
'The Shape of Things to Come'

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When I phoned up the SCONUL office and asked for directions to the Old Ship Hotel, the home of this year's conference, I was told to merely walk out of the railway station and it would be 'down hill all the way'. Down hill all the way, eh? A less appropriate description of a SCONUL Conference would be hard to find. This was an excellent conference that began on a high and somehow seemed to just get better and better, culminating in a paper that –as one delegate remarked to me– just blew us all away.

DAY ONE

Blown away *is* actually an appropriate phrase to use for this event. When I told colleagues that I was going to Brighton for three days you could (to nearly quote Morrissey) see jealousy in the eyes of the ones I left behind. In truth, this was not a sunny Brighton but a rather windswept, wet and –at times– even snowy Brighton that became the home of some 130 librarians, a record attendance for a SCONUL Conference, this April.

Any icy feelings, though, were soon melted away by the warmth of the reception we all received. Suzanne Enright, Chair of SCONUL, welcomed us and Debby Shorley (Librarian of the University of Sussex, co-host institution along with the University of Brighton) set the tone by explaining what Brighton means to her. It is (and am I really including these as bullet points?):

- vulgar
- very creative
- forward looking.

As these phrases already felt familiar to me from my school reports, I quickly felt at home. And, we were told, all the speakers were going to take a

strategic approach. *And* they were all tried and tested orators who had proved themselves to at least one of the organisers. I already had a good feeling about this conference.



My warm glow got even brighter as we were addressed by **Kay Raseroka**, President of IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions). Kay's approach can only be described as elegant, and her paper 'Shaping the future: libraries and the knowledge society' provided a most thought-provoking start to the programme. Kay began by saying she wanted to review some of the 'beautiful things' but also consider the problems we face. She focused her thoughts by describing the Three Pillars of IFLA:

- the members
- the profession;
- Society.

Of greatest concern is Society. We need advocacy to effectively support society. We need to celebrate success but monitor areas where development is needed. We need unity so we can influence policy makers and politicians. Kay made a plea for IFLA and SCONUL to work more closely to do just this. More cooperation is needed on a more practical level if we are to really extend access of e-resources into the Developing World. Other themes explored seemed quite familiar ...but Kay gave them a whole new perspective. Information skills are paramount not just so our students make better use of our resources: there is a deeper, darker reason. Learning packs are 'a disaster' because they lead to spoon-feeding. We need information skills if we are to think for ourselves and really have democracy. I must admit, I had never really followed this through to its natural conclusions of totalitarianism and unthinking acceptance of oppressive political regimes. Other new perspectives came on diversity and copyright. We address disability, but isn't illiteracy just a form of disability? And isn't copyright often a barrier to addressing illiteracy in the Developing World? We need to work together to address

these issues and build on the good work already undertaken. Advocacy and cooperation were –for me– the big messages of Kay’s eloquent speech, and indeed the whole conference.

Next up was **Chris Batt** who spoke on ‘Investing in knowledge’ from the perspective of his work with MLA, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (www.mla.gov.uk), in his usual inimitable style. Chris focused on MLA’s five year strategic review. Echoing the rest of the conference, advocacy came up as a key theme (Chris’s aim is to turn Government’s perception of museums, libraries and archives from ‘mostly harmless’ to ‘totally wicked’) as did regionalism (see review of Mike Hopkins’, workshop below). Like Kay, Chris saw three key parts to his work:

- collections
- delivery mechanisms
- audiences.

Alternatively:

- collections
- customers
- connectivity.



MLA’s mission is to build a successful and creative nation by access to information. It has branded its three constituent parts as ‘knowledge institutions’, the memory banks and raw materials for the future, ‘The Knowledge Bank of England’. He then explained the steps taken to make all this a reality. Chris concluded with some of his more long-term aspirations, especially in relation to the ‘digital futures’ project. He quoted the figure:

96:50

What this ratio represents is the percentage of the UK population who have access to the internet against the percentage who actually use it. Chris is keen to boost both figures, but especially the second, to ensure more people connect ...and use

it productively. Not for the last time this conference, Google was mentioned. We need to use the strength of design that Google offers but back it up with the trusted quality information that we can supply.

