowledge; reviewing and providing feedback
- Senior managers creating a supportive environment for those participating

### Top tips for future applicants

- Pick a topic you are genuinely interested in
- Get colleagues to review and provide feedback

...blogging is fun, have a go and you might surprise yourself.

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- Ask for help from colleagues
- Don't be afraid to learn new skills

The reflections provide a snapshot of the benefits perceived by those who provided feedback. Their feedback supports the view that the award has a positive effect in providing an opportunity for library assistants to share their thoughts, ideas, research and professional practice with a wider audience.

### Professional development opportunities: an institutional reflection

For the library team in the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), engagement with the award has presented continuing professional development opportunities across the team.

### Library assistants

The library assistants who submitted entries chose diverse topics that reflected personal areas of interest: investigating observed student behaviours; sharing professional practice; showcasing materials from the collection. Once the topic was decided on the library assistants researched their topic and sourced relevant resources. From their learning perspective the award challenged them to develop their research and writing skills and most significantly to find their writing voice.

### Assistant librarians

The assistant librarians who are direct line managers for the library assistant team undertook to speak with each team member and encouraged them to consider applying. They were tremendously enthusiastic in conveying the opportunities that participating in the award provides. Working together, the assistant librarians devised a blog training tutorial covering: idea generation; how to structure content; language and tone; finding and selecting images; copyright issues; referencing and linking; and design of the blog post. While directly aimed at library assistants thinking of applying for the ANLTC Award, the tutorial was attended by other members of the team. One-to-one support was provided with line managers, who supported queries about image quality, embedding links and images and providing feedback on the overall blog piece.

### Associate librarian

As the RCSI representative on the ANLTC Committee, I had the opportunity to assist with coordinating the award and to work and learn from other members of the judging panel. I have learnt a tremendous amount from reading all the entries received about current practice, developments under way, unique collections and emerging challenges in libraries. I have delighted in the sharing of the prize and highly commended entries with the wider library community. Through judging and compiling the feedback from all members of the judging panel, I too have learnt a lot about blogging – perhaps more about critiquing than writing! As a result of my participation in coordinating the award I now have the opportunity to share direct experiences from multiple perspectives about the award.

### Next steps

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ANLTC representatives, working with other managers in their home institutions, should encourage all participants in the 2016 award to continue to develop their writing voice. Participants should write and seek out opportunities to publish both within and outside their home institution.

As always, it is beneficial to reflect, and to capture how the process can be improved for the 2018 ANLTC Library Assistant Award. There is much to learn from the reflections provided by participants in how we promote the award and the support infrastructure we can put in place in our home institutions to nurture engagement.

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## Notes

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- 1 In 1995 ANLTC members included Dublin City University (DCU); Maynooth University; NUI Galway; University College Cork; University College Dublin (UCD); the University of Limerick (UL); the Library of Trinity College, University of Dublin (TCD); and the National Library of Ireland. Since then membership has expanded to include: Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT); Queen's University Belfast; the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland; the Royal Irish Academy and the University of Ulster.
- 2 The author is the nominated representative to the ANLTC Committee for the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.
- 3 The Consortium of National & University Libraries (CONUL) is a group of Ireland's research libraries which aims to develop and improve the library and information services of CONUL members through the exchange of experience and the organisation of co-operative activities. CONUL recently launched 'Ireland's Memory. Ireland's Discovery', the 2016–2019 strategy for the consortium. See <http://www.conul.ie/> and [http://www.conul.ie/media/CONUL-Strategy2016\\_2019.pdf](http://www.conul.ie/media/CONUL-Strategy2016_2019.pdf) [accessed 31 July 2016]
- 4 2012 ANLTC Library Assistant Award winning posters are available at <http://anltc.conul.ie/awards/> [accessed 31 July 2016]
- 5 libfocus (<http://www.libfocus.com/> [accessed 31 July 2016]) is a communal blog on the subject of library and information management. It features posts by guest contributors on a regular basis. The prize-winning and highly commended blog posts for the 2016 ANLTC Library Assistant Award are available at <http://www.libfocus.com/2016/06/conul-anltc-library-assistant-award-2016.html> [accessed 31 July 2016]

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