

Practice and projects as a basis for academic publishing: case study from Maynooth University Library

Maynooth University (MU) Library has developed an organizational culture that promotes professional development for all Library staff. This has led to significant Library-oriented publishing and presenting at conferences nationally and internationally.

Focusing on the publishing aspect, this article contextualizes professional development – which is core to publishing and presenting – at MU Library. After a brief literature review, it explores how library practice can be the basis of professional and peer-reviewed articles and how academic writing is a relevant form of continuing professional development (CPD) for library staff at all grades.

The case study reviews publications by MU Library staff over a five-year period (2013–2018). It identifies the main types of publication, key publication outlets and the main topics covered.

It concludes with a reflection on a range of issues including the benefits and challenges of sustaining a writing culture.

Keywords

Academic writing; academic publishing; staff development; writing; research



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Background/context

Maynooth University (MU) is one of eight universities in the Republic of Ireland. The University has a student cohort of over 11,500 full-time equivalent (FTE) students and over 800 staff. There are two libraries, the John Paul II Library, which underwent a major extension in 2013 and the historic Russell Library, home to a range of special collections and archives. There are 45 FTE Library staff, of which 17.5 are employed at librarian or equivalent grade.

Professional engagement

The Library is outward facing and is actively involved in a range of professional bodies. Nationally, this includes the Library Association of Ireland (LAI), which represents different types of libraries across the island of Ireland. Librarians are encouraged to join the LAI

2 and archivists the Archival and Records Association of Ireland (ARAI). The cost of one professional membership per year is paid by the Library. A number of MU librarians have achieved associateship (ALAI) and Fellowship (FLAI) of the LAI and the current Senior Vice President and the Honorary Treasurer of the LAI are from MU Library.

CONUL (Consortium of National and University Libraries), is the representative body of research libraries across the island of Ireland, with the CONUL annual conference being the major Irish academic library conference. MU Library staff, at all grades, are encouraged to present papers and posters and engage with colleagues from across the academic library sector. Staff are encouraged to serve on relevant committees of both CONUL and the LAI where appropriate.

The Library is also part of the IUA (Irish University Association) Librarians group, the IReL (Irish Research electronic Library) group and the AGI (Acquisitions Group of Ireland).

Internationally the Library is an active participant in committees including International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), UKSG, LIBER, SCONUL (Standing Committee of National and University Libraries) and the editorial board of *New Review of Academic Librarianship (NRAL)*.

MU Library is recognized for its development of academic writing and publishing support for library staff locally and nationally. This includes an annual academic writing seminar and the well-established blog, *Academic Writing Librarian*.

The Library Senior Management Team actively encourage and support library staff at all grades to present at national and international conferences and seminars, to publish in the professional and peer-reviewed literature and to undertake formal education programmes from certificate through to PhD level.

This commitment is formally documented in the *Maynooth University Library Strategic Plan (2016–2018)*:

'Goal 5: To be an excellent place to work, known for a collegial ethos which empowers all staff to contribute fully to the development of the Library and University'¹

This strong investment in staff development and well-being (articulated in a number of initiatives including well-being days) has resulted in a very positive working environment and a culture of innovation. Consequently, the Library was awarded the University President's Award for Service Innovation in both 2018 and 2019.

Across the University, there is a strong commitment to excellence with five-yearly quality reviews involving internal and external stakeholders. The most recent *Library Peer Review Report (2015)* noted:

'A particular strength is in the quality, flexibility, and commitment of staff, their desire to innovate, and the general 'can do' attitude that pervades the Library culture and reflects very positively on its leadership.'²

'Staff development is taken seriously, both by Library management and by Library staff. 4.68% of the Library's non-pay budget is allocated to staff training and development; an increase from 2.65% in 2010. The SAR [Self-Assessment Report] indicates an impressive array of internal and external staff development activities engaged in by Library staff with active staff involvement in national and international activities, academic writing and conference presentations. This is an impressive commitment in times of financial stringency.'³

'Library staff, at all grades, are encouraged to present papers and posters and engage with colleagues'

'a very positive working environment and a culture of innovation'

3 Against this background, following a brief overview of the literature, this case study presents a five-year (2013–2018) review and analysis of Library staff publishing output.