For those of you who have not yet attended a SCONUL conference, the organisers wisely break up the lecture programme with other activities. Punctuating the formal talks were a host of workshops covering many of the themes that are impacting on us now and are likely to be of greater significance in the future:

- ‘The effects of forthcoming changes in higher education on university library services’
- ‘Partnerships and further education’
- ‘Implications of top-up fees’
- ‘Regional collaboration’
- ‘The future of libraries in the blended learning age’.

Reviews of these (from a variety of people attending) are given below.

The effect of forthcoming changes in higher education on university library services, David House, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Brighton

Rapporteurs: Scott Robertson, University College Chichester and Steve Rose, University of Oxford

This workshop provided a rare opportunity to hear from an experienced university senior manager whose previous role had been managing Libraries and Learning Resources. David House, Deputy Vice-Chancellor from Brighton University, was able to provide insights into the current higher education agenda with an awareness of how these might affect library management.

HEFCE’s principal policies at the moment were the pursuit of excellence and widening participation (in reality the development of Foundation Degrees) and the concentration of research in the Russell Group.

A major problem for HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) was the financial security of institutions. At present 12 institutions are being financially monitored by the funding council. Many institutions are operating with tight margins. There is certainly not a level playing field across the sector. We were provided with some interesting funding comparisons – the teaching unit of resource is being increased by 2.9%, research funding is up 10.8% and being concen-

trated in even fewer institutions; £900M capital has been made available for research and £550M for teaching.

Prevailing government policies included:

- 50% participation through Foundation Degrees
- an instrumental view of education
- employer involvement
- strategic job losses
- less trust in autonomous universities
- new monitoring tools (space management/charging, HR policies as an analytical tool)
- pressure for stratification and collaboration
- lifelong learning and partnership with further education (the Wisconsin model).

The situation regarding funding for teaching was now to be one of non-variable fees, providing extra funds, 20 to 30% of which would be recycled in bursaries, leading to greater competition and confusion.

Turning to libraries, House noted that institutions had ignored the student survey findings that library funding was the top priority. Indeed there had been the disturbing example of Bangor's move to prune the professional library workforce. HEFCE's recent e-learning strategy document had no mention of the library's possible role. Recent documents on professional standards referred to an appropriate learning environment and resources to support learning, but with no reference to libraries. Librarians in higher education had a lot of ground to recover.

He went on to list a few challenges for higher education libraries:

- justification of cost and space
- attracting a share of new funding streams which tended to be earmarked
- the situation facing all academic-related staff in the new common pay framework with the job evaluation exercise leading to a 10% increase in the pay bill
- the e-learning agenda (do we embrace, ignore or resist? – libraries may not be seen to have a role in VLEs)
- the difficulties posed by partnership/collaboration in a competitive environment, including regional approaches to research resources.

A wide ranging discussion then ensued.

The atmosphere of lack of trust and transparency was seen as a major difficulty for the development of a methodology for identifying services for research and learning. The TRAC (Transparent Approach to Costing) exercise was seen as spurious and the devolution of resources to faculties meant less power to libraries to manage resources effectively for their institutions.

On the other hand, it was suggested that the current emphasis on a more inter-disciplinary approach to research offered libraries more of a role in supporting this activity, particularly in relation to the Research Libraries Network, e-deposit of all research output and subject repositories.

