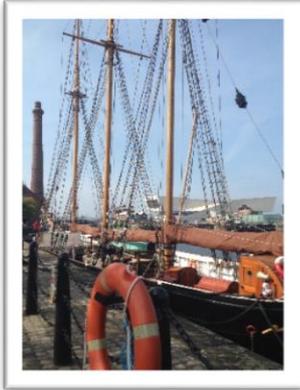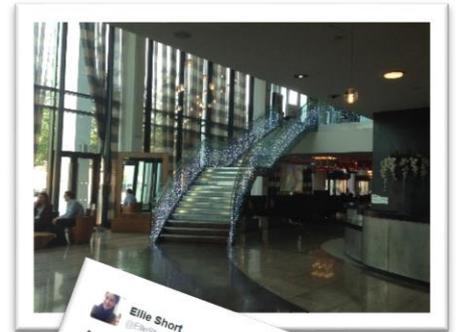Ellie Short

Northern Collaboration Conference 2016

Collaboration: Delivering Innovation, Engagement and Impact

I was delighted to be offered a sponsored place at the Northern Collaboration Conference 2016, which took place in Liverpool. Our venue, the Hilton Hotel, had fantastic views overlooking Albert Dock, the historic heart of the city. Despite having to get up at 5am, the day started positively as I bumped in to some old Leeds Beckett colleagues at the station in Leeds – networking to begin before the event even started!

The event's keynote speaker, futurist Richard Watson (check out his website 'What's next?' for interesting, current global trends), begun the day by raising some important issues on the impact of an increasingly digital age. Are we becoming too self-centred (think selfies, the preference of technology over face to face engagement), and too technology reliant? Using Henry David Thoreau's quote "Our inventions… [are an]… improved means to an unimproved end", Richard suggested that technology does not necessarily guarantee social and educational improvement. Technology might make tasks such as researching faster and more efficient, but at the expense of which skills (the *Medieval Help Desk* was a fabulous video for highlighting this predicament)?

Also, to what extent does this really matter? There's also the digital deluge problem: too much choice can result in research anxiety and a lack of research diversity, for example most of us stick to the first page of search results (…guilty!). The workshops however did highlight many positive impacts of our digital age and reflected that it might be more about finding a healthy balance.

The conference offered a fantastic range of sessions (both presentations and interactive workshops), the first of which I attended was *White Rose Libraries: Developing a Regional Shared Print,* delivered by Michael Fake (White Rose Libraries) and Liz Waller (University of York). I thought the White Rose Library initiative was a great collaborative concept, with numerous positive impacts, including: supporting and broadening research, identifying shared collections for easier accessibility, possibly creating more study space, in depth stock management and curation and improving overall student experience. Most interesting was White Rose Libraries' use of GreenGlass, a web based tool for managing monograph materials, allowing the comparison of data between libraries and enabling them to visualise and use collections in new, collaborative and unique ways.

I found the second interactive workshop *Reconceptualising Information and Digital Literacy in a Digitally Fluid World* headed by Caterina Sciamanna, Cat Bazela and Liam Bullingham (University of

Sheffield) incredibly engaging and thought provoking. Caterina presented the key concept, that learning is about change and doesn't always follow a linear pattern or strictly adhere to a learning cycle consisting of discovering, communicating, understanding, questioning, referencing and creating. The workshop helped me identify how to incorporate different ways of teaching different skills and materials in different formats, and engaging according to various learning styles, with a chance to apply this theory to practical lesson planning. I appreciated how important it is to improve teaching techniques and excellence in order to engage all learners to ensure better information retention.

The third session I attended, presented by Cath Dishman and Pat Clarke (Liverpool John Moores University), was *Open Journals for Open Learning: academics and library working together to develop students' scholarly learning,* a fantastic example of collaboration between institutional departments (the library and academic faculty). Cath and Pat talked about the Health and Social Care Journal, containing student written articles, as an excellent way of engaging students (who appeared to respond better to each other's work) whilst also having a long lasting impact on students' university experience and career skills. This also highlighted the potential career paths, and the skills needed, for students in further research or publishing focused roles. I enjoyed learning about the role and demands of a library as a publisher, such as editing demands, how time consuming it was and getting to grips with copyright policy in better detail (articles were published under the creative commons licence).

My final workshop was Emma Thompson's (University of Liverpool) *The Teaching Excellence Framework: an opportunity for libraries to make an impact?,* where I really appreciated being able to discuss how the TEF impacts our work, and how we do our jobs, and what implications the White Paper has for libraries and our subsequent roles and the future. Emma highlight that the current government White Paper has no specific library focus, therefore how do we get the most out of government funding? How difficult will this make it for the future of libraries? What came across most in this session was how to be evaluative and critical of our services and how to use our strengths and weaknesses to create positive outcomes of the opportunities we can identify. Increasing our understanding of policy, and where we might fit in relation to it, can only make us stronger when securing support and funding, even if it's as simple as using appropriate terminology.

Our closing speaker Richard Heseltine (chair of the [James Reckitt Library Trust](#)) shrewdly concluded the day's themes in his closing speech by touching upon one of the key themes of the conference: impact. It is vital, as librarians, that we "do not confuse purpose with impact". Our core purpose is not just to improve NSS scores, but to think more broadly about how we're engaging and making an impact on students, academics, peers and the information sector on the whole.

The Northern Collaboration Conference is a fantastic experience for a wide range of information professionals, providing the opportunity to discuss relevant issues, be inspired by projects and network with other library professionals, which was exciting and interesting. The day really encouraged me to be more self-evaluative: how can I better fulfil my current role? How do I improve what I am already doing? How do individual and collaborative efforts have an impact on libraries and their communities? I feel more prepared for my career and have a better understanding of the future direction libraries are taking and how our jobs will evolve.

Ellie Short