

# Health Sciences Libraries Journal

Official Journal of the Health  
Sciences Libraries Group of the  
Library Association of Ireland



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## eISSN

3088-6694

Published by University College Cork,  
Cork, Ireland on behalf of the Health  
Sciences Libraries Group, Library  
Association of Ireland.

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## Editorial

**Jean McMahon**

Editor-in-Chief

Tallaght University Hospital, Dublin

Welcome to the third issue of Health Sciences Libraries Journal (HSLJ). June is when Pride is celebrated so for this issue, we put out a call out for submissions relating to Diversity, Equity, Belonging and Inclusion (DEBI) and were not disappointed. Inclusion is a strong theme of Dr Deborah Reed's article, where she reflects on her career in librarianship in the UK and Ireland, and in which she discusses accessibility in Further Education in the UK. The discourse around DEBI is increasingly centred on the 'B' for Belonging. Many of our organisations are already highly diverse so the focus then shifts to ensuring equity and a sense of belonging for all. This is no less true for the library community. Libraries always strive to be inclusive spaces and it is interesting to see this turned inwards in the article by Walsh and co-authors, who examine accessibility and belonging for neurodiverse librarians and library workers. O'Neill and O'Connor share their experience of running a very impactful Human Library event at Dublin City University (DCU). This international project allows human 'Books' to be borrowed by 'Readers' with the aim of challenging stigma and fostering understanding. Jane Burns writes about the power of Graphic Medicine in portraying trauma, both across and between communities, and how it harnesses the universality of imagery to overcome barriers to understanding and shared experience.

HSLJ very much aims to encourage library and information science (LIS) students and recent graduates to publish and we are delighted to have Annmarie Whyte's dissertation summary about Australia's role in the development of LIS. We also have an article by two early-career librarians, Murphy and Adydan, from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, about a scaffolded model used to train librarians to provide systematic and scoping review services.

As well as career reflections, regular features in HSLJ include 'Librarians in Interesting Roles'. Here, Penny Wiggle describes her transition through three sectors: from public libraries in her native New Zealand, through health, to school librarianship. We have a historical piece by Mairéad Mooney about James Wilkinson, who steered Cork City's library service through challenging times. McKeown and Lombard's practice-based piece on AI, which they also presented at the Health Sciences Libraries Group (HSLG) Conference, is very welcome, as is the report on the conference because such contributions mean the learnings can be shared more widely. Lastly, the Irish library community experienced a very sad loss with the recent passing of Beatrice Doran and our thanks to Kate Kelly for remembering Beatrice here.



## Practice-Based Article

# **Not Just Evidence-Based, But Experience-Based: Establishing a Neurodivergent Peer Support Network for Staff in the Library and Information Sector**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A need for peer support for neurodivergent librarians, in line with the neurodiversity movement, was identified. This article describes this need and the establishment of the Neurodivergent Library and Information Staff Network (NLISN), from initial ideas such as NeuroSpicy Libraries, to its more formal recreation as NLISN, along with a description of its current activities.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Neurodiversity as a term is relatively recent and deals with the range, or diversity, in the ways that our brains function. This is despite descriptions and diagnoses for individual neurodivergent conditions being around for over a century (Autism was first coined as a term in 1911, Evans, 2013) but tending to be classed as mental health conditions or deficits rather than part of a natural diversity in human brain functionality. Because of the newness of some key terms, we give a brief explanation of them and how we use them in this article, along with the diagnoses that might be associated with them.

- Neurodiversity – the range or diversity in human brain function across a group or population.
- Neurotypical - Someone with average, or typical, cognitive function regarding the way their brain works to learn, communicate, process information, and experience the world.
- Neurodivergent - Someone with cognitive function that differs from the average.
- Neurotype - a way of describing a type of cognitive function (includes neurotypical and neurodivergent).
- Neurodivergence - a neurotype that is not neurotypical.
- Neurodivergent - someone with a neurodivergence.

There is some disagreement around which neurotypes fall under the “neurodivergent” labels, but neurodivergence is normally classed as a difference in the way your brain processes information that is persistent, which exists from childhood onwards and which causes difficulties in navigating everyday life and work. Generally, most classifications include the following under the banner of neurodivergences:

- Autism
- ADHD
- Dyspraxia
- Dyscalculia
- Dyslexia

But we might also include labels such as:

- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Tic Disorders such as Tourette's
- Stammering
- Acquired Brain injuries

Although awareness and diagnosis levels of the neurotypes above have increased in recent years, it is generally agreed in the academic literature, rather than the popular press, that levels of neurodivergence are generally still under-diagnosed and under-reported. For example, in a recent review looking at autism diagnoses in different age groups, Stewart & Happe (2025) found a significant under-diagnosis in middle-aged and older adults, that is, people who met the diagnostic criteria but had not previously had a diagnosis. Because of under-diagnosis such as this, it is hard to pin down exactly how many neurodivergent people are in the wider population, however, meta studies tend to come up with figures of anywhere between 15 to 25%, with dyslexia being most common at around 10%. Other diagnoses such as ADHD and autism are generally quoted as being anywhere between 3 to 7%. It is now widely accepted that multiple neurotypes can be present in one person, for example, ADHD/autism (sometimes called AuDHD), even though until 2013, the main criteria used for diagnosis from the DSM - Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), stated that it was impossible to be both autistic and ADHD. Awareness levels of neurodiversity in general, the neurotypes within this, and the benefits and differences of having an effective and neurodiverse workplace has increased over recent years. This is especially true of higher education, where the authors of this article have been largely working, and where we have sought to better support library users.

### **NEUROSPICY LIBRARIES (EARLY STAGES)**

It is against this background of greater awareness and seeking to better support our library users that we realised that no-one seemed to be considering better support for neurodivergent library *workers* rather than *users*.

In an influential blog post, Eng (2017) interviewed Charlie Remy, an autistic librarian, who said that "*...libraries can be good places for autistic people to work,*" and recalled that during a job interview, the panel shared "*...that there were likely many faculty on the spectrum at their university.*"

Recently, Moeller (2025, p.296), a neurodivergent librarian and researcher, stated in her thesis that "*...librarianship is a field that is especially appealing to neurodivergent workers, and... there is a higher rate of neurodivergence among library workers than any existing statistics would indicate.*"

These comments, alongside our work, which we will detail below, are strong indicators that neurodivergent representation is already present in this sector, however, Moeller (2025, p.18) also highlights that "*With the goal of serving their communities, libraries have begun to practice neuroinclusion for patrons but have yet*

*to do so for neurodivergent library workers.”*

This is echoed in other literature, such as Anderson (2018), “...*there is a distinct lack of information about adults on the autism spectrum within the library field, and a lack of literature about neurodiversity in the library profession.*” Later, Camp and Finlay (2025) showed that this issue still prevails, asserting that “*Within the LIS domain much of the literature related to the experiences of neurodivergent individuals is focused on that of library users,*” and “...*both the skew of the LIS literature that does exist, and the scarcity of literature of neurodivergent LIS staff experiences, indicates that there is still work to be done.*”

This is an issue that applies worldwide, with similar findings in Ochsner and Dinneen (2025, p.324), who note: “*Compared to research on children, adult neurodivergent stakeholders of the academic library have mostly been omitted from LIS research.*”

With this background of limited awareness of neurodiversity in library and information work and limited support for neurodivergent library and information workers, Joanne Fitzpatrick initiated a pilot support project in late 2022 called “Neurodiverse Library Leaders: strengthening ALN leadership through neurodiversity” with the support of Academic Libraries North (ALN) (<https://academiclibrariesnorth.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/>). This came with a small amount of money for the project from ALN, but the true benefit was the requirement for two of us from different ALN library services to commit time and energy into exploring the need for support for neurodivergent library workers. Andrew Walsh came on board at this point to fulfil the requirement for collaboration as he worked for a different institution to Joanne Fitzpatrick. The project came to be known as ‘NeuroSpicy Libraries’.

In this project, we tried different ways of communicating with other neurodivergent librarians through social media, a closed online network, and email lists. We carried out some research into how neurodivergent library and information workers experience the workplace environment, manage their workload, and recruitment and interviews (Fitzpatrick & Walsh, 2023, a, b & c). We presented at the ALN Conference that year, as well as at multiple webinars, wrote guest blogposts, and generally tried to increase awareness of what we were trying with NeuroSpicy Libraries (<https://nlisn.org/outputs/>).

In this initial phase, we were pleased by how much interest there was in a group aiming to support neurodivergent library and information workers, not just in our core, Higher Education, library-dominated networks, but across a range of information and archive work and in a range of different sectors. It was also clear, however, that although we found a large number of neurodivergent library and information workers were engaging with us, no one knew how many neurodivergent people worked in these settings, or what the mix of neurotypes might be.

At the end of our first year of NeuroSpicy Libraries, there was a meeting to discuss what people would find useful, would like us to focus on, and how we might be most valuable to them as a group. This fed into our creation of NLISN (see below), which was set up as a longer term network, to go beyond the end of this initial project.

We finished the project with a strong sense from the people engaging with us that there was a need and desire for a group or network that:

1. Acted as a peer support network for neurodivergent library and information workers
2. Worked across sectors and job roles
3. Facilitated training for neurodivergent workers
4. Enabled informal networking
5. Evidenced representation and impact

Underlying this seemed to be that people often knew what they struggled with as neurodivergent workers but didn't know how others in similar situations dealt with those challenges, what accommodations might be reasonable to ask for, or how to advocate for their strengths at work. So, sharing these things with others was at the core of much of NLISN's value as a peer support organisation, through networking, training or just evidence that neurodivergence was widespread through our profession.

We were also told by our members that with the limited time available for committee members to spend on NLISN activities, it was important not to get diverted into activities aimed at allies, employers, or interested third parties, such as training organisations in how to create library services aimed at neurodivergent users or build collections with neurodiversity as a topic.

### **NLISN BEGINNINGS**

This clear interest for a peer support group or network led to us transitioning from a limited project into something that could be clearly defined and sustainable in the medium to long term, and which is now the Neurodivergent Library and Information Staff Network, NLISN (pronounced as en-listen). We recruited a committee of volunteers, created our new identity as NLISN, and started a much longer-term scheme of work, with our first official meeting in March 2024. We focussed on expanding and developing the activities that people told us were most valuable in our initial project over the first year.

Our jiscmail list (<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/nlisen>) has nearly 300 subscribers and we have supplemented that with a membership platform (172 members) and a Discord server (58 members), all of which are intended only for neurodivergent library and information workers, with the variety enabling people to choose the platform through which they most want to engage with us. More publicly, we use Bluesky as our main social media platform (1,583 followers) as well as a LinkedIn page (161 followers). All figures were correct January 2026. We also have monthly informal "coffee catch-ups", run regularly over MS Teams, where anyone is welcome to drop in and talk "live" about anything they want to. We have seen members of the network overwhelmed by unexpected levels of communication through certain platforms, so this choice has helped us meet our members' needs in a more controllable way.

We regularly run training sessions for our members, largely as webinars, but with at least one in-person event each year, particularly to help facilitate informal networking. There were 6 training events (excluding coffee catch-ups) in 2025 (<https://nlisen.org/past-events/>).

We have experimented with different ways of enabling direct peer support across members, with a pilot buddying scheme, pairing up people to have informal discussions about shared workplace experiences. Growing out of this was the realisation that there was a desire for a more strongly structured and guided experience, rather than the informal pairing of equals that we had envisaged.

Additionally, we have had some significant turnover in committee members during 2024/2025, as we established the network and people struggled to combine their day jobs with volunteering. Neurodivergent people are often prone to being overwhelmed and burnt out, with the additional stresses of navigating neurotypical expectations and structures in the workplace. Even so, committee members, who are all neurodivergent themselves, have increased their profiles, talking at events about our work (e.g. at the CITE conference run by the Copyright Licensing Agency), making guest appearances in podcasts (e.g. <https://hiringlibrarians.com/2025/03/18/hiring-librarians-podcast-s02-e05-joanne-fitzpatrick/>), presenting at conferences, such as UKSG, about neurodivergence in libraries (Ball et al, 2025), and even writing a peer-reviewed article about information literacy as autistic library professionals (Haire, 2025).

By summer 2025, we felt we were in a more established position so produced our first (now annual) cycle of

reporting, creating a plan for the coming year, and holding an AGM (<https://zenodo.org/records/16919160>). This was not just an opportunity to let our members know what we had done and intended to do in the near future, but a chance to reflect on our activities, our capacity to carry out the work, and what we thought was most valuable to build upon in the coming year.

### **NLISN GROWTH AND LOOKING FORWARD**

In addition to establishing this new cycle of review, plan and AGM, the key areas we planned to develop and grow for mid-2025 to mid-2026 were:

- The membership offer
- Evaluate our pilot buddying scheme
- Carry out some statistical research
- Collect and disseminate case studies
- Develop our events
- Carry out Forum development
- Maintain and grow our online presence

Already half way through our reporting and planning year at the time of writing, we are progressing well with these.

One of the most common questions we get asked is: “How do I join NLISN?”. From the start, the process of becoming a member has been quite informal. People can join our JiscMail discussion list, come along to events, follow us on social media, or engage with us any way they wish, and we will consider them part of the network. To satisfy people who seemed to need a more formal membership option, we launched a membership platform this year (<https://membermojo.co.uk/nlisen>), which includes the option to donate towards our costs. Alongside other ways to keep in touch with us and with other members, as mentioned above, we initially had an online forum for people who wanted to visit a specific place for discussion, rather than having potentially overwhelming levels of discussion pushed to them via email. This had low levels of usage, so we shifted to trying Discord mid-2025 instead, setting up a Discord server that members could join, with the aim of developing that as our forum and assessing if it would work better for our members.

Peer support is central to our offer, with the most explicit example of this being our buddying pilot. We have reviewed this and as mentioned above, we think we need a more formal offering delivered by professionals, so we are currently investigating options such as coaching for members and are hoping to have something definitive in place by the end of our reporting year in mid-2026.

During the second half of 2025, NLISN ran a survey, which reached over 1,000 neurodivergent library and information workers in the UK and Ireland, and which aimed to get a clearer picture of neurodivergent representation in library work. Members of the NLISN committee are currently analysing the data and writing up results, with publication planned for later in 2026.

Alongside the quantitative data gathering that we have been carrying out, we have also begun to collect case studies of NLISN’s impact and the experiences of neurodivergent library workers. The first three of these have been published on our website and we will collect more in the future. These case studies are overwhelmingly positive, with one sharing that *“I connected deeply with these strangers and the topics we discussed, which led to a profound sense of belonging...”* and another emphatically stating that *“These changes saved my life.”*

Our events and training are the most visible and successful parts of our offering. Feedback shows that

attendees really value being in all-neurodivergent spaces and networking with people like them in the same sector, with comments about what they enjoyed including:

“Feeling like part of a community that genuinely get what it's like to be ND at work.”

“The feeling that I was with my people.”

“...sense of belonging that other librarians have the same experiences as me.”

Network members at events have also praised the content of the presentations, which are delivered in the majority by neurodivergent people;

“Honestly it was the most useful leadership training I've been to for a long time.”

“The content was great.”

“The personal stories of participants were really powerful.”

Also highlighted in feedback was our inclusive approach to planning events;

“What really stood out for me was the 'social contract': expectations intro, agenda, access, language, respite break, Q&A guidelines...”

“The support from colleagues was amazing.”

“Everything made sense.”

We are continuing to develop our events, and as part of this we are piloting a conference in Leeds, in July 2026, over two days, the core of which will be to help develop the contacts and meaningful networks that contribute to our members' progression in their careers. If the event is successful, we will build future conferences into our plans each year.

Finally, in our aims for the current year, we want to build on our successful online presence in a sustainable way, in particular by ensuring our resource lists are manageable for the volunteer team to maintain, as well as being easy to navigate and use for our members.

We would like to encourage library and information workers who know, or suspect, that they are neurodivergent to follow and join in with NLISN in whatever way they find most useful and accessible. No official diagnosis is needed, recognising that people have financial, social, and other barriers to diagnosis, or they may just suspect they are neurodivergent and wish to talk to others as their first step towards self-diagnosis or “official” diagnosis. We are primarily focussed on the UK and Ireland, but we have welcomed both attendees and speakers to our online events from all over the world.

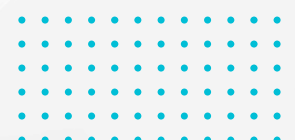
We have also developed links with similar organisations elsewhere for sharing ideas, primarily ANDPA in Australia (<https://andpa.org/>) and NeuroGLAM in Canada (currently on Discord by invite link only). NLISN continues to learn from our colleagues across the world and welcomes any connections readers can help us make with similar organisations we have not yet discovered.

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Practice-Based Article**Depicting Trauma, Building Community: Expanding the Scope of Graphic Medicine-Comics, Shared Experience and Collective Care****Author: Jane Burns, MBA, MLIS, MPhil, FLAI**

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<https://www.linkedin.com/in/janeaburns/>**Artist: K. Woodman-Maynard**[WoodmanMaynard.com](http://WoodmanMaynard.com)

Comics supplied and used with permission

**ABSTRACT**

Graphic Medicine is an interdisciplinary field that brings together comics, visual storytelling and health sciences to explore experiences of health, illness, disability, grief and care. It understands the graphic as visual language that bridges lived experience and clinical knowledge, enabling perspectives that are often difficult to capture through text alone. By valuing both the study and creation of comics, Graphic Medicine broadens how healthcare culture is represented and understood.

While Graphic Medicine has become an established field for examining illness narratives, its capacity to address broader experiences of trauma remains underexamined. There is focus on individual trauma and experiences but it is also an increasing area for dealing with the issues of collective trauma within groups, communities and cultures. This article argues that comics within the Graphic Medicine tradition are uniquely positioned to depict individual and collective trauma while also fostering forms of community that extend beyond clinical settings. Drawing on a case study this paper uses recent immigration enforcement activity in Minnesota, USA as reflected in the artwork of K. Woodman-Maynard. As a case study it examines how these comics functioned as a means of collective reflection, community identification and health related meaning making in contexts of a contemporary comic centred on shared traumatic experience. The article demonstrates how visual narrative conveys trauma through fragmentation, style and metaphor, while constructing communal meaning within both the narrative world and among engaged readers. By examining how these comics function as spaces of recognition, validation and connection, the article expands current understandings of Graphic Medicine to include trauma across many cultures and communities. It concludes by considering implications for health sciences libraries and education, highlighting the role of graphic narratives in trauma informed collections and practices.

