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LILAC 2016: interviews with bursary winners

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1. Bringing together staff from all sectors

LILAC 2016, held this year at University College Dublin Library between 21 and 23 March, offered bursary places to four exceptional applicants committed to information literacy (IL) in sectors where funding to attend conferences is often scarce: public, health, school and further education libraries. Bursary recipient Hilary Kennedy, Learning Resources Centre Manager at John Mason School, Abingdon, explained that “I would not have been able to self-fund and my school (a state school) probably would not have been able to fund me.” Jonas Herriot, Customer Service Manager for the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, added “I feel strongly that public librarians should be represented at LILAC, as not so many get to attend this conference.”



Conference debut: student award winner Anna Theis receives her certificate. Image: ILG

This was the second visit to LILAC for Rachel Guilbert, Library and Information Services Manager at Guernsey College of Further Education. She found her first visit to be a valuable experience, and said: “I wanted to see what advances had been made in the field in the past three years and recreate that boost to my practice”. The appeal of LILAC to Hilary was through its social media presence: “I wanted to come as I have followed it via Twitter for the last couple of years and there always seemed to be a really varied programme with relevant and up-to-date ideas and research.” Katie Edwards, Knowledge Manager for NHS Education for Scotland hoped that LILAC would help with a project she was working on: “We have been developing a suite of resources to support IL, digital literacy and health literacy with staff in NHS Scotland. It is a bit of an epic undertaking and LILAC seemed like the perfect opportunity to get some ideas on how to make these resources more interesting for our staff.” Jonas also hoped that attending LILAC would benefit his practice: “At my library I teach sessions on study skills and using resources, and I’m working on increasing the level and delivery of IL at work.”

The bursary winners’ first impressions of the conference were exceptionally positive, with the friendliness and well-organised nature of LILAC being praised by all. Jonas appreciated the clear instructions about the conference and the information available prior to arriving. Rachel said that she was able to find her way around and get to different sessions without any issue thanks to the great signage and the ‘my conference’ section on the LILAC website. Katie picked up on the

friendliness of the other delegates and said: "I quickly discovered that there were lots of other LILAC-goers in my hotel and they were all incredibly energetic and keen to share their many experiences." The conference committee also made a good first impression. Hilary said that the organisers made everyone feel really welcome "which I really appreciated as it was my first LILAC." The bursary winners were also struck by the sheer size of the event. Jonas said: "One thing that hit me was how many people there were. LILAC is definitely one of the biggest conferences I've been to." Hilary added: "It was also a very friendly space despite the huge number of delegates." Impressed by the choice of location, Rachel commented on the beautiful University College Dublin campus.

2. Keynotes a highlight for winners

The keynote speeches were one of the highlights for the bursary winners. Rachel explained that she enjoyed the variety, however "the main thing they had in common was how inspiring they all were". Jonas also found Char Booth's keynote *Why reflect? The holistic practice of stepping back* exceptionally inspiring. He said: "It covered such an interesting area which I hadn't really been conscious of before. The ideas she talked about and the subject matter she covered is something I will definitely be investigating further in the future." Katy agreed that Booth's keynote was fantastic: "I felt very lucky to have the chance to hear her speak and to benefit from her experiences. Everyone I spoke to seemed to be equally star-struck and I know I will be investigating some of the materials she mentioned and sharing her slides with my team." A highlight for Rachel was Nicola Whitton's and Alex Moseley's keynote *What can play do for you?* She said that she was really inspired to see the whole lecture theatre getting involved in the games.

The parallel sessions offered practical tips that the bursary winners could take back to the workplace. Each had a favourite - Hilary's was *AMORES: An approach to motivating learners to read in European schools - Digital Literacy in Action* run by Geoff Walton from Northumbria University. She said this section was particularly relevant for her as it explained fun ways of engaging reluctant readers and using play to construct meaning as to what they were reading. Jonas' enjoyed *Library Vines: developing IL six seconds at a time*. He said: "I felt that Vine is really accessible and I learned something that I can put into practice straight away. In fact, I made a vine whilst at the conference dinner." Both Rachel and Katie chose *Is it a bird? Is it a plane? What students can learn by asking questions about comics*. Katie commented that she thought it was incredible to see how broadening horizons and thinking outside the box can create an amazing experience for practitioners and students. "It also brought up some very important points about diversity, which is still an issue in the NHS workforce." She said she would keep it in mind when charged with creating sessions or materials in the future: "I am sure it will inspire me to create something really engaging."

The bursary winners agreed they learned much that would benefit their practice and that they could implement in the workplace. Rachel spoke of the parallel session *Communicating value through student learning assessment*. "It can be quite simple to put into practice, which really appeals to me as a solo librarian. I really want to create a higher profile for what I do, so I think I'll be putting plans into place this term and next to embed the assessment cycle into next year's teaching." Katie said she now had so many ideas she hardly knew where to start: "I think my main goal is to work what I've learned into some revamped training for IL that we can make available on our website." She said she had already contacted her local design team to see how they can help, and has arranged a meeting with the rest of her team to go over some ideas and choose a direction. Jonas commented on how he will implement what he's learned: "As well as putting Vine into practice at the library I'm going to go back to work and try and convince my management that we need to start looking at user experience (UX) and how we could possibly conduct a small-scale project involving it, especially as it's something that seems to have missed public libraries so far." He also plans to network more within the profession, build his LinkedIn profile, and continue to utilise his Twitter account. Hilary added "I also hope to integrate library vines into my Carnegie Shadowing group

and to ask students to create something short and fun to promote their favourite titles. I will also create shorter vines explaining other library procedures, in (very) short clips.”

3. Most importantly – they had fun

Most importantly, the bursary winners had a lot of fun while at the conference. All praised the LILAC game, with Rachel saying that she was proud of her performance. Katie added: “I thought it was a great way to get people excited and working together, as well as competing (my team won by the way).” Jonas felt it was something that he wouldn't normally do at a conference. He said that games were well-incorporated into LILAC, and that he would be thinking about how to utilise games in a forthcoming CILIP Youth Libraries Group (YLG) conference.

The contacts and networks built at LILAC were also considered important. Jonas identified sharing the conference with the other attendees as his biggest highlight: “They have all been such lovely people (which isn't uncommon for librarians, I know).” Katie added: “I feel like I made some great friends. The LILAC game and the networking event and conference dinner really helped to keep the energy going.” Hilary valued the opportunity to network with other librarians in her sector and hopes to follow up on the contacts she made with other school library practitioners. She said: “I will look up a lot of suggestions that came out of casual conversations. I was pleasantly surprised at the number of school and FE representatives who attended.”

The bursary winners were exceptionally grateful for the opportunity to attend, and they all wish to return. Rachel said “I couldn't have come to LILAC this year without [the bursary].” Jonas concluded “I have had such an amazing time this year that I am already thinking about next year. I am wondering if there is anything I do, or will do, which would allow me to present.” He added that any public librarians reading this report should ensure they apply for next year's bursary and convince their managers of the benefits.