There was then an exchange of views on e-learning and e-research. Some felt that it was not appropriate for standard nineteen-year-old undergraduates and others felt that the concept of institutional repositories was too wedded to the traditional publishing model. It was suggested that libraries needed to get across our information agenda for the twenty-first century to academics who don't want to change their methods. It was noted too that many academics are the driving force behind the development of e-learning initiatives, and so partnership here is crucial. The fact that HEFCE appeared not to recognise the library role in the e-learning strategy was alarming and SCONUL was urged to help in the process of promoting our essential role in this context. The recent HEFCE funding, earmarked for e-learning was noted, but it was considered that this was insufficient, it was not targeted directly at libraries and there was little time for consultation as to how it should be spent. It was considered that those managing merged services may have an advantage over those managing library services in obtaining funds for e-learning. Reference was made to SCONUL's e-learning task force. The e-learning agenda was seen by one delegate as a pedagogical debate, at the centre of all institutions' learning strategies, and it often offered an opportunity for libraries to lead.

David House felt that libraries needed to contribute more to knowledge management in their institutions.

Reference was made to the Bangor situation and the SCONUL vision, and the belief that the academic library community needed to be more informed about teaching and research and to market that knowledge and involvement. Some higher education institutions had embedded their professional information skills into the curricu-

lum; others found it difficult to recruit librarians with appropriate professional skills. The latter was a cross-sectoral difficulty that SCONUL was attempting to tackle jointly with CILIP.

Discussion took place about the future role of academic-related staff following on from the job evaluation exercise. Many participants are currently going through the HERA (Higher Education Role Analysis) exercise. Feelings were mixed. At one level, it was considered that the potential to achieve an upgrade in salaries for library and IT posts is positive (one delegate noted 50% of such posts had been upgraded as a result of this exercise). However, there was also concern as how the sector will handle a projected 10% rise in salary costs and it was feared that specialist posts (e.g. research librarians, cataloguers) may be discriminated against as a result.

The lively debate sparked off by the well-informed and provocative challenges provided by David House's presentation could have continued well beyond the allotted time in this lively workshop.

Partnerships and further education, Margaret Cou tts, University Librarian, University of Leeds
Rapporteurs: Jon Purcell, Newcastle University and Lyn Turpin, University of Brighton

Margaret Cou tts delivered a stimulating and fascinating workshop on partnerships and further education. Although based largely on her experiences at the University of Kent, and in particular, the collaboration with the University of Greenwich and Canterbury Christ Church University College to establish the joint Medway Campus, this workshop also explored some of the challenges and opportunities of further and higher education partnership working and discussed various partnership models currently operating in the UK.

Workshop participants were familiar with many of the issues involved in partnership working – defining 'access', availability of study facilities, collection development and acquisition policies, funding, quality assurance, parity of provision and esteem, operational staff understanding of policies and provision the list goes on! Some of the solutions discussed included commitment at all levels within the library and the institutions involved, a pragmatic approach to problem solving, keeping the service focused primarily on user needs, creative 'out of the box' thinking, and the provision of seamless services.

Margaret discussed some of the unique challenges and opportunities from operating shared services in the form of the new joint learning resource centre at the Medway Campus. These included the need to establish reality with regard to shared premises, ICT, staffing and dual management; the complexity of a single staffing structure; compromises on collection management principles, the irreconcilable needs for library management systems and the need to reconcile numerous differences in the detail of service levels.

The most interesting and relevant part of the workshop was the discussion of various operational models with a recognition that a franchising (and similar) partnership will be different from an equal or shared partnership arrangement. Key variables for a franchising model include: a clear understanding and agreement of institutional commitments; definition of user groups, access to collections/ICT/study facilities; collection coverage, enquiry and training services. Clarity with regard to the financial resources and the need for staff training were also deemed crucial. An equal partnership model involves a clear definition of ownership vs. provider/customer issues; the need to reconcile differences and the clear message that the needs of the user in any model are paramount. Often the most intractable differences are those relating to institutional operating systems and library management systems – there is only room for one of each in any joint provision of services.

During the discussions, various other models were also considered including those with the NHS (the direct provision of services, shared facilities and a complex NHS/higher education partnership) and various other exemplars between further and higher education. It was also evident that a variety of partnership models between further and higher education have been established and will continue to meet government, regional/local and institutional needs. To Margaret's initial question, 'do we have to think of solutions every time?', the answer appears to be 'probably' but there is sufficient good practice and models available to both guide and inform new developments.

