

Reports & Reviews

HSLG Conference Report Celebrating Our Collective Power: Finding Strength in Difference

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The annual Health Sciences Libraries Group (HSLG) conference took place in the Ashling Hotel, Dublin, on 12th March 2026. Delegates were from health and academic libraries, and this year we were especially delighted to also welcome students from the library masters programmes in University College Dublin and Dublin Business School.

The following is a brief synopsis of the presentations from the day. Where presenters have given permission, their slides are available to view on the HSLG website <https://hslg.ie/category/events/conference/>.

Keynote Speaker Prof. Brendan Kelly - Information, Intelligence, Instinct: Navigating Knowledge in an Ocean of AI

Our keynote speaker was Brendan Kelly, Professor of Psychiatry, Trinity College Dublin and Consultant Psychiatrist at Tallaght University Hospital.

Brendan delivered a balanced and insightful keynote, offering a clear evaluation of public anxiety surrounding artificial intelligence. He positioned current concerns within a recurring historical pattern of technological “panic,” drawing parallels with earlier societal reactions such as 19th-century fears around steam power and 20th-century concerns about the impact of radio on children and family life. This historical perspective reinforced Brendan’s point that societal anxieties about new technologies follow familiar patterns.

Brendan emphasised the gap between popular discourse and real-world data, challenging claims that technology is driving a youth mental health crisis. He noted that global rates of self-harm and suicide have been declining, a trend that contradicts widespread narratives and underscores the importance of grounding discussions in reliable evidence. This reframing encouraged a more measured perspective on AI and its potential effects.

The keynote also outlined several benefits AI can bring to healthcare and information environments. These included enhanced pattern recognition, more consistent data management, support for evidence review, and reduced administrative workload. However, Kelly balanced these positive aspects with a careful examination of four significant tensions: the epistemic or “black box” problem, which raises concerns about explainability; ethical issues stemming from bias in historical training data; the relational knowledge gap, where AI cannot replicate empathy or narrative understanding; and unresolved questions surrounding legal accountability.

To support responsible engagement with AI, Brendan presented a five-part framework: human judgement

must remain primary; understanding AI models is important even if partial; monitoring performance is essential; accountability must stay with human professionals; and narrative—the human story—must always remain central. This structured approach offered practical guidance for professionals navigating rapid technological change.

Brendan Kelly concluded with Bernard Levin's reflection: "The silicon chip will transform everything, except everything that matters, and the rest will still be up to us." This sentiment encapsulated the theme of his address, emphasising that while AI may reshape processes, it cannot replace the core human values that underpin healthcare, librarianship, and ethical decision-making.

Tony Linnane - One person libraries in healthcare settings

Tony Linnane, Area Library Manager for HSE Library, gave a very interesting talk on one-person libraries in healthcare settings based on the findings from a HSE Library Solo Librarians Group which was convened by Tony in the last year.

The group found that there are some advantages to being a one-person library. There is a degree of autonomy with more control over service direction and priorities, the ability to tailor services, to build strong relationships with clinicians and staff and to have increased visibility of library impact. In addition, there are professional development advantages as a solo librarian can have the opportunity to develop a broad range of skills and can gain a holistic understanding of library management.

However, the group found that there are accompanying challenges. These can be very practical in nature, such as a lack of cover for sick leave or annual leave. Working without immediate colleagues can lead to both professional and geographical isolation and a lack of peer collaboration. There is a risk that having responsibility for all tasks in a library may lead to a very heavy workload and to burnout.

The Group's recommendations to mitigate the challenges include protecting library spaces, providing institutional support, protected time for CPD, implementing hybrid service models and strengthening virtual networking.

Bryn Murphy and Emily Adydan – Growing together: scaffolding systematic review training for early career librarians

Bryn Murphy and Emily Adydan, two early-career librarians from Eskin Biomedical Library at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, spoke about the two-year scaffolding systematic review training which they undertook as new staff members before joining their library's review services team. The scaffolding process includes four key stages for the trainee:

Observe – sitting in on other team members' systematic review consults where they can take notes and ask questions as well as read over search documentation.

Acquire – formal systematic review specialisation through the Medical Library Association (MLA). This includes webinars on specialised review topics as well as other training such as database certification.

Practice – beginning to practice searches supported by peer mentoring from experienced team members.

Perform – taking on projects independently supported by Continuing Education and peer review from mentors according to PRESS guidelines.

Both librarians felt that the scaffolded process increased their confidence when approaching systematic reviews and clear benchmarks provided direction and purpose during the learning period. They urged conference attendees to avail of any similar training available to them through their institutions.