**KEYWORDS**

graphic medicine, comics, trauma, displacement, collective care

**DEFINING TRAUMA**

For the purposes of this article, trauma is understood not only as an individual psychological response to discrete events, but as a condition that operates across social and structural contexts, shaping wellbeing, identity and community life. Contemporary health research increasingly recognises trauma as a significant determinant of mental and physical health that may persist even when it does not manifest as a formally diagnosed clinical condition (Herman, 2015; Farmer, 2004). Socioeconomic factors such as displacement, precarity, surveillance and chronic insecurity are closely linked to adverse health outcomes and emotional distress, yet these experiences frequently fall outside the scope of individualised clinical encounters and biomedical models of care (Marmot, 2010; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). While Graphic Medicine has traditionally foregrounded illness narratives situated within healthcare settings (Green & Myers, 2010; Czerwicz et al., 2015), comics also provide a vital means of representing trauma that emerges from social conditions rather than from singular medical events. Through visual strategies such as fragmentation, metaphor and the deliberate use of silence, graphic narratives are particularly well suited to expressing the cumulative, non-linear and often unspeakable dimensions of socio-economic trauma (Chute, 2016). Importantly, these narratives do more than document hardship. They create spaces of recognition and shared understanding that support collective reflection and can foster a sense of community both within the narrative itself and among readers who engage with the work (Charon, 2006; Bagnall & Fickel, 2019).

**GRAPHIC MEDICINE, TRAUMA AND COMMUNITY**

This article is informed by sustained engagement with Graphic Medicine as both a research field and a collaborative practice. Graphic Medicine is best understood not as a fixed corpus of texts, but as a collective endeavour that brings together artists, readers, educators, clinicians, librarians, and researchers concerned with health, illness, and social experience. The Graphic Medicine International Collective, while based in the United States, operates through interconnected chapters in multiple countries, including Italy, Spain, Germany, Japan, and Ireland, where a national chapter was established in May 2026. Across these contexts, individual perspectives reflect a shared set of goals, most centrally a commitment to making space for voices that are often excluded from dominant medical, academic, and social narratives.

Positioning trauma within Graphic Medicine does not involve redefining the field, but rather making visible what already lies at its core. From its earliest formulations, Graphic Medicine has been concerned with lived experience, narrative agency, and whose knowledge is recognised as meaningful. This focus is especially relevant for those experiencing trauma, as trauma frequently involves the loss, disruption or erosion of voice, both medically and figuratively. Individuals affected by trauma are often spoken for within institutional systems, rendered silent by fear, stigma, language barriers or cognitive and emotional overload. Graphic Medicine offers modes of expression that do not rely exclusively on verbal fluency or written literacy, thereby widening the conditions under which experience can be communicated and received.

Understanding Graphic Medicine as a community rather than solely as an academic field or publication genre is central to this argument. The Graphic Medicine ecosystem includes not only books and journals, but also workshops, classrooms, reading groups, zines, newsletters, and informal digital platforms such as Substack and social media. Within these spaces, meaning is created dialogically through reader response, shared interpretation, and reciprocity. Experience circulates between creators and audiences, often blurring

distinctions between expert and non-expert knowledge. From this perspective, comics do not simply depict communities affected by trauma. They help constitute those communities by enabling recognition, connection, and shared reflection.

The use of drawing is particularly significant in this context. Visual storytelling can function as a form of connectable literacy, allowing communication to occur even when individuals do not share a spoken language or level of formal education. For people experiencing trauma, drawing can offer a way to express embodied memory, emotion, and uncertainty without the pressure of coherent verbal narration. In both clinical and community settings, comics and drawing practices can therefore support understanding, consolation, and the exchange of information where conventional modes of communication may be inaccessible or insufficient. This capacity to restore or reconfigure voice is central to Graphic Medicine's core aim and underscores why trauma belongs squarely within its scope.

**Figure 1.**

*Washed Ashore*



Artist: Murat Sayin

Within a Graphic Medicine framework, Murat Sayin's illustration can be read as a health humanities intervention that visualises collective trauma beyond the clinic. While the image centres on the lifeless body of a refugee child, its power lies equally in how it implicates the viewer. The drifting paper boat serves as a visual metaphor for distance, safety, and failed protection, positioning the observer as a witness whose physical distance reflects wider global patterns of awareness without intervention. In this way, the comic addresses not only the trauma experienced by displaced populations, but also the moral and psychological burden carried by those who witness suffering from a place of relative security (Sayin, 2015).

Graphic Medicine is particularly suited to such representations because it recognises health as socially and structurally produced rather than solely clinically defined. Sayin's work communicates grief, vulnerability and loss without reliance on text, diagnosis or spoken language, making it accessible across linguistic and cultural boundaries. This visual literacy allows the image to function simultaneously as documentation, memorial and communicative bridge, enabling shared recognition of trauma among diverse audiences. In doing so, the illustration exemplifies Graphic Medicine's core aim to give voice to experiences that are often rendered silent, especially where trauma disrupts an individual's capacity to speak or be heard within medical or institutional systems (DeMilked, n.d.).

Situating this analysis within Graphic Medicine allows engagement which draws on participant observer

insight without becoming autobiographical. Attention is paid to dialogue, reader engagement and shared meaning making as methodological realities of the field. This framing supports the broader claim that Graphic Medicine is uniquely positioned to engage with collective trauma, not only by representing it, but by fostering forms of voice, connection and community that are themselves health relevant acts.

### **GRAPHIC MEDICINE IN PRACTICE: A SELECTED RANGE OF TOPICS**

Graphic Medicine has been defined as the intersection between the medium of comics and the discourse of healthcare (Green & Myers, 2010). Since its initial articulation, the field has expanded beyond individual illness narratives to encompass the broader social, political and structural conditions that shape wellbeing, including trauma, displacement, socioeconomic precarity and systems of control (Czerwiec et al., 2015). Within this expanded scope, comics that engage with collective trauma play a particularly important role in fostering community recognition, shared meaning making and visibility for lived experiences that are often marginalised or rendered invisible within clinical and institutional contexts.

Collective trauma refers to the shared psychological, emotional and social impact of experiences such as war, forced migration, incarceration, racialised violence and authoritarian governance. These experiences are not only endured by individuals but are carried across families, communities and generations, shaping both mental and physical health outcomes over time. Scholars have argued that comics are especially well suited to representing collective trauma because they can accommodate contradiction, fragmentation and affect while remaining accessible to diverse audiences (Leone, 2018). Through visual sequencing, spatial arrangement and the use of silence, comics enable readers to engage with embodied experiences of fear, loss, resilience and survival, supporting processes of identification and empathetic witnessing.

Several key works within Graphic Medicine and adjacent fields foreground the relationship between trauma, health and community. *Looking at Trauma: A Toolkit for Clinicians* situates trauma within relational, cultural and historical frameworks rather than positioning it solely as an individual pathology (Hershler et al., n.d.). Although designed for clinical audiences, the collection reflects an understanding of trauma as socially produced and collectively experienced, aligning with public health perspectives that recognise community environments, family systems and structural harm as determinants of wellbeing.

Steve Haines's *Trauma Is Really Strange* further demonstrates how comics can democratise knowledge about trauma by making complex neurobiological and psychological processes visually legible (Haines, 2016). Widely used in educational, therapeutic and community contexts, the work illustrates how visual metaphor can support shared recognition of trauma responses, reduce stigma and enable collective reflection, particularly in communities where exposure to violence or insecurity has become normalised.

Intergenerational and community-based trauma is central to Grace Chiang's *Healing the Whole Family* (n.d.), which addresses Asian American and Pacific Islander experiences of migration, silence and mental health stigma. By framing trauma within family narratives and cultural histories, the graphic novel illustrates how collective experiences shape individual wellbeing across generations, giving voice to communities whose mental health needs are often underrepresented in dominant healthcare discourses.

War, displacement and life under authoritarian or heavily policed systems recur across many foundational texts. Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* remains a widely cited example of how personal narrative operates as collective testimony. Through childhood perspective and return, the work depicts how revolution, war and surveillance shape everyday life, identity formation and psychological wellbeing (Satrapi, 2000). Similarly, Olivier Kugler's *Escaping Wars and Waves* documents encounters with Syrian refugees through observational drawing and recorded testimony, foregrounding listening and ethical witnessing while making visible the health consequences of forced migration and prolonged uncertainty (Kugler, 2017). Nora

Krug's *Diaries of War* extends this documentary mode by juxtaposing visual accounts from Ukraine and Russia, illustrating how collective trauma unfolds differently within opposing communities while remaining deeply embodied and ongoing (Krug, 2023).

Historical collective trauma is explored in *Unjust Incarceration* by Richard Cahan and Michael Williams, which examines the forced incarceration of Japanese descended communities during the Second World War. The work highlights the long term psychological, social and health consequences of state sanctioned injustice and reinforces the role of narrative in acknowledgement, memory and communal healing (Cahan & Williams, 2022). Yazan Al Saadi's *Lebanon Is Burning and Other Dispatches* (2024) similarly captures the cumulative exhaustion and resilience of communities living through repeated crisis, depicting trauma as a chronic condition embedded within ongoing political and social instability.

Other influential works further illustrate the breadth of Graphic Medicine's engagement with trauma and community. Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (2003), although not originally framed within Graphic Medicine, is now widely discussed in the field for its depiction of trauma, memory and intergenerational survival, demonstrating how comics can represent historical and collective trauma as socially and temporally situated. Joe Sacco's *Footnotes in Gaza* (2003) documents displacement and structural violence through comics journalism, intersecting with public health concerns by showing how socioeconomic and political conditions shape long term wellbeing. Lynda Barry's *Making Comics* (2019), frequently used in educational and therapeutic settings, emphasises communal storytelling and collective meaning making, demonstrating how comics function as participatory tools that support connection, reflection and voice rather than solely recounting illness narratives.

Scholarly engagement with these works underscores their importance within health humanities. Leone (2018) describes war comics as sites where invisible wounds become legible, while Utell (2021) situates graphic trauma narratives within life writing and embodied history, emphasising ethical responsibility and witnessing. Curated resources such as Electric Literature's overview of comics about trauma further demonstrates the diversity of themes, styles, and cultural contexts within this growing field (Electric Literature, 2025).

Taken together, these texts illustrate that Graphic Medicine is not limited to discrete diagnoses or clinical encounters. Rather, it encompasses a wide range of experiences that shape health, including trauma, displacement, socioeconomic precarity, caregiving and community belonging. For readers seeking to explore this field further, the Graphic Medicine International Collective website (n.d.) provides accessible book reviews, teaching resources and reflections on these and many other Graphic Medicine titles, offering a valuable entry point into ongoing interdisciplinary dialogue and practice.

### **CASE STUDY – I.C.E. OUT**

In recent years, immigration enforcement activity conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has been reported across several regions of Minnesota, involving the detention of individuals identified as being in violation of federal immigration regulations. Public reporting and community responses indicate that these actions affected not only those detained, but also families, workplaces, schools and wider community networks. Although framed legally as administrative enforcement, such actions have been associated by community organisations and service providers with heightened stress, fear and disruption to everyday life within immigrant communities.

This case study does not evaluate immigration policy or enforcement practice. Instead, it examines the social and health related contexts in which these events were experienced. Approaching the material through a framework of collective trauma allows attention to be paid to how uncertainty, surveillance and

the risk of separation shape mental and physical wellbeing at a community level. Within this context, the paper explores a comics-based response that emerged organically as a means of shared expression, processing and connection.

In *What Comics Can Do When the News Is Your Neighborhood*, Woodman-Maynard describes how intensified immigration enforcement, experienced as part of everyday life, prompted her to use comics as an accessible and ethically grounded form of communication. This recognition directly motivated the call to action that became *I.C.E. Out Comics* (Woodman-Maynard, 2026a, b).

Published on Substack, the *I.C.E. Out Comics* series offers a clear example of community responsive cartooning produced in close temporal proximity to unfolding events. Rather than reflecting retrospectively, the comics were created alongside lived experience, allowing repetition, fragmentation and uncertainty to remain visible as narrative features. Read collectively, the series functions as an evolving body of work that documents everyday impacts while acknowledging the emotional and ethical complexity of representing ongoing conditions.

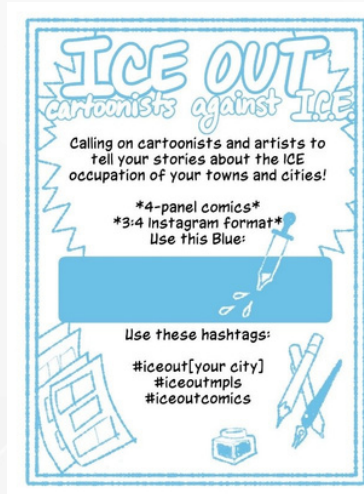
Formal consistency plays a central role in the series' reach and uptake. A simple four panel layout established visual rhythm and accessibility, while a restricted blue and white colour palette creates a strong and recognisable identity. The palette carries affective weight, evoking coldness, exposure and emotional constriction, and reinforcing the embodied dimensions of prolonged stress. These constraints operate as invitations rather than limits, signalling that participation does not depend on specialised artistic resources.

As the series circulated, engagement moved beyond passive readership. Other artists and non-artists adopted the same format to create and share their own comics, transforming individual observation into collective reflection. Within a Graphic Medicine framework, this case demonstrates how short form comics can support shared recognition and relational meaning making beyond clinical settings, functioning as ethical, community level interventions in contexts shaped by fear and precarity.

Within the framework, this case also illustrates how short-form comics can address health-related experience beyond clinical or institutional settings. By holding space for ongoing uncertainty rather than imposing narrative resolution, the *I.C.E. Out Comics* series demonstrates how comics can function as ethical, community-level interventions—supporting visibility, relational meaning-making and collective voice in contexts shaped by precarity and fear.

## Figure 2.

### *ICE OUT-Call to Action*



Artist: K. Woodman-Maynard

The following comics in this series highlighted such things as collective support and individual experiences. All of the comics are drawn in a square of four panels.

**Figure 3.**

*ICE OUT-Passports*



#ICEOUTCOMICS

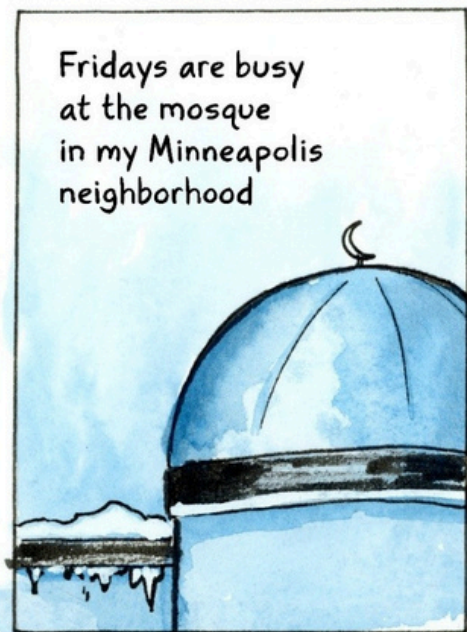
K. WOODMAN-MAYNARD

Artist: K. Woodman-Maynard

Developing community support and empathy is depicted in these series of panels entitled Mosque.

Figure 4.

ICE OUT-Mosque



Fridays are busy  
at the mosque  
in my Minneapolis  
neighborhood



And I.C.E. agents can be  
seen circling our blocks  
on most days



A group of neighbors has  
organized themselves  
to stand outside  
during Friday  
services



This sort of thing is  
happening all over  
Minneapolis

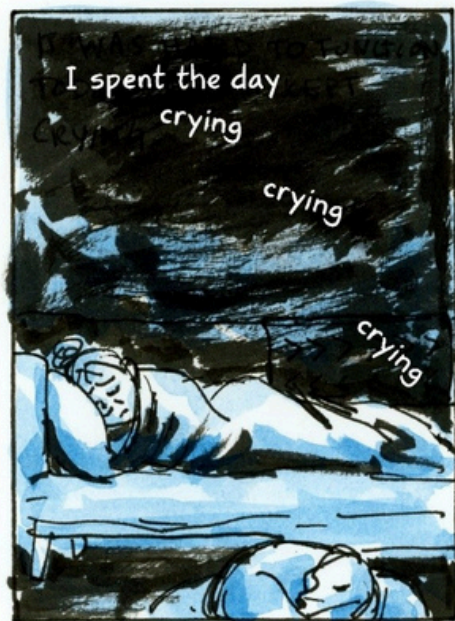
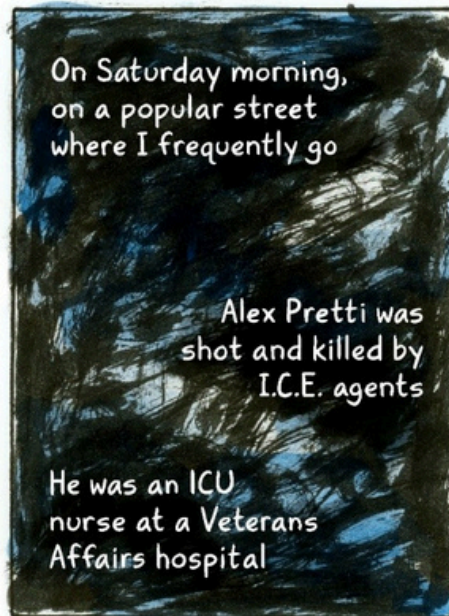
Even when it's -15° F  
outside, like today

#ICEOUTCOMICS #ICEOUTMPLS

K. WOODMAN-MAYNARD

Artist: K. Woodman-Maynard

Figure 5.  
ICE OUT-March 4th



#ICEOUTCOMICS #ICEOUTMPLS

K. WOODMAN-MAYNARD

Artist: K. Woodman-Maynard

**Figure 6.***ICE OUT-Call to Action*

Artist: K. Woodman-Maynard

The final instalment of *I.C.E. Out Comics* (<https://woodmanmaynard.substack.com/p/the-power-of-communityand-cartoonists>) foregrounds collective participation by presenting a range of comics created by other artists and contributors who adopted Woodman-Maynard's four-panel structure and restricted blue-and-white palette, making visible a shared visual language of response (Woodman-Maynard, n.d.). Rather than providing narrative closure, the comic page documents how formal constraint enabled recognition, accessibility and distributed witnessing, allowing diverse experiences to be read as part of a coherent communal exchange. Within a Graphic Medicine framework, this instalment demonstrates how comics can function as connective infrastructure, facilitating shared reflection and relational meaning-making under conditions of ongoing collective stress (Graphic Medicine International Collective, n.d.).