'Top up fees': our changing service context, Di Martin, Director of Learning and Information Services, University of Hertfordshire

Rapporteurs: Antony Brewerton, *SCONUL Focus* and Julie Parry, Bath Spa University

Di Martin began the session by pointing out that she is not an expert on this matter, and –indeed–

we are all learning fast about the subject. More darkly, she asked the question: Is this session really about top-up fees ...or the power of money?

Over the next few minutes Di showed that if she really is no expert she certainly isn't a novice. In a quarter of an hour she gave a very comprehensive overview of the issues and really got our brains going for the brainstorm element of the session:

- **Funding changes** - Di reviewed the current situation by looking at student outgoings (£3,000 pa for the next five years ...and after that?) and income opportunities (models of grants, bursaries and scholarships), along with monitoring bodies (the Office for Fair Access, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator and the role of the National Student Survey).
- **The wider Higher Education (HE) Strategic Context** – Di reviewed the wider drivers for change: Government pushes for 50% participation in HE by 2010; the shifting balance between Learning and Teaching, Research, Business and Community, and Widening Participation as the key drivers; the need for institutional differentiation/a Unique Selling Point; plus the usual suspects (RAE, and so on). To this familiar list she added funding as an effective change agent, reminding us of the effects of Thatcher's plans for HE growth in the early 1990s.
- **Student Expectations** – Herein lie the big questions. Will student expectation change? Tuition fees are already in place. Was there a huge upheaval when these were introduced? Will students' attitudes change? How about their parents? Where will the money go? The Unite Report shows that many students (31%) favour monies going to libraries. Do Vice Chancellors hold the same view? Will students increasingly see themselves as customers who can take their custom elsewhere if they do not get the education they wish to buy? How will external factors affect expectations (eg. the views of international students, changes in retail and demands for a more personal service in the de-personalising Internet Age)?
- **Key considerations for us** – To sharpen our minds further, Di posed more questions. What is our existing reputation? How can we find out? Do we know our customers? Are we really customer-focused? Do we

have customer service policies? Is the library clearly part of the 'brand' of its host institution? Is the library seen as 'relevant'? Can we anticipate change? What can we learn from others? How can we equip our staff to successfully deal with change?

Di ended her introduction with a slide posing the biggest question of all:

'If you were investing £30,000 in your future over the next 3 years with this university, what would you expect?'

So are there any answers? Or just more questions? In truth, the debate that followed brought up both. The key points raised were:

- Students' expectations are difficult to second guess ...but they are likely to be huge. The up-coming generation have had the Internet from birth. They are used to –and expect- a 24x7 world, with instant access and personalised services. We need to develop more of a Client Relationship Management approach.
- It was felt that some universities will become stronger and some weaker as a result of these changes. Funding is likely to go to the more popular areas. How will others survive?
- Will we –as librarians- get any money of this extra money at all? This was the most discussed element. 31% may wish for more library books, but most institutions are likely to divide monies up between bursaries, academic salaries and infrastructure (which usually means buildings). The need for revenue, not capital, funding for libraries was also raised. Are libraries perceived as important for investment?
- Staff will face new demands, new challenges. We need to train our staff to provide a more flexible workforce to cope with the changing environment. We need to exploit self-service in some areas to provide a more personalised offering in another. We need to develop the presence and role of subject librarians. We may need to even consider their titles to sound more dynamic and break down barriers.

In the end, the clock was against us so discussions were brought to an end earlier than we would have liked. What the future really holds, only time will tell.

