

Regular Feature - Librarians in Interesting Roles

Becoming Tusla's First Librarian

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I did not grow up aspiring to be a librarian. Well, that is not necessarily true, but it was not a career I considered for one reason or another. I decided early in my second-level education that I wanted to be a teacher and with that I headed off to the University of Limerick in 2012 to complete my BA in English and History. At the conclusion of my degree, I was fortunate to receive a summer job as a Library Attendant at the University of Limerick's Glucksman Library in 2016. It was a role I took without too much expectation, simply looking for something temporary over the summer months before starting my Professional Master of Education (PME) degree at the University of Galway. However, the more time I spent in the library that summer, the more I felt a pull in a different direction to the PME and what started as a summer job in the library soon turned into something much more meaningful.

By the end of summer 2016, I decided to withdraw from the PME and spent a further 12 months working as a Library Attendant at the Glucksman Library. Those 12 months were a huge learning curve, and I was fortunate to work alongside many supportive colleagues who helped shape my understanding of what a career in librarianship could look like. The year solidified my decision to pursue the profession and in 2017, I moved to Glasgow to complete my MSc in Information & Library Studies at the University of Strathclyde. Looking back, I realise now that libraries had been a quiet constant in my life. From the long afternoons studying for my school Leaving Certificate to the late nights writing college assignments, I always found myself drawn to the calm and focus that a library environment offered. It makes sense now, in hindsight, that I would find my professional home there too.

Much like when I decided early in my second-level education that I wanted to become a teacher, my expectation on completing the MSc was that I would pursue a career in an academic library but since graduating in 2018, I have held positions in both corporate and health libraries. My first role post-qualification was on a temporary contract at the NHS Education for Scotland (NES) where I was part of the Knowledge Services team responsible for The Knowledge Network, the national digital library for health and social care in Scotland. The 12 months I spent at NES were an excellent introduction to the profession and gave me a much broader understanding of the diverse roles within the sector.

Transitioning into the corporate world, I joined Bain & Company's Research and Data Services team in 2019 where I spent three formative years working as a healthcare-affiliated researcher in London. The experience at Bain offered a valuable new perspective on the important role of information services within a global business context, supporting consulting staff from across Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) with timely and targeted business research. Moving home to Ireland in 2022, I joined the Novartis Knowledge Center as an Information Specialist in License Management where I spent two years managing a portfolio of externally licensed information resources for Novartis employees globally. In 2024, I returned to the public

sector with HSE Library, taking up the role of Executive Librarian at Portiuncula University Hospital. During this time, I gained a wealth of knowledge from both my colleagues in the West and through my involvement with the national Evidence and Information Skills teams before taking up the position of Tusla's first Librarian earlier this year.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency in Ireland, was established on 1 January 2014 and is responsible for the provision of statutory functions such as child protection, alternative care, specified regulatory services and a range of family support services (<https://www.tusla.ie/about/>). Required to commission or undertake research into matters related to its functions under the Child and Family Agency Act (2013), Tusla has established its own National Research Office (NRO) to meet this requirement and produce research that informs practice development, service improvement and decision-making. Last year, the NRO published the Tusla Research Strategy 2024-2029 which recommended the creation of a Librarian post to oversee the implementation of a dedicated Library & Information Service (National Research Office, 2024). This marks a significant milestone for Tusla, as it represents the first time the Agency has brought this service in-house having previously been managed through an external partnership with the Barnardos Library & Information Service.

Located within the NRO, the Tusla Library & Information Service was established in January 2025 and is primarily a digital service, providing access to e-journals, e-books and databases. The library also offers a range of support services to staff, including literature searching, inter-library loans and information skills sessions. These services are designed to assist staff in accessing high-quality information and developing their research skills, while supporting evidence-informed practice at Tusla. In the development of the service, colleagues from across the organisation have been invited to contribute their knowledge and practice expertise to support the selection and acquisition of electronic content. This collaborative approach will ensure that the library catalogue reflects the diverse needs and professional insights of Tusla staff. Furthermore, in alignment with the library's resource selection and development policy, two key areas of Tusla's work will be prioritised each year over the next five years, enabling a comprehensive and relevant collection of resources to be developed over time.

As the Tusla Library & Information Service continues to develop, writing this piece has reminded me of my own journey through librarianship and my advice to new graduates is to keep an open mind about the wide range of opportunities that exist within the profession. While the setting has shifted from the physical space of an academic library to a digital environment at Tusla, the core motivation to help users find the right information at the right time remains the same. Staying true to this purpose, and holding onto our values of professionalism, impartiality and integrity (Library Association of Ireland, 2013), is all the more pertinent in an era of rapid, and often overwhelming, technological change. These principles, no matter what library sector we work in, will stand us in good stead going forward.

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