Niamh Walker-Headon - HSE Library partner organisation collaborations

First up after coffee with our colleagues and sponsors, Niamh Walker-Headon, HSE Library Resources Manager informed us of how HSE Library ensures its significant volume of partner organisations have access to a suite of constantly in demand medical research resource databases and the training of users on them. Niamh gave us a clear snapshot of the procurement process involving a comprehensive system of service agreements, licences and contracts between partners, the HSE and vendors where all 3 parties are protected allowing the service to run smoothly and sustainably.

Bennery Rickard - — HSE Library Day, 24th September 2025: light a big fire

Bennery Rickard, HSE Library Area Library Manager East, reviewed HSE's Library Day held in September 2025, in the aptly titled presentation "Light a Big Fire". Bennery confirmed librarians are vitally important in the HSE but are often hidden within the system and the Library Day was an opportunity to celebrate their work and invite wider engagement in a lively way.

As HSE libraries marketing lead, Bennery was able to take us through in detail the marketing timetable and plan for the day. A fabulous case study on how to host a successful event reaching existing and new library users across the country.

Aoife Lawton & Louise Farragher – A national eHealth Library for all: how can we meet the needs of a nation?

In the final presentation in this session Aoife Lawton, General Manager, HSE Library and Louise Farragher, Senior Information Officer, Health Research Board updated us on the highly ambitious national eHealth project. Aoife, who is chairing the business case working group for the project, took us through the background and context which is ultimately the provision of the most up to date research and evidence to enhance patient care, safety and empowerment but with barriers and gaps to be managed to comprehensively achieve this.

Louise, who chairs the roadmap working group for the project, gave us exciting examples of international best practice for eHealth libraries from Norway, Andalucía and the UK, and beautifully summed up an e-library as something that sounds simple but has a lot of moving parts requiring attention, especially the protection of funding commitment.

All in all, this session was an engaging glimpse of the extensive national body of work both routine and aspirational, the HSE library service is committing to for the benefit of all.

Mairéad McKeown & David Lombard - Preparing future talent for the AI era: a graduate Copilot upskilling programme

The afternoon session of the HSLG Conference 2026 began with an engaging talk by Mairéad McKeown and David Lombard, from Bord Bia. Mairéad immediately caught the audience's attention by declaring HSLG the best conference in the Irish library sector. With that level of charm, it's easy to see why she was approached by a Bord Bia talent manager to design and deliver a Copilot upskilling programme.

This request, however, came with familiar challenges: no additional budget, headcount, or time. Despite these hurdles, Mairéad and her colleagues developed a pilot programme and successfully scaled it up for Bord Bia's international graduate cohort, who are completing a fully funded MSc in Food Business at UCD.

The ambition was clear: equip future talent with practical skills for an AI-enabled workplace and ensure the food industry has the capability it needs. With an existing organisational subscription to Copilot, they focused their programme around this tool. It consisted of three phases:

- **Phase 1: Self-directed foundation**

Participants completed LinkedIn Learning pathways on responsible AI use and prompt engineering. Leveraging an existing subscription to Copilot allowed the team to avoid budget and staffing barriers.

- **Phase 2: Knowledge exchange and experimentation**

This phase, described as “where the magic happens” encouraged participants to share use cases, learn from peers, and experiment with Copilot. They also created a prompt library to ensure learnings were shared widely.

- **Phase 3: Creative finale**

Participants showcased their skills and demonstrated innovative uses of AI tools.

A pre-programme survey revealed that many graduates were aware of Bord Bia’s Copilot subscription but were hesitant to use it due to concerns about privacy and commercial sensitivity. The programme’s structure and supportive group environment helped address these fears, giving participants the psychological safety to experiment. All reported increased knowledge and skills by the end. They progressed from simple awareness to confident, everyday use of Copilot as a productivity partner. Interestingly, many also reported increased creativity stimulated by through use of AI.

It was insightful to hear Mairéad and David reflect on the programme’s success and to see how their work aligns with IFLA Library and Information Trends. The programme now runs three times each year across the organisation and even has a waiting list.

Mary Hearne - Beyond the individual: a collective approach to AI literacy for librarians

The next speaker was Mary Hearne from the RCSI, who is involved in a European funded research project “[AI2MED](#)” which focuses on integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into medical care. Mary’s presentation examined the impact AI is having on healthcare professionals, librarians and educators.

In general, librarians tend to be adopters of technology, so Mary examined the level of our AI literacy skills and practice through the published literature. She found that libraries are part of digital inclusion strategies at a national level and have an established role in providing technology skills and training which are important foundations for our role with supporting AI literacy education. AI literacy has become part of the professional evolution of librarians as AI topics are embedded in information literacy training.