Some additional points/questions raised at the other meeting included:

- There was special concern for smaller institutions where it may be necessary to promote the library even more than at present. Libraries are becoming more brand conscious in their own right. To what extent do we really know what our customers want/need?
- Student expectations – ‘I’ve paid my fees – why should I have to return my books on time/pay for other services.’ ‘I can afford it – I’ll just pay the fines.’ ‘I’m already in debt – I can always get deeper in debt.’
- One institution is providing a number of bursaries of £1,000 p.a. to students in exchange for 5 hours ‘meaningful’ work in the library each week. This is meant to contribute to the students’ employability skills but does not actually meet the needs of the library which would prefer security staff to work overnight.
- Suggested actions for SCONUL to undertake:
 - o Consider the longer-term implications of top-up fees e.g. impact on alumni
 - o Provide advice and guidance on what should be the norm for services for which charges are made
 - o Provide advice on how institutions should spend money on libraries

Regional collaboration, Mike Hopkins, Director of Information Services, University of Wales, Aberystwyth

Rapporteurs: Antony Brewerton, *SCONUL Focus* and Tony Lamb, Swansea Institute of Higher Education

Mike Hopkins, very much wearing his WHELP (Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum) hat, introduced the topic of regional collaboration by stressing how varied models of local cooperation can be. First up was the question of what defines a region. Is a *physical* region the most appropriate model? If, so, what size works best? What other qualities make regional collaboration work? For Mike, Wales is a good unit because it is ‘sufficiently distinctive’, ‘sufficiently large’ to bring benefits and ‘sufficiently small’ to be coherent and manageable.

He then moved onto a more detailed look at the local environment. How do geographical factors make a difference? In Wales, communication links

are good east to west, but less effective north to south. Perhaps, then, it is more appropriate for Cardiff to link with the south west of England, and north Wales to work with Liverpool/Manchester? What about the professional landscape? Are institutions of similar type and size lumped together? And what of politics: how will devolution affect us?

The organisation of regional bodies was raised as an issue too. On one level, there seems to be much work going on locally but it is only known about by those taking part. We lack knowledge and are missing opportunities to learn from the work of our peers. A national overview (by SCONUL?) would be welcomed by many, then we could more easily share good practice in how to effectively manage, finance and promote regional schemes, as well as monitor the effectiveness of initiatives.

Mike rounded his introduction off by bringing together some of the key issues as he saw them:

- When is a national, regional or local approach the most appropriate?
- How can we ensure financial sustainability?
- How can we promote what we do (to get maximum impact and share good practice)?
- How can we effectively coordinate activities to avoid duplication of effort?

After this whirlwind introduction, debate was opened up to the floor. Representatives of the M25 Group, SWHELs (South West Higher Education Libraries), SWMLAC (South West Museums, Libraries and Archives Council), SCURL (Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries), NoWAL (North West Academic Libraries) and other regional bodies were all present to give their views on the current collaborative environment. Below is a flavour of the issues raised:

- It is important to know what is already available so we can avoid duplication
- It is more difficult to create a sense of identity for the English regions: Wales, Scotland and Ireland are ‘neat’ areas
- What is the optimum size for a grouping? Has the M25 Group, for example, just got too big and is in danger of losing its identity?
- Are there perhaps too many groups in some areas ...whilst others remain neglected? Do we need more coordination?
- We must be aware that sometimes it is more appropriate to deal with issues nationally –or more locally– than at the regional level

- A forum for regional groups to talk about challenges and solutions would be most welcome
- The cross-sectoral element of collaboration is especially valuable as it encourages fresh solutions to old problems
- Opening up access for the non-higher-education community usually provides a win-win situation: politically this is a good move but the actual impact on day-to-day work is invariably limited and quite manageable
- Librarians have always been into collaboration, it is institutions that are into competition
- Regional access schemes are good for supporting Widening Participation initiatives
- Funding is an issue. Regional collaboration often leads to added costs. How are these to be funded? Subscription fees are becoming more common; but will these always be deemed worth investing in, given increasing financial constraints?
- This leads to asking the Big Question: why be involved? Are we clear about the benefits? Collaboration per se is not a benefit. We should have improved services for our customers, opportunities for staff development, an improved political profile and perhaps even the opportunity to raise funds as a result of collaboration. At the end of the day, can we do things better?
- Is the regional approach always the best way to achieve such benefits? Should we avoid being too tightly tied to our own region for support?
- Finally, what are the likely barriers to effective collaboration? Competition, the lack of a risk-taking mentality, the fear of being overwhelmed or (worse still) underwhelmed can all prevent us from making the great leap forward.

