

Report on the Consortium of National and University Libraries (CONUL) Annual Conference

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CONUL (Consortium of National and University Libraries) is a consortium of Ireland's main research libraries.

The theme of the second annual CONUL conference, which was held 1–2 June 2016, in Athlone, Ireland, was 'Going further together: Collaboration in Irish academic and research libraries'.

The 2016 conference had a lot to live up to following the inaugural conference in 2015, and it managed to meet and exceed the success of 2015 with a range of speakers and presenters in parallel and plenary sessions over the course of the two days.

The theme of collaboration was interpreted and presented in many practical, interesting and thought provoking ways. Presentations and posters covered the many topics suggested in the call for papers, including collaboration in teaching and learning, collection development and management and user experience (UX).

Collaboration was interpreted to include sharing storage, personnel and platforms, both within and between institutions, and between institutions and the communities in which they exist. The collaborations highlighted at this conference were about building on existing research and projects and trying to solve problems and achieve outcomes which, for reasons of constraint in terms of finance, space or expertise, could not be achieved by individual organisations. Challenging times, with budgetary constraints and competing demands, were seen to stimulate collaboration.

The keynote speakers were Ivy Anderson, Director of Collections at the California Digital Library (CDL), and Dr Susan Gibbons, University Librarian and Deputy Provost for Libraries and Scholarly Communication, at Yale University.

Ivy Anderson reflected on the riches and challenges of our print legacy, which forms the record of our intellectual heritage. With the shift from a print-based to a digital culture, the CDL offers shared services, from online collections to innovation in scholarly communication and shared storage facilities. A key challenge for the CDL is how best to preserve and protect the intellectual legacy for scholars of today and historians of tomorrow in the face of budgetary and space challenges.

Some of the themes highlighted by Ivy Anderson, such as shared storage facilities, shared collections and economies of scale, were also mentioned by Michelle Agar of TCD Library in her presentation of her experience of the CAVAL consortium in Australia.

Shared storage, collections and a union catalogue were topics high on the agenda of the conference as they are key areas in the CONUL strategy and were topics for discussion in at least two of the parallel sessions. Eoin McCarney of University College Dublin considered a why Ireland needs a CONUL union catalogue and Peter Guidling of the Library at TCD presented on the Legal Deposit Libraries shared cataloguing programme.

Susan Gibbons's keynote presentation elaborated on an ethnographic study of library users, which originated at the University of Rochester and continued at Yale University. At its core was the question 'How can we stay aligned with the user of the library as their research practices changes?' An anthropologist joined the library team, and students were observed using the methods of anthropology and ethnography. Susan emphasised the importance of making changes based on the findings in order to encourage students to continue to collaborate in the process.

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Siobhan Dunne, of Dublin City University, had also undertaken research into how the library caters for students based on their actual behaviour. Siobhan emphasised the importance of capturing the student voice. The findings have been used to improve undergraduate study skills modules.

Collaboration between faculty and library was the subject of a number of presentations. Lorna Dodd, Maynooth University (MU) Library, and Brian McKenzie, MU Department of History, presented on the new interdisciplinary curriculum that MU have introduced, which includes a programme on critical skills. Every single one of the skills in the programme relates to information literacy in some way – for example, understanding plagiarism forms part of understanding academic standards.

Collaboration with MU Department of History's MA in Historical Archives focused on the library collections. Hugh Murphy and Barbara McCormack of MU Library spoke of recognising the expertise of library staff in areas such as project management, financial management, applying for funding and leadership.

John McManus, from the Library of TCD, and Dr Brendan Power, also from TCD, spoke of a collaboration with the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the British Library to archive websites relating to the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland. They learned many lessons which will be useful when it comes to framing web-archiving legislation in Ireland.

All speakers emphasised the benefits of collaboration to the library and academic staff.

Speakers from the National Library of Ireland (NLI), Katherine McSharry and Elizabeth Kirwan (who is the curator of the National Photographic Archive – part of the NLI), illustrated how 'community collecting' and exhibitions are ways to connect in a relationship of equals with people who hold important pieces in the jigsaw of our national story. These are ways to collaborate with new and longstanding communities, grow the collections of the NLI and NPA and bring out what is held by local communities.

Laura Rooney-Ferris of the Irish Hospice Foundation and Jane Burns of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland had harvested tweets on the hashtags #bereavement #hospice #palliative #grieving #grief #, complicatedgrief; they presented a well-received and fascinating paper on new rituals around grief, using evidence from social media platforms.

The CONUL directors took the opportunity to present 'Ireland's memory, Ireland's discovery', the CONUL strategy for Ireland's major research libraries 2016–19.

The conference featured more than twenty sponsors and exhibitors offering information on a wide range of products and services.

Prizes were awarded to the CONUL ANLTC Library Assistant Award winners and runners up and to the poster presenter winners and the first time poster presenter bursary winner. (See Kathryn Smith's article, 'The ANLTC Library Assistant Award', in this issue of Focus.)

Overall the conference highlighted that those involved in collaborations were fulfilling the theme of the conference and 'Going further together'.

Useful links

CONUL website: <http://www.conul.ie/> [accessed 12 July 2017]

CONUL conference website: <http://conference.conul.ie/> [accessed 12 July 2017]

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CONUL Strategy 2016–2019 <http://www.conul.ie/conul-strategy-2016-2019/>
[accessed 12 July 2017]

Livestream videos on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLp6Pui4M5LhHTJLfp1fHpStPeK1KqLdOq> [accessed 12 July 2017]

Conference presentations on SlideShare:
<http://www.slideshare.net/conulconference/presentations/2> [accessed 12 July 2017]

CONUL ANLTC Library Assistant Award 2016: prize winning and highly commended entries:
<http://www.libfocus.com/2016/06/conul-anltc-library-assistant-award-2016.html>
[accessed 12 July 2017]

Twitter: @CONULconf #conulac16

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ConulConference/>

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