

CyMAL/WHELF study tour of Dublin

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(l to r) Richard Mellowes (Cardiff University); Mike Hopkins (Aberystwyth University); Rebecca Mogg (Cardiff University); Nicola Watkinson (Glyndŵr University); Jeremy Atkinson (University of Glamorgan); Sue Mace (WHELF Development Officer); Christopher West (Swansea University); Mairwen Owen (Bangor University); Tony Lamb (Swansea Metropolitan University); Anne Harvey (Swansea Metropolitan University); Sally Wilkinson (Trinity College Carmarthen); Carol Edwards (National Library of Wales); Paul Riley (University of Wales Institute, Cardiff); Lesley May (University of Wales Newport); Mieko Yamaguchi (Bangor University).

WHELF (Wales Higher Education Librarians Forum) is an umbrella organisation – or a mini-SCONUL – for all higher education (HE) libraries in Wales, along with the National Library of Wales.¹ Sixteen staff representing both WHELF and CyMAL (the Welsh Assembly Government body for museums, archives and libraries) completed a study tour of Dublin from 12 to 14 November 2008. WHELF is grateful to CyMAL for their participation in the study tour and for their financial contribution, which covered accommodation and travel costs in the Dublin area.

The study tour was modelled on the well-established SCONUL study tours. Our study tour was rather more modest in terms of travel, time and cost but proved to be equally stimulating and cost-effective. It was particularly productive to visit four very different HE libraries (and some of the other nationally important and unique libraries) in such a short space of time. Basing the study tour in a single conurbation maximised the opportunities to visit libraries and to exchange experience with Irish colleagues, as is shown by our programme:

Wednesday 12 November 2008

13.00: Trinity College Dublin

Thursday 14 November

Options:

10.00: National Library of Ireland

10.00: Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland

10.30: COLICO (Committee on Library Co-operation in Ireland) meeting

10.30: St Patrick's College

14.30: University College Dublin

Friday 14 November

Options:

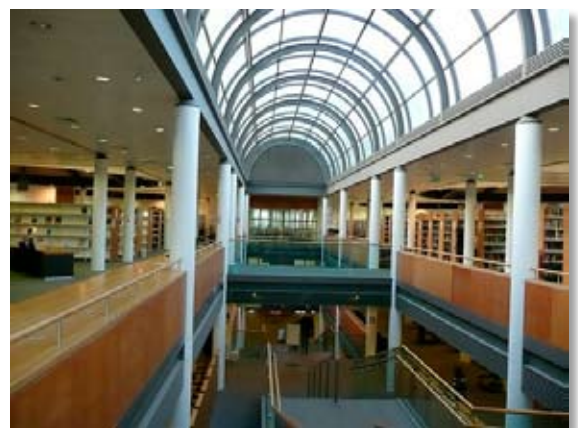
9.45: Dublin Institute of Technology

10.00: National Library of Ireland

10.00: Royal Irish Academy

13.00: Dublin City University

Seven WHELF members also attended a COLICO meeting as part of the study tour. COLICO is a North-South body which monitors and encourages co-operative projects on the island of Ireland and works towards providing and enhancing shared resources for library staff and users. Members North and South were keen to investigate possible opportunities for co-operation with WHELF.



John and Aileen O'Reilly Library,
Dublin City University

The tour was especially useful for ideas for library design. Several HE libraries in Wales plan to have new buildings and facilities over the next decade. The significant investment in the HE sector in Ireland over the last twenty years has produced some striking examples of library design, particularly in Dublin City University and in the Ussher Library in Trinity College Dublin. A number of the other libraries we visited also had impressive design features, including the very new health sciences library in University College Dublin and the very large UCD main library.²



Ussher Library, Trinity College Dublin

HE investment in Ireland has also included an impressive level of resource provision. The IReL (Irish Research Library) received 35 million euros in total as part of a government strategy to double postgraduate numbers by 2010. Initially covering just information technology and biotechnology (2004), it was then extended to other subject areas, including humanities and social sciences in 2006. It provides 109 bundles, ranging from Science-Direct to the ACLS Humanities e-books package, with over 22,000 e-journal titles.

Some common themes emerged from the Dublin HE libraries:

- There has been an impressive level of investment by the Irish government in HE library e-resources and in new library buildings.
- At present, there is relatively low use of self-issue and radio-frequency identification

(RFID), although this is expected to change over the next few years in some libraries.

- There was a fairly low number of fixed PCs in libraries but a correspondingly high use of personally owned laptops. All of the library buildings were wireless-enabled.
- Compared to several WHELF libraries, there was a fairly traditional approach to individual study spaces in libraries, with the enforcement of quiet behaviour, banning of mobile-phone use and strict rules on eating and drinking. This was counterbalanced by extensive and impressive separate group-study rooms in almost all libraries.
- There was no 24x7 opening yet and opening hours were relatively limited compared to many UK HE libraries.

The timing of the tour was also useful in the preparation of a revised WHELF 'Action plan', which is currently being developed. Many of the ideas and impressions picked up in Dublin will be fed into the revised 'Action plan' for the next two academic years. The joint approach to e-resources and research support was particularly impressive and deserves replication on a smaller scale. Similarly, a joint approach to some of the library-design ideas, use of Web 2.0 and other new technology and institutional repository development are just some of the areas that deserve further investigation. We are also investigating the possibility of a reciprocal visit by Irish HE librarians to WHELF and other libraries in Wales.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WHELF is grateful to CyMAL and particularly to Huw Evans (Head of Advice and Support) for his participation in and support for the study tour. Thanks are also due to Sue Mace (WHELF development officer) for providing an excellent programme and for organising us all, along with Philip Cohen (Head of Library Services, Dublin Institute of Technology) for his invaluable help as our Dublin contact person.

REFERENCES

- 1 See <http://www.whelf.ac.uk/background.shtml>
- 2 A WHELF Flickr photostream has been set up of photographs taken by some members of the study tour of library design and service features in Dublin: visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/34292444@N06/>