## DISCUSSION

This article emerges from a simple but profound recognition: life is hard, life is short, and it is deeply precious. The idea that a person could be suddenly torn from their home, their families and their community is, to me, profoundly unsettling. When life is at its most difficult, it is often the ordinary anchors that sustain us. A familiar street, a shared meal, the quiet reassurance of belonging somewhere. To have these taken away through fear or disruption is not abstract harm, but a deeply embodied form of trauma.

We often imagine that war, invasion, political instability or the erosion of basic freedoms are events that happen elsewhere. They feel distant, theoretical or historical. Yet this research confronts the fragility of that assumption. Communities are not only defined by crisis but by care, shared culture and mutual recognition. When these are threatened, the impact extends well beyond those directly targeted, shaping the emotional and physical wellbeing of entire neighbourhoods.

Comics matter here because they speak to this precarity with clarity and compassion. As an art form, comics have long provided me with ways to navigate difficult experiences that resist easy explanation. Graphic Medicine, in particular, has offered language for understanding distress, uncertainty and endurance when traditional narratives fall short. Through images and fragments, comics allow space for fear, grief and solidarity to coexist without resolution.

What this case study ultimately demonstrates is the power of expression that does not seek to dominate, persuade or conclude, but simply to witness and connect. While life will always contain hardship, we still carry responsibility for how much suffering we allow or impose. To be human is to recognise one another, to understand vulnerability as shared, and to acknowledge that we all inhabit the same fragile home. Comics remind us of this, quietly and insistently, by requiring attention, empathy and care.

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Practice-Based Article

## Human Books, Real Stories: Creating Space for Empathy at the Human Library in DCU

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### ABSTRACT

This case study examines two Human Library events that were held in DCU (Dublin City University) in 2024 and 2026. Human Library events are licensed and facilitated by the HLO (Human Library Organisation), who originally created the concept in Copenhagen in 2000. At a Human Library event, volunteers share their experience of prejudice or social stigma with 'Readers', or members of the community. These volunteers take part as human 'Books' that can be borrowed by Readers for 20-30 minute conversations, where questions are encouraged and pre-existing biases are challenged. The event creates a safe space for open, honest dialogue that breaks down stereotypes and encourages empathy, allowing the Readers and Books to 'unjudge' each other. We examine the proceedings in DCU from the perspectives of the organisers or 'Librarians', the Books and the Readers.

### KEYWORDS

human library, prejudice, stereotype, understanding, community, university

### THE HUMAN LIBRARY IN CONTEXT

The HLO (Human Library Organisation) is a not for profit organisation and learning platform which was established in Copenhagen in 2000 (Human Library, 2026a). It has become a global movement and is operational in more than 85 countries worldwide. Its aim is to create safe spaces where people who have experienced stigma, bias or prejudice because of aspects of their person, heritage or life experience can share their stories. The human 'Books' are 'borrowed' by members of the public or 'Readers' at a Human Library event. The Books then engage in 20-30 minute open conversations or 'Readings' with the Books that create empathy between people from different backgrounds.

Organisers or 'Librarians' who wish to run a Human Library event are required to apply for a licence from the HLO. Once approved, they are given access to documents and support that will help them to plan, implement and deliver a Human Library event to an agreed standard. Typical HLO partners include libraries, schools, universities and museums.

The Books are volunteers whose life experiences are linked to topics represented by their Book 'titles'. They receive training from the HLO that prepares them for the Readings and they are taught that everyone carries prejudices and that we all judge. They learn how to answer challenging questions that might otherwise be considered taboo and how to create a dialogue that will help the Reader and Book to unjudge each other. Once they complete their training they are 'published' and become available as Books (Human Library, 2026b). The training process will be examined in greater detail later in the article.

## THE HUMAN LIBRARY ORGANISERS IN DCU

In 2023, the Student Support and Development team in DCU proposed running a Human Library event in collaboration with the HLO, DCU Library, DCU People, the Students' Union and DCU Healthy. They were inspired to do this by The Human Library @IADT event, which took place in the [Institute of Art, Design and Technology](#) in 2023 (Buggle & Keogh, 2025).

To run a Human Library event, organisers make an application to the HLO. Once the application has been approved and the licence has been purchased, access is given to guides and methodologies that will lead the Librarians through the necessary processes. The documents provide support for budgeting, recruiting Books, branding and promotion, event management and evaluation.

Initially, the Librarians meet the HLO representatives for an online orientation session. A list of potential Book topics is shared with the Librarians, divided into 15 social categories that range from addiction to survivor. Hundreds of different Book titles have been published at Human Library events, linking into these categories. The Librarians are advised to aim for a variety of Books representing different themes, with a mix of genders, ages and content to ensure diversity.

In the weeks following the meeting the Librarians recruit and interview Books, whose information is shared with the HLO - both parties then complete online training. IADT connected us with participants who joined us as Books in 2024 and 2026. The remaining Books were recruited through an email invitation to DCU staff and students and through personal contacts. DCU published 16 Books in 2024 and 14 in 2026 - to view a list of DCU Book titles see Appendix A.

The DCU Librarians devised event plans in the approach to March 2024 and 2026. We worked with the DCU Communications team to promote the event and the DCU community and members of the public were encouraged to register as Readers on the DCU website. The Librarians communicated with the Books and invited them to lunch before the event. In the days leading up to the event, the Librarians printed evaluations forms, posted signage, set up the event space and finalised the Librarians' roles on the day.

### Figure 1.

*DCU Human Library Event Poster 2026*



DCU image licenced under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#)

On the day, the Librarians welcomed the Books, briefed them about the event and the venue and

introduced them to each other. They were given blue t-shirts with the Human Library logo that identified them as Books, the Librarians wore yellow t-shirts. The event took place in O'Reilly Library in 2024 and in Cregan Library in 2026, where a registration table was set up in front of the main event space. A minimum of four Librarians are recommended for an event, we had 10 for both of our events. Two Librarians managed the registration table and welcomed Readers. They screened Readers to ensure that they were in the right frame of mind to take part, explained the procedure to them and asked them to complete photography consent forms. Books were not advertised in advance, so Readers browsed and chose a Book title and were then guided to the relevant table by a third Librarian.

The remaining Librarians ensured that the conversations remained respectful, that the Books felt safe and took breaks when required. A room was reserved where the Books and Librarians could take breaks together and a quiet space was also identified where Books could rest by themselves. Librarians also took part as Readers during the event, prioritising Books without Readers.

In a Reading, either a single or a small group of Readers can participate, but there should always only be one Book. If a selected Book was at a maximum number of Readers (four), the Librarians encouraged the attendee to select an alternative Book. 20 minutes into a reading, a bell rang to announce the session would end in five minutes.

After their session, the Reader had the option to choose another title. Before exiting the event, they filled out an evaluation form. Afterwards, the Books joined a debrief session where they shared their experiences and filled out a questionnaire. The Librarians collated this data and shared it with the HLO in an event review, which included reflections about running the event. The organising team then met to discuss the outcomes and lessons learned. See Appendix B for a sample Human Library event planner we created based on our experience.

## Figure 2.

*The Human Library in DCU 2026*



DCU image licenced under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

## THE BOOKS IN DCU'S HUMAN LIBRARY

After signing up to be a Book, preparation for the event consists of meeting with an event organiser and completing the Human Library's proprietary training offered through an online portal. It should be recognised that the Human Library asks a lot of its participants, particularly the Books, who volunteer to share deeply personal and potentially traumatic experiences with strangers moments after meeting them. Between the training and the preparation with the event organiser, the Book will learn different

communication skills and strategies that, when combined with the structure of the reading session, offer the Book emotional support and situational control in exchange for vulnerability.

A Book's title is symbolic of this exchange. Participants are asked to choose a title that is direct and accurately reflects an identity subject to prejudice or stereotyping (Human Library, 2026b). They provide a Book with the power to choose which aspect of their lived identity to make the focus of a reading, which serves a practical purpose for everyone involved. Only 25 minutes is allotted to a session and there may be multiple Readers participating. They offer crucial context for the Reader, communicating likely boundaries for the conversation before the parties meet.

The thematic element of the event's language, the rigidity of a Book and Reader in the Human Library are also practical. This language formalises the act of the Reading session, freeing the Reader to ask questions in good faith without judgement and the Book to answer them in kind. How a reading unfolds is dependent on its participants. Books have control over their introduction, what questions they answer and how they choose to share their experience. Readers engage with the topic according to their interest.

The intention is to help the Reader to feel invited to ask questions of the Book. One Book who participated in both DCU events reflected on this dynamic, writing that the "story is informed by your conversation partner, which is something we don't really think of when we are reading and interpreting texts ... And even if your story remains the same, how you tell it changes depending on the person you are talking to" (O'Connor, 2026). Each session is unique to its participants despite the constancy of the Book and their title. This is because of the trust each side can place in each other.

### **BOOK FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION**

After each event, participants are asked to fill out a feedback form reflecting on their experience and evaluating the support provided by the DCU organisers and the HLO. For the writing of this article, a follow up reflection form (see Appendix C) was sent to consenting Books who participated in the 2026 event. Of the 30 Books across both Human Libraries, 27 submitted answers to the feedback form, and of the 14 who were Books in 2026, five provided additional reflection. Examination of the feedback reveals a common thread of experience for the Books. They experience alienation or discrimination related to their identity outside of the Human Library, made connections between Book and Reader despite perceived differences, and view the opportunity for further exploration of their identities as a result of the experience.

The first commonality among Books is unsurprising as their participation is indicative of belonging to an identity group subject to the prejudicial biases the Human Library seeks to address. The stigma varies, but it consistently manifests regardless of identity. For example, a 2024 Book, titled *Gender Queer*, described their stigmatisation as "passive unrecognition of my gender identity," (DCU Library, 2024). *Past Drug Misuse*, a 2026 Book, described this succinctly, having experienced "discrimination about who an addict is. What they can do" (O'Connor, 2026). However, experiencing stigmatisation and prejudice did not prevent the Books from making connections with their Readers.

Some of these were nostalgic, such as when one Book discovered their Reader was of a similar age and from the same hometown. Other connections achieved an emotional catharsis for both parties, such as *No Contact with a Parent*, who described how it felt to have a Reader become visibly emotionally affected by hearing their story (DCU Library, 2026). How Books and Readers connect with each other offers insight

into ways Books engage with their identities. Several Books described being drawn to the Human Library by the opportunity to advocate or raise awareness for their identity (DCU Library, 2026). Others perceived it as an opportunity for self-reflection. For *Past Drug Misuse*, it was “another way to help reclaim a bit of my own identity” (O’Connor, 2026). For *Mental Health & Recovery*, it was a chance to explore, writing “every time you are read, you get a new take on your title. You grow and expand” (O’Connor, 2026).

The collected feedback ultimately indicated satisfaction with being a Book in the Human Library. When asked to rate their agreement with the statement: “Sharing my experiences at the Human Library has made me feel better understood”, 25 of 27 respondents expressed that they agreed or strongly agreed. The remaining two Books rated their agreement as neutral (DCU Library, 2026). This is a promising signifier of success for this style of event.

### **HUMAN LIBRARY READERS IN DCU**

In 2024, 16 Books were published, 60 Readers visited the event and 53 readings took place. 15 of our Readers filled in evaluation forms and their ages were evenly distributed across the 21-35, 35-50 and 51-75 age groups (Moloney & Sicard, 2024).

In 2026, 14 Books were published, 30 Readers visited the event and 73 readings took place. 12 Readers filled in the evaluation forms and their ages mainly fell into the 21-35 and 51-75 age groups, with two 36-50 Readers and one 76+ Reader (Moloney, 2026a). Attendance numbers were impacted by heavy rain in 2026, which resulted in a low attendance rate for registered Readers and discouraged passersby.

The majority of the respondents at both events identified as women and they were mainly in employment. A smaller number were retired, unemployed or home-makers. Only a small percentage of our Readers were students (Moloney & Sicard, 2024; Moloney, 2026a).

The Librarians managing the registration tables in 2024 and 2026 noted that Readers were hesitant when they first approached, even after the process was explained to them. The Readers grew more assured once they finished their first Reading and most of the participants borrowed more Books. In one evaluation a Reader stated, “I found it difficult to ask questions first but as the conversation went on, I became more confident” (Moloney, 2026a). This initial uncertainty was experienced by several Readers who reported feeling uncomfortable asking questions at the beginning of the Reading. By the end of the Readings all the Readers stated that they felt at ease asking questions (Moloney & Sicard, 2024; Moloney, 2026a). The Librarians observed the resulting engagement, “once a reader sits down and connects with the human Book, magic happens” (Moloney, 2026b).

All the Readers agreed that they learned new things about the topics of their readings and the majority of the Readers stated that the way they felt about the topics had changed, “I feel more compassion towards those who suffer from difficult issues” (Moloney & Sicard, 2024). All but one Reader stated that they now felt more open to exploring unfamiliar subjects and that their Readings had made them more conscious of how they engage with certain groups of people (Moloney & Sicard, 2024).

Recording event highlights, one Reader described how much they appreciated connecting with the Books and learning from them, “I enjoyed this opportunity to engage with someone I really would not have access to” (Moloney, 2026a). The Readers were inspired by the bravery, passion and openness of the Books, “The

honesty and vulnerability shown by the books was genuinely inspiring and it is something I will definitely be trying to emulate in the future” (Moloney, 2026a).

All of the Readers rated the quality of the event and of their experience as excellent or very good, noting the “welcoming and friendly” Books and Librarians (Moloney, 2026a). Their final comments captured their deep engagement with the Books and their appreciation of the opportunity to converse with them, “It was very difficult to move on. I had so many questions. A very emotional experience” (Moloney, 2026a).

## OUTCOMES

The core aims of the Human Library events in DCU were to: challenge prejudice and stereotypes, foster social cohesion, promote human rights and develop empathy and understanding (Moloney, 2026b).

The Reader evaluations demonstrate that the events achieved these aims and more. They show that Readers who were initially nervous about asking questions became more comfortable exploring challenging topics with Books. The majority of the Readers stated that their pre-conceived notions had changed, illustrating that the conversations helped challenge stereotypes and create empathy for the Books. They developed an understanding of the Books’ experiences and many Readers expressed their admiration for the Books (Moloney & Sicard, 2024; Moloney, 2026a).

The majority of the Books agreed they would now be more conscious about how they engaged with certain groups of people. The Readers enjoyed meeting people from diverse backgrounds and left the event feeling more open to exploring unfamiliar subjects (Moloney & Sicard, 2024; Moloney, 2026a).

The welcoming, safe space created at the event helped foster empathy and connection and provided an opportunity for the Books to feel perceived and empowered, “I am often met with disbelief, upset, awe, very mixed, rarely will they actually ask questions - makes people uncomfortable” (Moloney, 2026a). Another Book felt heartened by his conversation with a Librarian about the library’s provision of digital books to students, “I found it interesting and encouraging that DCU Library were coming to understand the accessibility needs of disabled students” (O’Connor, 2026).

In 2026, the Books met before the event and built a rapport over lunch. One Book reported that they monitored each other’s wellbeing during the event and in the last hour when attendance was low, the Books became Readers for each other. As noted in the 2026 event review, “This created a wonderful dynamic, fostering warm and encouraging engagement between the Books themselves and the Human Library working group” (Moloney, 2026a).

The event also helped foster a culture of health and wellbeing in the DCU Community. It provided DCU staff members taking part in the event as Books with a sense of belonging and provided a space for them to engage in an honest, open dialogue about their experiences, contributing to a positive community culture. One DCU Book described their experience as “insightful and healing” (Moloney & Sicard, 2024).

**Figure 3.**

*Books and Librarians at the 2026 Human Library in DCU*



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**LESSONS LEARNED**

We recommend planning a Human Library event at least 6 months and up to a year in advance. This will give the Librarians time to review the HLO documents and formulate a project plan. It will also allow the Librarians to recruit and interview Books and give both parties sufficient time to complete training with the HLO.

Initially, it can be difficult to grasp the concept of the Human Library and understand the processes around planning an event. We advise attending an online event as a Reader, an opportunity offered by the HLO to key members of the organising team. This allows the Librarians to understand the format of a Reading and experience the positive benefits of the interaction.

Involve a relevant university course through a lecturer, to encourage more students to attend. Linking a course assignment with the event would boost student attendance numbers significantly. At the IADT event, two lecturers attended with students from their classes. The IADT team advised staggering the attendance times of larger groups, to avoid overcrowding. (Buggle, personal communication, April 23, 2026).

Involve other local groups and your local public libraries when recruiting Books and Readers. Link in with events run by community, cultural and county council teams if possible. IADT were part of the 'Festival of Inclusion' programme organised by the Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Co Council in 2023 (Buggle & Keogh, 2025).

There will likely be Book dropouts before the event so recruit two or three more Books than you think you'll need. Two Books were unable to attend the DCU Human Library event in 2024 and four Books in 2026.

Promote pre-registration to potential Readers, but as there will likely be a non-attendance rate of up to 50% encourage walk-ins. Interaction between the Books is important - give them time to get to know each other before the event. This offers them a support network beyond the Librarians during Readings.

This is a valuable, life-affirming event and we strongly agree with one Reader who stated, "This is an important event and it should be continued" (Moloney, 2026a). It takes time, effort and funding to plan and deliver an event, so we aim to run the next DCU Human Library event in two years' time.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

We have no known conflicts of interests to declare.

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See supplementary documents on HSLJ website - <https://doi.org/10.33178/hslj.2.1.4>.

## APPENDICES

Appendix A: Titles of DCU Books from 2024 and 2026

Appendix B: Sample Human Library event planning document

Appendix C: Responses to Human Library Book Survey



## Research-Based Article

# **Australia's Place in Library and Information Science (LIS) Education: Evolution, Progress and Future Challenges**

**Annmarie Whyte**

Summary of Dissertation by Annmarie Whyte, MSc Information and Library Management, Dublin Business School (2025)

### **ABSTRACT**

The study aimed to determine Australia's position within international Library and Information Science (LIS) education, whilst also examining its evolution, progress, and continuing challenges. The research involved a sample of nine Library and Information Science educators, working in the Republic of Ireland, who provided answers to a series of questions on global LIS education. The aim of the questionnaire was to determine whether Australia's contribution to LIS education would be referenced and in what context. The name of the country under investigation was not disclosed to the sample, as deliberately prompting discourse on Australia would have potentially compromised the authenticity of the data. The study proved Australia is a formidable provider of LIS education, often ranking highly within key academic indicators such as research output, university rankings and educational programmes. The research shows this could not have been possible without the British and American influences on Australian library education since the late nineteenth century.

### **KEYWORDS**

Australia, library and information science education, dissertation summary

### **EVOLUTION**

To understand the provenance of library education in Australia, we must acknowledge the inextricable history and links this vast country has to the United Kingdom in the first instance and the United States later on. These two nations have had a profound impact on most aspects of modern life in Australia, and the British and American influences on Australian libraries and library education remain evident to this day.