Literature review

While there is a growing body of literature relating to the publishing and research output of academic librarians, this generally does not include the publishing output of library assistants and related grades.

Writing for publication is frequently a requirement for academic librarians to achieve tenure in the United States and Canada. A survey of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) found that, in half of the responding libraries, librarians are allowed to use one to five hours each week for research and publication, while most of the remainder allow six to ten hours per week. Sabbaticals are also available to librarians in some institutions. Training and mentoring support varies from participation in formal training programmes to informal mentoring.⁴ Similar findings were reported in another study of ARL member institutions, which found that funding, time and mentoring are the most frequently used approaches to encourage research and publication among librarians.⁵ Overall, the three main barriers to librarians publishing identified in the literature are lack of institutional support, time and confidence.⁶

In Australia, while there is no formal requirement to publish, it is recognized that research and writing contribute to career development and the development of the profession. Various initiatives to encourage a research culture amongst librarians, including a Research Working Group (RWG) at Flinders University Library, have been documented.⁷

A similar situation pertains in the UK and Ireland, with no formal requirement to publish in order to achieve tenure/permanency. A comprehensive national survey of publication patterns of Irish academic librarians over a 15-year period (2000–2015) reported a moderate growth in research and publication.⁸ In 2010, in a study of academic librarians in the Greater Dublin area, 23 librarians underwent semi-structured interviews; the majority of them reported having published or presented in some format.⁹

The literature above relates to librarians publishing. There is a dearth of literature on writing for publication among library assistants. Also, the literature, in the main, focuses on the value of publishing a piece of work, rather than what can be gained from undertaking a writing project. The Writing to Learn Movement (WTL) argues that the process of writing helps the writer work out what they have to say, develop ideas and learn through writing.¹⁰ The WTL emphasizes the iterative cycle of writing and revision and places emphasis on the importance of informal writing, including reflective writing, freewriting, writing to prompt, and drafting and redrafting as important steps in the creation of formal writing outputs. The recognition of writing as an iterative process where people develop the skill to write through writing and the value of writing as a way of reflecting on practice, has been part of the motivation at MU Library to offer formal training to library staff at all grades in academic writing. An annual academic writing workshop – with participation from library staff locally and nationally – is offered free of charge by the Library¹¹ and a blended learning programme has also been offered.¹² Ongoing mentoring and support in writing is also available to MU Library staff from more experienced MU librarians who are writing.

‘an iterative process where people develop the skill to write through writing’

Case study

This case study examines the publishing output of MU Library staff between 2013 and 2018. It explores the link between practice and publication and identifies the main publishing outlets. Table 1 shows the main outlets and numbers of publications.

Professional journal articles and newspapers	23
<i>An Leabharlann: The Irish Library</i>	4
<i>SCONUL Focus</i>	11
<i>Catalogue & Index Periodical of CILIP</i>	1
<i>CILIP Update</i>	1
<i>Health Information News & Thinking</i>	1
<i>Information Journal Literacy Club</i>	1
<i>Archives & Records Association Newsletter</i>	3
<i>Irish Times</i>	1
Peer-reviewed journal articles	7
<i>Journal of Library Innovation</i>	1
<i>New Review of Academic Librarianship</i>	2
<i>AISHE-J (All Ireland Society for Higher Education)</i>	2
<i>Games for Health Journal</i>	1
<i>Archivium Hibernicum</i>	1
Book – edited	1
Routledge	1
Book – chapters	6
Daraja Press	1
Roman & Littlefield	1
Elsevier/Chandos	1
Four Courts Press	2
Facet	1
Book reviews	5
<i>An Leabharlann: The Irish Library</i>	2
<i>Ariadne Web Magazine</i>	1
<i>The Furrow</i>	1
<i>Veritas</i>	1
Conference reports	4
<i>An Leabharlann: The Irish Library</i>	1
<i>SCONUL Focus</i>	2
<i>ACLAIIR Newsletter</i>	1

Table 1. MU Library publishing output and outlets, 2013–2018

Analysis

Between 2013 and 2018, Library staff published 46 items in total. With a complement of 45 FTE staff, this is a significant output. In total 26 people published, some as part of a group of authors, others as individual authors. Of these, 14 are at librarian or equivalent grade, while 12 are at library assistant or equivalent grade. Of the 46, 30 were single-author items, 13 had two authors, two had three authors and one had six authors.

