

## Report on the Northern Collaboration Conference 2016

By Sean Matthew Smith, Durham University

It was here! The 2016 Northern Collaboration Conference – what an amazing experience to be able to attend. A conference full of professionals, a strong wealth of experience, a network of collaboration, and innovative ideas. I have been very fortunate to be able to attend in 2014, 2015, and 2016. I'm fast becoming a serial attendee! Why?

The aims of the Northern Collaboration are to provide a framework for libraries to work together to improve the quality of services, to become more efficient, and to explore new business models against a backdrop of rapid change in higher education and in the information and technology industries<sup>1</sup>. The three key issues of this year's conference were *delivering innovation, engagement and impact*<sup>2</sup>; reflecting on the three strands of the collaboration – research support, academic libraries and the community, and teaching and learning.

Beginning with the conference structure, everyone was welcome to attend the opening and closing keynotes. The opening was an address by Richard Watson, *The Future: The Good, The Bad & the Totally Unexpected*, and the closing keynote by Richard Heseltine, *The Soul of the City: developing a progressive voice for public libraries in the UK*. In addition, the parallel sessions I attended were:

- *Using collections based learning to inspire widening participation: the Durham experience* by Sarah Price (Durham University)
- *Is there a statistically significant relationship between library resource access and student attainment at the Open University* by Anne Gambles (The Open University)
- *How sparkly are your treasures? Demonstrating the impact of special collections* by Alison Cullingford (University of Bradford)
- *Schools not out! Embedding real university experience in sixth form projects* by Sara Hastings and Fiona Ware (University of Hull)

– each session with its own added value to the conference.

First impressions are always important – especially after a 4:30am start! Crossing the threshold, I climbed the warmly lit staircase and was greeted by a friendly, familiar face. Christopher introduced me to the venue, the conference, and signed me in. I was impressed! I enjoyed a warm cup of coffee and a hot cup of tea to get the brain into gear after the journey. This is an excellent chance to socialise with colleagues and other delegates – a few I recognised from other establishments and previous conferences.

It was time to begin. We all made our way into the hall for the welcome and opening keynote. The keynote address by Richard Watson who wrote the book *Digital vs human: how we'll live, love, and think in the future*. The address was an experience that you had to be there to appreciate. A round of applause, then came the parallel sessions.

Each time I've been to a talk by Sarah I always enjoy them. She uses up-to-date, innovative ideas and information to discuss what developments are happening in the field. Sarah updated delegates that Culture Durham was the new name for Heritage Collections and discussed the learning offer that the University of Durham provides:

- Formal and informal
- Single service
- Onsite, outreach, and online

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<sup>1</sup>The Northern Collaboration. c. 2016. *Aims*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.northerncollaboration.org.uk/content/aims>. [Accessed 23 September 2016].

<sup>2</sup>The Northern Collaboration. 2016. *Northern Collaboration Conference 2016 Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016 Collaboration: Delivering Innovation, Engagement and Impact*.

Highlighting that, with the support of publications, the learning offer can help university in strategy. Publications which promote doubling the students from disadvantaged backgrounds by 2020 – *Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching in Excellent, Social Mobility, and Student Choice* (BIS, 2015), the use of ‘early seeding’ in support of the *National Strategy for Access and Student Succession* (BIS, 2014), along with greater emphasis on outreach and activity to support OFFA guidance (2016).

Part of Sarah’s presentation focused on skills for university – enquiry, curiosity, and debate. She added that those who partook in the offer were having fun but learning, embedded in what the programme does and that it used different types of learning styles. Each activity lasted 35 – 40 minutes and the structure followed:

1. What do you want to know
2. Present with various sources
3. What is this source telling us
4. Activity
5. Talk about it
6. Write about it.

She emphasised that they worked to their strengths and everything was curriculum linked – knowledge and skills; teachers preferring soft skills. Another element was the use of the environment and buildings to create a unique and memorable experience and also teachers wanted practical help hence the development (e.g. Durham Uni 4 Schools).

I’ve never heard Anne Gambles talk before but it was very interesting. She used statistics to analyse significant relationships between library resources, access, and student attainment at the Open University. The Open University has had 1.89 million students study with them world-wide with 173,899 UK students. Students can work full or part-time and 85% agree that the resources are good enough for their needs. Data indicated a strong correlation between students accessing resources online and achievement and that the older the student is the more likely they are to access, with males slightly higher to females. The project blog link is: [www.open.ac.uk/blogs/librarydata/](http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/librarydata/)

Alison captivated the audience through sparkly treasures, using a PowerPoint presentation. She focused on what do we mean by impact – providing the following example to illustrate:

INPUTS	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• funds</li> <li>• resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• catalogue records</li> <li>• events</li> <li>• books</li> </ul>	(the ‘so what’ question) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• used in article</li> </ul>	(the ‘what next’ question) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• effect on people</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• book catalogued</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• object digitalised</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exemplified in a talk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• delegates learn from the talk and put into practice</li> </ul>

Sara and Fiona engaged the audience by participation. They explained about the structure of their programme and then allowed the audience time to think and talk amongst themselves – feeding back at the end and sharing ideas, of which a few useful suggestions arose e.g. SCOUNL Access for sixth formers who are preparing for university to help break down any barriers to entry.

The Northern Collaboration has allowed me to see what other organisations are doing well, why, and given me some very good ideas and understanding of best practices to apply in my professional life and education.