The main point to come out of the workshop was the need for a mapping exercise to be carried out into the number and location of regional consortia. It was felt that this was something that SCONUL could undertake which would help all members. It was also felt that SCONUL could host a forum of such groupings or have regular sessions at the Conference to allow input from regional consortia.

Postscript

Colleagues might also be interested to see a report of a WHELP Conference on the theme of Regional Collaboration and Academic Libraries held in Cardiff last September. Details of the papers

presented can be found at www.glam.ac.uk/lrc/whelf/collaboration.php until 14 October 2005.

Normally at this point, I would include an extremely brief paragraph saying that the **SCONUL AGM** happened. Usually these are shorter than John Prescott's temper, but this one was (nearly) longer than Labour's time in office. In truth, this was because the AGM saw several major developments for the organisation. After looking at the new, improved Annual Review (a key tool for advocacy) and the accounts, we came onto a new financial strategy (to bring savings, raise income and increase transparency) and a review of subscription levels (to bring greater equity for institutions of different sizes) plus a review of actions required by individual advisory committees. There were lengthy papers to consider and much discussion. For details of the key developments agreed upon see Suzanne Enright's summary included in this issue.

The day ended with a reception in the Grand Parade Gallery Bar at the University of Brighton, hosted by Vice Chancellor, **Sir David Watson**, who pointed out that the University had –in recent years– opened three (soon to be four) renewed libraries, and each time it does this footfall doubles at each site. Standing under an art installation that looked like a totem pole made of diving suits we were then treated to an amusing review of life under New Labour, where some people/policies were treated like fruit flies and other were turtles. We were urged to be turtles!

Day Two

Like the good turtle I am, I did wander down to water's edge on the Brighton seafront first thing on Day Two. But the wind was too ferocious to stay long, and anyway, I did not wish to miss any of the day's programme of speakers. First up was **Jan Wilkinson**, Head of Higher Education at the British Library. Jan's paper 'Supporting the higher education researcher' began by looking back to the 1990s. Whilst higher education (HE) was doing relatively well for once (Follett money and all that), for the British Library (BL) it was the worst of times, and the library was felt by many to be the 'library of last resort'. She likened the BL to Miss Havesham, waiting for the lover –higher education– that would never come. Since then, things have improved, with (for example) the creation of Jan's post and moves to provide a more strategic alliance between the BL and HE. Most importantly, the British Library has developed a new vision and strategy, based on market

research undertaken from 2001 onwards, when Lynn Brindley took up post. Jan then gave a quick overview of some of the challenges (Google, cooperation and, most significantly, staying relevant to a new generation of library users ...or non-users) before the substance of her paper: a sneak preview of the BL's six strategic priorities:

- enriching the user experience
- building a digital research environment
- transforming search and navigation
- growing and managing the national collection
- staff development
- achieving financial stability.

I hope these issues will be covered in an article from Jan in a forthcoming issue, alongside other exciting issues the BL is exploring such as the UK electronic license and opportunities for closer collaboration with university librarians.

Jan was followed by **Bill Simpson** reflecting on his own experiences at Manchester. Some of his themes are covered elsewhere in this journal so I will not spoil your delight of reading that by giving away too much of the plot here, but it was good to get the full picture of why the universities (and hence libraries) merged, the vision and strategy for change, the practicalities and outcomes. All this activity was guided by a clear sense of direction. A key message to come across for me was that 'nothing has any value unless it contributes effectively to academic excellence'. Bill delivered his paper in his usual good-humoured and (above all) inspirational style. It was only at the end that he gave away that –on top of everything else– they were also developing a visitor centre. No wonder 18 hour days got mentioned...