Eleven of the 12 library assistants who published did so in professional journals – either *An Leabharlann: The Irish Library* and/or *SCONUL Focus*, while one contributed a chapter to a book.

Peer-reviewed journal articles

There were seven peer-reviewed articles published by MU Library staff across five academic journals, three of these outside the field of librarianship. These articles underwent a double-blind peer-review process rather than an editor or editorial board review.

In addition to the spread of journals, there was a variety of topics. Some articles were based on practice but had a theoretical framework and were grounded in the literature in order to conform to the rigours of the peer-review process.

5 A deselection project was the topic for one of the two *NRAL* articles. A major library extension was completed in 2013, which prompted a total review of the modern print book collection. This was critical to ensure that the 'on the shelf' collection was as relevant as possible to the needs of the user community, while also preparing for the reconfiguration instigated by the extension. The methodology for this assessment and deselection project became the basis of a case study for a peer-reviewed article in *NRAL* written by the Librarian who managed the project.¹³ In addition to presenting the context and the methodology, it was necessary to situate the Library experience in the literature on collection review. Writing the article provided an opportunity for the Librarian who led the project to reflect on the initiative, to learn more about similar projects and to share MU's experience to inform others considering a review of print book collections. The author was subsequently invited to present at a national seminar on collection development.

The second peer-reviewed article for *NRAL* was also firmly rooted in practice. In 2015 MU Library hosted a World Café exploring front-line services in new and evolving library spaces, with 60 staff from CONUL libraries in attendance. Using the World Café methodology both facilitated the exchange of experience and ideas and also gave organizers and participants an insight into how this methodology can be effectively used by any group with a common interest. In order to facilitate the World Café, the two organizers researched the methodology. Hosting and organizing a national event of this nature presented challenges as well as key learning opportunities. The subsequent article in *NRAL* drew on the actual experience/case study, participants' evaluation forms and the literature.¹⁴ It was the first time one of the two authors published a peer-reviewed article. This collaboration – between an experienced academic author and a person new to writing for peer-reviewed publication – assisted in both the development of writing skills and the development of the confidence to write. It also illustrated the value of retaining feedback forms, which are a valid form of research data, and illustrated the value of practice as the basis for peer-reviewed journal articles.

'the value of practice as the basis for peer-reviewed journal articles'

The third peer-reviewed article, in *Journal of Library Innovation (JOLI)*,¹⁵ was a collaboration between a librarian (as lead author) and a professor of adult education. The article described a collaborative initiative between the Library and the Department of Adult and Community Education at MU to integrate the death row correspondence of Nigerian writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa into the teaching of a development theories module on the BA in Community Studies. The article demonstrated that the use of research collections and the active involvement of librarians alongside lecturing staff in designing course content around a special collection has the potential to maximize the use of such collections. It also showed how the use of such collections can enhance students' learning and creates an awareness of archives as a source of interesting and otherwise unavailable information. The collaboration gave the Librarian an insight into the literature and practice of development studies, and the professor an insight into special collections and how such collections can be used in teaching and learning.

'librarians can write about topics which are of interest beyond the library community and publish alongside academic staff'

The peer-reviewed *Archivium Hibernicum* is produced by the Catholic Historical Society of Ireland, founded in 1911. MU has its roots in the seminary St. Patrick's College, which was established in 1795. Maynooth students also studied in Irish colleges on the continent, including the Irish College in Salamanca. Archives from the college, including the rectors' reports, were deposited with MU, and these formed part of the basis of an article in *Archivium Hibernicum*. The publication of an article in this journal demonstrated how librarians can write about topics which are of interest beyond the library community and publish alongside academic staff.¹⁶

Similarly, the *All Ireland Society for Higher Education Journal (AISHE-J)* is a useful forum for Irish librarians to publish alongside academic colleagues. At MU Library, staff in senior management positions undertake formal leadership training with a view to developing and

6 enhancing their leadership skills and to learn from other experienced library leaders. Two members of the Senior Management Team undertook the UK Future Leaders Programme. Part of this programme involved the writing of a reflective journal. The reflective journals were useful to draw on when writing the article about the leadership programme.¹⁷ Leadership in higher education is a concern of a wide range of staff. The publication of the article demonstrates that librarians and academic staff share common concerns, and the readership in this case is much broader than librarians.