According to Wilson et al. (2012, p. 3), efforts to formalise education for entry into the library profession in Australia began in the late 1930s, initially following the British examination-based model. During this same period American popular culture was emerging worldwide and relationships between prominent Australian educators and their US peers were strengthening. The presence of US philanthropic organisations in Australia, like the Carnegie Corporation, ultimately led Australia to adopt more formal, academically oriented professional training aligned with the American model (Carroll, 2007, p. 65).

The establishment of the Australian Institute of Librarians in 1937, now ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association) as the accrediting body for librarianship, sought to emulate developments overseas, particularly in the United States and Britain. The American Library Association (ALA) was founded

in 1876, followed by the British Library Association (LA) in 1877, and both played a key role in legitimising library education in their respective countries. In contrast, Australia's lack of a national professional association prior to 1937 had hindered the development of a national education system for librarianship (Wilson et al., 2012, p. 3).

1938 and 1939 witnessed the introduction of the first formal education and training in librarianship through the Public Library of New South Wales and the Public Library of Victoria, marking a shift from on-the-job training to classroom-based education for librarianship.

## **RATIONALE**

There is evidence in the literature to support Australia's contribution to the development and implementation of various LIS education frameworks and theories. The field of Records Management in particular appears to be heavily influenced by Australian theorists. The Records Continuum Model (RCM) developed in 1996 by Frank Upward, an Australian academic at Monash University in Melbourne, was "immediately recognized as a once-in-a-generation breakthrough" and Upward's "pivotal role in developing a unified model of archives and records is undisputed" (Australian Society of Archives, 2015).

Australian records managers and archivists were the first to introduce a records management and archival standard – AS 4390. The International Organisation for Standardisation subsequently based ISO 15489 on its "Australian parent" (Findlay, 2018, p.222) AS 4390 and ISO 15489 became and remains the international standard for records management today.

Australian public servants employed by the State Record Authority of New South Wales also developed the Designing and Implementing Record Keeping Systems (DIRKS, 2003) methodology. DIRKS is essentially an eight-step guide for the application of ISO 15489. This eight-step model was quoted by Koga (2007, p.2) in his paper on the implementation of DIRKS at the United Nations, as an important methodology in terms of its flexibility as a pragmatic solution for recordkeeping activities.

The Australian and New Zealand Information and Literacy (ANZIL) Framework (Bundy, 2004) has been recommended by the Library Association of Ireland's (LAI) Working Group on Information Literacy (WGIL) as the national information literacy framework Ireland should adopt.

One of the most notable features in LIS education in Australia, which is not broadly offered in other countries, is the availability of the Library Technician Diploma. This one-to-two-year qualification is accredited by ALIA and delivered through Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges. The diploma qualifies a person as a technician, offering greater access to the profession and helping to alleviate workforce shortages by providing a cost-effective entry route.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study incorporates primary research via a standardised, self-completion questionnaire. The questions were open ended, allowing respondents to provide as much or as little information as they wished. It was important to avoid direct references to Australia in any of the questions, so as not to influence respondents' answers and to ensure the reliability of the data. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to determine whether participants would mention Australia unprompted, so that its position amongst influential countries in LIS education could be ascertained.

### Participants / Sample

The sample comprised nine current and former, third level LIS educators from Dublin Business School's Master of Science in Information and Library Management programme and University College Dublin's Master of Library and Information Studies, and Graduate Diploma in Library and Information Studies programmes. These three programmes are the only LAI accredited LIS programmes in the Republic of Ireland.

### Literature

Secondary research from the literature included, but was not limited to, papers from peer-reviewed journals, government reports, conference papers, discussion papers and information from LIS accreditation body websites. All of these sources provided history, context and understanding of the topic. Insights gained from the literature and questionnaire responses directed the study and led to the development of several themes and concepts.

### Data Analysis

(Based on Braun and Clarke (2006), Phases of Thematic Analysis)

Similar themes began to emerge from the data especially in terms of the countries deemed to be the strongest LIS providers. As expected, the responses heavily reflected the influences of the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) on global LIS education. Both nations have played a significant role in shaping all aspects of modern life in Australia and education is no exception. It was important to compare Australian LIS education output to these countries, often as a way of gauging Australia's position globally.

## RESULTS

Australia did not feature as prevalently as the US or UK in the questionnaire but was commended by four out of nine respondents for its ALIA frameworks, community-focused delivery of LIS education and its strong LIS programmes. Three participants also identified Australia as one of the countries whose LIS programmes inform the structure of their own modules.

The United States was mentioned by the highest number of participants as the leading country in many aspects of LIS education. It was the country most frequently cited by participants as a source of inspiration for developing and updating LIS modules. The majority of theorists listed as helping to inform participants' teaching practice were American and it was named more than any other country as being exceptional at providing LIS education. The US offers more LIS bachelor's and master's degree programmes than the UK, Australia, Ireland and Canada combined, but it also has a significantly higher population to serve. US universities host seven of the top ten Library and Information Management courses in the world according to QS (2025) and it consistently ranks as the leading producer of published LIS articles. The study revealed the US is certainly the one to beat or emulate in terms of delivery of, and innovation in, LIS education. The UK is a formidable contender in that it was generally runner up to the US or maintained a strong presence in the statistics within the literature and in terms of mentions in the questionnaire.

As an aside, and despite the questionnaire not explicitly requesting this information, participants identified Ireland as excelling in academic librarianship, information literacy, media literacy, digital literacy, scholarly communications, open science, research data management, digital information management and social justice/equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

### Future Challenges For Australian LIS Education

In 2009, the Australian Teaching and Learning Council funded a paper called 'Re-conceptualising and Re-positioning Australian Library and Information Science Education for the 21st Century', to examine how LIS education in Australia could produce graduates with the appropriate attributes to support LIS professional practice into the 21st Century. Some years later, in 2020 ALIA published 'The Future of Library and Information Science Education in Australia, Discussion Paper'. Both works highlighted many of the same future challenges for Australian LIS education.

### Decline in Programmes

The instability of LIS programmes in Australian universities and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges has been a common theme throughout the literature, as programmes seem to develop and conclude regularly. Willard and Wilson (2016, p.251) illustrate the availability of 32 graduate and postgraduate programmes on offer across 12 third level institutions in 2003. An analysis of graduate and postgraduate LIS programmes on the ALIA website in 2025 reveals a considerable decline to approximately nine courses across four institutions available nationwide today.

### Relevant Skills

ALIA's Discussion Paper highlights an apparent lack of alignment between academic courses/providers and the needs of employers. Participants did not feel curricula mirrored societal changes, especially in the fields of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital preservation and should better reflect the realities of the profession and real-world scenarios (ALIA, 2020, p.14).

### Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Ongoing professional development offered to library professionals in Australia, once employed, falls short of what many employees expect. Suggestions for CPD in the ALIA 2020 Discussion Paper (2020, p.15) include staff exchanges, mentoring, rotations, secondments, and internships. These initiatives should be accompanied by credentials to validate and recognise this training. Ongoing education in areas like AI, metadata, copyright and indigenous knowledge practices, was identified as being particularly important in the Australian LIS sector right now.

### Workforce Diversity

Data from Jobs and Skills Australia (no date) notes that women comprise 66% of the librarian workforce and Mitchell and Weldon (2016, p.6) report that over 80% of those in teaching-related library roles are female.

LIS students tend to be older and come to the profession as a secondary career (Combes et al., 2021, p.5). LIS professionals in general do not speak a language other than English, leading to shortfalls in the provision of services to multicultural communities. The lack of LIS professionals who speak a language other than English and the homogeneity of the LIS demographic may mean that ethnic and migrant groups may not feel comfortable in environments where their language is a barrier (Combes et al., 2021, p.5).

### Educator Shortages

There is a significant concern about the 'greying' of LIS educators who qualified in great numbers during the 1970s and 1980s and who are all expected to retire around the same time (Hallam, 2007, cited in Partridge et al., 2011, p.14). While this will result in many vacant positions which more diverse hires could fill, it is

unlikely, given the data, that there are many diverse candidates available. Ansari and Munshi (2024, p.9) also note the decreasing number of LIS academics, which is worrying in terms of the currency and relevance of LIS curricula. Partridge and Yates (2012, pp.88-89) note that recruitment of LIS educators has emerged as a pressing issue and the challenge for LIS education now is to find ways to entice new educators into the field.

#### Salaries

Postgraduate qualification within the LIS field is not usually linked to higher salaries, which provides little incentive for prospective students to pay the extra cost incurred in pursuing a master's degree (Harvey and Higgins, 2003, cited in Ansari & Munshi, 2024, p.9). The majority of respondents to ALIA's discussion paper survey indicated that their motivation for becoming LIS professionals was "based on their commitment to the values of the sector rather than to any expectation of high earnings" (ALIA, 2020, p.12).

#### Librarian and Library Technician Task Debate

A recurring theme in the literature is the ambiguity between tasks appropriate for library professionals and those more suited to library technicians. The constant uncertainty and overlap of duties can be attributed to both undergraduate and technician education emerging at virtually the same time and overseen by the same group of people (Carroll, 2007, p.52). Partridge et al. (2011, p.12) also refer to boundaries between paraprofessional and professional roles blurring over time.

### CONCLUSION

While an exact ranking of Australia's contribution to global LIS education is difficult to pinpoint given the various facets of LIS, Australia does appear to hold a respectable position in several aspects of LIS education provision. Four individuals who took part in the study commended Australia for its various contributions to LIS education, ranging from educational programmes to ALIA frameworks, to community-focussed delivery of LIS education. Furthermore, Australia offers an ALIA accredited Library Technician Diploma, which is a unique strength, as a similar qualification to this does not appear to be widely available in other countries. Several Australian universities feature on the QS university rankings for their LIS programmes and Australia is fourth in the world in terms of LIS published articles according to Aslam et al. (2022, p.85) and sixth in the world in LIS citations according to Nisha et al. (2022, p.379), giving it a strong research performance relative to its population.

As previously mentioned, LIS educational programmes in Australia appear to be in decline, with 32 professional third-level programmes available in 2003 compared to nine programmes available today. There also seems to be a considerable dip in bachelor's degree programmes between Gibbons and White's study in 2019 and this study in 2025. Furthermore, Chawner (2015, p.20) reports that in 2014 there were fewer than 30,000 Australians employed in library and information services positions, and that number has dropped significantly since 2010.

There could be a number of reasons for the ongoing downturn in programmes, ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic (especially as foreign students were prohibited from travelling to Australia), programmes moving online, or just the prevailing uncertainty surrounding the future of LIS education amid the rise in Artificial Intelligence.

The literature also suggests this decrease in programmes could be intentional due to a previous

overabundance of LIS courses for Australia's sparse population. With more LIS courses offered per capita than the UK and US, Australian universities have been competing for the small number of students nationally who wish to pursue a career in LIS (Partridge & Yates, 2012, p. 83). Perhaps this is not a decline at all, but a deliberate re-structuring, to ensure the stability and viability of LIS education in Australia into the future.

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## Practice-Based Article

# **Building AI Literacy Through Library-Led Copilot Training: A Practice-Based Case Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Libraries across all sectors are increasingly expected to support their organisations in navigating artificial intelligence (AI) tools while also building confidence, critical judgement and ethical awareness among staff. This practice-based article summarises a conference presentation delivered by Mairéad McKeown and David Lombard at the Health Sciences Libraries Group (HSLG) Annual Conference 2026. It describes the design and delivery of a Microsoft Copilot graduate upskilling programme at Bord Bia and positions librarians and knowledge professionals as capability builders and trusted guides in organisational AI adoption. It outlines a structured, time-bound learning programme that combined foundations in AI literacy with hands-on experimentation embedded in everyday work, supported by knowledge management (KM) tools and reflective practice. While developed in a specific organisational context, the programme design, learning principles and librarian-led interventions are transferable across library sectors, including health, academic, public and special libraries.

### **KEYWORDS**

AI literacy, capability building, knowledge management, libraries, practice-based learning

### **INTRODUCTION**

Artificial intelligence (AI), and generative AI in particular, is rapidly reshaping how information is created, accessed and used. For librarians, this shift presents both opportunity and responsibility. Library professionals are increasingly asked to support colleagues who are curious about AI tools, uncertain about their limitations and concerned about issues such as accuracy, bias, transparency and professional judgement. Building organisational AI capability therefore requires more than technical training; it demands a focus on literacy, critical thinking and ethical use.

This article summarises a presentation delivered at the Health Sciences Libraries Group (HSLG) Annual Conference 2026. It shares a practical case study from Bord Bia, Ireland's food board, on a Microsoft Copilot graduate upskilling programme. The programme was designed and delivered by the Library, Knowledge and Market Intelligence team in partnership with a colleague seconded from Finance, with the aim of building confident, responsible and value-driven use of generative AI among early-career professionals. The purpose of this article is to offer librarians a concrete, adaptable model for leading AI capability building within their own organisations.

## CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Bord Bia operates in a complex, fast-moving environment where digital demands on graduates are accelerating year on year. Graduates are expected to synthesise large volumes of data and information to support evidence-based decisions/recommendations, while also balancing rotation learning with the needs of the organisations' functions within which they are placed.

The introduction of Microsoft Copilot generated both enthusiasm and uncertainty. Although graduates were comfortable with digital tools, many were not yet confident Copilot users and needed support to collaborate with it appropriately and responsibly in professional contexts, while applying human judgement.

Recognising this early-career inflection point, Bord Bia's Industry Talent team identified an opportunity to intervene by embedding AI capability and literacy into the existing graduate rotation learning framework. The Library, Knowledge and Market Intelligence team was asked to design and deliver a programme that would build confidence, critical thinking and responsible practice from the outset. Rather than positioning Copilot as a simple productivity shortcut, the programme framed it as a collaborative assistant that could support synthesis, creativity and efficiency when used with appropriate human judgement, organisational context and domain knowledge.

This approach aligns closely with the traditional strengths of librarianship, including the critical evaluation of information, reflective practice and ethical stewardship. It was also deliberately future-focused. The programme was designed to align closely with all seven of the IFLA's Trends on *Facing the Future of Information with Confidence* (IFLA, 2024) ensuring that graduates were not only learning how to use an emerging tool, but were also developing the skills, mindsets and critical awareness required to navigate an increasingly complex information environment. This alignment helped shift the focus away from simply providing tool-specific training towards transferable information literacy capabilities, such as critical evaluation, synthesis, ethical awareness and professional judgement, that remain relevant regardless of how technologies evolve. By grounding generative AI capability building within these internationally recognised trends, the programme helped ensure relevance, resilience and transferability beyond any single technology or organisational context.

## PROGRAMME DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Our programme incorporated several design principles that may be of relevance across library sectors:

- **Library-led capability building:** The programme was designed and facilitated by the library and knowledge team in conjunction with a colleague seconded from the Finance team (this colleague participated on a previous Copilot up-skilling programme), reinforcing the role of librarians as AI educators and critical guides rather than passive tool adopters.
- **Plain English AI literacy:** Concepts such as large language models, hallucinations and prompt quality were explained in accessible, nontechnical language.
- **Timebound, realistic learning:** All peer-to-peer knowledge exchange sessions were limited to 45 minutes, respecting workload pressures while modelling sustainable learning behaviours.
- **Learning by doing:** Participants applied Copilot to real organisational tasks and day-to-day activities rather than hypothetical exercises.

- **Community connections and collective learning:** The programme was intentionally designed as a community of practice, where graduates learned with and from one another while experimenting with Copilot adoption and AI literacy together. Peer discussion, shared problem-solving and visible learning helped normalise uncertainty and supported collective sensemaking.
- **Psychological safety by design:** Experimentation was encouraged in a psychologically safe environment, where curiosity, questioning and iteration were valued over performance. This enabled participants to practise, learn and adapt together without fear of failure or judgement.
- **Ethics and judgement first:** Responsible use, in line with Bord Bia's generative AI policy, alongside verification and transparency, was embedded throughout rather than treated as an add-on.

## PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

The Copilot graduate upskilling programme was delivered over three distinct phases.

### Self-Directed Foundations:

In the foundations phase, graduates focused on AI literacy and critical thinking and completed a self-directed LinkedIn Learning pathway on Microsoft Copilot. This provided a shared baseline of learning covering responsible and appropriate use of generative AI, effective prompting, and a range of practical Copilot use cases across the Microsoft 365 suite of applications.

Completion of the learning pathway was reinforced through assessment. Graduates successfully completed an associated exam and were awarded industry recognised professional certificates, helping to build both confidence and credibility in their foundational Copilot knowledge before progressing to applied experimentation.

### Peer to Peer Knowledge Exchange on Applications and Tools:

A core feature of the programme was encouraging graduates to use Copilot in the flow of their everyday work rather than treating it as a standalone tool. Participants were supported to test Copilot while drafting emails, summarising documents, preparing briefings, structuring presentations, planning meetings and reflecting on learning. This helped demystify AI use and positioned it as an assistive layer within existing workflows.

The facilitators emphasised that value emerged not from the tool itself, but from how thoughtfully it was applied. Graduates were encouraged to iterate on prompts, critique outputs and combine Copilot suggestions with their own subject knowledge and professional judgement. This approach fostered more creative ways of working, such as exploring alternative framings of problems, generating options rather than answers, and using Copilot to challenge assumptions rather than replace thinking.

Alongside Copilot, practical KM tools such as conversational leadership techniques, peer assist approaches and reflection were introduced. These tools helped participants situate AI outputs within a wider knowledge ecosystem and recognise when human expertise, collaboration or escalation were required, reinforcing that Copilot outputs were starting points for dialogue rather than finished answers. Every two weeks graduates met as a group with the facilitators, where they shared what was working well and what wasn't, the group were inspired by different use cases and application of the best practice prompt

framework and for many this was their favourite part of the programme.

### **Creative Finale and Impact**

In the final phase, graduates completed a reflective lesson learned exercise and then fed their reflections into the Copilot Creator app using a structured prompt. They were encouraged to apply the RGCSE prompt framework (role, goal, context, source, expectations) to create a multimedia asset of their choice that captured the story of their learning journey. (RGCSE is a simple prompt checklist used to make expectations explicit and improve output quality.)

Graduates were not expected to produce polished or perfect outputs. Instead, they were encouraged to apply the skills and knowledge they had developed throughout the programme in a psychologically safe environment. This approach allowed participants to test creative ideas, experiment with different formats and reflect on impact without fear of failure. Graduates reviewed what worked, what did not and how their approach might change, reinforcing learning through reflection rather than performance. Graduates produced a range of multimedia assets, including videos, storyboards, posters, infographics, poems and presentations.