The final paper of the day (following another workshop session) came from **Trevor Potten**, Director of Information Technology Services at the University of Sussex. Various speakers had mentioned the Google Generation, now it was time to look at enabling the Mobile Generation, a generation who choose where they want to work or play, what device they want to use, and what specific personalised approach they desire. Access used to be tied to a box tied to table. Now we are freed up (and becoming more and more free). Once students had to move to the books. Now the tools are moving to the students. For Trevor, an obvious evangelist, it is imperative that we get on this (can I call it this?) broadbandwagon. This will enable us to improve quality, give our institutions the competitive edge, create collaborative

learning environments and make better use of existing buildings. He finished with a case study of Brighton ('Wireless Brighton'). Highlights for me were the mobile library (that provided both access to the internet via PCs inside plus a hotspot around the van to provide wireless access for residents whilst parked in the locale) and the buses (which transmitted signals to bus stops so they could say when the next bus was due). I was less convinced about the dust carts and their needs for wireless. I would have thought CB radio would suffice. Then again, I still buy vinyl.

My love of simple technologies partly informed my choice of visit for the afternoon part of the programme. Some colleagues checked out the buzzing new public library, Brighton City Jubilee Library (a must by all accounts and a definite future visit for me), whilst others opted for Preston Manor, the Brighton Museum, the Regency Town House or even a guided walk around Brighton. I plumped for the **Mass-Observation Archive** at the University of Sussex, partly because Brookes is starting to develop special collections, but partly out of an interest for the subject that has existed since my first degree in history. I was not disappointed and particular thanks must go to Dorothy Sheridan, head of special collections and director of the archive, who gave an excellent overview (of the collections and issues) and allowed us to handle 1940s and 1990s documents. One of the most popular boxes she showed us covers citizens' views on 'having an affair'. These ranged from diatribes on politicians (notably Bill Clinton!) to a beautiful and touching description of a lost love ('I held her hand as she died') in the second world war. A real privilege.

The evening witnessed a privilege of a totally different kind, a **Reception in the Royal Pavilion**. Following an address from the Brighton and Hove City Major and a group photo (which involved very senior members of the profession sitting crossed legged in the front so we could cram everyone in!) we were offered a tour around the Royal Pavilion. If Brighton is very creative, forward looking and (above all?) vulgar, this is Brighton at its best. A wonderful building with over the top décor: something to visit rather than live with. The evening was rounded off with the conference dinner and an after dinner speech from **Professor Alasdair Smith**, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sussex. After giving us his personalised history of Brighton (*Brighton Rock*, dirty weekends, mods and rockers: 'Brighton is a city that is helping the police with its enquiries'), we moved from petty car crime to real villainy:

journal pricing, and the history of this particular 'caper'. A most entertaining talk, arguing for Open Access publishing from an economist's perspective.

DAY THREE

So far this SCONUL Conference had seemed to get better and better. It was with a rather heavy heart that I packed my bags on this last morning. Surely today could only disappoint, after so much, so good? How wrong I was.



Day Three started with a paper on institutional repositories from **Bill Hubbard**, SHERPA Project Manager at the University of Nottingham. I feared this might be a case study only of interested to the techies. Bill wisely took a wider view, put his project into context and (most importantly) drew out the themes that were likely to prove issues (read: 'challenges') to us all. Bill was the only speaker to really go back to HG Wells and the conference title. After looking at a fictional view of the future he looked at another vision of things to come: the SCONUL Vision 2010 (www.sconul.ac.uk/pubs_stats/pubs/vision%202010). He then gave an excellent overview of definitions, benefits (to publishers, authors, institutions and society as a whole), challenges (concerns of academics and administrators) and possible barriers to adoption (copyright issues, publisher embargoes, cultural resistance). One questioner raised the issue of poor adoption of IR in his own institution. Whereas 79% of academics are more than willing to store pre- and post-prints, very few get round to it. Again we need to promote the benefits. Again, we need an advocacy role. Bill's talk neatly led into a paper from another international speaker, **Gail McMillan** from Virginia Tech. Gail's talk was similarly evangelical, this time promoting the joys of e-theses. Gail