The second article in *AISHE-J* was a collaboration between an MU and a Dublin City University librarian on the topic of the key role the library can play in supporting academic publishing.¹⁸ The invitation to a librarian to be part of a systematic review team was a recognition of the Library's expertise in research and publishing, and afforded an opportunity to develop and strengthen professional relationships.¹⁹

'inhibitors to greater engagement include a lack of confidence in our role as "writers"'

MU Library is embedded in an academic community, and there is some collaboration with academic colleagues evident in the peer-reviewed publication output. Informal feedback suggests that some of the inhibitors to greater engagement include a lack of confidence in our role as 'writers' coupled with the sense of different drivers for publishing.

Professional journal articles

This was the most popular type of publication, with 21 articles published across seven journals, 11 of them in *SCONUL Focus* and four in *An Leabharlann: The Irish Library*. There is quite a high reliance on these two publications for practice-based articles and there has been a trend among Irish librarians to publish in these two journals. *An Leabharlann: The Irish Library* is the professional journal of the LAI. A significant number of library staff are members of the LAI and would be familiar with many of the places and topics covered by the journal. Also, there is probably a natural tendency to look towards an Irish publication, particularly for those publishing for the first time. This journal comes out twice a year and represents all libraries across the island of Ireland, so is limited in the amount of material it can take from the university sector. Irish university libraries are represented on *SCONUL* and one of the authors of this paper served on the editorial board for a period. It is likely that was a factor in the high level of submissions. The fact that there are many common concerns in higher education libraries in Ireland and the UK has also contributed to its popularity.

SCONUL Focus articles were typically around 2,000 words. Two librarians, who attained associateship and fellowship respectively of the LAI, wrote about the process.²⁰ Writing about the experience gave them a space and structure to reflect on their experience and will hopefully encourage more librarians to engage with our professional body awards.

The Library frequently pilots new University initiatives with an aim to improving services. The participation in an online Disability Awareness pilot project for front-line staff allowed desk staff to learn about the topic and to participate in what was, for most, a new way of learning (online) and acquire Irish National Disability Awareness (NDA) certification. Following completion of the training, three Library staff, at different grades, wrote an article on the course content, their experience of online learning and the management of the process for *SCONUL Focus*.²¹ The experience of writing the article allowed the authors time to reflect on the benefits of both the certification and the process of piloting a new resource. It was the first time one of the three authors published.

Each year, the LAI organizes Library Ireland Week (LIW). One aspect of this is a job shadowing initiative, whereby library staff are encouraged to go on one-day swaps to various types of libraries. This provides an opportunity for staff to learn practice and procedures in a variety of library settings and use this knowledge to inform their own professional practice. It also facilitates networking across the sector. *SCONUL Focus* published an article written by six library assistants from Maynooth University who participated in LIW 2015.²²

In 2015 MU introduced a new and ambitious undergraduate curriculum. In response to this, the Library reviewed how it supports students in the development of key skills such as information literacy. This review resulted in a significant reorganization of how the Library supports teaching and learning in the undergraduate curriculum and the development of a new framework for information literacy. Library staff collaborated with academic staff in the design of the new curriculum in order to ensure a successful delivery of these changes. This reorganization and collaboration formed the basis of an article for *SCONUL Focus*.²³ The article resonated strongly with other libraries who were also reviewing how they approached information literacy within their institution, and the author was invited to the UK as a keynote speaker to discuss the issues outlined.