The programme concluded with a creative finale where participants shared their reflections and voted on the work that most inspired them. This peer led recognition reinforced a sense of community and embodied a core KM principle: valuing and learning from the collective wisdom of the group.

### **OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION**

As a practice-based initiative, the programme prioritised observable changes in confidence, judgement and day-to-day use over purely technical mastery. Evaluation was kept lightweight and embedded within delivery to reduce burden while still capturing learning and improvement opportunities.

- **Participation and completion:** attendance across the peer sessions, completion of the LinkedIn Learning pathway, and exam/certificate attainment by all graduates.
- **Confidence and capability lift:** brief pre- and post-programme self-assessment (for example, confidence using Copilot, confidence evaluating outputs and confidence knowing when not to use generative AI).
- **Quality of practice indicators:** evidence of iterative prompting, explicit verification behaviours, and appropriate use of sources (e.g., citing internal documents, checking figures, confirming policy constraints).
- **Applied outcomes in the flow of work:** participant-reported examples where Copilot supported drafting, synthesis or planning, alongside the human review steps taken before outputs were shared.
- **Reflective learning capture:** themes emerging from the “lessons learned” exercise and creative finale (what changed in how graduates approached tasks, what pitfalls they encountered, and what guardrails helped).
- **Continuous improvement:** a short retrospective with facilitators to identify what to keep, change or add for the next cohort (for example, more peer-to-peer exchange in smaller groups or shorter check-ins between self-directed learning modules).

## GUARDRAILS FOR RESPONSIBLE USE

Responsible use was reinforced throughout in line with Bord Bia's generative AI policy, with a consistent emphasis that Copilot outputs require human oversight. The following guardrails summarise the types of controls and behaviours that supported safe experimentation and professional judgement.

- **Protect sensitive information:** only use Copilot in line with the do's and don'ts set out in Bord Bia's generative AI policy; responsibility for compliance sits with each user.
- **Assume errors are possible:** treat outputs as drafts; check facts, figures, citations and any claims that could affect decisions, stakeholders or reputation.
- **Verify against trusted sources:** confirm outputs against authoritative internal material (policies, reports, approved messaging) and external primary sources where relevant.
- **Keep human accountability:** the user remains responsible for what is sent, published or decided; Copilot does not replace professional judgement.
- **Be transparent when appropriate:** follow internal expectations for disclosing gen AI assistance, particularly for externally facing material or high-stakes work.
- **Use AI for options, not authority:** favour prompts that generate alternatives, outlines and questions, and avoid treating the tool as a single source of truth.
- **Know when to escalate:** seek advice from the library/knowledge team, IT, corporate governance or line management when a task involves uncertainty.

## HOW TO ADAPT THIS MODEL

Although delivered in a specific organisational context, the approach can be adapted to suit different library sectors, workforce profiles and technology environments. The following options help translate the model without requiring extensive new resources.

- **Start with a minimum viable programme:** run a pilot with one cohort, evaluate and reflect. If the proof of concept is viable, begin to scale and iterate.
- **Use whatever tools are available:** if Microsoft Copilot is not licensed, focus on AI literacy, prompting, verification and workflow design using organisation-approved alternatives (or non-tool-based scenarios).
- **Embed into existing structures:** attach the programme to induction, continuing professional development (CPD) time, performance management programmes, quality improvement forums, or graduate/trainee rotation learning.
- **Localise use cases:** co-design examples with teams (e.g., briefing notes, evidence summaries, communication drafts, meeting preparation, policy comparison) so practice aligns with real work.
- **Scale support through community and partnerships:** if resourcing is a constraint, look for co-leads and champions outside of the library (e.g., in human resources or learning and development, IT, governance, business units) and set up a community of practice, peer champions or office hours, where dedicated support is available, so learning continues after the formal programme ends. In this practical

case, the programme co-lead was a member of the first colleague Copilot programme and was not a member of the library team; this brought valuable diversity of thinking and firsthand learner experience into design and delivery.

- **Be always guided by governance:** ensure all instruction is delivered in line with your organisation's generative AI policy.
- **Keep evaluation lightweight:** collect a small number of indicators (confidence lift, examples of applied use, verification behaviours, skills, knowledge) and use these to refine the next cohort.

## ROLE OF THE LIBRARY

A key message here is that librarians and co-programme leads are well placed to lead AI capability initiatives. In this programme, the library team acted as facilitators, critical friends and ethical guides. They supported participants in validating outputs, identifying gaps and understanding when not to use AI. This role mirrors the advisory function librarians already perform across sectors, including evidence appraisal, research support, information governance and professional education.

## Relevance Across Library Sectors

Although this case study was developed within a single organisation, the approach has relevance for librarians working across health sciences, academic, public and special libraries. The emphasis on embedding AI experimentation into everyday tasks, alongside critical appraisal, ethical awareness and reflective practice, aligns with core professional values common to all library contexts. The programme demonstrates how AI capability can be built incrementally within existing training, induction or continuing professional development structures, without requiring deep technical expertise or significant additional resources.

## CONCLUSION

The programme aimed to move graduates from being Copilot-aware but not yet confident or consistent in extracting value, to becoming confident, responsible users who continuously apply the knowledge, skills and habits needed to collaborate with Copilot to enhance creativity and enable smarter ways of working. This practice-based case study demonstrates how libraries can move beyond tool demonstrations to lead meaningful AI capability building. By encouraging experimentation in the flow of daily work, supported by AI literacy, knowledge management (KM) tools and reflective practice, librarians can help colleagues develop more responsible and more creative ways of working.

Importantly, learning did not end when the formal programme concluded. Graduates are now transitioning into a Bord Bia Copilot Alumni community, designed to sustain momentum and embed learning as an ongoing, collective endeavour. This community brings together a wider, multigenerational and cross-functional cohort of colleagues who have also undertaken the Copilot programme, enabling continued sharing of practice, peer learning and reflection. By positioning AI capability as something that is continually practised, discussed and refined within a supportive professional community, the programme reinforces the idea that AI literacy is not a one-off intervention, but a sustained capability built over time.

The approach described offers a flexible, transferable model that can be adapted by librarians across sectors seeking to build organisational confidence and capability in AI.

**Figure 1.**

Image by Ronan Sweeney

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors acknowledge the use of Microsoft Copilot as a brainstorming and editing support tool during the preparation of this article.

**AUTHOR CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

The authors declare no known conflicts of interest.

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## Practice-Based Article

# Growing Together: Scaffolding Systematic Review Training for Early Career Health Sciences Librarians

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article describes a scaffolded training model developed to prepare early-career health sciences librarians to provide systematic and scoping review services. Two librarians, one in their first year and one in their second year of professional practice, participated in a one-year training process prior to joining the library review services team. The model combined formal external specialization activities, including online courses and webinars, with an internal mentoring framework emphasizing supervised practice searches, consultation observations, and feedback from colleagues. Progression through the scaffold was individualized and completed at the librarian's own pace. By the conclusion of the training period, both librarians reported increased confidence in conducting review consultations, refining research questions, and developing complex search strategies. Formalizing similar models may support sustainable review services and workforce development in academic health sciences libraries.

## **KEYWORDS**

systematic reviews, scoping reviews, review services, training, early career librarians, health science librarians, scaffolded training

## **BACKGROUND**

Systematic review training is a tedious and complicated process. For many early-career health science librarians, exposure to the reviews process happens during their first job, where they undertake the bulk of learning and training under guidance from colleagues. Without any previous exposure during their library program, this process can feel intimidating.

At Vanderbilt University's Eskind Biomedical Library (EBL), our health sciences team identified a need to streamline systematic review training for new team members. EBL serves both an R1 (a doctorate-granting institution with the highest research output) university and a major hospital, resulting in a large number of review requests from teaching faculty and medical providers annually. These requests are serviced by a

team of six full-time health science librarians, who assist review teams all the way through to the publication phase of their research project.

The new scaffolded training process was implemented in April 2024, beginning with us as two early career librarians. Both of us arrived with different levels of familiarity with the systematic review process and worked with our colleagues to refine the scaffolded learning approach. The scaffolded training model was originally designed by our supervisor and was then progressively co-developed with us, whose feedback informed each refinement as the model was being utilized. Now the model is a fully formed scaffold that has informed the entirety of the EBL systematic review training processes for new staff.

## **METHODS**

Our EBL team selected a scaffolded model to enable incoming librarians to engage meaningfully with continuing educational materials, peer mentors, and practice opportunities within the systematic review training process. The scaffolded training was designed to allow us to move forward and backward through the training process, much like moving up and down a ladder. This method enables continuous learning and improvement in systematic review skills throughout our librarianship careers.

Our scaffolded model for systematic review training focuses on four main levels of skill development or enhancement:

- Level One: Observe
- Level Two: Acquire
- Level Three: Practice
- Level Four: Perform

Each of these focus areas was selected with criteria specific to EBL's needs in mind, including considerations such as the types of research requests that we are likely to encounter. At the EBL, librarians are often asked to either consult for best-practice advice or collaborate as co-authors on systematic reviews of biomedical and/or clinical care topics. Therefore, it is essential for the librarians to be well-versed in the Cochrane Handbook standards to effectively instruct our research teams (Higgins et al., 2024). These standards were then woven throughout Level Two: Acquire. EBL's patron base was also a driving factor when designing the training levels. As a library that services both a medical centre and a university, building lasting relationships through research consultations is crucial. Therefore, we dedicated an entire level to observing how to conduct an effective reference interview with patrons during "Level One: Observe".

Additional important focus areas in each scaffold level include:

- Time allotment for training
- Staffing availability/ bandwidth
- Mentorship availability/ bandwidth
- Library funding
- Current library review service models offered

Our scaffold was developed by our librarians and tailored to the needs of our librarians and patron base, allowing for the best educational and workplace outcomes. The next section provides further detail on each scaffold level.

**Level One: Observe**

The first step of the scaffolded process is centred around building foundational knowledge. While some new librarians have a basic understanding of systematic reviews from their library and information science, or LIS, program, others may not have had that exposure. Starting from scratch is the best way to ensure that all new librarians are on the same standing.

This foundational knowledge began with observing colleagues. During the piloting phase of this first step, we sat in during review consults and were permitted to ask questions and take notes while observing more experienced peers. At EBL, systematic review consult requests are common, and we could expect to sit in on one to three consults per week. Most consults were done in person, though a few were online at the request of the principal researcher for the project.

In these sessions, we received a copy of our peer's notes in addition to the ones we took. This allowed us to look back and reflect on the consultation once the meeting had ended. We directed any questions on the structure, scope or direction of the project to our colleague who led the session.

Communication between the lead researcher and the more experienced librarian colleague included us so that we could track communication between research teams and librarians. This communication also included the research team's feedback on the final search string that our colleague presented for their topic. Observing this back-and-forth exposed us to the types of questions and requests that often come from researchers during this process.

At the end of this phase, we had a strong understanding of systematic reviews, the role of a librarian on review teams, and the structure of a review consultation. Promotion from this step of the scaffold to the next depended on our colleague's views of our knowledge base and on how confident our understanding was of the consultation process as a whole.

**Level Two: Acquire**

The second step of the scaffold included obtaining more specialized knowledge on the systematic review process. This was done predominantly through a formalized external specialization process. While there are several systematic review specializations available, we chose to use the Medical Library Association's, or MLA's, Systematic Review Service Specialization, or SRSS, Level One certification course. This decision was made based on recommendations from colleagues and membership in the larger MLA organization.

**External Certification Process**

The MLA offers two levels for their systematic review specialization. According to their website, Level One is meant for building foundational knowledge, and is often recommended for new librarians that are starting with systematic reviews (Medical Library Association, n.d.).

The SRSS Level One competency focuses on five major areas of building systematic review knowledge: fundamentals, communication, searching, documentation and reporting, and data management (Medical Library Association, n.d.). Fulfilling these competencies comes from completing a variety of courses and webinars offered through the Medical Library Association. Up to eight credit hours of required courses and six hours of electives are needed to fulfil the requirements for specialization (Medical Library Association, n.d.).

These courses and webinars cover a variety of topics, from grey literature, complex searching, research

question development, and basic to intermediate software use during reviews, like Covidence and citation managers. Most courses consist of prerecorded webinars, with only one course requiring a live session with feedback. The average length of these videos' ranges from one and a half to three hours. In this training model, these videos are completed on the librarian's own time. At the end of each course, a short attestation is required to get credit.

At the completion of this process, applicants submit a formal request for specialization through the MLA's website. Credit will only be given once the applicant has proven that all requirements for specialization have been fulfilled and has paid the processing fee. Once approved, the applicant will receive a certificate in the mail detailing their SRSS Level One certification.

The external specialization process was meant to build upon the foundational knowledge that we had learned from our peers by diving deeper into more specialized systematic review training. Helpful topics, such as citation managers and grey literature searching, allowed us to look further past the initial consultation, and to understand the full systematic review process.

A formal external certification was included as part of the scaffolded training model for the added benefit of providing us as new librarians with a specialization. The certification at the end of the MLA course is a hard deliverable that we can share with researchers to communicate our value on a review team. It also provides natural progression into the next phase of the scaffolded learning process.

When considering external certification for this step, several important factors were taken into account. The price for the MLA SRSS Level One course ranges from US \$840-1,040, with an additional US \$99-132 needed for the certificate application fee (Medical Library Association, n.d.). At the EBL, fees for this course were allocated from the university. The MLA course provided additional benefits by offering course flexibility, allowing librarians to take up to a year to complete the self-directed work at their own pace.

### **Level Three: Practice**

During and after the second step of skill development, step three of the scaffold naturally emerges: practice. We began honing the key skill of synthesizing research questions into PICOT questions (Gallagher, Ford, & Melnyk, 2019). As this essential research skill built, we also began to practice key complex database searching skills gained through level two of the scaffold. These included term harvesting, search formatting, search translating, proofreading, and search modifying. With the oversight of a peer mentor, we practiced creating keyword lists, implementing truncation tools, field tags, and inserting search filters. This helped achieve a complex search strategy that matched the criteria of the researcher's final PICOT question. We then executed these practice searches and documented the results. This practice helped to build habits of writing and recording searches, which are key skills for systematic review participants.

As we engaged in this enriching practice work during this stage, we each had a peer mentor to review our work and provide individualized feedback on every search. These peer mentors were other EBL librarians, each with five or more years of experience in systematic review searching. This feedback took multiple different forms, such as in-person or virtual meetings, notes/ edits in a shared document, or an email with notes/ edits to the search. This mentor was able to provide specific feedback on corrections or things done well. This was very helpful as we were able to keep notes to reflect on progress for future search strategies. This allowed us to further hone our searching skills and build on our already mounting progress.

Along with individualized peer feedback on systematic review database search strategies, peer mentors were also available throughout the entire scaffolded systematic review training process. This mentoring was available across the library, across colleagues, and existed very informally. Mentoring took place in the form of emails, virtual or in-person meetings, Microsoft Teams messages for brief questions, or a coffee and a chat with someone during a break.

Our senior librarians made themselves very available to us for questions about systematic reviews, for formal peer review, or less formal input, advice, or best practices advice. These mentorships were truly invaluable, as they offered some of the most essential advice. From more technical advice, such as using ctrl+h in Microsoft Word to more easily “Find & Replace” terms when formatting a search, to the more interpersonal advice, such as when to set boundaries on a systematic review team. These mentorships also served to create a harmonious and seamless work environment when bridging the gap between new and existing staff. This training brought forth the opportunity for bonding and team building for the library. Peer mentorship should serve as an essential part of any systematic review training model, as it accounts for the essential professional experience of the librarians who know the process best.

#### **Level Four: Perform**

The fourth and final level of the scaffold is the performance level. By this point, according to our scaffolded model, the librarian should be able to accomplish three main objectives:

1. Be added to the library’s official review service
2. Build and execute systematic review searches
3. Be prepared to continue education on systematic reviews outside of the scaffold

For us as EBL’s newest librarians, being added to the library’s official review service means taking independent systematic review consults for solo projects. While peer review of a librarian’s search strategies is still a large part of our workflow at EBL, per the PRESS guidelines, we operate largely independently (McGowan et al., 2016). Once level four of the scaffold has been reached, consultations with review teams are held individually, self-sufficiently and we each manage our own workload. We are also able to select which projects they would like to work on. Additionally, at this stage, searches are built and executed independently, with peer review occurring at the initial search completion stage, per the PRESS guidelines.

Despite achieving outside certification, completing the scaffold, and operating largely independently, librarians at EBL still largely rely on one another for advice. Our doors always remain open to one another for professional input, questions and support – something built in large part thanks to peer mentorship in this scaffolded training. This is intended to continue long past level four of our training.

While one certification course was completed by both new librarians, continuing education is an essential part of this or any training scaffold for systematic reviews. Certifications like the MLA SRSS have additional iterations, such as Level II SRSS. MLA also has additional certifications in related areas to systematic reviews that may be explored by the new librarians to support their systematic review skills. There are also many other evidence synthesis and evidence-based medicine workshops, courses, webinars, and articles being hosted and published that should continue to be explored throughout the lifespan of the career of a health sciences librarian. Systematic reviews procedure constantly evolving area of study. As funding, time, and bandwidth allow, this should remain a key point in any scaffold of systematic review training to keep new information and approaches as fresh as possible.

## RESULTS

This scaffolded learning process took place from a timeline beginning in April 2024 has continued into the first half of 2026. A one-year training deadline was set for each of us from our respective appointment dates, with both authors projected to complete the process by August 2026.

While we are at different stages of the scaffolded process, both of us have found the process to be beneficial to our systematic review training. During this process, we have felt a high level of confidence in mastered skills after each step in the scaffold and have had a clear understanding of the requirements to pass into the next phase. The formal specialization was an added benefit that we have enjoyed having at our disposal.

Clear benchmarks allowed us to take a more hands-on approach to our own learning. We both were satisfied with tracking our own progress during the scaffolded process and having a clear understanding of learning across the different stages. The longitudinal learning allowed us to make connections between the different scaffolded stages and build upon the foundational skills mastered at each step.

Another added benefit was the opportunity for close peer mentorship with other members of our team. Both of us enjoyed learning from fellow colleagues and forging professional connections as we went through this process. Feedback provided by team members was especially helpful, as we built trust and confidence and fostered an environment inclusive of asking questions and seeking help when needed. In addition to professional benefits, we had personal benefits as well. Due to the slow-building scaffold, we felt low stress for the duration of this learning process. With a one-year timeline that detailed our learning path, we were comfortable with the pace and scope of each scaffolded step and felt that balance between training and normal day-to-day duties was manageable.