has been involved with e-theses for an incredible ten years and is keen to highlight the good work undertaken by the US Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (www.ndltd.org). Gail started with the somewhat depressing statistic that the US produces over 400,000 masters and doctorate theses a year and these (on average) get consulted three times in their life on the shelves. By adopting a policy of submission and storage of electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) we can improve services, save space and save money. The process is low cost (we have most of the infrastructure in place to start our collections) and results in high usage (Gail showed us various charts with figures going up to 3,000,000 downloads in 2004). Most importantly, students (unlike some of the academics mentioned earlier) seem to prefer this approach, with only 7% of the students at Gail's institution wishing to restrict access (for reasons of patent or publication negotiations).



These were two excellent papers and –despite my adherence to vinyl– I was keen to hear more. I hope to publish articles from both speakers in the next issue of *SCONUL Focus*.

We had begun with Kay's pleas for collaboration between professionals in general, and between IFLA and SCONUL in particular. SCONUL must have been treating this as one of Alasdair Smith's dirty weekends as today she was accepting advances from CILIP. Sparing us the sordid details, **Suzanne Enright** (SCONUL Chair) and **Maggie Haines** (Past-President of CILIP by the time you read this) reported on the CILIP and SCONUL Joint Declaration (see www.sconul.ac.uk/news/sconul_cilip) and other collaborative activities. The four key points for future action will be:

- CILIP and SCONUL will work closely together in areas of mutual interest
- CILIP and SCONUL will concentrate joint policy development on areas of mutual interest

- CILIP and SCONUL will work together on various activities (committees, conferences, etc)
- CILIP and SCONUL will encourage involvement of library staff in professional activities.

All this will be delivered via a joint steering group and mutual representation. Joint responses to Government initiatives (e.g. VAT on e-publications) will hopefully give the profession more muscle ('unity is strength' I scribbled in my notes). Again, collaboration and advocacy shined through.

The conference was brought to an end by **Eugenie Prime**, who also very nearly brought the house

down. It is very difficult to convey just how brilliant this talk was: Eugenie seemed cool and collected as an attendee of the conference, but on stage she was a fireball. You had to be there to really experience the heat, so apologies if this review can only hint at the effects of her explosive show. Eugenie started by pondering the future (which isn't what it used to be!) and why we should be interested in it. The reason is because we are not passive spectators but players and we should have a role in fashioning the future. We complained about our profile 50 years ago and we will still be complaining 50 years hence if we don't do something about it. We need to make a contribution which is of value and perceived to be of value to others. She quoted Andy Grove's management text book *Only the paranoid survive* at length. Professions, organisations, even individuals often will come to a 'strategic inflection point'. From here we can go up ...or down into decline. More poetically, she turned to Shakespeare and Brutus:



'There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea we are now afloat;
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.'

(*Julius Caesar, Act 4, Scene 3*)

Eugenie surveyed the drivers for change: the customers; suppliers; competition; and sustainability. The big challenge is that someone can do what you have been doing but differently, better,

cheaper and quicker. AltaVista? Google? Google Scholar? The tide is here.

So how can we survive? We need to rethink the role of the library in our institutions. We need to 'expose ourselves'. We are good at talking to each other ('professional incestuousness'); we need to start talking to politicians and policy makers ('professional promiscuity'). We need to create ambidextrous organisations, on the one hand doing all the old stuff, but at the same time experimenting with new ideas.

But the most impressive suggestion Eugenie put forward was that we should let go of emotional baggage, let go of the things we do not need to do any more and do things of importance. Imagine you left your job today. What role would they replace you with? Then, go out of your office and walk back in. Now, do that new job...

Phew!

This was the perfect end to a brilliant Spring Conference. So much to think about. So much to do. Next year's is in June in Newcastle. But as an unnamed Geordie librarian said, that will be spring in Newcastle....

POSTSCRIPT

For PowerPoint pages relating to many of the above papers go to www.sconul.ac.uk/event_conf/agm2005/presentations/