A member of Library staff who is on the editorial board of *NRAL* edited a themed issue of that journal and used the experience as the basis of a professional journal article for *SCONUL Focus*.²⁴

Other articles in *SCONUL Focus* included a description of the Library quality review process,²⁵ an article on organizing a World Café,²⁶ an article on developing a blog for the library quality review,²⁷ a piece on leadership challenges,²⁸ an article about situating the library at the heart of the university²⁹ and an article on the integration of a contemporary collection from Froebel College of Early Childhood Education into MU Library.³⁰

Similar topics which drew on practice were covered in the four articles in *An Leabharlann: The Irish Library*. In 2015 the LAI began to offer the Professional Knowledge Skills Base (PKSB) tool for self-evaluation of training and development needs. A librarian piloted it for the LAI and wrote about the process.³¹ Another article covered participation in Library Ireland Week.³² The Library acquired a major special collection – the St. Canice's Cathedral Library – which spawned a few publications including a practice-based article on the topic of the cataloguing of the collection.³³ Another topic covered was the future of print collections.³⁴ This article was requested following the publication of an article in an Irish national newspaper, by the same author, which discussed publishing trends and the merits of both print and electronic formats.³⁵

Three articles were published by the *Archives & Records Association Newsletter*. This reflects the increased recognition of the importance of archival collections. Since 2010 the Library has been actively growing these collections, while also becoming increasingly active in drawing on these collections as sources for publishing. In late 2013 the archive of the renowned writer Pearse Hutchinson was deposited in the Library. This was the basis of an article.³⁶ Similarly, other key archives have proved valuable as a stimulus to publication. The archives of the Salamanca College from Spain, which underpinned a peer-reviewed article, also yielded a practice-based article, by a different author, on the attendant cataloguing and endeavours to make the archives more accessible,³⁷ as did an archive relating to the Irish War of Independence.³⁸

The remaining four professional journals where Library staff published were *Catalogue & Index Periodical of CILIP*,³⁹ *CILIP Update*,⁴⁰ *Health Information News and Thinking*⁴¹ and *Information Journal Literacy Club*.⁴²

'Library staff collaborated with academic staff in the design of the new curriculum'

'key archives have proved valuable as a stimulus to publication'

Edited books/books/book chapters

Library staff contributed to one edited book in the field of librarianship published by Routledge.⁴³ This grew out of a themed issue of the Taylor & Francis journal *New Review of Academic Librarianship*. There were six individual book chapters from five publishers. The chapters in edited collections published by Roman & Littlefield⁴⁴ and Chandos/Elsevier⁴⁵ were in the field of librarianship, as was the chapter in an edited collection published by Facet. The Roman & Littlefield chapter on creating an audio archive to complement the Ken Saro-Wiwa collection resulted from a response to a call for chapters for a book on library innovation. The Chandos/Elsevier chapter on quality measures in Irish academic libraries

8 was requested by the editor of the collection, who was familiar with an earlier article in *SCONUL Focus* on the topic. The Facet chapter, written by a library assistant, related to a Kindle pilot project whereby undergraduate texts were made available on Kindle and this resulted from a call for chapters.⁴⁶

Of the three additional books Library staff contributed to, two were from an Irish publisher (Four Courts) that is well established in the history field. One of the chapters related to the Morpeth Roll. This 450-yard-long roll, containing over 250,000 signatures offering thanks to the retiring Chief Secretary, Lord Morpeth on his departure from Ireland in 1841, effectively serves as a pre-famine census. The roll was conserved and digitized in a project involving the Library and external partners. As a relatively rare project, it served as a wonderful source for the conservator involved, who published a book chapter on conserving the roll.⁴⁷ A chapter in a second volume published by Four Courts related to the collection of St Canice's Cathedral. This collection of 3,000 rare books includes four items of incunabula.⁴⁸ A final chapter related to the Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive and was published by Daraja, who specialize in human rights issues.⁴⁹

Book reviews and conference reports

Book reviews and conference reports are often a useful first step into publishing. A book review allows the writer to consider the topic in depth and demonstrate their own critical understanding of the thematic area covered by the book. Between 2013 and 2018, Library staff published five book reviews and four conference reports. These were on a variety of topics, including librarians supporting research,⁵⁰ library space,⁵¹ university spaces in the digital era⁵² and, outside the Library literature, on the topic of a significant figure in the 1916 Rising in Ireland⁵³ and Irish chaplains during the First World War.⁵⁴

Library staff are encouraged to report on conferences and events they have attended, so that the learning can be disseminated throughout the organization. Transforming this into a published conference review can act as a relatively easy first step in publishing.