However, in the literature to the end of 2024, she found that AI literacy had not yet been incorporated into many formal LIS programmes and that many librarians, while individually motivated, were upskilling on an ad-hoc basis. Some had doubts about the trustworthiness of educational resources in the area so Mary argued that the many unanswered questions around AI should be addressed via a “collective professional response” and proposes sector level as well as organisation level interventions.

The example of ambient AI scribes in clinical settings certainly raised some questions from the audience and discussion points with the speaker. As multiple companies are bringing products to the market in this area, it’s not clear whether the AI products are simply speeding up note taking or if some cognitive processing is happening as the clinician interacts with the patient.

In response to these challenges, RCSI have developed an online open education resource which is an introduction to AI in healthcare for healthcare professionals. Additionally, the AI2MED project develops curricula for AI literacy for healthcare professionals to help bring everyone to a shared baseline level of understanding of AI.

Aphra Kerr - Libraries, Expertise and Literacy in the AI Era: a hands-on workshop for busy professionals

Following on from her successful Summer 2025 presentation at the HSLG/A&SL Joint Networking evening, Aphra Kerr, Professor of Digital Media and Communication at the School of Information and Communication Studies, UCD, returned to deliver a hands-on workshop.

To many, AI still feels like a fast-moving, sometimes bewildering frontier. One of the immediate strengths of Aphra Kerr's workshop was its accessibility – no prior AI knowledge required. Aphra opened with a clear, engaging walk-through of the AI timeline, tracing its roots back to the 1950s.

A recurring concern among health librarians is whether AI will automate fundamental professional tasks. Aphra addressed this head-on, AI cannot fully automate a systematic review. Human expertise, particularly the deep, critical, and methodological knowledge that librarians provide, remains indispensable. AI may assist, but it cannot replace the intellectual labour of rigorous knowledge production.

Aphra highlighted the European Algowatch Project, completed in 2025, which aims to educate the public about algorithms and AI. This fed directly into the workshop's three core goals:

1. Understanding how algorithms and AI shape the information we encounter online, especially in relation to misinformation and disinformation.
2. Exploring and engaging with interactive digital resources that illuminate how these systems work.
3. Reflecting on how this knowledge can support critical thinking and ethical, effective use of AI in libraries and everyday life.

Attendees were reminded that AI is already embedded in everyday tools, opening Adobe software now triggers prompts for AI summaries. Aphra encouraged attendees to compare different AI systems, from ChatGPT to Copilot, and to understand their varying capabilities and limitations.

Delegates were invited to identify the top two uses and top two concerns relating to AI in libraries, which sparked animated discussions around the room. The most common uses identified included citation checking, coding, chatbots, and cataloguing assistance. The most common concerns centred around distrust of AI systems, hallucinations, stereotyping, and bias. The exercise underscored both the opportunities and the risks that AI introduces into library practice.

Aphra emphasised the importance of understanding how algorithms are trained and how they build user profiles through interaction. She outlined the two major types of algorithms shaping online experiences: recommendation algorithms, which suggest content based on past behaviour; and ranking algorithms, which order content to maximise engagement. These systems track search history, location, likes, reposts, and even the content users scroll past. The result: echo chambers, reduced content diversity, and environments where misinformation and disinformation can thrive. Aphra stressed that researchers and librarians must actively resist working in bubbles.

A striking example of AI bias came from a simple prompt: “Draw a person with a disability.” The AI produced an image of a person in a wheelchair, revealing how training data can reinforce narrow stereotypes. Prof. Kerr urged participants to ask critical questions: what is happening behind our screens; how are models trained; and what biases are embedded in the data. The conversation naturally extended to deep fakes, the risks they pose, and the vulnerability of individuals, particularly women and minorities.

The workshop featured three hands-on activities that brought algorithmic behaviour to life:

Activity 1: My Digital Footprint. Participants searched for famous paintings on Facebook or Instagram. While the images were broadly similar, the order and personalisation varied, with many attendees noticing AI-generated images and content tailored to their interests, especially animal lovers who saw pets inserted into classic artworks. This sparked discussion about what platforms learn from user behaviour.

Activity 2: Being an Active User. Attendees experimented with blocking or reporting irrelevant content. After closing and reopening the app, the previously unwanted content had disappeared—an immediate demonstration of how quickly algorithms adapt to user signals.

Activity 3: Creating a Gen AI Image. The final activity explored generative image creation. Participants discussed how to verify whether an image is authentic, whether AI-generated images require citation, and where and when such images are ethically appropriate.

Professor Aphra Kerr delivered a workshop that was both practical and thought-provoking. Participants left with a clearer understanding of AI’s capabilities, its limitations, and the critical role librarians continue to play in fostering digital literacy, ethical engagement, and informed information practices. The session reinforced that while AI is reshaping the information landscape, human expertise remains at the centre of trustworthy knowledge work.