While both of us have not finished the process, Emily has reported feeling highly confident working independently on research teams after completing the final step. The scaffolded learning process built a strong foundational and practical understanding of each step of the systematic review process that has allowed her to take on projects of her own. At the time of publication, she has officially been credited as an author on her first systematic review article and has consulted on more than a dozen others. Bryn, who is still on the third step, has earned her SRSS certification and continues to receive feedback on her practice searches.

## CONCLUSION

Scaffolded systematic review training is hugely beneficial for new health sciences librarians, health sciences librarians who are new to systematic reviews, or health sciences librarians who need a formalized refresher on systematic reviews. The detailed levels of the scaffold establish clearly defined goals, encourage time allocation for work tasks, set clear expectations and increase confidence for the training librarian. Opportunities for peer mentorship are created and a healthy, clearly communicated scaffold allows for longitudinal learning. Taking the time to create a scaffold for systematic review training creates confident librarians who are ready to actively partner with researchers and academics in the research lifecycle.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge Rachel Lane Walden, MLIS, Assistant Director for Research and Education Services, from the Annette and Irwin Eskind Family Biomedical Library and Learning Centre, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, for her invaluable assistance with this scaffolding project. We would also like to

thank our colleagues Melissa Mallon, MLIS, and Dr Andrew Shipley at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN for their invaluable assistance with this manuscript.

### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

We have no known conflicts of interest to declare, and this work is unfunded.

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## Regular Feature

# SHOUT

## Sharing Hints, Outcomes and Useful Techniques

In this feature we draw together some of the excellent knowledge and information that our international colleagues have recently produced.

If you have seen or published an open access study that should be highlighted in our regular SHOUT feature, please submit the reference, link and short summary (max 150 words) to [hslj.hslj@gmail.com](mailto:hslj.hslj@gmail.com)

### USEFUL OPEN ACCESS JOURNALS

- Journal of EAHIL (European Association for Health Information and Libraries) <https://ojs.eahil.eu/JEAHIL/index>
- Journal of Health Information and Libraries Australasia (JOHILA) <https://www.johila.org/index.php/Johila>
- Journal of the Medical Library Association (JMLA) <https://jmla.mlanet.org/ojs/jmla>
- Evidence Based Library and Information Practice (EBLIP) <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/eblip/index.php/EBLIP>

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### SELECTIONS FROM [EAHIL 2025, VOL. 21 NO. 3](#)

**Harriss E, Bridge S & Henry M (2025) Shaking it up: a research project to determine why our information skills training sessions are so popular. Journal of EAHIL, 21(3), 2-6.**

<https://ojs.eahil.eu/JEAHIL/article/view/684>

The Bodleian Health Care Libraries (BHCL) deliver ten different workshops as part of the wider University of Oxford (UK) Bodleian Libraries information skills training programme. The authors set out to discover why their training sessions are popular with postgraduate students, through interviews and focus groups. The data indicated a strong need for training in literature searching, evidence synthesis, critical appraisal, science communication (translating research for a non-specialist audience) and writing skills. Their training sessions fill some of those needs, and while the sessions are popular for that reason, the authors set out actions for the team to build on the results from this qualitative research.

**Papachristoforou E, Lewney J, et al (2025) Library usage by DDUH students and staff. Journal of EAHIL, 21(3), 7-15. <https://doi.org/10.32384/jeahil21686>**

The aim of this study was to explore the accessibility, functionality and effectiveness of Dublin Dental University Hospital (DDUH) library services for students and staff. The authors used a survey to assess satisfaction with library hours, study spaces, resources, online databases and preferred study environments among students (dental nursing, technology, hygiene, science) and staff [see article appendix for the questionnaire]. They found that, of 217 respondents (86.2% students, mostly dental science), 68.7% were satisfied with library hours, though undergraduates favoured extended and weekend access ( $p=0.015$ ). Online database difficulties affected 32.3%, highest among dental technology students (57.9%,  $p=0.025$ ). Study spaces were most valued; librarian services least. Most requested additional quiet, group, and lounge areas. Despite alternatives, 68.7% considered DDUH Library optimal. The authors conclude that extended

hours, improved study spaces, digital training, and promoting librarian services are essential to enhance accessibility and meet evolving needs.

**Förstner KU & Albers M (2025) Creating an open, community-driven and resilient data base of life science literature metadata. Journal of EAHIL, 21(3), 16-18. <https://doi.org/10.32384/jeahil21688>**

This brief article presents a brief overview of the proposed OLSPub (Open Life Science Publication database) project, which seeks to develop a continuously expanding database of life-science metadata. Designed as a resource built by the community and for the community, OLSPub aims to provide an open, interoperable, and sustainable infrastructure that enhances access, supports discovery, and ensures long-term resilience in the management of biomedical literature.

**SELECTIONS FROM [EAHIL 2025, VOL. 21 NO. 4](#)**

**D'Hont A, Cortebeeck K, et al (2025) Navigating the publishing trap: safeguarding researchers from predatory practices. Journal of EAHIL, 21(4), 9-13. <https://doi.org/10.32384/jeahil21699>**

This article describes the motivation, development and results of the workshop 'Spotting sharks in the ocean of academic publishing: how to steer clear of predatory behaviour'. The goal of the workshop was to teach researchers how to make the distinction between reliable and untrustworthy journals and reduce distrust of new or smaller publishers. The session was developed at KU Leuven and then adapted for presentation at the EAHIL conference. It provided valuable insights into raising awareness, fostering collaboration among research support staff, and strengthening trust in the publishing landscape.

**Wa Baile M (2025) Making the Medical Library of the University of Bern a caring and safe space. Journal of EAHIL, 21(4), 14-17. <https://doi.org/10.32384/jeahil21694>**

The Medical Library (BibMED) at the University of Bern has launched the Caring Library initiative. This initiative promotes a safe, welcoming space through twenty guiding principles displayed prominently behind the information desk. These principles, such as respect, inclusion, and solidarity, serve as a daily reminder of the values that keep our community caring and discrimination-free. This article describes the motivations behind the Caring Library initiative. The BibMED is committed to fostering an environment where all backgrounds and identities are valued and respected.

**Walz J (2025) Human vs. machine in medical search strategy development: a comparative evaluation of ChatGPT-4.1. Journal of EAHIL, 21(4), 18-21. <https://doi.org/10.32384/jeahil21697>**

This study examined the potential of generative artificial intelligence, specifically ChatGPT-4.1, to support development of search strategies. Using two Cochrane Review topics as benchmarks, AI-generated MEDLINE strategies were compared to the expert strategies using PRESS (Peer Review of Electronic Search Strategies) criteria. Results show that ChatGPT-4.1 can accurately translate research questions and apply Ovid syntax and Boolean operators but shows considerable weaknesses in subject heading and text word selection.

**Scotti V, De Silvestri A, et al (2025) Exploring the impact of scientific research through citation analysis tools in policies and guidelines. Journal of EAHIL, 21(4), 22-24. <https://doi.org/10.32384/jeahil21695>**

Research impact has traditionally been measured through academic citations. In recent years, however, the focus has shifted towards assessing the broader effects of research on society, including its influence on policy-making and clinical guidelines. This brief article explores the role of citation analysis, extending impact measurement beyond academia. Using data from Scival Impact Module, the authors demonstrate how scientific publications from their institution have influenced policy documents and guidelines. They argue that these tools are essential in recognising the real-world value of research, providing meaningful indicators for evaluation and accountability.

**SELECTIONS FROM [JMLA 2025, VOL. 113 NO. 4](#)**

**Wang J & Moody H (2025) Language inclusion intentions in scoping reviews. *JMLA*, 113(4), 290-297. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2025.2170>**

Scoping reviews, in comparison to systematic reviews, examine a broader range of sources to build a conceptual summary of a field of inquiry, making languages other than English (LOTE) literature an important source of information for authors. This study therefore aimed to characterise the current state of LOTE inclusion intentions in scoping reviews. Peer-reviewed, PubMed indexed scoping review protocols published from 01-Jan-2024 to 11-Aug-2024 were analysed for LOTE inclusion. Author affiliation, which LOTEs (if any) were included, and what methods authors planned to use to read LOTE literature were recorded. Their analysis demonstrates the need for increased LOTE inclusion and reporting guidelines for scoping reviews, as well as the importance of analysing LOTE inclusion for other forms of evidence synthesis.

**Patterson B, Diekema AR, et al (2025) "Is this professionally correct?": understanding the criteria nurses use to evaluate information. *JMLA*, 113(4), 298-309. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2025.2163>**

This study sought to determine nurses' evaluation criteria when encountering health information using a mixed-methods approach with a survey and follow-up individual interviews. The authors conclude that nurses value accurate, relevant information; however, their evaluation criteria are often superficial. Educators should encourage nursing students to engage more deeply with the nuances of evaluation. While many nurses pointed to research and peer review as evidence of accuracy, fewer demonstrated a deeper understanding of how to evaluate particular research methodologies, such as systematic reviews. [See appendices A–G for survey and other instruments.]

**Wilson P (2025) Sometimes the apple does fall far from the tree: a case study on automatic indexing precision errors in PubMed. *JMLA*, 113(4), 318-326. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2025.2110>**

This case study identifies the presence and prevalence of precision indexing errors in a subset of automatically indexed MEDLINE records in PubMed (specifically, all MEDLINE records automatically indexed with the MeSH term Malus, the genus name for apple trees). In short, how well does automatic indexing compare [figurative] apples to [literal] apples? The author found that automatic indexing can commit errors when indexing records that have words with non-literal or alternative meanings in their titles or abstracts. Librarians should be mindful of the existence of automatic indexing errors and instruct authors on how best to ameliorate the effects of them within their own manuscripts.

**Watson E & Zhang L (2025) Analyzing the citation impact of predatory journals in the health sciences. *JMLA*, 113(4), 327-335. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2025.2024>**

Using citation analysis techniques, this study investigates the influence of predatory journals in the health sciences. The study found that the content from articles published in predatory journals has infiltrated reputable health sciences journals to a substantial extent. They conclude that it is crucial to develop strategies to prevent citing such articles.

**SELECTIONS FROM [JMLA 2026, VOL. 114 NO. 1](#)**

**Shipman JP (2026) The I's have it: everything needed to practice medical librarianship starts with an I. *JMLA*, 114(1), 1-10. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2026.2431>**

The medical or health sciences library professional vocabulary uses many words that start with an I. On the eve of the 60th anniversary of the Janet Doe Lectureship, this lecture article highlights and summarizes the 15 lectures (27%) that have included an I in their titles. The most frequent I word was information; this word appeared in four lectures. Only one lecture used more than one I word in the title. A new I word incorporated in this lecture, but not in its title, is Intelligence, Artificial.

[Note: +Italics were used to emphasize I words within the lecture or titles of published works.]

**Roga E (2026) Using andragogy and instructional design to teach workshops on systematic searching in an academic library: case report. JMLA, 114(1), 46-52. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2026.2185>**

At Federation University Australia Library, in response to increasing requests for support from researchers conducting knowledge syntheses, a series of workshops on systematic searching was developed using adult learning methods. The authors aimed to deliver quality, engaging learning experiences to researchers, and using instructional design was likely to help meet this goal. Learning outcomes were identified, followed by developing active, collaborative learning strategies and activities. After implementation, the workshops were evaluated informally, resulting in planned changes and improvements to future offerings. The authors found that using andragogy and instructional design provided a structure to follow, and centred researcher needs. While positive feedback was received from workshop participants, there is a need to formally evaluate the learning outcomes to determine if the workshops resulted in improvements in systematic searching practices. The approach to developing the workshops can be adapted by other libraries delivering similar training on systematic searching.

**Lipke L & Gilman N (2026) Changing minds and methods: providing health sciences faculty with alternatives to systematic reviews assignments. JMLA, 114(1), 60-66.**

<https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2026.2056>

Health sciences librarians frequently engage in discussions about the appropriate assignment of evidence synthesis reviews (ES) for graduate students. Health sciences faculty are often not familiar with required standardized methodologies. Health sciences librarians at an R1 (doctoral) institution ventured to address the ES review knowledge gap through a continuing education webinar for health sciences faculty and graduate students. The webinar provided guidance on systematic review (SR) methodology, optional alternative research assignments, and discussions encouraging the use of these assignments. Alternative assignments were developed based on those by Lipke & Price (2025), each with specific learning objectives and grading rubrics. Pre- and post-webinar surveys were conducted to gauge any changes in participants' knowledge, skills, or abilities. Study participants included six faculty and a graduate student. Survey results showed that participants had an improved understanding of, and placed increased importance on, ES method guidelines, with an equal understanding of the need for alternative assignments.

A recording of the webinar can be found in the Binghamton University institutional repository [https://orb.binghamton.edu/library\\_resources/31/](https://orb.binghamton.edu/library_resources/31/) (under additional files).

**Duffy C, Tripp T, et al (2026) Information mastery skills among pre-clerkship students in a problem-based learning curriculum: a case report. JMLA, 114(1), 68-74. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2026.2203>**

Training students to utilize and apply principles of evidence-based medicine (EBM) is critical but data and methods for evaluating students' EBM skills are lacking. The Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine has early curricular introduction of information mastery techniques to combat these challenges. Students create research presentations related to the weekly problem-based-learning (PBL) case to practice applying EBM skills. Medical librarians developed and utilized an assessment tool to evaluate students' weekly presentations. Librarian staff reviewed 595 presentations during the first year of the pre-clerkship curriculum using five criteria: (1) appropriate scope of presentation (2) correct categorization of the question based on the finding information framework (3) appropriate resource used (4) search strategy and (5) bibliographic citations according to American Medical Association (AMA) guidelines. They conclude that, of the evaluated presentations using these criteria, the majority of students routinely and reliably applied EBM skills in their case-based presentations. Further studies will need to look at continued development of these skills throughout other phases of training.

**SELECTIONS FROM [EBLIP 2026, VOL. 21 NO. 1](#)****Medaille A (2026) Editorial: Publishing assessment projects as research. Evidence Based Library and Information Practice, 21(1), 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.18438/eblip31053>**

Librarians and other information professionals commonly conduct assessments and evaluations of their own programs and services and report the results of these efforts in journal articles. However, consideration should be given to when it is appropriate to publish the results of an assessment project as research. This article will provide some guidance about this issue.

**Bell EC & Stagg A (2026) Developing an OPEN Framework for asking EBLIP questions in open education. Evidence Based Library and Information Practice, 21(1), 4–21. <https://doi.org/10.18438/eblip30867>**

This paper proposes a novel framework for asking questions in evidence based library and information practice (EBLIP) called OPEN (Objective, Purpose, Evidence, and Narrative). It responds to the question: How can a framework for asking EBLIP questions be developed and applied to open educational practices (OEP)? Arising concurrently from three-year collaborative project to create a data dashboard, the OPEN framework comprises four elements - Objective: What do we need to know?; Purpose: Why do we need to know this?; Evidence: What evidence do I have or need?; and Narrative: How will I communicate this evidence? These elements guide library and information professionals to define what they need to know, collect, and communicate to make evidence based decisions. and found that the collaborative and reflective nature of the project was instrumental in developing both a useful data dashboard to empower authors to tell their own data stories, and a new framework that contributes to the future of EBLIP and enhances the ability of OEP practitioners to meaningfully engage with EBP.

**Cabugos L & Premji Z (2026) Examining the meaning and methodological characteristics of the systematized review label: a scoping review. Evidence Based Library and Information Practice, 21(1), 167–193. <https://doi.org/10.18438/eblip30757>**

In 2009, a typology by Grant and Booth introduced the concept of a systematized review in which authors (typically students) selectively employ various elements of the systematic review process. The objective of this scoping review is to identify and describe the extent of published systematized reviews, and to 1) identify and collate, where available, sources used for the conceptualization and conduct of the systematized reviews, 2) determine if explanations provided were based on constraints, and 3) describe common methodological characteristics. The authors found that the methodological attributes of published systematized reviews vary significantly. A small number (15) of reviews searched only one database or source, while the majority searched between 2 and 6 sources. The majority (134) provided no search details or a non-reproducible search strategy. Only 36 included reviews mentioned librarian involvement. They conclude that librarians, as methodological guides, participants, or evaluators can play a key role in reinforcing the expectations of this review type and the standards that should be met when publishing a systematized review.

SHOUT is a regular feature of the HSLJ and is compiled by Mary Dunne, of the editorial team.



## Regular Feature - Librarians of Note from the Past

# James Wilkinson and the Evolution of Public Librarianship in Turbulent Times

Mairead Mooney

UCC Library, University College Cork, Ireland

### **BACKGROUND**

Public libraries are often understood as steady presences—quiet places of learning, civic connection, cultural memory, and public service. Yet the professional lives of those who build and sustain these institutions frequently reveal stories of disruption, resilience, and negotiation with forces far larger than any library budget or committee meeting agenda. This is certainly the case in the career of James Wilkinson, Cork City Librarian from 1892 to 1932. His four decades of service illustrate not only the development of a modern municipal library service but also the complexities of practicing librarianship through colonial rule, war, political upheaval, censorship, and shifting national identity.

Wilkinson's professional life demonstrates how librarians work at the intersection of culture, education, politics, and community need, and how the profession has long required a blend of diplomacy, advocacy, and determination. His story, drawn from annual reports, newspaper archives, accession records, and correspondence, offers enduring lessons for library professionals today.

### **KEYWORDS**

James Wilkinson, Public Libraries Ireland, children's literature, Irish Free State, moral panics, de-anglicisation

### **BEGINNINGS: BUILDING A LIBRARY SERVICE FROM SCRATCH**

James Wilkinson arrived in Cork from County Durham in 1892 to take up the post of librarian in a newly created municipal service. The original plan to house the library on South Mall fell through when the landlord refused to reduce the rent, prompting the committee to settle instead in the building that is now the Crawford Art Gallery.

From the outset, Wilkinson demonstrated the energy and organisational acumen that would become hallmarks of his career. Within months he had catalogued the collection, opened reading rooms, and established practices that encouraged civic use of the space. The annual reports of these early years stress the tremendous public demand: by 1905, the library had recorded over 2.8 million visitors, a remarkable figure for a city of its size. His early challenges will resonate with many professionals today: inadequate stock, lack of space, concerns about ventilation, contentious opening hours, and the ongoing quest for more funding. He succeeded in addressing many of these by negotiating the establishment of a purpose-built Carnegie Library in 1905, but this, as we will see, was to be a short-lived boon.