Reviews of the 2015⁵⁵ and 2016 CONUL conference were published in *SCONUL Focus*,⁵⁶ an IFLA 2017 conference report was published in *An Leabharlann: The Irish Library*⁵⁷ and a music conference was the topic of a review for *ACLAIIR Newsletter*.⁵⁸

Reflection

Taking time to prepare and write a paper on any aspect of practice allows reflection and analysis, which is extremely valuable. It allows the writer to consider what they do and understand it in the context of the literature, thus giving a broader perspective. Developing the discipline and motivation that are required to write consistently are also useful attributes that staff can adopt for other areas of their work. Furthermore, receiving feedback from colleagues at work and from peer reviewers can help develop resilience. Writing is a transferable skill and the value of writing as a form of continuing professional development (CPD) is emphasized along with the desirability of developing a professional portfolio, both for personal and professional development.

Where copyright permitted, articles and posters by Library staff were deposited in Maynooth University Research Library Archive (MURAL), our open access (OA) institutional repository. This is in keeping with our aspiration to be exemplars in the practice of OA. Some of the emphasis in publishing has been on sharing experience. As a result, staff have become more familiar and competent in terms of social media, and issues such as OA and copyright.

'Book reviews and conference reports are often a useful first step into publishing'

'the discipline and motivation that are required to write ...are also useful attributes that staff can adopt for other areas'

9 Sustaining and improving a culture of publishing takes time and effort by both staff and Library senior management. The Library has an annual coffee morning where those who have published, presented externally or acquired a degree or diploma during the year, are honoured. This has established a positive culture, encouraging and recognizing staff efforts. It has also helped people to recognize the value of their work and their contribution to the field of librarianship. This is a critical point as staff will not always see this as part of their brief. Through the process of writing, their sense of their role both within the Library and the field of librarianship is expanded and enhanced.

Conclusion

The Library is currently in the early stages of developing its next three-year strategic plan, and professional development for Library staff will be an important part of this. However, the overall University context may change with the recent appointment of a new staff member in Human Resources with responsibility for staff training and development. E-portfolios and keeping reflective journals offer interesting possibilities for recording experience.

New methods of publishing including the possibility of establishing a university press will be explored as part of the plan and will impact on the direction of Library staff publishing. The Library has worked with the Physics Department in making Open Journal of Astrophysics available via the Scholastica platform, and has facilitated making a peer-reviewed journal, produced by a University Centre, available on OA through the institutional repository MURAL (Maynooth University Research Archive Library). The Library is exploring facilitating the production of a military studies journal using the Open Journal System (OJS) and open publishing is the focus of Research Week 2019.

The Library has had an over-reliance on two publications for practice-based articles – *An Leabharlann: The Irish Library* and *SCONUL Focus* – and alternative ways of sharing practice-based articles need to be explored. While the annual CONUL conference elicits a large and diverse range of papers, no formal conference papers are currently produced. This event could be a catalyst for a publication from across the Irish university library sector, which would both serve to give a snapshot of the sector at present and also as a means to encourage more library staff to publish.

Similarly, the Library needs to broaden the range of peer-reviewed journals in which staff publish. Little has been published in North American, European or Australian journals. While some publications have resulted from significant acquisitions, this also needs to be explored further and collaborative publication with academic colleagues offers an opportunity for the Library to have a stronger position in scholarship, moving from being a provider of information to being a creator of information.

Balancing writing alongside day-to-day obligations can present challenges. Within reason, staff can progress practice-based writing during normal working hours. However, it is not possible to offer time within the working day for more detailed research and much of that is done in personal time. This is a challenge in libraries across Ireland and beyond and consideration needs to be given to this issue. A recently established LAI Publishing Group might usefully look at this issue.

For some years MU Library has been very proactive in terms of academic writing and other forms of professional engagement. This has undoubtedly led to an enhanced reputation in this area as well as a broader engagement with the wider academic community both nationally and internationally, and the evidence supports this. By leading nationally in this endeavour, MU Library has demystified the process of writing and made a significant contribution to the further development of academic writing by library staff nationally.

'Through the process of writing, their sense of their role ... is expanded and enhanced'

'MU Library has demystified the process of writing'

Abbreviations and Acronyms

A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the 'full list of industry A&As' link: <http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa>

Competing Interests

The authors have declared there are no competing interests.

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