

CILIP Conference 2019
Manchester, 3-4 July

I was awarded the CILIP Scotland Professional Development Fund to attend the CILIP Conference in Manchester on 3rd and 4th of July. As a young professional recently enrolled for Chartership, the fund provided me with an opportunity to build invaluable networks and hear engaging talks from all sectors of the profession. The main focus of the conference was equality, diversity and inclusion. It is a field that I am particularly interested in and, as a result of attending, I have made contacts with CILIP staff and librarians in other institutions, which will be used to share best practice on promoting these values.

Day One

Following the welcome speech by CILIP CEO Nick Poole, the first keynote was by technologist and fair artificial intelligence advocate Kriti Sharma. Kriti's talk explored how the AI industry is sorely in need of diversity and how this affects its marginalised users. She provided her toolkit towards a fairer AI world and mentioned the work that she had been engaged with through her organisation AI for Good. It was great to start off the conference with Kriti's talk as it highlighted why diversity is important in sectors that represent and serve communities.

The next session I attended was a seminar on the Libraries Change Lives award, showcasing two success stories of public engagement and inclusion. The speakers – representing the Mitchell Library in Glasgow and Norfolk public libraries – made a clear point that they would not like to be limited by the language of project work. Rather, they see advocacy and inclusion as an ongoing commitment, one that needs to be continually reviewed in order to serve its communities better.

At the end of the session was a brief announcement by Dawn Finch, the Chair of CILIP's Ethics committee. Dawn emphasised the organisation's commitment to widening access and diversity and announced that, following the success of the CILIP BAME advocacy group, that further groups will be formed – LGBT+ advocacy group, disability group and women's group. These groups will be an opportunity for me to create further contacts within CILIP and continue sharing best practice.

Lunch provided an excellent opportunity for further networking and an exploration of the exhibition stalls. I was very interested in the stall by BookLove – a multicultural travelling book festival, which focuses on diverse children's books. I also engaged with the stall of CILIP's cataloguing and indexing group and found out about more initiatives which I can get involved with.

The second keynote of the day was by Liz Jolly, the Chief Librarian of the British Library. Liz shared her experience of building a career in the library sector and offered a perspective on how we can diversify paths into the profession. She emphasised that pathways into professional development are very rarely straightforward and that variety should be welcomed and celebrated.

The following panel was on Innovation in Public Libraries, with attendees from the Manchester LGBT Archive, Digital Leeds, Libraries Hacked and Kirklees Libraries. Of particular interest was the work of Kirklees Libraries to engage young users from disadvantaged communities with libraries through poetry and spoken word. Kirstie Wilson shared how this initiative succeeded in emphasising the community role of libraries among pupils and destroying structures of social privilege.

The final session of the day was from the Technical branch of the programme and focused on RDA, ISNI and Linked data. It was a particularly useful session for developing the IT & Communication section of my PKSB. The talk on RDA (structured like an entertaining treasure hunt) in particular was very enlightening and, I thought, more accessible than similar talks I have attended in the past.

Day one was rounded off with a drinks reception at the Science & Technology Museum, which provided further networking opportunities.

Day Two

The second day of the conference began with a breakfast seminar by EveryLibrary, a political action committee for library activism. They introduced the LibrariesDeliver project, an important platform for encouraging engagement and material support for libraries in need. They also presented frameworks for successful advocacy campaigns.

The first keynote of the day was delivered by Hong-Anh Nguyen of the King's Fund and was immediately followed by a panel on Diversity in the Profession. These two sessions worked very well in conjunction as they both conveyed lived experiences of marginalised communities. Hong-Anh's talk highlighted the need for an ongoing sector-wide commitment to inclusion of BAME professionals. She pointed out that we need to make personal as well as institutional commitments to diversity. A very useful takeaway for me was Hong-Anh's point that data keeps us accountable and allows us to implement inclusion practices into our day-to-day job. Going forward, I will be implementing diversity data monitoring in my cataloguing work as a self-assessment tool.

The follow-up panel focused on four speakers' lived experiences in the library profession. It was supplemented by answers to an anonymous survey circulated beforehand, in which professionals not in attendance could share their own experiences of marginalisation. This was a powerful tool, which made everyone in the room reassess the power they hold and the actions they can take to make the profession more accessible for BAME, LGBT+ and disabled library workers.

The Diversity in the Professional panel and Hong-Anh's keynote were easily the highlight of my conference experience. They allowed for difficult conversations to be had and action plans to be put in place. It was great to see that CILIP as an organisation has made a steady, ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion.

In the following keynote, Patrick Lambe focused on the role of library professionals in building a knowledge society. He highlighted that it's important to create open spaces for discussion and disagreement and that we need to adapt an ecosystem approach in which we collaborate with other knowledge management professions.

My final seminar session was on Impact and influence, as part of the career development strand of the conference. I was very interested in the talk by Kay Grieves and the bespoke impact and engagement model she has implemented at her institution. As it was implemented in a Higher Education institution, it was interesting to think how this could be transferred to other library contexts.

The conference finished with an engaging talk by Aat Vos on transforming library spaces. I found his concept of the "third place" very helpful and the talk communicated very well with the idea of the library as a public place of sanctuary. It was also fascinating to see examples of different library spaces from all over the world.

Reflections

Attending the CILIP Conference was an enlightening experience. I left Manchester with more questions than answers, which I believe is always the mark of a successful professional development event. I have fostered valuable networks, discovered multiple ways in which I can continue my involvement with CILIP, and developed three important areas of my PKSB report – IT & Communication, Leadership and advocacy and Customer focus. I was also happy to see the organisation's commitment to increasing access to librarianship and diversifying as a professional body. Many of the practical examples given over the two days were inspiring and easily applicable in many contexts. I am grateful to CILIP Scotland for the opportunity and I hope to be able to attend many more CILIP events in the future.