### **INVENTING A CHILDREN'S LIBRARY SERVICE**

One of James Wilkinson's most enduring professional contributions was the establishment of a pioneering children's library service, the first municipal system of its kind in Ireland. While many contemporaries resisted the idea of children as library users meriting specific space and services, Wilkinson recognised early

the desirability of dedicated space for child readers. The new Carnegie Free Library featured a juvenile reading room, an unusual innovation at the time.

His contemporaries were often sceptical. Influential librarian and library theorist L. Stanley Jast, for instance, initially dismissed children's services as a passing novelty. Yet Wilkinson persisted, building a substantial children's collection and recording astonishing usage statistics. Juvenile materials were among the most heavily borrowed items, even as library culture remained anxious about "mere storybooks" and the perceived dangers of fiction.

Professional correspondence and reports reveal Wilkinson's keen awareness that children's reading was never politically neutral. He operated within an Ireland under British rule, where juvenile collections were dominated by imperial adventure stories by the likes of G. A. Henty and R. M. Ballantyne. Later, during the early decades of the Irish Free State, the same collections were accused of undermining the emerging national identity. As debates intensified over the moral influence of printed matter, librarians found themselves at the centre of anxieties about citizenship, national culture, and young readers' alleged vulnerability to the politics of their reading matter.

Wilkinson faced these shifting expectations with characteristic pragmatism, balancing what the public requested, what donors supplied, what was available to purchase and what political discourse demanded. His careful stewardship of children's services demonstrates a fundamental truth of library work: our collections are always interpreted through the ideological currents of their time.

#### **FIRE AND ASHES: THE BURNING OF CORK**

Nothing tested Wilkinson's professional resilience more than the events of 11 December 1920. In reprisal for an ambush at Dillon's Cross, British Crown Forces set fire to numerous buildings across Cork city. City Hall was destroyed, and the flames spread to the adjacent Carnegie Library.

By dawn, the library was a shell. Over 14,000 volumes — the overwhelming majority of the collection — were reduced to ash. Only books out on loan survived.

Wilkinson also lost his home, which occupied the upper floors of the library. His wife and daughter moved to England for a time, hardly surprising as the city of Cork was manifestly unsafe. Yet in the face of such personal and professional upheaval, Wilkinson did not resign. Instead, he made Herculean efforts towards rebuilding the library service. Notices appeared in the press within weeks, requesting the return of borrowed books and appealing for donations to reconstitute the collection. The response, both domestic and international, was extraordinary: thousands of books were donated, authors from home and abroad contributed copies of their work, and parcels of books were sent from as far as America.

The library's accession ledgers from 1921–24 reveal not only the generosity of donors but also the sheer labour of processing, cataloguing, and absorbing an entirely new collection, while simultaneously lobbying for premises, staffing, and long-term funding. For library professionals, Wilkinson's response stands as a case study in crisis leadership.

#### **WORKING IN A CLIMATE OF CULTURAL ANXIETY**

The years following Irish independence were marked by intense debates about reading, morality, and national identity. The Committee on Evil Literature (1926), the Censorship of Publications Act (1929), and high-profile controversies such as the Mayo librarian dispute thrust librarians into the political spotlight.

James Wilkinson was an English Protestant heading up a major public library in a newly independent state

that was committed to establishing an Irish-Ireland identity, in opposition to much that could be regarded as English Protestant culture. In this milieu, Wilkinson might easily have become a target for suspicion. One periodical even attempted to cast doubt on the religious composition of the library's holdings as evidence of his unsuitability to lead a public library in a Catholic-majority city.

However, unlike the unfortunate Letitia Dunbar-Harrison of the Mayo librarian controversy, momentum did not gather around this implicit discrediting of James Wilkinson. It can be speculated that this was due to a number of factors, such as:

- Wilkinson had an established reputation for integrity and diligence after decades of service.
- He had successfully stewarded the library through the catastrophic fire, earning public goodwill.
- His service was deeply embedded in Cork civic life, crossing religious and political lines.

Nevertheless, the professional dilemmas he faced — balancing demand for British-published juvenile fiction against nationalist calls for de-anglicisation, complying with an expanding censorship regime, defending the library profession against accusations of moral laxity — illustrate the multifaceted pressures on librarianship during the early Free State period.

### **THE TEMPORARY LIBRARY: INNOVATION FROM CONSTRAINT**

The establishment of a temporary library service in 1924 at No. 2 Tuckey Street, a former RIC barracks, required compromise. The building had been burned during the War of Independence and was only partially restored. Space was cramped, ventilation poor, and furnishings basic. The city's Carnegie Library had been purpose-built, whereas the Tuckey Street Library was a stop-gap.

Yet within three days of opening, the juvenile shelves were emptied: every one of the almost five hundred children's books had been borrowed. Wilkinson acknowledged this "unexpected extraordinary demand for children's literature." That it was not a fleeting spike in lending due to the novelty of a new library is witnessed to by the 1924-25 annual report, which records that issues from the children's collection totalled 19,832 within six months, in comparison to the previous highest record of issues 14,329 in a full year. Issues continued to grow and grow over subsequent years. The appetite for reading material after four years without a library was palpable.

The Tuckey Street years highlight the adaptive skills that remain essential to library work:

- maximising use of limited facilities
- working with inadequate stock
- dealing with record-high demand
- managing public expectations while advocating for replacement premises
- maintaining staff morale through precarious circumstances

In interviews and reports, Wilkinson stressed the need for a purpose-built library, and his persistent advocacy contributed significantly to the eventual construction of the new library building in Grand Parade, which is still in operation today.

### **OPENING A NEW LIBRARY IN A NEW STATE**

The Grand Parade Library opened in 1930, a modern, spacious, and carefully-planned building with support from the municipal authority and the Carnegie UK Trust. Public reaction emphasised its light-filled reading rooms, dedicated children's library, and promise of renewed civic pride after years of destruction.

Yet its opening coincided with the height of the censorship era. Collections needed constant review as lists

of banned books grew. Professional anxieties were widespread: librarians were expected to act as moral guardians while also supporting learning, maintaining public trust, and implementing rapidly changing policy.

Having navigated the destruction of his library, the loss of his home, the rebuilding of collections, and decades of political turbulence, Wilkinson retired two years after opening the new library building. His forty-year tenure had been testing, coinciding as it did with three wars, the Spanish Flu pandemic, and moral panics about reading. His official retirement letter noted that “few...could realise the strenuous times” through which he had served.

### LEGACY: BUILDING THE CONDITIONS FOR MODERN LIBRARY WORK

James Wilkinson retired at the end of 1932 and moved to Stetchford, Birmingham, where he lived until his death in 1943. Yet his professional influence remained deeply woven into Cork’s library culture.

Minutes from 1950 record the committee’s desire to expand children’s services further and even to open a library building exclusively for the use of child readers, an ambition directly traceable to Wilkinson’s early pioneering work.

His career offers enduring insights into the profession:

- **Librarianship is a public leadership role.** Librarians mediate between culture and community, operating at the intersection of policy, politics, and pedagogy.
- **Collections are always political, explicitly or implicitly.** Wilkinson’s careful negotiation of imperialist fiction, nationalist sentiment and censorship reminds us that librarians must frequently examine the values embedded in their collections.
- **Advocacy is central to the profession.** From leveraging the power of the press, lobbying potential funders, utilising professional networks and negotiating prevailing discourses, James Wilkinson demonstrated the importance of strategic communication.
- **Resilience and adaptability are professional necessities.** Whether navigating pandemics, war, funding crises, or shifting public expectations, librarians must innovate within constraint.
- **Children’s library services matter.** Wilkinson championed improved services to cater for child readers, recognising that they deserved their own library spaces and were not simply passive, uncritical incubators of sentiments espoused in their reading matter.

**Figure 1.**

*James Wilkinson mural*



## CONCLUSION

James Wilkinson's career exemplifies a truth familiar to library staff: library work is never confined to books on shelves. It involves cultivating trust, navigating complexity, and building public value in ways often underappreciated but deeply consequential.

His professional life - spanning Victorian Britain, revolutionary Ireland and the early Free State — reminds us that the library is both a sanctuary and a battleground, a civic anchor and a cultural lightning rod. Today, as libraries again confront political polarisation, debates about reading material and questions about their societal role, Wilkinson's story resonates powerfully. A mural to honour his legacy is located at the junction of Anglesea Street and Old Station Road, Cork City, close to the site of the lost Carnegie Library.

The City Library is on the move again: it has recently been announced that the Counting House complex on South Main Street is to become the new home of the current Grand Parade Library. We may speculate with confidence that James Wilkinson would have been pleased to learn that the new space will offer expanded sections for children, teenagers and young adults.



## Regular Feature - Reflections

### **Libraries are for Everyone**

**Dr Deborah Reed**

Dr Deborah Reed holds a BA from the University of Southampton, an MA in Anglo-Irish Literature from University College Dublin (UCD) and a PhD in Anglo-Irish Literature, also from UCD, specifically on James Joyce's 'Finnegan's Wake'. Deb has had an extensive career in librarianship, working in both the public library service in Ireland and subsequently in Further Education colleges in the UK. In the latter she has held roles as both a librarian and an equality and diversity officer. Here she reflects on issues of social justice for libraries and how her experience as a librarian in Further Education made her aware of how it is especially important to reach out to those who may not even consider that libraries are spaces for them.

#### **KEYWORDS**

social justice, diversity and equity, access

#### **LIBRARIES ARE FOR EVERYONE**

Libraries have always been closely linked to the principles of social justice. Regardless of the type of service or library setting, librarians have long recognised that libraries exist to serve everyone, and that their resources are essential to all members of the community.

The ethos of libraries is rooted in the idea that access should be universal. Librarians, in all their varied roles, understand that the provision of library services is a matter of fairness and equity. This belief drives a commitment to making libraries accessible and relevant to every individual, regardless of background or circumstance.

#### **EXPERIENCES IN FURTHER EDUCATION**

After an early period working with Dublin public libraries, I moved into Further Education in England, serving in two different colleges. Historically, Further Education has been regarded as the 'Cinderella' service within the wider education sector, often overlooked and underfunded. At the time, government funding per student was lower than in any other branch of educational provision. Much of Further Education focuses on providing vital catch-up opportunities for young people who may not have thrived in mainstream schooling. This meant our students were less academically able, but their motivation was frequently remarkable and this positivity helped to overcome many challenges.

#### **INEQUALITY IN LIBRARY PROVISION**

My first awareness of the gap in equality occurred when I noticed how poor the provision was for the students with learning disabilities. Staff would sometimes comment that mainstream services did not cater for these learners, and it became clear that library resources were primarily aimed at those studying university-level courses, Access to University, or A-levels. This raised the question: should the library not also serve foundation studies students and those pursuing vocational paths?

I decided to explore the possibility of greater library support for these groups. Foundation and springboard course staff were immediately responsive and enthusiastic. There was no dedicated library budget for these courses and the Head of Foundation Studies provided a grant for shelving to house materials rarely found in libraries. I sourced and, in many cases, created resources tailored to these students. Library sessions were introduced into their curriculum, and tutorial groups were brought into the library to access the new materials. Staff, realising there were actually other useful resources in the existing collection which they didn't know about, began to use the library for careers guidance as well.

### **SUPPORTING VOCATIONAL LEARNERS**

Vocational learners, such as those studying mechanics and building trades, were also notable absentees from the library. They had course requirements to achieve certain levels in English and Maths so we initially focused on resources in these areas. This led to requests from staff for more technical materials, and soon, students from these courses were regularly visiting the library as part of their tutorials.

There was, however, less initial interest from hairdressing and beauty therapy courses. While the courses were excellent, the staff felt there was little the library could contribute and offered me no suggestions. I began subscribing to a selection of hairdressing magazines. 'Black Hair' proved particularly popular. Staff frequently visited the library to read it, leading to the magazine being placed on a '4 hour loan' due to its high demand. In a predominantly white, rural area, staff appreciated the resource, which helped them reflect on teaching approaches to diverse concepts of race and beauty, prompting questions and further discussions about inclusion. They didn't know what they didn't know!

### **INCLUSION THROUGH THE STUDENT UNION**

The student union appointed officers with equality roles and they led the student body's participation in national initiatives. The library, with several display areas throughout the college, partnered with the student union to celebrate events such as Black History Month, Holocaust Remembrance, and Pride. The officers were very keen on the collaboration and would use the library displays as points to distribute their own literature. We would display relevant stock in the library which then turned into increased loans. We actually had a copy of Nelson Mandela's autobiography: 'Long Walk to Freedom', which had never gone on loan until it was featured in a Black History Month display.

### **KNOCK-ON EFFECTS**

These basic outreach efforts have led to many positive, unexpected outcomes. For example, the library provided a safe space for a student seeking information about their legal position, helping them avoid a forced marriage. We were a little more ambivalent about a local Indian restaurant sending in some dishes to sample as their son had told them about our celebration of a Muslim festival, so we diverted this generosity into the student union. Recognition also came from Ofsted, the UK government office that oversees standards in education, when they noted improved achievement among Bangladeshi students due to their increased library use. I will confess here no specific targeted intervention was implemented but we took the compliment as it reflected the broader impact of inclusive library practices.

### **PROGRESS AND CONTINUING CHALLENGES**

Since these early efforts, understanding and appreciation of diversity have grown considerably. Physical accessibility barriers have largely been addressed, and community partnerships are now standard practice for most libraries. Yet, societal inequality persists, and there is still much to do to create truly inclusive environments. Having a strategy is crucial: it is important to observe who is absent from the library and to actively seek their views on what would encourage them to utilise resources to which they are equally entitled.

Throughout my time at the colleges, I was heartened to see a genuine commitment to supporting these vital initiatives. Perhaps inevitably, I found myself increasingly collaborating with senior managers and governors to drive meaningful improvements in diversity across the curriculum. There was an era of significant societal change and there was a willingness from Government to update Equality legislation to reflect this by reconciling the 100 plus pieces of legislation into some cohesive frameworks. I was pleased to contribute to these, from the development of the Gender Recognition Certificate Act, known as the Gender Recognition Act, right through until Equal Civil Marriage, more properly known as the Marriage (same-sex couples) Act. Some of these very much need updating so I trust that there are serving librarians who continue to champion progress and advocate for positive change.

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## Regular Feature - Librarians in Interesting Roles

# **A Library Career: Spanning Public, Health and Schools Libraries in New Zealand and Ireland**

**Penny Wiggle**

The W.B. Yeats Library, The High School, Dublin

### **ABSTRACT**

This article describes a career that commenced in a public library in New Zealand, then moved to a health sciences library in Ireland and, finally, to an Irish secondary school. I describe how each setting brought its own unique challenges and rewards and demonstrate how a librarian can enjoy a great variety of work during the lifetime of a career.

### **KEYWORDS**

career, public librarian, school librarian, health librarian

My library career commenced in 1982, when I started as a Library Assistant in Birkenhead Public Library, Auckland New Zealand. A large public library, set in one of Auckland's suburbs, it serves a widespread geographical area – Auckland being a sprawling city. There I worked from the ground up – as a Junior, I was responsible for making the morning tea, doing the “bun run” to the local shop each day prior to the 10:00 am tea break, sorting and counting the daily non-fiction issue cards from the previous day (sometimes as many as 1,200 a day), and shelving all of the adult fiction. I absolutely loved it and sometimes yearn for those days of practical tasks that are akin to mindfulness in their repetition.

After a year, I was encouraged to apply to Library School. In 1983 New Zealand, the degree course was only just commencing, the main route to qualification was the New Zealand Library Studies Certificate. It was akin to an apprenticeship, one had to be first employed as a Library Assistant and then apply to the only central college, the New Zealand School of Library Studies based in Wellington. Studies were in blocks of six weeks, during which you had to live in Wellington. I was lucky enough to have my accommodation paid for by the City Council that employed me but others, particularly those in small, private libraries, had to pay for this themselves. There were three six-week blocks, with nine months in between. In those months, you had to submit assignments that were based on the library in which you worked. For example, I had to do a literature review on the craft books available in my library. Upon qualification, my Head Librarian created a new post of Circulation Librarian (known as Reader Services in Ireland), which I performed for another 5 years.

After a period of travel, I ended up in Ireland. As I was unable to secure a librarian position, I (bizarrely) retrained in the Adelaide Hospital as a nurse. Whilst I did not love working as a nurse, it assisted me to obtain a post as a part time Library Assistant in The Adelaide and Meath Hospital (AMNCH), now Tallaght University Hospital. Back in the work I loved, I eventually became the Reader Services Librarian. For one of my years in Tallaght, I was seconded to the CEO of the hospital as Research Librarian, working with members of the Management Team, performing literature searches and reviews.

Due to family reasons, I moved from Tallaght to my present employment, The High School in Dublin. I am the only librarian employed in this large secondary school. We have circa 850 pupils and are a fee-paying Church of Ireland co-educational school.

In an odd quirk of the Irish education system that the majority of fee-paying schools in Ireland have librarians but only 30 of the 235 publicly funded Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) post primary schools do. The DEIS schools that have a librarian are funded through the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP). This is an Irish Department of Education intervention programme for post-primary students at risk of early school leaving or academic failure. However, only schools who can create the space for a library qualify for this funding, which was limited, despite initial promises.

This means that currently, in Ireland, approximately only 80 of the 720 secondary schools in Ireland have a library staffed by a qualified librarian. I have often heard said amongst school librarians that a room full of books in a school, manned by a teacher, supervisor or pupils is not a library, it is a room full of books.

Being a school librarian in Ireland generally means that you do everything: circulation, acquisitions, cataloguing and classifying, user services, shelving and deselection. But this is one of the things that I love about my job. If I get bored of cataloguing, I can go and do some shelving, for example. Very few schools have more than one member of staff in their library. I am lucky, as I am autonomous in what I do. I report to the Academic Deputy Principal, but I am trusted to work independently by school management, ensuring I keep the Deputy Principal and Principal up to date with the library and its activities. We all occasionally discuss ideas or upcoming events but, overall, I am left to do what I do best.

A large part of the role is, like many librarian roles, pastoral. The library always attracts the quiet or lonely children. It is one of my school's designated Safe Spaces and we advertise this to our incoming parents and children. I ensure that there is no bullying, excessive noise or disruptive behaviour. It is important that schools have such an environment to give children that need this a place to feel included.

I work closely with the English Department. I host first and fourth year English classes every week, where the focus is silent reading. As the Librarian, I support the teacher in this, providing up to date material and giving recommendations – especially to reluctant readers or those who require support for learning. At other times I host other subjects, such as science. During national event weeks, Science or Space Week for example, the teachers bring in their classes to read the science books or to do word searches or crosswords. I maintain a noticeboard at the entrance to the library, and this changes weekly, according to the school calendar and weekly events.

Increasingly, Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate subjects require project work. Over the years, my role in this has also expanded, giving lessons on referencing and basic research skills. I find the glazed expression on the children's faces quite amusing – I always assure them that these skills will be carried on into their college life, and that they'll thank me then.

As Irish secondary teachers have been known to say, there are three reasons to be a teacher – June, July and August. I am extremely fortunate to have the same contractual holidays. But I would do this job anyway. I am very glad to have done my training in a large public library – I had the opportunity to learn all aspects of a librarian's role and had fantastic colleagues to train me. A public library gives one the experience to deal

with all types of people with a variety of social problems. Working in a school library has similarities – you need to have the ability to work with children of all personality types and educational needs. This can be very challenging at times, especially when combined with behavioural issues.

In comparison, working in Tallaght University Hospital Library for eight years, was a very different experience. An academic library is very different to both a public and a school library. It is a more structured environment, with a far greater need for a detailed catalogue (both in terms of cataloguing and classification of materials). For example, in the public library that I worked in, we greatly simplified Dewey numbers and subject headings, and this is done to an even greater degree in my school library. An academic librarian also deals with a more specific clientele (neither any less challenging), with different outcome requirements to a school library.

I'm not convinced I could have done this job as a young, newly qualified librarian, but it is an amazing and privileged role in which I will be ending my career. It is now up to Irish policy makers to gain the foresight to employ librarians in every school in the country.



## Reports & Reviews

# HSLG Conference Report Celebrating Our Collective Power: Finding Strength in Difference

**Therese Ahern, Breeda Herlihy, Dymphna McGettigan, Aoife McGrath,  
and Julianne O’Callaghan**

The annual Health Sciences Libraries Group (HSLG) conference took place in the Ashling Hotel, Dublin, on 12th March 2026. Delegates were from health and academic libraries, and this year we were especially delighted to also welcome students from the library masters programmes in University College Dublin and Dublin Business School.

The following is a brief synopsis of the presentations from the day. Where presenters have given permission, their slides are available to view on the HSLG website <https://hslg.ie/category/events/conference/>.

### **Keynote Speaker Prof. Brendan Kelly - Information, Intelligence, Instinct: Navigating Knowledge in an Ocean of AI**

Our keynote speaker was Brendan Kelly, Professor of Psychiatry, Trinity College Dublin and Consultant Psychiatrist at Tallaght University Hospital.

Brendan delivered a balanced and insightful keynote, offering a clear evaluation of public anxiety surrounding artificial intelligence. He positioned current concerns within a recurring historical pattern of technological “panic,” drawing parallels with earlier societal reactions such as 19th-century fears around steam power and 20th-century concerns about the impact of radio on children and family life. This historical perspective reinforced Brendan’s point that societal anxieties about new technologies follow familiar patterns.

Brendan emphasised the gap between popular discourse and real-world data, challenging claims that technology is driving a youth mental health crisis. He noted that global rates of self-harm and suicide have been declining, a trend that contradicts widespread narratives and underscores the importance of grounding discussions in reliable evidence. This reframing encouraged a more measured perspective on AI and its potential effects.

The keynote also outlined several benefits AI can bring to healthcare and information environments. These included enhanced pattern recognition, more consistent data management, support for evidence review, and reduced administrative workload. However, Kelly balanced these positive aspects with a careful examination of four significant tensions: the epistemic or “black box” problem, which raises concerns about explainability; ethical issues stemming from bias in historical training data; the relational knowledge gap, where AI cannot replicate empathy or narrative understanding; and unresolved questions surrounding legal accountability.

To support responsible engagement with AI, Brendan presented a five-part framework: human judgement

must remain primary; understanding AI models is important even if partial; monitoring performance is essential; accountability must stay with human professionals; and narrative—the human story—must always remain central. This structured approach offered practical guidance for professionals navigating rapid technological change.

Brendan Kelly concluded with Bernard Levin's reflection: "The silicon chip will transform everything, except everything that matters, and the rest will still be up to us." This sentiment encapsulated the theme of his address, emphasising that while AI may reshape processes, it cannot replace the core human values that underpin healthcare, librarianship, and ethical decision-making.

### **Tony Linnane - One person libraries in healthcare settings**

Tony Linnane, Area Library Manager for HSE Library, gave a very interesting talk on one-person libraries in healthcare settings based on the findings from a HSE Library Solo Librarians Group which was convened by Tony in the last year.

The group found that there are some advantages to being a one-person library. There is a degree of autonomy with more control over service direction and priorities, the ability to tailor services, to build strong relationships with clinicians and staff and to have increased visibility of library impact. In addition, there are professional development advantages as a solo librarian can have the opportunity to develop a broad range of skills and can gain a holistic understanding of library management.

However, the group found that there are accompanying challenges. These can be very practical in nature, such as a lack of cover for sick leave or annual leave. Working without immediate colleagues can lead to both professional and geographical isolation and a lack of peer collaboration. There is a risk that having responsibility for all tasks in a library may lead to a very heavy workload and to burnout.

The Group's recommendations to mitigate the challenges include protecting library spaces, providing institutional support, protected time for CPD, implementing hybrid service models and strengthening virtual networking.

### **Bryn Murphy and Emily Adydan – Growing together: scaffolding systematic review training for early career librarians**

Bryn Murphy and Emily Adydan, two early-career librarians from Eskin Biomedical Library at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, spoke about the two-year scaffolding systematic review training which they undertook as new staff members before joining their library's review services team. The scaffolding process includes four key stages for the trainee:

**Observe** – sitting in on other team members' systematic review consults where they can take notes and ask questions as well as read over search documentation.

**Acquire** – formal systematic review specialisation through the Medical Library Association (MLA). This includes webinars on specialised review topics as well as other training such as database certification.

**Practice** – beginning to practice searches supported by peer mentoring from experienced team members.

**Perform** – taking on projects independently supported by Continuing Education and peer review from mentors according to PRESS guidelines.

Both librarians felt that the scaffolded process increased their confidence when approaching systematic reviews and clear benchmarks provided direction and purpose during the learning period. They urged conference attendees to avail of any similar training available to them through their institutions.

### **Niamh Walker-Headon - HSE Library partner organisation collaborations**

First up after coffee with our colleagues and sponsors, Niamh Walker-Headon, HSE Library Resources Manager informed us of how HSE Library ensures its significant volume of partner organisations have access to a suite of constantly in demand medical research resource databases and the training of users on them. Niamh gave us a clear snapshot of the procurement process involving a comprehensive system of service agreements, licences and contracts between partners, the HSE and vendors where all 3 parties are protected allowing the service to run smoothly and sustainably.

### **Bennery Rickard - — HSE Library Day, 24th September 2025: light a big fire**

Bennery Rickard, HSE Library Area Library Manager East, reviewed HSE's Library Day held in September 2025, in the aptly titled presentation "Light a Big Fire". Bennery confirmed librarians are vitally important in the HSE but are often hidden within the system and the Library Day was an opportunity to celebrate their work and invite wider engagement in a lively way.

As HSE libraries marketing lead, Bennery was able to take us through in detail the marketing timetable and plan for the day. A fabulous case study on how to host a successful event reaching existing and new library users across the country.

### **Aoife Lawton & Louise Farragher – A national eHealth Library for all: how can we meet the needs of a nation?**

In the final presentation in this session Aoife Lawton, General Manager, HSE Library and Louise Farragher, Senior Information Officer, Health Research Board updated us on the highly ambitious national eHealth project. Aoife, who is chairing the business case working group for the project, took us through the background and context which is ultimately the provision of the most up to date research and evidence to enhance patient care, safety and empowerment but with barriers and gaps to be managed to comprehensively achieve this.

Louise, who chairs the roadmap working group for the project, gave us exciting examples of international best practice for eHealth libraries from Norway, Andalucía and the UK, and beautifully summed up an e-library as something that sounds simple but has a lot of moving parts requiring attention, especially the protection of funding commitment.

All in all, this session was an engaging glimpse of the extensive national body of work both routine and aspirational, the HSE library service is committing to for the benefit of all.

### **Mairéad McKeown & David Lombard - Preparing future talent for the AI era: a graduate Copilot upskilling programme**

The afternoon session of the HSLG Conference 2026 began with an engaging talk by Mairéad McKeown and David Lombard, from Bord Bia. Mairéad immediately caught the audience's attention by declaring HSLG the best conference in the Irish library sector. With that level of charm, it's easy to see why she was approached by a Bord Bia talent manager to design and deliver a Copilot upskilling programme.

This request, however, came with familiar challenges: no additional budget, headcount, or time. Despite these hurdles, Mairéad and her colleagues developed a pilot programme and successfully scaled it up for Bord Bia's international graduate cohort, who are completing a fully funded MSc in Food Business at UCD.

The ambition was clear: equip future talent with practical skills for an AI-enabled workplace and ensure the food industry has the capability it needs. With an existing organisational subscription to Copilot, they focused their programme around this tool. It consisted of three phases:

- **Phase 1: Self-directed foundation**

Participants completed LinkedIn Learning pathways on responsible AI use and prompt engineering. Leveraging an existing subscription to Copilot allowed the team to avoid budget and staffing barriers.

- **Phase 2: Knowledge exchange and experimentation**

This phase, described as “where the magic happens” encouraged participants to share use cases, learn from peers, and experiment with Copilot. They also created a prompt library to ensure learnings were shared widely.

- **Phase 3: Creative finale**

Participants showcased their skills and demonstrated innovative uses of AI tools.

A pre-programme survey revealed that many graduates were aware of Bord Bia’s Copilot subscription but were hesitant to use it due to concerns about privacy and commercial sensitivity. The programme’s structure and supportive group environment helped address these fears, giving participants the psychological safety to experiment. All reported increased knowledge and skills by the end. They progressed from simple awareness to confident, everyday use of Copilot as a productivity partner. Interestingly, many also reported increased creativity stimulated by through use of AI.

It was insightful to hear Mairéad and David reflect on the programme’s success and to see how their work aligns with IFLA Library and Information Trends. The programme now runs three times each year across the organisation and even has a waiting list.

### **Mary Hearne - Beyond the individual: a collective approach to AI literacy for librarians**

The next speaker was Mary Hearne from the RCSI, who is involved in a European funded research project “[AI2MED](#)” which focuses on integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into medical care. Mary’s presentation examined the impact AI is having on healthcare professionals, librarians and educators.

In general, librarians tend to be adopters of technology, so Mary examined the level of our AI literacy skills and practice through the published literature. She found that libraries are part of digital inclusion strategies at a national level and have an established role in providing technology skills and training which are important foundations for our role with supporting AI literacy education. AI literacy has become part of the professional evolution of librarians as AI topics are embedded in information literacy training.

However, in the literature to the end of 2024, she found that AI literacy had not yet been incorporated into many formal LIS programmes and that many librarians, while individually motivated, were upskilling on an ad-hoc basis. Some had doubts about the trustworthiness of educational resources in the area so Mary argued that the many unanswered questions around AI should be addressed via a “collective professional response” and proposes sector level as well as organisation level interventions.

The example of ambient AI scribes in clinical settings certainly raised some questions from the audience and discussion points with the speaker. As multiple companies are bringing products to the market in this area, it’s not clear whether the AI products are simply speeding up note taking or if some cognitive processing is happening as the clinician interacts with the patient.

In response to these challenges, RCSI have developed an online open education resource which is an introduction to AI in healthcare for healthcare professionals. Additionally, the AI2MED project develops curricula for AI literacy for healthcare professionals to help bring everyone to a shared baseline level of understanding of AI.

### **Aphra Kerr - Libraries, Expertise and Literacy in the AI Era: a hands-on workshop for busy professionals**

Following on from her successful Summer 2025 presentation at the HSLG/A&SL Joint Networking evening, Aphra Kerr, Professor of Digital Media and Communication at the School of Information and Communication Studies, UCD, returned to deliver a hands-on workshop.

To many, AI still feels like a fast-moving, sometimes bewildering frontier. One of the immediate strengths of Aphra Kerr's workshop was its accessibility – no prior AI knowledge required. Aphra opened with a clear, engaging walk-through of the AI timeline, tracing its roots back to the 1950s.

A recurring concern among health librarians is whether AI will automate fundamental professional tasks. Aphra addressed this head-on, AI cannot fully automate a systematic review. Human expertise, particularly the deep, critical, and methodological knowledge that librarians provide, remains indispensable. AI may assist, but it cannot replace the intellectual labour of rigorous knowledge production.

Aphra highlighted the European Algowatch Project, completed in 2025, which aims to educate the public about algorithms and AI. This fed directly into the workshop's three core goals:

1. Understanding how algorithms and AI shape the information we encounter online, especially in relation to misinformation and disinformation.
2. Exploring and engaging with interactive digital resources that illuminate how these systems work.
3. Reflecting on how this knowledge can support critical thinking and ethical, effective use of AI in libraries and everyday life.

Attendees were reminded that AI is already embedded in everyday tools, opening Adobe software now triggers prompts for AI summaries. Aphra encouraged attendees to compare different AI systems, from ChatGPT to Copilot, and to understand their varying capabilities and limitations.

Delegates were invited to identify the top two uses and top two concerns relating to AI in libraries, which sparked animated discussions around the room. The most common uses identified included citation checking, coding, chatbots, and cataloguing assistance. The most common concerns centred around distrust of AI systems, hallucinations, stereotyping, and bias. The exercise underscored both the opportunities and the risks that AI introduces into library practice.

Aphra emphasised the importance of understanding how algorithms are trained and how they build user profiles through interaction. She outlined the two major types of algorithms shaping online experiences: recommendation algorithms, which suggest content based on past behaviour; and ranking algorithms, which order content to maximise engagement. These systems track search history, location, likes, reposts, and even the content users scroll past. The result: echo chambers, reduced content diversity, and environments where misinformation and disinformation can thrive. Aphra stressed that researchers and librarians must actively resist working in bubbles.

A striking example of AI bias came from a simple prompt: “Draw a person with a disability.” The AI produced an image of a person in a wheelchair, revealing how training data can reinforce narrow stereotypes. Prof. Kerr urged participants to ask critical questions: what is happening behind our screens; how are models trained; and what biases are embedded in the data. The conversation naturally extended to deep fakes, the risks they pose, and the vulnerability of individuals, particularly women and minorities.

The workshop featured three hands-on activities that brought algorithmic behaviour to life:

**Activity 1: My Digital Footprint.** Participants searched for famous paintings on Facebook or Instagram. While the images were broadly similar, the order and personalisation varied, with many attendees noticing AI-generated images and content tailored to their interests, especially animal lovers who saw pets inserted into classic artworks. This sparked discussion about what platforms learn from user behaviour.

**Activity 2: Being an Active User.** Attendees experimented with blocking or reporting irrelevant content. After closing and reopening the app, the previously unwanted content had disappeared—an immediate demonstration of how quickly algorithms adapt to user signals.

**Activity 3: Creating a Gen AI Image.** The final activity explored generative image creation. Participants discussed how to verify whether an image is authentic, whether AI-generated images require citation, and where and when such images are ethically appropriate.

Professor Aphra Kerr delivered a workshop that was both practical and thought-provoking. Participants left with a clearer understanding of AI’s capabilities, its limitations, and the critical role librarians continue to play in fostering digital literacy, ethical engagement, and informed information practices. The session reinforced that while AI is reshaping the information landscape, human expertise remains at the centre of trustworthy knowledge work.



## In Memoriam: Dr Beatrice Doran PhD, MBA, BA, Dip Lib

**Kate Kelly**

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), Dublin

Beatrice Doran, formerly Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland's (RCSI) Chief Librarian 1986-2007, died October 13, 2025.

Beatrice had a transformative impact on RCSI library services and librarianship in Ireland, UK, Europe and internationally.

Beatrice was the first qualified Librarian in RCSI's long history and professionalised RCSI Library service at a rapid pace following her appointment in 1986.

Most visibly she moved the old 19<sup>th</sup> century library full of antiquarian texts, to a purpose-built modern library in the Mercer building, opened by then President Mary Robinson in 1994 and followed this by establishing the Beaumont Hospital Library, opened in 1996, as the largest hospital library in Ireland at the time.

More importantly she introduced technology to the libraries and to RCSI. She was an early adopter of technologies that supported and improved student and faculty access to, and delivery of, library services and resources. She provided computing facilities for library users, introduced the first online library management system and was often ahead of the College and other libraries in adopting and using technology of the day. The library had the first and only fax machine in the College in 1987, was the first Irish library to introduce CD Rom technology in 1989 and provided RCSI with its first online catalogue in 1990. With the arrival of the Internet to RCSI, circa 1996, the library services entered the digital era. Just a year later, in 1997, 400 e-journals were available through the library website, also one of the first College websites. By the end of her tenure, 2000 e-journals were available and the foundations for the future, predominantly online, service were set. By the time she retired in 2007 and in the words of Prof Cathal Kelly (RCSI) she had transformed the service into— *'a flagship for medical libraries throughout the world'*.

Her impact on the development of health sciences librarianship in Ireland and Europe was significant. She served as President of the Library Association of Ireland (LAI) three times, 1993, 1995 and 1998. She was Chair and Secretary of the Consortium of National and University Libraries for Ireland (CONUL). She was a founding member, later Secretary and Senior Vice President of the European Association for Health Information and Libraries (EAHIL) and the Chair and founder of the Health Sciences Libraries Group of the Library Association of Ireland (LAI). She provided consultancy services internationally travelling variously to the UK, Europe, Iraq, the Sudan, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia and served on editorial boards for health sciences librarianship journals in Ireland. Beatrice was a founding member and member of the editorial board for many years, for Health Libraries Review, now Health Information and Libraries Journal (HILJ) UK. Beatrice wrote extensively in professional journals and was a frequent attendant and speaker at international conferences including the US Medical Library Association (MLA) conference.

Continuing professional development was something she advocated and practiced. She was generous with her time, always contributing ideas and with enthusiasm. During her time in RCSI she achieved an MBA and following her retirement a PhD in 2011, with her thesis “**Knowledge Management: an empirical analysis in relation to Irish healthcare**”. It was the first empirical study of its kind in the health system of the Republic of Ireland.

In later years she gained recognition as a local historian and published a number of books on the history of the Dublin suburb of Donnybrook.

She is remembered as a congenial companion, powerful advocate and trailblazer in medical and health care libraries, and as someone with a rich and full life beyond her professional persona – she had a keen intellect, a great curiosity and interest in people and places, was a breeder of prize-winning cats, and was passionate about golf, opera, history and her beloved Donnybrook, Dublin where she lived for most of her life.

May she rest in peace.



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